

# The Ideological Embedding of Euroscepticism

by

Giuseppe Carteny<sup>a</sup> and Hermann Schmitt<sup>a,b</sup>

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## Abstract

We propose that the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism at the individual level is moderated by the electoral fortunes of far-left and far-right parties (as well as the political involvement of citizens). Far-left and far-right parties are known to combine sceptical positions about EU integration with their extreme ideological stances. We therefore expect that the stronger far left parties are the more left leaning is Euroscepticism in the public; and the stronger far right parties are, the more right leaning is Euroscepticism in the public. Analysing the latest waves of the European Election Study (EES) and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), we indeed find that the association between Eurosceptic attitudes of citizens and their left-right positions is moderated by the electoral strength of far-right parties, while we do not find the same for far-left parties. We propose that this finding is due to the different electoral fortunes of far-right and far-left parties in recent years. Euroscepticism half a century ago was largely a left-leaning phenomenon when far-left parties were still fairly strong. It has become essentially a right-leaning phenomenon in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century during the “fourth wave” of far-right parties’ growth.

<sup>a</sup>Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, University of Mannheim, Germany <sup>b</sup> Faculty of Humanities, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

## Introduction

The literature on public opinion towards European integration is rich and variegated.<sup>1</sup> It is dominated by studies with a rationalistic conception of citizens, implicitly assuming that these are knowledgeable about the course of European integration and its effects on their personal well-being (e.g. Gabel 1998; Eichenberg and Dalton 2007).

Around the turn of the millennium, in light of growing opposition towards European integration among parties (and in places in the public at large), *public support for European integration* became referred to as *Euroscepticism*.<sup>2</sup> A growing branch in that literature looks at Euroscepticism as a consequence of long-term structural changes in society that are mainly caused by globalising economies. These processes are said to produce a new social divide between winners and losers of globalisation (the latter in Europe being largely equivalent with European integration). Although somewhat less explicit about rational action, the authors claim that it is the loser side of that new structural divide – the less well educated, manual workers, the elderly, those living in the countryside – which looks more critically at the European Union and is responsive to its opponents (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008, 2012; more generally Ford & Jennings 2020).

Fewer studies apply the lessons that can be learned from the study of public opinion at large, namely that many citizens are essentially holding “non-attitudes” (Converse 1964) and ill-informed as they are when nonetheless forming an opinion depend on cues from political elites (Zaller 1992; Ray 2003; Sniderman & Bullock 2004). This is the political behaviour version of what consumer research calls “bounded rationality”. We claim that the latter conception most adequately describes the formation and evolution of public opinion. This suggests that the study of citizens’ political orientations about European integration must also consider the position-taking of political elites in that domain.

## Euroscepticism

Introduced by Taggart (1998) and elaborated by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008) in their two-volume book, Euroscepticism originally was a party-focussed concept. The term was quickly adapted to also refer to attitudes about European integration of the citizenry at large (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2007). A prominent more recent example for the latter is the book by de Vries (2018). Inspired by the Brexit process, she entertains a benchmark theory according to which “... people’s attitudes towards Europe are essentially based on a comparison between the benefits of the status quo of membership and those

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<sup>2</sup> In the following, we use the terms public support for European integration, Euroscepticism, and EU scepticism synonymously.

associated with an alternative state, namely one's country being outside the EU" (de Vries 2018: abstract chapter 2).<sup>3</sup>

While such a rationalistic orientation might indeed be characteristic for some part of the citizenry, we claim that for the main part people's views about politics – including those regarding European integration – are shaped (or not) in a dialogue between political elites and the public at large. In that regard we follow Ray (2003) who found that under certain circumstances – mainly when a party puts strong emphasis on the issue and when citizens are strongly attached to that party – party positions do influence voter orientations regarding European integration.

However, the focus of the present paper is not Euroscepticism as such, i.e. how critical or supportive citizens and party elites are about European integration and the EU. We rather ask how EU orientations at mass and elite levels are associated with the main axis of ideological controversy – the left-right divide. Hooghe and Marks (2005: 205) report that (neo-functional) theories of regional integration predicted early on that European integration leads to its politicization, a process by which "... the political conflicts unleashed by integration come back to shape it." This seems to be confirmed by a number of recent studies (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter and Kriesi 2019). As the political actors that are involved in these conflicts all have their place on the left-right divide, our question here is how the politicisation of European integration relates Euroscepticism to this main dimension of political conflict in European societies.

## The Left-Right Divide

The left-right schema provides the overarching political code that promotes political orientation among citizens and facilitates political communication between elites and mass publics in Europe, the Americas, and beyond (Laponce 1981; Noel & Therien 2008). This schema is not static but variable: the meaning repertoire of the left-right code changes over time and varies between countries (Fuchs & Klingemann 1990; Schmitt & van der Eijk 2009; de Vries et al. 2013; Meyer & Wagner 2020).<sup>4</sup>

There are of course alternative views of the political space, typically assuming a two-dimensional structure. We briefly refer to two of the more prominent among them. One juxtaposes an economic left-right dimension with a libertarian-authoritarian dimension, usually assuming that the two are independent from one another (in statistical parlance: orthogonal). A well-known exposition of this view is from Evans et al. (1996; for later applications in the analysis of party manifesto content see Prosser 2016; Schäfer et al. 2020; for analyses based on expert surveys see Benoit & Laver 2006). There

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<sup>3</sup> In earlier work de Vries (de Vries and Edwards 2009) actually pursued that very same analytical perspective.

<sup>4</sup> We note that this is all but common sense: Hooghe and Marks (2007b: 125) for example fully ignore the integrative capacity of the overall left-right dimension when they call it a "... simplistic left/right conception of ideological space that is inadequate to investigate public opinion in western Europe and inappropriate for central and eastern Europe."

are alternative views, currently perhaps the best known is the opposition between the economic left-right dimension and a GAL-TAN dimension (the acronym standing for green-alternative-libertarian vs. traditional-authoritarian-nationalist). Again, these two dimensions are understood to be independent from one another and together structure the political space (Hooghe et al. 2002).

By way of contrast, we suggest that each of these sub-dimensions adds meaning to the overall left-right divide – possibly to different and over time varying degrees. A good justification for that proposition is Kitschelt’s (1994) analysis of the politics of European social-democratic parties showing that for them being on the left has assumed a more libertarian character in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that the economic component of it has become less important.

### Issue content and elite agency

Whether a nascent issue in the end will be associated by the citizenry with the left or the right pole of that schema, or neither, is not a natural nor an automatic process. It is governed by the *material content of the issue*, more in particular by its ‘connectability’ to established meaning elements of left and right. The closer a political issue comes to established elements of the left-right divide, the more likely it is that such a connection is established. Of course, the issue associations of Euroscepticism can be explored by analysing the issue correlates of it among left-wing and right-wing citizens, as van Elsas et al. (2016) do. They find that Euroscepticism among left-wing citizens is motivated by redistribution and equality (i.e., economic) concerns while Euroscepticism among right-wing citizens is strongly correlated with anti-immigrant (i.e., cultural identity) orientations.<sup>5</sup> The latter is confirmed by an analysis of 2019 Euromanifestos of far-left and far-right parties (Brack 2020). Obviously the issues identified in both studies have a clear position on the left-right dimension, redistribution and equality pointing to the left (on the economic left-right component) and anti-immigration to the right (on the cultural left-right component).

In addition, however, we propose that the establishment of a left-right connection depends on the *agency of elite political actors*, more specifically on the clarity and strength of the signal they send out to the mass public.<sup>6</sup> This is why our investigation of the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism proceeds at two levels of political actors. We investigate the EU position taking of political parties and their elites on the one hand, and the positions of citizens towards the EU on the other. On the party level, the conventional wisdom is that extreme left and extreme right parties are Eurosceptic while more moderate

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<sup>5</sup> The authors also report that Euroscepticism on the left and on the right are of different qualities. While Eurosceptic left-wing voters are dissatisfied with certain policies of the EU, right-wing Eurosceptics are fully Eurosceptic among political parties.

<sup>6</sup> The communication between political elites and the mass public is of course not a one-way street. This is particularly well researched in the electoral domain. With regard to the dyads of party elites and their (potential) electorates we know that voters follow the lead of their parties while at the same time parties are responsive to changing problem perceptions and policy preferences of their voters (e.g., Schmitt & Thomassen 2000; Steenbergen et al. 2007).

parties are more Europhile. This is the familiar horseshoe (or inverted U-shape, see Figure 1) pattern of left-right and EU orientations of political parties (Hix and Lord, 1995; also Taggart 1998).

Things are different once we turn our attention to the citizenry at large. Led by the early insights of Converse (1964) into the nature of mass belief systems we do not expect much ideological embedding of Euroscepticism among ordinary citizens. Recent work focussing on EU orientations of citizens confirms that expectation (Wheatley & Mendez 2019; Huismans & Krouwel 2021; van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). However, the lack of constraint in public opinion that was diagnosed by Converse in 1964 is not absolute but relative. At least since Zaller (1992) we know that public opinion is heavily shaped by the elite political discourse. And this is the central argument of this paper: the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism in mass publics depends on elite agency.

### Signal clarity vs signal strength as moderators of cross-level interactions

The clearer the signals are that elites are sending out, the higher is the likelihood that citizens are picking up the messages (Zaller 1992: ch3.). This is a rehearsal of Key's (1966) earlier argument that citizens political beliefs can only be as clear as the alternatives that are presented to them.<sup>7</sup>

Since we borrow this argument from studies realised in the US two-party system, we need to do some translation work in order to adapt it to European multi-party politics. In European politics, the most important question is perhaps not so much the clarity of party elite position taking.<sup>8</sup> Multi-party systems allow for both subtle and stark differences in party position taking. What is more important here is the strength of the signal that is being send out to the public. This is not the case in the US where the two parties opposing each other are about equally strong.

We argue that for an argument to be recognised in European mass publics it does make a difference whether it is issued by a small or a large party. This is why we propose that in European settings, the signal strength is the important moderating variable for cross-level interactions. Signal strength in our view is a function of the size of a party, not so much of the clarity of the position that a party takes. The stronger left-wing and right-wing parties are, the better are their potential voters able to establish a connection (i.e. to constrain) between left and right position taking and EU scepticism.

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<sup>7</sup> In his own words: "The voice of the people is but an echo. The output of an echo chamber bears an inevitable and invariable relation to the input." (1966: 2).

<sup>8</sup> However, we should not present the issue of 'clarity' and 'strength' as totally at odds with one another. Rather, clarity is almost invariably conditional on signal strength. Whereas in democratic and competitive two-party systems the signal strength has little variability, in multiparty systems it varies by a much greater extent.

## Political involvement and ideological predispositions as individual level moderators

The construction of citizens' belief systems is affected by the properties of the political context in which they are situated. In addition, however, citizens and voters are not equal. They differ in many important respects, not least with regard to the degree to which they follow or expose themselves to political developments. This leads us to propose that their ability to connect left-right position taking and EU scepticism is moderated in addition, at the individual level, by their political involvement (i.e., their interest in politics). Moreover, citizens differ regarding their political predispositions. Such predispositions in the US two party system are often measured by the partisanship of citizens.<sup>9</sup> This is again somewhat more complicated in European multi-party systems. Here we propose an alternative measure of predisposition which relies on citizens self-identification on the left-right dimension.

In all of this we again follow Zaller (1992: Ch. 3) who at the level of individual citizens identifies two moderators of attention to elite messages. One of them is the political involvement of citizens; the more politically involved they are, the more likely it is that they *receive* a message. The other is the relative accordance of the message with citizens' predispositions; the higher this accordance is, the more likely it is that citizens *accept* a message. This is why voters on the left are accessible by political messages from left-wing parties and *vice versa*.

## Hypotheses

Based on the arguments and observations presented so far, we propose four hypotheses which we will put to an empirical test in the following.

The first is about mass-elite differences in Euroscepticism. Other than de Vries & Edwards (2009: 8), we do expect a clearer ideological structure on the elite level than among the citizenry of the European Union. More in particular, we expect to find the well-known horseshoe shape of Euroscepticism when displayed in the left-right dimension (see Figure 1).

H1 Euroscepticism has clearer ideological contours at elite level than in the mass public.

The second hypothesis is about individual level moderators, or filters, of elite cues. Citizens on the left are attentive to left parties' cues, even more so if they are interested in politics. The same holds *mutatis mutandis* for citizens on the right of the political spectrum.

H2 Ideological contours of Euroscepticism in the citizenry at large tend to follow the party pattern when political involvement facilitates recognition and ideological predisposition facilitates credibility of party cues.

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<sup>9</sup> Partisanship in the US ranges from Strong Democrat over Weak Democrat over Independent over Weak Republican to Strong Republican.

Our third hypothesis incorporates the “signal strength” on the elite side in the argument. We assume that the strength of party cues depend on the electoral strength of these parties. This leads us to expect:

H3 The stronger far-left parties are electorally, the more can they pull politically interested citizens on the left towards their EU position; the same holds for citizens and parties on the right.

Our fourth hypothesis substitutes the left-right position of citizens as a mighty predisposition with key policy issues associated with the left-right dimension. This leads us to expect:

H4 The stronger far-left parties are, the more can they pull politically interested citizens with issue positions associated with the left (redistribution) towards their EU position; the same holds for citizens and parties on the right when we substitute left-right position by issue positions associated with the right (immigration; gay rights).

## Data, measurement, and methodology

For testing the hypotheses presented above we rely on an individual-level dataset combined with contextual/country-level variables derived from party-level data.

Our *individual-level data basis* consists of the voter study of the 2019 European Election Study (EES) (Schmitt et al. 2020). This cross-national post-election survey was conducted by Gallup International in all 28 EU member states after the 2019 European Parliament elections as a web-based survey (CAWI). Respondents were selected randomly from access panel databases using stratification variables, with the exception of Malta and Cyprus where a multi-stage Random Digit Dialing (RDD) approach was used. In all countries, the samples were stratified by gender, age, region, and type of locality, and the sample size is roughly 1000 interviews in each EU member state (except Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta where the sample size is 500), with a total number of observations equal to 26,538.

This dataset is very well suited for our analyses because, among other information, it includes data about respondents’ political attitudes and background characteristics across all the EU Member States (as in 2019). In particular, the EES provides reliable measures of respondents’ Euroscepticism, left-right position, and their attitudes about socio-economic and socio-cultural issues related to the left-right dimension.

Moreover, it provides information concerning individual respondents’ interest in politics, a key variable for testing our theoretical expectations about the relationships between Euroscepticism and the orientations mentioned before. As the 2019 round of the EES is a web survey not based on random probability samples, it would be reasonable to expect that politically interested individuals might be overrepresented. This is confirmed when comparing the answer distributions of the 2014 and 2019 rounds of the EES. However, we have good reasons to believe that this issue does not constitute a real problem, since relationships identified in multivariate models are less likely to be affected by sampling

bias as compared to more descriptive statistics (see e.g. Ansolabehere and Schaffner, 2014; Sanders et al. 2007).

Our *individual data* has been then merged with *party- and country-level variables* derived from the 2019 wave of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Jolly et al. 2022) and the 2019 EP election results. The CHES is particularly suited for our analyses because it provides information concerning national parties' ideological (left-right) positioning for all the national contexts considered in our analyses, for the same time period in which individual-level data were collected.

### Individual-level variables

Our *dependent variable*<sup>10</sup> is an eleven-point scale, rescaled in order to fit into the [0,1] interval, measuring citizens' evaluations of the EU integration process<sup>11</sup>, with high values indicating support for further EU integration (“[it] should be pushed further”) and low values indicating disapproval for current levels of integration (“[it] has gone too far”).

Our main, individual-level *independent variables* consist in the respondents' left-right self-placement, and their attitudes toward economic redistribution (which is the commonly used indicator of the socio-economic sub-dimension of the overall left-right dimension), same-sex marriage, and restrictive immigration policies (which we take to be indicators of the socio-economic sub-dimension of the left-right dimension).<sup>12</sup> All said variables are eleven-point scales which were rescaled to the [0,1] interval<sup>13</sup>.

Another key variable for our analyses is respondents' self-reported level of interest in politics. This measure has been recoded from the original four-categories Likert-type item in a dichotomous variable, with a reference category (with the value 0) identifying respondents “not at all” or “a little” interested

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<sup>10</sup> The EES provides two items which might qualify for measuring individual Euroscepticism, a first one measuring individual evaluations of EU membership, and a second one gauging individual evaluations of the EU integration process, our measure of choice. The former survey item has a longer career on its shoulders, and it has been employed in more survey projects than the latter. Most importantly, the two items differ in terms of answer categories (three unordered categories for the first one, and eleven ordered categories for the second one), and clearly do not share the same exact meaning. Nonetheless, both represent established measures of EU support that have been used in a number of studies, and despite some differences they have both rather similar policy implications. Moreover, both measures have shown to be empirically correlated, and additional analyses provided in the supplemental materials show that substituting the chosen variable (eleven-point scale) with the alternative one (three categories factor) yields substantively the same results. For statistical modelling reasons as well as for being more straightforward, we opt to use the 11-point scale.

<sup>11</sup> In the original EES 2019 Master Questionnaire reference is made to EU “unification” rather than “integration” process. Nonetheless, we believe that the two concepts can be considered almost equivalent.

<sup>12</sup> But see de Vries et al. (2013) and Otjes & Katsanidou (2017) who keep ignoring same-sex marriage as a cultural left-right indicator.

<sup>13</sup> The left-right measure was coded following the tradition according to which low values indicate leftist positions and high values rightist ones. Then, the remaining variables were coded in order to positively correlate with the just mentioned left-right scale. In two cases, namely attitudes toward economic redistribution and same-sex marriage, the original coding was left unchanged, with low values indicating positive orientations toward said policies and high values indicating negative attitudes. On the contrary, the item asking respondents' positions about restrictive immigration policies was inverted, with low values reflecting negative attitudes and high values indicating positive ones.



in politics, and a second category (with the value 1) identifying respondents “somewhat” or “very” interested in politics<sup>14</sup>.

In addition to said variables, at the individual-level, we include in our models a set of *control variables*, namely socio-demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, level of education, subjective social class, area of residency, and unemployment) and a set of attitudes that are often related with attitudes toward EU integration (satisfaction with democracy, and government approval).

### Contextual-level variables

One of our main arguments is that signal strength – i.e. the share of votes of far-left and far-right parties – moderates the relationship between left-right orientations and Euroscepticism. In order to test this hypothesis, we developed our two *main contextual-level independent variables* measure of far-left and far-right electoral strength by combining the 2019 round of the CHES and their electoral results in the 2019 EP elections. We first selected parties according to their score on the CHES general left-right dimension index (rescaled to the [0, 1] interval), coding parties with a score below 0.25 as far-left parties, and parties with a score above 0.75 as far-right parties (Figure 2). Then, for each country included in our analyses, we computed the electoral strength of these two ideological areas by summing up the vote shares obtained by the selected parties in these two groups, thus obtaining two country-level variables bounded into the [0, 1] interval (Figure 3)<sup>15</sup>. In addition to our main contextual variables, we include in

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<sup>14</sup> The reasons behind such coding are related, first, to the nature of the original scale, second to its empirical distribution (and how this might affect our models), and third to more specific statistical modelling needs and choices. About the first point, although coding procedures are almost invariably arbitrary and dependent on the research questions to be investigated, it is a rather common assumption that Likert scales often represent discrete versions of continuous dimensions. If this assumption holds, then aggregating even Likert scales using as a threshold the central limit differentiating between the lowest and highest categories appears as the best solution to cut in half the theoretical continuum underlying the Likert scale.

About the second point, political interest is a variable often characterized by a very skewed distribution, with extreme categories (especially those identifying respondents most interested in politics) populated by much less observations than the more central ones. In some of our samples, given the bias of the 2019 EES sampling method mentioned in the previous section, we actually face distributions skewed in the opposite direction (categories identifying respondents with little interest in politics with lesser observations), but still skewed distributions. Thus, in order to avoid empty categories in our multivariate analyses, we aggregate as explained few lines above.

Finally, since this variable is meant to be interacted with two (an individual- and a contextual-level) continuous measures of our hierarchical multilevel regression models, it would be more appropriate to free its slope to avoid inflated regression coefficients. However, random slopes for categorical variables with more than two categories are often source of convergence issues. Thus, for avoiding said issues and be consistent with suggestions about hierarchical regression modelling coming from methodological literature (Heisig & Schaeffer 2019, Schmidt-Catran & Fairbrother 2016), we adopt said aggregation procedure.

<sup>15</sup> Different criteria might apply for classifying far-left and far-right parties. In our case, we rely on two arbitrary cut-off points selected on the range of our scale, assuming that above and below such thresholds reside the parties of interest. Other researchers prefer criteria based on *empirical* distributions and relate party stances to the mean position within a national party system. Doing so, one could classify a party as part of the far-left/far-right camp if its left-right point estimate is at least one standard deviation below or above the party system mean party position (see De Vries & Edwards 2009). Finally, one might rely on more theoretical or conceptual classifications, such as those provided by the PopuList (Rooduijn et al. 2019) dataset. Any of these approaches has its strengths and weaknesses that we are not going to discuss here. As kind of a robustness check, we computed our contextual variables – electoral strength of far-left and far-right parties – also relying on the methods just mentioned. Although the lists of parties classified as part of the far-left or the far-right differ somewhat according to of these criteria, and thus despite differences in the strength of the far-left and far-right political camps as derived by such classifications, our empirical results remain substantively unchanged.

our models as *contextual-level control variable* the natural logarithm of the gross domestic product per capita of 2019 chained at 2010 prices, as provided by Eurostat.

## Method

Given the hierarchical structure of our data (individuals nested in countries) we rely on a set of hierarchical linear models (HLMs) to empirically test our hypotheses. In terms of modelling our HLMs share some common features. First, ordinal measures with more than six categories, at both individual- and contextual-level, are treated as continuous and centered on the grand-mean. However, since our aim is investigating how our contextual variables moderate the *relationship* between our main predictors and our dependent variable, the same type of variables (namely, those treated as continuous) are group-centered when included in our cross-level interactions (Enders & Tofighi 2007). Second, all our models are random intercept and random slopes HLMs, in which the slopes of our main individual-level predictors, or at least those interested by cross-level interactions (Heisig & Schaeffer 2019) and related ones (e.g. squared terms), are freed<sup>16</sup>. Specific features of our models related to our hypotheses are then discussed in the following section, dedicated to the results of our empirical analyses.

## Results and findings

Our first hypothesis (H1) states that the curvilinear relationship between left-right and EU integration positions seen at the party-level should be similar at the level of the citizenry but much weaker. To test this hypothesis, we first modelled the relationship between left-right self-placement and attitudes toward EU integration as a linear one (Model 1) and as a curvilinear one by including in the regression model a squared term for citizens' left-right positions (Model 2). Our results, as shown in the first regression table (Table 1) and summarised by the prediction plot related to these models (Figure 4), support this hypothesis. The regression coefficient of left-right in Model 1 is negative but not statistically significant. In Model 2 the same coefficient is negative and marginally significant ( $p < 0.1$ ) while the coefficient of the squared term is negative and statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Despite its statistical significance, however, the magnitude of the squared left-right coefficient is rather weak (See also Figure 4). Overall, these results suggest that the relationship between left-right self-placement and Euroscepticism is best described as a very weak curvilinear relationship (H1). In contrast to the bold horseshoe pattern at the party-level (Figure 1), citizens attitudes about EU integration have slightly higher values on the left side of the ideological continuum and decrease modestly when we move toward

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<sup>16</sup> The methodological literature concerning HLMs suggests that the more slopes are freed the lesser the risk to obtain inflated coefficients for the model predictors. Nonetheless, in models based on maximum likelihood (ML) estimators, high numbers of random slopes invariably lead to convergence problems. Thus, we resorted to the strategy presented in the main text, namely freeing all our main predictors or, if not possible, all those included in our cross-level interactions. However, in order to further validate our findings a set of parallel HLMs based on Bayesian methods with weakly informative priors has been estimated. Said models returned results in line with those based on ML estimators.

the right-side. Nonetheless, the decrease is minimal, and differences do not reach any level of statistical significance.

Next, we test whether the relationship between ideological positions and attitudes toward EU integration is moderated by citizens' interest in politics (H2), and whether the strength of far-left and far-right parties moderates the relationship between citizens' left-right orientations and their attitudes about EU integration (H3). We test these hypotheses by assuming that the moderating effect of far-left and far-right parties electoral strength might differ between citizens that are interested in politics and those that are not interested.<sup>17</sup>

We model these assumptions, then, by the means of *three-way cross-level interactions* between left-right self-placement, political interest, and far-left/far-right party strength. The results of our analyses (Models 3 and 4), as shown in Table 2 and plotted in Figure 5, only partially support our hypotheses. In Model 3, the cross-level interaction of interest is not significant. This lack of statistical significance implies that the electoral strength of far-left parties *does not* moderate the relationship between ideological positions and attitudes toward EU integration, irrespective of individual political involvement (i.e. interest in politics). This lack of effect is evident when considering the top panel of Figure 4, in which we see how the predicted slopes remain substantially unchanged. In marked contrast, the models including the electoral strength of far-right parties as contextual-level moderator (Model 4), *do confirm* our hypotheses. Our three-way cross-level interactions are negative and highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). In contexts where far-right parties are weak, the relationship between left-right self-placement and attitudes toward EU integration are uncorrelated, both for politically interested and uninterested individuals (see Figure 5, left panel). However, in contexts where far-right parties are strong the relationship becomes strong, negative, and statistically significant, but only for citizens that are interested in politics (see Figure 5, right panel). This indicates that where far-right parties are strong the relationship between left-right orientations and attitudes toward EU integration is negative, but also that this relationship becomes increasingly negative as we move from the left of the ideological divide to the right.

To further investigate the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism we then move to models in which our main dependent variable (left-right self-placement) is substituted, on the one hand, by negative attitudes toward redistribution of wealth and, on the other hand, attitudes toward restrictive immigration policies and negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage. To test our last hypothesis (H4) we resort again to three-way cross-level interactions between our main predictors, our individual-level moderator (political interest) and our contextual-level moderators. Based on previous research (van Elsas et al. 2016) we interact negative attitudes toward redistribution policies with the far-left electoral strength

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<sup>17</sup> We restrict our modelling here and in the following to the linear relationship between left-right self-placement and attitudes toward EU integration. The curvilinear relationships (as in Model 2) were also inspected but did not add substantially to our findings.

(Model 5), attitudes toward restrictive immigration policies with the far-right electoral strength (Model 6), and attitudes toward same-sex marriage again with electoral strength of far-right parties (Model 7).

Starting with models addressing the effect of (negative) attitudes toward redistribution on attitudes toward EU integration (Table 3, Model 5), we see very clearly that the former are *uncorrelated* with the latter. None of the coefficients of interest is significant so that we can conclude that attitudes toward redistribution policies are essentially irrelevant for predicting Euroscepticism, irrespective of far-left parties' strength and individuals' interest in politics (see also Figure 6).

A totally different picture appears when moving to the relationship between attitudes toward immigration policies and attitudes toward EU integration (Table 3, Model 6). In this model, the coefficient of the main predictor is negative and statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), and the coefficient of the three-way interaction is also negative and highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that even where far-right parties are weak, attitudes toward restrictive immigration policies and Euroscepticism are correlated irrespective of individual levels of political interest. The magnitude of this correlation grows as the electoral weight of far-right parties increases. Yet, the (negative) correlation increases only for citizens that are interested in politics (see Figure 7).

In sum, the latter model suggests that attitudes toward immigration and Euroscepticism are negatively correlated; this correlation is mild where far-right parties are weak; it grows mostly (but not only) for individuals interested in politics as the strength of far-right parties increases.

In a final step, we test whether citizens' attitudes toward same-sex marriage are related to their attitude about EU integration (H4; Table 3, Model 7). We find that attitudes about same-sex marriage are significantly related to attitudes about EU integration (at  $p < 0.05$ ), as is the coefficient of the three-way cross-level interaction.

We can summarize our findings as follows. First, where far-right parties are weak the correlation between (negative) attitudes toward same-sex marriage and Euroscepticism is borderline significant for citizens that are interested in politics, while it is not significant (using any confidence interval) for those who are not. As the electoral strength of far-right parties grows, the negative correlation between our main predictor and the dependent variable increases, but only for individuals interested in politics (see Figure 8). And this finding is particularly relevant for our research question. This is due to what we earlier called "connectability" of left-right orientations and issue attitudes. While we can easily think about antecedents of both attitudes toward immigration and Euroscepticism (nationalism; nativism), it is hard to identify a shared meaning between attitudes toward same-sex marriage and Euroscepticism. While we cannot exclude that other, unobserved factors might produce the results just reported, we do believe that these correlations might be one of the best hints about an increasing ideological embedding of Euroscepticism.

## Summary and conclusions

Relating to one another the mass survey data of the European Elections Study 2019 and the party position estimates of the Chapel Hill expert survey, this paper studied the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism. We found that this ideological embedding is different among citizens and among political parties. At the party level, the well-known horseshoe shape of Euroscepticism on the left-right scale was re-confirmed for the European Union of 28 member-countries in 2019. Far-left and far-right parties were found to be rather Eurosceptic while ideologically more moderate parties are more Europhile. However, among the citizenry of the Union at large, we found only a faint shadow of this inverted U shape.

The latter is consistent with the findings of van Elsas and van der Brug (2015). Comparing the “minimalist” horseshoe shape that they found among the citizenry of 12 member-countries over four decades of European integration, they attributed minor alterations of that form over time to the changing character of the European Union. They say that Euroscepticism was initially a left-wing perspective, but after the Maastricht Treaty the intensification of political integration increasingly caused right-wing opposition.<sup>18</sup> Correct as this statement might be, it does remain somewhere on the surface and is unable to unearth the mechanism by which these changes were instigated.

In order to explain the discrepancy of our findings at elite and mass levels, we recurred to the literature of public opinion formation in general. There, notions about the limited capacity of ordinary citizens to grasp complex political constellations are abundant, and so are proposals how citizens yet are capable to form consistent worldviews and arrive at meaningful political decisions. Several of these proposals suggest that elite agency provides the mechanism for translating citizens’ perceptions into coherent attitudes.

With regard to elite agency, the strength of a party’s voice is functional for getting its message through. On the individual level, this works best when ideological predispositions help to attribute credibility to elite cues. In addition, the political involvement of a citizen strengthens this translation function.

Regarding the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism then, we could show that those on the right of the ideological spectrum are assuming more Eurosceptical views, particularly when politically interested. This individual-level association is nicely moderated by the electoral strength of far-right parties: the stronger they are, the more Eurosceptical are politically interested citizens on the right found to be.

This works only for the political right: we could not identify that same mechanism on the left of the ideological spectrum. The question then is what is different here. With regard to elite agency, far-left

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<sup>18</sup> “Initially, EU market integration mainly sparked left-wing opposition; after Maastricht the intensification of political integration additionally produced nationalist Euroscepticism among the political right” (van Elsas and van der Brug 2015: 194).

parties on average are somewhat less Eurosceptic than far-right parties. In addition, they are fewer and tend to be weaker electorally. With regard to cross-level interactions, we find politically interested citizens on the left somewhat more Eurosceptic when far left parties are weak; but these parties' increasing strength pulls uninterested citizens on the left towards greater Euroscepticism rather than increasing the Euroscepticism among the politically interested and involved. In addition, these tentative trends are very weak and statistically not significant.

Turning our attention to underlying issues and policies rather than the overarching ideological super-issue, we found much the same thing. Citizens' preferences about gay rights (same sex marriage) and more restrictive immigration policies are equally connected with Euroscepticism than their general left-right orientations are, and equally moderated by political involvement on the individual level and the strength of far-right parties as a cross-level interaction. This again does not work on the left of the political spectrum where the redistribution issue is only weakly associated with Euroscepticism, and our individual-level (political involvement) and cross-level moderators (far-left party strength) are not statistically significant.

This suggests to us that, by 2019 and among the citizenry of the Union, the left-right divide has integrated the transnational cleavage between friends and foes of European integration in its meaning repertoire. Politically interested citizens on the right are particularly Eurosceptic, and all the more so where far-right parties are strong.

## Perspectives

We assume that the constellation of EU support in the party space has always been the same since the beginning of European integration in the 1950s. Far left-parties and far-right parties tend to be skeptical about it if not opposed to European integration while ideologically moderate parties tend to support it. This constellation produces the well-known horseshoe shape of party positions in the two-dimensional ideological space. By contrast, the ideological embedding of Euroscepticism in mass publics has probably changed considerably over time. In the beginning of European integration, far-left parties were still fairly strong while far-right parties were not represented in parliament due to their fascist stigma.<sup>19</sup> Euroscepticism at the time was a left-wing phenomenon at least on the level of political parties, if not in the public at large.<sup>20</sup> This changed with the passage of time. The collapse of communism in 1989 caused far-left parties to decline substantially (March and Mudde 2005). In the first directly elected EP of 1979, the far-left group – they yet proudly called themselves “Communist Group and Allies” – still

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<sup>19</sup> While Haas (1958: chapter 2) noted that all communist parties voted against the ratification of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty in the parliaments of the six founding member states, he forgot to mention that far-right forces were not represented at the time, and that they certainly would have also objected to the ECSC treaty were they represented.

<sup>20</sup> Based on USIA surveys, Puchalla (1970: 42 f.) reports for 1957 and 1962, that communist voters in France and Italy were by far the least favourable about the Common Market. West Germany was also surveyed but the KPD (the Communist Party of West Germany) was banned as extremist in 1956 and did not participate in the election of 1957 and subsequent federal elections. Therefore, the approval rate of West German communist voters could not be ascertained.

could rely on 11 % of all deputies; four decades later, the number of its members has shrunk to 5 % of the 2019 EP. On the other side of the political spectrum, far-right parties in Europe gained ground for many reasons – among them in Europe the growing density and complexity of the EU system of multi-level governance (Mudde 2009, 2019). The expansion of the EU towards ten Eastern post-communist countries was also a factor that contributed to the rise of far-right parties because of the growing nationalism in these post-communist countries (e.g. Verdery 1996; Sygkelos 2015).

In Europe, socialism has lost ground as a party-based ideology since the 1960s and certainly after 1989 while nationalism has gained not least due to European integration itself. Far-left parties lost much of their impact on public opinion, while the voice of far-right parties became stronger. As a result, public Euroscepticism nowadays is aligned with the political right.

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## Tables

Table 1: Base hierarchical models for respondents' attitudes toward EU integration

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Within-level random sl.s</i>		
LR self-positioning (sl.)	-0.074 (0.044)	-0.076 (0.044)
LR self-positioning (squared term, sl.)		- <b>0.089</b> * (0.036)
Interested in politics (Ref = Not interested)	<b>0.031</b> *** (0.008)	<b>0.033</b> *** (0.008)
<i>Between-level fixed sl.s</i>		
Left-Right self-positioning (mean)	-0.417 (0.271)	-0.369 (0.268)
AIC	6429.472	6422.535
BIC	6624.705	6656.816
Log Likelihood	-3189.736	-3181.268
Num. obs.	18203	18203
Num. groups: countryshort	28	28
Var: countryshort (Intercept)	0.003	0.003
Var: countryshort LR	0.053	0.053
Var: countryshort Pol.Int	0.001	0.001
Cov: countryshort (Intercept) LR	0.001	-0.003
Cov: countryshort (Intercept) Pol.Int	0.001	
Cov: countryshort LR Pol.Int	-0.003	-0.003
Var: Residual	0.082	0.082
Var: countryshort LR <sup>2</sup>		0.016
Cov: countryshort (Intercept) LR <sup>2</sup>		0.001
Cov: countryshort LR LR <sup>2</sup>		0.000

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

Table 2: Hierarchical models for respondents' attitudes toward EU integration with Left-Right orientations as main predictor

	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Within-level random slopes</i>		
LR self-positioning (sl.)	-0.008 (0.058)	0.031 (0.063)
Interested in politics (Ref = Not interested)	<b>0.033**</b> (0.010)	0.013 (0.012)
<i>Within-level interactions</i>		
LR x Interested in politics	<b>-0.066**</b> (0.023)	0.054 (0.030)
<i>Between-level fixed slopes</i>		
Left-Right self-positioning (mean)	-0.416 (0.273)	-0.187 (0.260)
Far-left electoral strength	0.073 (0.115)	
Far-right electoral strength		-0.126 (0.073)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>		
LR x Far-left electoral strength	-0.370 (0.452)	
Pol.Int. x Far-left electoral strength	-0.015 (0.077)	
LR x Pol.Int. x Far-left electoral strength	0.190 (0.175)	
LR x Far-right electoral strength		-0.363 (0.249)
Pol.Int. x Far-right electoral strength		<b>0.097*</b> (0.047)
LR x Pol.Int. x Far-right electoral strength		<b>-0.527***</b> (0.114)
AIC	6443.330	6412.788
BIC	6677.610	6647.068
Log Likelihood	-3191.665	-3176.394
Num. obs.	18203	18203
Num. groups: Countries	28	28
Var: countryshort (Intercept)	0.003	0.003
Var: countryshort LR	0.054	0.038
Var: countryshort Pol.Int.	0.001	0.001
Cov: countryshort (Intercept) LR	0.001	-0.001
Cov: countryshort (Intercept) Pol.Int.	0.001	0.001
Cov: countryshort LR Pol.Int.	-0.003	-0.001
Var: Residual	0.082	0.082

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

Table 3: Hierarchical models for respondents' attitudes toward EU integration with negative attitudes toward redistribution, positive attitudes toward immigration restrictive policies, and negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage as main predictors

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
<i>Within-level random slopes</i>			
Redistribution (sl.)	0.019 (0.020)		
Immigration restr. pol. (sl.)		<b>-0.084**</b> (0.030)	
Same-sex Marriage (sl.)			<b>-0.057*</b> (0.024)
Interested in politics (Ref = Not interested)	<b>0.037***</b> (0.010)	0.016 (0.012)	0.019 (0.012)
<i>Within-level interactions</i>			
Redistribution x Interested in politics	-0.014 (0.019)		
Imm. restr. pol. x Interested in politics		-0.020 (0.021)	
Same-sex marriage x Interested in politics			-0.012 (0.019)
<i>Between-level fixed slopes</i>			
Redistribution (mean)	-0.134 (0.199)		
Immigration restr. pol. (mean)		-0.275 (0.206)	
Same-sex Marriage (mean)			-0.085 (0.114)
Far-left electoral strength	0.064 (0.123)		
Far-right electoral strength		-0.107 (0.075)	-0.111 (0.072)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>			
Redistribution x Far-left electoral strength	0.193 (0.154)		
Pol.Int. x Far-left electoral strength	-0.041 (0.075)		
Redistribution x Pol.Int. x Far-left electoral strength	-0.048 (0.142)		
Pol.Int. x Far-right electoral strength		0.080 (0.046)	0.079 (0.046)
Pol.Int. x Far-right electoral strength		0.080 (0.046)	0.079 (0.046)
Imm. restr. pol. x Far-right electoral strength		-0.212 (0.121)	
Imm. restr. pol. x Pol.Int. x Far-right electoral strength		<b>-0.275***</b> (0.083)	
Same-sex marriage x Far-right electoral strength			-0.072 (0.096)
Same-sex marriage x Pol.Int. x Far-right electoral strength			<b>-0.185*</b> (0.074)
AIC	6463.013	6230.071	6369.699
BIC	6714.249	6481.307	6620.936
Log Likelihood	-3199.506	-3083.035	-3152.850
Num. obs.	18980	18980	18980
Num. groups: Countries	28	28	28

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

## Figures

Figure 1: Party positions on left-right and EU integration dimensions (CHES 2019)

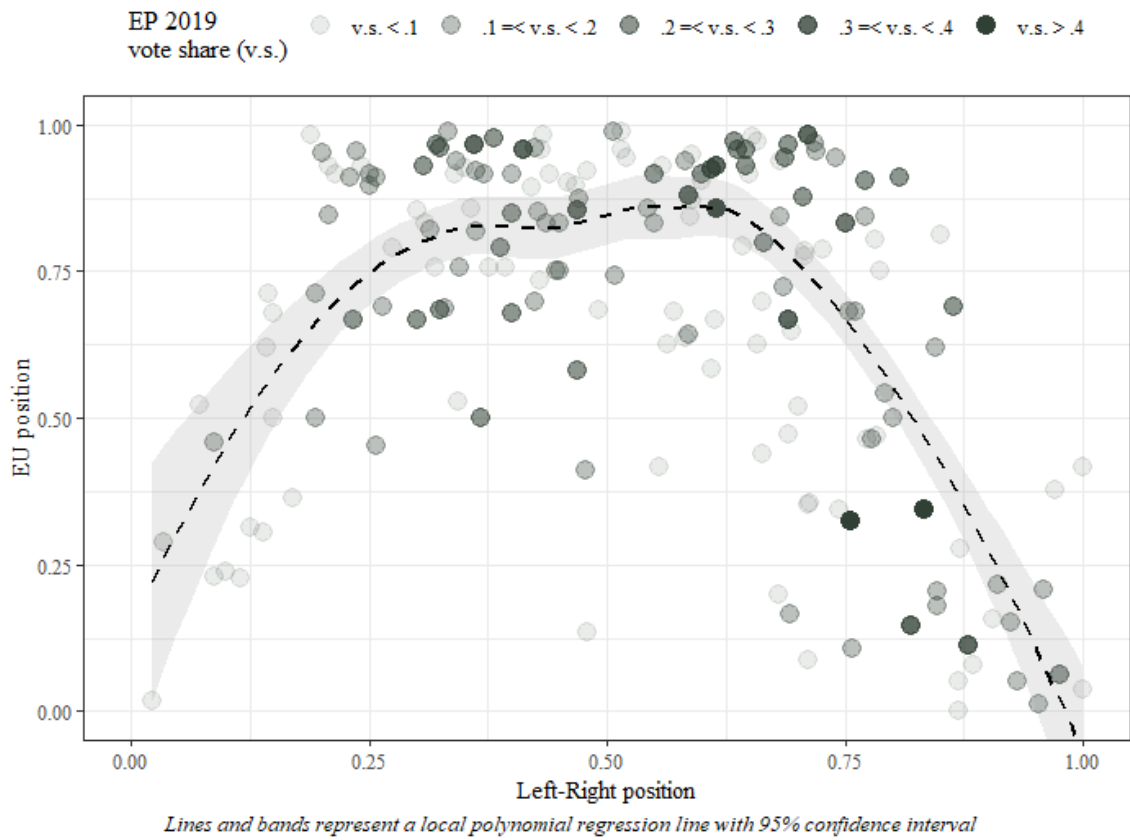


Figure 2: Criterion of choice for classifying far-left and far-right parties

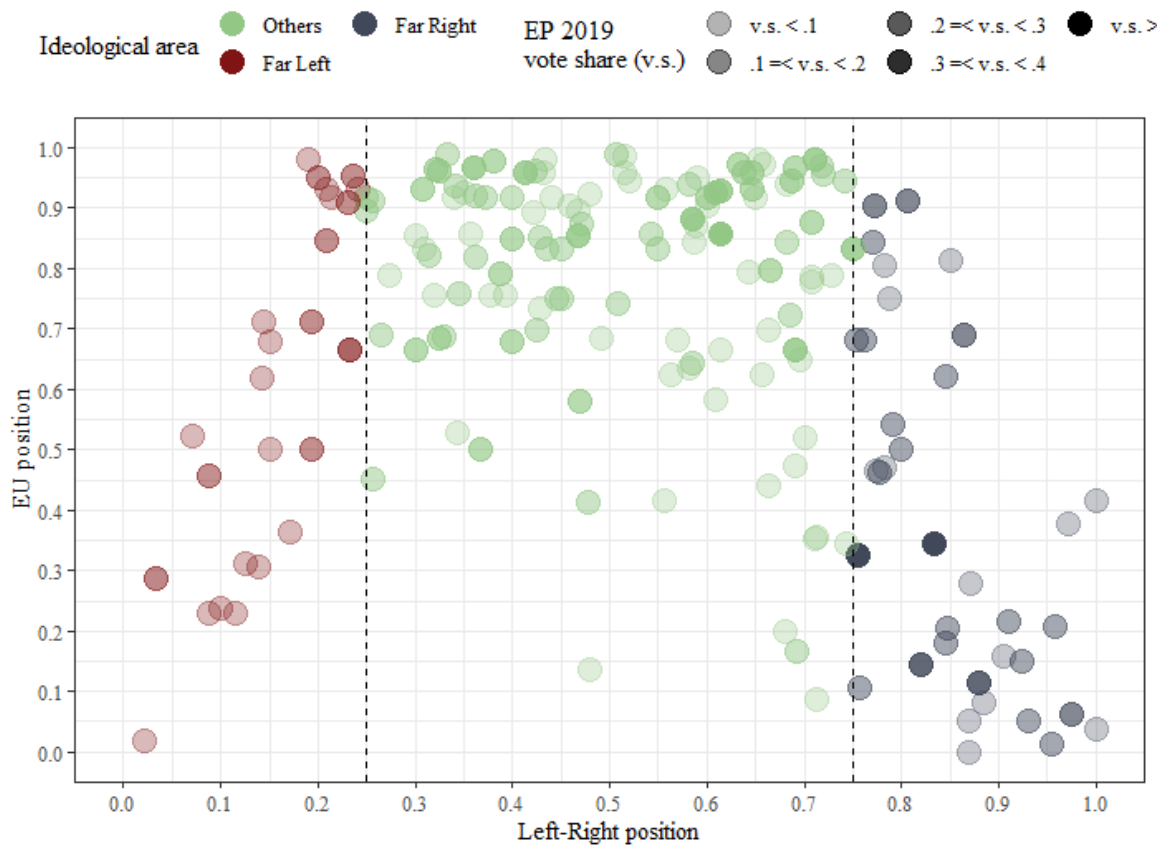


Figure 3: Far Left and Far Right vote share at 2019 EP elections

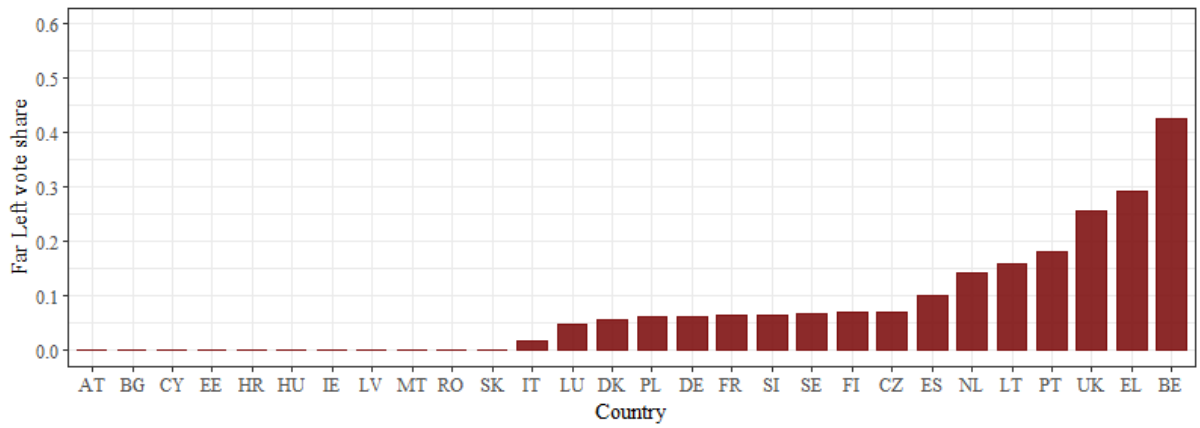
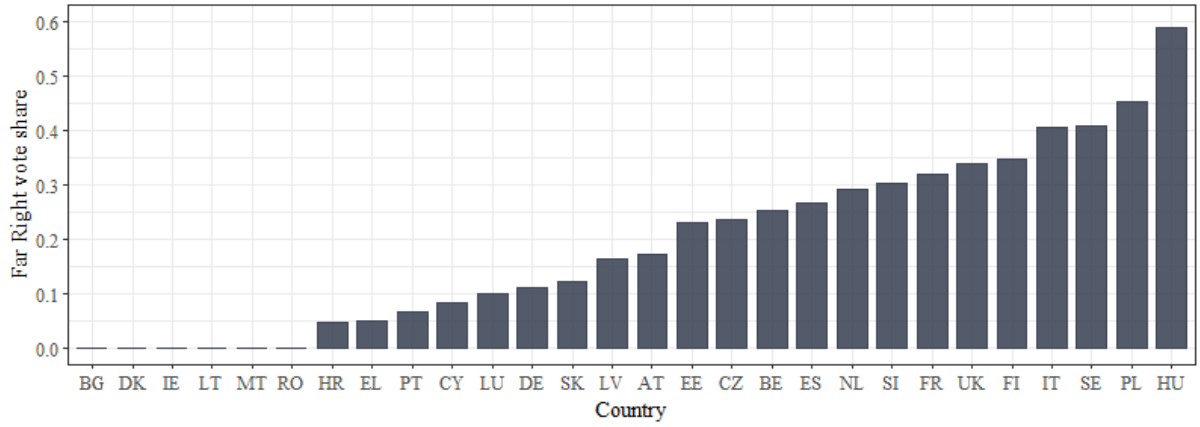
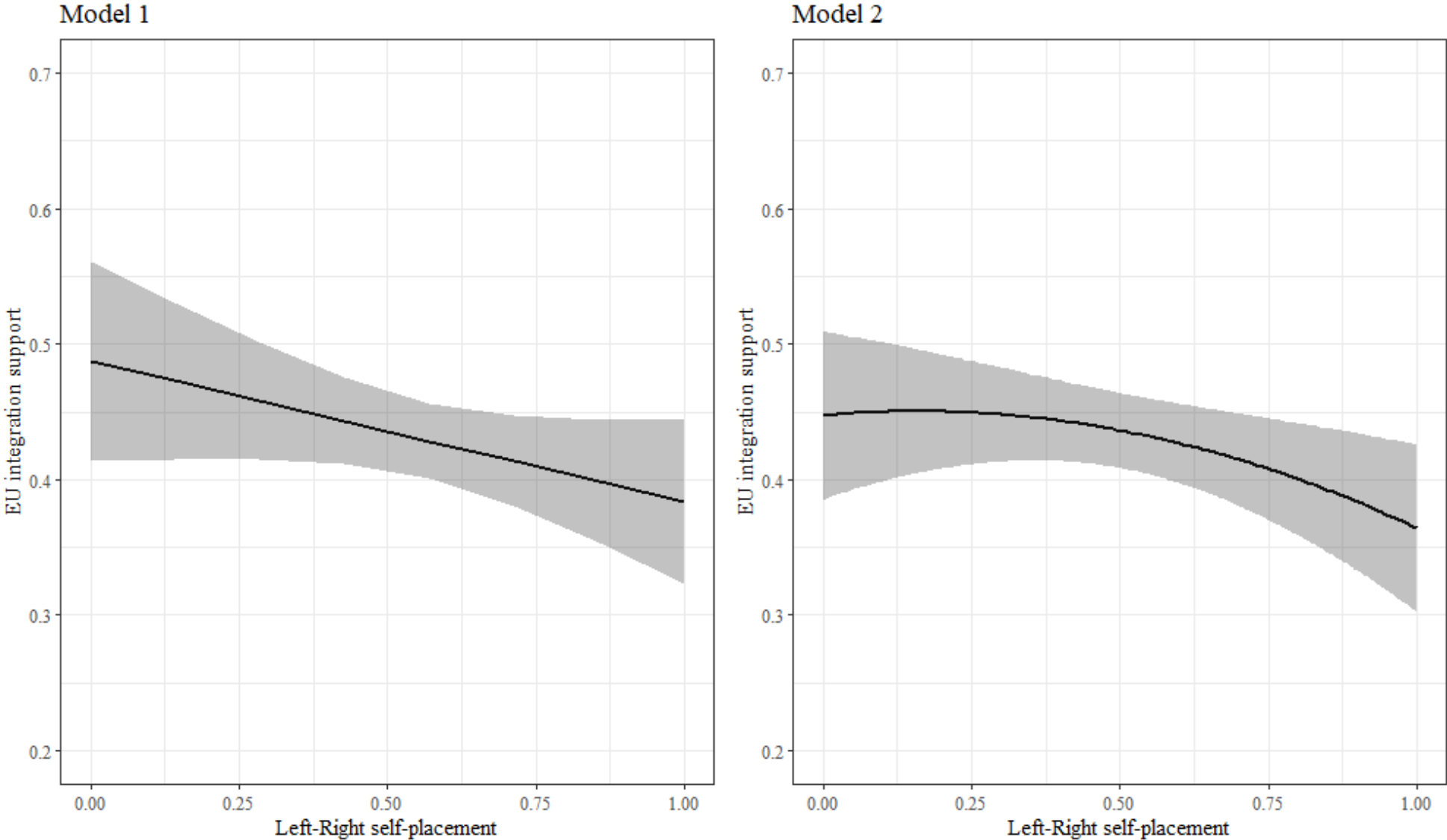


Figure 4: Conditional effects of LR self-placement on attitudes toward EU integration for Models 1 and 2

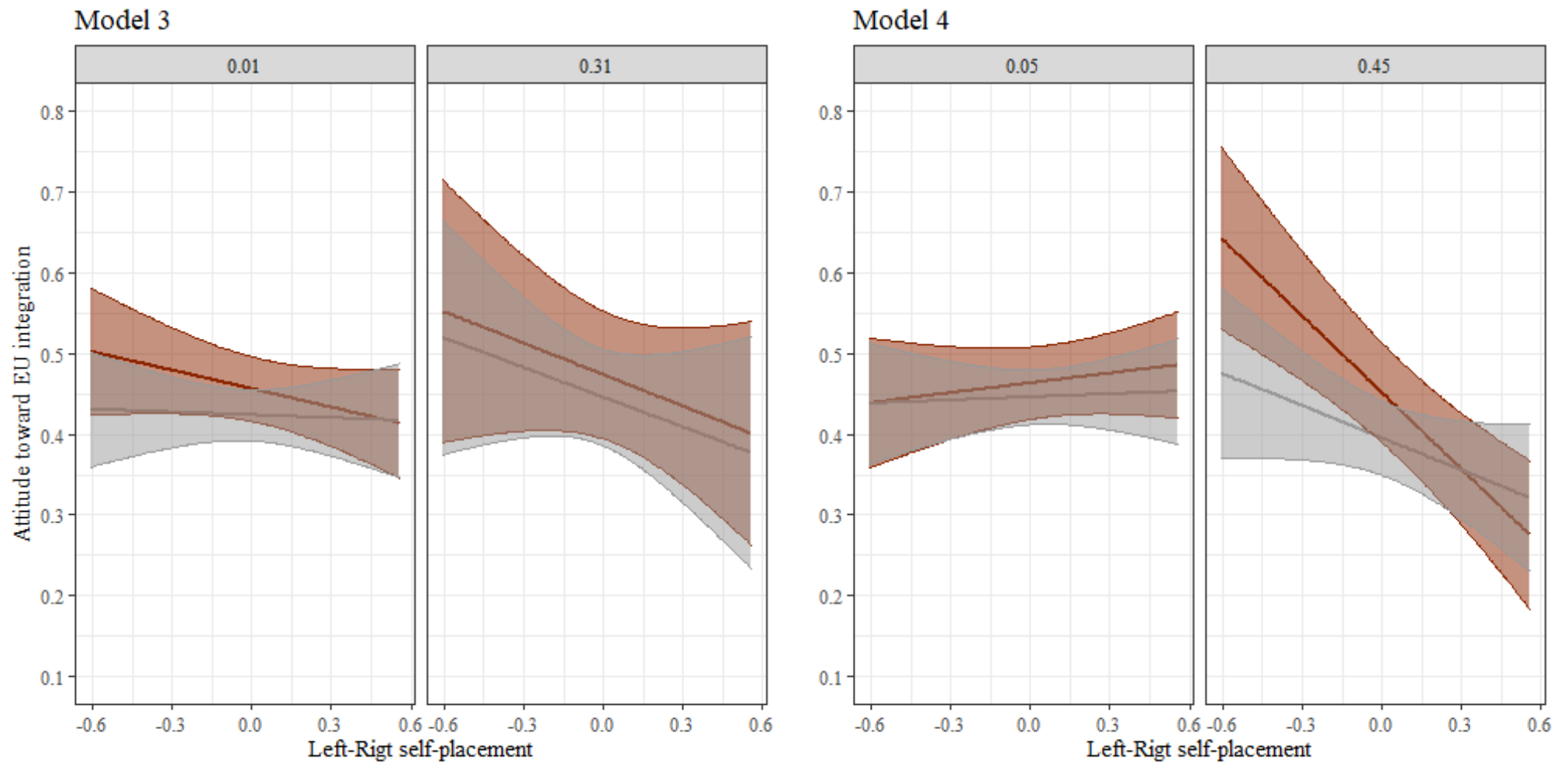


Notes: Bands represent 95% confidence intervals



Figure 5: Effects of LR self-placement on attitudes toward EU integration conditional on Far-left (Model 3), and Far-right strength (Model 4)

Interested Uninterested



*Bands represent 95% confidence interval*

Figure 6: Effects of negative attitudes toward redistribution policies on attitudes toward EU integration conditional on Far-left strength

Interested Uninterested

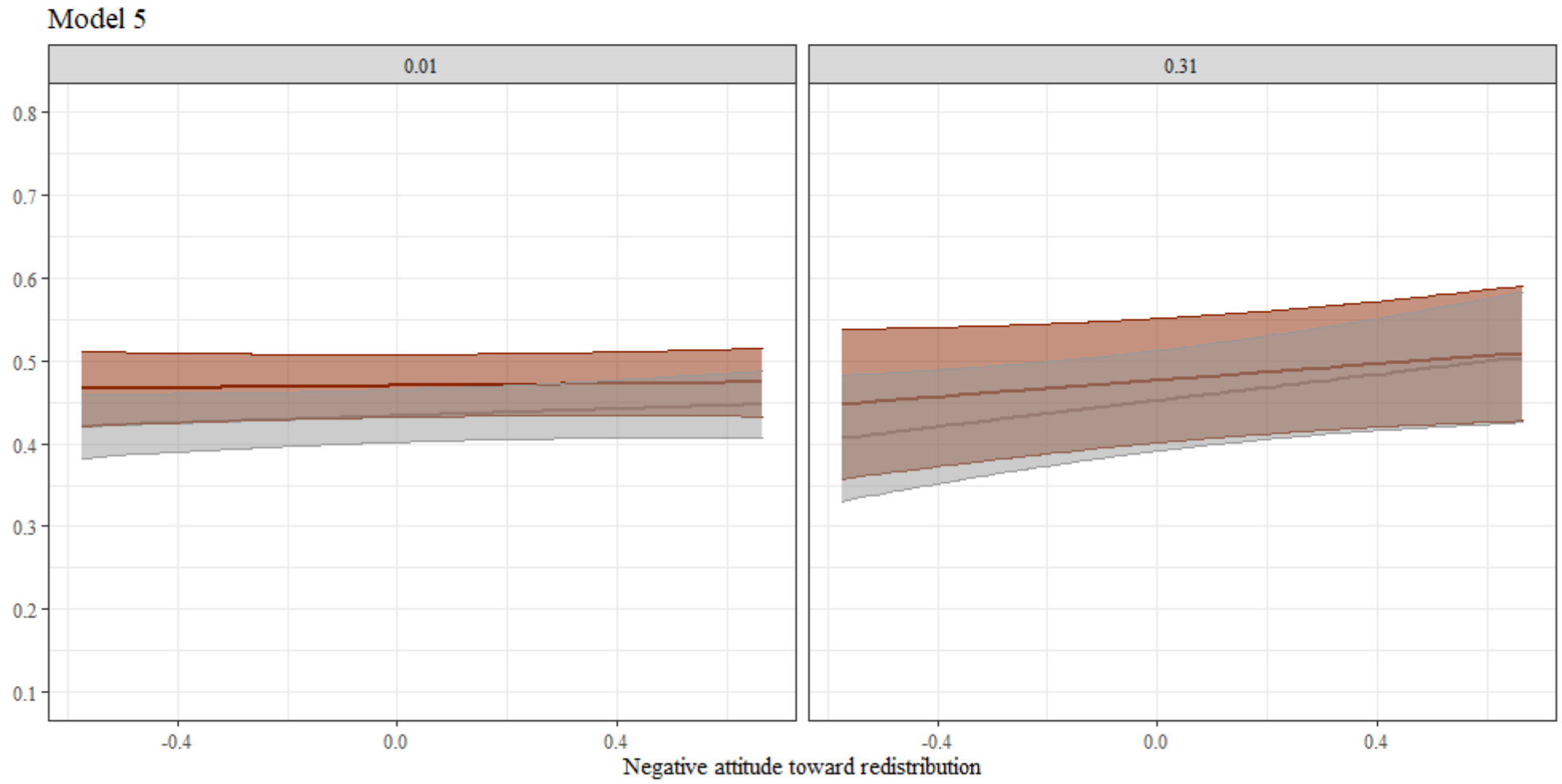


Figure 7: Effects of attitudes toward restrictive immigration policies on attitudes toward EU integration conditional on Far-right strength

Interested Uninterested

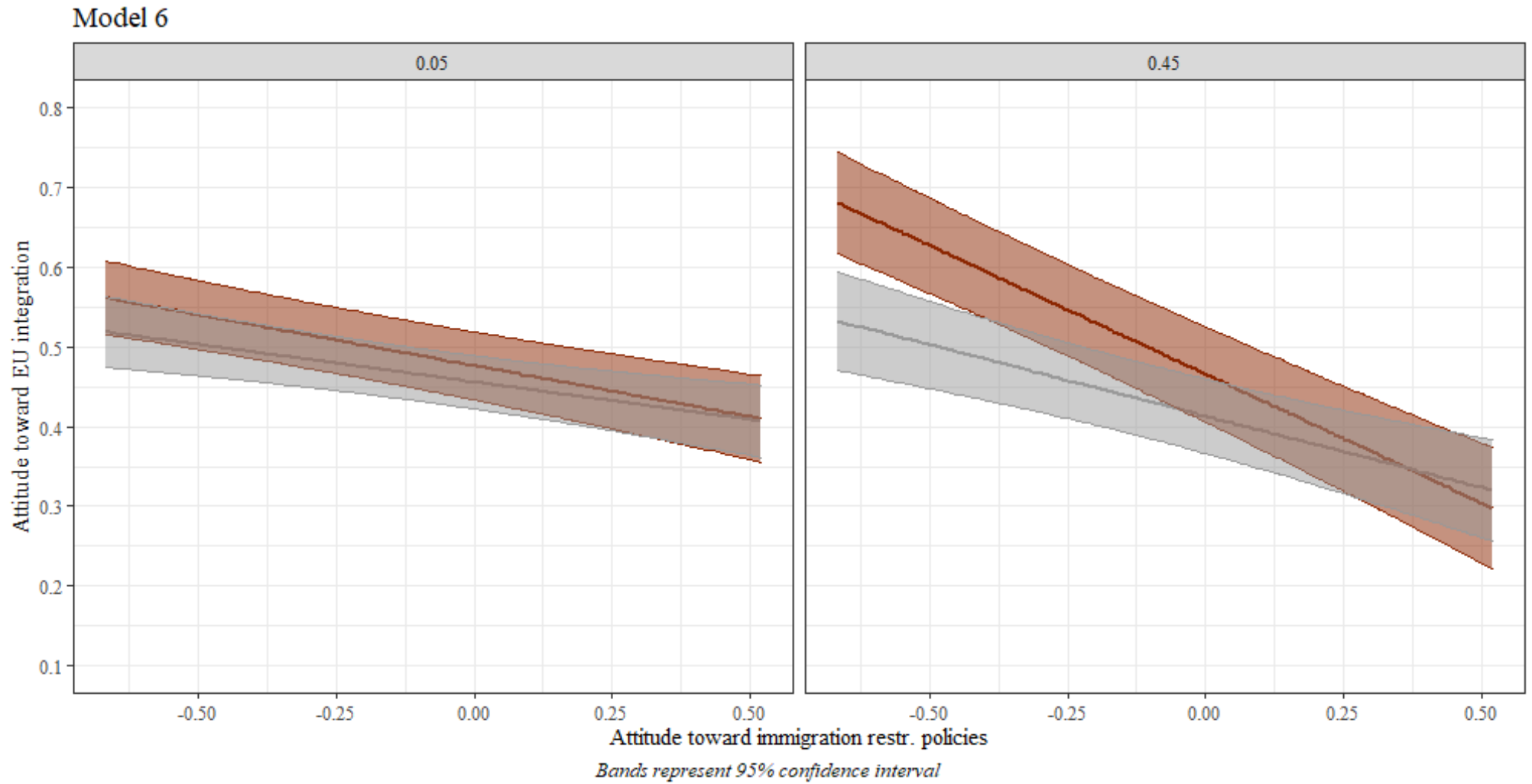


Figure 8: Effects of negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage on attitudes toward EU integration conditional on Far-right strength

Interested Uninterested

Model 7

