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“DID WE GO TOO FAR?”: POST-INCUMBENCY ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE AFTER  
PARTNERING WITH POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT IN EUROPE 1999-2023

MA Thesis

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## **Authorship Declaration**

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

Word count of the thesis: 20,332.

Eduardo Astudillo Laureda, January 15th, 2024

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the electoral consequences for the political parties that decided to collaborate in executive coalitions with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) in Europe. It addresses the need to understand the implications of these political alignments, given the growing frequency of such coalitions. Using a large-N quantitative analysis and linear regression model, this research analyzes electoral data from eleven European countries to explore the strategic implications of coalition formation with PRRPs. Even though the study reveals that there is no consistent impact and direction on overall electoral costs for forming such coalitions, the effect changes depending on a party's position on the left-right spectrum. The thesis finds that right-leaning parties face uncertain immediate electoral fates post-coalition, while left-leaning parties will perceive a negative electoral impact when entering a coalition with PRRPs. The findings have important implications for the study of multi-party competition as they challenge expectations regarding accommodative strategies and the efficiency of the cordon sanitaire. The research highlights the complex dynamics of ideological alignment, voter behavior, and the challenges of balancing core values against the need for strategic coalition-building.

Keywords: populism, radical right, coalition formation, incumbency.

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## 1. Introduction

Across the political systems of the western world, we usually see how the organizations or groups in charge of representing us in the modeling of our society have a long historical tradition—either based on widely recognized ideologies or historical struggles representative of each territory. However, in post-war Europe, and with the development of globalization, we saw the birth of two new party families: the Greens and the populist radical right (Mudde, 2007). For this MA thesis research, the analysis will focus on the consequences of the growth of the latter one.

Within the literature associated with this phenomenon, Cas Mudde is one of the most relevant academics studying these new trends, e.g., Mudde (2007) and Mudde (2002). This author describes that the emergence of populist radical right-wing parties is usually associated with anti-elitism sentiment, social conservatism, economic protectionism, and nativism. For the last 25 years, these parties have seen increased popularity at the electoral level. Political discontent, together with anti-immigrant, authoritarian, and nationalist beliefs, have increased radical voting with populist right-wing candidates gaining substantial ground and, in many instances, becoming key players in governing coalitions (Carter, 2013; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug & Fennema, 2003).

The puzzle this research addresses is the observation that despite mainstream political parties (center-right and center-left) maintaining significant involvement in policy creation, their pragmatism on a variety of social issues has opened the door for more radically oriented agendas. There are instances where center-right parties have adopted radical-right discourse frames as a communication strategy since the turn of the century. However, it is only recently that some of these parties have started to implement such policies, opting for radicalization over moderation, under the false illusion that this will help reclaim disenfranchised voters (Kaltwasser & others, 2020). This trend is not exclusive to the right; certain sectors of the European left are also co-opting the agenda of Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs). Notable examples of this can be observed in Denmark and some Central and Eastern European countries (Mudde, 2002). When mainstream parties are perceived as inert in their policy proposals and lack a clear ideological program, issues related to immigration, identity, and security, as championed by PRRPs, gain significant traction among citizens and the media (Grzymala-Busse, 2019).

From the scenario described, a distinct crossroads has emerged for established parties considering the future of their policy decisions. Recent studies, such as those by Bale & Rovira-Kaltwasser (2021), have detailed and analyzed the qualitative aspects of the tension mainstream parties face in light of these more radical trends. On the one hand, the need to continue to appeal to moderate voters, many of whom express liberal and progressive values associated with the ‘silent revolution’ and, on the other hand, the need to attract voters sympathetic to the authoritarian and nativist ideas associated with the ‘silent counter-revolution’ pursued by the radical populist right (Kaltwasser & others, 2020).

In the evolving landscape of European politics, the role of cohesive moderate mainstream parties helped to reach a consensus in a post-war world. They became a crucial part of developing the welfare state and democratic nations. The disruptive characteristics of radicalized movements that reject some cornerstones of liberal democracy will directly affect the political system's capacity to reach agreements. Consequently, "the success of the populist radical right—and, arguably, the stability of democracy itself—" (Gidron & Ziblatt, 2019) must rely on the political strategies performed by mainstream parties in the political center (Bale, 2018).

My research project is designed to trace the observed effects of decisions made by mainstream parties in the current restructuring scenario of modern politics. This study will specifically analyze those parties that have chosen to partner with Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs). For the purposes of this research, a partnership is considered 'official' when it results in the creation of a governing coalition that holds executive office at a national level, typically observed in parliamentary systems with proportional electoral regulations. While it is understood that in a democratic system, every participant or organization involved in policy-making must negotiate to achieve their agenda - a process that inevitably involves forming alliances - partnerships with radical parties are often approached with caution by both politicians and citizens. Some forms of partnership may have 'blurry' or unclear boundaries, where the extent of the agreed pact could threaten each party's perceived values and integrity. Therefore, reactions and political costs to such alliances might vary. Specifically, the decision to form a ruling executive coalition at the national level sets a clear condition, garnering critical nationwide attention and implying a significant degree of responsibility for the pact members.

The challenges faced by the parties that embraced the far-right have received less attention in academia than those met by the oppositional left or the far-right itself. Previous research regarding governing coalitions that included PRRPs has focused on topics like the consequences in the content of the PRRP's policy agenda post-incumbency (e.g., Akkerman & De Lange, 2012); or the reasons behind the centre-right parties taking the decision of effectively forming governing coalitions with PRRPs (S. L. De Lange, 2012). But further focus on the centre-right perspective is still uncovered. Evaluating electoral costs, measured quantitatively, that the coalition partner parties face after opting for the mentioned ruling coalition will cover an essential empirical gap.

The objective of this thesis is to shed light on whether collaborating with PRRPs influence the post incumbency electoral results of political parties and being able to systematize the magnitude of the possible relation with existent electoral data. The research question that follows is: What are the electoral outcomes for political parties if they partner with the populist far right in governing coalitions?

Considering that ideological proximity can make coalitions with the far-right more or less likely to occur, this thesis will add further depth to the analysis presented. Therefore, a second research question is proposed: Does ideological position significantly influence a party's immediate electoral performance after collaborating with a PRRP in a government coalition?

The presented questions are pertinent in modern times, given the increasing instances of such coalitions and the critical need to understand the implications of these political alignments. The calculus regarding bloc expansion must also consider its costs and how these will shape the strategic behavior of parties. Parties will thus have an additional tool for adequately managing the trade-off between office-seeking, policy-seeking, and vote-seeking objectives.

After the introduction, this thesis begins by laying the foundational groundwork in the Theoretical Background section. Here, key concepts and theories are thoroughly discussed, along with a review of prior research relevant to understanding coalition formations, political strategies at the party level and the overall consequences of the disruption of PRRP in modern liberal democracies. This section is crucial as it provides the contextual underpinnings and theoretical lens through which the study's subject matter is analyzed, setting the stage for the in-depth exploration that follows.

Transitioning from theory to practice, the thesis then delves into the Methodology section, which outlines the specific research design and analytical methods employed in this study. This part details the approaches used for data collection and interpretation, thereby clarifying how the research questions are tackled and setting the framework for the empirical investigation.

Up next, the Analysis section will be presented. Utilizing a robust large-N regression analysis, this part of the study employs statistical methodologies to extract meaningful inferences related to the core research objectives, offering a detailed and empirical examination of the data.

Following the analytical exploration, the thesis transitions to the Discussion and Implications section. This segment interprets the findings within the broader landscape of political trends and theoretical discussions. It's an integral part of the thesis, as it extrapolates the implications of the research findings for political parties, policymakers, and the general public, highlighting the real-world significance of the study.

The narrative of the thesis culminates in the Conclusion, which succinctly summarizes the key findings, offers reflections on the study's limitations, and proposes directions for future research. This concluding section is designed to encapsulate the essence of the research, bringing together its key contributions and suggesting pathways for further exploration in this critical field of political science.

Through this structured approach, the thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role and impact of PRRPs in European politics, particularly focusing on the electoral costs and benefits for more moderate parties engaging with these populist entities. This research seeks to offer insights that are not only academically relevant but also practically significant for political strategists and stakeholders in the European political arena.

## **2. Theoretical background and conceptualization**

### **2.1 Political Parties Conceptualization**

### **2.1.1 Populist Radical Right Parties**

After the victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election and the success of the Brexit political campaign in the 2016 UK referendum, the term “populism” received worldwide attention. Every news post and expert analysis included the term in their recollection of these two significant political events. The word itself was awarded as Word of the Year by Cambridge Dictionary in 2017. This decision was based on, additionally to the notorious spike of online interest seen in the term, the fact that it “represents a phenomenon that’s both truly local and truly global”(University of Cambridge, 2017).

However, trends like these don't emerge overnight. Students and academics in political science and comparative politics have become familiar with, and have extensively analyzed, the development of political cleavages in modern Western democratic party systems and their institutional configurations. The traditional structure of politics, which was based on class, religion, and the urban-rural and center-periphery divides, has evolved in the current globalized international setting. Over the last 30 years, we have witnessed an additional wave of liberal democratization reaching regions like Eastern Europe and Latin America. Parts of the traditional working class have faced increasing competition from globally integrated markets, and the initially exponential economic growth in Western countries associated with these markets has sparked new societal, political, and institutional debates. A natural result of these developments is the growth of movements aiming to substantially challenge the programmatic and organizational standards of modern democracy and its major established parties. The decline in confidence in traditional parties in Western Europe has manifested in the emergence of Green parties on the Left and populist parties on the Right (Müller-Rommel, 1998). These party families share a public articulation of a protest voice against established politics and state structures. For this thesis, it is necessary to conceptualize the family of parties that are considered Populist Radical Right-wing parties.

Firstly, what identifies a party as populist is a style of rhetoric that endorses a set of ideas affirming society is ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’ (Kazin, 1995; Rooduijn et al., 2023). This concept argues that politics should be an expression of the ‘volonté générale’ or ‘general will’ of the people (Mudde, 2004). At

its core, this notion critically views the pragmatism of liberal democratic institutions that rely on the election of representatives for the delegation of public decisions, attributing this as the origin of the subsequent creation of an out-of-touch elite.

Populist leaders and parties will use this critical view to create a simplified and emotional message that can resonate with an expansive audience. In this sense, populist movements tend to be a natural development, an inherent tension (Canovan, 1999) and even an “antidote” (Laclau, 2005) to the functioning of representative democracies and their possible failures. Yascha Mounk has claimed that to curb populist support, we need to reform our institutions “[...] to strike a better balance between expertise and responsiveness to the popular will” (MOUNK, 2018. p. 97). This suggests that actors or groups that are able to gain some popularity with populist ideas in an attempt to partly challenge established system, do it initially and primarily as a political strategy, and that these initial gains in attraction are not necessarily ideologically charged (Betz, 2002). It is the evocation of latent political grievances and the emotions produced by them that serves as a starting point for the configuration of modern Populist Radical Right-wing parties.

Thankfully for the present research, the study of PRRPs have been very extensive in the last few years, reaching a developed professionalization. The works of other scholars have allowed to establish a clear picture of the mentioned party family. One of the main boundaries in the definition has to do with the use of the word Radical, versus other possible uses like “extreme right” or “neo fascism”. The 'radical' adjective differentiates this group of parties from the extreme right in their acceptance of democratic values. PRRPs accepts popular sovereignty and majority rule (Mudde, 2015). Certain academic agreement was also reached for terms like “far-right”, that is used as an umbrella term to refer to a wider range of parties on the right-end of the political spectrum and embraces radical (democratic) and extremist (anti-democratic) parties (Mudde, 2010; Ravndal, 2018).

The last two main characteristics of PRRPs, after the mentioned populism and their adherence to respect the bases of democratic rules, are the inclusion of nativistic and authoritarian beliefs in their ideological core. Nativism as a core feature propose ideals that entangle with nationalism and racism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013), but that it separates from those conceptions by being broader than racism, in the way that exclusivism will also consider aspects like culture and religion; and stricter than nationalism, if we consider the existence of liberal nationalistic movement (de Jonge,

2019). This will be the cause that PRRPs considered in this research will possess an anti-immigration agenda that aims for their states to be built and administered solely for the native group, with alien elements, “whether persons or ideas, being fundamentally threatening” to the ethnically and morally homogeneous nation-state (Mudde, 2015, p. 296).

Regarding their authoritarian element, PRRPs advocate for an agenda that reinforces the notion of “law and order”, the subordination of society to the authority, and the belief that infringements to this order must be punished severely (Perliger & Pedahzur, 2018). This mainly translates into party manifestos that advocate for policing forces with greater competencies, fewer rights for criminals, and a focus on discipline in school education (Mudde, 2015). In this rhetoric, immigration and crime are often related.

In Europe, one of the most significant developments in regional party systems over the last thirty years has been the emergence and ‘mainstreaming’ of PRRPs (Mudde, 2007; MUDDE, 2013). Scholarly works on PRRP party family developments in Europe relate to how historical, institutional, and contextual factors have allowed these challenger parties to exploit the sentiments previously described in this section to gain traction in the political mainstream. These works usually analyze this growth considering demand-side explanations, supply-side explanations, and how these both interact in specific country contexts. Demand-side explanations refer to structural and societal changes that fuel popular dissatisfaction with the established institutional order or mainstream parties (Ivarsflaten, 2008). Some of these factors are economic recessions, globalization, EU law-making, unemployment, and, of course, immigration. Supply-side factors refer to how the institutional setting for political parties’ competition can aid the growth of challenger parties. Examples of this include the nature of the electoral system, party competition, party strategies, and their organizational structures and leadership (Carter, 2013). Additional factors will be country-specific and could greatly influence the mainstreaming of PRRPs: the country's history and its relationship with previous far-right movements, the relation of PRRP leadership with the media, particular corruption cases or scandals, among others. According to Art (2011, p. 20), the success of the populist radical right “ultimately hinges on historical legacies and pre-existing foundations or networks that these parties can exploit”.

Since this thesis will focus on European cases for the analysis of electoral results, an additional attribute will be added to the conceptualization of PRRPs in contrast to more general definitions.

The parties considered as PRRPs in this research will also be Eurosceptic parties. These parties express the idea of either outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration, or contingent or qualified opposition to European integration (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2013). The topic of national legislative sovereignty and stronger control over immigration are the main arguments for opposition to one's country joining or remaining a member of the EU.

In summary, PRRPs in this research will possess the following five key characteristics: populist, nativist, authoritarian, Eurosceptic, and critical but committed to democratic rules. Possible differences between groups in our selected cases might arise in the analysis section of this research, especially regarding the east/west Europe divide. Since some differences in the topics that mobilize voters exist between eastern and western countries, for example, the level of threat of large waves of immigrants or varying levels of support for welfare retrenchment (Bustikova, 2014), it could be possible that electoral costs differ in both regions, considering that forming an alliance with PRRPs constitutes a lesser difficult decision to make for parties in other “political families”.

### **2.1.2 Parties as Coalition Partners of PRRPs.**

The other family of subjects for this research will not have such a precise definition as the PRRPs. The political parties who will have their electoral results analyzed are the ones that decided to break the “cordon sanitaire” and join a governing coalition with PRRPs. Most of the parties who had to take this decision are considered to be mainstream parties, but there will also be a few cases considered to be “pariah”, “niche” or “challenger” parties that have also gone through a similar decision process to balance possibilities to reach executive office.

It is important to mention that these party’s categorizations: mainstream, pariah, niche, among others, are usually used in previous scholar work assuming that readers will know intuitively their meaning. The meaning of the term “pariah” in the general parlance, refers to “someone or some group that is an outcast, despised and avoided by the majority” (Moffitt, 2022, p. 5). And, within the field of politics, the definition extends, then, to understanding a person or a party as “untouchable, beyond the pale of political acceptability” (Moffitt, 2022). From this, we can infer that the mainstream subjects are meant to be the opposite to what is known as the “pariah other”.

But the way these definitions are configured are more challenging to determine than when the discussion is about ideologies. Conclusions in this regard by Benjamin Moffitt (2022), are that labels like mainstream and pariah are “constructed, negotiated, maintained and constantly policed, not only by political scientist pursuing conceptualizations, but by a series of local political actors like media figures and political parties themselves” (ibid., p 2), and that the ultimate goal shouldn’t be to set-up strict boundaries in the definition of these ideal typologies, but to understand the circumstances and party landscape, of the researched period and place, that lead to the construction and maintenance of what is perceived largely in the aforementioned political setting.

For the researched period in this thesis, PRRPs were gaining popularity and increasing their participation in national parliaments around Europe. And one of the biggest focuses of study for many political scientists, was how the mainstream parties were reacting to the phenomena. Considering that one of the most distinctive characteristics of populist radical-right candidates is their rhetoric, which makes vast use of negative emotions (Crabtree et al., 2020), mainstream parties were in a crossroad. On the one hand, the need to continue to appeal to moderate voters, and on the other hand, the need to attract voters sympathetic to the authoritarian and nativist ideas (Kaltwasser & others, 2020). And it is possible to give certain characterization of the parties that were facing this crossroad. Around 75% of the cases to be analyzed in this thesis are perceived as mainstream.

In modern European party systems, several authors have agreed that ‘mainstreamness’ can be defined in two levels, on the ideological level and on how well it fulfils perceived ‘governing potential’. When it comes to ideology, mainstream parties are equated with ideological moderation. In European context these are the electorally dominant actors in the center-left, center, and center-right blocs on the Left–Right political spectrum (Meguid, 2005; Pop-Eleches, 2010), meaning liberal, conservative, Christian-democratic, and Social-democratic party families. When it comes to the perceived “governing potential”, the mainstreamness comes from the electoral dominance that party has shown in the past. The main evidence of this is if the party have previously participated in executive office. At the same time, parties that the governing parties consider as “suitable partners for government formation, or parties that are willing to cooperate with the main governing parties by joining them in a coalition government” (Abedi, 2004. p 11) can also be considered as mainstream actors.

This characterization of the actors that decided to break the cordon sanitaire with PRRPs will provide an important base of how they will behave on coalition formation processes and their projection on future possible electoral costs. As mentioned before, in the case selection for this thesis, not all the PRRPs partners qualify as mainstream. There are a few cases of single-issue parties, niche parties, and other pariah parties that don't belong to the PRRP classification. But it is important to mention that these parties will also consider a possible backlash from breaking the cordon sanitaire and own loyalty and integrity to their origin supporters/audience. In conclusion, they will face a similar tension in the office-seeking decisions as mainstream parties.

## **2.2 Coalition formation in European Parliamentary context**

### **2.2.1 General Aspects**

The democratic system that will be the focus of this research is the parliamentary system of government, either it is a republic or a constitutional monarchy. The base of this system is that the executive branch derives its legitimacy from and is accountable to the legislature (the parliament). After voters attend to cast their ballots on each parliamentary election and select candidates belonging to different political parties or movements, the most common outcome is that no party gains a majority of the seats in the legislature, and this will imply that no party can take control of government without the support of some other parties. This is where coalition formation negotiations begin. Coalition governments usually are a temporary alliance, where parties work together to hopefully reach a majority of seats in the parliament in order to make legislative process more efficient and where a coalition agreement needs to be agreed to define the boundaries of this alliance. Some of the most common and relevant resolutions that the coalition agreement denotes are: the distribution of ministries stipulating what members of all the participating parties will be appointed to each of the positions in the cabinet of ministers; the shared values and principles that the participants will have as priority, creating a common ground for policy-making and governance; establishing decision-making, coordination and conflict resolution mechanisms; among other key foundations for the functioning of the coalition.

The ideal outcome of coalition formation negotiations is to achieve a majority coalition, where the participant parties can have more than half of the seats of parliament to ensure stability and the ability to pass legislation. In the context of this research other types of governing coalitions will be relevant. For example, in some cases only an agreement to form a minority coalition will be reached. In this scenario, a coalition is sworn into office without holding the majority of the seats in the legislature. To pass legislation and maintain certain stability, a minority coalition must rely on the support and abstention of other parties (Parliament.UK, 2023), entering agreements that are less formal and creating “jumping majorities” according to the legislation being discussed (Bogdanor & others, 1983).

Other variations to be found in present research are the concepts of interim coalition and support parties in a coalition. The former concept is used when a coalition is formed and assume office with the purpose of specifically addressing an immediate crisis or managing the affairs of the state temporarily. It will be expected that a new round of parliamentary elections is held to restore a governing coalition with democratic legitimacy. When it comes to the latter concept, a support party in a coalition or also known as a tolerance agreement, is when a party does not formally join a governing coalition but agrees to support it on key votes or issues. The supporting party may receive certain concessions but does not take on ministerial positions (rnz.co.nz, 2023). PRRPs in Europe have assume this role on some occasions.

This is the scenario in which European political parties will balance and strategize political tradeoffs in their negotiations for the coalition formation process after an election. There has been extensive research on coalition formation theory. The classic approach to coalition theory assumes that parties have homogeneous goals, and hence are equally likely to join coalitions given the same circumstances. von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) and Riker (1962) take the pursuit of office as the solely motivation and assuming minimal winning coalition as main result. More recently, a popular model that works as a simplified vision, but is a good base for analyzing political parties' goals more integrally, is the one of Kaare Strøm (1990). Strøm defines three possible party goals: office-seeking, vote-seeking, and policy-seeking. He defines these three goals as not compatible and often conflicting (Helboe Pedersen, 2012), and making the fundamental assumption of the model that the party cannot fully pursue all three goals simultaneously. In the cases to be examined in this research in the context of parliamentary party systems, as coalitions are expected to be

majority coalitions, “membership of the executive provides the best opportunity to influence policy as well as gaining office benefits, and hence no trade-off between policy and office exists” (ibid., p 899).

The narrow definitions proposed by Størm motivated extensive scholar works considering additional dimensions in party behavior on coalition formation processes. For example, Sened (1996) developed models of coalition formation which allow the weights of policy and office goals to vary across parties. Furthermore, Warwick (2006) argues that parties have different policy horizons, i.e. they diverge in terms of their willingness to compromise on policy in order to win office. Bäck (2003) found that some parties may be less likely to be in government due to the fact that they use highly democratic decision-making procedures, or because they are highly factionalized. Highlighting intra-party politics as one key factors in the coalition formation processes.

The findings of Bäck (2003) also provide a robust conclusion for this section: that parties are neither pure office-seekers, nor pure policy-seekers, nor pure vote-seekers. Instead, parties are steered by multiple objectives, and that the decisions taken to reach these goals are not taken as unitary actors. In each party, there will be several pragmatic considerations in their coalition decisions, making it hard to create predicting models of successful partnerships. Nevertheless, what is certain is that parties are concerned with the effects of coalitional choices on future election results. And that when considering an existing context and period, as this thesis is attempting, it might be possible to systematize the weight of a specific decision.

In Europe, the emergence of PRRPs have put political parties in a complicated decision-making situation, when trying to estimate possible tradeoffs in partnering with them. Some approaches have been made in local elections with some trans-partisan lists, but with mixed results based on individual reputations that don't help answering present research questions. On the other hand, political parties are aware that taking this decision at the national level, where issues have a higher level of politization and where party labels matter more to prospective voters, have greater implications. Either if it is for the history of interaction between parties or because of policy or ideology convergence, political parties know that in partnerships at national level, even institutions can be compromised and endangered by politicians' behaviours” (Houard-Vial, 2022). In the next section, a closer look to the decision of breaking the cordon sanitaire with PRRPs will be presented.

### **2.2.2 Coalition formation involving PRRPs.**

This section aims to have closer look and highlight relevant literature of the initial effects of having PRRPs gaining strong parliamentary base and how the issues that these parties consider to be the most relevant in our society take a salience that is difficult for other political actors to ignore. This process will reach the national level executive office coalition formation negotiations, and the sometimes negatives perceptions around PRRPs will play a part in party's strategies facing these negotiations.

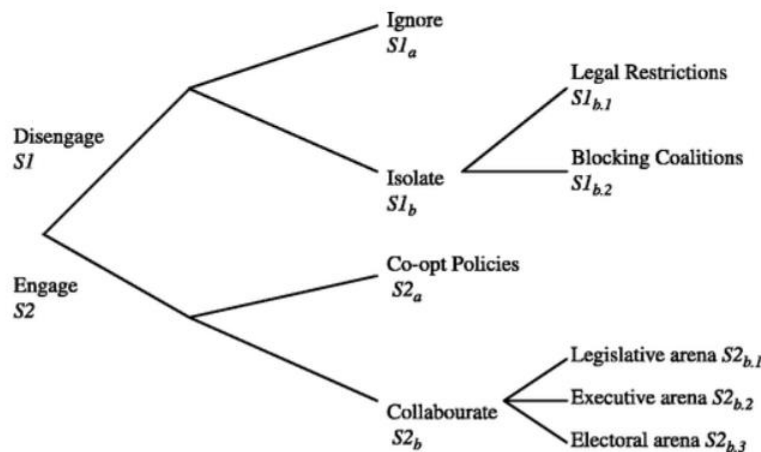
As I noted in previous sections, PRRPs rise is closely linked to what known actor within the party system have been able to deliver. Mainstream political parties, both center-left and center-right, have increasingly struggled to differentiate themselves and present clear policy alternatives. This blurring of political lines has led to their inability to provide a viable alternative to the rising neoliberal consensus. As a result, in the face of mild economic, identity, and welfare-state crises, these parties have drifted away from their traditional roles. This shift, especially evident in the center-left abandoning its historic commitment to uniting the working class through strong welfare states and economic growth, has paved the way for populism (Grzymala-Busse, 2019). Simultaneously, the center-right parties have been criticized for their lack of decisive ideological programs and inertia in policymaking. This has allowed populist radical right parties (PRRPs) to capitalize on issues like immigration, identity, and security, gaining significant traction among citizens and in media coverage (Grzymala-Busse, 2019).

As mainstream democratic parties fail to address these electoral challenges, populist parties have found an opportunity to address the unmet grievances and concerns of voters. In this context, PRRPs present themselves as a shock, creating a party system realignment. For the public, they offer a chance to express previously marginalized preferences. And politicians, on the other hand, can use the rise of these parties to highlight their dedication to democratic norms, aiming to mobilize other voters (Valentim, 2021; Valentim & Widmann, 2023).

The process of PRRPs gaining ground in the political arena has been slow and in a similar pace than the mentioned decrease in trust that mainstream parties experienced. In the realm of political

dynamics, the acquisition of power by PRRPs was a multifaceted process that extends beyond the mere formation of coalitions. Political cooperation, a key mechanism in this process, is not just limited to government coalitions but also encompasses pre-electoral alliances, minority government arrangements, among others; each form of cooperation will obey to its own logic (S. De Lange, 2007). Mentioned rise of PRRPs often results in notable shifts in the political landscape. Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) observed that traditional politicians, in response to the success of PRRPs, tend to adopt more right-leaning policy stances. This phenomenon is further elucidated by Van Spanje and de Graaf (2018), who describe it as a "parroting the pariah" strategy. This strategy involves mainstream politicians aligning closer to the ideologies of these radical groups while simultaneously distancing themselves, a dual approach that reflects both adaptation and differentiation in the face of emerging political forces.

For the case of the parties that maintained ideology, policy positions and a discourse that are close to what PRRPs propose, William M. Downs (W. M. Downs, 2001) created a model where is easy to visualize the tree of possibilities that these parties face. He proposes at least four choices: (1) a dismissive strategy of ignoring pariah party in hopes that the issues they propose don't receive much attention; (2) isolate the PRRP through legal and political means; (3) co-opt their policies; and/or (4) allow those deemed to be radical to share some governing responsibility (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Alternative strategies for responding to radical right (Source: Downs [2001, pp. 23–48]).

At a point where the political climate increasingly legitimizes the radical right's issues and theses, the dismissive strategy eventually become practically impossible. This shift often leads to a 'parroting the pariah' effect and internal conflicts within mainstream right-wing parties, making

the ostracism of PRRPs seem superficial. Mainstream right parties frequently face a dilemma: they must choose between forming broad coalitions, which often entail significant policy compromises that deviate from their ideal standpoint, or conceding power to left-wing parties (Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2004). This situation highlights the constrained coalition options and limited influence they possess over the political left. Concurrently, radical right parties are increasingly moving away from a purely vote-seeking strategy with a policy- and/or office-seeking strategy. In light of Downs's model and the growing compatibility between PRRPs and mainstream right parties, collaboration in legislative and executive arenas is starting to be viewed more as an opportunity than a threat (Houard-Vial, 2022).

In the context of this research within European party systems, relevant previous research has focused on the origin of collaborative alliances between PRRPs and Mainstream parties. De Lange (2012) identifies two primary changes in Western European party systems that have facilitated the formation of these new alliances: an electoral shift towards the right and a convergence in the party positions of mainstream right and radical right-wing populist parties. Further expanding on this theme, Joost van Spanje (2010) delineates three factors that favor mentioned alliances between mainstream and PRRPs. These include the electoral weight of the far-right party, the ideological closeness between the two parties, and the far-right party's avoidance of very extreme stances. The first two factors resonate with De Lange's findings, emphasizing the shift in the political spectrum and the ideological alignment that enables these coalitions. These findings rest on the Schumpeterian paradigm (Schumpeter, 1942), where political parties are driven by strategic considerations to maximize electoral gains, and thus seek alliances with ideologically similar entities to maintain coherence in the eyes of voters.

The third factor identified by Van Spanje (2010) introduces the concept of the "defense of democracy," which suggests that democratic actors should exclude parties with objectionable ideologies from decision-making processes. This approach, while sometimes viewed as idealistic, especially in the era where parties are primarily driven by electoral interests, aligns with a broader Schumpeterian perspective. In this view, the ostracism of far-right parties is not purely a moral stance but also a result of a strategic cost/benefit analysis, where the negative repercussions of associating with parties holding controversial ideologies are considered (Houard-Vial, 2022).

It is highly relevant to mention how these alliances implicitly involve a meticulous cost-benefit analysis, balancing potential electoral gains against the risks of aligning with far-right ideologies. Consequences may include being associated with constant negative rhetoric, attacking current democratic institutions, or even facing the possibility of xenophobic comments. However, on the other side, there are incentives in the accommodative strategy, such as fulfilling office-seeking objectives, seizing this opportunity from political adversaries on the other side of the ideological/political spectrum, and having the chance to advance a policy agenda in areas where similarities with coalition partner PRRPs exist.

Additional support for the mentioned crossroads or calculations that parties considering collaboration with PRRPs in the executive-legislative arena face can be derived from the research of Bonnie M. Meguid. Meguid (2005) studied the electoral success of niche parties, focusing on PRRPs and green parties, and she proposed relevant conclusions for the present research. She developed a simple model where only three parties exist: two mainstream parties and one niche party. The political landscape is based on the policy position of a single issue, and the electoral success of the niche party is tracked according to the policy position taken by the mainstream parties. The mainstream parties could choose between dismissive, accommodative, or adversarial strategies on the issue proposed by the niche party. The model suggests that when a mainstream party adopts an accommodative strategy towards the niche party's issue, it simultaneously validates the topic proposed by the niche party and aims to take ownership of this issue as well. This results in the niche party losing electoral support and the mainstream party or parties gaining support, taking control of the issue because of having stronger political capital, legislative experience, and networks to push the policy forward.

Meguid (2005) statistically confirmed her hypothesis in the context of European party systems. Accommodative strategies by mainstream parties result in decreased electoral success for niche parties, while adversarial strategies increase electoral success for niche parties. The research doesn't test the electoral performance of mainstream parties, but it is assumed that parties that accommodate niche issues gain votes by taking ownership of the issue. Conversely, if a party adopts an adversarial stance, it bases its strategy on trying to gain support by targeting opponents on the other side of the issue dimension (niche and accommodative party). The main takeaways from this research are: (1) niche party support can be shaped by both proximal and non-proximal

competitors, with the ideological proximity or distance between them affecting their strategies; and (2) “the fact that parties have a set of tools that allow them to adapt to the institutional and sociological environment in which they participate” (Meguid, 2005, p. 348), meaning that the conception of party strategies must recognize that parties compete by altering policy positions and the salience and ownership of political issues.

As we know, multi-party systems are more complex, with multiple dimensions, issues, varying reputations, and perceptions of actors, corruption scandals, among many factors that might affect party behavior and performance. This thesis will address the research gap in understanding what happens to parties that have adopted an accommodative strategy with an actor perceived as an outsider that evokes a protest vote with negative rhetoric. These parties have decided to take the riskiest decision within the previously reviewed Downs model and have engaged in joining office with PRRPs. The initial incentive and goal of reaching executive power is achieved after this decision, but will it compensate for possible future backlash from associating with a populist actor? Can they take ownership of PRRPs' main issues as Meguid estimated in her model? Or will ‘voters prefer the original to the copy’?

The next section will be the main body of theory for hypothesis building and subsequent analysis in this thesis. Besides the scholarly work reviewed so far, I will also incorporate insights from research considering the effects of incumbency and opposition in the possible net vote losses or gains of the parties that are the subject of this study.

## **2.3 Incumbency effects**

### **2.3.1 Costs of Governing: General Aspects.**

Historically, the notion of incumbency advantage has been a cornerstone in understanding electoral dynamics. However, recent empirical evidence suggests that this once-pervasive trend, particularly dominant until the mid-20th century, is no longer a consistent phenomenon in contemporary politics. Traditionally, incumbents benefitted from enhanced name recognition stemming from their tenure, alongside more straightforward access to campaign finance and government

resources, which indirectly supported re-election campaigns. However, the landscape has evolved with the advent of diverse information sources such as social media, the significance of private funding, and increased expectations of governmental austerity.

The magnitude of incumbency advantage has seen notable fluctuations over time. Ebanks et al. (2022) highlight this variability, noting a surge from approximately two percentage points in the 1950s to a peak of ten in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by a reversion to around two in the 2010s and 2020s. Despite these shifts, the likelihood of incumbents losing their seats has remained relatively stable across these periods. Yet, these models, while informative, can sometimes mislead with overconfidence in their predictions, as events with extremely low expected frequencies occur more often than anticipated (Ebanks et al., 2022).

Moreover, the concept of anti-incumbency also plays a significant role but is challenging to predict due to the myriad factors influencing political contexts. Voter perceptions, often subject to biases such as partisan leanings, can sway anti-incumbent sentiments, particularly in periods deemed as challenging or underwhelming, such as during economic downturns. This phenomenon, however, raises concerns as it may incentivize political parties to prioritize short-term gains over long-term, sustainable policies.

An intriguing aspect of anti-incumbency is its relationship with the maturity of democratic systems. Bochsler & Hänni (2019) observe a pattern where new democracies initially experience a general anti-incumbent effect, which gradually shifts as citizens begin to associate the legitimacy of democratic actors more with their economic performance than with procedural adherence. As democracies mature, this effect of retrospective voting diminishes, reflecting a stabilizing legitimacy reservoir for incumbents.

The post-incumbency electoral performance is, therefore, a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various factors such as levels of corruption, the gender of incumbents, policy cycles, and economic performance, each contributing to the heterogeneity of incumbency effects (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013; Hodler et al., 2010; Klačnjaja, 2015; Murray, 2008). De Magalães et al. (2020) underscore this diversity, noting significant variations in both the magnitude and direction of these effects across countries with comparable open-list proportional representation systems.

In conclusion, understanding the electoral costs of incumbency requires a nuanced approach that accounts for a spectrum of influences, ranging from political structures and economic conditions to societal attitudes and the evolving nature of democratic institutions. The following section will delve deeper into the literature focused on Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) and their executive office partners, shedding light on how these dynamics play out in specific political alignments.

### **2.3.2 Electoral effects of incumbency: involvement of PRRPs.**

One of the main scholarly pieces that this thesis can derive conclusions from, is the work of Tjitske Akkerman and Sarah L. de Lange (2012) where they analyze the incumbency records and electoral costs of governing for Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs). Their study serves as a foundation for this research, which extends their efforts by updating case selections and concentrating on the performance of PRRPs' coalition partners, rather than the PRRPs themselves.

Akkerman and de Lange (2012) identify three primary variables that may explain incumbency effects: contextual factors, institutional contexts, and party-specific factors. Their research predominantly focuses on party factors, given the limited utility of structural explanations, such as institutional or sociological conditions, in accounting for short-term electoral effects. This research will incorporate economic indicators into the regression model as part of the independent variables, alongside additional controls for each country in the sample, thus addressing contextual factors.

A key focus of this thesis, following Akkerman and de Lange's approach, is on how parties leverage opportunity structures and develop strategies within their institutional environments. The methodology employed by Akkerman & de Lange (2012) examines three critical elements within aforementioned party-specific factors: policy achievements, the performance of ministers, and strategies for maintaining internal coherence.

In terms of policy achievements, Akkerman and de Lange's research indicates a surprising disconnect. They found that legislative successes, even in key areas such as immigration control, did not necessarily correlate with improved electoral performance post-incumbency for PRRPs.

This suggests that factors beyond policy effectiveness play a critical role in shaping electoral outcomes.

The performance of ministers within PRRPs presents another layer of complexity. The inherent challenges for these parties, often characterized by a lack of deep institutional roots and a scarcity of experienced political personnel beyond their top leaders, manifest in their governance. Issues such as intra-party conflicts, individual missteps, and broader signs of political incompetence often led to high rates of ministerial turnover. Such instability within the ministerial ranks has shown to negatively affect the electoral prospects of PRRPs after their tenure in office.

Moreover, the strategy to maintain internal coherence is pivotal. The balancing act for PRRPs, as they navigate the tightrope between their radical roots and the pragmatism required in coalition politics, is fraught with challenges. Heinisch (2003) underscores the pressure on extremist elements within coalitions to moderate their agendas, a process that can engender or exacerbate internal divisions between ideological hardliners and pragmatic realists. Downs et al. (W. M. Downs et al., 2009) further elucidate this dynamic, pointing out the precarious position of under-institutionalized PRRPs as they oscillate between moderation and the risk of implosion.

Akkerman & de Lange (2012) discovered that PRRPs' success in maintaining internal coherence often hinged on retaining their confrontational stance, even while participating in executive roles. By positioning themselves as outsiders within a coalition, they managed a 'half in, half out' strategy, picking adversaries within the multi-party coalition while still maintaining ties with major partners. Rathgeb and Wolkenstein (2022) also contribute to this discourse, pointing out the significance of institutional party structures in mediating the success or failure of such internal accommodation efforts.

Further literature about this phenomenon is presented by Daniel Hegedüs (2019), particularly on Hungary, as he highlights the 'externalization strategy' employed by these governing PRRP while in government. This approach involves intensifying a populist 'us versus them' narrative, positioning the party as a defender against external threats, such as international institutions or foreign governments. In practice, this is reflected in policies like stringent immigration controls and confrontations with the European Union. This externalization strategy is not exclusive to populist parties but is a viable approach for populists in overcoming the incumbency challenge.

The main output this thesis is taking from the Akkerman & de Lange (2012) study about PRRP's incumbency, is that internal schisms and cabinet instability, indicative of diminished party integrity, were key factors leading to voter punishment of PRRPs post-incumbency. How can we, then, extrapolate these findings to infer the electoral outcomes of their coalition partners?

Building on the established relationship between party integrity and electoral performance, this section will further explore how the strength of party integrity and strategic decisions made by both proximal and non-proximal competitors influence electoral outcomes post-legislative or executive efforts. The Spatial Theory of Electoral Performance (A. Downs, 1957) provides another critical theoretical base for future hypothesis.

Anthony Downs, in his seminal work "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (1957), introduced the Spatial Theory of Electoral Performance, fundamentally altering the understanding of political party behavior. In two-party systems, Downs posited that parties could maximize their vote shares by converging towards the median voter. This convergence is based on the assumption that a majority of voters are positioned in the political spectrum, and thus, appealing to this median voter would be the most efficient electoral strategy. However, his theory also recognized that this strategy's applicability changes in multiparty systems. Here, the emphasis shifts to 'ideological product differentiation' and maintaining 'purity of doctrine.' Parties are encouraged to clearly distinguish themselves from competitors, essentially creating a unique 'brand' that resonates with specific voter segments. This differentiation is key to electoral success in such systems (Kitschelt, 1994). Downs' theory underscores the importance of branding in politics; it allows voters to easily identify party positions on various issues, aiding in decision-making. However, as parties moderate or converge their positions, they risk losing this distinctiveness, leading to a dilution of their brand appeal. Consequently, voters may turn to other parties that offer clearer and more proximate positions to their beliefs (Polacko, 2023).

Expanding on these concepts, Lupu (2014) provides a model explaining the causes for party stability and party breakdown in terms of brand dilution and incumbency performance. His study highlights two primary mechanisms by which political parties may inadvertently weaken their brand: through inconsistent messaging and by aligning their policies too closely with other parties. When a party is plagued by internal disagreements, it sends mixed messages to the electorate, creating uncertainty about the party's core values and positions. This inconsistency erodes the

distinctiveness of the party's brand. Similarly, when parties shift their policies to resemble those of other parties, a process known as convergence, it becomes challenging for voters to discern one party from another, leading to further dilution of the party's unique identity. Inconsistency and convergence risks will be high in the case of parties associating with PRRPs in governing coalitions.

Lupu (2014) also discusses the strength of a party's brand in relation to how accurately and confidently voters can identify the party's stance on various issues. A party that consistently communicates clear, unambiguous messages about its policies strengthens its brand, as this clarity allows voters to form a distinct image of what the party represents. On the other hand, a party whose positions are vague or variable appears heterogeneous and less defined in the eyes of the electorate, weakening its brand. This concept suggests that the actions and messages of a party play a crucial role in shaping voter attachment and loyalty, with significant implications for the party's electoral performance and stability.

It will also be critical for inferring what scenario does coalition partners of PRRPs face after incumbency, which strategies the parties on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum will take. The political landscape, particularly in response to the success of radical-right parties, undergoes notable shifts in discourse and strategy, as evidenced in recent scholarly research. Bustikova (2014) observes a tendency among political actors at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum to intensify their distinct ideological stances in reaction to changes initiated by their counterparts. This reaction often involves moving further away from the newly established status quo, effectively widening the ideological gap. This phenomenon underscores a dynamic polarization process in response to the radical right's influence on the political status quo.

Building on this understanding, Valentim & Widmann (2023) research reveals that politicians from other parties tend to adopt more positive emotional tones, rather than negative ones, when discussing political issues in the context of radical-right success. This shift in emotional tone appears to be a deliberate strategy to create a clear distinction from the radical-right's discourse. Valentim & Widmann (2023) also argue that this approach highlights a broader strategy by these politicians to reinforce democratic norms, which are challenged or breached by radical-right politicians. The inclusion of radical-right candidates in governing coalitions, particularly those employing rhetoric deemed unacceptable, further incentivizes the use of emotional appeals as a

counter-strategy to mobilize the electorate. Bischof and Wagner (2019) also identify a “backlash effect” pushed forward specially by parties and politicians on the left-wing side of the ideological spectrum. As a reaction to ultimate success of PRRPs, they will have deeper intrinsic (their own values) and strategic (their voters’ reactions) motivations to distance themselves from the right-wing leaning governing coalition.

Further evidence of backlash effect was developed by Matthew Polacko (2023) that through application of the spatial theory of party competition (Downs, 1957) and accommodation theory (Meguid, 2005), and using aggregate-level election results and CSES data, found that the radical left significantly benefits from the adoption of rightward economic positions by mainstream parties, which is magnified when combined with rightward sociocultural positions. The main conclusion to be drawn from this study is the existence of trade-offs associated with political accommodation because reaching out to new voters may drive away existing ones. For example, traditional center left and social democratic parties, is recommended reverting to the traditional leftist policies reminiscent of the postwar era's social democracy, particularly through bolstering the welfare state and moving away from neoliberalism. By focusing on this strategy and de-emphasizing the sociocultural issues typically leveraged by the right, social democrats can re-engage with their core brand, which has long been centered on promoting equality, addressing labor concerns, and enhancing the welfare state. It's noteworthy that a significant majority in Western countries favor increased wealth redistribution and higher taxation for the wealthy and corporations (OECD, 2019). Such measures could be instrumental to capitalize on their traditional brand that they have neglected.

Where does all this previous evidence leave coalition partners of PRRPs standing when it comes to their party brand after incumbency? There seem to be only a narrow space between the counter-strategies put in place by recent opposition parties and, at the same time, the effects of having embrace an accommodating decision with PRRPs.

This thesis hypothesis will propose that this will make their party brand weak when facing following general elections, and that the expect result will be a negative change in electoral performance in comparison with previous election. Coalition partners of PRRPs face a significant challenge: strengthening their party brand and image. This involves strategically identifying and emphasizing characteristics that resonate with their core values, for enabling voters to easily

identify with and remain loyal to the party. Party images can be linked to “ideological characteristics (conservative, liberal, progressive, etc.), to social belongings (the party of the workers, of the farmers, etc.) or to certain manners of practicing politics (honesty, competence, empathy, etc.)” (Houard-Vial 2022, p. 436). This pursued attachment can be described as the “collective incentive” of party organization (Panebianco, 1988), referring to the shared values among a party's leaders, followers, and supporters that enable them to behave jointly and support one another in spite of occasionally conflicting personal interests. If this collective incentive diminishes with time – as parties care less about ideology and policies and more about votes and seats – there will always be a sense of what the party’s roots and goals were originally (Houard-Vial 2022, p. 437).

In conclusion, accommodating PRRP positions can lead to a net vote loss, as evidenced by the studies of Chou et al. (2021) and Hjorth and Larsen(2022), in Germany and Denmark respectively. They find that while accommodation can attract certain voter demographics, it often repels others, leading to a shift in the overall vote share. This context-dependent outcome suggests the necessity for coalition partners of PRRPs to carefully consider their strategies and opens the main research motivations for the development of present thesis.

This thesis aims to systematize a probable "net vote loss" for the coalition partners of PRRPs, focusing on the incentives to maintain party brand integrity. Literature review on the topic suggest a need for theories that “incorporate parties' interests in fostering and maintaining partisan attachments” (Lupu, 2014), potentially offering new insights into party strategy and competition. The next section, 2.4, will build upon these theories and propose a clearer definition of research questions and hypotheses.

## **2.4 Hypotheses**

Even though there are various factors - contextual, historical, and institutional - invariably influence the electoral performance of incumbent mainstream parties, this research aims to measure, with existing data, whether there is a consistency in their post-incumbency performance when partnering with PRRPs in executive office.

The ideological proximity between center mainstream and far-right parties often facilitates coalition formations. The calculus of bloc expansion must therefore account for its costs, including the potential loss of voters resulting from breaking the 'cordon sanitaire' (Houard-Vial, 2022). The primary objective of this thesis is to systematize existing evidence regarding a possible net vote loss for a party that associates with PRRPs in executive office. This is an important task, considering that these parties hold the power to certify the complete mainstreaming of far-right's ideas. A party can be a pariah not only because it is perceived as a threat to the political system's values, but also as a threat to its good functioning, its stability, and its credibility.

The research question, following literature on accommodation strategies and post-incumbency electoral results, is as follows: *How does partnering with the populist far right in government coalitions affect a party's performance in subsequent elections?* Previous sections have outlined the challenges these parties face, particularly in maintaining a consistent party brand. Consequently, the hypothesis that derives from the theoretical review is:

*H1: Forming a government coalition with Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) will result in poorer electoral performance in the subsequent general election for the other parties involved in the coalition.*

If so, there would be evidence that the "bloc expansion" in the interests of the mainstream parties would not be achieved. And that the similarity of discourse in some respects does not compensate for the difference in others.

Furthermore, it also follows from the literature review that parties more ideologically distant from the far-right can capitalize on the negative rhetoric recently present in the executive branch to enforce the norms that the radical-right breaches and promote their intrinsic core values. This ideological backlash can be exploited more convincingly by parties that were not PRRPs coalition partners. This observation leads to a second research question: *Will the ideological distance between coalition partners and PRRPs influence their immediate electoral performance post-incumbency?* According to the spatial theory of electoral competition, parties sharing ideological similarities with PRRPs may more effectively justify their coalition decision to their electorate, potentially reducing the negative electoral consequences. The ideological backlash, as discussed in our theory section, is likely to affect more severely those parties that are ideologically distant

from PRRPs yet still choose to collaborate with them. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this research is as follows:

*H2: Parties closer ideologically to PRRPs will experience a smaller negative electoral impact compared to those that are more ideologically distant from PRRPs, after forming a coalition with them.*

If this hypothesis holds true, it will significantly enhance our understanding of the role and implications of a party's commitment to general ideological propositions or principles of political action.

The upcoming section, dedicated to methodology, will outline the specific research design, data sources, and analytical techniques employed to systematically investigate these hypotheses.

### **3. Methods and Data**

In this section, the methodology of the study is presented, adopting a large-N quantitative research approach. This methodological framework involves a comparative statistical analysis of electoral results from political parties. The focus is on those parties that either chose to collaborate with the Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRP) at the executive level or refrained from doing so. This approach aligns with a positivist standpoint, where large-N denotes the analysis of a substantial number of cases, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the results.

The advantage of employing a large-N quantitative analysis is eloquently summarized by Landman (2002), who notes that the extensive coverage of countries enables more robust inferences and theory-building. This is due to the higher degree of certainty achieved when relationships are demonstrated across a broader range of instances. This approach stands in contrast to qualitative research, where the focus is more on narrative and descriptive accounts rather than numerical data representation.

In this study, political phenomena are quantitatively articulated. The methodology involves statistically analyzing the distribution of numerical values to discern potential correlations, and, with the support of theoretical frameworks, argue the existence of causal relationships. This

statistical method is particularly appropriate for our research objectives, which aim to illuminate the implications of specific coalition formation decisions on the electoral outcomes of political parties. The analysis will track the evolution of party electoral performances through strategic decisions across time, providing insights into the impact of pariah actors disruption on the electoral competition within liberal democracies.

The selected unit of analysis in this thesis is the 'Party-Term.' Each data entry analyzed corresponds to a specific political party at the conclusion of a specific parliamentary term, e.g. FPÖ (Austria), 2002-2006. The research will utilize various datasets sources to enrich the characterization of each party-term. These datasets will include information on electoral results, party ideological characteristics, attributes of the political landscape, and the country-level context of the elections. This comprehensive model aims to facilitate a well-rounded and academically sound exploration of the posed research questions.

Linear regression is a widely used tool in quantitative political science analysis. This will be the mathematical model used in this thesis to approximate the dependency relationship between a dependent variable and several independent variables. It will serve to investigate correlations between these variables. However, acknowledging that correlation does not imply causation, theoretical backing is employed to interpret these statistical relationships. In our case, the link between party-level strategic decisions and electoral results is analyzed. This correlation, once established, is interpreted within the comparative politics framework to draw meaningful real-world inferences.

The subsequent sections will detail the specific features and components of the regression model used in this study. These details will not only justify the methodological approach chosen but also provide the necessary foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion.

### **3.1 Case selection**

The selection of cases for this research has been tailored to focus specifically on the parliamentary system of government, which includes both republics and constitutional monarchies. This choice is rooted in the unique political environments these systems provide, particularly conducive to the

formation of coalitions, which is a central aspect of this study. This focus contrasts with the dynamics found in presidential or semi-presidential systems, where the appointment of executive office follows different patterns.

Another critical aspect of the case selection process is the criteria for including or excluding certain democracies. This thesis aims to scrutinize the strategies and decisions of political parties and their impact on voter decisions. To ensure an undistorted analysis, it is essential to consider the democratic integrity of the countries under study. To this end, countries that are not considered completely "free" according to the Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" report are excluded from the analysis. This report evaluates the state of political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories, assessing a range of individual freedoms from voting rights to freedom of expression and equality before the law. These freedoms, which can be influenced by both state and nonstate actors, are crucial in understanding how elections and voting decisions occur (Freedom House, 2023). Present study necessitates an environment where democratic standards are well-established and maintained, ensuring that the electoral and political processes under study are reflective of a genuine democratic setting.

Consequently, this leads to the exclusion of certain European parliamentary systems classified as flawed democracies. Countries such as Georgia, Armenia, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Moldova have been omitted from this study. Their classification in the Freedom House's report indicates a level of democratic freedom that may not accurately reflect an unencumbered political will of the electorate, which could potentially skew the analysis of political party strategies and voter behavior.

The subsequent step in the case selection process involved identifying instances where Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) have held executive office during the designated analysis period. Utilizing the Popu-list database (Rooduijin et al., 2023), which offers an expert-reviewed classification of European parties from 31 countries identified as populist, far left, and/or far right, I was able to pinpoint the parties relevant to my research. This information was then cross-referenced with data from the ParlGov database (Döring et al., 2022), including detailed cabinet information by country and electoral period. This comprehensive approach led to the final list of political parties pertinent to this thesis. The findings are detailed in the attached Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1.** PRRPs that held executive office participation 1999-2023.

Country	Party	Party Name (English)	Far-right	Populist	Euro-sceptic
Austria	FPO	Freedom Party of Austria	✓	✓	✓
	BZO	Alliance for the Future of Austria	✓	✓	✓
Bulgaria	OP	United Patriots (composed by:)	✓	✓	✓
	ATTAKA	<i>National Union Attack</i>	✓	✓	✓
	IMRO-BNP	<i>IMRO -- Bulgarian National Movement</i>	✓	✓	✓
	NFSB	<i>National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria</i>	✓	✓	✓
Denmark	DF	Danish Peoples Party	✓	✓	✓
Estonia	EKRE	Conservative People's Party	✓	✓	✓
Finland	PS	Finns Party	✓	✓	✓
Italy	LN	North League	✓	✓	✓
Netherlands	LPF	Fortuyn List	✗	✓	✓
	PVV	Party for Freedom	✓	✓	✓
Norway	FRP	Progress Party	✓	✓	✓
Poland	PIS	Law and Justice	✓	✓	✓
Slovakia	SNS	Slovak National Party	✓	✓	✓
	SME	We are family – Boris Kollar	✓	✓	✓
Slovenia	SNS	Slovenian National Party	✓	✓	✓

Source: own elaboration with data from Populist database (Rooduijin et al., 2023)

**Table 2.** Parties that collaborate with PRRP in executive office and their cabinets. 1999-2023

Country	Party Name (English)	Cabinet	Electoral Cycle
Austria	Austrian People's Party	<i>Schuessel I (2000-2003)</i>	1999 - 2002
		<i>Schuessel II (2003-2005)</i>	2002 - 2006
		<i>Schuessel IV (2005-2007)</i>	2002 - 2006
		<i>Kurz I (2017-2019)</i>	2017 - 2019
Bulgaria	Citizens for European Development	<i>Borisov III (2017-2021)</i>	2017 - 2021
Denmark	Conservative People's Party	<i>Rasmussen F I (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2005
		<i>Rasmussen F II (2005-2007)</i>	2005 - 2007
		<i>Rasmussen F III (2007-2009)</i>	2007 - 2011
		<i>Rasmussen L I (2009-2011)</i>	2007 - 2011
		<i>Rasmussen L III (2016-2019)</i>	2015 - 2019
		<i>Rasmussen F I (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2005
	Denmark's Liberal Party	<i>Rasmussen F II (2005-2007)</i>	2005 - 2007
		<i>Rasmussen F III (2007-2009)</i>	2007 - 2011
		<i>Rasmussen L I (2009-2011)</i>	2007 - 2011
		<i>Rasmussen L II (2015-2016)</i>	2015 - 2019
		<i>Rasmussen L III (2016-2019)</i>	2015 - 2019
		<i>Rasmussen L III (2016-2019)</i>	2015 - 2019
		<i>Rasmussen L III (2016-2019)</i>	2015 - 2019
Estonia	Estonian Centre Party	<i>Ratas II (2019-2021)</i>	2019 - 2023
	Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica	<i>Ratas II (2019-2021)</i>	2019 - 2023

Finland	Centre Party	<i>Sipilae I (2015-2017)</i>	2015 - 2019
	National Coalition Party	<i>Sipilae I (2015-2017)</i>	2015 - 2019
Italy	Go Italy - The People of Freedom	<i>Berlusconi II (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2006
		<i>Berlusconi III (2005-2006)</i>	2001 - 2006
		<i>Berlusconi IV (2008-2011)</i>	2008 - 2013
	National Alliance	<i>Berlusconi II (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2006
		<i>Berlusconi III (2005-2006)</i>	2001 - 2006
	CCD+CDU / UdC	<i>Berlusconi II (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2006
		<i>Berlusconi III (2005-2006)</i>	2001 - 2006
	Five Star Movement	<i>Conte I (2018-2019)</i>	2018 - 2022
Netherlands	Christian Democratic Appeal	<i>Balkenende I (2002-2002)</i>	2002 - 2003
		<i>Balkenende II (2002-2003)</i>	2002 - 2003
		<i>Rutte I (2010-2012)</i>	2010 - 2012
	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	<i>Balkenende I (2002-2002)</i>	2002 - 2003
		<i>Balkenende II (2002-2003)</i>	2002 - 2003
		<i>Rutte I (2010-2012)</i>	2010 - 2012
Norway	Conservative Party	<i>Bondevik II (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2005
		<i>Solberg I (2013-2017)</i>	2013 - 2017
		<i>Solberg II (2017-2018)</i>	2017 - 2021
		<i>Solberg III (2018-2019)</i>	2017 - 2021
		<i>Solberg IV (2019-2020)</i>	2017 - 2021
		<i>Solberg V (2020-2021)</i>	2017 - 2021
	Christian Democratic Party	<i>Bondevik II (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2005
		<i>Solberg I (2013-2017)</i>	2013 - 2017
		<i>Solberg IV (2019-2020)</i>	2017 - 2021
		<i>Solberg V (2020-2021)</i>	2017 - 2021
		<i>Solberg V (2020-2021)</i>	2017 - 2021
	Liberal Party of Norway	<i>Bondevik II (2001-2005)</i>	2001 - 2005
		<i>Solberg I (2013-2017)</i>	2013 - 2017
		<i>Solberg III (2018-2019)</i>	2017 - 2021
		<i>Solberg IV (2019-2020)</i>	2017 - 2021
<i>Solberg V (2020-2021)</i>		2017 - 2021	
Poland	League of Polish Families	<i>Marcinkiewicz II (2006-2006)</i>	2005 - 2007
	Self-Defense of the Republic Poland	<i>Marcinkiewicz II (2006-2006)</i>	2005 - 2007
Slovakia	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	<i>Fico I (2006-2010)</i>	2006 - 2010
		<i>Fico I (2006-2010)</i>	2006 - 2010
		<i>Fico III (2016-2016)</i>	2016 - 2020
		<i>Fico IV (2016-2018)</i>	2016 - 2020
		<i>Pellegrini (2018-2020)</i>	2016 - 2020
	Most-Hid	<i>Fico III (2016-2016)</i>	2016 - 2020
		<i>Fico IV (2016-2018)</i>	2016 - 2020
		<i>Pellegrini (2018-2020)</i>	2016 - 2020
	Ordinary People and Independent	<i>Matovic (2020-2021)</i>	2020 - 2023
		<i>Heger I (2021-2022)</i>	2020 - 2023
<i>Heger II (2022-2023)</i>		2020 - 2023	
Freedom and Solidarity	<i>Matovic (2020-2021)</i>	2020 - 2023	

		<i>Heger I (2021-2022)</i>	2020 - 2023
		<i>Heger II (2022-2023)</i>	2020 - 2023
Slovenia	Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia	<i>Jansa III (2020-2022)</i>	2018 - 2022
	New Slovenia - Christian People's Party	<i>Jansa III (2020-2022)</i>	2018 - 2022
	Modern Center Party	<i>Jansa III (2020-2022)</i>	2018 - 2022
	Slovenian Democratic Party	<i>Jansa III (2020-2022)</i>	2018 - 2022

Source: own elaboration with data from ParlGov database (Döring et al., 2022)

It is crucial to clarify that this study initially focused on the most formal sense of coalition participations. This refers to parties that secured cabinet positions and ministerial roles, and were thus expected to wield significant influence in passing legislation. However, subsequent research expanded the scope to include partnerships formed through confidence and supply agreements or external legislative support. Notable examples of such partnerships include the Danish People's Party (DF), the Progress Party of Norway (FrP), the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, and the Slovenian National Party (SNS). This inclusion is based on the presence of formal agreements and policy concessions.

The decision to expand the study's scope is supported by previous research. Akkerman & de Lange in their 2012 and 2016 studies, as well as Krause et al. in (2023), have acknowledged these types of agreements as significant in exploring the impact of PRRP's role in governance. They highlight the importance of these agreements, particularly in the context of the implications that arise from breaking the cordon sanitaire for the partner parties. Such arrangements, although not as formally binding as coalition governments, still represent a significant political commitment and can have substantial policy and electoral repercussions.

In the process of continuing to refine the case selection for this thesis, certain exceptions were considered and ultimately excluded from the sample. These exclusions were based on specific criteria that align with the research's focus and objectives.

One notable exclusion involves cases where interim coalitions assumed executive office temporarily, until next election can be organized and held. Such situations often arise in the aftermath of various crises, forcing the formation of what are known as unity coalitions or transversal coalitions. These coalitions are crucial for stabilizing the social and political landscape following significant disruptions. A key characteristic of the coalition formation process in these

interim governments is that the participating parties are not operating under normal political circumstances. As a result, the strategic decisions made in forming these coalitions are unlikely to reflect the usual considerations of party branding or future electoral performance. In the context of this research, notable examples include the cabinet of Mario Draghi in Italy, formed in response to the COVID-19 crisis, and the cabinet of Lucas Papademos in Greece, which followed the collapse of the George Papandreou cabinet amid the financial crisis in 2011. In these instances, the abnormal political conditions and the nature of the coalitions suggest that their inclusion would not offer meaningful insights into the typical dynamics of party strategy and electoral consequences in standard political settings.

Another significant exclusion concerns Latvia and its party system. Latvia is known for its prominent far right and populist movements, especially the "National Alliance (NA)" and "Who owns the state? (KPV LV)". The National Alliance, with its long-standing presence in government and classification as far right and Eurosceptic (but not populist) by the Populist dataset, does not fit the criteria for this study. Despite its ideological stances, the party's extensive integration into the political elite over the years means its participation in government does not create substantial shocks within the party system, nor does it possess a pariah reputation. On the other hand, "Who owns the state?" is a newer political entity, categorized as populist and Eurosceptic but not far-right, notably diverging from the National Alliance on several liberal issues (Rooduijin et al., 2023). The distinction in categorization and the relatively recent involvement of "Who owns the state?" in politics led to the decision not to include Latvia in this thesis. The political dynamics within Latvia, while intriguing, do not align closely enough with the specific focus of this study, particularly given the nuanced distinctions within its far right and populist movements.

Contrastingly, the case of the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) in the Netherlands presents a different scenario. Although categorized similarly as populist and Eurosceptic but not far-right, the LPF's inclusion in much of the literature on this topic and the evident polarization it triggered in Dutch politics warrant its inclusion in this study. Research, such as the panel study by Bischof & Wagner (2019), indicates that the LPF's entry into the Dutch parliament in 2002 led to immediate ideological polarization across the political spectrum. This polarization, along with the institutional recognition and legitimization of the LPF, had a significant societal impact. Therefore, the LPF

represents a relevant case for examining the effects of a radical-right party's parliamentary entrance and its broader implications on political dynamics and public opinion.

The dataset of cases for this study is meticulously structured to encompass only incumbent parties. These are parties that are facing a new election after having participated, at some point, in executive office during last parliamentary electoral term. Within this pool, the dataset includes parties that have formed coalitions with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRP) in this specific term, parties that have not, and the PRRPs themselves. The deliberate focus on incumbent parties as the sole constituents of the dataset is a strategic decision aimed at controlling for inherent effects associated with incumbency. These effects include, but are not limited to, increased visibility, access to resources, and the incumbent advantage, which could otherwise skew the analysis. This control is crucial because it allows for a more accurate assessment of the impact of forming a coalition with PRRPs, independent of the advantages conferred by incumbency.

By selecting only incumbent parties, the study controls for these inherent effects, such as increased visibility, access to resources, and incumbent advantage, which might confound the analysis. This control is crucial because it allows for a more accurate assessment of the impact of forming a coalition with PRRPs, independent of the advantages conferred by incumbency.

Other incentive to limiting the sample to only incumbent parties, is to ensure that all analyzed parties had the agency and opportunity to form a coalition with PRRPs, thus making the sample more homogeneous in terms of decision-making potential. This homogeneity allows for a more focused examination of the strategic decision of agreeing a coalition with PRRP, as it applies to parties that had a realistic chance of entering into such coalitions.

Furthermore, the selection of incumbent parties as the study's sample is methodologically sound and strategically chosen to address the proposed research questions effectively. This choice allows for a more targeted examination of the electoral repercussions of forming a coalition with PRRPs, minimizing confounding factors and maximizing the relevance of the findings to parties in positions of power.

In addition to the incumbent-focused selection, the study's dataset is tailored to include only parties from countries where PRRPs have been part of governing coalitions. This criterion is pivotal for grounding the analysis in real-world scenarios, where voters have directly responded to these

political alliances. By concentrating on countries where the 'cordon sanitaire' has been breached, the study can precisely evaluate the electoral impact of such political decisions. This focus excludes countries where no coalition with PRRPs has occurred, as the electoral implications in these contexts would be largely speculative and not based on observable outcomes.

The inclusion of only those contexts where PRRPs have entered coalitions is crucial for understanding the nuanced political dynamics at play. These dynamics include public sentiment, media framing, and overall political discourse surrounding PRRPs. It's in these environments that the potential backlash or voter response to forming coalitions with PRRPs becomes most evident and measurable. In contrast, in countries where such coalitions have not been formed, the absence of this political signal renders the voter reaction to this specific scenario untestable. Thus, the dataset's composition is methodologically structured to ensure a focused and contextually relevant analysis of the electoral consequences of coalition formations with PRRPs.

It is also important to highlight that this thesis was able to incorporate incumbent electoral data performance of all the relevant elections for my sample that occurred in 2023. This includes the recent elections that took place in Estonia, Finland, Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia during 2023, which allows a novel approach when building large-N aggregate studies regarding inclusion of PRRP in governments. In summary, the built dataset involves 113 data entries, consisting of 46 political parties from 11 different countries.

Through these careful selections and exclusions, the study aims to focus on cases that provide the most relevant and insightful data regarding the impact of populist radical right-wing parties on coalition formation and electoral performance in European parliamentary systems. In the next section, a closer look at the relevant variables for the methodology will be presented.

### **3.2 Variables**

As mentioned in previous sections, the unit of analysis in this research is the 'Party-Term.' It is necessary, therefore, to break down the variables that will define each of these units.

The first step involves considering the dependent variable for the model. Since the main topic of this research is to measure the electoral cost of certain political strategies, the model used in the analysis must consider the electoral performance of a party as its dependent variable.

Next, we focus on selecting suitable independent and control variables aligned with our research questions and hypotheses.

The first, and most crucial, independent variable assesses whether a party chose to collaborate with the PRRP during the previous parliamentary term. This distinction is critical for comparing different subgroups in the sample based on their coalition formation decisions.

An extra variable will be included among the independent variables to identify whether a party is a PRRP. While analyzing the electoral outcomes for PRRPs post-executive office participation is intriguing, this research primarily focuses elsewhere. Identifying PRRPs will enable us to isolate their unique electoral performance effects.

Additionally, another independent variable concerning the ideological position of each party in the dataset will be introduced. This inclusion is essential for exploring aspects related to the second hypothesis outlined in the theoretical framework of this research.

Up to this point in the section, I have outlined all the essential variables for my model, as they directly relate to the research objectives and primary focus. However, it is now necessary to introduce additional variables to make the model more representative of real-life factors that can influence electoral performance. The variance in the dependent variable cannot be fully explained by the independent variables already mentioned. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate other independent variables that impact the electoral performance of these parties and isolate the "real" effects of political decisions on subsequent vote shares.

In light of this, and following extensive review of similar studies, my model needs to include additional key effects that could significantly impact electoral performance. These will be categorized into two new sets of variables. The first set includes variables related to the parties' performance while in office during the recently concluded parliamentary cycle. The second set comprises variables that provide insight into the general social and economic context at the time of the upcoming election.

In the first group, which pertains to in-office performance, variables related to the party's influence within the governing coalition, the level of conflict within the coalition, and the overall performance of the cabinet will be added. Initially, the share of seats a party held in the previous parliamentary cycle is a critical variable. It serves as a measure of the party's influence and potential bargaining power within a coalition. A party with a larger share of seats is likely to have a more significant say in policy decisions, potentially influencing voter perceptions associated with forming a coalition with PRRPs. This will also apply in the cases of parties that participate in coalition within the agreement of external support. Furthermore, the electorate's response to a party's coalition entry may be influenced by the party's perceived strength and effectiveness in the prior term.

Regarding the level of intra-cabinet conflict, this variable is included to account for the coalition's internal dynamics, which can significantly impact voter perceptions of government stability and efficacy. High levels of conflict within the cabinet could exacerbate the electoral costs of coalition formation, as it may signal disunity and inefficiency, undermining voter confidence and overshadowing the benefits of coalition governance. For instance, Pedro Riera's 2022 study, a key reference in constructing my analysis model, found that populist parties in cabinets with low intra-cabinet conflict tend to fare worse electorally in subsequent elections compared to those in cabinets with higher levels of conflict (Riera & Pastor, 2022).

Regarding the duration of a party's participation in executive office, this factor is included in the model as a proxy for the overall performance of the cabinet. This variable goes beyond merely recording the party's tenure in office; it also reflects its sustained impact on policy outcomes. A lengthy period of participation can suggest a stable and successful governance phase, potentially mitigating any negative electoral repercussions from controversial coalition decisions. On the other hand, a brief tenure might indicate instability or public dissatisfaction, potentially increasing the electoral risks associated with forming coalitions with PRRPs.

Moving on to the second set of variables, those providing insight into the sociological climate at the country level, the model will include independent variables that represent the main macroeconomic indicators for each country at the time of the election. In terms of economic conditions, our measures focus on three usual suspects: inflation, unemployment, and economic

growth. These are widely used in cross-national studies as reliable indicators to explain election outcomes (Paldam & others, 1991; Powell Jr & Whitten, 1993).

Recent literature continues to affirm the relevance of retrospective economic voting. Guntermann et al. (2021) found that incumbent presidents are more likely to seek re-election and win in a favorable economic context. Additionally, Achen and Bartels (2017) highlighted that voters typically hold incumbents responsible for economic conditions, regardless of the actual influence these incumbents have over the economy. This phenomenon is further nuanced by findings from Goubin et al. (2020), who noted that incumbents face stronger penalties for poor economic performance, particularly in countries with high economic inequality. Wilkin et al. (1997) also contributed to this narrative, demonstrating that economic growth in an election year significantly sways votes towards the major party in office.

Although some studies have questioned the predictive power of these economic variables concerning the electoral performance of incumbents, they are not deemed entirely irrelevant. Powell and Whitten (1993) suggest that while these variables might not always be decisive, they maintain significant weight in certain specific contexts.

To conclude the description of variables in our model, we incorporate control variables to account for fixed effects from each country in the sample. The use of country dummies in our regression model is key to addressing unobserved heterogeneity across various national contexts. With a dataset featuring multiple parties from each of the present countries, controlling for country-specific factors is crucial, as these can significantly influence electoral performance.

Country dummies serve as proxies for numerous country-specific attributes, including political culture, electoral systems, and economic conditions not previously covered. This approach allows the model to more precisely isolate the impact of forming coalitions with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) on vote shares. It's important to note that political institutions and the historical presence of PRRPs vary widely, influencing voter expectations and reactions to coalition formations in different political contexts.

Additionally, country dummies are instrumental in reducing the risk of omitted variable bias. This type of bias can occur when relevant variables are excluded, leading to skewed estimates of the effects of included variables. Without country dummies, the model could inaccurately attribute the

impact of country-specific factors to the main variables under study, potentially misrepresenting the electoral implications of coalitions with PRRPs.

The next section will provide a detailed overview of the operationalization and data sources for each variable, offering an in-depth understanding of their application within the model.

### **3.3 Data sources and Operationalization**

In this section, we delve into the foundational aspects of our research methodology, specifically focusing on the data sources and the operationalization of each variable. This involves a detailed exploration of where our data originates and the rationale behind the specific operational choices made for each variable. A comprehensive approach to data collection and operationalization was implemented to align with the research's objectives. This section outlines the various data sources utilized and the methodology employed in operationalizing these data sets to serve the research objectives effectively.

#### **Electoral performance (Dependent Variable):**

The initial step in data collection involved gathering electoral data. Two primary sources were instrumental in this regard: EU-NED, The European NUTS-Level Election Dataset (Schraff et al., 2022), and the CLEA European Union Parliamentary Elections Archive (Kollman et al., 2019). These datasets provided comprehensive party totals for each parliamentary election during the relevant years for this thesis.

A significant aspect of electoral data collection was the decision on how to register the vote share. Instead of calculating the share over the total of valid votes, I chose to consider the share over the total counted votes. This approach acknowledges the growing trend of casting blank or null votes in an era marked by populist movements and a general decline in democratic trust. By including these votes in the total, the analysis gains a more nuanced understanding of the total vote share, providing insights into the behavior of increasingly disillusioned and disappointed voters.

When it comes to the operationalization of the variable in the regression model to be performed, several options were examined to best represent sensitive changes in party electoral results. One

option that is widespread in the academic literature researching vote performance of political parties is to have the vote share of current ( $V_t$ ) election as a dependent variable and adding the previous party vote share ( $V_{t-1}$ ) to the independent variables, to consider the prior level of electoral support. Aiming to fix potential problems related to temporal dependence in the data (Beck & Katz, 1995). But, instead, I decided to use the logarithm of the ratio of current to previous vote shares as the dependent variable (DV). This decision is more aligned with my research question and theoretical framework for several reasons.

Firstly, the logarithm of a ratio is a symmetrical measure. It treats proportional gains and losses equally. This is not the case if one were to simply subtract the lagged vote share from the current vote share, which could create an asymmetrical view of electoral changes. Additionally, by employing the log ratio, the DV directly captures the proportional change in vote share. This approach is sensitive to the nuances of political decisions, such as forming coalitions. The log ratio reflects the significance of such changes more accurately than absolute differences would. This is particularly relevant in understanding the dynamics of coalition impacts on electoral performance.

Another advantage of using the log ratio is its ability to address potential issues of autocorrelation, which can occur when using lagged vote share as an independent variable (IV). Autocorrelation happens when the error terms are correlated with the lagged DV, potentially violating the assumptions of a regression model. By integrating the past vote share directly into the DV through the log ratio, this methodological pitfall is avoided.

Furthermore, the log ratio allows for comparability across different contexts and time periods. As a relative measure, it acknowledges that a gain or loss of a certain percentage of the vote share can have varied implications, depending on factors like the party's initial size and the electoral context.

Lastly, the decision to form a coalition with PRRPs is strategic, and its impact on vote share may not be linear or absolute. The log ratio aptly captures the multiplicative effect of this decision, offering a more nuanced understanding of voter response. If voters react to coalition formation with PRRPs by significantly altering their support – potentially halving or doubling it – the log ratio will dynamically capture this effect, providing a more accurate representation of the political landscape.

**Dummy identification variables (independent variables):**

As outlined in the previous section, the model incorporates two dummy variables for each data entry. The first, labeled 'CoalitionWithPRRP,' indicates whether the party in question formed a coalition with the far-right in the specified term (yes/no). The second dummy variable identifies if the party is categorized as a PRRP or not.

Regarding the source of party categorization, this thesis relies on the Popu-list database (Rooduijn et al., 2023), as referenced in the case selection section. This database provides an expert-reviewed classification of European parties across 31 countries. Information on coalition formations with the populist radical right is sourced from the ParlGov database (Döring et al., 2022), an online dataset that includes detailed cabinet information by country and electoral period.

### **Ideological position (independent variable):**

This research primarily utilizes the 1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Jolly et al., 2022) to determine the ideological positions of parties. We specifically focus on their LRGEN index, which indicates a party's left-right position in terms of its overall ideological stance during an election year. The index ranges from 1 to 10, with 0 representing the Extreme Left and 10 the Extreme Right. It is evaluated by experts on each year of elections capturing possible changes in the positions of parties from one election to the other. Notably, the LRGEN index reflects the parties' broader ideological stance beyond just economic issues, encompassing views on topics like Euroscepticism, authoritarianism, and multiculturalism tolerance. This dynamism in the evaluation allows to capture important differences between PRRP and other parties.

While alternative measures like the left-right index from the ParlGov project (Döring et al., 2022) and the RILE index from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2015) were considered, they were ultimately not chosen. The index in ParlGov is a static index that doesn't get reassessed election after election. The RILE index, in particular, faced criticism for its effectiveness in representing true positions (Mölder, 2016), leading to its exclusion. The CHES data offers a more dynamic and comprehensive representation of party ideologies, crucial for understanding strategic decisions and alignments in coalition formations.

For the built dataset, for each party that is evaluating its vote share in a current election ( $V_t$ ) compared to their vote share in the previous election ( $V_{t-1}$ ), the ideological stance being considered in that unit is the one that the party presented in the  $t-1$  election. This stance reflects the policy

agenda the party committed to before entering the governing coalition and serves as the baseline for voters to evaluate the party's performance as an incumbent.

**Intra-cabinet conflict (independent variable):**

Intra-cabinet conflicts play a significant role in how parties communicate differences among coalition members to voters, a process that can substantially impact their electoral prospects (Klüver & Spoon, 2020). These conflicts serve as a key indicator of the internal cohesion, or lack thereof, within coalition governments. Understanding and measuring this dynamic is essential for comprehending how it affects the electoral outcomes of the parties involved.

To quantify intra-cabinet conflict, this research utilizes a measure based on the ideological distance between the most left-wing and the most right-wing parties in a given cabinet. This approach offers a clear, quantifiable way to assess the ideological spread within coalitions, providing insights into the degree of political diversity and potential sources of friction. The ideological positions of these parties are also sourced from the 1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Jolly et al., 2022); and the detailed information about the composition of cabinets is extracted from the ParlGov database (Döring et al., 2022).

**Seat Share (independent variable):**

Seat share information was obtained from the ParlGov database's election data (Döring et al., 2022). This dataset details the number of seats held by each party in a particular parliamentary term, in relation to the total number of seats available in that country's legislature. In my model, this will be operationalized as the percentage of total seats gained by a party.

**Duration of participation in executive office (independent variable):**

Once again thanks to the data from the ParlGov cabinet database (Döring et al., 2022), I was able to determine the exact start and end dates of each cabinet analyzed in this thesis. To operationalize this variable, I calculated the duration that a party participated in one or several cabinets within a single parliamentary term. This duration was then compared to the legally mandated frequency of Parliamentary Elections in the respective country, which typically spans 4 or 5 years in the countries included in my sample.

Accordingly, I operationalized this variable as the proportion of days a party spent in an executive coalition relative to the total number of days in the standard electoral cycle of that country. In instances of early elections, the calculation still considered the total number of days as per the regular election frequency. This approach is justified as early elections often signal the breakdown of a functioning cabinet or the inability of parties with greater influence to secure a suitable coalition partner.

#### **Economic indicators (independent variables):**

According to the standard convention established by Powell and Whitten (1993), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and inflation variables are constructed to measure change. Specifically, these variables indicate the percentage change in the gross domestic product per capita and the consumer price index, respectively. These measures provide a dynamic view of the economic conditions, reflecting how they evolve over time. On the other hand, the unemployment variable differs in its construction, being based on the absolute percentage of the total workforce. This offers a direct and straightforward indicator of employment conditions within an economy.

The data for these economic indicators was meticulously sourced from The World Bank website (World Bank, 2023). The usage of this data was carefully timed to align with the electoral schedules in each of the sample cases in this research. In instances where an election occurred in the first half of the year, the economic data from the previous year was employed. This approach is based on the assumption that the economic conditions of the previous year would have a more pronounced impact on early-year elections. Conversely, for elections held in the latter half of the year, the economic indicators from that same year were utilized. This ensures a closer alignment with the economic context voters experienced leading up to the election.

## **4. Analysis and Results**

This section delves into the empirical heart of my research inquiry, presenting a comprehensive analysis of the electoral dynamics at play when political parties choose to ally with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs). Through a series of meticulously constructed regression models,

we examine the intricate relationships between coalition behaviors and their subsequent electoral repercussions. The coefficients derived from these models offer quantifiable evidence that either substantiates or refutes our guiding hypothesis: that collaboration with PRRPs imposes an electoral penalty on mainstream parties.

Building on the previous sections, the dataset for this analysis encompasses parties that have formed coalitions with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRP), those that haven't, and the PRRPs themselves. However, the regression analysis in this section will focus on a sample excluding the PRRPs. This approach is taken to facilitate conclusions that are instrumental for comparison across similar political entities, enhancing the precision of our estimates regarding the impact of coalition decisions on vote shares.

The rationale behind this decision is rooted in the distinct nature of voter responses to coalition formations. For mainstream center-left or center-right parties, entering into a coalition with a PRRP is often a contentious move that elicits clear voter reactions. These reactions are a key focus of this thesis, particularly in exploring the 'penalty' or 'reward' incurred by parties for collaborating with PRRPs. In contrast, voter support for PRRPs follows a different rationale. It may be more ideologically driven and less impacted by coalition dynamics. Analyzing the results excluding PRRP initially, allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the electoral implications, closely aligning with the research question's specificity.

Nevertheless, it's important to emphasize that the full dataset, which includes the electoral data of PRRPs and considers their post-incumbency electoral results within the subgroup of parties that did not form a coalition with PRRP (since they cannot do a partnership with themselves), will be subjected to a parallel regression analysis. The findings from this comprehensive analysis will be detailed in the appendix of this thesis. Including this additional analysis serves as a vital statistical robustness check, reinforcing the reliability and depth of the results presented in this section. This comprehensive approach ensures that our conclusions are well-supported and that they reflect the complex dynamics of electoral responses to coalition formations with PRRPs more precisely.

Considering all the previously established criteria to build a comprehensive analysis, the regression model representation is summarized in the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \log(\text{Vote Shr ratio}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CoalitionWithPRRP} + \beta_2 \text{LeftRight position} + \beta_3 \text{Seat Shr} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Duration in Office} + \beta_5 \text{Intracab Confl} + \beta_6 \text{GDP grw} + \beta_7 \text{Inflation grw} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{Unemploy rt} + \beta_n \text{CountryFES} + \dots + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

The presented model, systematically encapsulates the relationship between the log ratio of vote shares and a set of explanatory variables, including the critical factor of coalition formation with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs), ideological placement on the left-right spectrum, and the set of other pertinent political and economic indicators described before in this research. This formulation allows us to quantify the extent to which these variables influence the electoral outcomes for parties in question.

Moving forward, the empirical findings derived from this model are presented. The results are displayed in Table 3, which encompasses two distinct yet complementary models. The first column of the table delineates the results from the model that incorporates country fixed effects, offering insights into the electoral dynamics while accounting for country-specific heterogeneities. Conversely, the second column of Table 3 outlines the results from a similar model but without the inclusion of country fixed effects.

**Table 3.** Regression results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	log_ratio	
	With FE (1)	Without FE (2)
Coalition With PRRP	-0.043 (0.142)	-0.148 (0.118)
Left-Right Ideological Placement	0.011 (0.041)	0.008 (0.043)
Seat Share	-0.254 (0.501)	0.026 (0.471)
Participation Length	-0.225 (0.237)	-0.024 (0.220)
Intra-Cabinet Conflict	0.026 (0.049)	-0.045 (0.040)
GDP Growth	-1.907 (2.355)	-3.357* (1.947)
Inflation Rate	-2.227 (1.990)	-1.605 (1.747)
Unemployment Rate	0.446 (3.004)	-2.746 (2.046)
Constant	0.212 (0.505)	0.170 (0.473)
Observations	88	88
R <sup>2</sup>	0.349	0.096
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.179	0.005
Residual Std. Error	0.466 (df = 69)	0.513 (df = 79)
F Statistic	2.054** (df = 18; 69)	1.053 (df = 8; 79)

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: own elaboration with data from ParlGov, CLEA, and CHAPEL database

Upon examining the results, it becomes evident that the variable confirming the existence of a “Coalition With PRRP”, central to this investigation, does not show statistical significance in either model. This finding challenges our initial hypothesis that partnering with PRRPs in a coalition government would lead to poorer electoral performance for mainstream parties in subsequent

general elections. The lack of a significant negative effect contradicts the anticipated electoral penalty, suggesting that voters may not uniformly penalize mainstream parties for such coalition decisions. Similarly, the variable representing left-right ideological placement, while crucial in understanding the political landscape, also does not show a statistically significant impact on the electoral outcomes in the context of these models.

These results compel us to reject our first hypothesis. The anticipated clear-cut electoral cost for parties entering coalitions with PRRPs is not evident in the data. This outcome prompts a more nuanced consideration of how coalition dynamics might play out in different ideological contexts.

We then shift our focus to a more detailed examination involving the interaction between “Coalition With PRRP” and left-right ideological placement. This analysis aims to uncover whether the ideological proximity to PRRPs influences the electoral impact experienced by mainstream parties. In essence, this analysis acknowledges that the impact of coalition formation is unlikely to be uniform across the political spectrum. The results from the interaction analysis will move beyond the question of whether coalitions with PRRPs affect electoral outcomes to examining how the impact varies based on a party's ideological position. They could indicate whether ideological proximity acts as a buffer against electoral losses in coalition scenarios or if ideological contrasts exacerbate the electoral risks of such political decisions.

Our second hypothesis posits that parties ideologically closer to PRRPs will suffer less from an electoral standpoint compared to those more ideologically distant, after forming a coalition. The rationale behind this hypothesis is rooted in the belief that voters may be more forgiving or even supportive of coalitions between ideologically aligned parties, as opposed to those that cross significant ideological divides. The results of the interaction analysis are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Regression Results. Interaction Analysis.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	log_ratio	
	With FE (1)	Without FE (2)
Coalition With PRRP	-1.424 <sup>***</sup> (0.516)	-1.337 <sup>**</sup> (0.559)
Left-Right Ideological Placement	-0.093 <sup>*</sup> (0.054)	-0.085 (0.060)
Seat Share	-0.357 (0.480)	0.046 (0.461)
Participation Length	-0.148 (0.228)	0.032 (0.217)
Intra-Cabinet Conflict	0.069 (0.049)	-0.016 (0.041)
GDP Growth	-2.589 (2.262)	-4.511 <sup>**</sup> (1.976)
Inflation Rate	-2.484 (1.903)	-1.712 (1.708)
Unemployment Rate	1.043 (2.876)	-2.391 (2.006)
CoalitionWithPRRP * leftright_pos	0.221 <sup>***</sup> (0.080)	0.188 <sup>**</sup> (0.087)
Constant	0.729 (0.517)	0.638 (0.510)
Observations	88	88
R <sup>2</sup>	0.415	0.148
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.252	0.050
Residual Std. Error	0.445 (df = 68)	0.501 (df = 78)
F Statistic	2.540 <sup>***</sup> (df = 19; 68)	1.505 (df = 9; 78)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Source: own elaboration with data from ParlGov, CLEA, and CHAPEL database

The regression analysis, incorporating an interaction term between forming a coalition with Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) and the left-right ideological placement, reveals several key insights pertinent to understanding the electoral dynamics at play in coalition politics.

Regarding the overall model indicators, and considering the model that includes country fixed effects, it can be seen that the model's residual standard error of 0.445 and an adjusted R-squared value of 0.252 indicate a moderate fit. The F-statistic (2.54) with a p-value of 0.002632 suggests the model, as a whole, is statistically significant, though there is considerable variability that is not captured by the model.

The interaction term between the decision of collaborating with PRRP in executive office and the ideological placement of the party is statistically significant, highlighting its importance in the model. The positive coefficient (0.221) indicates that the effect of forming a coalition with PRRPs on vote share changes depending on a party's position on the left-right spectrum.

This result directly addresses the second hypothesis of this thesis. The positive sign of the interaction coefficient suggests that parties closer to PRRPs ideologically experience a less negative, or potentially even a positive, change in their electoral performance compared to those more ideologically distant. In essence, for right-leaning parties, the electoral cost of forming a coalition with PRRPs is smaller, and it increases as parties are ideologically further from the PRRP spectrum.

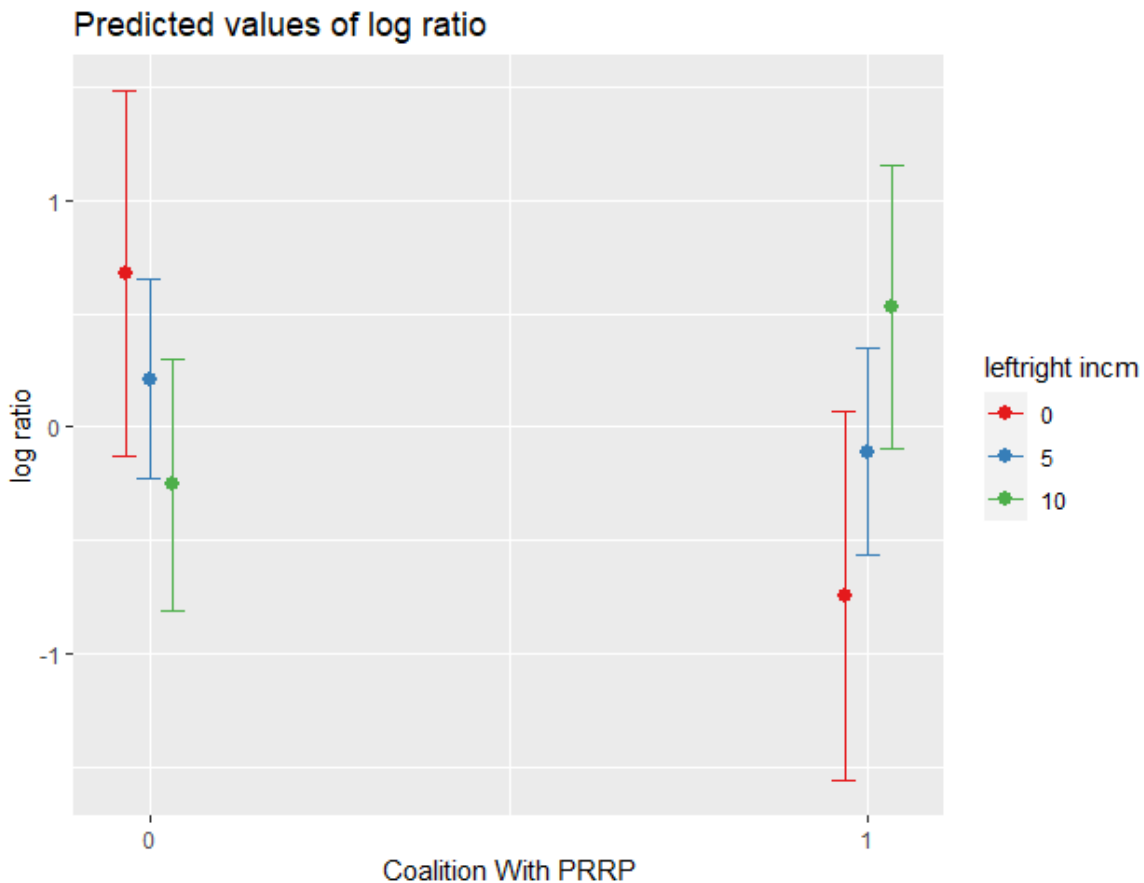
To understand better the previous results, the visual representation of the regression results through a predicted values plot, is a powerful tool that complements the numerical output of the statistical analysis. The significance of the interaction between forming a coalition with Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) and left-right ideological placement is not only established in the table of regression results but is also vividly illustrated in the plot found in the Figure 2.

The visualization becomes especially valuable in elucidating the nature of the interaction effect. It helps to convey complex statistical relationships in a more intuitive format, allowing us to see at a glance how the predicted log ratio of vote shares changes for parties with different ideological stances, both in and out of coalition with PRRPs.

In the plot, distinct lines for parties with different levels of left-right ideological scores (notated as 0, 5, and 10) will be observed. These lines graphically depict how the predicted change in vote

shares shifts when a party decides to enter into a coalition with PRRPs. The varying slopes and positions of these lines offer a visual confirmation of the hypothesis that ideologically closer parties to PRRPs will experience a different electoral impact than those more distant.

Moreover, the confidence intervals in the plot underscore the precision of the predictions at each level of the ideological spectrum, giving an immediate sense of the confidence we can have in the model's predictions across different scenarios.



**Figure 2.** Predicted values of log vote ratio. Interaction Analysis (Source: Own elaboration).

From previous plot, the significance found in the regression model is more clearly seen. Parties with a 0 left-right ideological score, imputable to the far-left, have a predicted decrease in log ratio of vote shares when forming a coalition with PRRPs. This suggests a negative electoral impact for these parties when entering into a coalition with PRRPs. For parties with a 5 score, which might represent centrist parties, the change in predicted log ratio when forming a coalition with PRRPs is also negative but less pronounced than for the far-left parties. Parties on the far-right, with a 10

score, show an increase in the predicted log ratio of vote shares when not in coalition with PRRPs, and a less negative or nearly neutral change when in coalition. This suggests that right-leaning parties might not experience a significant electoral penalty for forming a coalition with PRRPs.

As this analysis section conclude, it is imperative to emphasize the need for further statistical validation to reinforce the robustness of the findings presented. The observed statistical significance, particularly regarding the interaction between coalition formation with Populist Radical Right-wing Parties (PRRPs) and left-right ideological placement, serves as a promising indicator of the substantive impact of such political alliances on electoral outcomes.

As delineated before, in the appendix of this thesis, additional statistical tests are performed to ensure the reliability of these results. The consistency in the significance of the findings across these tests indicate a great deal about the methodological soundness of presented analytical approach.

In the next section of discussion and conclusion, I will synthesize the insights collected from this empirical analysis with the broader body of literature reviewed earlier in the thesis. This synthesis aims to provide a comprehensive reflection on the interplay between theoretical expectations and empirical evidence.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

### **5.1 Discussion**

The previously presented findings did not support the main theoretical expectation of seeing that the electoral fate of a party can be directly affected by their decision of collaborating with PRRP in governing coalition. But a more profound methodological approach to existing data, offered substantial support to the second hypothesis of the thesis. The variation in electoral impact based on ideological proximity implies that voters' responses to coalition formations are nuanced and influenced by perceived ideological alignments.

The predicted values plot that concluded the previous section, showed that as parties become more right-leaning (moving from a score of 0 to 10), the predicted log ratio of vote shares when in coalition with PRRPs may move from negative to less negative or even positive. This trend would validate the second hypothesis, suggesting that right-wing parties, which are ideologically closer to PRRPs, may face less of an electoral penalty—or even gain support—when aligning with PRRPs. Conversely, parties that are ideologically distant from PRRPs and yet form a coalition with them might face greater electoral penalties. This outcome could stem from voters perceiving the coalition as a betrayal or a significant deviation from the party's core principles and values. Such a coalition could be viewed as purely opportunistic or a compromise on fundamental ideological stances, leading to a loss of trust and support among the party's traditional voter base.

The theories explored in the literature review section of this thesis find a direct correlation with the findings presented here. Downs' Spatial Theory of Electoral Performance, emphasizing 'ideological product differentiation' and the maintenance of 'purity of doctrine,' is particularly relevant. In the context of this thesis, these concepts are especially critical for left-leaning parties. The findings underscore the importance of these parties carefully balancing their strategies during coalition formation decisions. This strategic balancing act is not just about political maneuvering; it directly contributes to the establishment of a strong and distinct “party brand”.

Regarding the challenges faced by right-leaning parties, these can be linked to the risks and rewards of the accommodative strategy discussed by Meguid (2005). The decision to collaborate with PRRP in office and the resultant net cost is influenced by a range of factors. These include the contextual scenarios and the distinct forms of leverage that parties in their “ideological neighborhood” need to utilize to their advantage. Crucially, signaling to relevant voters about the salience and ownership of core policy issues becomes a defining factor. This will determine whether voters ultimately prefer the “original” party, or issue owner, over its imitators or if they are open to alternative groups for their democratic representation. The outcome hinges on how effectively parties communicate and maintain their ideological standpoints while navigating the complex landscape of coalition politics.

Building on the analysis of right-leaning parties, the empirical evidence presented in this thesis suggests that their electoral fortunes post-coalition with PRRP are wrapped in uncertainty. However, it's critical to acknowledge that these parties should still be open to exploring such

coalitions. The decision to form an alliance with PRRP hinges on a complex interplay of factors, including the PRRP's competence in communicating salience and ownership of issues to voters. In addition to issue ownership, aspects related to the scope of party brand, such as a propositional and honest critique of current institutional structures, will be also critical for voters. Considering these insights, the right-leaning parties will be able to adeptly navigate the disruption caused by new actors like PRRP in their ideological “neighborhood”.

As PRRP evolves into strong and competent niche parties in many countries, they increasingly assert stronger issue ownership. This development makes the accommodative strategy a high-stakes choice for right-leaning parties, especially in terms of immediate electoral outcomes. The risk involved in such a strategy is underscored by recent research conducted by Krause et al. (2023). In their study, which also approaches electoral support in function of accommodation strategies, they found that populist parties do not lose support from accommodation strategies employed by mainstream parties, and, at the same time, mainstream parties do not appear to benefit significantly from such accommodative strategies.

These findings highlight the complexities of coalition dynamics and the importance of understanding the nuances of voter behavior and party perception. To effectively guide political strategies and decisions, a deeper exploration into additional contextual information is necessary. This includes gaining insights into issue ownership and salience at the policy level, which are crucial for mainstream parties to effectively 'surf' the waves of disruption caused by entities like PRRP.

In examining the applications of our findings for left-leaning parties, it becomes evident that the empirical evidence from this study does not provide strong incentives for these parties to partner with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRP) in executive office. This conclusion, especially in contrast to the analysis for right-leaning parties, suggests that voters that left-leaning parties lose after partnering with PRRP, are unlikely to migrate to right-wing representatives in significant numbers. This aligns with insights from the theoretical background section of this thesis. The reviewed research of Matthew Polacko (2023) found that is the radical left tends who benefit when mainstream parties adopt rightward economic positions. This implies that voters are less inclined to switch 'blocks' from the center-left to the radical right. The reluctance to cross ideological divides highlights a critical aspect of voter behavior and party allegiance.

Moreover, Björn Bremer's survey research, which spanned across countries like Spain, Italy, the UK, Germany, and incorporated larger datasets from 12 EU countries, reinforces this point. Bremer's investigation into policy accommodation, specifically regarding welfare chauvinism and fiscal policy, concluded that efforts by the left to mimic right-wing positions are generally unsuccessful (Bremer, 2018). This finding suggests that attempts by left-leaning parties to adopt right-wing stances do not resonate well with their traditional voter base. There is little real voter competition between the center-left and the radical right.

The main conclusion derived from this for left-leaning parties, is that the costs of expanding their voter bloc towards the right, particularly in seeking new voters, are likely to outweigh the benefits. This dynamic highlights a strategic dilemma: while adapting to changing political landscapes is necessary, there is a fine line between strategic adaptation and the loss of core ideological identity. For left-leaning parties, maintaining their foundational principles seems more crucial than ever, especially in a political environment where voter loyalty cannot be taken for granted and where the repercussions of ideological shifts can be significant. The findings of this thesis, therefore, offer valuable insights for left-leaning parties in strategizing for future elections, emphasizing the importance of authenticity and ideological consistency in an increasingly competitive political landscape.

Regarding the applicability of this research, the findings offer intriguing insights that could be relevant in other political contexts, including other parliamentary systems where the rupture of the cordon sanitaire is imminent or in other institutional structures, like presidential systems. The dynamics of coalition formation and the interplay between mainstream and populist radical right parties (PRRPs) in a parliamentary context provide a foundational understanding that may have broader applicability.

For example, in presidential systems, the mechanics of forming coalitions and the electoral repercussions may manifest differently. However, the core principles identified in this study - such as the electoral risks and rewards of aligning with PRRPs and the ideological balancing acts parties perform - could still be pertinent. For instance, the strategic considerations for mainstream parties when aligning with more extreme factions might still apply, albeit in a modified form, in the context of presidential elections or legislative collaborations. Additionally, the concept of 'ideological product differentiation', as discussed in the context of parliamentary systems, may also

have implications for how parties in presidential systems position themselves on various issues. The potential electoral penalties or benefits of such positioning could influence the strategies adopted by parties in these systems, particularly when faced with the rise of populist movements.

In summary, the regression analysis in this thesis, particularly the significant interaction effect, offers a nuanced view of the electoral repercussions associated with coalition politics. It underscores the complexity of voter behavior and suggests that careful balancing of ideological stances, party branding, and the dynamic political landscape remains the key challenge for parties navigating the evolving terrain of coalition politics.

## **5.2 Limitations of research**

This section aims to transparently discuss the limitations inherent in this study, which are essential for a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the findings. Recognizing these limitations not only grounds the research in a realistic context but also opens avenues for future inquiries and improvements.

One of the primary concerns in this type of statistical analysis, and a key limitation of this study, is the classic adage that correlation does not imply causation. The nuances in interpreting correlations between party-level strategic decisions and electoral outcomes present a significant challenge, particularly in establishing causation within the realm of political science research. This thesis, while meticulously designed to address the research questions posed, encounters the inherent complexities of discerning direct causal relationships in a field characterized by multifaceted and dynamic political phenomena.

Furthermore, the methodology adopted in this thesis, though rigorous and carefully implemented, results in a number of cases that may be considered small relative to similar electoral studies. This aspect is particularly notable given the study's focus on a very specific and contemporary political phenomenon. The recent emergence and consolidation of the latest wave of populist right-wing movements have naturally limited the number of cases available for analysis. This study endeavors to justify these methodological decisions, aiming to accurately represent modern political scenarios and enhance the external applicability of its findings. However, the relatively limited

number of cases necessitates a cautious approach to interpreting the results. The conclusions drawn from this study, while valuable, must be considered within the context of these methodological constraints.

In discussing further limitations of this thesis, it's vital to move beyond viewing political parties as static organizations operating in no-context, with abstract interests and strategies solely determined by doctrinal proximity and electorate complementarity, as noted by Houard-Vial (2022). Political parties are far from monolithic entities; they exist and operate within complex, evolving contexts that significantly influence their strategic decisions and alliances.

The existing literature, and also this research, much more focused on the intriguing object that the far right is, might have underestimated other factors. These include the contexts preceding such alliances and the detailed defining characteristics of mainstream parties. While the behavior of these parties is certainly influenced by their electoral interests and opportunity structures, their actions are not solely self-explanatory or mechanical. There is a need to understand these parties as dynamic and responsive to a multitude of internal and external factors.

The methods and data employed in this thesis can be used in various ways, and the results found can be diverse and sometimes contradictory. Similar situations may lead to different outcomes due to past methodological choices and configurations. Still, this thesis endeavors to distill relevant insights from the systematization of available data, aiming to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding presented research puzzle.

It is also pertinent to address the issue of endogeneity, as highlighted by King, Keohane, and Verba in their seminal work (King et al., 1994). Endogeneity poses a common challenge in social science research, including this analysis. While regression models can detect correlations between values, they rely heavily on theoretical frameworks to determine the direction of causality. King et al. (1994) describe endogeneity as a problem when the explanatory variables' values are a consequence, rather than a cause, of the dependent variable. In the context of this thesis, while coalition formation decisions may influence electoral results, it is equally plausible that electoral outcomes drive parties' coalition strategies. This bidirectional potentiality underscores a perennial challenge in social science: the difficulty in empirically establishing the direction of causality between variables, given the inability to control them fully.

Furthermore, to delve into the intricate motivations behind coalition formation decisions, a qualitative case studies approach may offer more detailed and nuanced insights, particularly in relation to policy accommodation procedures. Solely focusing on a few issues may obscure broader strategic considerations. Qualitative methods, through context-rich case studies or comparative analyses, can more effectively illuminate the differences in approaches to niche party success. These methods enable a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of factors driving political strategies, going beyond surface-level analysis to reveal the intricacies inherent in political decision-making processes.

### **5.3 Conclusions and prospects for future research**

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the electoral outcomes for political parties that choose to form coalitions with Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs). This exploration aimed to systematize the existing electoral data to understand the magnitude and nature of the relationship between coalition decisions and subsequent electoral performance.

The personal interest to write this thesis emerged from observing the political landscape in my home country, where a notable shift towards the local Populist Radical Right Party (PRRP) agenda seemed to be influencing the electorate's voting choices. This shift has led to increased internal conflicts within center-right parties regarding their political strategies. The dilemma they face is immediate and pressing. Additionally, and when it comes to the European parliamentary context, some very evidential coalition breakdowns where PRRPs were participating also called my attention.

The subsequent exhaustive review of the literature covered various critical aspects, including coalition formation, policy accommodation, spatial theory of electoral competition, and party branding. This thorough exploration of existing research provided valuable insights and laid the groundwork for the methodological approach of this study. This thesis proposed a methodological framework centered around a large-N quantitative analysis. Utilizing a linear regression model and drawing on electoral data from multiple sources, this approach was meticulously crafted to address the research questions posed.

And the results suggested that contrary to the expectations set out in the first hypothesis, the analysis did not find supporting evidence that forming a government coalition with PRRPs inevitably leads to poorer electoral performance for other parties involved in the subsequent general election. This finding challenges the assumption that coalitions with PRRPs can predictably affect electoral outcomes just by taking this coalition formation decision. To systematize the possible net cost was, then, not possible because of not consistent empirical evidence.

However, the study successfully identified a significant correlation supporting the second hypothesis. This hypothesis posited that parties ideologically closer to PRRPs would experience a less negative electoral impact compared to those more ideologically distant from PRRPs after forming a coalition with them. This result underscores the importance of ideological proximity in the context of coalition politics. It suggests that the electoral impact of collaborating with PRRPs is not uniform across the political spectrum but varies depending on the ideological alignment between the parties involved.

After concluding this analysis, several avenues for future research have emerged. Inspired by the work of Meijers & Williams (2020), it's suggested that the electoral costs associated with accommodating Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRP) are linked to the prior electoral success of these parties. This concept is further reinforced by Meguid's identification of three distinct phases of PRRP - marginalization, breakthrough, and consolidation (Meguid, 2005). Meguid posits that the success of mainstream parties in countering niche parties like PRRPs hinges on whether their accommodation happens before the niche party becomes entrenched as the sole credible issue promoter. This idea offers an intriguing extension to the current thesis, especially considering that the dataset used here encompasses varying trajectories of PRRP across different countries.

Moreover, this thesis has contributed new insights at the aggregate level, particularly in terms of electoral analysis related to coalition formation decisions and party strategies. An important revelation from testing the first hypothesis revolves around questioning the effectiveness of the 'cordon sanitaire'. This aspect of the research opens up a critical discussion on the traditional approaches to managing the influence of PRRPs and their integration into mainstream political dynamics.

How, then, should a political party tackle the challenge posed by a successful niche party in the electoral arena? One initial recommendation is that democracies should permit the participation of parties that are lawfully elected by voters in free and fair elections, regardless of the potential contentiousness of their ideologies. However, robust political institutions can effectively regulate the influence of such challengers. This can be achieved by strictly enforcing legislative and constitutional norms, subjecting these parties to rigorous public accountability and scrutiny, and addressing pertinent policy issues that polarizing groups often highlight, without necessarily adopting their specific agendas (Downs et al., 2009).

Efforts to address the challenges posed by Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) should not solely depend on the strengths of existing institutions. Political parties and politicians can adopt a proactive stance rather than merely resorting to accommodative or adversarial strategies in response to issues already dominated by PRRPs. It is crucial to recognize that while PRRPs often bring to the forefront real concerns of many people, promoters of liberal democracies should consistently strive to prevent further polarization of societal political discourse. A proactive approach involves identifying and re-politicizing issues that have previously been overlooked. This re-politicization should not simply mimic the proposals of niche parties. Each party, while remaining true to its core values, can address the underlying structural problems that have contributed to the rising success of PRRPs. By doing so, they can redirect public attention to ‘new’ issues over which mainstream parties can assert their own issue ownership. This strategy involves a careful balance between acknowledging the legitimate concerns raised by PRRPs and offering alternative, constructive solutions that align with the party's fundamental principles. It's about shaping the political discourse in a way that transcends mere reaction to PRRPs' agendas, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and less polarized political environment.

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## Appendix

Analysis with sample that includes PRRP post incumbency electoral performance:

- Regression results for independent variables.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	log_ratio	
	With FE (1)	Without FE (2)
Coalition With PRRP	-0.162 (0.144)	-0.121 (0.115)
Left-Right Ideological Placement	0.005 (0.042)	0.025 (0.041)
PRRP	-0.206 (0.181)	-0.228 (0.153)
Seat Share	0.502 (0.467)	0.236 (0.418)
Participation Length	-0.075 (0.233)	0.082 (0.193)
Intra-Cabinet Conflict	-0.023 (0.041)	-0.033 (0.035)
GDP Growth	-3.564 (2.228)	-2.068 (1.717)
Inflation Rate	-1.930 (1.844)	-1.464 (1.420)
Unemployment Rate	-1.590 (2.854)	-2.190 (1.841)
Constant	0.091 (0.494)	-0.167 (0.432)
Observations	113	113
R <sup>2</sup>	0.198	0.077
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.034	-0.004
Residual Std. Error	0.500 (df = 93)	0.510 (df = 103)
F Statistic	1.207 (df = 19; 93)	0.951 (df = 9; 103)
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01	

- Regression results: interaction between Coalition with PRRP and Left-right position.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	log_ratio	
	With FE (1)	Without FE (2)
Coalition With PRRP	-1.113** (0.546)	-1.120** (0.542)
Left-Right Ideological Placement	-0.067 (0.058)	-0.052 (0.058)
PRRP	-0.064 (0.195)	-0.084 (0.169)
Seat Share	0.497 (0.461)	0.262 (0.413)
Participation Length	-0.036 (0.231)	0.106 (0.191)
Intra-Cabinet Conflict	-0.002 (0.043)	-0.011 (0.036)
GDP Growth	-3.955* (2.212)	-2.834 (1.744)
Inflation Rate	-1.957 (1.822)	-1.555 (1.404)
Unemployment Rate	-1.322 (2.824)	-2.073 (1.820)
CoalitionWithPRRP1:left:right_incm	0.151* (0.084)	0.158* (0.084)
Constant	0.477 (0.533)	0.243 (0.479)
Observations	113	113
R <sup>2</sup>	0.225	0.108
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.057	0.020
Residual Std. Error	0.494 (df = 92)	0.503 (df = 102)
F Statistic	1.338 (df = 20; 92)	1.233 (df = 10; 102)
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01	

- Predicted values of log vote ratio. Interaction Analysis

