

Contesting Democracy: Far-Right Protests and Public Satisfaction with Democratic Institutions

Xavier Romero Vidal¹ Caterina Froio² Pietro Castelli
Gattinara³ Andrew Klassen⁴

¹Universidad Carlos III Madrid

²Sciences Po

³Université libre de Bruxelles

⁴HUMAN Surveys

REXKLIMA Workshop - Dresden, 1-2 October 2025

Motivation

Far-right protests (FRPs) on the rise but we know little about their consequences for democratic support.



State of the Art

Political parties

- Elite politics (elections, party competition, policy-making).

(Mudde, 2016; Rooduijn, 2019)

Social movements

- Protest consequences (elections, opinion, policy, activists).
- Mostly progressive.

(Bosi & Uba, 2009; Polletta & Amenta, 2025)

Gap

- Far-right protests, recent (when, who).

(Castelli Gattinara, Froio, & Pirro, 2022)

→ Consequences on democratic attitudes?

This article: Far-right protests → satisfaction with democracy

Theory: Protest as a Signal of the State of Democracy

Reactions depend on (Muñoz & Anduiza, 2019):

- Political orientation
- Protest tactics

	Nonviolent	Violent
Left	Backlash (-): blame institutions	Rally (+): defend democracy
Right	Inclusion (+): legitimate corrective	Disillusionment (-): breakdown of order

Table 1: Effects of Far-Right Protests on Satisfaction with Democracy

Research Design

Natural Experiment: Unexpected Event During Survey (UEDS)

- **Goal:** Estimate causal effect of far-right protests on satisfaction with democracy (SWD)
- **Design:** Compare survey responses before vs. after 18 far-right events (12 protests, 6 violent attacks)
- **Data:**
 - *HUMAN Surveys* – 22,000+ respondents across 9 European countries
 - *FARPE farpo.eu* – Far-right protest events (2008–2018)
 - *RTV* – Right-wing violent attacks
- **Dependent Variable:** Satisfaction with democracy (binary: satisfied = 1, dissatisfied = 0)
- **Independent Variables:**
 - *Treatment*: Exposure to protest (0 = before, 1 = after)
 - *Ideology*: Left-right scale (0–100)
- **Controls:** Gender, age, education; fixed effects by country-survey

Findings |

FRPs, overall, have no significant effect on SWD.

Table The Effect of Far-Right Protest Mobilisation on Satisfaction with Democracy

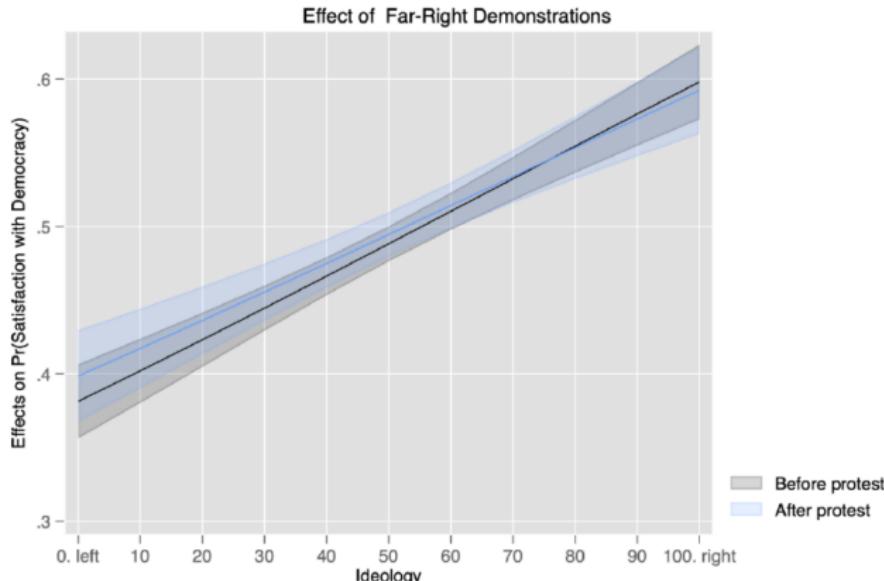
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Baseline	Interaction	Far-right demonstration	Far-right violent attacks
Treatment	1.01 (0.04)	1.12 (0.08)	.00 (0.04)	1.01 (0.04)
Ideology	1.01*** (0.00)	1.01*** (0.00)	1.01*** (0.00)	1.01*** (0.00)
Treatment*Ideology		1.00 (1.00)	1.00 (0.00)	0.99*** (0.00)
Age	0.98 (0.02)	0.98 (0.02)	0.98 (0.02)	0.97 (0.02)
Female	0.94* (0.03)	0.94* (0.03)	0.94* (0.03)	0.94* (0.03)
Education	1.25*** (0.04)	1.25*** (0.04)	1.25*** (0.04)	1.26*** (0.04)
Constant	0.21 (0.04)	0.20 (0.01)	0.22 (0.01)	0.20 (0.05)
Observations	18,088	18,088	9,245	8,843
Country-survey FE	YES	YES	YES	YES

Odds ratios. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Findings II

Peaceful FRPs have no significant impact on SWD across ideological lines.

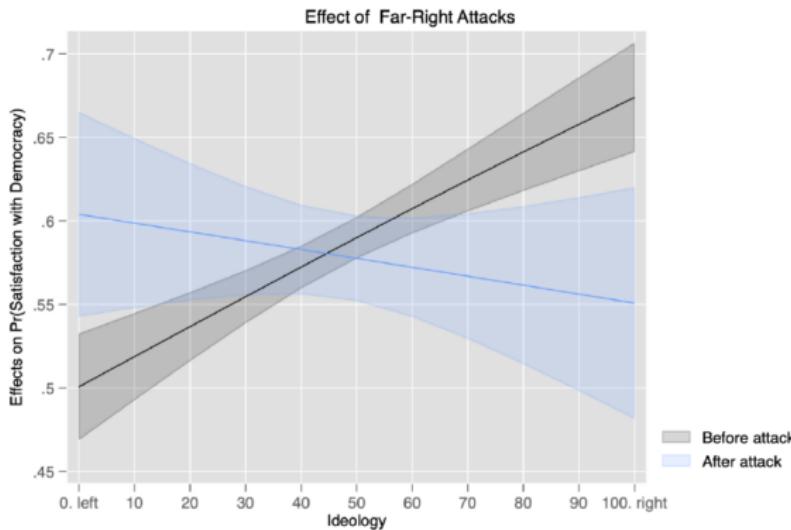
Figure 1. Effect of Far-right demonstrations on SWD across the ideological orientations



Findings III

Violent FRPs trigger divergent reactions along ideological lines.

Figure 2. Effect of Far-right violent attacks on SWD across the ideological orientations



- ↓ SWD among the right: **disillusionment**
- ↑ SWD among the left: **rally effect**

Conclusions

- Far-right protests do **not significantly affect** overall satisfaction with democracy.
- Far-right violence has **ideologically asymmetric effects**:
 - **Right-leaning**: ↓ SWD (perceived threat)
 - **Left-leaning**: ↑ SWD (rally effect around democratic norms)
- These opposing shifts lead to a **narrowing of ideological gaps** in democratic satisfaction.
- **Paradoxically, violent events may foster alignment** in how democracy is evaluated across ideological lines.
- BUT: is left/right enough to capture acceptance/opposition to far-right protests? Authoritarian attitudes?

Thank you for your attention!

Literature I

Bosi, L., & Uba, K. (2009). Introduction: The outcomes of social movements. *Mobilization*, 14(4), 409–415.

Castelli Gattinara, P., Froio, C., & Pirro, A. L. (2022). Far-right protest mobilisation in europe: Grievances, opportunities and resources. *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(4), 1019–1041.

Mudde, C. (2016). *The populist radical right*. Routledge.

Muñoz, J., & Anduiza, E. (2019). 'if a fight starts, watch the crowd': The effect of violence on popular support for social movements. *Journal of Peace Research*, 56(4), 485–498.

Polletta, F., & Amenta, E. (2025). *Changing minds: Social movements' cultural impacts*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Ravndal, J. A. (2018). Explaining right-wing terrorism and violence in western europe: Grievances, opportunities and polarisation. *European Journal of Political Research*, 57(4), 845–866.

Rooduijn, M. (2019). State of the field: How to study populism and adjacent topics? a plea for both more and less focus. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58(1), 362–372.

APPENDIX

Research design and data (I)

Leveraging exogenous events to identify treatment effects

- **Unexpected Event During Survey (UEDS) Design**
- Allows estimation of the causal effect of FRP on satisfaction with democracy (Muñoz & Anduiza, 2019).
- Pooled analysis of **18 events**: 12 far-right demonstrations and 6 violent attacks.

Treatment assignment

- Respondents interviewed **before** a protest = Control Group (0).
- Respondents interviewed **after** a protest = Treated Group (1).

Key assumptions

- Each protest event is the *only significant event* during survey fieldwork.
- No systematic sociodemographic differences between before and after groups (validated via t-tests).

Advantages of UEDS approach

- Strengthens causal inference by isolating protest as main difference between groups.
- Captures short-term effects better than traditional time-series data.

Research design and Data (II)

Data sources

- **Human Understanding Measured Across National Surveys Project:** Combines nationally representative survey data from 80 sources and 21 million respondents from 185 countries.
- **Far-Right Protest in Europe (FARPE) Project** (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2022): 3,915 events from 11 European countries between 2008 and 2018.
- **Right-wing Terrorism and Violence Database** (Ravndal, 2018): 578 right-wing attacks in Western Europe from 1990 to 2021.



Combined dataset scope

- Surveys overlapping with 18 specific events.
- Subsamples of at least 100 respondents.
- Dataset spans 2003–2019, covering 22,416 respondents from 9 European countries.

Research design and data (III)

Dependent variable: Satisfaction with democracy

- Binary coding: **1 = Satisfied, 0 = Dissatisfied**
- Midpoint responses omitted if scale lacks clear definitions
- Data sources: *European Social Survey, Eurobarometer, Pew Global Attitudes, and others*

Independent and moderating variables

- **Key Independent Variable (Treatment):** Indicates whether the survey response occurred *before or after a far-right protest*
- **Moderating variable (Ideology):** Harmonized left-right scale (0–100) to ensure cross-national comparability

Control variables and modeling

- Gender (binary), Age Groups (< 30, 30–50, > 50), Education (Tertiary = 1, Lower = 0)
- Robustness check includes income
- **Model:** Logistic regression with fixed effects for country-survey

The Project(s) : open data

FARPO

ABOUT

DATA

PUBLICATIONS AND NEWS

Far-Right Protest Observatory

A one-stop source to track, measure and compare ongoing trends in far-right protest mobilization in Europe

[Read more](#)

Protest distribution and tactics in Europe (2008-2021)

