

## Talking to the Populist Radical Right: A Comparative Analysis of Parliamentary Debates

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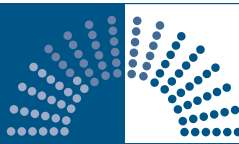
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## *Talking to the Populist Radical Right: A Comparative Analysis of Parliamentary Debates*

In many Western European states, right-wing populist parties made it into national parliaments. This presents the established parties with the challenge of how to behave towards the new party. While the scholarly literature has focused more on the interaction with the populist radical right in the electoral arena, we know little about how it functions in an institutionally constrained arena such as parliament. This study asks in what way these structures affect the position taking and confrontation in speeches. Using different text-as-data approaches, I analyze parliamentary debates in four Western European parliaments after the entry of right-wing populist parties. The results show that government-opposition dynamics continue to structure parliamentary debates by and large, but right-wing populist parties succeed in polarizing debates on immigration. They also become the center of attention in these debates. These results have important implications for the analysis of strategic party interaction in the parliamentary context.

“Wir werden sie jagen!”<sup>1</sup> — “We will chase them.” With these words, Alexander Gauland, one of the leading figures of the populist radical-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), described their upcoming role towards the government after the AfD had succeeded in entering the German parliament for the first time in 2017. Regardless of actual intention, the statement expresses confidence in the power to influence the behavior of other parties—or to frame it in the same rhetoric: the ability to chase them to a place where they otherwise would not have gone. Additionally, several German MPs stated that debates in parliament had “become rougher” and direct confrontation had increased with the entry of the AfD.<sup>2</sup> This study analyzes how the interaction of parties

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in parliamentary debates is structured after populist radical-right parties (PRRPs)<sup>3</sup> have entered.

There is a research gap in terms of comparative analyses of party behavior when PRRPs enter parliament. The phenomenon of PRRPs growing stronger and putting mainstream parties under pressure is nothing new. In the last 20 years, they have entered many parliaments in Western Europe; in some, they even supported governments. Commentators have examined the influence of these parties using two preponderant perspectives: First, there has been a discussion as to whether they drive mainstream parties towards certain policies, such as tightened immigration laws (e.g., Mudde 2013). Second, the reaction of parties in the electoral arena has been an often-debated topic over the last decade (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Meguid 2005, 2007). Another area, however, has been addressed considerably less in comparative studies, namely the daily interaction in parliaments—the heart of democratic deliberation.

I combine the findings from research on (electoral) campaigning with theoretical assumptions about the effects of institutional settings in parliament (Helms 2008; Rasch 2014). I argue that both perspectives must be considered when attempting to formulate an explanation of how parties compete in parliament. The focus lies in the interaction with PRRPs in the field of immigration in comparison to other areas. Previous case studies have shown that PRRPs participate in policymaking activities less than the average opposition party. Therefore, plenary debates are an important stage for their communication with citizens (Heinze 2021; Louwerse and Otjes 2019).

Different types of quantitative text analysis are used for the methodological implementation. I analyze parliamentary debates from four European national parliaments that have witnessed the entry of prominent PRRPs. Using correspondence analysis allows me to derive positions from political texts that provide the basis of my analysis (Petrovic et al. 2009; Schonhardt-Bailey 2008). Furthermore, a dictionary approach enables me to measure the addressing of others by parties and thus contextualize confrontation in parliament.

The results show that assumptions from party competition in the electoral arena cannot be transferred to the parliamentary arena. In general, debates in parliament continue to follow a government-opposition structure after the entry of PRRPs. However, debates on immigration reveal a division between the

new parties and all other parties. Furthermore, they become the center of these debates as they are disproportionately often addressed by parties in debates on immigration. This confrontation is driven to a larger extent by left-wing parties which seem to expect a bigger electoral advantage. In the following section, I look at why parliaments are a constrained environment and hypothesize how this influences party interaction after the entry of a PRRP. After the introduction of the data set and the methodological approach, I present the results from which I draw my conclusions and open questions that should be addressed in future research.

### **Parliament as a Constrained Environment**

Previous studies dealing with the influence of PRRPs on the behavior of established parties have often focused on the electoral arena. In most cases, they analyze which strategies have led to electoral success, such as an increase in vote share or entry into parliament (Spies and Franzmann 2011; Van Spanje and de Graaf 2018). To a lesser extent, the success of these parties is evaluated in terms of influence on competing parties (Abou-Chadi 2016; Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020) or voters (Bischof and Wagner 2019). These studies show that PRRPs, as issue entrepreneurs, achieve electoral success by introducing new issue dimensions (De Vries and Hobolt 2012). Furthermore, they find in the electoral arena that, especially on such issues, PRRPs pull the position of mainstream parties in their own direction (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020). In contrast, this study focuses on how party competition structures and influences daily interaction in parliaments when PRRPs enter and stay in parliaments. Although scholars of party competition have recognized the differences between the electoral and the parliamentary arena, they only recently started to focus more on the parliamentary context, “precisely because it is where all relevant parties make choices about policies” (Field and Hamann 2015, 901). This seems all the more necessary since several studies have shown that party systems and positions can undergo considerable change between elections (Laver 2005; Mershon and Shvetsova 2008). Only if we take the institutional setting as the basis for the competition between parties in a parliament can we formulate meaningful expectations of their behavior.

Three aspects are particularly important: agenda-setting rules, the specific nature of parliamentary debates, and government-opposition dynamics. They generate incentive structures as well as institutional constraints that are different to the incentives that structure party manifestos or party behavior during elections in general. Parliamentary rules determine when parties can put issues on the agenda and how long and often they can speak in the plenary (Proksch and Slapin 2015; Rasch 2014). As a result, a single party never has full control over which issues are discussed in a given debate. Contrary to manifestos or interaction on social media platforms, parties are therefore “forced” to talk about certain topics. Although it is possible for MPs to talk about issues that do not correspond to the intention of the party that has put the issue on the agenda, they must always stick to the debate in some way. Therefore, it is not possible to the same extent for parties to express positions via salience in debates.

This is strongly related to the fact that the position that a party or MP takes during a debate is almost always tied to a reference point, such as a legislative proposal or a parliamentary question. Only rarely are broad policy areas discussed in their entirety in debates. These specific reference points do not always allow to draw conclusions about the aggregate position on the issue. Moreover, the positions that are expressed always reflect the attitude towards the actor who set the reference point or, in this case, the agenda. For these reasons, it is not possible to draw conclusions about broad positions and reactions of parties in the same way based on issue attention and statements as from manifestos.

This in turn is connected to the division into government and opposition. Hix and Noury (2016) identify government-opposition dynamics as the most important factor for parliamentary behavior. The parties in these two groups follow a different logic in their behavior and therefore cannot necessarily be distinguished by their ideology (Dahl, 1966; Martin and Vanberg 2011). An opposition party is limited in its ability to agree with the government as its purpose is to scrutinize the government. Conversely, MPs in a government coalition are limited in their options for arguing against their coalition partners, even if they are ideologically closer to an opposition party on an issue. Moreover, parliamentary debates can be roughly divided into policymaking (government debates) and scrutiny activities (opposition debates) (Louwerse and Otjes 2019). Government parties usually set the reference point for bill debates by proposing legislation. In contrast, opposition

parties act as scrutinizers, attacking the government and offering alternatives through questions and debates (Helms 2008).

While the mechanisms described above work somewhat the same in all parliamentary democracies, there are also differences between them. In systems where the influence of opposition parties is higher (e.g., through legislative committee systems), position taking will be less structured by a government-opposition divide than in systems with less opposition influence (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2006). Additionally, countries that traditionally witness the formation of minority governments might show a smaller government-opposition divide as coalitions in parliament change more frequently (Strøm 1990). Moreover, electoral systems that encourage personal vote seeking allow a greater number of MPs to engage in parliamentary debates and express more diverse opinions leading to lower party unity (Proksch and Slapin 2015). Against this background, theoretical expectations are formulated in the following section.

### **Expectations of Parties' Interaction**

The interaction of parties in parliamentary debates can be analyzed in several ways. In terms of interaction with PRRPs, for example, Valentim and Widmann (2021) examine how their presence affects the sentiment of debates. In this study, I turn to two other important quantities, namely the relative positioning and the mutual confrontation in parliamentary debates. Populist parties (PRRPs in particular) show a strong policymaking inactivity in comparison to other parties in the opposition, while they are slightly more active with regard to scrutiny (Louwerse and Otjes 2019). This makes parliamentary speeches even more important for these parties as they either do not have the means or see the need to engage in policymaking (Heinze 2021). Moreover, it leads to the expectation that PRRPs will simply adopt a strategy of frontal opposition in policymaking debates (unlike other opposition parties). In scrutiny debates, by contrast, involvement in the discourse might be more likely in the wake of government criticism.

If we take the institutional characteristics described above seriously, we should expect parliamentary debates in terms of position taking to be primarily characterized by a government-opposition divide (Hix and Noury 2016). This expectation serves as a baseline expectation for any parliamentary debate. However,

there are statements by parliamentarians, as quoted at the beginning, who have perceived a fundamental change in parliamentary debates after the entry of PRRPs. In particular, parties that are in opposition with a PRRP may face a dilemma. While it can be strategically important to distance themselves from these parties, they still need to criticize the government in order to present an alternative to potential voters. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that PRRPs, once they enter, will bring about such a strong change on the fundamental structures within parliament. Therefore, I expect that even after the entry, the division into government and opposition will determine position taking in parliament. Thus, opposition parties will be closer to PRRPs if they are in opposition together regardless of their ideology.

However, the respective topic of the debate plays a decisive role for position taking. For example, I expect position dynamics to change for issues where PRRPs take a particularly extreme position on the one hand, and where potential voters of established parties demand a clear demarcation on the other hand, such as immigration. New cultural dimensions, such as immigration, show a potentially higher degree of conflict in Western European party systems (Kriesi et al. 2012). Furthermore, PRRPs are comparatively more radical and unique in their stances on immigration (Immerzeel, Lubbers, and Coffé 2016). On this issue, opposition parties in particular may find it more important to distance themselves from the PRRP than to take a stance against the government. Down and Han (2020) find that mainstream parties make the election of PRRPs less likely if they do not adopt their positions. They would thus refrain from differentiating themselves more clearly from the government position in order to distinguish themselves more clearly from right-wing populist positions. This strategy may also be due to the fact that voters are often more familiar with the extreme positions of the PRRPs on these issues. Thus, distancing is used as a signal only in very specific debates from both sides and leads to a stronger selective polarization. I expect this effect to be particularly strong in debates on immigration (Atzpodien 2020).

*H1 (Selective Polarization Hypothesis): In parliamentary debates on immigration, all parties position themselves further away from PRRPs.*

As described above, the positioning in parliaments is to a large extent influenced by the parliamentary rules and a government-opposition divide. However, the composition of the parties in parliament can also influence *how* debates are held. This leads to the second relevant aspect, namely how often and when parties address or confront each other during debates. In this context, several strategic considerations are important. First of all, the behavior of the addressee matters. I expect PRRPs to succeed in being at the center of the debate, especially on issues that are particularly salient to them and where they take a more extreme position. It is debates on immigration where PRRPs attract the attention of competing parties (Johnston and Sprong 2022) and add to a general increase in salience of the topic (Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019). Although other issues like European integration might show similar interaction patterns, immigration is topic-wise considered the major selling point of PRRPs (Mudde 2009). While not all PRRPs have a clear niche party profile, immigration is often the core subject of emerging PRRPs entering the political system (Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn 2016; Pardos-Prado, Lance, and Sagarzazu 2014).

As with position taking, I expect increased direct confrontation by competing parties here. Similarly, the assumed intention is a communal delegitimization of the new party. Confrontation with the new competing party is therefore particularly attractive on issues where its position is to be depicted as particularly illegitimate. Furthermore, a decisive aspect is that mainstream parties are less likely to be successful in dealing with populist parties (in contrast to extremist parties) if they simply ignore them (Heinze 2020). Thus, both aspects that define PRRPs (populist and radical right) are important for the interaction with other parliamentary parties. However, the high level of attention might not necessarily be against the interest of the PRRP. It likely increases the party's chances of benefiting from media coverage and, more generally, becoming the center of the debate outside of parliament. In addition, the unique position of the party on this issue is hereby underlined, and the remaining parties are more difficult to distinguish from each other. Overall, this leads to a disproportionate attention and thus a domination of these debates by PRRPs.

*H2 (Selective Domination Hypothesis): PRRPs become the center of attention in parliamentary debates on immigration.*



While there may be a common intention to delegitimize the PRRP, parties' incentives to engage in direct confrontation vary. Contrary to position taking, ideology is a key factor here. I expect that left parties are on average more likely to confront PRRPs directly. This expectation stems from the assumption that direct confrontation is less subject to the constrained environment set up than position taking. By addressing them directly, left-wing parties can distinguish themselves without escaping patterns of government and opposition. This is an opportunity especially for left opposition parties facing a right-wing government. In this way, they can distinguish themselves from center-right parties, even if they criticize the government jointly.

In contrast, center-right parties can be expected to avoid direct confrontation with the new party. Particularly in contrast to position taking, this reflects much more a well-considered choice in terms of influence on voters. While parties have to position themselves in their speeches anyway, they are less constrained in deciding to what extent and in which debates they address and confront competing parties. This reflects the theoretical approach by Meguid (2005, 2007), that center-right mainstream parties try to avoid confrontation with PRRPs, while center-left mainstream parties try to gain profile by doing so. As issues like immigration are very important for the voters of PRRPs (De Vries and Hobolt 2020), center-right parties fear to increase the salience of the issue through direct confrontation and to lose votes.

*H3 (Confrontation Hypothesis): Left parties confront PRRPs more often by addressing them directly.*

In principle, I assume that the hypotheses are applicable to any democratic parliamentary context. Nevertheless, there are substantial differences between countries that need to be taken into account and should affect the strength of the expected effects. A decisive factor is whether cooperation with the respective PRRP is rejected by all major parties in parliament or whether coalitions are being considered or have already been established (Heinze 2018; Van Spanje and de Graaf 2018). An example of such an exclusion is Sweden where center-right parties have so far refused to cooperate, at the expense of the chance of a right-wing majority in parliament. Such a cordon sanitaire did not exist in other countries. This does not mean that PRRPs are involved in every government, but

the possibility has implications for party competition, as it creates new coalition options. In some cases, there was cooperation in the past in the form of a supported minority government. This form of government is another factor that blurs the division into government and opposition—even more when these are supported by PRRPs. Especially in Denmark where changing alliances are common, this might also influence the expectation on party interaction and weaken the expected effects (Christiansen and Pedersen 2014).

*H4 (Cordon Sanitaire Hypothesis): The preceding effects are smaller in countries where coalitions with PRRPs are not ruled out.*

### Data and Methods

To implement the theoretical framework outlined above, I use full transcripts of parliamentary speeches in the countries Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, and Germany. The ParlSpeech data set, which contains annotated full-text vectors of 6.3 million plenary speeches in the legislative chambers of key European states, forms the basis for this implementation (Rauh and Schwalbach 2020).<sup>4</sup> The case selection of these countries is driven by the idea of having as similar cases as possible in order to make the effects comparable. All cases are West European countries with proportional representation or mixed electoral systems. In all cases, PRRPs have won over 10% of the votes in national parliamentary elections. Furthermore, all countries are multiparty systems with at least six parties in parliament, and all of these parliaments have strong legislative institutions, especially regarding the strength of committees (Martin and Vanberg 2011) and rather strong opposition rights (Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2006; Wegmann 2022). Additionally, all parliaments show a high level of party unity that stems both from the electoral system and the rights of the party leadership to allocate speaking time (Bäck, Debus, and Fernandes 2021; Proksch and Slapin 2015). Nevertheless, there are also relevant differences between the countries such as the origins of the PRRP, the level of fragmentation and polarization in the party system, as well as the patterns of coalition formation (Mudde 2013; Otjes and Willumsen 2019; Strøm 1990). Therefore, all analyses are carried out with country fixed effects.

TABLE 1  
Case Selection

Country	PRRP	Analyzed Period	Right Parties	Left Parties
Denmark	DF	03/1998–11/2007	V, KF	S, RV, SF, EL
Germany	AfD	09/2017–09/2021	CDU/CSU, FDP	SPD, Greens, Left
Netherlands	PVV	11/2006–11/2015	VVD, CDA, CU	PvdA, GL, D66, SP <sup>6</sup>
Sweden	SD	09/2010–09/2018	M, C, KD, L	S, MP, V

To ensure that the period is as long as possible, but also as comparable as possible, I analyze the first three legislative periods in Denmark and the Netherlands, the first two in Sweden, and the first legislative period in Germany after the entry of the PRRP.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 shows the selected countries with the considered parties for each country. In this context, it should be mentioned that the Dansk Folkeparti (DF) was already present in parliament in the pre-1998 term. Individual members of the Progress Party had split off and founded the party in 1995. Furthermore, in the case of the Netherlands, a PRRP, Pim Fortuyn List, was already present in parliament before the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) entered. Despite its brief participation in government, however, it was only in parliament for a total of four years. Moreover, the party was extremely tailored to the leadership figure of Pim Fortuyn and thus quickly collapsed after his death. Both factors, like many other possible variables, could affect a comparison between before and after the entry of the respective party. Since the focus of this analysis is on postentry behavior, these factors should be taken into account, but they make a comparison of countries possible.

The use of parliamentary debates to extract party positions is a less common instrument in political science than using manifestos, expert surveys, or roll-call votes (see e.g., Lauderdale and Herzog 2016). Nevertheless, apart from roll-call votes, it is the only data source that allows a direct inference of the position of a party in a parliament. In addition, the methodological approach of deriving positions from text has become increasingly important, especially due to improved data availability. Speeches in parliament do not only signal parties' preferences on certain policies but also their preferences as to the use of legislative time as well as their position in parliament (Hix and Noury 2016; Pedrazzani 2017). One could argue that every positioning of parties (whether in manifestos or debates) should be considered as cheap talk as long as it

does not manifest in actual legislative action. However, parliamentary debates usually take place during the time of related legislation or if the topic is part of a general debate. Furthermore, parties consider parliamentary debates as an important stage as speaking time is highly in demand (Proksch and Slapin 2015). Also, the measurement can be easily replicated and promises the “ability to process large amounts of text quickly and, hopefully, accurately” (Budge and Pennings 2007, 123).

Besides the complete set of speeches, I analyze the positions in subsets with speeches on the issue of immigration as well as education as a control case to compare the party positions in these areas separately. As described above, immigration debates are the most likely case for the expected behavior described in Hypothesis 1 (the selective polarization hypothesis) and Hypothesis 2 (the selective domination hypothesis). I selected debates on education as a control case as the behavior should not be expected here. It could be argued that education as part of the cultural dimension, for example, in the area of gender-related issues, may as well be salient for PRRPs. However, on the one hand, education-related issues discussed in parliaments are rather technical in nature, such as the structure of a particular vocational training program. On the other hand, in all four cases, when considering the relevance of education issues in manifestos, the PRRP is well below average (Volkens et al. 2018). In order to contextualize these particular debates, I also conduct all analyses with the respective full samples of speeches.

As a first step, I apply a keyword dictionary approach to identify the debates dealing with immigration and education. For the topic of immigration, I use a search string from Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2009), which I translate and extend for this article, and I create a new dictionary to identify education debates. Similar to the manifesto approach, all speeches containing statements held by members of a party during a certain time (here a legislative term) serve as data for the measurement of the party position in this issue area. Speeches are only considered if they include at least three keywords or if the speech and the debate topic contain at least one keyword. This prevents the use of speeches that do not fit the topic and, for example, only contain one keyword in a different context. The procedure reduces the number of speeches for the subsamples considerably. Once the debates have been selected and random checks have ensured that the dictionaries work, the individual speeches are aggregated at debate level according to parties,

since this analysis does not focus on individual MPs. This data set forms the basis for the analyses of party positions. Appendix A in the online supporting information shows a summary of all numbers of speeches included for each analysis.

Additionally, it is important to take into account that different parliamentary rules provide different groups in parliament with instruments that vary considerably across countries. Very simplified, these can be broken down into government and opposition instruments. While the former focus mainly on the preparation and adoption of bills, the latter are designed for government scrutiny. However, there are significant differences, such as what types of question time are available to the opposition, how institutionalized private member bills are, and who sets the agenda (Rasch 2014). But nevertheless, the expected differences in the dynamics of the debates are similar for all countries. For this reason, government and opposition debates (policymaking vs. scrutiny) are identified via the agenda title and also considered separately in the analyses in order to examine the extent to which effects differ between these types of debates.

I use the resulting data sets to run a correspondence analysis<sup>7</sup> for all parties in parliament that hold at least 5% of the seats in parliament (Benoit et al. 2018; Petrovic et al. 2009). The exclusion of very small parties is justified by the fact that they often speak very little on topics such as immigration due to a very strong focus on other issues. Correspondence analysis is a nonparametric scaling method and is similar to principal component analysis and has the advantage that it can scale documents on several dimensions. Classes and words are cross-tabulated in their root form in order to create a matrix that can then be subjected to factor correspondence analysis. This can help to separate government-opposition dynamics from ideological positions. Schonhardt-Bailey (2008) shows that correspondence analysis is particularly useful for the analysis of parliamentary debates as these tend to be structured by several dimensions.

As with all scaling techniques, the analysis relies heavily on the selection of texts as well as the interpretation of the produced scales by the researcher. In order to scale the debates to analyze the party positions for each country, I preprocess the data in order to minimize the influence of parts of the text that do not substantially contribute to its meaning. However, preprocessing can have a strong impact on the results of quantitative text analysis (Denny and Spirling 2018; Proksch and Slapin 2009). Therefore, Appendix

B in the online supporting information lists all preprocessing steps. Moreover, the analysis is calculated as a robustness test without preprocessed text data as well as normalized position scores in order to avoid biased results. The transformation and the results are listed in detail in Appendix B. All main effects of the analysis stay significant throughout the different PRR models.

I calculate the distance to the PRRP's position for all parties from the scaled positions. I use the distance on the dimension with the highest eigenvalue as it constitutes the most important dimension for the respective party positions. The distance measures are all calculated on a legislative-term-aggregated level to account for changing government-opposition dynamics while drawing on sufficient speeches to calculate positions. This variable forms the dependent variable of an OLS regression model. The main independent variables are government-opposition affiliation and the debate topic. As control variables, I use a left-right dummy to analyze whether parties with different ideologies behave differently beyond the government-opposition divide. Furthermore, I control for the seat share of the respective PRRP in parliament and the number of legislative periods after entry. The expectation is that the distance to the PRRP increases the stronger the PRRP is, and possibly decreases with the number of terms it is in parliament, as a normalization process might take place (Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn 2016). In addition, I take into account the difference between minority and majority governments as the expected difference between government and opposition is smaller on average under minority governments. Furthermore, in the case of minority government, I control for PRRP support for the government and, in an interaction term, whether this has a different impact on government and opposition parties. I expect a general decrease in distance for minority governments due to the increased need for parliamentary cooperation, especially when supported by a PRRP. Finally, I account for the type of debate (government vs. opposition), which I infer from the title of the debate.

For the analysis of which parties address the PRRP most frequently, I use a simple but informative dictionary approach. The dictionaries of the respective countries contain the names of the relevant parties as well as different forms and abbreviations, if used in the respective languages. I count for each party how often it addresses all other parties and what proportion of each party addresses the PRRP has. This approach is only an approximation of how often parties in parliament address each other. Instead of

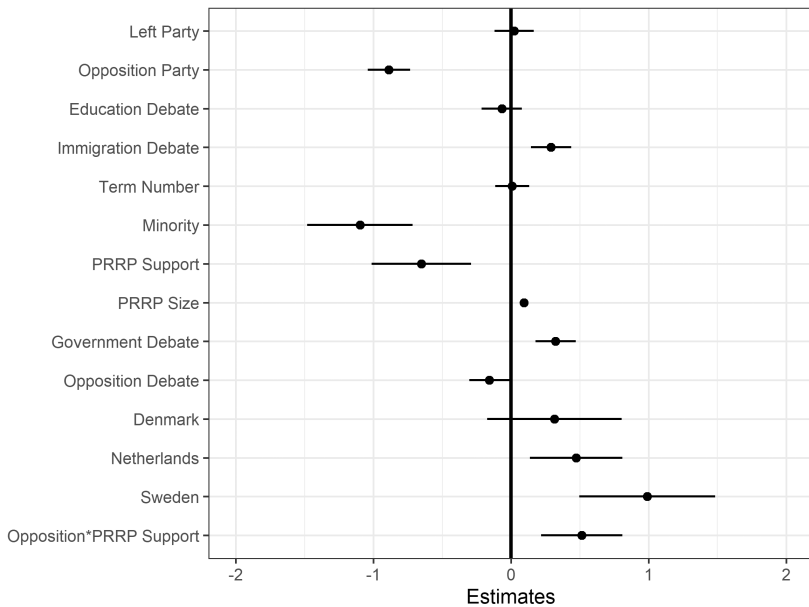
the party, individual speakers could be addressed and the parties could use other names among themselves (e.g., the “Merkel-Party” for the CDU). Nevertheless, this approach offers a reasonable estimate. Moreover, this limitation to the party brand and not individual MPs is justified by the case selection with regard to party unity (see Bäck, Debus, and Fernandes 2021). As all countries in the analysis have proportional-representation electoral systems where a high level of party discipline exists, the party label has a great influence on the electoral decisions of citizens and the behavior of parties in parliament (Slapin and Proksch 2008). Furthermore, greater differentiation could lead to further problems such as the appearance of the same MP name in several parties or in various offices not affiliated with the party.

I use these count variables in different ways and aggregation levels. First, I analyze what proportion of all party mentions the PRRPs make up, and whether this share is larger in certain debates. Secondly, I use a logit model to analyze whether the probability of these parties being named is higher for left or right parties and to what extent this effect interacts with the type of the debate. For the debate topics, I use the same data sets as for the analysis of party positions. The model also includes all control variables that were used for the analysis of the positions.

### **Position Taking in Parliament after PRRP Entry**

Before turning to the analysis of the party positions in relation to the PRRP, I first look at the raw positions to assess their plausibility as a first robustness check. Figures C1 to C4 in Appendix C in the online supporting information show the plotted party positions from the first legislative period after the entry of the respective PRRP for all debates as well as for debates on immigration only. The party positions from all debates show a clear government-opposition divide in all countries. This divide varies in its intensity between countries but is always consistent. The PRRP is often one of the parties that is furthest from that of the government parties. This is in line with the expectation, as these parties very rarely cooperate with government parties. If we now turn to the positioning in the immigration debates, it is evident that the respective PRRP in all cases takes an extreme position. While the PRRP position in Denmark is still relatively close to the other opposition parties, the other countries show a strong polarization. This provides a first indication of the confirmation of Hypothesis

FIGURE 1  
Estimates Plot for the Correspondence Analysis



1. Turning to the results of the regression analysis of all included debates in [Figure 1](#), several factors stand out that are significantly related to the positioning of a party in relation to the PRRP.

First, there is a strong and significant effect of government or opposition affiliation. The distance to the PRRP of parties that are in opposition together with them is substantially smaller than that of government parties. This confirms that by and large government-opposition dynamics structure position taking in parliament. Furthermore, the type of government seems to be an important factor as well. The distance between parties and a PRRP decreases in cases of minority governments and even more when it is supported by an PRRP. However, in this case the distance to opposition parties increases in comparison to government parties. This makes sense and should be applicable to any minority support party.

If we take a look at the effects of the individual debate topics, the effect of debates on immigration supports the hypothesis. The distance to the respective PRRP is significantly larger in these



debates. The control case of education debates has no significant effect on the distance to the PRRP. With regard to the distinction between government and opposition debates, the analysis shows a significantly larger distance in government debates. The term number after entry has no significant effect whereas the size of the PRRP fraction in parliament shows a small positive effect. Finally, the differentiation between left and right parties is not significantly correlated to the distance to the PRRP. This underlines the finding of previous studies that the line of conflict in parliaments is characterized more by government-opposition dynamics than by ideology<sup>8</sup> (Hix and Noury 2016).

### The Confrontation of PRRPs

As a second part of the analysis, I examine which parties are addressing PRRPs particularly often. First, I look at the share of the mentions of PRRPs in all party mentions of each party. Put differently, how often does a party address a PRRP when addressing competing parties in parliament. These values are based on the same legislative periods after the entry of the new party as the position analyses. Tables 2 to 4 show the average shares of right-wing and left-wing parties as well as the variation between the different debate topics. Looking at the proportionate mention in the debates, a couple of things stand out: in all countries, the average share for all types of debates is substantially higher for left-wing parties than for right-wing parties. When comparing the different types of debates, the disproportionately high shares in debates on immigration are most striking. As expected, the debates on education hardly differ from the average in all debates. Comparing the averages between the countries, the high shares of the AfD in Germany are noticeable in particular.

TABLE 2  
PRRP Share of Party Mentions in all Speeches

Country	PRRP	Share Left Parties	Share Right Parties	Share Total
Denmark	DF	27.8%	9.7%	21.8%
Germany	AfD	36.8%	30.2%	34.2%
Netherlands	PVV	13.4%	10.7%	12.2%
Sweden	SD	18.5%	11.9%	14.7%

TABLE 3  
PRRP Share of Party Mentions in Speeches on Immigration

Country	PRRP	Share Left Parties	Share Right Parties	Share Total
Denmark	DF	35.7%	13.8%	28.4%
Germany	AfD	68.0%	44.5%	58.6%
Netherlands	PVV	32.0%	24.4%	28.7%
Sweden	SD	37.0%	35.4%	36.1%

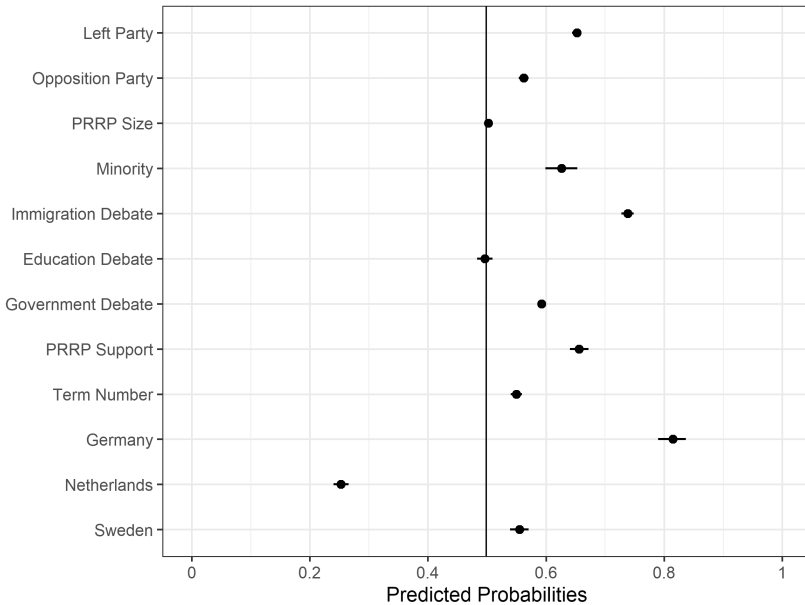
TABLE 4  
PRRP Share of Party Mentions in Speeches on Education

Country	PRRP	Share Left Parties	Share Right Parties	Share Total
Denmark	DF	21.1%	10.1%	17.4%
Germany	AfD	28.8%	26.3%	27.8%
Netherlands	PVV	10.3%	7.8%	9.1%
Sweden	SD	19.6%	8.4%	13.2%

The baseline expectation<sup>9</sup> of the shares in Germany is slightly higher than in the other countries due to fewer parties in parliament. Nevertheless, the shares are disproportionately higher here—especially in debates on immigration: while in all debates in Germany every third addressing of another party is directed at the AfD, in debates on immigration it is more than every second. However, about 28% of all party mentions in Denmark and the Netherlands as well as more than one-third in Sweden are extremely high values for immigration debates, considering the large number of parties in the respective parliaments.

The descriptive results already give an insight into the dynamics of the confrontation between the parties. To look at this confrontation from a different point of view, I use a logit regression to analyze which characteristics of speeches increase the probability that a PRRP is addressed. Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities for all variables (regression model in Appendix E in the online supportive information). Comparing the different debate topics, the observation from the descriptive statistics is confirmed. While the probability of addressing a PRRP in debates on education hardly differs from all debates, it is substantially increased in

FIGURE 2  
 Predicted Probabilities for the PRRP Mentions Analysis



debates on immigration (confirming Hypothesis 2). Furthermore, the probability of a PRRP being mentioned is substantially higher in a left-wing party's speech compared to a speech that is given by a right-wing party (confirming Hypothesis 3). Together, the analysis confirms the hypothesis that PRRPs strongly dominate debates on immigration. It also supports the hypothesis that the addressing of PRRPs is related to the ideological position of the respective party. PRRPs are significantly more likely to be addressed in speeches by left-wing parties.

With regard to the control variables, it is noticeable that the probability of a PRRP being addressed increases in legislative periods in which a minority government is supported by these parties. Furthermore, government debates also show a higher probability of PRRPs being named. In comparison to the analysis of the positions, the respective seat share of the PRRP has a substantial positive influence on the probability of it being addressed. The country fixed effects also reveal significant differences. The probability of the respective PRRP being mentioned is highest in

Germany and lowest in the Netherlands. However, this could also be related to the different average length of speeches which is substantially lower in the Netherlands. Interestingly, the probability is also lower in opposition debates and increases in the legislative terms after the entry of the party. This increase is significant, but substantially weaker than the other effects.

### **Discussion: General Trends and Country Variation**

What general lessons can be learned from the analyses? First, the division into government and opposition continues to determine the dynamics of most parliamentary debates, despite the entry of PRRPs. This underlines the assumption that the parliamentary arena is not comparable to the electoral arena. Parties are subject to different constraints in this arena, which have an impact on their strategic positioning. At the same time, however, there are issues where polarization between the PRRP and all the other parties is evident—most notably debates on immigration. This increased polarization in debates on immigration could be related both to particularly extreme positions of the PRRP and to an increased distancing of all parties. Underlining the importance of the institutional setting, government and opposition debates show a significant difference. The former show a higher degree of demarcation from the PRRP. This finding could be related to the fact that the common criticism of government parties in, for example, question times, leads to more similar measured positions than in debates on legislation.

Whether left-right ideology has an effect on the behavior towards a PRRP depends on the form of interaction. Left-wing parties seem to expect an advantage from directly confronting PRRPs in parliament without the basic government-opposition dynamics being reduced. However, it should be emphasized that this is only a very rough classification and represents the broader trend. Differences in the respective party groups and within parties should be the focus of future research.

In addition to these findings, the variation between the four countries studied should be highlighted as well. These are illustrated particularly well by two examples. In the case of position taking, Denmark shows a significantly lower level of polarization between the PRRP and the competing parties. There are several possible explanations for this. For example, stable minority governments were actively supported by the Dansk Folkeparti during

the period observed. This factor also appeared as an important variable in the regression analysis of the distance to PRRPs. In contrast, in Germany and Sweden, any cooperation with the right-wing populists at the national level has so far been rejected. In the Netherlands, there was similar support for two years, but this coalition broke down due to disagreement on immigration issues. In conclusion, a PRRP's involvement in the legislative process indicates a strong effect on how parties interact with the new party and offers support for Hypothesis 4 (the *cordon sanitaire* hypothesis).

Germany is a distinctive case for the analysis of the addressing of the PRRP. Here, the AfD is addressed in every third case that parties mention a competing party. Especially for debates on immigration, this amount is substantially higher. This could be attributed to the strong rejection of any cooperation from the established parties. Another possible explanation is that the strong confrontation is also related to the public salience of immigration. In particular, the effects of the refugee crisis in 2015–16 might have contributed to the significantly stronger effects in Germany compared to other countries. This variation between countries highlights the need to extend existing case-specific research (Heinze 2020). In this context, further channels of parliamentary behavior should be focused on, which allow for an analysis of the interaction of the established parties with PRRPs in parliament. However, both analyses give reason to believe that the parties' public political approach to the PRRP has an influence on the dynamics in parliament.

### Conclusion

The behavior of parties towards PRRPs has been a much-debated topic over the last decade (Abou-Chadi 2016; Meguid 2007). However, this debate has been predominantly connected to the electoral arena where studies have shown that mainstream parties increasingly adopt positions from PRRPs (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016; Wagner and Meyer 2017). I argue that while these analyses provide valuable information on parties' behavior during elections, they are not transferable to the parliamentary context. Only if the institutional context is taken into account is it possible to theorize and empirically test party behavior in parliaments. Using quantitative text-analysis methods capable of processing large amounts of newly

available data, I analyze speeches from four Western European parliaments to identify the interaction of established parties with PRRPs after they have entered parliament.

Looking at the general positioning of parties, parliamentary behavior is by and large structured by government-opposition logic after PRRPs have entered. However, this changes for debates on issues that are of electoral importance to PRRPs, namely debates on immigration. In most cases, the main dimension becomes a division between the PRRP and all other parties in these debates. This can be attributed to the particularly extreme positions of these parties. Another explanation might be that all parties clearly distance themselves from the new party in order to delegitimize its position. At the same time, however, this also means that the positions of all parties in parliament become more similar in contrast to the PRRP.

As position taking in parliament is heavily influenced by institutionalized dynamics, I also analyze when and by whom PRRPs are addressed during debates. The results show that PRRPs seem to dominate the debate especially when immigration is discussed. It could mean that they successfully make themselves the center of the debate to increase external visibility. This phenomenon might also contribute to MPs' and the press' perception of an impact of PRRPs on the parliamentary discourse. However, they are not addressed equally by all parties. Left-wing parties are generally more likely to confront PRRPs directly. Ideology thus seems to play a stronger part in this context: while center-right parties may be afraid of losing voters, left parties expect to gain profile in the confrontation regardless of their affiliation to government or opposition.

The findings of this study are of scientific as well as societal relevance, and the resulting implications require further discussion that go beyond this study. What lessons can be learned so far? First, despite institutional constraints, PRRPs become somewhat isolated in most parliaments on issues such as immigration. This reflects in particular qualitative findings from Germany and Sweden, while it is much less evident in Denmark (Heinze 2018). It remains to be discussed to what extent such behavior benefits these parties by staging themselves as victims of the others and, to pick up on the initial quote, by chasing everyone away from them, or whether this is a consequent rejection of their positions towards immigration. Second, the analysis shows that PRRPs succeed in being at the center of the debate, especially in discussions

on immigration. The impact of this confrontation, which originates in particular from left-wing parties, on parliamentary and political interaction has not been fully explored either.

Third, both aspects of PRRPs are important, being populist and radical right, to understand their interaction with other parties in parliament. While the first aspect speaks more to their general behavior in the parliamentary context (e.g., the importance of speech and the in-activity with regard to policymaking), the second has a strong influence on policy-area salience (especially the importance of immigration). Finally, do these findings matter? On the one hand, it has implications for the way we look at party interaction in parliament scientifically. Researcher cannot analyze party competition in parliaments with the same expectation and methodological implementations as in the electoral context. On the other hand, it also has consequences for the political and societal interaction with PRRPs in democracies. Since political parties in many countries are still looking for an appropriate way to interact with PRRPs, it is relevant that they can only exert a small influence on some political dynamics in parliament and a stronger influence on others.

All in all, this study has taken first steps in analyzing the behavior of parties in parliament towards PRRPs. Therefore, it comes with limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, I treat parties as unified actors and therefore do not address the variation between MPs. An analysis on the MP level could provide valuable information on the dynamics within parties. Furthermore, recent studies show that party behavior changes during the legislative cycle which should be taken into account (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2019). With regard to the generalizability of the results, future studies should take a closer look at the impact of the institutional context that was only discussed briefly in this study. In particular, the difference between majority and minority governments, and especially situations in which PRRPs support minority governments, should be mentioned here. Moreover, further studies would profit from a connection to qualitative analysis of the position taking in speeches. These might also include quantitative methods such as topic models to attach more meaning to abstract spatial party positions. On a theoretical level, future studies should look at the extent to which the results can be transferred to other party types. For example, it could be examined whether green or left-wing populist parties generate similar

effects in parliament with different issues. This study offers a possible framework.

#### *Data Availability Statement*

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available here <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/9HV7XR>

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Quotation from a statement during the election-day party for the German parliamentary elections 2017.

2. Quotation from an interview with a SPD member in the German newspaper Tagesspiegel.

3. For the definition of PRRPs, I refer to De Vries and Hobolt (2012) describing them as parties that mobilize new issues (such as immigration or European integration), that see themselves as anti-establishment and that are reluctant to compromise. However, I do not follow the notion that these parties cease to be challengers as soon as they participate in government.

4. German debates more recent than 2018, as well as the debate titles for the Dutch debate, had to be scraped additionally from the respective parliamentary websites.

5. It could be argued that for reasons of better comparability, only the first period after entry should be compared. This is done in Appendix B as a robustness test. However, this diminishes the variance of important control variables.

6. D66 is an ambiguous case as its classification (left/right party) changes over time (Volkens et al. 2018). However, all models are robust for either classification.

7. I use a wordshoal analysis as robustness test (see Appendix D in the online supporting information). All main findings are robust for both analyses.

8. For an alternative model using GAL vs. TAN party classifications, see Appendix B in the online supporting information.

9. With an equal distribution of all party mentions, the share would be 20% in Germany, about 17% in Denmark and about 14% in Sweden and the Netherlands.



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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web site:

**Appendix S1:** Supporting information