On People and Their Passions: The Role of Identities and Emotions in Radical Political

Behavior

Dissertation Kappa

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Abstract
Abundant evidence suggests that identities and emotions motivate individuals to engage in two recently prominent political behaviors: radical right support and affective polarization. This dissertation integrates this knowledge by asking *why* identities and emotions are so relevant. I propose that either factor shapes how individuals perceive their position in relation to others, motivating to exclude or oppose them. Across five papers, I leverage seven theories substantiating and a mixed-methods approach examining this claim. In so doing, this dissertation establishes one mechanism—perceived societal position—for why identities and emotions matter for radical right support and affective polarization. Moreover, by integrating these two behaviors into *radical political behavior*, I invite future research to theorize and investigate these behaviors' *shared* consequences for social cohesion and democratic norms. This dissertation implies that purely rational approaches to understanding and addressing radical political behavior are limited. Identity or emotion-based interventions may be more effective.
   Keywords: identities, emotions, radical right support, affective polarization, radical political behavior, mixed methods

Sammanfattning

Det är välbelagt att identiteter och känslor motiverar individer att engagera sig i två olika och idag mycket framträdande politiska beteenden: radikala högerpopulistiska sympatier och affektiv polarisering. Denna avhandling vidareutvecklar denna kunskap genom att ställa frågan *varför* identiteter och känslor är så relevanta för dessa former av politiskt beteende. Jag föreslår att endera faktorn formar hur individer uppfattar sin position i förhållande till andra, vilket motiverar individer till att utesluta eller motsätta sig andra grupper. I avhandlingen används sju teorier och olika metoder i fem artiklar för att undersöka detta påstående. Vidare lanserar jag en mekanism—uppfattad samhällsposition—för varför identiteter och känslor spelar roll för radikala högerpopulistiska sympatier och affektiv polarisering. Genom att integrera dessa två beteenden i begreppet *radikalt politiskt beteende* uppmuntrar jag också framtida forskning att teoretisera och undersöka dessa beteendes *gemensamma* konsekvenser för social sammanhållning och demokratiska normer. Denna avhandling visar att rent rationella perspektiv för att förstå och hantera radikalt politiskt beteende har begränsningar. Istället kan identitets- eller känslobaserade interventioner vara mer effektiva.

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1. Introduction

Identities and emotions motivate various political behaviors (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Huddy, 2013). Importantly, they also explain two of the century's most prominent political behaviors—radical right support and affective polarization (i.e., to like like-minded partisans but dislike opponents; Iyengar et al., 2019). Racial identity, for example, steers support for Donald Trump (Jardina, 2019) and dislike of opponents (Dawkins & Hanson, 2022). Anger, for instance, drives support for the radical right in France (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019) and affective polarization in Sweden (Renström et al., 2023). These are just examples of previous research, leaving little doubt that identities and emotions matter for radical right support and affective polarization.

But previous work says much less about *why* they matter. Of course, papers on the effects of identities and emotions on radical right support and affective polarization theorize these links. Often, however, the mechanism underneath remains uncovered. This gap matters as emotions are distinct from identities, and both are heterogeneous concepts. National identity, for example, is fundamentally different from racial identity, and so is anger from fear. Yet, many identities and emotions seem relevant to what I will later integrate into *radical political behavior*. Why, then, do identities and emotions generally—and their many particular kinds specifically—affect radical political behavior?

To answer this question, this dissertation makes a case for what identities and emotions share. This will enable scholars to more efficiently predict why single identities and emotions matter for radical political behavior. My central argument for *why* identities and emotions motivate radical political behavior is that they shape how individuals perceive their position in relation to others. Vast evidence describes that identities and emotions generally frame how we perceive something or someone (e.g., Van Bavel & Packer, 2021). Crucially, it also suggests that they alter *how we perceive our position to others*. For example, group identity

affects our perceptions of enemies' physical proximity (Xiao & Van Bavel, 2012), political preferences vary by how much we consider others as part of our group (Harell et al., 2022), pride makes us feel bigger than others (Van Osch et al., 2018), and disgust-prone people see others as more dissimilar (Mentser & Nussinson, 2020). Identities and emotions thus reshuffle the distance, status, and inclusiveness of the actors involved, and it is this commonality that I seek to highlight in this dissertation. Recognizing this mechanism deserves more attention because politics eventually is about "who gets what, when, and how" (Lasswell, 1936). If parties compete along axes of who is included vs. excluded economically and culturally (Kriesi et al., 2006), many political behaviors boil down to whom we consider similar, close, or inferior. My argument implies that identities and emotions are key players in politics because they determine citizens' perception of the *who*: is someone part of *Us*, a competing *They*, or a neglected *Nobody*?

This dissertation makes three theoretical contributions to develop current explanations for radical political behavior. The first theoretical contribution is to apply seven theories—discussed in detail in the single papers—to provide instances of *why identities and emotions matter* for radical political behavior. These theories show how identities and emotions render how we perceive our position in relation to others, motivating radical political behavior. They are not exhaustive but develop current knowledge showing *that* they matter into explaining *why* they matter. Paper 1 connects Relative Deprivation Theory (Smith et al., 2012) and Intergroup Emotions Theory (Mackie et al., 2000) to explain why nostalgia makes individuals perceive their group-based (but not their personal) situation as worse off compared to the past. Papers 2 and 3 use Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991) to explain how the failure to integrate one's several identities creates exclusion experiences. Paper 4 examines how diversification affects attitudes toward multiracial democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023) due to status threats and how commonalities (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) may dilute this

mechanism. Paper 5 bridges Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and motivated reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013) to establish how individuals use their emotions to consolidate group differences.

The second theoretical contribution occurs through an extensive review in this Kappa, where I consult previous work on how identities and emotions generally steer people's perceptions and reactions. I transfer this knowledge to political behavior, arguing that changes in how we perceive our position in relation to others is *why* identities and emotions matter for radical political behavior. This is not to conflate differences between identities and emotions (or single forms therein) but to integrate current evidence that often remains scattered.

The third theoretical contribution concerns the outcome. I synthesize radical right support and affective polarization into *radical political behavior* as both may challenge social cohesion and democratic norms (Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018; Bichay, 2022; Finkel et al., 2020; Hartman et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2019; Kingzette et al., 2021; Mudde, 2007, but see Broockman et al., 2022). While disagreement is central to democracies (Habermas, 1996; Oscarsson et al., 2021), contempt is not. Radical right parties exclude minorities from society (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) and democratic processes (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Likewise, due to polarization, people refrain from political conversations if they expect disagreement (Cowan & Baldassari, 2018) and distance themselves from disagreeing others (Iyengar et al., 2019). Polarized individuals tend to perceive the other as hostile (Moore-Berg et al., 2020) and support anti-democratic practices if they think opponents do not value democratic norms (Pasek et al., 2022). In extreme cases, they dehumanize them (Martherus et al., 2021) or become violent (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). Even if we overestimate polarization across the public (Druckman et al., 2022; Mason, 2013), countries (Garzia et al., 2023;

Oscarsson et al., 2021), and its impact on democratic institutions,[1] it is problematic that

substantial shares of societies do not talk to or even despise each other. In short, I do not

neglect important differences between radical political behavior and affective polarization but

propose that their shared risk for cohesion and norms justifies considering them together.

The empirical contribution is a mixed-methods response to the methodological challenges

the field faces and my theoretical argument accentuates. As for any scientific explanandum of

interest, the best test of how identities and emotions shape individuals' perceived position to

others would be to observe their effects when identities and emotions are activated vs.

deactivated. However, targeted activations of identities and emotions are difficult, reliable

deactivations seem impossible, and both approaches are sometimes ethically problematic.

Therefore, I combine several data sources, including in-depth explorations of how individuals

relate their identities and emotions to society and other people, temporal variation in

identities and emotions, and experimental manipulations. Specifically, I use panel models in

Paper 1 to exploit temporal variation in nostalgia, conduct qualitative interviews in Papers 2

and 5 to uncover individuals' reasoning, employ representative cross-sectional settings for

descriptive mapping in Paper 3, and run experiments in Paper 4 to provide causal evidence.

While all papers demonstrate how identities and emotions relate to radical political behavior,

the designs' primary strength is that they can show how these two factors alter individuals'

perceptions of where they stand in society.

This dissertation raises implications for how researchers should assess radical political

behavior and how it may be addressed. For the former, it alters the interpretation of previous

research suggesting, for example, that radical right support is a consequence of people's

migration (e.g., Arzheimer & Berning, 2019) or gender *attitudes* (Anduiza & Rico, 2022).

Correlations between self-reported attitudes and radical right support suggest that individuals'

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[1] Note that insurrections in the US, Brazil, and Germany warn they may threaten democratic institutions, too.

convictions predict political behavior. In contrast, my argument touts that these attitudes often reflect a respondent's underlying identity and emotion. It follows that research on these issues needs to account for people's *motivated reasoning* (Lodge & Taber, 2013). As a methodological implication, researchers need to measure people's *implicit* reactions to stimuli (e.g., Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Schumacher et al., 2022) or *explicitly acknowledge* that people's attitudes are a function of their identity- and emotion-based reasoning.

The latter suggests that educating individuals about the content of their perception may not necessarily affect their behavior. If identities and emotions shape our perceptions of society and the actors involved, our capacity to rationally evaluate a situation is limited. That is, if I perceive members of another group as a risk to my employment, I will not change my behavior if informed that the other group is unqualified in my industry. Likewise, fact-based reasoning will not increase my respect for opponents when discussing emotional issues (Kubin et al., 2021). Shared identities and certain emotions, instead, may more efficiently mitigate radical political behaviors (e.g., Levendusky, 2018).

I proceed as follows. First, I expound my argument that identities and emotions frame how we perceive our position in relation to others, motivating radical political behavior. Second, I review previous literature along with my argument in three steps: I start by defining *radical political behavior* as an outcome and justify theorizing it broadly instead of studying its single components. I then review previous evidence on how identities and emotions shape people's *perceptions* and *reactions*, arguing that this often entails a perceived repositioning of the actors included. Afterward, I review common explanations for radical right support and affective polarization, focusing on the proposition that these are reactions to subjective perceptions. Third, I present five papers developing and examining testable theories of my argument. Fourth, I discuss this dissertation's contributions and limitations and the avenues for future research it gives rise to.

2. **Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation's research question asks *why* identities and emotions—two different and heterogeneous concepts—motivate radical political behavior.[2] My response is that many identities and emotions affect how individuals perceive their or their group's position in relation to others. In Section 4, I offer an extensive review of how identities and emotions generally shape individuals' perceptions of and reactions to their surroundings. A focus of this review is how identities and emotions alter perceptions of and reactions to any current societal development (e.g., economic crises, wars, diversification, but also technologization and globalization). This review suggests that human beings inevitably perceive and process these developments on behalf of their identities and emotions. Our reactions to these perceptions, I argue, often imply changes in our physical or psychological position to those we associate with any perceived development.

A few examples may clarify this proposition: If a company fires me as one of several employees, I may bond with my co-workers (we) to resist the threat of the employers (them), even if being laid off has primarily personal consequences. Similarly, if we think that someone (they) unfairly attacked a third party (them), we may distance ourselves from the attacker (they) and fraternize with the victim (them). Regarding emotions, if he perceives someone as threatening (fear), he will likely distance himself. Instead, her love for him drives her to be close to him (love) but possibly makes her neglect others (indifference).

Considering these everyday examples, my argument comes as no surprise: the perceived position of ourselves in relation to others changes based on our identities and emotions. However, the argument can efficiently summarize the relevance of identities and emotions

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[2] My observation that *many different* identities and emotions matter for the same outcome (i.e., radical political behavior) does not imply that *all* identities and emotions would matter. Many do not matter. Likewise, I do not criticize previous literature for brushing over differences between single identities and emotions. Many researchers carefully theorize the effects of single emotions on forms of racial political behavior. Instead, I observe that many different *X* predict a common *Y*, and I aim to advance one mechanism (i.e., perceived reshuffling) that synthesizes these effects.

for political behavior, where attitudes and votes significantly rely on where we perceive

someone stands or should stand (Kriesi et al., 2006; Lasswell, 1936). This is particularly true

for behaviors like radical right support and affective polarization, which build on exclusion

(Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) and difference (Mason, 2016). Hence, it should be noted

that identities and emotions—as well as a perceived reshuffling of positions—certainly

explain various forms of political behavior. However, I consider bonding and boundaries a

central characteristic of radical political behavior, making them particularly relevant here.

Figure 1 summarizes my argument. Identities and emotions affect how we perceive our

position (e.g., close-distant, inferior-superior, better or worse off), and some of this

repositioning motivates radical political behavior. This behavior allows us to "correct" a

position that feels unpleasant, for example, by supporting a radical right party that keeps

migrants distant or minority members left out. Similarly, affective polarization allows for

devaluation or neglect of opponents. This dissertation does not test this overall argument as

such. Instead, it merges a review of how identities and emotions *generally* shape information

processing with my new empirical evidence, where I apply previously validated theories

Figure 1. *Theoretical Framework.*
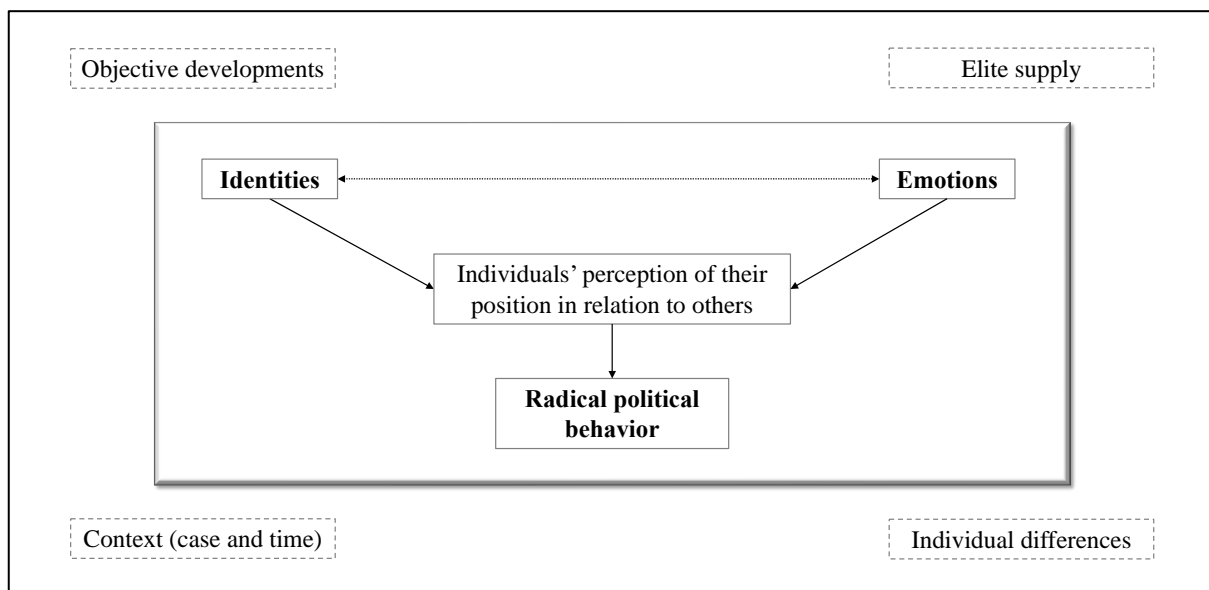
specifically to the radical political behavior outcome. These theories are illustrated in Papers 2 and 5 and tested in Papers 1, 3, and 4.

A central difficulty of my argument is endogeneity. I consider radical political behavior as partly motivated by individuals' identity and emotion-informed perception of the social space (i.e., how they stand in relation to others). However, as just mentioned, these radical political behaviors are themselves defined by group differences (e.g., the ordinary people vs. the elites, Mudde, 2007) and emotions (e.g., affective like vs. dislike in affective polarization, Iyengar et al., 2019). Moreover, political actors in either behavior steer identities and emotions (Mols & Jetten, 2020), which creates reverse causality. Endogeneity can partly be addressed empirically, and I do so with a mixed-methods approach employing causal tests (Paper 4), temporal variation (Paper 1), and in-depth analyses of individuals' reasoning (Papers 2 and 5). This mitigates the limitation but does not solve it.[3]

Therefore, I also acknowledge the endogeneity problem in my theoretical framework (see Figure 1). On the one hand, the framework recognizes intricacies in *how* identities and emotions operate. For example, individuals do not hold one but several identities, and some of their backgrounds (e.g., *white* person) may predict different behaviors than others (e.g., *female* white person). Moreover, identities and emotions interact (as indicated with the dotted line), such that individuals experience emotions as part of their groups (Mackie et al., 2000). Finally, individuals may sometimes explicitly deliberate the relevance of a development for their group (e.g., Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981), but often, identities and emotions act unconsciously (e.g., Lodge & Taber, 2013).

On the other hand, the framework acknowledges four additional complexities in *where* identities and emotions operate. The dissertation examines none of these but recognizes that

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[3] I refrain from labeling any framework element (i.e., identities, emotions, or perceived position) as mediators or moderators because they take different functions in different theories. Moreover, this would suggest causal evidence that some papers' designs are unable to provide.

its framework is embedded in these contextual aspects. First, even if my dissertation adds to the literature suggesting that people's perceptions matter, the object of perception may sometimes suffice to motivate radical political behavior. For instance, a recession may motivate radical right support regardless of how identities and emotions shape a person's perception of the economy. Second, the framework may function differently across time and space. For example, ethnic identity conflicts in the US are historically racialized but primarily religious in European countries; Germany's history may make guilt a more relevant emotion here than elsewhere. Third, the dissertation's focus on groups does not mean neglecting individuals. Even though people's social identities are central to how they understand themselves (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015), they are individual entities and experience and act as such. Fourth, several supply aspects explain why identities and emotions may become more relevant. Populist radical right rhetoric steers narratives about groups in decline (e.g., Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019) or anxiety about economic developments (e.g., Mols & Jetten, 2020). Moreover, media outlets tend to appeal to certain electorates and thus strengthen their consumers' identities and emotions about specific issues (e.g., Mols & Jetten, 2020). Social media rewards group-conform and extreme (i.e., emotional) content (e.g., Brady et al., 2020).

All these considerations matter for evaluating the framework's usefulness and its evidence. They are particularly relevant because identities and emotions cannot sufficiently explain the recent *rise* in radical political behaviors. Changes in objective conditions (e.g., migration, war), context, and supply are thus necessary. Still, although not tested in this dissertation, identities and emotions could have become more relevant recently: People increasingly sort into social groups (Bornschier et al., 2021; Mason, 2016; Zollinger, 2022), and politicians politicize and fuel social identities (e.g., Smith & King, 2021). Similarly, they ride people's emotions (e.g., Widmann, 2022) and may increasingly do so (e.g., Rhodes &

Vayo, 2019; but see Pipal et al., 2024). This, in turn, suggests that they could also contribute to the recent rise in radical political behavior.

With these issues in mind, the theoretical focus of this dissertation is on developing existing theories to explain why identities and emotions matter. Table 1 summarizes this, showing each theory employed, whether identity or emotion-focused, the consequence for one's perceived position, and how radical political behavior can contribute to "correcting" this repositioning. Paper 1 links Intergroup Emotion Theory (Mackie et al., 2000) and Relative Deprivation Theory (Smith et al., 2012) to argue that nostalgia motivates radical right support because it makes individuals compare past and present. The former theory suggests that individuals experience emotions as part of a group. This means people can be nostalgic for group-based issues, thus comparing their past and present. Using the latter theory, I argue that individuals feel relatively disadvantaged when comparing past and present, but only for group-based and not for personal issues. Thus, only group-based nostalgia predicts radical right support. Papers 2 and 3 use Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

Table 1. *Summary of Theories.*

#	Theory	Perception	Theorized Change in Position	Predicted Repositioning (Through Radical Political Behavior)	Paper
1	Intergroup Emotion Theory (Mackie et al., 2000)	Emotion	Emotional comparison of *group* and *personal* position in past and present	Improving one's *group's* position, no attempts to change *personal* position	1
2	Temporal Relative Deprivation (Smith et al., 2012)	Identity			1
3	Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991)	Identity	Exclusion experience due to neglected subgroup	Gaining subgroup recognition	2, 3
4	Status Threat (Outten et al., 2012)	Identity	Ingroup's position expected to lose status	Supporting status-maintaining parties	2, 3, 4
5	Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000)	Identity	Ingroup merged with outgroup	Supporting politics for the shared group	4
6	Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)	Identity	Undifferentiated groups of equal status	Interpreting information to differentiate and elevate	5
7	Motivated Reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013)	Emotion			5

(Brewer, 1991) to explain why even majority members may feel excluded from society. Arguing that their group membership makes them feel disrespected within the larger society, I predict that individuals support the radical right to get subgroup recognition. Paper 4 tests whether the perceived risk of losing one's status (i.e., status threat, e.g., Outten et al., 2012) is altered when one's subgroup is merged with an outgroup (i.e., Common Ingroup Identity Model, Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Paper 5 combines Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) with literature on motivated reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Using the former, I argue that individuals try to render their partisan group distinct and superior to opponents. They may do so by reporting and ascribing certain normatively desirable emotions, a bias that the latter theory predicts.

Empirically, the papers combine three cases (the Netherlands, Germany, and the US), use qualitative (semi-structured interviews) and quantitative data (cross-sectional, panel, and experimental), and employ various analytical methods (qualitative content, thematic, cluster, panel, and mediation analyses). While the quantitative papers' mostly pre-registered analyses contribute to established open science practices, various transparency and accountability procedures in the qualitative papers seek to promote similar standards in this field.

Together, these theories allow me to argue that identities and emotions share that they determine how we perceive our position in society. The seven theories are not exhaustive, such that others (e.g., collective narcissism; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020) similarly concern the positions of various actors. However, I consider them particularly relevant because they illuminate prevailing explanations of radical political behavior, such as the "left behind" (e.g., Jennings & Stoker, 2016, addressed in Paper 1), social integration (e.g., Gidron & Hall, 2020, Papers 2, 3, and 4), status threat (Mutz, 2018, Papers 2, 3, and 4), and motivated reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Paper 5).

In the following sections, I review the literature this framework is embedded in and seeks to contribute to. Before doing so, however, I emphasize that I do not consider identities and emotions as problematic as such. For example, national identity (Van Bavel et al., 2022), awe (Piff et al., 2015), and compassion (Sohlberg et al., 2019) predict various prosocial behaviors. In fact, Paper 1 shows that nostalgia may motivate *and* possibly mitigate radical right support. This complexity is yet another motivation for me to promote "changes of perceived position" as a mechanism, allowing us to more efficiently predict when identities and emotions help and when they hurt.

3.   Literature Review: Radical Political Behavior

This section explains why I conceptualize *radical political behavior* as a joint outcome, combining radical right support and affective polarization. Scholars and pundits devote considerable attention to *populist radical right* support and increasingly study *affective polarization*, which complements the right pole of the ideological spectrum with the opposing side. The two concepts bear essential differences but are linked (e.g., Harteveld et al., 2021b). In this section, I first define the two before arguing that they represent the broader phenomenon of *radical political behavior*.

3.1. Populist Radical Right Support

The term *populist radical right* encompasses a heterogeneous party family that comprises populist, authoritarian, and nativist elements (Mudde, 2007). There are considerable differences across time and between countries in how much these parties endorse each element (Golder, 2016). Current research understands radical right voters as partially policy-motivated (e.g., Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018) and primarily *culturally* conservative (Rovny & Polk, 2020). Summarized in its *nativist* and *authoritarian* elements, radical right voters typically endorse politics favoring the autochthonous population, which enjoys priority in a hierarchically ordered society. Nativism states that members of the native group should be the only ones inhabiting a country and that non-native entities threaten the nation-state (Mudde, 2007). Authoritarianism favors law and order, conform groups, and collective security measures that aim to maintain the status quo (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

The third element, *populism*, is often described as a *thin-centered* ideology (Mudde, 2004). Instead of an ideology endorsing certain political beliefs (e.g., Haidt, 2012; Lütjen, 2020), it represents a style in which politics shall be pursued. Populists differentiate between what they consider self-interested, corrupt, lazy political elites and true, hard-working, and *ordinary* citizens (Mudde, 2007). At least as much a style of communication as a set of

beliefs, populism combines with radical *right* (i.e., nativist and authoritarian) and radical *left* ideology (e.g., criticism of economic elites). Strikingly, even mainstream politicians use populist communication (e.g., Faltin, 2022). Together, the *ordinary people* (nativism) stand above ethnic outgroups (authoritarianism) and in opposition to the elites (populism). These three elements already indicate the relevance of the relative position of any actors involved.

3.2. Affective Polarization

Affective polarization describes the trend of an increasing share of individuals liking like-minded partisans and disliking opposing partisans (Iyengar et al., 2019).[4] Research usually operationalizes this tension as the difference between an individual's sympathy for their party or supporters thereof and their antipathy toward an opposing party or its voters. The concept originates in the US, where Iyengar and colleagues (2012) strode to conceive mass polarization as a psychological dislike of opponents instead of diverging policy preferences.

Affective polarization is based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory predicts that human beings' fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) motivates them to become and see themselves as members of social groups. Once in a group, their *social identity* describes their cognitive and affective membership in it (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Furthermore, it maintains that individuals seek to differentiate their group (i.e., *ingroup*) from groups they do not belong to (i.e., *outgroup*) and elevate their ingroup over the outgroup (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).[5]

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[4] While outgroup-dislike seems more critical in rising affective polarization than ingroup-like (Wagner, 2021), Brewer (1999) suggests that strong ingroup liking is possible without outgroup-dislike. I understand affective polarization as a strong preference for one's political ingroup, regardless of whether this is primarily due to outgroup-disliking or ingroup-liking.

[5] My dissertation argument goes beyond the origin of affective polarization in social identity. I agree that an individual's identity motivates affective polarization but propose that their identity shapes their perceived position, which then motivates affective polarization.

Affective polarization establishes these tendencies in the political realm. Specifically, an increasing number of individuals nowadays *affectively* identifies with their partisan group,[6] meaning that they understand themselves as members of a political group (Huddy & Bankert, 2017). Other social identities (e.g., gender, race) sort into these partisan groups in the US (Mason, 2016) and elsewhere (e.g., Bornschier et al., 2021). Affective polarization thus describes a growing chasm between positive valence for the political ingroup (and their related groups, e.g., Zollinger, 2022) and negative valence for political and social outgroups.

3.3. Conceptualizing *Radical Political Behavior*

Having established the meaning of *radical right* and *affective polarization*, I argue that researchers should consider them together more often. In this section, I discuss their central differences and similarities to explain why I merge them into *radical political behavior*. Despite extensive research on either concept, I am not aware of any work reviewing their relationship. Thus, I propose to differentiate them as follows.[7] First, the radical right describes only one end of the ideological spectrum. Affective polarization instead describes partisans' opposing views on both sides (in two-party systems) or several points (in multi-party systems; Wagner, 2021) of the ideological spectrum. Second, the radical right comprises organized parties that can be elected and offer political representation and policies. Affective polarization cannot be elected and offers neither representation nor policies.

In this dissertation, I unite the radical right and affective polarization as expressions of a general phenomenon. While I am wary not to conflate these concepts or their causal order (see Harteveld et al., 2021b, for a study on their directionality), I argue that researchers should consider them together for at least three reasons.

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[6] *Affective* partisan identity (i.e., identifying *with* conservative voters) is different from *ideological* partisanship (i.e., identifying *as* a conservative voter). The latter is known to decline, such as in party membership (e.g., Van Biezen et al., 2011). See Huddy and colleagues (2018) for a discussion of affective vs. ideological partisanship.

[7] A comprehensive comparison of the two concepts is beyond this section's scope. I only compare them for conceptual clarity. A review of their relationship promises to be worthwhile.

First, the presently divided interests in radical right support or affective polarization lead to overemphasizing the concepts' distinctness. As mentioned above, the radical right is a heterogeneous party family that often draws from other definitions (Golder, 2016). The topic attracts so many scholars that terminology gets conflated (Minkenberg, 2013). Affective polarization research has become popular more recently. But as the growing interest in affective polarization coincides with the rise of prominent radical right politicians in two-party systems (e.g., Johnson in the UK or Trump in the US), I argue that these concepts overlap: While scholars turn toward affective polarization in two-party systems, they tend to stick to radical right support in multi-party systems. Both approaches are correct, as affective polarization is strongest toward and from radical right voters (Harteveld, 2021b). Of course, researchers will not clarify the blurry boundaries *between* concepts and the variance *within* them by empirically conflating them, such as in joint measures. However, scholars should apply the knowledge of one concept—including theories on its causes, evidence on its effects, and methodological innovations—to the other more often. Anger, for example, motivates radical right support (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019) *and* affective polarization (Renström et al., 2023).

Second, I specify this "more often" to moments when scholars study the consequences of these phenomena. Arguably, the two have some positive effects, such as higher turnout or more satisfaction with democracy among some voters (Harteveld et al., 2021a; Leininger & Meijers, 2021; Wagner, 2021; Ward & Tavits, 2019). However, current evidence on either concept suggests that their negative effects exceed (e.g., Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018; Bichay, 2022; Finkel et al., 2020; Hartman et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2019; Kingzette et al., 2021; Mudde, 2007). Thus, scholars should combine efforts and knowledge to explain these phenomena more efficiently. While some work suggests that, for example, affective polarization does not undermine democratic norms as much as widely assumed (Broockman

et al., 2022), the effects are grave enough if future evidence concludes that only half of the concerns are true. However, the current focus on one phenomenon risks neglecting findings from the other.

Third—and consistent with evidence that *all* individuals have subjective perceptions of societal developments (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Huddy, 2013)—merging radical right support and affective polarization into radical political behavior acknowledges that there may be other forms besides these two. Many are bad at tolerating an opponent's view, regardless of their ideology (Crawford & Pilanski, 2014). Likewise, populist rhetoric occurs across *all* camps (Engesser et al., 2017), and many individuals report affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019; Reiljan, 2019; Wagner, 2021). Most citizens in the US nowadays overestimate the differences between groups (Ahler & Sood, 2018) and opponents' animosity (Moore-Berg et al., 2020). In fact, (presumably left-leaning) vegetarians and vegans are more hostile toward meat-eaters than vice versa (Guidetti et al., 2022). Ultimately, the radical left also poses threats (e.g., Weyland, 2013). This is not to downplay the paramount challenge radical right parties pose for cohesion and democratic norms. However, I argue that the common dislike, animosity, misperception, and intolerance *across* camps (e.g., Ditto et al., 2019; Moore-Berg et al., 2020) should make us scholars think of these behaviors more broadly.

Therefore, I introduce *radical political behavior* as an umbrella term describing individual-level political behaviors encompassing radical right support, affective polarization, and potentially others. Consistent with common usage in the literature, *political behavior* comprises individuals' attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behaviors. These concern political (e.g., policy preferences, vote intention) and social aspects (e.g., attitudes toward women and violence against opponents). The term *radical* does not imply that individuals' political participation is necessarily highly engaged (i.e., that they are activists). Instead, it means attitudes and behaviors that aim for fundamental change. Moreover, the term does not suggest

that radical political behavior is negative per se. Figure 2 summarizes the forms and

consequences of radical political behavior.

This dissertation studies radical right support and affective polarization as two forms of

radical political behavior. While I do not study any of their consequences, I am motivated to

explain these two forms as they have implications for social cohesion and democratic norms.

By *social cohesion*, I mean the quality in which society's subgroups (e.g., different

ethnicities, sexual orientations, and age groups) live together. By *democratic norms*, I mean

individuals' beliefs about how these different groups should participate and be treated in

democratic processes. Potential downstream consequences, such as effects on democratic

institutions (e.g., Bellodi et al., 2022), are beyond this dissertation's scope.

To summarize, I do not mean to conflate the radical right and affective polarization.

Research should continue to distinguish these theoretically and empirically. However, I

propose acknowledging that they share a central characteristic: both risk to impede social

cohesion and democratic norms. As such, the two are not the only forms of radical political
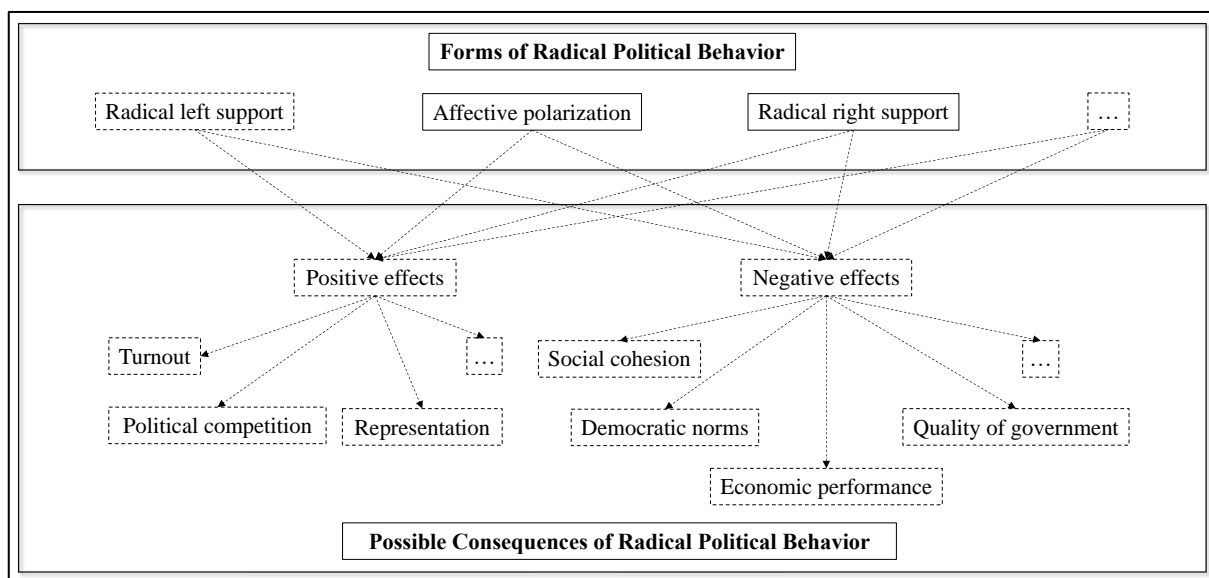

Figure 2. *Forms and Consequences of Radical Political Behavior.*
Note. Solid boxes show concepts studied in this dissertation. Dotted lines show concepts and relationships examined elsewhere. The ellipses indicate that the figure is not exhaustive. Future research may propose and test other forms and consequences of radical political behavior.

behavior but the best-established and most apparent forms of one development: citizens increasingly disliking, mistrusting, misperceiving, ignoring, and sometimes even fighting political opponents or social outgroups. If researchers join learnings from either field to inform discussions about their shared consequences, this will likely accelerate the efficient development of theories, implications, and possibly interventions.

Clearly, more conceptual work is needed to facilitate efficient but differentiated future research on this proposal. With this section and the dissertation more broadly, however, I hope to inspire scholars to consider the commonalities between its single components more often. By integrating identities and emotions as heterogeneous predictors with similar functions, I seek to contribute to explaining individuals' engagement in this political behavior. I couch this reasoning in Section 4, where I review foundational research on the role of identities and emotions in political behavior. Having established their general relevance, I move to common explanations for populist radical right support and affective polarization in Section 5.

4. Literature Review: Identities and Emotions Shape Perceptions and Reactions

In this section, I review previous work establishing that identities and emotions determine individuals' political behavior. I provide some foundation for these factors but focus on how they shape individuals' *perception and processing* of information, as well as *reactions* to it. In the next section, I will turn to common explanations for radical right support and affective polarization, which are often suggested to result from some form of societal development (e.g., migration or economic recessions). The evidence on either section is vast. However, I consider this dissertation's main argument—that identities and emotions shape individuals' perceptions of their position to others, which then motivates radical political behavior—a crucial piece that can help bridge these two factors: A central reason for *why* identities and emotions motivate engagement in radical political behavior is that they are the glasses through which any societal development is being perceived, altering the relative position of various actors to ourselves. In turn, they motivate us to differentiate, protect, or elevate ourselves from some and ally with others, all in response to whatever societal challenge at hand.

4.1. Social Identities

Humans belong to many groups. We belong to a certain generation, a professional group, and are either larks or owls. Not all groups matter to us. *Social identity* describes the extent to which individuals cognitively and affectively understand themselves as members of a group and care about it (Huddy, 2013).[8] While *group membership* is relatively objective and fixed, *social identities* are subjective and fluid: passports document individuals' citizenship, but people become particularly aware of it while traveling, during wars, or world cups.[9]

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[8] Individuals also have *personal* and *relational* identities, which describe how they understand their personal background and relationships, respectively (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015). Political behavior research focuses on *social* identities.

[9] Group membership is not identity. There is no contradiction between declines in institutional political support (e.g., party membership; Van Biezen et al., 2011) and rising affective identification with co-partisans.

Social identities affect political behavior in several regards. Of course, *partisan identity*—the psychological attachment to a partisan group (Campbell et al., 1960)—is most intuitively related to political outcomes (Huddy & Bankert, 2017; West & Iyengar, 2022). Arguably, individuals' attachment to a group and their political action for it are so closely intertwined that it is questionable whether partisan identity can help *explain* political behavior. It is, therefore, reassuring that political behavior is also affected by national (Garand et al., 2020; Levendusky, 2018; Sniderman et al., 2004; Van Bavel et al., 2022), racial (e.g., Petrow et al., 2018; Sides et al., 2019; but see Duckitt & Sibley, 2014), gender (Mansell et al., 2022; Winfrey et al., 2014; see Schneider & Bos, 2019), religious (Fleischmann et al., 2011; see Margolis, 2022), and educational (Spruyt et al., 2016) identities.

But identities do not just affect political behavior. They also determine how individuals *perceive* current developments. In contrast to the conception of individuals as informed, rational actors (see Chong, 2013, for a discussion of rationality), most individuals rely on available cues about what is expectable, normal, and appropriate (Tversky & Kahnemann, 1974). Groups provide such cues (Converse, 1964; Conover & Feldman, 1984) and tell what is right or wrong (Haidt, 2012). Particularly when mentally taxed or stressed, humans use mental shortcuts to process information efficiently (Tversky & Kahnemann, 1974). Often, political information processing boils down to *motivated reasoning* (Lodge & Taber, 2013): Partisans bend information to confirm what their group or previous "knowledge" (i.e., affective cues in their memories) tells them is right and disconfirm what this knowledge tells is wrong. For example, identities predict perceptions of fairness (Jost et al., 2004), political performance (e.g., Evans & Pickup, 2010), and facts (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018).

While this literature establishes that identities generally drive information processing, identities may be especially relevant for processing pressing developments. People identify particularly strongly with a group when threatened, neglected, or in competition (e.g.,

Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Thus, any development perceived as a crisis or competition amplifies group identification. In turn, people are particularly likely to use social cues when identifying strongly with a group.

Moreover, identities affect political behavior beyond perceptions. They also shape the *reactions* to what is perceived. Group behavior is more than the sum of all behaving individuals (Sunstein, 1999). Individuals' motivation to belong to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and be part of distinct groups (Brewer, 1991) drive them to concentrate on the most prototypical members of a group (e.g., Hogg, 2014). Prototypes are those who are most different from members of another group. Often, people's desire to share one interpretation of reality with their group results in support for the status quo (Jost et al., 2004). However, group membership sometimes makes its members commit extreme behavior (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Politically, group members take more extreme attitudes when just thinking of their group (Ledgerwood & Chaiken, 2007) and are ready to engage in extreme behavior for it (Goldman & Hogg, 2016; Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

Together, this literature suggests that identities affect how individuals *perceive* and *react* to information. A common consequence of these altered perceptions, I argue in this dissertation, is an updated perception of where an individual stands in relation to various actors involved. Emotions, which I will discuss next, have similar effects.[10]

4.2. Emotions

Emotions—"culturally delineated types of […] affects" (Thoits, 1989, p. 318)—characterize the mere valence descriptions of affect (positive vs. negative) into discrete categories like "happy" or "sad." Emotions are immediate reactions to preconscious and conscious appraisals (Lazarus, 1991) and tend to predict unique action tendencies (Frijda et

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[10] Intergroup Emotion Theory (Mackie et al., 2000) states that identities and emotions interact, such that individuals experience emotions as group members: They feel guilty about their nation's historical wrongdoings or proud about their team's Champions League win.

al., 1989, but see Lodge & Taber, 2013). Importantly, conceptualizing emotions as reactions to novel stimuli implies that they arise amid change, including any societal developments.

Like identities, emotions affect information-seeking and decision-making (Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Lodge & Taber, 2013). While I address the debate about emotions as the supposed antagonist to rationality in the discussion, I emphasize here that emotions facilitate *and* hinder information processing. Fear, for example, drives individuals to seek information (e.g., Brader et al., 2008; Valentino et al., 2008). Anger, in contrast, undermines information-seeking, the consideration of facts, and the use of available information (e.g., Valentino et al., 2009; see Brader & Marcus, 2013, for a review). In short, emotions arise due to specific stimuli and impact our ability and motivation to understand them.

Moreover, they also shape our *reactions* to such stimuli. Most research in political science, particularly political psychology, is situated here. This work often studies emotions as predictors of political behavior (e.g., Banks et al., 2019; Sohlberg et al., 2019; see Brader & Marcus, 2013, for a review). It shows, for example, that anger increases risk-taking (Lerner & Keltner, 2000) and support for the punishment of hypothetical criminals (Petersen, 2010). Empathy and guilt, in turn, predict people's willingness to support or compensate the victims of their group's transgressions (Pagano & Huo, 2007). Some papers specifically examine emotions concerning the radical right, either as a tool in political supply (Widmann, 2022) or as a driver of demand (e.g., Rico et al., 2017; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019).

Together, emotions generally affect how individuals *process* information and *react* to it. But, like identities, research suggests that they become more relevant in reaction to new stimuli (e.g., any salient societal development). Therefore, identities and emotions are well-positioned to explain people's reactions to current societal issues, especially when considering that they affect the perception of any players involved. In the last part of this review, I discuss common explanations for radical right support and affective polarization.

5.   Literature Review: Explanations for Radical Political Behavior

Building on the overall relevance of identities and emotions for information processing and reactions, I now review the most common explanations for radical right support and affective polarization. Previous papers reviewed the general causes of radical right support (Golder, 2016) and affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019). I focus on explanations centered around individuals' perceptions of and reactions to societal developments because this is where, I argue, identities and emotions can substantially improve our understanding.

5.1. Explaining Radical Right Support

Explanations for radical right support broadly encompass three approaches: economic hardship, cultural grievances, and status threat (Jetten & Mols, 2021). The first account proposes that people support the radical right when they experience or anticipate some form of economic hardship. The theory assumes that individuals experiencing economic grievances turn to radical right parties as they expect them to care about the so-called *ordinary people* (Mudde, 2007). Consistently, regional economic decline, globalization, or technologization predict support for the radical right (Rodrik, 2018), protectionism and nationalism (e.g., Colantone & Stanig, 2018), and sympathy for authoritarian leaders (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). Moreover, nonmanual workers and working-class members—who are among the groups who appear most affected by globalization and technologization—are more likely to support the radical right (Arzheimer, 2009; Gest et al., 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). This evidence shows that economic developments motivate radical right support.

However, other individual-level evidence questions whether they suffice (e.g., Rothwell & Diego-Rosell, 2016). While radical right voters tend to be white, male, and often older (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), ethnic minorities, women, and younger generations tend to be most strongly affected by economic decline and related crises (e.g., Couch et al., 2020; Verick, 2009). Moreover, the correlation between income and radical right voting is weak at

best (Rooduijn, 2018). In fact, this link may be about relative disadvantage instead of absolute poverty (e.g., Engler & Weisstanner, 2021; also see Smith et al., 2012). Other research shows that wealthier individuals and citizens of wealthier nations are even particularly likely to endorse the radical right (Mols & Jetten, 2017).

The second explanation advances cultural developments. Previous research focuses on migration as a predictor of radical right sympathy (Golder, 2016). Indeed, macro-level migration (e.g., Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020, but see Stockemer, 2016) and individual-level migration attitudes (e.g., Rydgren, 2008) are related to radical right support. Problematically, either approach may assume that people have dormant racist attitudes that migration merely activates. However, one could argue that the underlying explanation is social identity, such that individuals react adversely toward an outgroup (i.e., migrants) that they perceive as threatening to their ingroup (i.e., natives). Hence, previous work often writes about cognitive nativist convictions but may implicitly use social identity explanations.

The third explanation, status threat, is more explicitly identity-based. Here, economic and cultural effects are explained through the subjective perception or expectation that the position of oneself or people like oneself will deteriorate (Major et al., 2018). The emphasis on "people like oneself" comprises people one feels connected to, thus making a social identity argument. Most papers operationalize status threat as economic decline (e.g., Mutz, 2018). Few other studies examine an individual's perceptions of personal or societal decline more generally (Gest et al., 2017; Steenvoorden & Harteveld, 2018). But regardless of whether a development is economic or cultural, this account maintains that individuals do not merely evaluate how a development affects their own position but what it means to their group. Fittingly, recent work on the classic distinction between egotropic (i.e., personal) and sociotropic (i.e., societal) motivations (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981) suggests the latter is more

relevant for explaining political behavior (Abdallah, 2022; Sevincer et al., 2023; Solodoch, 2021).

Compared to the migration and hardship accounts, the status threat explanation is an advancement because it takes individuals' identity and emotion-shaped perceptions into account.[11] However, these are rarely directly tested. Among the few, Baccini and Weymouth (2021) show that the effect of deindustrialization on political behavior in the US depends on identities, where white people turn to Republicans but Black people to Democrats. Similarly, Rhodes-Purdy and colleagues (2021) explicitly test the interplay of societal developments, emotions, and radical right support. They find that the effects of economic and cultural developments on populist attitudes are mediated through anger. Though significant contributions, papers like these remain relatively isolated evidence. Moreover, they neglect that identities and emotions do not just matter but play a similar role. Regardless of whether economic, diversification, or other developments, identities and emotions reshuffle how we perceive our position in society, strengthen groups, and create distinct others. I postulate the same for affective polarization, for which I review common explanations next.

5.2. Explaining Affective Polarization

In contrast to radical right support—which used to be considered a deviant behavior of some isolated outsiders (Mudde, 2013)—affective polarization has been viewed as an all-encompassing trend early on. One reason for this may be that radical right voters overrepresent certain demographic groups, but affective polarization transcends individuals of various backgrounds.

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[11] Norris and Inglehart's (2019) Cultural Backlash Theory makes a similar argument. However, rather than explaining how individuals perceive developments, they argue that conservative values make older cohorts rebel against liberalization and diversification. However, the theory lacks empirical support (e.g., Schäfer, 2022), particularly as radical right support is common among younger generations, too (e.g., Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). More crucial to my argument, values, like attitudes (Lodge & Taber, 2013), may primarily represent identities and emotions.

The first explanation for affective polarization is *ideological* polarization. Research from the US suggests that growing tensions about policies drive affective polarization (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017; but see Reiljan, 2019). However, comparative research debates the extent to which ideological polarization is rising and notes that ideological disagreement is central to democracy (e.g., Dalton, 2021; Oscarsson et al., 2021). Moreover, the directionality between ideological and affective polarization can be debated: people may dislike others because they disagree or take a position because despised others will dissent (Groenendyk et al., 2022). Cross-national evidence shows that people are more likely to overestimate an opposing position and inter-party competition when disliking them (Ward & Tavits, 2019). Moreover, even apolitical issues get politicized among affectively polarized individuals (Druckman et al., 2021).

A second set of explanations concerns periodic or historical developments. For the former, political competition tends to increase affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019; Lelkes et al., 2017). As voters follow fierce debates about policy pledges, they become divided about the people backing or opposing these ideas. But as elections are not new to established democracies, they can hardly explain the latest rise in affective polarization. Thus, more recent developments may be a better explanation. Especially the growing internet consumption and partisan or social media are likely drivers. Partisans withdraw into homogeneous chambers in the news and social media (e.g., Muise et al., 2022). In turn, media reports can reduce affective polarization when using a different communication style (Zoizner et al., 2020). However, other evidence questions the causal effect of media consumption on affective polarization (e.g., Boxell et al., 2017).

I highlight that these explanations strongly differ from those for radical right support. Moreover, while the causes of radical right support are at least discussed to be about actual *content* (e.g., migration, economy), the proposed explanations for affective polarization

instead focus on the content's *packaging:* People dislike others because they disagree, stand on the wrong side of a campaign, or get other information from the news. And as they dislike them, they disagree with them, place themselves on the other side, and search for other information. Evidently, these explanations are highly endogenous.

A third explanation does not alleviate those endogeneity concerns but offers the most solid empirical support. This account postulates that increased *partisan sorting*—individuals' categorization into groups of politically like-minded others (Levendusky, 2009)—explains why isolated camps dislike each other. Moreover, it observes that *other* social identities progressively sort into these homogenous partisan boxes (i.e., *social sorting*; Mason, 2016). In the US, for example, Democrats and Republicans attract specific ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds (Mason, 2016) and even consumer groups (Lee, 2021). In this and other contexts (e.g., Bornschier et al., 2021; Gidron et al., 2022; Sczepanski, 2023; Zollinger, 2022), partisans have strong conceptions of other camps' social backgrounds. Even though individuals overestimate these differences (e.g., Mernyk et al., 2022; Moore-Berg et al., 2020), it seems intuitive to dislike others because they have different backgrounds.

Together, the explanations for the relatively recent phenomenon of affective polarization remain debated and require further and especially causal investigations. However, the current accounts share the view that affective polarization results from a different understanding of reality, whether due to ideological disagreements, diverging news consumption, or social circles. Especially the third explanation pushes the relevance of social identities. Moreover, emotions are ingrained in *affective* polarization.[12]

This may suggest that identities and emotions are sufficiently recognized in explaining affective polarization. However, my dissertation argument advances yet another take on

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[12] The distinct emotions characterizing the *affect* in affective polarization remain surprisingly unclear. See Paper 5 for a theoretical argument and Lawall and colleagues (in prep.) for an empirical investigation.

them: So far, the literature shows that identities predict like and dislike and very recently acknowledges that we may need to characterize general affect with more specific emotions (Kretchner et al., 2024, also see Paper 5). In contrast, I argue that identities and emotions explain affective polarization as a consequence of current developments (whether ideological polarization, an election event, or media polarization) because they reshape the relative positioning of the various actors involved. For example, they fortify the understanding of Republicans and Democrats as entirely distinct groups, render people with opposing abortion preferences as morally inferior, or evoke such joy that one becomes tied to their favorite politician.

Does it help to locate the mechanism of "altered perceived position" into an endogenous network of outside developments, identities and emotions, and radical political behavior? I argue that it does: This mechanism offers an explanation for *why* so many previous studies find that identities and emotions predict various radical political behaviors despite all the differences between identities and emotions and the heterogeneity within these concepts. More precisely, it allows synthesizing many studies by providing one central mechanism (there may be others) through which identities and emotions function: The constellation of any actors involved, I argue, is different once we perceive a given setting on behalf of our identities and emotions. Nevertheless, endogeneity and other empirical challenges remain. In the next section, I discuss how I sought to tackle them.

6. Summary of the Papers

The central aim of this dissertation is to advance our understanding of *why* identities and emotions play such central roles in explaining radical political behavior. I argue that they transfer current societal developments into a subjectively perceived repositioning of society's actors, thus necessitating the need to differentiate, protect, or elevate oneself from others. In this section, I describe the five papers constituting this compilation dissertation. The empirical goal is to illustrate (Papers 2 and 5) and test (Papers 1, 3, and 4) single theories substantiating this argument.

Table 2 summarizes all papers. I briefly highlight them here before discussing their single contributions in more detail. Paper 1 studies emotions. It tests the argument that nostalgia makes individuals evaluate the group's present more negatively than its past and that this perception predicts radical right support. Papers 2 to 4 examine whether individuals feel excluded from society following recent societal developments, thus motivating radical right support to restore their position in society. I develop this argument from a theoretical illustration using qualitative data (Paper 2) to a representative, cross-sectional analysis (Paper 3) and an experimental test of its implications (Paper 4). Paper 5 extends the examination of radical political behavior. It studies how partisans engage in affective polarization by actively ascribing emotions to the ingroup and outgroup. As previously mentioned, I have tailored each paper's design to accomplish its purpose as far as possible.

I aim to build a general framework on the relevance of identities and emotions for radical political behavior. To illustrate and test the framework's theories, I draw from various cases and examine them where I could conduct the required design. The *case selection* reflects rather practical reasons. Nevertheless, the variety of cases allows me to provide evidence from diverse contexts, including different party systems (e.g., majoritarian two-party (US) vs. proportional multi-party system (the Netherlands)) and levels of polarization (e.g., increasing

Table 2. *Summary of the Dissertation Papers.*

Paper	Focus	Theoretical Argument	Data	Analysis
1. Versteegen, P. L. (2023). Those Were the What? Contents of Nostalgia, Relative Deprivation, and Radical Right Support. *European Journal of Political Research*.	Emotions + identities	Group-based but not personal nostalgia predicts radical right support because it sparks group-based (but not personal) temporal relative deprivation.	Representative panel data (LISS) from the Netherlands ($N = 10,413$)	Panel models and mediation analysis
2. Versteegen, P. L. (2023). The Excluded Ordinary? A Theory of Populist Radical Right Supporters' Position in Society. *European Journal of Social Psychology*.	Identities	Majority members feel excluded despite firmly belonging to society because they feel unrecognized with their subgroups.	Semi-structured interviews with radical right voters in Germany ($N = 27$)	Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998)
3. Versteegen, P. L. (revise & resubmit). Trump Voters' Social Position in US Society: Uniqueness and Radical Right Support.	Identities	White, male, and Christian Americans feel excluded despite firmly belonging to society because they feel unrecognized with their subgroups. This relates to radical right support.	Representative cross-sectional data (ANES) from the US (total $N = 20,374$)	Cluster analysis (Everitt et al., 2011), OLS and logistic regressions
4. Versteegen, P. L. & Syropoulos, S. (under review). E Pluribus Whom? Status Threat and American Identity in a Multiracial Democracy.	Identities	Status threat mediates the effect of diversification on white Americans' support for multiracial democracy; a common identity abolishes this mechanism.	Experimental data from convenience samples in the US (total $N = 4,062$)	OLS regressions, mediation analysis
5. Versteegen, P. L. (2024). We Love, They Hate. Emotions in Affective Polarization and How Partisans May Use Them. *Political Psychology*.	Emotions + identities	In affectively polarized contexts, individuals engage in affective polarization through emotion portrayals.	Semi-structured interviews with radical right voters in Germany ($N = 27$)	Qualitative content analysis, Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998)

(the US) vs. stable (Germany), Garzia et al., 2023). This alludes to potential conditional effects that are beyond the dissertation's interest. Including them is an asset but not central to this dissertation.

To elaborate, the illustrative purpose of Papers 2 and 5 required in-depth knowledge of the case (theoretically and practically) and excellent language skills. I used the German case for these papers. Paper 3 demanded representative, high-quality data assessing identity-related experiences to examine whether identities' relevance generalizes across a population. I found these data in the American National Election Studies (ANES), which additionally allowed me to test my theory on a likely case (see Paper 3). To test how emotions shape people's perceptions and drive radical political behavior (Paper 1), I took advantage of representative and detailed nostalgia measures from the Netherlands. These data allowed me to differentiate various nostalgia contents and to examine the mechanism between this emotion and radical political behavior. Finally, Paper 4 presents experiments from the US as this combines a relevant case for this dissertation with a good infrastructure to conduct online experiments.

Moreover, my evidence builds on various methods. I use qualitative (extensive semi-structured interviews) and quantitative evidence (cross-sectional cluster analysis, panel models, and experimental designs). The quantitative analyses are largely pre-registered, which feeds into established practices in this field. I also contribute to nascent qualitative open science initiatives by pre-registering the larger interview project, providing extensive methodological descriptions and supplemental materials, and interactive online overviews documenting further coded materials.[13]

I emphasize that the papers' evidence remains limited to their respective cases and samples. While the dissertation aims to illustrate and test the framework as widely as possible, additional generalizable evidence is needed. As mentioned above, the relevance of

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[13] All papers discuss ethical considerations and measures to ensure the ethical treatment of subjects.

identities and emotions generally and the type of identities and emotions specifically may vary across cases. Likewise, cultural differences in elite rhetoric and media reporting mean that supply differs across Western democracies, too. Finally, the objective developments at stake vary internationally, regionally, and between individuals with the same identity. These are no minor issues. However, the argument that identities and emotions shape perceptions of developments and inform reactions may abide despite all heterogeneity across time, space, and individuals. Thus, rather than taking the papers as specific to a particular case or group, I invite future research to replicate and extend the evidence amassed here in different settings.

6.1.Paper 1: Those Were the What? Contents of Nostalgia, Relative Deprivation, and

   Radical Right Support.

How do emotions shape people's perception of present society, and how does that motivate radical right support? The first paper investigates why nostalgia—a rose-colored longing for the past (Wildschut et al., 2006)—is related to radical right support. Much literature shows that nostalgia is related to this political orientation. However, this broad perspective neglects that individuals can be nostalgic for various things (Wildschut et al., 2014), such as personal memories (e.g., one's childhood) and group-based issues (e.g., how society was). In this paper, I use fine-grained, representative panel data from the Netherlands to disentangle which contents precisely predict radical right support.

I theorize that nostalgia relates to the radical right because it creates relative deprivation. People feel relatively deprived when comparing themselves or their group's situation to other individuals, groups, or these entities' past and conclude that they are worse off for unfair reasons (Smith et al., 2012). When nostalgic, I argue, individuals implicitly compare past and present, and the *rose-colored* past appears favorable to the present. I also postulate that these effects are different for group-based and personal nostalgia: On the one hand, the collective narrative of a society in turmoil (e.g., Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019; Mastroianni & Gilbert,

2023; Rosling, 2018; Van der Meer & Hameleers, 2022) makes the collective present appear unfavorable to the rose-colored past, sparking group-based relative deprivation. In turn, people seek to improve the present by restoring the past through radical right support. On the other hand, as many individuals' objective condition is bearable, feeling personal nostalgia does not evoke personal relative deprivation. Therefore, personal nostalgia does not predict radical right support.

Pre-registered[14] panel analyses show that group-based but not personal nostalgia predicts radical right support. Moreover, exploratory mediation analyses indicate that group-based but not personal relative deprivation mediates this effect: people who long for the group-based past tend to be more dissatisfied with society's present and, in turn, more likely to support the radical right. This paper uses the relative deprivation argument to substantiate the dissertation's claim that emotions can affect how individuals perceive their position (in this case, compared to its past) in society. By differentiating group-based and personal nostalgia, this paper takes a joint perspective on how identities and emotions shape people's perceptions. In line with recent research (Abdallah, 2022; Sevincer et al., 2023; Solodoch, 2021), it shows that mainly sociotropic motivations explain the rise of the radical right.

6.2. Paper 2: The Excluded Ordinary? A Theory of Populist Radical Right Supporters' Position in Society.

How do majority members experience their position in society based on how societal developments impact their groups? In the second paper, I use Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991) to explain why some majority members may subjectively feel excluded. The theory suggests that individuals must balance two identity needs to feel included. First, and consistent with an intuitive understanding of inclusion, they need to *belong* to the larger group. Second, they need to feel recognized for their *unique* and distinct backgrounds.

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[14] https://osf.io/jmsu3/?view_only=539601bbf963414e87a24bfbf380ee38

Consequently, feeling part of the larger whole does not suffice to feel included. Instead, it simultaneously requires one to feel respected and appreciated for one's distinct background that deviates from the larger whole.

I argue that an increasing share of majority members may feel excluded because they lack subgroup uniqueness. On the one hand, majority members should experience firm belonging to society as they see themselves and are seen as default members of their societies (Jardina, 2019; see Wenzel et al., 2016). On the other hand, however, an increasing share of them feels subjectively disrespected or unrecognized as men, white people, or Christians (e.g., Jardina, 2019). While members of these groups tend to remain privileged economically, politically, and culturally, recent strides in diversification and minority empowerment may signal that their majority background remains unrecognized.

This conception of inclusion finds support in various fields (Leonardelli et al., 2010) but remains largely untested in political behavior research. I introduce the theory through pre-registered qualitative data[15] from semi-structured interviews with 27 German radical right voters conducted in 2021. Through a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), I find that the interviewees have clear conceptions of what being German means, that they identify as Germans, and understand themselves as *true* Germans (Mudde, 2007). Therefore, I conclude that they feel they belong to the larger German society. Simultaneously, I find that they often feel neglected and actively disrespected as white people, men, or conservatives. This suggests that the second inclusion need remains unsatisfied, as they lack recognition as a unique subgroup.

The paper illustrates the argument that majority members perceive societal developments (i.e., diversification, liberalization) through their identities. Furthermore, it shows that these identities create a perceived repositioning of various actors, in this case, resulting in an

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[15] https://osf.io/cbhg3/

exclusion experience. The paper neither claims representative nor causal evidence but offers a novel perspective to understanding radical right supporters' position in society. While previous research has extensively studied (primarily economic) status loss as a predictor of radical right support (e.g., Engler & Weisstanner, 2021; Gidron & Hall, 2020), the present paper shows that one's different social groups need to be integrated.

6.3. Paper 3: Trump Voters' Social Position in US Society: Uniqueness and Radical Right Support.

Are experiences of social exclusion among majority members related to radical right support? The third paper extends Paper 2 with generalizable and representative data from another case. I use the 2016 and 2020 waves from the American National Election Studies (ANES) to investigate the claim that substantial shares of white, male, and Christian Americans do not feel respected with these groups, respectively. If radical right support is a social exclusion problem, substantially meaningful numbers of these majority members should a.) report firm belonging to the US superordinate group and b.) simultaneously feel disrespected with their respective subgroup. Americans tend to identify strongly with their nation (Huddy & Khatib, 2007), but majority members increasingly report feeling discriminated against (e.g., Jardina, 2019; Schildkraut, 2017). This provides a likely case.

I exploit the merits of descriptive designs (Gerring, 2012) to evaluate the share of majority members who combine the sensation of firm belonging and lacking uniqueness. I use a k-means cluster analysis (Everitt et al., 2011), which employs a machine learning algorithm to group cases along different dimensions (i.e., national identity and discrimination perceptions in my case). I find that about 21% of white Americans firmly identify as American but feel disrespected as white people. Likewise, about 16-20% of men and about 35% of Christians fall into this cluster (depending on the survey wave and cluster solution). In turn, these clusters are likelier to vote for and sympathize with Donald Trump than individuals who

cluster as *included* (i.e., individuals who identify as Americans *and* feel recognized with their subgroup).

This paper contributes more robust empirical support for the argument established in Paper 2. It corroborates the dissertation's premise that identities affect individuals' perceptions of current developments, which affects how they perceive their position in society. However, the paper does not allow for the causal conclusion that exclusion experiences *predict* radical right support.

6.4. Paper 4: E Pluribus Whom? Status Threat and American Identity in a Multiracial Democracy.

Does status threat explain why many white Americans' backlash against diversification despite valuing the ideals of a multiracial democracy? Can a shared identity dilute this mechanism? Co-authored with Stylianos Syropoulos, we approach the conundrum that many (white) Americans across the ideological spectrum understand equal rights and liberties for all groups as a defining value of the US but often react to progress toward this ideal with backlash (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023; Simonsen, 2021). Often, diversification sparks backlash (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) that darkens many white Americans' views on questions related to multiracial democracy (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2014). In this paper, we study *status threat* as the mechanism explaining the gap between value and reality, and we study *American identity* as a possible factor diluting this mechanism. The latter builds on the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), which suggests that intergroup conflict may be mitigated if competing groups recognize shared characteristics. Political scientists repeatedly theorize (e.g., Fukuyama, 2018) and study (e.g., Levendusky, 2018) American identity's potential to be such a shared group, such that it could reconcile divided groups into a larger group of Americans.

We conduct four experiments (three of them pre-registered[16]) with convenience samples of white Americans (total $N = 4,062$). These samples do not represent the US population but offer diverse samples and high-quality responses (Litman et al., 2021). Through mediation analyses, we replicate the effect of diversification on status threat (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2014; Major et al., 2018) and show that these threat perceptions correlate with attitudes and sentiments relevant to multiracial democracy. However, despite various American identity primes and careful differentiations from other conceptions of nationhood (Huddy & Khatib, 2007), we find no support that American identity would reduce status threat and hence mitigate backlash against multiracial democracy.

Together, this paper adds a causal test of the argument that group-based threats explain the effect of diversification on multiracial democracy, and it examines the potential and limitations of group identities to annihilate this mechanism. While the other papers focus on radical right support *or* affective polarization, this paper addresses both as it measures political and social manifestations of backlash (Bornschier et al., 2021; Mason, 2016; Zollinger, 2022). Moreover, it finds no effects on affective polarization scores.

6.5. Paper 5: We Love, They Hate: Emotions in Affective Polarization and How Partisans May Use Them.

How do partisans engage in radical political behavior through their emotions? While the first papers focus on radical right support as an expression of radical political behavior, the fifth paper centers around affective polarization. I make two contributions to the affective polarization literature. The first is theoretical. I argue that despite vital progress on the concept's measurement (e.g., Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) and operationalizations in different party systems (e.g., Gidron et al., 2022; Wagner, 2021), the emotions characterizing affective polarization remain surprisingly unclear. *Affect* is a broad concept defining the

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[16] https://osf.io/agvcj/?view_only=9886f9de192446d58cd8de6bc0444ffe

valence with which individuals perceive something (e.g., like vs. dislike). In contrast, emotions are distinct categories that derive from specific stimuli and may predict specific behaviors (Frijda et al., 1989, but see Lodge & Taber, 2013). Disliking opposing partisans because they evoke fear may predict different reactions than disliking them because of anger.

The second contribution is empirical. The qualitative data introduced in Paper 2 does not allow for testing the correlation between general affect and distinct emotions (see Lawall et al., in prep., for this endeavor). However, it can provide an in-depth analysis of what emotions partisans express. Emotions are at least partially socially constructed, meaning that individuals can express them to reach social identity goals (Barbalet, 1998; Wetherell, 2012). It follows that individuals in affectively polarized contexts may factually experience certain emotions (e.g., anger) but express others (e.g., fear). Why would they report emotions they do not feel? As affective polarization predicts individual efforts to increase the distance between their group and opposing partisans (Iyengar et al., 2019), I suggest that individuals can differentiate their group from opponents by how they talk about their emotions. Specifically, some emotions are normatively desirable (e.g., love, fear); others are undesirable (e.g., anger, disgust) (Wetherell, 2012). By motivating their group's position with desirable emotions, partisans can improve their status. In contrast, they can attribute undesirable motivations to the opposing group to devalue it. In so doing, partisans reach the social identity goals of distinctness and superiority (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012), which build the fundament of affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019).

I illustrate this reasoning by coding what emotions radical right voters *suggest* they and their opposing group experience and why. This paper remains limited to the radical right of the two poles and again does not aim for causal conclusions. However, it contributes to the literature by a.) acknowledging the distinct emotions potentially characterizing affective polarization and b.) showcasing an individual's active role in radical political behavior.

7. Discussion: Contributions, Limitations, and Implications

With this dissertation, I aim to advance our understanding of why identities and emotions inform radical political behavior. To reach this aim, I review, theorize, and study how they alter people's perception of their societal position relative to others. Societies currently face significant transitions and challenges, which push identities and emotions *and* are perceived through them. If identities and emotions make us perceive that our proximity, status, or distinctness to relevant others has changed, we may try to correct this by distancing, elevating, or differentiating ourselves from some and bonding with others. This argument's merit is that it can synthesize many studies on identities, emotions, and radical political behavior, explaining why the former explains the latter.

The papers' single theories flesh out specific instances of how the proposed positional reshuffling occurs and provide testable hypotheses. Thanks to them, I can provide the following conclusions. The emotion of nostalgia motivates radical right support in the Netherlands because individuals perceive their group-based present as worse than the past (Paper 1). Recent developments make some individuals with majority identities feel excluded in Germany (Paper 2) and the US (Paper 3), which is associated with radical right support in the latter case. But while an identity-driven perceived change of one's position drives opposition to multiracial democracy in the US, a reverse mechanism does not seem to mitigate such radical political behavior (Paper 4). Finally, affectively polarized individuals in Germany may actively process and report certain emotions to further distance and elevate themselves from opponents (Paper 5). This dissertation's research question asked why identities and emotions motivate radical political behavior and why this behavior results from various identities and emotions despite all differences between concepts and heterogeneity within them. The evidence above corroborates my claim that their capacity to change how people perceive their position in relation to others is one synthesizing factor.

While the power of identities and emotions may still appear novel to proponents of rational thought, considerable evidence prohibits such claims. Previous work extensively examined how identities and emotions shape political behavior. Nascent research even examines how identities and emotions mediate the link between societal developments and political outcomes (e.g., Evans & Ivaldi, 2021; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021). While more research is desirable, I consider these ideas and studies established by now.

Where this dissertation adds to knowledge, however, is in synthesizing abundant previous knowledge in three aspects. The first, and this is my primary theoretical contribution, is to propose and describe a new mechanism that can summarize many effects of identities and emotions, that is, how they make us perceive the constellation of actors in the social space. Scholars' ability to efficiently theorize and study the effects of identities and emotions may become particularly relevant as they become increasingly important (e.g., Mason, 2016; Rhodes & Vayo, 2019; Smith & King, 2021; Widmann, 2022; but see Pipal et al., 2024) and subjective experience risks to replace facts (Mounk, 2023). My synthesizing effort tries to facilitate this efficiency.

The second aspect is my empirical contribution. I apply seven different theories on how relationships between actors are reshuffled. While other theories may predict similar conclusions (e.g., collective narcissism; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020), I chose those as they speak to prominent displays of radical political actors as "left behind" (e.g., Jennings & Stoker, 2016, addressed in Paper 1), socially excluded (e.g., Gidron & Hall, 2020, Papers 2, 3, and 4), threatened (Mutz, 2018, Papers 2, 3, and 4), or motivated reasoners (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Paper 5). Together, the papers study identities, emotions, and their combination across three countries (the Netherlands, Germany, and the US) and five designs (qualitative interviews, quantitative cross-sectional, descriptive, panel, and experimental). While the qualitative designs focus on theory development, the cross-sectional and the panel data

provide representative evidence, and the panel and experimental data aim for causal conclusions. Qualitative data are rare in research on the radical right (Damhuis & De Jonge, 2022) and, to my knowledge, unprecedented in affective polarization research. Moreover, I supplement the qualitative papers with detailed codebooks and interactive online overviews documenting the coded data. In so doing, I contribute to budding initiatives promoting open science in qualitative methods (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). The analyses in Papers 1 and 4 are largely pre-registered and feed into more established open science practices in quantitative methods.

The third integration aspect ties radical right support and affective polarization into the broader phenomenon of radical political behavior. Despite impressive advancements in research on either behavior, the connection between the two has received little attention until now. Moreover, it is inconsistent to consider radical right voters as an isolated faction of society but affectively polarized individuals as an overarching trend. While it is imperative to acknowledge the differences between these phenomena, I posit that their shared effect on social cohesion and democratic norms is vital. Both may impair our capability to discuss, collaborate, and co-exist as disagreeing others. Again, more collective theorizing is needed to efficiently use this concept. I hope this dissertation inspires to do so.

7.1. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

As for any research project, the five papers constituting this dissertation bear limitations. These include design issues, data availability, generalizability, and theoretical scope. I address these affairs in the respective papers. Here, I raise three more general constraints that point to central avenues for future research.

First, and as repeatedly mentioned, endogeneity is a prevailing issue in most studies on identities, emotions, and any radical political behavior. My designs addressed this issue with experiments and panel data or circumvented them with qualitative or explicitly descriptive

designs. However, more innovation is needed in the long run. Currently, most researchers in this field (including myself) seem to address this problem by turning to online experiments, which are great in causal identification but extremely limited in external validity. Lacking external validity is no minor limitation. It is serious because clean, small, and often vignette-style manipulations of identities and emotions barely reflect the real world.

The implication is to conduct experiments where identities and emotions actually happen. But while natural experiments are always challenging, an additional challenge in studying identities and emotions is that these are rapid and within-individual experiences. Of course, political behavior research has made great strides in such natural designs, but for the study of within-individual processes, I strongly advise against assuming identity or emotion "mechanisms" that are not measured. There are too many alternative explanations, and individual experiences are too complex to assume that certain macro-level observations are due to micro-level experiences. Instead, we may exploit *external causes* of identities and emotions (e.g., competition, conflict, holidays, catastrophes) and consequences (e.g., voting behavior, macro-level polarization) but should continue *measuring internal mechanisms*.[17]

Second, I acknowledge that I do not test the full theoretical framework. Instead, the single papers develop, illustrate, and test single theories, demonstrating the impact of identities and emotions on reshuffling the social space. However, I give limited consideration to the context aspects discussed in Figure 1 (e.g., supply-side effects and time). More work must consider the interplay between elite and media messaging, contextual effects, and people's identities and emotions. This is particularly needed to better understand if, when, and why identities and emotions have recently become more relevant in the political world.

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[17] More generally, I think more studies combining macro- and micro-level data (e.g., Evans & Ivaldi, 2021; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021; Stockemer, 2016) are needed.

I highlight this limitation as it has vital methodological implications: As identities and emotions shape individuals' perceptions and reactions to the outside world, self-reported attitudes provide limited information. Scholars should not expect their survey data to be derived from informed individuals who "rationally evaluated" a development. This is particularly so in the political context, where electoral competition incentivizes partisans to put their group, motivation, or goals in a desirable light.[18] For example, respondents may expect observers to be more understanding if they motivate their radical right vote as "fear of immigrants taking my job" instead of "I just hate them." Therefore, to study arguments like the one proposed in this dissertation, scholars need to either use implicit measures (e.g., Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Schumacher et al., 2022) or account for bias in explicit methods. In Paper 5, I expressly interpret the material as *respondents telling their motivation* rather than *me observing true emotions*. While implicit measures are increasingly used, I hope that scholars also find creative solutions for explicit measures, including qualitative designs.

As a third limitation, this dissertation theoretically and empirically focuses on the right end of the political spectrum. My work reflects the tendency to concentrate on the challenges from the right (Mudde, 2013), which is likely due to the overrepresentation of left-leaning scholars (e.g., Woessner & Maranto, 2021). Radical right support is a pressing issue in contemporary politics, and the radical right is of particular interest in affective polarization (Harteveld et al., 2021b). Still, I think of radical political behavior as a general phenomenon transcending all camps. In fact, left-leaning citizens express intolerance toward diverging views (Ditto et al., 2019), left-populist parties are electorally successful (e.g., Brazil, Spain), and the radical left may weaken democratic norms, too (e.g., Mounk, 2023; Weyland, 2013).

This implies that scholars need to put more effort into understanding the role of left-leaning actors in radical political behavior. A thought-provoking puzzle revolves around the

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[18] I emphasize that this constraint goes beyond the usual social desirability concern in survey research.

balance between the protection of marginalized groups and freedom of speech: should

societies value inclusive language over original art (Taylor, 2023) or prioritize free

expression—including hate speech (Howard, 2019) and aggressive action (Boxerman &

Kwai, 2023)—over the integrity of its addressees? Political theorists discuss this normative

question, and various disciplines examine it empirically. However, a vital step forward would

be to theorize its implications for public opinion and political behavior.

7.2. Practical Implications and Conclusion

The main takeaway of this dissertation should not be that rational choice is limited. While

extensive evidence undermines the narrow conception of individuals as rational maximizers

of utility (Simon, 1985), individuals may be considered rational when broadening the

definition (e.g., Rubinstein, 1998). But even if people do not act in their self-interest, their

actions may still be rational: While emotions are rational in that they facilitate goal-directed

behavior (Barbalet, 1998; Frijda et al., 1989), it is evolutionarily useful to invest into the

well-being of one's group (Tomasello, 2014). Thus, if individuals engage in radical political

behavior because they are worried about their group—may they worry about their subgroup

or have sociotropic concerns about society at large—they behave pro-socially and rationally.

Regardless of whether this behavior helps them or the group they are concerned about, they

behave pro-socially because they *intend* to help (Pfattheicher et al., 2022), and they behave

rationally because this behavior appears most reasonable to the experiencing individual.

Therefore, it does not matter whether radical political behavior fits conventional rationality.

Instead, this dissertation raises three sets of practical implications on people's perception

of and reaction to the outside world. First, we must *widen the discussion about which actors

engage in radical political behavior*. Again, the radical right is the most prominent

expression of this phenomenon, which implies that its voters are central actors. But as

polarization and outgroup animosity transcend all camps (e.g., Ditto et al., 2019), all

members of society can potentially contribute to amplifying and mitigating these phenomena. While citizens often victimize their group, they sarcastically denigrate the experiences and motivations of political opponents (Paper 5). However, we must recognize that *any* subjective experience is valid, regardless of how much it opposes what our own identities or emotions— or even objective measures—indicate is *true*.

It follows, second, that we need to *differentiate individuals' perceptions from their behavior*. Crucially, realizing that any *perception* is valid does not imply that any resulting *behavior* is justified. People can tolerate someone's threat experience and still condemn their reaction to support a radical right party that endorses racism and sexism. Likewise, they can tolerate someone's frustration about anti-vaxxers while condemning their wish to exclude anti-vaxxers from democratic processes (Bor et al., 2023).

Third, we may need to *reconsider the power of citizens as such*. One of democracies' premises is that governments deliver to their citizens. Citizens, in turn, expect functioning economies, schools, and healthcare systems. If citizens get dissatisfied, they may turn to a radical party (see Rooduijn et al., 2016). But governing is difficult, especially amid wars, climate disasters, and other crises. Eventually, it is citizens who form a society. Thus, they can take action in conducive (i.e., solution-oriented) ways to deal with current developments.

Together, this dissertation suggests that individuals' identities and emotions significantly steer how they—and they together as a society—react to current developments. Identities and emotions can create division and possibly radical political behavior. But sometimes, these factors can reduce division (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) and promote prosocial behaviors (Versteegen & Sohlberg, in prep.). Human beings are evolutionarily tailored to be prosocial (Tomasello, 2014), can control their emotions (Gross, 2015), and tend to be resilient in times of crisis (Bregman, 2020). We are equipped to deal with contemporary challenges. Of course, it needs functioning institutions to address structural inequalities and immediate suffering.

But ultimately, it is on each individual citizen whether their identities and emotions make

societies break apart or prevail.

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