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## Press Release

### **International Study: Copying the Far Right Doesn't Help Mainstream Parties - On the Contrary.**

**Adopting the policies of far-right parties will not convince voters to switch back to supporting mainstream parties. Mannheim political scientist Denis Cohen points this out on the occasion of the French presidential elections.**

Parties intending to contain the advance of radical right parties such as Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz or the German AfD do well in not adopting the far-right positions. This is the result of an international study of Dr. Denis Cohen, political scientist at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research and his colleagues Dr. Werner Krause (University of Vienna) and Professor Dr. Tarik Abou-Chadi (University of Oxford). For the most part, copying far right positions helps legitimizing them and thereby increases the success of right-wing parties.

"As a reaction to the continuing success of radical right parties, politicians, pundits and the public have been arguing that mainstream parties need to accommodate positions and policies of the far right, in order to respond to the concerns of the public. The idea is that this would make mainstream parties more attractive and would win back voters from the right. We have analyzed empirically whether this strategy proves to be successful", explains Denis Cohen of the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) of the University of Mannheim.

#### **50 years of data from twelve countries**

The researchers analyzed election and survey data of twelve western European countries that go back as far as the 1970s. The researchers also considered the political context: For example, whether radical right parties were ostracized by established parties and the role of immigration policies during the electoral campaign.

The results show that the adoption of restrictive stances on immigration by mainstream parties, center-left and center-right, does not lead to a debilitation of the radical right. On the contrary: Mainstream parties that put a strong emphasis on key issues of the radical right lose particularly many votes to them. The researchers name the campaign for the 2018 Landtag in Bavaria as an example. Back then, according to the researchers, the center-right

CSU joined the anti-immigration platform of the far-right AfD. In the end, the CSU received 37 percent of the votes and their worst result since 1950, whereas the newcomer AfD received about 10 percent of the votes.

### **France's Conservatives have been adopting nationalist policies for years - and can't take down Le Pen**

In neighboring European countries the researchers also observed that the political center has unsuccessfully adopted right-wing policies. In France, issues such as immigration and national identity have been on top of the agenda of center-right parties for decades. However, the radical right Marine Le Pen made it to the runoff election this past Sunday.

### **Denmark as an exception**

The often-quoted Danish case therefore seems to be an exception. In 2019, the Danish social democrats won the election with an immigration-skeptical platform, while the radical right "Danish People's Party" incurred sizable losses. However, "a lot more often we observe, that by adopting far-right positions established parties only bring about that everybody talks about radical right topics and positions and that these are thereby legitimized", explains Denis Cohen.

So, what is it that established parties can do to counter the radical right?

Cohen says: "Up until now, the success of radical right parties is relatively immune against the strategies of established parties. Unfortunately, it is hardly possible to identify a more successful strategy. That is probably the reason for the accommodative strategies of the moderate parties – they simply do not know what else to do."

The study "Does accommodation work? Mainstream party strategies and the success of radical right parties" has recently been published in "Political Science Research and Methods" and is available online.

### **Further information and contact:**

Werner Krause, Denis Cohen, Tarik Abou-Chadi:

Does accommodation work? Mainstream party strategies and the success of radical right parties. Political Science Research and Methods, 2022

Open Access:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/political-science-research-and-methods/article/does-accommodation-work-mainstream-party-strategies-and-the-success-of-radical-right-parties/5C3476FCD26B188C7399ADD920D71770>

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