

SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT AND THE COST OF GOVERNING FOR FAR-RIGHT PARTIES

Harley Roe (Florida State University) examined data from the first nine rounds (2002-19) to assess whether far-right political parties experience a drop in public support when they become part of the ruling establishment they often rally against

In this project I explore how far-right supporters respond to their parties participating in executive politics. Far-right participation in the executive is uncommon, but has been increasing in frequency since the 1990s. These parties position themselves as champions of the people against a corrupt elite.

When far-right political parties join the ruling executive, further ingraining themselves into the establishment they often rally against, they typically experience high governing costs - vote attrition that occurs during the party's tenure as a member of a governing coalition, federal council, or as a key supporter of minority governments.

Far-right and other anti-establishment parties experience greater voter attrition following executive incumbency than most other parties. Formal theory suggests that these high governing costs might be related to the voters' satisfaction with government performance over the course of a term of office.

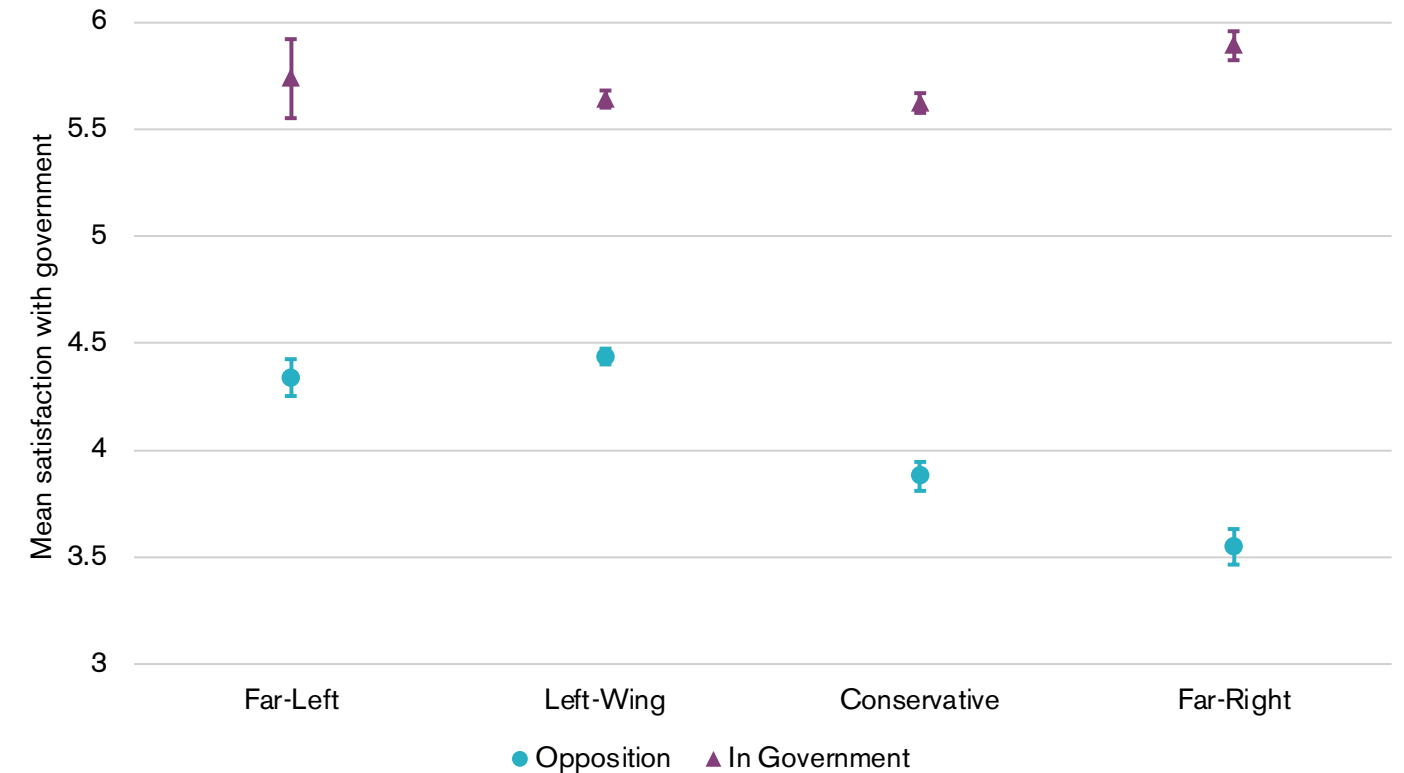
Yet at the same time, empirical work shows that winners of electoral contests are typically more satisfied with government performance and democracy in general than election losers. I argue that these assumptions about government satisfaction vary according to ideological party family groupings, and that executive participation has unique influences on voter evaluations of their governments' performance.

I test these assumptions using the first nine waves of the ESS (2002-19) and executive participation data from the ParlGov database. I use a combination of one-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD tests and OLS regressions to measure levels of government satisfaction among large party families across eight countries (Austria, Denmark, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Switzerland).

I find that, on average, far-right supporters are indeed the group least satisfied with government, but only while their preferred party remains in opposition. Once they enter the executive, the far-right experiences the greatest boost in government satisfaction. The boost in satisfaction is equivalent to a 1 standard deviation increase.

Figure 1 shows that this may be a story about how parties on the extremes of the political spectrum become more satisfied with government performance when they experience representation in the executive. At the same time, there appears to be a left-right dimensionality to how voters evaluate their government when their party serves in the executive. Voters on the left are typically more satisfied with government than voters on the right, even while their party remains in opposition.

Figure 1. Mean satisfaction with government



The boost in satisfaction the left experiences is also less robust than the boost voters on the right experience. Despite these differences, the far-right stands out as the group that is both least satisfied with government while in opposition and most satisfied while in government.

However, this boost diminishes for far-right voters over time. I take advantage of the timing of the ESS and measure how long each

party has served in the executive at the time of the administration of the survey. The longer far-right parties serve in the executive, the less satisfied they are compared with other voters whose party has served an equal amount of time in the executive. In other words, far-right voters appear to be initially enthusiastic about their party entering the executive, but become less satisfied over time.

In sum, there is a strong relationship between executive incumbency and voter satisfaction particularly among far-right supporters, but these findings suggest that the cost of governing is less tied to evaluations of government performance, and may be an artefact of a more robust and progressive disillusionment among far-right supporters. 