

Fostering Divide: Do Radical Right Parties Increase Mass Polarization?

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ABSTRACT

Radical parties have been found to be successful under conditions of mass polarization. It is argued that their message resonates better when the electorate is positioned towards the extremes of the ideological spectrum. This paper investigates if the reverse also holds, meaning that radical parties may contribute to the polarization of the public. I test this claim by using a synthetic controls model in four European democracies where a radical right party had an electoral breakthrough in the last three decades: Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria. Results show that an increase in polarization happened in each case in at least one of the indicators used, as well as a significant average overall effect when compared to control countries.

Keywords: Radical right parties, Mass polarization, Synthetic controls, European politics