

# Economic Insecurity and Sociocultural Appeals of Right-Wing Populism

Analysing the Impact of Economic Insecurity and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Finland

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## Abstract

This research investigates the influence of economic and sociocultural factors on voting behaviour for the True Finns (PS), a populist radical right-wing party in Finland. Regression models analyse data from the European Social Survey's Round 10, to explore associations between economic and sociocultural variables and support for the True Finns. Findings indicate subjective economic insecurity has no direct impact on voting when combined with sociocultural factors. Lower economic satisfaction and being welfare dependence are associated with reduced support for the party. Moreover, negative perceptions of economic immigration impact positively relate to voting for the True Finns. Cultural immigration impact shows a weaker, although similar association. Lastly, no significant moderation was found regarding Economic Insecurity and Anti-Immigration Attitudes predicting voting behaviour. The study contributes to explore these relationships through the lenses of Social Identity Theory and the Integrated Threat Theory, emphasizing the complexity of the relationship between economic insecurity, sociocultural grievances, and populism.

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## 1 Introduction

Populist movements have been making waves in the global political arena for several years now, with right-wing and left-wing parties alike attracting a growing number of voters with their anti-establishment messaging. The recent Finnish parliamentary elections, held on April 2, 2023, saw a continuation of this trend as the True Finns (Perussuomalaiset, PS) party achieved its biggest result to date, securing 20% of the vote and 48 seats in parliament (YLE News, 2023). This is a substantial increase from their 2019 result of 17.5% of the vote, and it positions the True Finns as the second largest party in the Finnish Parliament, only behind the National Coalition Party. Moreover, the movement led by Riikka Purra secured the most seats in half of the country's electoral districts. As of the writing of this thesis, it remains to be seen if the True Finns will have presence at all in a possible government moving forward. In either case, the rise of this populist party, with its controversial rhetoric on immigration and minority rights, is a significant, sustained development in Finnish politics that demands attention and analysis.

The surge of the True Finns in Finnish politics is not an isolated case but rather another telling example of the wider Western wave of populism (Berman, 2021). Across Europe, we have witnessed the rise of populist leaders and parties:

In the UK, the rise of populism was exemplified by the UK Independence Party (UKIP) led by Nigel Farage. UKIP gained significant support through its anti-immigration stance and Eurosceptic policies (Wintour & Watt, 2014). Their message resonated with many Britons who were dissatisfied with the political establishment and felt that their concerns were not being addressed. UKIP's campaign culminated in the 2016 Brexit referendum, which resulted in a narrow victory for the Leave campaign, ultimately leading to the UK's exit from the European Union (Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017).

Italy has seen the rise of several populist parties, including the Lega Nord, the Five Star Movement, and the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia) party. The Lega Nord, led by Matteo Salvini, was originally a regionalist party advocating for greater autonomy for Northern Italy, but under Salvini's leadership, it shifted towards a more populist, nationalist platform.

Salvini's hard-line stance on immigration and Euroscepticism gained support among many Italians who felt that the mainstream parties were not addressing their concerns (Sala, 2018).

The Five Star Movement, on the other hand, was founded by comedian Beppe Grillo and aimed to represent the voice of the people against the political establishment. The party's platform focused on direct democracy, environmentalism, and Euroscepticism. The Brothers of Italy, led by Giorgia Meloni, is a far-right party that gained significant support in the 2022 Italian general election, becoming Italy's largest party earning around 26% of the vote (Kirby, 2022).

In France, the National Front (now known as the National Rally), led by Marine Le Pen, has been a significant force in recent years. The party's platform focused on anti-immigration policies, Euroscepticism, and economic protectionism. Le Pen's campaign in the 2017 French presidential election saw her make it to the second round, where she was defeated by Emmanuel Macron. However, the National Front's strong showing in the election confirmed its status as a major player in French politics (Caulcutt, 2022).

In Spain, the rise of populism has been exemplified by the Vox party, which was founded in 2013. The party's platform is focused on anti-immigration policies, Euroscepticism, and Spanish nationalism. Vox gained significant support in the 2019 Spanish general election, becoming the third-largest party in the Spanish parliament (Plaza, 2019). The party's success has been attributed to the rise of nationalist sentiment in Spain and dissatisfaction with the political establishment.

The rise of populist movements is not limited to Europe, as more movements gain relevance in parliaments of other Western nations. The rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil can be attributed to his promises to tackle corruption through traditional values and his stance on security issues. Bolsonaro, a former army captain, was a fringe politician for many years before his 2018 presidential campaign, which saw him win the election by a large margin (Phillips, 2018). Bolsonaro's controversial remarks on issues such as race, gender, and human rights have drawn criticism, but he remains popular among his supporters who see him as a strong leader who can bring about change in Brazil.

And lastly, in the case of the US, the rise of Donald Trump can be attributed to his positioning as an "anti-establishment" figure who championed his "America First" policies. Trump's campaign in the 2016 presidential election focused on issues such as immigration, trade, and national security. His message resonated with many Americans who felt that the political establishment had ignored their concerns (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Trump's victory in the election was seen as a major upset, and his presidency was marked by controversy and division. Nevertheless, his populist message continues to resonate way after he left office.

Populist parties are characterized by these strong anti-establishment messages and controversial stances, which they tend to focus on issues such as immigration, national identity, and traditional values (Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The appeal of populism has been linked to various factors, including economic and cultural changes brought about by globalization (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Populist leaders and movements often present themselves as the "voice of the people" against the "elite" (Akkerman et al., 2014; Mudde, 2007). They often blame these elites for the problems faced by the country and its citizens, and they propose themselves as the solution (Taggart, 2004). Moreover, these main figures often employ simple and emotive language,

and they present themselves as outsiders who will shake up the political establishment (Mudde, 2007).

It is possible for populism to impact democracy in varying ways. Some argue that populist parties can encourage greater voter participation by shining a light on long-standing and neglected issues (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). Conversely, others worry populist movements may lead to the degradation of democratic institutions or even infringe upon individual freedoms and liberties (Meijers & Zaslove, 2021). Indeed, some contend that such an outcome has already begun taking hold given the rise of authoritarian leadership styles which seem linked with proposals from certain populist figures (Meijers & Zaslove, 2021).

The rise of populist parties has challenged established political norms and values and understanding the underlying reasons for their electoral success is essential for policymakers seeking to address the needs and concerns of citizens.

The emergence of populist movements is a complex phenomenon that reflects not only the specific political and socio-economic contexts of different countries, but also a broader global trend of political polarization and distrust towards established institutions (Berman, 2021; Spruyt et al., 2016; Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017). One of the key factors driving the rise of populism is the growing sense of disillusionment with mainstream politics and parties. As traditional party systems have become increasingly disconnected from the concerns and aspirations of ordinary citizens, many people have turned to populist movements as a way of expressing their frustration and anger (Berman, 2021).

Moreover, the rise of populism can also be attributed to the impact of globalization and rapid technological change, which have resulted in significant changes in the economic, social, and cultural landscape of many societies (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

These changes have created winners and losers, and many people who feel left behind or

marginalized by these developments have turned to populist parties as a way of expressing their grievances and demanding change (Colantone & Stanig, 2018).

However, the rise of populism is not without its challenges and risks. Populist parties often adopt a confrontational approach towards mainstream institutions, including the media, the judiciary, and other branches of government (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). They also tend to promote a simplistic and often divisive understanding of complex issues, which can fuel social tensions and undermine democratic values (Canovan, 1999; Müller, 2016).

Moreover, the success of populism can also lead to a shift in political norms and practices. Populist leaders and parties often prioritize their own agenda and interests over the broader public good, eroding institutional checks and balances in the process. This can result in the erosion of democratic norms and values, with some populist leaders and parties attempting to consolidate power and silence opposition voices (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018).

Additionally, the rise of populism can have a destabilizing effect on the international system, as populist leaders often pursue nationalist and protectionist policies that can lead to tensions and conflicts between countries. The Brexit vote in the UK and the subsequent negotiations, as well as the trade wars between the US and China under the Trump administration, are clear examples of how populism can impact global relations (Inglehart & Norris, 2017; Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017). Overall, while the rise of populism may reflect legitimate grievances and concerns among the population, its consequences can be far-reaching and have long-lasting effects on the political and social fabric of a country.

As such, it is crucial to understand the drivers and consequences of populism in order to address its challenges and promote democratic resilience. This research aims to contribute to this understanding by analysing the social psychological motives behind the rise of right-wing populism in Finland. As such, this thesis aims to provide an insightful analysis of the social

psychological motives that underpin the support for the True Finns and their right-wing populist agenda.

## 2 Theoretical Background

In the support for populism, very different feelings of economic, cultural, and political vulnerability come together (Spruyt et al., 2016). To understand the elements of populist success, it is important to consider both demand-side and supply-side factors (Akkerman et al., 2014; Benczes & Szabó, 2022; Berman, 2021).

Demand-side factors refer to the reasons why individuals and communities support populist movements (Benczes & Szabó, 2022; Kestila, 2006). These factors can include economic insecurity, dissatisfaction with the political and economic elite, and a feeling of exclusion from the political and economic mainstream (Kriesi et al., 2016). Similarly, individuals who have experienced a decline in their standard of living and have a lower level of trust in government are also more likely to support populist movements (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Supply-side factors refer to the reasons why populist movements are able to gain support and succeed (Berman, 2021; Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007). These factors can include the ability of populist movements to tap into the demands of the electorate, their ability to mobilize individuals and communities, and to offer a viable alternative to the existing political and economic landscape. (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

For this research, we will be focusing on the demand-side arguments, overviewing some of frameworks and theories exploring the underlying economic and social factors that create an environment where populist movements thrive.

## 2.1 Economic Grievances

Numerous economists and political economists have studied the economic explanations for the rise of populism. These scholars have noted that globalization, neoliberalism, and technological advancements have led to economic grievances among the working and middle classes, creating divisions and discontent among citizens (Berman, 2021; Guiso et al., 2020; Ivanov, 2023). Economic gains over the last few decades have disproportionately gone to the wealthy and highly educated, and income and wealth inequality have increased dramatically. These issues have led to declining social mobility, which threatens to turn “have” and “have-nots” into hereditary categories, and perpetuate inequality (Blanchard & Rodrik, 2021). In addition, economic development has created deep divisions within societies and between countries. Economic “losers” in developed countries blame countries such as China and successful rising powers for their problems. These “losers of globalization”, people who have experienced negative consequences as a result of increased global interdependence, such as factory laborers whose industries are in decline or farmers facing heightened competition from low-cost imports, tend toward backing populist movements that tackle those grievances (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Gidron & Mijs, 2019).

Such economic trends have made many voters resentful and susceptible to populists who scapegoat and vilify elites and the establishment. The financial crisis of the late 2000s accelerated these decades-long divisive and destabilizing economic trends (Gidron & Hall, 2017). Economic downturns tend to hit the already suffering or left behind particularly hard. Previous research using economic variables from the European Social Survey (ESS) has shown that individual level economic insecurity is strongly related not only to distrust of political parties and legislatures, but also to increase in anti-immigration sentiment (Guiso et al., 2017); which are two key elements in the development for support of populist parties (Berman, 2021; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Economic factors are undeniably key in assessing the reach and impact of populist messages into sectors of the population that are being consistently left behind by economic hardship, and becoming more disenfranchised with the traditional parties and political dynamics (Berman, 2021; Guiso et al., 2020). However, and despite more efforts on establishing useful economic frameworks to understand these movements, economic-only approaches operate at a macro-level that is easily disrupted in smaller scales (Benczes & Szabó, 2022; Berman, 2021).

## **2.2 Sociocultural Attitudes**

There is a second standpoint from the literature on demand-side arguments, explanations that highlight sociocultural grievances have emerged as an alternative (and more recently, complementary) explanation to economic grievances (Berman, 2021). Instead of focusing on economic factors, these explanations assert that social and cultural changes in recent decades such as increasing immigration, the erosion of traditional values, and the empowerment of minority groups and women have been the primary cause of populism (Murray, 2017). These scholars argue that these changes have challenged existing ethnic and gender hierarchies, triggering a backlash among certain groups, especially white men, who feel threatened by these shifts. Consequently, they tend to support right-wing populist leaders who promise to safeguard their interests (Obradović et al., 2020).

Sociocultural grievances have gained popularity among scholars of American politics and sociology, as well as those studying the advanced industrial world (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

The "cultural backlash" hypothesis is an example of it and proposes that individuals who believe their primary values are exposed may tend to support populist movements (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). This could affect those people whose traditional

customs might be at risk due to immigration or social transformations such as allowing same-sex marriage, leading to seeking support and refuge on the tradition-heavy populist messages. This has been evident in the rise of anti-immigrant parties like the National Front in France and the Freedom Party in Austria, which have gained support from individuals who feel that their cultural values are under threat (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Moreover, the role of media and communication technologies in the rise of populism has also been a topic of research. A recent study by Ernst et al. (2019) found that the use of social media and other digital platforms has allowed populist parties to bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly communicate with their supporters, helping to amplify their message and mobilize their base.

Similarly to the economic-heavy approaches, the claims over the impact of this “Cultural backlash” are contested in subsequent research due to its little empirical support as a standalone factor (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Schäfer, 2022). As we mentioned on the previous section, economic grievances have been directly interlinked with increase in more negative attitudes towards the political system, higher anti-immigration attitudes and higher authoritarian values (Guiso et al., 2017, 2020).

### 2.2.1 Anti-Immigration Attitudes & Populism

The prevalence of anti-immigration attitudes has emerged as a significant sociocultural factor in shaping the success of populist movements (Algan et al., 2017; Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). These attitudes reflect the concerns and fears surrounding immigration, encompassing perceptions of immigrants as economic and symbolic threats to the host society (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). From an economic perspective, anti-immigration attitudes are often driven by fears of wage pressure,

job competition, and potential strains on welfare systems (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022).

Populist leaders capitalize on these economic anxieties by framing immigration as a burden on the national economy, appealing to the grievances of individuals who perceive their economic well-being to be at risk (Gidron & Mijs, 2019; Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022; Oesch, 2008).

In addition to economic concerns, cultural impacts play a crucial role in shaping anti-immigration attitudes and their connection to populism (Algan et al., 2017; Oesch, 2008).

Cultural anxieties related to immigration revolve around fears of the erosion of national traditions, cultural values, and social cohesion (Berman, 2021). Populist parties often exploit these cultural fears by emphasizing the perceived threat to national identity and cultural homogeneity, presenting themselves as defenders of national heritage (Berman, 2021; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). Such appeals resonate with individuals who perceive immigration as a challenge to their cultural norms and sense of belonging, leading to heightened support for populist parties that promise to protect their cultural heritage (Algan et al., 2017; Berman, 2021; Gidron & Hall, 2017).

Understanding the distinct dimensions of the economic and cultural impact of immigration is crucial in comprehending the multifaceted nature of anti-immigration attitudes and their relevance to populist voting behaviour. The economic impact of immigration sheds light on concerns about labour market effects, wage dynamics, and the distribution of economic resources within society (Benczes & Szabó, 2022; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). On the other hand, the cultural impact highlights the significance of identity politics, cultural backlash, and the preservation of national values (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). These dimensions operate independently but can also interact, as economic anxieties can be intertwined with cultural fears, leading to complex attitudes and behaviours among

individuals (Berman, 2021; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Schäfer, 2022). By examining the interplay between these dimensions, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of how anti-immigration attitudes shape the electoral success of populist parties.

### **2.3 A Social Psychology Perspective**

While traditional political and economic frameworks offer valuable insights into the drivers of populism, social psychological frameworks can provide a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. Research has shown that people's attitudes and behaviours are shaped not only by their objective economic or political circumstances but also by their subjective perceptions of these conditions (Obradović et al., 2020; Pellegrini et al., 2022; Spruyt et al., 2016). Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), for example, posits that people's sense of self-worth is closely tied to the groups they belong to, and that threats to their group identity can lead to feelings of anxiety and insecurity. These feelings can be exploited by populist leaders, who often frame their political agenda in terms of defending the interests of "the people" against "the elites" or "the others" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In this section, we will explore the various social psychological frameworks that can shed light on the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the success of populism.

#### **2.3.1 Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory provides a useful framework for understanding the psychological underpinnings of the cultural backlash and the rise of populist discourses and rhetoric. There is extensive research about the deep roots that anti-elitist and exclusionist social identities have in the general public, and how the exclusionary discourses of right wing populist parties resonates deeply with them (Bos et al., 2020; Murray, 2017; Schulz et al., 2020). More recently, we have seen even development of social identities that confront the scientific

community and the health and safety guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, usually backed and supported by these populist movements (Magnus, 2022).

As discussed in the previous sections, economic factors and cultural changes have led to a sense of insecurity and anxiety among certain groups of the population (Berman, 2021).

Social identity theory provides an excellent lens to assess how these factors interact with group identity, perceived threats, and intergroup relations to shape individuals' attitudes and behaviours (Tajfel, 1982).

In the context of the cultural backlash, social identity theory posits that individuals form their sense of identity based on both personal and social aspects of themselves (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Personal identity refers to the unique characteristics and attributes that define an individual, while social identity encompasses the group memberships individuals associate themselves with, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. Through the categorization of people into different social groups, boundaries are created between groups, reinforcing the idea of belongingness to a particular group. Additionally, individuals tend to display in-group favouritism and exhibit prejudice towards out-groups as a means of enhancing their own self-esteem and social status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Cultural backlash can be understood as a response to the changes in values and norms that have occurred in the Western world since the 1960s (Norris & Inglehart, 2018). These changes have challenged traditional gender roles, religious beliefs, and national identities, and have created a sense of cultural insecurity among some segments of the population (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). According to social identity theory, this sense of insecurity can lead individuals to seek refuge in their group identity and to view cultural changes as a threat to their group's values and way of life (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This phenomenon can lead to the polarization of society and the rise of identity-based conflicts.

### 2.3.2 Social Dominance Orientation

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) theory, which focuses on the psychological tendency to support hierarchy and domination of certain groups over others, provides a complementary framework to social identity theory for understanding the rise of populist movements.

Research has shown that individuals with higher SDO scores are more likely to support right-wing authoritarianism and populist parties (Pratto et al., 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). SDO theory posits that individuals' beliefs about group-based dominance are influenced by socialization processes, including parental socialization, education, and media exposure (Pratto et al., 1994).

In the context of the cultural backlash and the rise of populist movements, social identity theory and SDO theory can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Social identity theory focuses on the psychological processes that shape individuals' group identity, while SDO theory focuses on the psychological tendency to support hierarchy and dominance of certain groups over others. In other words, social identity theory explains why individuals identify with certain groups and show ingroup favouritism, while SDO theory explains why individuals may be motivated to support the dominance of their group over other groups.

Moreover, SDO theory and social identity theory can interact in complex ways. For example, individuals with high SDO scores may be more likely to view their group as superior to other groups, leading to more extreme forms of ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation (Ho et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 2006). This, in turn, may lead to more polarization and identity-based conflicts, which can reinforce individuals' sense of group identity and SDO beliefs (Pratto et al., 2006). Thus, understanding the interplay between social identity theory and SDO theory can provide a more nuanced understanding of the psychological underpinnings of populist movements.

### 2.3.3 Integrated Threat Theory

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) is another useful framework that can be applied to understanding the underlying motives for voting for a far-right wing populist party. This theory suggests that when groups perceive threats to their well-being, they tend to respond with prejudice and discrimination towards the out-group (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). ITT proposes four types of threats that can be perceived by individuals or groups: realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes.

Realistic threats refer to material and economic threats, such as competition for resources or jobs. Symbolic threats, on the other hand, relate to threats to the group's values, beliefs, and culture. Intergroup anxiety refers to the discomfort and fear individuals feel when interacting with members of another group. Negative stereotypes involve the negative beliefs and attitudes held by one group towards another group (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

Research has shown that these types of threats can interact and reinforce each other, leading to heightened prejudice and discrimination towards the out-group (Croucher et al., 2013). For example, economic insecurity caused by globalization and competition can lead individuals to perceive immigrants as a threat to their job security and economic stability. In turn, the perception of immigrants as a threat to the group's values and culture can intensify intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes towards the out-group (Pellegrini et al., 2022).

By applying ITT to the study of far-right wing populism, we can understand how the combination of economic insecurity and sociocultural grievances can lead individuals to perceive a range of threats and to seek refuge in their group identity. This can lead to the formation of strong ingroup-outgroup distinctions and the development of exclusionary and anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviours (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

## 2.4 Finland's Context

Finland, like many Western countries, has witnessed a rise in far-right wing populist parties in recent years. In this section, we will explore the Finnish context in more detail and examine how economic and sociocultural factors contribute to support for the Finns Party.

In Finland, the losers of globalization can be found in regions that have been affected by deindustrialization, particularly in rural areas (Tohmo, 2007). The deep financial crisis of the early 1990's and the rapid involvement into the globalized economy shortly after that provided a very fertile ground for the demand arguments we mentioned above.

### 2.4.1 The True Finns

The True Finns (Perussuomalaiset in Finnish, or PS by their acronym) is a Finnish political party originally formed in 1995. This right-wing party achieved its electoral breakthrough in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary election, when it won 19.1% of votes, unexpectedly becoming the third biggest party in the country. Furthermore, the party gained even more support after the European migrant crisis of 2015 and eventually joined the coalition government of Juha Sipilä. In their ideology lies an amalgamation of conservative principles together with nationalistic values and anti-immigration policies (Arter, 2010).

The basis of the party is focused on Finnish nationalism, traditional values, and distrust towards European politics. The True Finns have continuously pushed for a rigid approach to immigration laws insisting that it causes danger against Finland's customs and development (Kuisma, 2013).

As mentioned in the introduction, the ascent of the populist True Finns party continues to advance in Finland's political landscape. In the April 2023 parliamentary elections, the party gained seven new MPs and took 20% of the vote, solidifying their position as the third-largest

party in the Finnish Parliament with 46 seats out of 200. This result marks a significant increase from their previous success in the 2019 election, where they secured 17.5% of the vote and 39 seats (YLE News, 2023). The True Finns' rise reflects a larger trend of the growing popularity of right-wing populist parties in Europe, which have gained significant ground in recent years by tapping into issues such as immigration, national identity, and economic anxiety.

#### 2.4.2 Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Finland

The study of anti-immigration attitudes in Finland provides valuable insights into the various factors that shape public opinion on this topic. Research conducted in Finland has shed light on the relationship between individuals' knowledge, the importance they attach to the immigration issue, as well as the social and identity-related factors that influence their attitudes.

One study by Rapeli (2014) explored the role of knowledge and issue saliency in shaping immigration opinions. Surprisingly, the findings revealed that individuals who considered immigration to be unimportant displayed a positive connection between their knowledge about immigration and their opinion on the matter. In contrast, those who viewed immigration as important did not demonstrate a similar relationship between their knowledge and opinion. This finding challenges our intuitive expectations and suggests that low issue saliency, rather than high saliency, predicts greater knowledge about immigration. Understanding the distinct causes and effects of attitude importance and knowledge is crucial, as they motivate individuals differently in seeking information about the issue.

Another study by Lonnqvist et al. (2019) examined attitudes towards immigration before and after the 2015 parliamentary elections in Finland. The results highlighted the role of social

processes and identity concerns in shaping attitude change. Individuals who were disappointed by the election outcome and those who did not support the anti-immigration-oriented Finns Party showed increased support for migration. Furthermore, supporting rival political parties and expressing a dislike for the Finns Party independently predicted more favourable attitudes towards immigration. These findings indicate that individuals' attitudes can be influenced by their social categorization and self-identification, underscoring the importance of considering identity dynamics when studying attitude change.

In a study on deliberation and opinion change regarding immigration, Lindell et al. (2017) found that deliberative processes can lead to both opinion polarization and moderation. Surprisingly, both pathways can be seen as desirable outcomes. The study revealed that participants on both sides of the immigration debate had opportunities to learn and develop their understanding during deliberation, with levels of empathy relatively high. Group pressures had limited influence on their opinions, while the physical presence of immigrants in the discussion groups was associated with polarized attitudes in the anti-immigrant direction.

Taken together, these studies provide valuable insights into the complex nature of anti-immigration attitudes in Finland. They demonstrate that attitudes are influenced by a combination of factors, including knowledge, issue saliency, social processes, and identity concerns. To gain a comprehensive understanding of public opinion on immigration, it is essential to consider the interplay of these factors.

In conclusion, the theoretical background presented in this section offers valuable insights into the rise of populist movements, with a specific focus on the True Finns party in Finland. Through the lenses of social identity theory, integrated threat theory, and social dominance

orientation, we have explored the intricate interplay between economic and sociocultural factors, group identities, perceived threats, and intergroup relations.

These frameworks provide a foundation for understanding how individuals' attitudes and behaviours are shaped within the context of populist movements. By delving into these theoretical perspectives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics that contribute to the emergence and impact of such political phenomena.

### 3 The Present Research

Sociocultural and economic demand-based explanations for populism have different strengths and weaknesses when examined at different scales. On the micro level, individuals' views on sociocultural issues such as immigration policy and racial animus are strong predictors of right-wing populist voting (Berman, 2021; Gidron & Hall, 2017). However, on the macro level, there is little correlation between levels of racist or anti-immigrant sentiment and populist success (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Schäfer, 2022). These findings suggest that sociocultural attitudes or grievances alone are insufficient to explain the changing fortunes of right-wing populism.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of populism, scholars have attempted to combine economic and sociocultural explanations, explaining support for far-right populist parties using arguments from both frameworks (Berman, 2021; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Schäfer, 2022). The present research aims to further study that converging area and analyze the dynamics of resorting to populist parties through economic or cultural arguments.

This understanding of the underlying motivations for supporting far-right populist parties is crucial in developing effective strategies to address their rise. More specifically, the research aims to examine the relationship between Economic Insecurity, Anti-Immigration Attitudes, and voting for the True Finns party in Finland. By doing so, we hope to contribute to the larger conversation about the relationship between populist movements and social identity in the current political landscape.

### **3.1 Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are proposed to examine the potential relationships between Economic Insecurity, Anti-Immigration Attitudes, and voting for the True Finns (PS):

H1: higher levels of Economic Insecurity will be positively associated with the likelihood of voting for the True Finns (PS).

H2: Negative perceptions of the Economic Impact of Immigration will be positively associated with the likelihood of voting for the True Finns (PS).

H3: Negative perceptions of the Cultural Impact of Immigration will be positively associated with the likelihood of voting for the True Finns (PS).

H4: the association between the negative perceptions of the Economic Impact of Immigration and voting for the True Finns (PS) will be moderated by Economic Insecurity, such that the positive association will be stronger among individuals with higher levels of Economic Insecurity

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Data Collection**

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years since 2002. The survey is designed to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and values of citizens across Europe, with a focus on understanding the social and political issues that are important to Europeans. The survey is conducted in over 30 European countries and covers a wide range of topics such as political attitudes, trust in institutions, attitudes towards immigration, and social values.

ESS Round 10 (2020-2021) is the latest round of the European Social Survey. It includes data from 32 countries, which include all the countries from previous rounds and also includes new participants like Israel and North Macedonia. The survey was conducted between September 2020 and June 2021. In Finland, The response rate for this study was 41.1%. The sampling procedure employed was systematic random sampling using a probability approach. The sampling frame used was the population database, which is derived from the official Population Information System maintained by the Digital and Population Data Services Agency. The sampling design followed a single-stage equal probability systematic sample without clustering. Implicit stratification was conducted based on gender, municipality, and date of birth.

Data collection was carried out using face-to-face interviews conducted with the assistance of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) or computer-assisted mobile interviewing (CAMI). During the interviews, the interviewer read the questions to the respondents from the screen of a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. The answers were then entered directly into the same device. The administration of the interviews was managed using a specially

designed program or application (*ESS Round 10: European Social Survey Round 10 Data (2020)*., 2020).

The data collection was conducted by trained data collectors from Statistics Finland.

## 4.2 Variables

### 4.2.1 Demographic Controls

The **Age** variable was operationalized as the self-reported age of the participants. **Gender** was coded based on the self-reported gender of the participants. The binary variable took the value of 1 for male and 0 for female due to the limited options provided by the ESS.

**Education Years** were measured by asking participants to report the number of years of formal education they had completed. The **Left-Right Scale** measures a participant's political orientation on a left-right scale ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right). By including this variable as a demographic control, we can account for the potential impact of political ideology on attitudes towards economic insecurity and trust in institutions.

**National Attachment** measures a participant's attachment to their country on a scale from 0 (not at all attached) to 10 (very attached).

**Gender** was also included with the demographic controls. The current format of ESS variable for gender allows for categories of Male (1) and Female (2).

#### 4.2.2 Dependent Variable

In our study, we have defined a binary dependent variable, “**VotedPS**”, that measures whether an individual voted for the target political party, Perussuomalaiset, or not. To create this variable, we used a combination of responses from the ESS survey data. Specifically, we looked at the response to the question about which party the individual voted for in the most recent national election (prtvtefi). If the response to this question was 5, indicating that the individual voted for Perussuomalaiset, we assigned a value of 1 to our target variable.

Conversely, if the response was between 66 and 99, which indicates that the individual did not vote or did not disclose which party they voted for, we assigned a value of NaN (missing data) to our target variable. Finally, if the response indicated that the individual voted for any other political party, we assigned a value of 0 to our target variable. By creating this binary variable, we are able to examine the factors that contribute to voting behaviour and specifically, the factors that may be associated with support for Perussuomalaiset.

#### 4.2.3 Economic Insecurity Variables

Economic insecurity is a multifaceted concept that encompasses a range of economic challenges individuals and communities may face, such as unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and poverty (Billiet et al., 2014). Economic insecurity can also manifest in the form of income volatility, debt, lack of savings, and limited access to credit. These factors contribute to a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability about one's financial future, which can create stress and anxiety (Kopasker et al., 2018).

**Subjective Economic Insecurity** was extracted from the ESS item “*hincfel*”, which reflects the respondent’s feeling about its household income nowadays. Participants were asked to choose the description on the card that comes closest to how they feel about their household income nowadays. The options included living comfortably on present income, coping on

present income, difficult on present income, and very difficult on present income, with a higher value indicating a greater feeling of economic insecurity. Responses of refusal, don't know, and no answer were considered missing values.

In addition to the main predictor variable of economic insecurity, several other relevant variables will be introduced in the analysis.

The dichotomous variable **Welfare-Dependent** was created based on the main source of household income (ESS Code: *hincsrca*), identifying individuals whose households receive some form of social benefit as their primary income source. This categorization included student, unemployment, retirement and other welfare benefits. It is coded as welfare dependent (1) or not (0).

**Economy Satisfaction** uses the original values of the ESS item "*stfeco*." It assesses the respondent's satisfaction with the country's economy, with a more holistic approach than our main predictor, taking into account various factors beyond just household income. This variable is scaled from 0 to 10, with higher values indicating higher levels of satisfaction.

#### 4.2.4 Sociocultural Variables

In this study, we measure sociocultural variables using composites sourced from the Cultural Backlash framework. (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2018) These composites are constructed by combining relevant items from the European Social Survey (ESS) that measure attitudes towards immigration and politics, and authoritarian values.

In order to measure Anti-Immigration attitudes, we will use three separate items from the European Social Survey, which will be labelled **Economic Impact** ("Immigration is bad or good for the country's economy", *imbgeco*), **Cultural Impact** ("*Country's cultural life is undermined or enriched by immigrants*" (*imueclt*)) and **Overall Impact of Immigration**

("Immigrants make the country a worse or better place to live.", *imwbent*). These items have been previously used in research regarding Anti-Immigration Attitudes (Norris & Inglehart, 2018), but in the context of this research we have special interest on assessing the effects of the separate components of this sentiment. Each item is scored in a 0-10 scale, with more negative perceptions resulting in lower scores.

The **Authoritarian Values** variable measures attitudes towards authoritarian values in Finland. The construction follows the steps of the Inglehart and Norris models (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2018) It is derived from responses to five separate ESS items related to safety, rule of law, respect for authority, traditional values, and strong leadership. Responses to each question are scaled from 0 to 6, and then the values are summed and converted to a scale from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger authoritarian values. The Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.65 (95% CI [0.625, 0.68]), indicating a moderate level of internal consistency.

Additionally, trust-measuring variables were included, also following Inglehart and Norris research (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). Trust has been consistently mentioned as a key factor in the development of support for populist parties (Canovan, 1999; Ivanov, 2023). Although not in the main scope of the study, it was considered as a source of potential insights within the sociocultural variables, and is included in the models.

**Trust in International Institutions**, composed from two individual ESS items, "Trust in UN" and "Trust in European Parliament", were created by extracting values from two different items of the ESS survey, and then combined by taking the sum and converting the scale to a percentage score ranging from 0 to 100. The resulting variable is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 100 and higher scores indicate higher levels of trust in international institutions.

**Trust in National Institutions**, a set of variables from ESS that encompasses "Trust in Politicians", "Satisfaction With National Government", "Satisfaction With Democracy", "Trust in Parliament", and "Trust in Political Parties". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.90 ( $\alpha = 0.90$ , CI [0.89, 0.91]). The scores are combined by taking the sum and converting the scale to a percentage score ranging from 0 to 100. The resulting variable is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 100 and higher scores indicate higher levels of trust in national institutions. This is a more complete variable than the one used by Norris and Inglehart (2018), since later rounds of ESS have included more items on the topic.

Lastly, there was a decision to include an additional variable reflecting trust in the scientific community, which was a novelty variable for this round of the European Social Survey (Round 10). In a post-pandemic world, trust in science and scientists has become an increasingly relevant aspect, particularly in countries where populism is on the rise (Magnus, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role that science plays in society and has emphasized the need for evidence-based decision-making. Trust in scientists and their findings can influence the public's behavior and adherence to public health measures (Magnus, 2022). Therefore, understanding the level of trust in scientists is important for policymakers and public health officials, particularly in the context of a rise in populism where skepticism towards science and expertise has become more prevalent.

**Trust in Scientists** reports the values from the ESS survey item "*trstsci*", which asks participants to rate their trust in scientists. The resulting variable is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 10 and higher scores indicate higher levels of trust the scientific community.

By using composites of relevant items from the ESS, we are able to construct measures of sociocultural variables that have been widely used in previous research and are theoretically relevant to the study of populist attitudes and support.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the analyses, several steps were taken during the data cleaning and wrangling process. These steps included recoding variables to account for missing data, as well as the removal of any remaining missing values. The resulting sample size for the analysis was 1079 individuals, representing a reduction from the original sample size of 1577 individuals prior to data cleaning. All data cleaning, wrangling, and statistical analyses were conducted using the R coding software. A complete syntax of the code used in the analyses will be included in the appendixes, providing a transparent and replicable record of the data processing steps taken.

#### 4.3.1 Logistic Regression Modeling

To study the economic and cultural variables that may influence voting for Finland's populist party, Perussuomalaiset (PS), we constructed a series of logistic regression models. The models were built progressively, with each subsequent model incorporating additional predictors to assess their individual contributions to the explanation of voting behavior.

The initial model included only our demographic controls. Subsequently, we added the variables that captured subjective and objective aspects of economic insecurity, including our main predictor, Subjective Economic Insecurity. The third model incorporates the block of sociocultural variables, including the scales for Anti-Immigration Attitudes, Authoritarian Values and Trust in National Institutions.

Lastly, to address H4 specifically, a fourth model was constructed, that includes the specific interaction terms required for the analysis.

We estimated the coefficients of the logistic regression models using maximum likelihood estimation and assessed the goodness-of-fit of each model using pseudo R-squared statistics.

We also computed odds ratios to estimate the effects of each predictor variable on the likelihood of voting for the True Finns (PS).

By building these progressive models, we were able to systematically evaluate the relative contributions of different predictors to the explanation of voting behavior, and to identify the most important factors that influence the individual's decision to vote for the True Finns.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Results

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variable*

Variable	Yes	No	Total
VotedPS	129	945	1074

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable 'VotedPS' among participants in the last parliamentary elections for the True Finns party. The table provides an overview of the distribution of voting behaviour within the sample of 1077 individuals. Among the participants, 129 (12.01%) reported having voted for the True Finns, while the majority of 945 (87.98%) indicated not voting for the party. It must be noted that the collection of responses of ESS Round 10 is during 2020-2021, and the specific item for Finland asks about “the last parliamentary elections”. Therefore, it should be assumed that answers for this Round belong to the 2015 elections, where the True Finns received a 17.7% of votes, showing a similar distribution for our sample.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables*

Variable	Sample	
	M	SD
Age	55.00	17.62
Education Years	15.03	4.14
Left-Right Scale	5.72	2.35
National Attachment	8.83	1.30

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for demographic variables of the sample. The table presents mean and standard deviation (SD) of age, education years, left-right scale, and national attachment for male and female participants separately, as well as the sample as a

whole. The sample consisted of 533 male and 546 female participants, with a total sample size of 1079. The mean age of the participants was 55 years ( $SD = 17.62$ ), indicating a wide range of ages within the sample. The average education years reported by the participants were 15.03 ( $SD = 4.14$ ), suggesting a moderate level of educational attainment among the sample. Regarding political orientation, participants scored an average of 5.72 ( $SD = 2.35$ ) on the left-right scale, indicating a somewhat centrist tendency. Lastly, the national attachment scores had a mean of 8.83 ( $SD = 1.30$ ), suggesting a relatively high level of attachment to their nation

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics for Welfare Dependency*

	Welfare Dependent	
	N	%
Yes	423	39.2%
No	656	60.8%
Total	1079	100%

Table 3 displays the frequency and percentage of the "Welfare Dependent" variable in the sample of 1079 individuals. The variable was coded based on the respondents' reported main household income source. Specifically, if the respondent reported receiving any social benefit (e.g., unemployment benefits, social assistance) as their main household income source, they were categorized as welfare dependent. The results indicate that 39.2% of participants reported being welfare dependent, while the majority of participants (60.8%) reported not being welfare dependent.

**Table 4***Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables*

Variable	ESS Code	Scale	M	SD
Overall Impact Immigration	imwbent	0-10	6.02	2.01
Cultural Impact Immigration	imueclt	0-10	7.41	1.89
Economic Impact Immigration	imbgeco	0-10	6.42	2.15
Authoritarian Values Scale		0-100	47.39	14.24
Economy Satisfaction	stfeco	0-10	6.44	1.80
Subjective Economic Insecurity	hincfel	1-4	1.72	0.64
Trust In National Institutions		0-100	63.95	15.99
Trust in International Institutions		0-100	62.22	18.35
Trust In Scientists	trstsci	0-10	6.80	1.98

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for continuous variables in the sample. The variables are measured on different scales, ranging from 0-100 to 0-10. The mean and standard deviation of each variable are presented in the table. The Overall Impact Immigration variable had a mean of 6.02 (SD = 2.01), the Cultural Impact Immigration variable had a mean of 7.41 (SD = 1.89), and the Economic Impact Immigration variable had a mean of 6.42 (SD = 2.15). The Authoritarian Values Scale had a mean of 47.39 (SD = 14.24). Economy Satisfaction had a mean of 6.44 (SD = 1.80), and Subjective Economic Insecurity had a mean of 1.72 (SD = 0.64). Trust in National Institutions had a mean of 63.95 (SD = 15.99), while Trust in International Institutions had a mean of 62.22 (SD = 18.35).

## 5.2 Logistic Regression Models.

### 5.2.1 Model A: Demographic Controls

**Table 5**

*Logistic Regression Results for Model A*

Variable	Coeff	OR	t	p	95% CI
const	0.322	1.379	0.353	0.724	(-1.46, 2.11)
EducationYears	-0.136	0.873	-4.509	< 0.001	(-0.19, -0.08)
Age	-0.028	0.973	-4.509	< 0.001	(-0.04, -0.02)
LeftRightScale	0.186	1.204	3.982	< 0.001	(0.09, 0.28)
National_attachment	0.09	1.094	1.081	0.28	(-0.07, 0.25)
Gender	-0.564	0.569	-2.742	0.006	(-0.97, -0.16)

Table 5 shows the results of Model A. The results revealed significant associations between certain demographic predictors and the likelihood of voting for the True Finns. Education Years demonstrated a negative association ( $\beta = -0.136$ , odds ratio [OR] = 0.873,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that each one-unit decrease in Education Years was associated with a 12.7% decrease in the odds of voting for the True Finns. Similarly, Age showed a negative association ( $\beta = -0.028$ , OR = 0.973,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that with each one-unit increase in Age, the odds of voting for the True Finns decreased by 2.7%.

Left-Right Scale exhibited a positive association ( $\beta = 0.186$ , OR = 1.204,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that as individuals' Left-Right Scale scores increased by one unit (moving to the right), the odds of voting for the True Finns increased by 20.4%. However, National Attachment did not show a statistically significant association with voting for the True Finns ( $\beta = 0.09$ , OR = 1.094,  $p = 0.28$ ).

Gender, represented by 1 for male and 2 for female, demonstrated a significant negative association ( $\beta = -0.564$ , OR = 0.569,  $p = 0.006$ ). This indicates that being female (compared to male) was associated with 43.1% lower odds of voting for the True Finns.

A correlation analysis was also performed to check the interrelation of our continuous variables. The results can be found in Annex 1 in the format of a correlation heatmap.

### 5.2.2 Model B: Economic Predictors

**Table 6**

*Logistic Regression Results for Model B*

Variable	Coeff	OR	t	p	95% CI
const	0.711	2.036	0.685	0.494	(-1.32, 2.75)
EducationYears	-0.139	0.87	-4.309	< 0.001	(-0.20, -0.08)
Age	-0.015	0.985	-1.98	0.048	(-0.03, -0.00)
LeftRightScale	0.191	1.21	3.887	< 0.001	(0.09, 0.29)
National_attachment	0.136	1.146	1.595	0.111	(-0.03, 0.30)
Gender	-0.503	0.605	-2.34	0.019	(-0.92, -0.08)
EconomySatisfaction	-0.301	0.74	-5.696	< 0.001	(-0.40, -0.20)
SubjectiveEconomicInsecurity	0.304	1.355	1.821	0.069	(-0.02, 0.63)
WelfareDependent	-0.861	0.423	-3.04	0.002	(-1.42, -0.31)

Table 6 shows the results of Model B, which included our Economic predictor variables. The model revealed several significant predictors:

Education years significantly predicted voting for the True Finns party, with each additional year of education associated with a decrease in the odds of voting for the party ( $B = -0.139$ , OR = 0.87,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [-0.20, -0.08]). Age was also found to be a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in age was associated with a slight decrease in the odds

of voting for the True Finns party ( $B = -0.015$ ,  $OR = 0.985$ ,  $p = 0.048$ , 95% CI [-0.03, -0.00]).

Furthermore, respondents who scored higher on the left-right scale (reflecting more right-wing views) had increased odds of voting for the True Finns party ( $B = 0.191$ ,  $OR = 1.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.09, 0.29]).

Additionally, gender was found to be a significant predictor, with females having lower odds of voting for the True Finns party compared to males ( $B = -0.503$ ,  $OR = 0.605$ ,  $p = 0.019$ , 95% CI [-0.92, -0.08]).

Economic satisfaction was also significantly associated with voting behaviour, indicating that lower levels of economic satisfaction were related to decreased odds of voting for the True Finns party ( $B = -0.301$ ,  $OR = 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [-0.40, -0.20]). Finally, being welfare dependent was found to be a significant predictor, with welfare-dependent individuals having lower odds of voting for the True Finns party ( $B = -0.861$ ,  $OR = 0.423$ ,  $p = 0.002$ , 95% CI [-1.42, -0.31]).

The coefficient estimate for our main predictor, Subjective Economic Insecurity, was 0.304, indicating that higher levels of subjective economic insecurity were associated with an increase in the odds of voting for the outcome variable, voting for the True Finns party ( $OR = 1.355$ ). However, this effect was marginally non-significant ( $t = 1.821$ ,  $p = 0.069$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.63]).

## 5.2.3 Model C: Sociocultural Predictors

**Table 7***Logistic Regression Results for Model C*

Variable	Coeff	OR	t	p	95% CI
const	4.102	60.488	3.264	0.001	(1.64, 6.57)
EducationYears	-0.062	0.94	-1.935	0.053	(-0.12, 0.00)
Age	-0.025	0.975	-3.587	< 0.001	(-0.04, -0.01)
LeftRightScale	0.149	1.16	2.703	0.007	(0.04, 0.26)
National_attachment	0.064	1.067	0.656	0.512	(-0.13, 0.26)
Gender	-0.406	0.666	-1.705	0.088	(-0.87, 0.06)
Trust in International Institutions	0.001	1.001	0.166	0.868	(-0.02, 0.02)
Trust In National Institutions	-0.013	0.987	-0.839	0.402	(-0.04, 0.02)
TrustInScientists	-0.031	0.969	-0.282	0.778	(-0.25, 0.19)
Authoritarian Values	-0.007	0.993	-0.754	0.451	(-0.02, 0.01)
OverallImpactImmigration	-0.297	0.743	-3.494	< 0.001	(-0.46, -0.13)
EconomicImpactImmigration	-0.232	0.793	-3.169	0.002	(-0.38, -0.09)
CulturalImpactImmigration	-0.115	0.891	-1.654	0.098	(-0.25, 0.02)

Table 7 portrays the results of Model C, which includes our sociocultural predictors. The results revealed significant associations between several predictor variables and the likelihood of voting for the True Finns.

Firstly, education years emerged as a marginally non-significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.062$ , OR = 0.94,  $p = 0.053$ ), suggesting that each additional year of education is associated with a slight decrease in the odds of voting for the True Finns party.

Secondly, age was found to be a significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.025$ , OR = 0.975,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that increasing age is associated with a modest decrease in the odds of voting for the True Finns party.

Furthermore, individuals who scored higher on the left-right scale (reflecting more right-wing views) were more likely to vote for the True Finns party ( $\beta = 0.149$ , OR = 1.16,  $p = 0.007$ ).

This suggests that political orientation plays a role in shaping voting behaviour.

Other predictors, such as national attachment ( $\beta = 0.064$ , OR = 1.067,  $p = 0.512$ ), gender ( $\beta = -0.406$ , OR = 0.666,  $p = 0.088$ ), trust in international institutions ( $\beta = 0.001$ , OR = 1.001,  $p = 0.868$ ), trust in national institutions ( $\beta = -0.013$ , OR = 0.987,  $p = 0.402$ ), trust in scientists ( $\beta = -0.031$ , OR = 0.969,  $p = 0.778$ ), and authoritarian values ( $\beta = -0.007$ , OR = 0.993,  $p = 0.451$ ) did not reach statistical significance.

Moreover, attitudes toward immigration were found to be important predictors. Respondents who perceived a higher overall impact of immigration ( $\beta = -0.297$ , OR = 0.743,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as a higher economic impact of immigration ( $\beta = -0.232$ , OR = 0.793,  $p = 0.002$ ), were less likely to vote for the True Finns party. Similarly, cultural impact of immigration ( $\beta = -0.115$ , OR = 0.891,  $p = 0.098$ ) had a marginally non-significant negative association with voting for the True Finns.

## 5.2.4 Model D: Combined Model

**Table 8***Logistic Regression Results for Model D*

Variable	Coeff	OR	t	p	95% CI
const	3.534	34.257	2.566	0.010	(0.83, 6.23)
EducationYears	-0.073	0.929	-2.184	0.029	(-0.14, -0.01)
Age	-0.014	0.986	-1.695	0.090	(-0.03, 0.00)
LeftRightScale	0.149	1.161	2.657	0.008	(0.04, 0.26)
National_attachment	0.044	1.046	0.449	0.654	(-0.15, 0.24)
Gender	-0.350	0.705	-1.442	0.149	(-0.82, 0.13)
Trust in International Institutions	0.000	1.000	0.011	0.992	(-0.02, 0.02)
Trust In National Institutions	-0.009	0.991	-0.507	0.612	(-0.04, 0.02)
Authoritarian Values	-0.006	0.994	-0.692	0.489	(-0.02, 0.01)
OverallImpactImmigration	-0.296	0.744	-3.488	< 0.001	(-0.46, -0.13)
EconomicImpactImmigration	-0.217	0.805	-2.947	0.003	(-0.36, -0.07)
CulturalImpactImmigration	-0.133	0.876	-1.875	0.061	(-0.27, 0.01)
TrustInScientists	-0.049	0.952	-0.431	0.667	(-0.27, 0.17)
EconomySatisfaction	0.003	1.003	0.033	0.974	(-0.15, 0.16)
SubjectiveEconomicInsecurity	0.252	1.286	1.298	0.194	(-0.13, 0.63)
WelfareDependent	-0.830	0.436	-2.585	0.010	(-1.46, -0.20)

Results of Table 8 show the impact of all our predictors combined in Model D. Education years were found to be a significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.073$ , OR = 0.929,  $p = 0.029$ ), indicating that each additional year of education is associated with a slight decrease in the odds of voting for the True Finns.

Age was marginally non-significant ( $\beta = -0.014$ , OR = 0.986,  $p = 0.090$ ), suggesting that age may have a minor influence on voting behaviour.

Political orientation, as measured by the left-right scale, emerged as a significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.149$ , OR = 1.161,  $p = 0.008$ ), suggesting that individuals with more right-wing views are more likely to vote for the True Finns party.

Regarding the sociocultural predictors, only the Anti-Immigration Attitudes variables were found to be important predictors. Respondents who perceived a more negative Overall Impact of Immigration ( $\beta = -0.296$ , OR = 0.744,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as a higher negative Economic Impact of Immigration ( $\beta = -0.217$ , OR = 0.805,  $p = 0.003$ ), were less likely to vote for the True Finns party. The Cultural Impact of Immigration had a marginally non-significant negative association with voting behaviour ( $\beta = -0.133$ , OR = 0.876,  $p = 0.061$ ).

From our economic predictors, only Welfare Dependency ( $\beta = -0.830$ , OR = 0.436,  $p = 0.010$ ) resulted a significant predictor, whereas Economy Satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.003$ , OR = 1.003,  $p = 0.974$ ) and our main predictor, Subjective Economic Insecurity ( $\beta = 0.252$ , OR = 1.286,  $p = 0.194$ ) did not demonstrate statistically significant associations with voting behaviour.

## 5.2.5 Model E: Interactions

**Table 9***Logistic Regression Results for Model E*

Variable	Coeff	OR	t	p	95%CI
const	2.315	10.126	1.266	0.205	(-1.27, 5.90)
EducationYears	-0.072	0.930	-2.116	0.034	(-0.14, -0.01)
Age	-0.014	0.986	-1.616	0.106	(-0.03, 0.00)
LeftRightScale	0.159	1.173	2.799	0.005	(0.05, 0.27)
National_attachment	0.037	1.038	0.374	0.709	(-0.16, 0.23)
Gender	-0.343	0.710	-1.415	0.157	(-0.82, 0.13)
Trust in International Institutions	-0.000	1.000	-0.015	0.988	(-0.02, 0.02)
Trust In National Institutions	-0.008	0.992	-0.472	0.637	(-0.04, 0.03)
Authoritarian Values	-0.006	0.994	-0.717	0.473	(-0.02, 0.01)
OverallImpactImmigration	-0.305	0.737	-3.573	< 0.001	(-0.47, -0.14)
EconomicImpactImmigration	-0.381	0.683	-2.169	0.030	(-0.73, -0.04)
CulturalImpactImmigration	0.182	1.200	0.897	0.369	(-0.22, 0.58)
TrustInScientists	-0.050	0.951	-0.443	0.658	(-0.27, 0.17)
EconomySatisfaction	-0.007	0.993	-0.092	0.927	(-0.17, 0.15)
SubjectiveEconomicInsecurity	0.906	2.474	1.363	0.173	(-0.40, 2.21)
WelfareDependent	-0.817	0.442	-2.531	0.011	(-1.45, -0.18)
Interaction_ECONINSEC_ECOIM	0.091	1.095	1.041	0.298	(-0.08, 0.26)
Interaction_ECONINSEC_CULTIM	-0.168	0.845	-1.639	0.101	(-0.37, 0.03)

Table 9 shows the results of our final Model, where we integrate all predictors and explore for the potential interaction effects suggested in our hypotheses. Surprisingly, the interaction between Subjective Economic Insecurity and Economic Impact of Immigration was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.091$ ,  $p = 0.298$ , 95% CI [-0.08, 0.26]). Similarly, the interaction between Subjective Economic Insecurity and Cultural Impact of Immigration was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.168$ ,  $p = 0.101$ , 95% CI [-0.37, 0.03]). These results suggest that the Subjective Economic Insecurity did not moderate the economic or cultural impact of immigration in voting for the True Finns.

Regarding the rest of predictors of our interaction model, individuals with more Education Years were less likely to vote for the True Finns ( $\beta = -0.072$ ,  $p = 0.034$ , 95% CI [-0.14, -0.01]). For every one unit increase in education years, the odds of voting for the True Finns decrease by approximately 7.0% (OR = 0.930).

Our predictor of ideological orientation, measured on a left-right scale, had a positive effect on voting for the True Finns ( $\beta = 0.159$ ,  $p = 0.005$ , 95% CI [0.05, 0.27]). Individuals who positioned themselves more towards the right on the political spectrum were more likely to vote for the True Finns. For every one unit increase in the Left-Right Scale the odds of voting for the True Finns increase by approximately 17.3% (OR = 1.173).

The perceived Overall Impact of Immigration had a negative influence on voting for the True Finns ( $\beta = -0.305$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , 95% CI [-0.47, -0.14]). Those who perceived a larger negative impact of immigration were more inclined to support the True Finns. More specifically, for every one unit decrease in the perceived overall impact of immigration (lower values meaning more negative attitude), the odds of voting for the True Finns increase by approximately 26.3% (OR = 0.737).

Similarly, Economic Impact of Immigration also had a negative effect on voting for the True Finns ( $\beta = -0.381$ ,  $p = 0.030$ , 95% CI [-0.73, -0.04]). Individuals who perceived a larger negative economic impact of immigration were more likely to support the True Finns, with every one unit decrease in the perceived economic impact of immigration increasing the odds of voting for the True Finns by approximately 31.7% (OR = 0.683).

Being welfare dependent had a negative influence on voting for the True Finns ( $\beta = -0.817$ ,  $p = 0.011$ , 95% CI [-1.45, -0.18]). Compared to non-welfare-dependent individuals, welfare-dependent individuals have approximately 55.8% lower odds of voting for the True Finns (OR = 0.442).

The complete logistic regression model revealed that the main predictor, subjective economic insecurity, did not exhibit statistical significance in predicting the outcome variable ( $\beta = 0.906$ , SE = 1.363,  $p > .05$ , 95% CI [-0.40, 2.21]). Furthermore, in the complete model with interactions, this predictor lost weight compared to previous models.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Main Results

The research question in this study aimed to examine the impact of various economic and sociocultural factors on individuals' decision to vote for the populist radical right-wing party in Finland, the True Finns (PS).

#### 6.1.1 H1: Economic Insecurity and Voting for the True Finns

Regarding our main predictor, in **Model B**, the coefficient estimates for **Subjective Economic Insecurity** showed a **positive association** with voting for the True Finns.

However, this effect **was marginally non-significant** ( $p = 0.069$ ). Therefore, we cannot conclusively confirm or reject our first hypothesis, which states that higher levels of Economic Insecurity will be positively associated with the likelihood of voting for the True Finns.

In **Model D**, we expanded the analysis by incorporating both the economic and sociocultural predictors to examine their combined influence on voting for the True Finns party. Comparing the results with the previous models, **subjective economic insecurity was not a statistically significant predictor** with voting behavior in Model D, which is consistent with the findings of the Economic-only Model (Model B). Consequently, we do not find sufficient evidence to support our first hypothesis regarding the direct influence of these economic variables on voting for the True Finns party, when combining economic and sociocultural predictors.

Nevertheless, these non-significant findings open up opportunities for future research in this line of inquiry. It is possible that other economic factors or alternative measures of economic satisfaction and insecurity may yield different results. Exploring additional dimensions of economic perceptions and incorporating more nuanced measures of economic well-being

could potentially provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between economic factors and support for populist right-wing parties like the True Finns (Berman, 2021).

Moving onto the rest of economic predictor variables, the results of Model B indicated that lower levels of **economic satisfaction** were associated with decreased odds of voting for the True Finns. This finding suggests that individuals who are less satisfied with their country's economic situation are less likely to support the party. Additionally, being **welfare dependent** was found to be a **significant predictor**, with welfare-dependent individuals (i.e., those who have some form of social benefit as the main reported income in their households) having lower odds of voting for the True Finns. This implies that individuals relying on welfare programs are less likely to support the party compared to those who are not welfare dependent. These results are a great example of just how complex the relationships between economic perceptions and its effects on political attitudes can be. We see how the effect of economic struggle can affect differently if it is considered from an individual situation perspective, or regarding the broader economical context of the country. This complexity is widely mentioned in research addressing the impact of economic circumstances on voting attitudes (Berman, 2021; Billiet et al., 2014; Guiso et al., 2020; Margalit, 2019).

### 6.1.2 H2 & H3: Anti-Immigration Attitudes and Voting for the True Finns

**Model C** expanded upon the demographic predictors by incorporating sociocultural variables to investigate their impact on the likelihood of voting for the True Finns. The results revealed several **significant associations** between sociocultural predictors and support for the party, providing valuable insights into the role of sociocultural factors in influencing voting behavior.

In this model, **Anti-Immigration Attitudes** emerge as important factors influencing support for the True Finns. Respondents who perceived a more negative **overall impact of immigration** and **economic impact of immigration** were more likely to vote for the True Finns. This relates directly to our second hypothesis, which suggested that negative perceptions of the Economic Impact of Immigration would be positively associated with voting for the True Finns.

Additionally, the **cultural impact of immigration** exhibits a marginally non-significant negative association with voting behavior, indicating a potential but weaker influence of cultural concerns related to immigration on support for the True Finns. In further analysis, a set of separate models were built to check for the independent impact of each anti-immigration variable. Annex 2 contains the results in Table 10.

For our complete model (Model D), the variables related to **anti-immigration attitudes** remained important predictors when including all variables, as they were in Model C. Our second hypothesis, stating that negative perceptions of the **Economic Impact of Immigration** will be positively associated with the likelihood of voting for the True Finns (PS) is supported by the results. In Model D, respondents who perceived a more negative economic impact of immigration were found to be more likely to vote for the True Finns party. These results **support H2**, suggesting that negative perceptions of the economic impact of immigration are associated with an increased likelihood of supporting the True Finns.

Similarly, in Model D, the **cultural impact of immigration** had a marginally non-significant negative association with voting behavior in Model C.. Although **not statistically significant**, the direction of the association suggests a **potential trend supporting H3**, which focused on the association between negative perceptions of the Cultural Impact of Immigration and

voting for the True Finns. However, further investigation is needed to confirm this relationship.

Overall, Model D provides a more comprehensive understanding of the predictors of voting for the True Finns party. By incorporating both economic and sociocultural factors, we can better assess the combined influence of these variables. The results indicate that while education, political orientation, and anti-immigration attitudes are important factors, other demographic, economic, and sociocultural predictors may have limited impact on support for the party.

#### 6.1.3 H4: Moderation of Economic Insecurity in Anti-Immigration Attitudes

Lastly, looking at the results of Model E, which includes interaction terms. The interaction effects between Subjective Economic Insecurity and both the Economic Impact of Immigration and the Cultural Impact of Immigration were not statistically significant. This suggests that Subjective **Economic Insecurity did not moderate** the cultural and economic impact of immigration as predictors for voting for the True Finns and **rejects our fourth and final hypothesis**.

Similarly, these non-significant results should be interpreted as a need for more extensive, diverse methods of assessing the individuals' sense of economic deprivation to fully appreciate its impact in voting behaviour in future research.

#### 6.1.4 Demographic Predictors of Voting for the True Finns

The results also revealed intriguing associations between certain demographic variables and support for the True Finns, providing valuable insights into the role of demographics in voting

behavior. Model A sheds light on the influence of demographic factors and falls in line with previous findings of the demographics of populist vote. However, it is important to note that it focused solely on demographic predictors to examine their impact on the likelihood of voting for the True Finns, which does not provide a comprehensive understanding of voting behavior (Berman, 2021; Obradović et al., 2020).

The findings indicated that **Education Years** displayed a negative association with voting for the True Finns. In a similar fashion, **Age** exhibited a negative association, implying that as individuals' age increased, their odds of supporting the True Finns decreased. Younger individuals appeared to be more inclined to support the True Finns compared to older individuals, which has been a key aspect in the True Finns recent success (Arter, 2010; Herkman, 2017; Kovalá et al., 2022).

Additionally, the variable **Left-Right scale**, which measures individuals' political orientation on a scale, demonstrated a positive association. This suggests that individuals with a more right-leaning political orientation were more likely to support the True Finns, which is also a widely reported result when studying this political formation (Kovalá et al., 2022; Kuisma, 2013).

Interestingly, the level of attachment to the nation, as captured by **national attachment**, did not yield a statistically significant association with voting for the True Finns. This implies that Finns' sense of national attachment, as assessed in this study, may not strongly influence their likelihood of supporting the True Finns.

**Gender** also emerged as a significant predictor, with females having lower odds of voting for the True Finns compared to males. This gender difference suggests that men are more inclined to support the party than women, which is a widely concurred statement in populism research,

particularly on right-wing populism (Berman, 2021; Mudde, 2007; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015).

#### 6.1.5 Social Psychological Explanations

Overall, the findings from this study are consistent with previous research on social identity theory, which posits that individuals' social identity, such as their age, ideological placement, and attachment to their nation, plays a significant role in shaping their political behaviour (Bos et al., 2020; Schulz et al., 2020). Our results showed that education years and age were significant predictors in the initial models, but their effects were dimmed in subsequent models. As we discussed during the theoretical background, Anti-immigration attitudes can be examined through the lens of social identity theory, which offers valuable insights into how individuals form their sense of identity and belonging within social groups. In the context of immigration, people may perceive their national, cultural, or ethnic group as being under threat due to the presence of immigrants (Bos et al., 2020; Schulz et al., 2020; Tajfel, 1982). This perception can trigger an "us versus them" mentality, where individuals feel compelled to protect their group's interests. Negative stereotypes, prejudice, and discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants can arise from this sense of threatened social identity. By aligning themselves with their in-group, individuals may seek to safeguard their group's social, cultural, and economic resources, often resulting in opposition to immigration. These findings suggest that while these anti-immigration attitudes play a role in developing support for right-wing populism, other factors, such as sociocultural attitudes and economic constraints, are also influential.

Moreover, the Integrated Threat Theory suggests that individuals' perceptions of economic and sociocultural threats to their group status can lead to support for right-wing populism (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). While our study found that sociocultural factors, such as anti-

immigration attitudes and ideological placement, were significant predictors, our main predictor of subjective economic insecurity did not have a significant effect. This finding contradicts our initial hypotheses and suggests that economic insecurity may not be a crucial factor in predicting support for right-wing populism, or at least when studied isolated. However, other economic variables, such as overall satisfaction and being welfare dependent, did show significant results, indicating the importance of taking a more comprehensive approach to understand the relationship between economic insecurity and voting behaviour.

## **6.2 Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the valuable insights gained from our study, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, our sample size of 1074 participants, with only a fraction (12%) voting for the True Finns party, may limit the generalizability of our findings. Although not far from the actual percentage of voting results for the True Finns in the 2015 election, a larger and more representative sample would provide a more robust analysis of the predictors of right-wing populism.

Second, the lack of significant effects for subjective economic insecurity, despite its prominence in previous research on populist voting, raises questions about the specific measurement and operationalization used in our study (Guiso et al., 2020; Kopasker et al., 2018; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). Alternative measures of economic insecurity, such as job insecurity and income inequality, should be considered in future studies to capture the multidimensional nature of economic concerns and their impact on voting behaviour.

Furthermore, our study primarily focused on the economic and sociocultural predictors of support for the True Finns party, while there are other important factors that may contribute to the appeal of right-wing populism. Factors such as cultural values, personality traits, and

social networks should be explored in greater depth to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex drivers of right-wing populism.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that the relationship between cultural and economic factors in driving support for right-wing populism is complex and multidirectional. Our study mainly examined the impact of sociocultural factors on economic concerns, but further investigation is needed to explore the reciprocal relationship between cultural and economic influences on populist voting. Understanding the interplay between cultural perceptions and economic realities will provide a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying right-wing populism.

In conclusion, while our study contributes to the existing literature on the predictors of right-wing populism, it is crucial to recognize the limitations and areas for further research. Future studies should aim for larger and more diverse samples, employ alternative measures of economic insecurity, and explore the complex relationship between cultural and economic factors to enhance our understanding of the dynamics behind the rise of right-wing populism.

### 6.2.1 Conclusions

The results of the logistic regression models provide valuable insights into the factors influencing voting behaviour for the True Finns party in the last parliamentary elections. Consistent with our hypothesis, more negative perceptions of the economic impact of immigration were associated with an increased likelihood of supporting the True Finns. However, subjective economic insecurity and the cultural impact of immigration did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that their relationships with voting behaviour may be more complex or require alternative measures (Margalit, 2019). Nevertheless, other factors regarding the individual's economic stability did result significant, such as their welfare

dependency. This should come as no surprise since the stance of the True Finns party on Finland's welfare system has been consistently harsh. The formation has advocated for restricting the access to welfare, in order to limit its access to immigrants and refugees (Kuisma, 2013; Wahlbeck, 2016). These findings contribute to the existing literature on populism and its economic and sociocultural factors (Berman, 2021; Guiso et al., 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2018; Schäfer, 2022) but also highlight the need for further research to explore additional dimensions of economic perceptions and alternative measures of sociocultural factors. By investigating a broader range of variables and incorporating more nuanced measures, future studies can provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between these factors and support for populist right-wing parties like the True Finns.

The current understanding of populism should be cautious about subsuming cultural concerns solely within an economic framework, as it overlooks the independent influence of cultural factors on support for populism (Margalit, 2019). It is important to recognize that cultural concerns can shape individuals' economic beliefs and perceptions, rather than solely being a reaction to economic factors. Future research should further explore the interplay between cultural and economic factors of Immigration to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of populist support.

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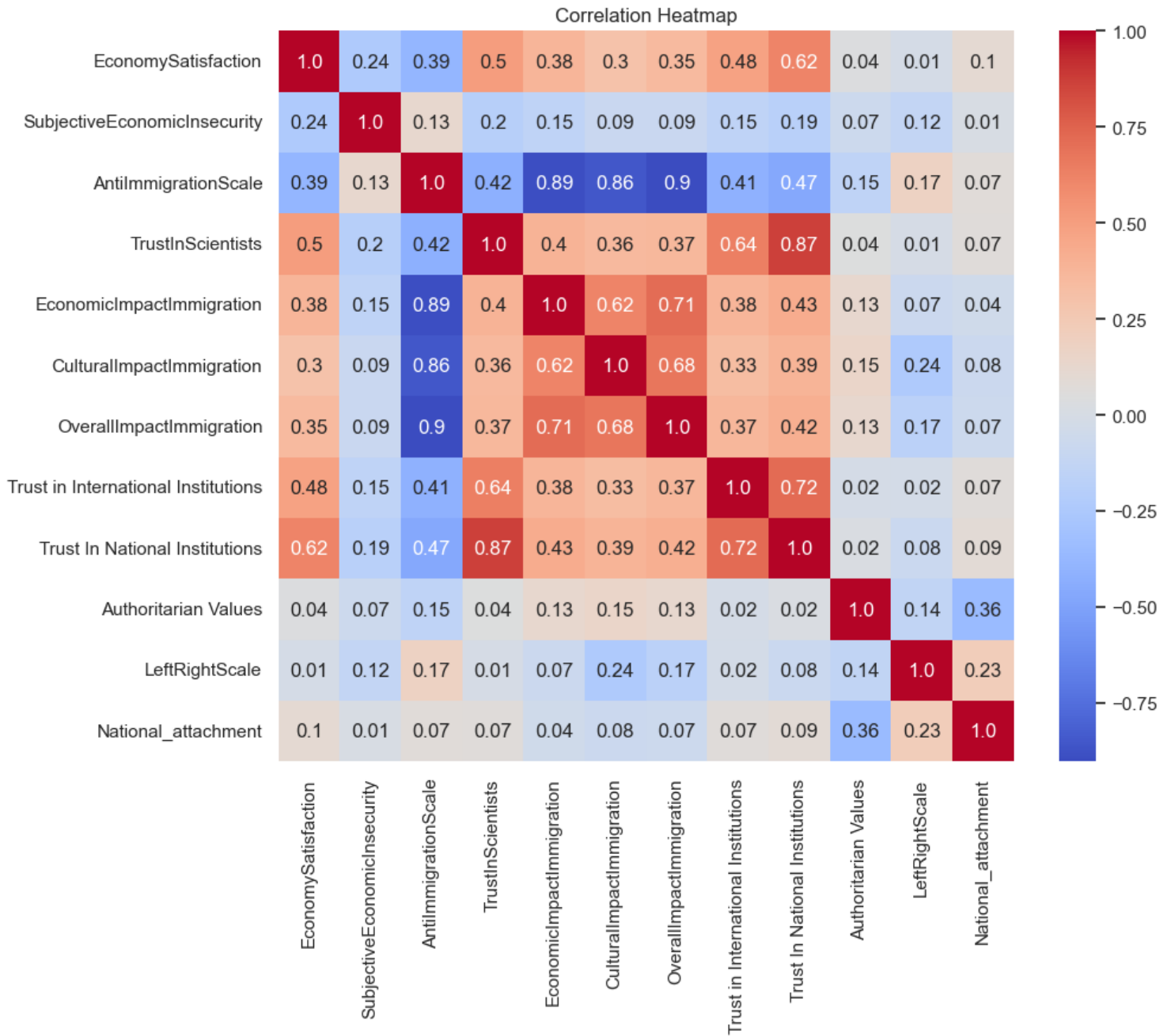
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Correlations Heatmap for Continuous Variables



## Appendix 2: Alternatives to Model C

Table 10: Model Comparison for Anti-Immigration Attitudes

Model	Variable	Coeff	OR	t	p	95% CI
	OverallImpactImmigration	-0.297	0.743	-3.494	<0.001	(-0.46, -0.13)
Model C	EconomicImpactImmigration	-0.232	0.793	-3.169	0.002	(-0.38, -0.09)
	CulturalImpactImmigration	-0.115	0.891	-1.654	0.098	(-0.25, 0.02)
Model C1	OverallImpactImmigration	-0.528	0.590	-8.437	<0.001	(-0.65, -0.40)
Model C2	EconomicImpactImmigration	-0.457	0.633	-8.248	<0.001	(-0.57, -0.35)
Model C3	CulturalImpactImmigration	-0.389	0.678	-6.895	<0.001	(-0.50, -0.28)

When grouped together, all three variables show statistically significant effects on the likelihood of voting for "VotedPS." When examined independently, each variable still shows a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of voting for "VotedPS." However, the coefficients indicate that the impact of each variable may be slightly stronger when considered individually.

Overall, these comparisons indicate that the variables have consistent effects on the likelihood of voting for True Finns when examined either together or independently. However, the individual models provide more specific insights into the independent impact of each immigration attitude variable, with the overall and economic impacts having a stronger influence on the likelihood of voting for the True Finns, compared to the cultural impact.