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ORIGINAL PAPER

Downward Class Mobility and Far-Right Party Support in Western Europe

Alexi Gugushvili[1] · **Daphne Halikiopoulou**[2] · **Tim Vlandas**[3]

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Abstract

This article contributes to debates about the importance of class in far-right voting behavior by focusing on intergenerational class mobility. Using data from the European Social Survey (ESS), we employ Diagonal Reference Models (DRMs) to examine whether and how actual downward class mobility is linked to far-right party voting. First, drawing on a framework that focuses on discontent, loss, and blame, we explore four types of mechanisms that may mediate this relationship: life satisfaction (discontent), income insecurity (loss), distrust of elites (internal blame attribution) and anti-immigration attitudes (external blame attribution). Our results show that individuals from salariat origins and working-class destination are more likely to vote for the far-right. However, the relationship between downward class mobility is only mediated by life satisfaction and income insecurity, suggesting that the class route to far-right voting is largely linked to existential and material issues. Second, we explore whether these individual-level variables, as well as overall national-level mobility, moderate the effect of downward mobility. We find that while mobility effects do not vary depending on these individual traits, overall national-level mobility does moderate the effect of downward mobility, suggesting that context matters for individual-level associations between class mobility and far-right voting. Third, we assess the extent to which downward class mobility is important for far-right party success by examining the share of downwardly mobile individuals within the far-right electorate. We find that while downwardly mobile individuals are likely far-right supporters, they constitute a small percentage of the far-right electorate. Overall, our findings show that downward class mobility significantly affects far-right voting but only under specific conditions.

Keywords Far-right Parties · Downward Class Mobility · Europe · Attitudes · European Social Survey (ESS) · Diagonal Reference Models (DRMs)

All authors contributed equally to this work.

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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Introduction

Class features prominently in the literature on political attitudes. Since Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) classic analysis of the social bases of voting behavior, a large body of literature has examined the extent to which patterns of voter-party alignments may be attributed to socio-demographic group memberships (Lipset 1992; Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). While the premise that class shapes voting behavior has been widely questioned, and in some instances empirically refuted (e.g. Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza 2006), it remains an extensively researched topic, with certain social classes often linked to support for particular political parties.

Studies on far-right voting behavior often focus on the common features of the typical far-right voter, who is likely to be a lowly educated, male individual with poor prospects in the labor market (Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2022). Manual workers in Western democracies, seen as the "losers of modernization" (Swank and Betz 2003), are expected to be more likely far-right party supporters because they experience stronger labor market insecurity and higher levels of competition with immigrants (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012). While scholars agree that there are strong theoretical reasons to expect a range of objective and subjective factors to drive individuals from certain social classes to support the far-right, empirical studies, however, report significant variations across countries and across time (see Bolet 2023; Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2022). The far-right's electoral support base appears to be particularly diverse, with parts of the working class highly supportive of far-right parties in some cases (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012), and lower middle class individuals supporting the far-right in others (e.g. Kurer 2020).

Literature that attempts to explain why middle class voters sometimes support far-right parties focuses mainly on relative subjective decline (Bolet 2023; Kurer 2020). These works suggest that far-right party support is less the outcome of actual economic hardship and more the result of perceived decline and relative deprivation. While such explanations shed light on the ways in which perceptions of decline might augment the far-right, we still lack a comprehensive explanation that takes into account the objective mechanisms of class decline, or in other words, the ways in which actual intergenerational class mobility, specifically in the downward direction, may explain why certain individuals opt for far-right parties.

This article theorizes and empirically tests the effects of actual intergenerational class mobility on far-right party support. Our analytical starting point is that mixed results about the role of socio-economic status and social class in explaining far-right voting behavior may be partly driven by insufficient attention to the important role of changing class positions over time. It is indeed possible that changing class patterns (Oesch and Vigna 2021) matter more than one's current class position, as the effects of the latter on far right party support may depend on whether the individual had parents in higher, the same, or lower classes. To address this gap, we examine the ways in which the relationship between downward class mobility and far-right party support can be affected both through mediation and moderation.

First, we derive several hypotheses about how downward class mobility might be linked to far-right voting by drawing on a framework that focuses on discontent, loss, and blame: individuals in classes lower than those of their parents are likely to expe-

rience discontent with their standard of living, face material losses and blame domestic elites and outsider groups for this decline. Specifically, to test these mechanisms, we explore four types of attitudes that may *mediate* the relationship between downward class mobility and far-right party support: life satisfaction (discontent), income insecurity (loss), distrust of elites (internal blame attribution), and anti-immigration attitudes (external blame attribution). Second, we derive a set of hypotheses about whether these individual-level variables, as well as overall national-level mobility, moderate the effect of downward mobility. We expect the effects on far-right voting to be particularly strong among individuals who already hold some of these attitudes, especially in contexts where other individuals in society have not experienced similar declining trajectories. Third, we assess the extent to which downward class mobility is important for far-right party success by examining the share of downwardly mobile individuals within the far-right electorate.

We test our hypotheses about the potential link between actual intergenerational class mobility and far-right support using data from five waves of the European Social Survey (ESS). Specifically, using Diagonal Reference Models (DRMs), a specialized statistical approach prevalent in quantitative sociology literature, we test the proposition that class decline shapes the different forms of discontent feeding far-right party support empirically. This method has been used to explore the extent and consequences of class mobility, not least for attitudes, but to the best of our knowledge, without explicitly considering implications for far-right voting behavior.

Our findings show that downward class mobility matters for far-right party support: individuals who experience social decline, particularly those falling from the salariat to the working class, are more likely to vote for the far-right. Indeed, working class voters whose parents come from the most advantaged social class experience both objective (i.e., material) decline and disillusionment (i.e., a discrepancy between their reality and expectations) and are, as such, the most likely supporters of the far-right. In terms of the hypotheses concerning mediation, our results show that downward mobility only affects life satisfaction (discontent) and income insecurity (loss), whereas distrust in politicians (internal blame attribution) and anti-immigration attitudes (external blame attribution) are driven by position and upward mobility. Nonetheless, the effect of downward mobility on far-right voting remains when controlling for all considered mechanisms. In terms of the hypotheses concerning moderation, we find that overall national-level mobility moderates the effect of downward mobility, but mobility effects do not vary depending on individual economic insecurity, life dissatisfaction, distrust in politicians, and anti-immigration attitudes. Finally, our analysis of the extent to which downward class mobility is important for far-right party success suggests that the association between class decline and far-right party support does not necessarily drive the electoral success of these parties: while individuals from salariat origins and working-class destination are the most likely far-right supporters, these individuals constitute only a small percentage of the far-right electorate.

In sum, our findings suggest that downward class mobility significantly affects far-right voting but only under specific conditions. Our study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, we are among the first to illustrate how the distinction between current class position and class mobility matters for far-right party support by using

the DRM approach, a method particularly appropriate for estimating class mobility effects. Second, we provide a systematic comparative and cross-country account of how class mobility affects the far-right vote and some evidence about the mediating and moderating roles of different attitudes that have been shown to affect far-right support. Third, our findings add nuance to theories of class and voting behavior by illustrating that scholars should pay attention not only to current class position but also to class movement, and by taking into account the share of individuals that experience class decline within the far-right electorate.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we theorize our expectations with regards to mediation and moderation. Second, we present our data and method. Third, we describe our results. We conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of our argument and some avenues for future research.

Class and Far-Right Party Support

Class Position and the Perception of Socio-Economic Status

The claim that there is an association between class and the far-right vote is hardly new. A wealth of voting behavior literature documents a strong association between working-class individuals and far-right party support (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2022), showing that lowly educated, male individuals with poor prospects in the labor market are more likely to be far-right supporters (Swank and Betz 2018). Indeed, routine manual workers have increasingly endorsed far-right parties (Oesch and Rennwald 2018) suggesting that the core far-right electorate has undergone a process of "proletarianization" in many Western European countries including Austria, France, Denmark, and Norway, among others (Oesch 2008).

Theoretically, this can be explained by austerity and labor market insecurity (Baccini and Sattler 2024): individuals experiencing economic marginalization are more likely to vote for far-right parties because they worry about wage pressures and competition with immigrants for jobs and benefits. The lower social strata are often referred to as the "losers of modernization" (Swank and Betz 2003) who experience such pressures because of economic globalization and trade openness. Greater exposure to labor-market competition likely reinforces prejudices against immigrants, which therefore may have material economic foundations (Dancygier and Donnelly 2013; Stockemer et al. 2021). In sum, working class individuals are more likely to support parties with an interest in limiting immigration because of (perceived) labor market competition (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012). In turn, far-right parties have increasingly adopted welfare chauvinist policies to appeal to these voters (Enggist and Pinggera 2022).

However, the predictive power of socio-economic factors varies, and findings are often mixed. On the one hand, income, unemployment, and economic situation are often found to be weaker predictors of far-right party support than cultural factors (Bolet 2023; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012). On the other hand, far-right parties have also attracted support from other social groups, for example, the self-employed or

parts of the middle classes depending on the country and time period under consideration (Bolet 2023; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2016; Kurer 2020). In addition, labor market competition does not solely affect the lower social strata- indeed its impact often varies across countries, occupational sources, and skill level (Dancygier and Donnelly 2013).

Scholars have sought to explain this puzzling diversity of the far-right voter base by focusing on *perceptions* of status and socio-economic position. Recent studies argue that relative shifts in the social hierarchy (Kurer 2020) and perceived decline drive individuals from different class origins to support the far-right (Engler and Weisstanner 2021; Gest, Reny, and Mayer 2018; Gidron and Hall 2017). According to such approaches the threat of decline could matter more than actual decline (see Engler and Weisstanner, 2021; Im et al. 2023; Kurer 2020). While such studies shed light on the perceptions or threat of class decline, the role of actual intergenerational class mobility remains underexplored in the far-right voting behavior literature. Few notable exceptions focus on individual case studies (see Kurer and Van Staalduinen, 2022 for Germany; Mcneil and Haberstroh, 2023 for Brexit). We still lack, however, a systematic comparative account of the effect of actual intergenerational mobility on far-right voting across Western Europe. This is important because having a different social position than one's parents had can potentially have major effects on an individual's outlook on life and society and have significant consequences for voting preferences (Daenekindt, van der Waal, and de Koster 2018; Day and Fiske 2019; Gugushvili 2016a, b).

Theorizing the Role of Actual Class Decline and Mediation

Western European countries have experienced widespread changes in intergenerational class mobility (Bukodi et al. 2020). Following the so-called post-World War II 'golden era of social mobility' (Goldthorpe 2016) upward class mobility in absolute terms has been in decline, while downward class mobility has increased across Europe (Bukodi, Paskov, and Nolan 2020). These developments have had significant political consequences. Various forms of intergenerational social mobility have been linked to a wide range of outcomes, such as support for democracy (Gugushvili 2020), political participation (Fan and Yan 2019), voting behavior (Nieuwbeerta et al. 2000), anti-immigration attitudes (Paskov, Präg, and Richards 2021) and psychological well-being (Zelinska, Gugushvili, and Bulczak 2021).

Class decline, therefore, is important for our understanding of how people behave politically (Gest et al., 2018; Jackson and Grusky 2018; Lipset 1992). Unlike their stable class counterparts, mobile individuals are not only attached to two different social environments, their origins and destination classes, they also experience a change in position from one class to another. In this study, we theorize how the *experience* of downward mobility may have effects on far-right voting behavior, independently of an individual's class origin, which may shape which attitudes they have assimilated, or their class destination which determines the social environments in which they are socialized (cf. McNeil and Haberstroh 2023). Regardless of attachment to a particular class, the *experience* of class decline itself can be expected to affect far-right voting behavior via four main mechanisms, represented in Fig. 1: life

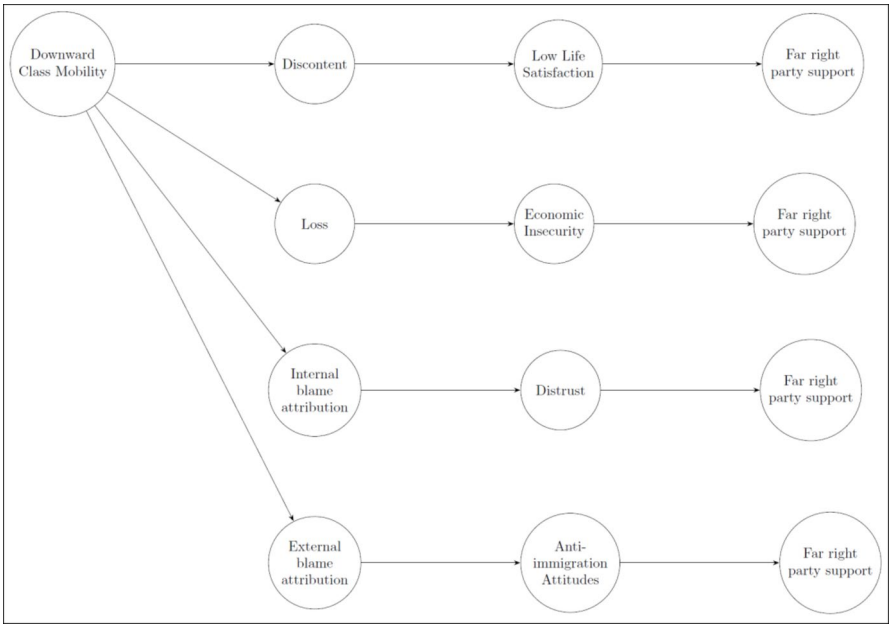

Fig. 1 The four mechanisms through which downward class mobility may lead to far-right voting. Source: Authors' Interpretation

satisfaction (discontent), income insecurity (loss), distrust of elites (internal blame attribution) and anti-immigration attitudes (external blame attribution).

First, downward class mobility generates discontent by reducing well-being and life satisfaction (Chan 2018; Kaiser and Trinh 2021). The experience of class decline can lead to a loss of social status, which is closely tied to an individual's identity and self-worth and can result in feelings of failure, inadequacy, and a diminished sense of self-esteem, all of which negatively impact well-being and life satisfaction. Downward mobility also often results in unfavorable social comparisons, where individuals compare themselves to their own past social status or to peers who have maintained or improved their status (Gugushvili 2021). This can lead to feelings of envy, resentment, and social stigma, further reducing life satisfaction. In addition, changes in social class can disrupt existing social networks and support systems. The loss of social connections and support from peers in the higher social class can leave individuals feeling isolated and unsupported, which adversely affects their emotional and psychological well-being. In sum, downward mobility often leads to a perceived loss of control over one's life circumstances. This lack of control and predictability can contribute to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, which are detrimental to overall well-being and life satisfaction (Newman 1999). In turn, dissatisfaction has been linked to political behavior in general (Esaiasson, Dahlberg, and Kokkonen 2020) and also far-right party support in particular (Lindholm, Lutz, and Green 2024).

Second, the experience of downward class mobility is directly linked to material losses. Downwardly mobile individuals who experience a loss, both of status and standard of living, are more likely to experience actual deprivation, hardship, and

economic insecurity (Kurer 2020). They face poor labor market prospects and are often unable to cope with economic, social, and cultural acceleration (Rydgren 2007; Swank and Betz 2003). These individuals may develop grievances if they experience discrepancies between their value expectations, i.e. those goods and services they believe they are entitled to, and their value capabilities, i.e. the goods and services they actually attain (e.g. Klandermans et al., 2001) (e.g. Gidron and Hall 2017). As a result, they are more likely to have different political preferences from the intergenerationally stable members of their classes of destination (Clifford and Heath 1993). In addition, comparisons that individuals make across time with their past selves and social origins can often result in the development of grievances associated with the intergenerational decline (e.g. Gurr 2015; Runciman 1966; Kurer and Van Staalduinen 2022). A wealth of literature has shown that material losses are often associated with far-right party support (Swank and Betz 2003; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020).

Third, downward class mobility may trigger blame-shifting attitudes. Blame attribution theory (Cochrane and Nevitte, 2014) sheds light on how individual grievances may become expressed through blaming or scapegoating. In short, aggrieved individuals are likely to express their grievances by turning against those they can hold responsible for their real or perceived plight (Stockemer and Halikiopoulou 2023). Individuals experiencing class decline are more likely to exhibit high levels of dissatisfaction with the system, domestic elites, and institutions whom they blame for the lack of opportunities and their movement down the social ladder (Daenekindt et al. 2018). As such the experience of downward class mobility is likely to decrease trust in/satisfaction with political institutions (Day and Fiske 2019). In turn, institutional distrust and overall dissatisfaction with the democratic process tend to be associated with the rise of the far-right (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2023; Vrakopoulos 2022). Far-right parties often present themselves as challenger or anti-establishment alternatives to the political mainstream (Oude Groeniger et al. 2022), drawing on issues such as "trust, performance and policy-related grievances over elites, institutions, the government and, overall, the existing mechanisms of democratic representation" (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2023: 5).

Fourth, blame-shifting may also be directed against external groups or elites (Goodfellow 2020). Immigrants are often the recipients of blame because they are perceived as direct competitors in the labor market, or for access to public goods and state services (Dancygier and Donnelly 2013; Mayda 2006). Prejudice also plays a role, as individuals often tend to blame groups they perceive in negative ways and/or "prejudge individuals on the basis of their group memberships" (Healey 2006, p. 26). Indeed, studies report a link between downward mobility and increases in anti-immigration attitudes (Paskov et al. 2021). In turn, far-right parties often engage in blame-shifting narratives. They center their agendas on purported conflicts between in-groups and out-groups, and often frame the immigration issue, which they own, around other issues such as the economy, access to welfare, policy performance and public goods provision, scapegoating immigrants for a range of domestic policy failures (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2023).

In sum, we have strong theoretical reasons to expect far-right parties to benefit from the experience of downward class mobility (Burgoon et al. 2019; Derndorfer

2023; Hochschild 2016; Kurer 2020; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Mutz 2018). As such we hypothesize:

H1: Individuals experiencing downward class mobility are more likely to vote for far-right parties.

Moreover, we further specify hypotheses about the mechanisms linking downward class mobility to far-right voting by exploring the four types of attitudes discussed above that may mediate this relationship: life satisfaction (discontent), income insecurity (loss), distrust of elites (blame directed internally) and anti-immigration attitudes (blame directed externally):

H1.1– The mediating role of discontent: Downward class mobility is likely to decrease life satisfaction which is associated with higher far-right party support.

H1.2– The mediating role of loss: Downward class mobility is likely to increase economic insecurity which is associated with higher far-right party support.

H1.3– The mediating role of internal blame attribution: Downward class mobility is likely to increase institutional distrust which is associated with higher far-right party support.

H1.4– The mediating role of external blame attribution: Downward class mobility is likely to increase anti-immigration attitudes which are associated with higher far-right party support.

Individual and Contextual Level Moderation

Our theoretical framework so far has focused on the relationship between downward class mobility and far-right party support, as well as the mechanisms that underpin the relationship. This approach allows us to gauge the potential effect of downward class mobility on four types of attitudes, i.e.,life satisfaction (discontent), income insecurity (loss), distrust of elites (internal blame attribution), and anti-immigration attitudes (external blame attribution), which in turn are likely to predict far-right party support. It is also, important, however, to examine the factors that may have an effect on the *strength* of the relationship between downward class mobility and far-right party support. In order to do this, we account for moderation by distinguishing between and separately examining the individual and national level factors that could accentuate or lessen the effect of downward class mobility among different individuals. At the individual level, a substantial body of literature on the far-right has shown that certain individual attitudes make it more or less likely that individuals choose far-right parties. These include the four types of attitudes we discussed in the context of mediation, but which could also potentially moderate the effects. Thus, for instance, one could imagine that the effect of class decline may be stronger

among individuals who report low levels of life satisfaction (Esaiasson et al. 2020), are already highly economically insecure (Swank and Betz 2003), and/or distrustful of politics and institutions (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2023). Conversely, individuals with favorable views of immigration would be less likely to support anti-immigrant far-right parties (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020) even if they experienced downward mobility. As such we hypothesize:

H2.1– The moderating role of discontent: the effect of downward class mobility on far-right party support is likely to be stronger among individuals with lower levels of life satisfaction.

H2.2– The moderating role of loss: the effect of downward class mobility on far-right party support is likely to be stronger among economically insecure individuals.

H2.3– The moderating role of internally directed blame: the effect of downward class mobility on far-right party support is likely to be stronger among individuals with lower levels of political trust.

H2.4– The moderating role of externally directed blame: the effect of downward class mobility on far-right party support is likely to be stronger among individuals with higher anti-immigration attitudes.

We also focus on the contextual effect of class mobility at the national level. Our logic is as follows. A rich body of literature suggests that political attitudes vary substantially between inhabitants of different areas and/or countries (e.g., Huijsmans 2023; Nieuwbeerta et al. 2000). Citizens are likely to be affected by the context in which they live (Arzheimer et al. 2024) because they tend to compare their own experiences with others' and thus perceive these experiences not in isolation but vis-à-vis a more generalized sense of how their own situation fares within the broader context (Gugushvili et al. 2019). In other words, context affects people's egotropic concerns, i.e., their perceptions of their own relative position, and sociotropic concerns, i.e. their perceptions of the general state of society (Huijsmans 2023). Contextual developments regarding class mobility can contribute to a generalized sense of societal decline or affluence against which individuals are likely to compare to their own class circumstances. If downward class mobility takes place in the context of widely prevalent downward mobility, then psychologically, the adverse effect on downward mobility might not be as strong. Its effect is likely to be stronger in a context where downward mobility is generally low, or when upward mobility is common, as individuals may feel singled out in their trajectory of decline.

From this discussion, we derive the following hypothesis:

H3– The moderating role of context: Overall social mobility is likely to moderate the effect of downward class mobility on far-right voting.

Research Design

Data and Operationalization

We use data from the ESS, one of the most comprehensive comparative datasets for Europe, which is freely available to researchers and includes information on individuals' voting behavior as well as data on their class mobility experiences (European Social Survey 2020). Due to the specific historical trajectories of class mobility in post-communist societies as well as the different nature of far-right politics in these countries (Brils et al. 2022; Gugushvili 2017; Mudde 2019), we run our analysis only for the following 12 Western European societies that had far-right parties that received votes in the national election that took place during the period under consideration: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. Descriptive statistics for these countries are presented in Table S1 in the supplementary materials. We limit our sample to the first five biannual waves of the ESS (2002–2010) because of the unavailability of detailed information on parental class in more recent waves (2012–2022), which makes a thorough analysis of intergenerational class mobility using the entire ESS sample challenging.

For our dependent variable, we rely on an ESS question asking respondents which parties they voted in the last national elections. We create a binary outcome variable coded 1 if respondents voted for a far-right party in the last general election, and 0 otherwise (non-voters are coded as missing). We classify far-right parties in accordance with the PopuList (Rooduijn et al. 2024), a widely referenced database that has been used extensively in the literature to classify far-right parties (see e.g., Muis et al. 2022; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2023). This classification includes parties that are authoritarian, populist, and nationalist and whose programmatic agendas focus on national cohesion, identity, and a purported conflict between in-groups and out-groups (Mudde 2007). We examine a total of 20 parties in the 12 Western European countries mentioned above. Our classification is in line with a broad literature that examines far-right parties (e.g., Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2020; Immerzeel et al. 2016; Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012; Rooduijn and Burgoon, 2018; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2023) and includes only two parties that have been categorized as "borderline far-right" in some of these studies (e.g. Rooduijn et al. 2024). These are the Norwegian Party (FrP) and the Finns Party prior to 2017 (previously True Finns). To account for this, we run a separate analysis without these parties as a robustness check (see the section on robustness checks below). For a detailed list of the parties in our sample, see supplementary materials, Table S2.

For our main independent variable, we first create a measure of class using the comparatively validated class schema of the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC). We then operationalize intergenerational class mobility by contrasting individuals' origin class (understood as the class of their parents) with their destination class. More specifically, origin and destination class variables are generated using four-digit occupational codes from the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88), together with information about individuals' employment status, the nature of their work, and supervisory functions.

Occupational data on parents in the ESS are derived for the period when respondents were 14 years old which is the common approach in intergenerational mobility literature (Eshaghnia, Heckman, and Landersø 2024). Originally, the publicly available ESS data set only included verbatim strings for parental occupation in various European languages. Within the framework of the ESS-DEVO project for the first five waves of ESS data, this has been converted into numerical ISCO-88 occupational codes to generate comparable measures for respondents and their parents. When there was missing information on individuals' employment status and the nature of work of supervisory functions, the weighted mode of ESeC class was assigned to that occupation. Following the established approach in the relevant literature, social origin was defined as the highest class between the maternal and paternal classes. For ease of interpretation and comparability of results across a large number of European societies, we use ESeC's three class scheme with salariat, intermediate, and working classes (Rose and Harrison 2007). The salariat class consists of all managerial and professional occupations for which employment regulation is based on service relationship; the intermediate class includes higher-level white-collar workers, small business owners, and skilled blue-collar workers with mixed or no employment regulation, while the working class is comprised of individuals under labor contract employment regulation and includes lower-grade white-collar workers, skilled workers, semi-skilled, and non-skilled workers (Rose and Harrison 2010).

Considering that long-range social mobility from working to salariat class (and vice versa) may differ from other types of social mobility in affecting far-right voting, we divide individuals' class mobility experiences into two short-range (i.e., from working to intermediate class) and two long-range (i.e., from salariat to working class) mobility trajectories.

In the main analysis of the links between class mobility and far-right voting, we account for respondents' main demographic characteristics such as gender, age (in 10-year categories from 26 to 75), and ethnic minority status, which are one of the most important attributes of support for far-right ideology (Campbell and Erzeel 2018; Immerzeel, Coffé, and van der Lippe 2015). Marital status, urban locality, and unemployment are known to be associated with political behaviors, in general, and far-right voting, in particular, and, therefore, we account for them in our models (Evans and Ivaldi 2021; Sipma and Lubbers 2020). In addition, education is known to predict far-right vote (Savelkoul and Scheepers 2017), so it is also included in our empirical analysis.

Perceived economic insecurity is based on individuals' feelings about their households' income with possible answer options from "living comfortably on present income" (=1) to "very difficult on present income" (=4); the life dissatisfaction variable ranges from "extremely satisfied" (=0) to "extremely dissatisfied" (=10); distrust in politicians takes the value of "complete trust" (=0) to "complete distrust" (=10); while anti-immigration attitudes are based on factor averages of answers on the following three survey items, all ranging from 0 (positive attitudes) to 10 (negative attitudes): "immigration bad or good for country's economy," "country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants," and "immigrants make country worse or better place to live." Higher scores in the generated variable correspond to more negative attitudes towards immigration.

Statistical Analysis

One challenge when trying to estimate the effect of class mobility by comparing parents' and respondents' classes is perfect collinearity. Indeed, in a conventional regression analysis, we cannot simultaneously consider (a) a mobility effect (i.e. the difference between parents' and respondents' social class), (b) an origin effect (i.e. parental class), and (c) a destination effect (i.e. respondents' social class). Initially, theSquare Additive Model (SAM) was introduced to identify mobility effects through the interaction between social origin and destination (Duncan 1966). However, it faced criticism for contamination, as destination effects were found to blend non-mobile and mobile individuals (Hope 1971). In response, Sobel (1981, 1985) developed the Diagonal Reference Model (DRM), which compares mobile individuals to a reference group of immobile individuals, effectively isolating mobility effects. DRMs have been widely recognized and employed in empirical studies, demonstrating their superiority over conventional regressions (Bulczak and Gugushvili 2022; Jaime-Castillo and Marqués-Perales 2019; Paskov et al. 2021).

DRMs make it possible to disentangle the effects of origin and class mobility. This allows us to estimate the association between class mobility and voting for far-right parties, while distinguishing it from the effects of origin and destination class (Sobel 1981). DRMs have been widely employed in sociological research (e.g. Kaiser and Trinh, 2021; Paskov et al., 2021), but have so far received only limited attention in political science scholarship (for exceptions, see Daenekindt et al. 2018; Mcneil and Haberstroh, 2023).

The focal point in the DRM approach is the assumption that intergenerationally immobile individuals represent typical voting behaviors for corresponding classes, and therefore, they are used in statistical estimations as reference groups. In tabular visualization, as seen in Table 1 in the Results' section, the row effects show how class origins affect outcomes, while the column effects show how current class positions influence outcomes. By taking both of these into account, the model offers a detailed understanding of how class mobility occurs and the significance of class origins compared to the current class. The model initially evaluates how closely an indi-

Table 1 Class mobility and far-right voting by parents' and respondents' class

	Percent of specific class mobility trajectories in the total sample		
	Destination: Salariat	Destination: Intermediate	Destination: Working
Origin: Salariat	16.8(11,047)	10.0(6,589)	2.9(1,926)
Origin: Intermediate	15.1(9,951)	20.6(13,573)	9.4(6,167)
Origin: Working	6.2(4,101)	10.7(7,021)	8.3(5,453)
	Percent of far-right voters in overall sample for specific class mobility trajectories		
	Destination: Salariat	Destination: Intermediate	Destination: Working
Origin: Salariat	2.6[2.3,2.9]	4.9[4.3,5.4]	6.9[5.7,7.9]
Origin: Intermediate	3.8[3.4,4.1]	5.8[5.4,6.2]	5.9[5.3,6.4]
Origin: Working	3.5[3.0,4.1]	5.9[5.3,6.4]	6.1[5.5,6.8]

The number of individuals are shown in parentheses, while confidence intervals are shown in squared parentheses. The colour of cells indicates where each cell value falls within that range

vidual's current class aligns with their social background. The diagonal cells in the model signify a scenario where an individual's present class matches their parental class. Off-diagonal effects measure the deviation from this line, indicating intergenerational class mobility. More specifically, the voting behavior of mobile individuals, who differ from their parents by attaining a class position in an upward or downward direction, is derived by contrasting it to both the voting behavior of the immobile class to which parents belonged and the immobile class to which individuals belong. The mobility effect, hereafter, is the remaining difference between mobile and immobile individuals.

Equation (1) formally outlines the components of the DRM approach.

$$\begin{aligned} & log\left(\frac{prob\left(\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}=1\right)}{1-prob\left(\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}=1\right)}\right) \\ & =\mathrm{w}^{*}\mathrm{u_{ii}}+(1-\mathrm{w})^{*}\mathrm{u_{jj}}+\gamma_{1}\mathrm{Up1_{ij}}+\gamma_{2}\mathrm{Up2_{ij}} \\ & +\gamma_{3}\mathrm{Down1_{ij}}+\gamma_{4}\mathrm{Down2_{ij}}+\sum\delta\,\mathrm{X_{ijk}} \quad (0\leq\mathrm{w}\leq 1) \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where $\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}$ equals 1 if individual *k* in cell *ij* of the three-way mobility table is a far-right voter and 0 if a non-far-right voter, and *i* and *j* refer to, respectively, the respondent's origin and destination classes. We can denote the part before the mobility effects in Eq. (1) $[\mathrm{w}^{*}\mathrm{u_{ii}}+(1-\mathrm{w})^{*}\mathrm{u_{jj}}]$ as $\widehat{\mathrm{u}}_{\mathrm{ij}}$ which is the estimated probability of far-right voting in cell ij predicted by a weighted combination of u_{ii} and u_{jj}, the respective probability of far-right voting among the immobile members of classes *i* and *j*. (w) is the origin weight, indicating the relative importance of the origin class in the estimation of $\widehat{\mathrm{u}}_{ij}$, and (1-w) represents the relative importance of the destination class.

Over and above the effects of position, our DRM specification allows estimating class mobility effects. Equation (1) estimates the impact of four types of class mobility on our outcome variable: working to salariat class mobility (Up2), all other upward mobility (Up1), salariat to working class mobility (Down2), and all other downward mobility (Down1). DRM in Eq. (1) also includes already described covariates of far-right voting. To clarify the interpretation of mobility parameters in the DRM framework, the mobility effect for downward mobility reflects the deviation in far-right voting likelihood for mobile individuals compared to a weighted baseline. This baseline combines the probabilities of far-right voting for immobile individuals in the origin and destination classes, weighted by the w-parameter. The w-parameter captures the relative influence of the origin versus destination class. For instance, a mobility effect of 1.5 in terms of odds ratios indicates that downwardly mobile individuals exhibit a higher likelihood of far-right voting compared to this weighted baseline, which accounts for both the origin and destination effects. This approach ensures that the mobility effect is isolated from the independent contributions of the origin and destination classes.

Next, we explore (1) the potential mechanisms linking class mobility and far-right voting theorized above and (2) the moderating effect of individual and contextual factors in the investigated association. Specifically, we first fit models that separately account for life dissatisfaction, perceptions of economic insecurity, distrust in politi-

cians, and anti-immigration attitudes as important aspects of far-right support (Abou-Chadi, Cohen, and Wagner 2022; Engler and Weisstanner 2021), followed by models in which the described characteristics serve as outcome variables. In Eq. (2) below, we add interaction terms between class mobility and variables related to the mechanisms we outlined above:

$$\begin{aligned} & log\left(\frac{prob\left(\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}=1\right)}{1-prob\left(\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}=1\right)}\right) \\ & =\mathrm{w}^{*}\mathrm{u_{ii}}+(1-\mathrm{w})^{*}\mathrm{u_{jj}}+\gamma_{1-4}\mathrm{Mobility_{ij}} \\ & +\sum\delta\,\mathrm{X_{ijk}}+\gamma_{1-4}\mathrm{Mobility_{ij}}^{*}\sum\delta\,\mathrm{X_{ijk}} \quad (0\leq\ \mathrm{w}\leq\ 1) \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Unlike traditional mediation frameworks such as the Baron-Kenny mediation analysis (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010), our approach prioritizes the comprehensive estimation of mobility effects and their interactions with class contexts. As such, this analysis operates within the tradition of DRMs, which emphasize a structured comparison of mobility trajectories rather than the stepwise identification of direct and indirect pathways as in mediation analysis. We examine the moderating effect of contextual-level class mobility on the links between individual-level class mobility and far-right voting. We generate two macro-level variables: (a) the share individuals who experienced upward class mobility from working/intermediate classes; and (b) the share individuals who experienced downward class mobility from salariat /intermediate classes. These measures are derived separately for each country and survey round. In Eq. (3) we include contextual levels of downward and upward class mobility and interact them with class mobility parameters at an individual level:

$$\begin{aligned} & log\left(\frac{prob\left(\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}=1\right)}{1-prob\left(\mathrm{Y_{ijk}}=1\right)}\right) \\ & =\mathrm{w}^{*}\mathrm{u_{ii}}+(1-\mathrm{w})^{*}\mathrm{u_{jj}}+\gamma_{1-4}\mathrm{Mobility_{ij}}+\delta\ \mathrm{Contextual\ mobility_{ij}} \\ & +\gamma_{1-4}\mathrm{Mobility_{ij}}*\delta\ \mathrm{Contextual\ mobility_{ij}}+\sum\delta\,\mathrm{X_{ijk}} \quad (0\leq\ \mathrm{w}\leq\ 1) \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

We use list-wise deletion to exclude cases with missing information. The estimations of the main model were conducted through the "DRM" package with logit link function in Stata 18 (Kaiser 2018). The descriptive statistics for the analyzed variables are shown in the supplementary materials, Table S3.

Results

Downward Class Mobility and Far-Right Voting

To explore whether there is an association between class mobility and support for far-right political parties in Western Europe, we first cross-tabulate voting patterns by individuals' origin and destination classes. The upper half of Table 1 indicates that the three largest class mobility categories are those who experienced upward

mobility from intermediate to salariat class (15.1%) and immobile individuals in salariat (16.8%) and intermediate (20.6%) classes. On the other end of this distribution, upwardly mobility individuals from the working to the salariat class (6.2%) and downwardly mobile individuals from the salariat to the working class (2.9%) are the smallest class mobility categories.

The lower half of Table 1, in turn, suggests that individuals' preferences for far-right parties vary depending on their origin and destination classes. Individuals with the working class destination have stronger preferences for far-right parties than individuals with the salariat class destination, regardless of their origins. By contrast, class origin for those who belong to the working and salariat classes also plays an important role. Upwardly mobile individuals from the working class origin have higher support for the far-right (mean equal to 3.5) than immobile individuals in the salariat class (mean equal to 2.6). One of the effects observed in Table 1 is the difference between the downwardly mobile and immobile working class individuals. Among the immobile working class individuals, 6.1% voted for far-right parties, while among those in the working class who originated from the salariat class, the share of far-right voting is 6.9%. These descriptive findings align largely with our H.1.

Class Gradient, Destination Weights, and Mobility Effects

In Table 2, we present the results from four DRM models that account stepwise for individuals' socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Since we fit the logistic function of DRM models, we convert the point estimates into odds ratios for ease of interpretation of coefficients (hence, values below 1 indicate the lower probability of voting for the far-right, whereas values above 1 indicate the higher probability of voting for these parties).

Several results are noteworthy. First, in Models 1–4, we observe a clear class gradient in far-right voting. The odds ratios for immobile individuals indicate that those with salariat origin and destination are, respectively, much less likely to vote for the far-right, whereas those with working class origins and destinations are much more likely to vote for these parties. The effect of the working class on far-right voting is somewhat reduced when individuals' education is accounted for in Model 4.

Second, the weight parameter for the relative importance of the destination as opposed to the origin class for far-right voting suggests that the individuals' destination class plays a slightly more important role than the origin class, especially when our DRM models account for the individuals' socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics (origin weight in Model 4 is 1.00-0.58 = 0.42).

Third, for class mobility parameters, we find that downward mobility from the salariat to the working class is consistently associated with higher odds ratios of voting for far-right parties in our sample. This effect varies from 1.75 in Model 1 to 1.55 in Model 4. Other coefficients for mobility effects are not statistically significant, though all estimates for upward mobility from the working to salariat class are below 1.00. These results partially confirm our H.1 suggesting that downward class mobility indeed matters for far-right party support, but only when the fall is severe from the highest class origin to the lowest class destination. One explanation for this

Table 2 Odds ratios from logistic diagonal reference models of voting for far-right parties

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
ESeC class				
Salariat	0.52***	0.51***	0.52***	0.61***
	[0.43,0.62]	[0.42,0.61]	[0.44,0.62]	[0.54,0.70]
Intermediate	1.31***	1.33***	1.33***	1.28***
	[1.17,1.47]	[1.20,1.48]	[1.20,1.47]	[1.16,1.42]
Working	1.48***	1.48***	1.45***	1.27***
	[1.26,1.74]	[1.25,1.74]	[1.24,1.68]	[1.13,1.43]
Weight of destination	0.51***	0.57***	0.58***	0.58***
	[0.30,0.72]	[0.36,0.77]	[0.37,0.79]	[0.33,0.80]
Class mobility				
Working → salariat	0.89	0.93	0.94	0.95
	[0.79,1.01]	[0.80,1.09]	[0.80,1.10]	[0.84,1.08]
Other upward	1.08	1.11	1.12	1.13
	[0.84,1.38]	[0.85,1.45]	[0.86,1.46]	[0.88,1.46]
Other downward	1.05	1.02	1.02	1.00
	[0.87,1.27]	[0.86,1.22]	[0.85,1.22]	[0.84,1.20]
Salariat → working	1.75***	1.65***	1.62***	1.55***
	[1.46,2.09]	[1.36,2.01]	[1.34,1.96]	[1.32,1.82]
Female	–	0.63***	0.63***	0.63***
	–	[0.51,0.78]	[0.51,0.78]	[0.50,0.78]
Age group				
36–45	–	1.07	1.06	1.02
	–	[0.84,1.37]	[0.86,1.31]	[0.83,1.26]
46–55	–	1.02	1.01	0.93
	–	[0.81,1.29]	[0.83,1.23]	[0.76,1.14]
56–65	–	1.1	1.09	0.95
	–	[0.69,1.74]	[0.73,1.63]	[0.65,1.40]
66–75	–	1.13	1.13	0.96
	–	[0.67,1.91]	[0.70,1.82]	[0.59,1.54]
Ethnic minority	–	0.34***	0.34***	0.33***
		[0.24,0.47]	[0.24,0.49]	[0.23,0.48]
Urban settlement	–	–	0.86*	0.88
	–	–	[0.76,0.98]	[0.78,1.00]
Married	–	–	1.05	1.04
	–	–	[0.85,1.29]	[0.85,1.28]
Unemployed	–	–	1.29	1.29
	–	–	[0.92,1.81]	[0.92,1.80]
Years of education	–	–	–	0.95***
	–	–	–	[0.92,0.98]
Fixed effects				
Countries	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey waves	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	14232.96	14097.2	14081.8	14034.95
BIC	14332.89	14197.13	14181.74	14134.89
Number of individuals	65,193	65,193	65,193	65,193

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses; standard errors are adjusted for countries; weights applied

is that downward mobility from the salariat class to the working class is associated with a significant loss in status and economic security, which can lead to feelings of resentment and alienation. In contrast, downward mobility from the salariat to the intermediate class or from the intermediate to the working class may not trigger the same level of insecurity or social dislocation. The less dramatic decline in these cases might be the reason why these forms of mobility are not as strongly linked to far-right voting.

Mechanisms Linking Class Mobility and Far-Right Voting and Mediation Analysis

Next, we explore the potential mechanisms linking class mobility to far-right party support. In Table 3, we test whether the association between class mobility and voting for far-right parties is affected by life dissatisfaction (H1.1), subjective perceptions of economic insecurity (H1.2), distrust in politicians (H1.3), and anti-immigration attitudes (H1.4). In Models 1–4, we consecutively, while in Model 5 jointly introduce these variables in our DRM analysis. We see that the significant associations between downward mobility from the salariat to the working class and far-right voting remain, yet the size of the effect is reduced to an odds ratio of 1.30 in Model 5 (the most conservative model). We observe that the weight parameter for the destination increases in comparison to the weights shown in Table 2. Models 1–4 also show that distrust in politicians and anti-immigration attitudes are also positively associated with far-right voting, while life dissatisfaction and the subjective perception of economic insecurity are not significantly linked to our dependent variable.

In Table 4, we present the results from the mediation analysis in which life dissatisfaction, economic insecurity, distrust in politicians, and anti-immigration attitudes serve as outcome variables. The results suggest that downward class mobility is associated with life dissatisfaction (discontent) and economic insecurity (loss) as predicted in H1.1 and H1.2, but not with distrust in politicians (internal blame attribution) and anti-immigration attitudes (external blame attribution), as expected in H1.3 and H1.4. We also observe that upward class mobility is associated with lower economic insecurity and anti-immigration attitudes.

Moderation Analysis and Contextual Effects of Class Mobility on Far-Right Voting

In Table 5, to test H2.1-H2.4 on the moderating role of life dissatisfaction, economic insecurity, political distrust, and anti-immigration attitudes, we fit DRM models that include interaction terms between these variables and class mobility. The results suggest that life dissatisfaction, economic insecurity, political distrust, and anti-immigration attitudes do not moderate the association between class mobility and voting for far-right parties.

Next, we proceed to test H3 on whether overall society-wide levels of class mobility in a country where individuals reside are associated with far-right voting and if contextual class mobility moderates the effect of individual-level class mobility on far-right voting (H3). We first consider the overall level of upward and downward class mobility as separate variables and then interact them with individuals' own class mobility trajectories.

Table 3 Odds ratios from logistic diagonal reference models of voting for far-right parties with variables related to mechanisms

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
ESeC class					
Salariat	0.61***	0.60***	0.62***	0.73***	0.74***
	[0.53,0.70]	[0.52,0.70]	[0.53,0.73]	[0.65,0.82]	[0.66,0.83]
Intermediate	1.25***	1.25***	1.26***	1.21***	1.21***
	[1.13,1.38]	[1.13,1.37]	[1.14,1.39]	[1.09,1.33]	[1.10,1.33]
Working	1.31***	1.33***	1.27***	1.13*	1.12*
	[1.16,1.49]	[1.17,1.51]	[1.12,1.45]	[1.01,1.27]	[1.00,1.25]
Weight of destination	0.67***	0.68***	0.66***	0.71***	0.72***
	[0.39,0.95]	[0.39,0.95]	[0.40,0.92]	[0.39,1.04]	[0.41,1.03]
Class mobility					
Working → salariat	0.99	0.99	0.98	1.02	1.01
	[0.81,1.20]	[0.81,1.21]	[0.83,1.17]	[0.88,1.18]	[0.87,1.18]
Other upward	1.21	1.21	1.21	1.23	1.23
	[0.94,1.56]	[0.93,1.57]	[0.93,1.57]	[0.92,1.63]	[0.92,1.64]
Other downward	0.92	0.92	0.91	0.90	0.90
	[0.80,1.06]	[0.80,1.05]	[0.80,1.04]	[0.77,1.05]	[0.77,1.05]
Salariat → working	1.36*	1.36*	1.36**	1.29*	1.30*
	[1.07,1.74]	[1.06,1.74]	[1.09,1.68]	[1.02,1.62]	[1.04,1.63]
Potential mechanism					
Economic insecurity	1.08	–	–	–	1.01
	[0.94,1.23]	–	–	–	[0.89,1.14]
Life dissatisfaction	–	1.01	–	–	0.96**
	–	[0.96,1.06]	–	–	[0.93,0.99]
Distrust in politicians	–	–	1.16***	–	1.06*
	–	–	[1.07,1.25]	–	[1.00,1.13]
Anti-immigration attitudes	–	–	–	1.47***	1.46***
	–	–	–	[1.39,1.57]	[1.39,1.52]
Control variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fixed effects					
Countries	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	12716.26	12711.86	12588.19	11931.34	11890.94
BIC	12815.88	12811.47	12687.81	12030.96	11990.55
Number of individuals	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses; standard errors are adjusted for countries; weights applied

The results in Table 6 suggest that downward mobility from the salariat to the intermediate and from the intermediate to the working class has a positive association with voting for the far-right in countries where the levels of upward class mobility are high. By contrast, when we replace the contextual variable on downward class mobility with levels of upward class mobility, we see that the downwardly mobile individuals, except those who move from the salariat to the working class, are less likely to vote for the far-right in the contexts where downward class mobility is more prevalent. These findings confirm H3 and suggest that the contextual environment

Table 4 Odds ratios from logistic diagonal reference models of attitudes toward migrants, trust in politicians, and subjective income

	Economic insecurity		Life dissatisfaction		Distrust in politicians		Anti-immigration attitudes	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
ESeC class								
Salariat	0.73***	0.81***	0.63***	0.74***	0.67***	0.78***	0.41***	0.61***
	[0.70,0.76]	[0.79,0.84]	[0.54,0.75]	[0.67,0.81]	[0.62,0.73]	[0.73,0.83]	[0.37,0.44]	[0.59,0.63]
Intermediate	0.98	0.98	0.92***	0.96*	1.03	1.01	1.21***	1.08***
	[0.95,1.00]	[0.96,1.00]	[0.88,0.97]	[0.93,0.99]	[0.95,1.12]	[0.93,1.09]	[1.13,1.29]	[1.04,1.13]
Working	1.40***	1.25***	1.71***	1.41***	1.44***	1.27***	2.04***	1.52***
	[1.33,1.48]	[1.21,1.29]	[1.46,2.00]	[1.30,1.54]	[1.34,1.55]	[1.20,1.35]	[1.86,2.24]	[1.45,1.60]
Weight of destination	0.37	0.55**	0.51***	0.41	0.86*	1.76	0.51***	0.46***
	[−0.01,0.74]	[0.20,0.89]	[0.25,0.77]	[−0.26,1.08]	[0.14,1.59]	[−11.8,15.4]	[0.38,0.65]	[0.19,0.72]
Class mobility								
Working → salariat	0.71**	0.86*	0.69**	0.73	1.10	1.64	0.76**	0.75*
	[0.58,0.88]	[0.75,0.97]	[0.54,0.88]	[0.47,1.14]	[0.59,2.04]	[0.00,1388]	[0.62,0.93]	[0.58,0.97]
Other upward	0.84**	0.92*	0.85**	0.88	1.02	1.25	0.87*	0.89
	[0.76,0.94]	[0.87,0.99]	[0.76,0.95]	[0.71,1.09]	[0.73,1.42]	[0.04,37.28]	[0.77,0.98]	[0.77,1.03]
Other downward	1.13*	1.04	1.16**	1.16	1.00	0.82	1.07	1.06
	[1.02,1.25]	[0.97,1.12]	[1.05,1.29]	[0.93,1.44]	[0.74,1.34]	[0.03,22.38]	[0.92,1.25]	[0.91,1.23]
Salariat → working	1.39**	1.17*	1.85***	1.79*	0.89	0.59	1.22	1.19
	[1.14,1.70]	[1.02,1.33]	[1.37,2.51]	[1.01,3.20]	[0.53,1.49]	[0.00,438.5]	[0.91,1.63]	[0.86,1.64]
Control variables	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed effects								
Countries	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	107841.77	102928.91	217649.90	214661.83	217618.06	217018.08	208845.85	205996.72
BIC	107941.39	103037.59	217749.51	214770.49	217717.68	217135.82	208945.48	206096.34
Number of individuals	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses; standard errors are adjusted for countries; weights applied

might moderate the manifestation of class mobility effects on far-right voting at an individual level.

Since the employed "drm" statistical software does not allow the generation of predictive margins, in the supplementary materials, Figure S1, we fitted linear probability models and generated predictive margins for the following trajectories of mobility: from working to salariat, other upward, other downward, and from salariat to working. The results are not directly comparable to the DRM results shown in Table 6 but the direction of the associations remains identical.

Further Analyses and Robustness Checks

In Table S4 in the supplementary materials, we present heterogeneity analysis of class mobility by consecutively interacting the mobility parameters with individuals' age and gender. None of these interactions are statistically significant. In the supplementary materials, Table S5, we also run separate DRM regressions for males and females and observe a largely comparable class gradient in far-right voting across genders among those who are immobile. Yet, women in the intermediate class are less likely than men in the same class to vote for far-right parties. Another important difference between men and women is the observed weight parameter of destination class. With regards to far-right voting among male individuals, the destination class matters much more than the origin social class but the opposite is true for women. Women's origin class weight (1-0.23 = 0.77) is much higher than their destination weight (0.23), which is in line with earlier research on depressive symptoms in Europe (Gugushvili, Zhao, and Bukodi 2019).

To check the robustness of our main findings, we fit DRM models with alternative specifications. First, in the supplementary materials, Table S6, we run the main analysis without the "borderline" cases of the Norwegian FrP and Finland's Finns Party. The results are essentially the same as those in Table 2 in the main text. Second, we substitute DRM's logit link function with a linear function, and, hence, we effectively fit linear probability DRM models. The results reported in Table S7 of the supplementary materials pinpoint the same findings as shown in the main analysis– downward mobility from the salariat to the working class is associated with a higher likelihood of far-right voting. Third, instead of using the ESeC class scheme, in Tables S8 and S9 of the supplementary materials, we employed the three- and five-fold Oesch class scheme, which is widely used in the European political science research on voting (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). The results again suggest that downward mobility from service to the working class is positively associated with far-right voting, yet with the five-class Oesch scheme, there are only a few dozen individuals in the data set who experienced downward mobility from higher-grade service to the unskilled working class and voted for radical right parties. Fourth, instead of class mobility measures, in Table S10 of the supplementary materials, we use the International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI) measure (varying from 16 to 90) to create tertiles of occupational status for individuals and their parents (Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Treiman 1992). With the latter mobility specification, we find not only a strong and consistent association between moving from the top to the bottom ISEI and far-right

Table 5 Odds ratios from logistic diagonal reference models of voting for far-right parties with variables related to mechanisms and their interaction terms with class mobility

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
ESeC class				
Salariat	0.61***	0.61***	0.62***	0.73***
	[0.53,0.70]	[0.52,0.70]	[0.53,0.73]	[0.65,0.82]
Intermediate	1.25***	1.25***	1.26***	1.21***
	[1.13,1.37]	[1.13,1.38]	[1.15,1.38]	[1.10,1.33]
Working	1.32***	1.32***	1.27***	1.14*
	[1.17,1.48]	[1.18,1.49]	[1.12,1.45]	[1.02,1.27]
Weight of destination	0.65***	0.68***	0.67***	0.71***
	[0.36,0.93]	[0.39,0.97]	[0.42,0.93]	[0.39,1.04]
Class mobility				
Working → salariat	0.96	1.15	0.97	0.66
	[0.51,1.80]	[0.77,1.73]	[0.55,1.74]	[0.38,1.14]
Other upward	1.05	1.28	1.29	1.06
	[0.70,1.57]	[0.95,1.72]	[0.61,2.72]	[0.61,1.83]
Other downward	0.96	0.92	0.77	0.75
	[0.63,1.45]	[0.69,1.24]	[0.49,1.21]	[0.49,1.16]
Salariat → working	1.49	1.79**	1.99**	0.92
	[0.64,3.50]	[1.22,2.63]	[1.23,3.22]	[0.37,2.26]
Potential mechanism				
Economic insecurity	1.06	–	–	–
	[0.87,1.30]	–	–	–
Life dissatisfaction	–	1.02	–	–
	–	[0.94,1.11]	–	–
Distrust in politicians	–	–	1.16***	–
	–	–	[1.09,1.23]	–
Anti-immigration attitudes	–	–	–	1.45***
	–	–	–	[1.36,1.54]
Interaction terms between mechanism and class mobility				
Working → salariat	0.96	0.94	1.00	1.08
	[0.51,1.80]	[0.84,1.06]	[0.92,1.09]	[0.97,1.20]
Other upward	1.08	0.98	0.99	1.03
	[0.86,1.35]	[0.90,1.06]	[0.90,1.09]	[0.97,1.08]
Other downward	0.98	1.00	1.02	1.03
	[0.78,1.25]	[0.91,1.09]	[0.97,1.09]	[0.98,1.08]
Salariat → working	0.97	0.92	0.94	1.06
	[0.58,1.62]	[0.79,1.06]	[0.87,1.02]	[0.92,1.21]
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fixed effects				
Countries	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	12715.02	12708.68	12586.12	11931.02
BIC	12814.65	12808.29	12685.74	12039.70
Number of individuals	63,355	63,355	63,355	63,355

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses; standard errors are adjusted for countries; weights applied

Table 6 Odds rations from logistic diagonal reference models of voting for far-right parties with interactions between individuals' class mobility and levels of upward and downward mobility

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
ESeC class				
Salariat	0.61***	0.61***	0.62***	0.61***
	[0.54,0.70]	[0.54,0.70]	[0.54,0.70]	[0.54,0.70]
Intermediate	1.28***	1.28***	1.28***	1.29***
	[1.16,1.42]	[1.16,1.42]	[1.16,1.42]	[1.17,1.42]
Working	1.27***	1.27***	1.26***	1.26***
	[1.12,1.43]	[1.13,1.42]	[1.12,1.43]	[1.12,1.43]
Weight of destination	0.57***	0.58***	0.57***	0.57***
	[0.33,0.80]	[0.35,0.80]	[0.33,0.80]	[0.34,0.80]
Class mobility				
Working → salariat	0.95	0.76	0.95	1.44
	[0.84,1.08]	[0.26,2.20]	[0.84,1.08]	[0.20,10.41]
Other upward	1.14	0.96	1.14	2.10
	[0.88,1.47]	[0.42,2.16]	[0.88,1.47]	[0.43,10.30]
Other downward	1.01	0.14***	1.01	6.74**
	[0.85,1.20]	[0.05,0.37]	[0.84,1.20]	[1.78,25.55]
Salariat → working	1.56***	1.20	1.56***	4.66
	[1.34,1.82]	[0.24,5.97]	[1.33,1.83]	[0.23,96.46]
Contextual mobility				
Upward mobility	0.97	0.95	–	–
	[0.81,1.16]	[0.79,1.14]	–	–
Downward mobility	–	–	1.00	1.02
	–	–	[0.94,1.05]	[0.96,1.07]
Interaction terms between contextual mobility and class mobility				
Working → salariat	–	1.01	–	1.02
	–	[0.96,1.06]	–	[0.96,1.07]
Other upward	–	1.01	–	0.98
	–	[0.97,1.04]	–	[0.94,1.02]
Other downward	–	1.09***	–	0.94**
	–	[1.05,1.14]	–	[0.90,0.98]
Salariat → working	–	1.01	–	0.97
	–	[0.95,1.08]	–	[0.88,1.06]
Fixed effects				
Countries	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	13907.68	13892.39	13909.18	13900.56
BIC	14007.34	13992.05	14008.85	14000.23
Number of individuals	63,583	63,583	63,583	63,583

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses; standard errors are adjusted for countries; weights applied

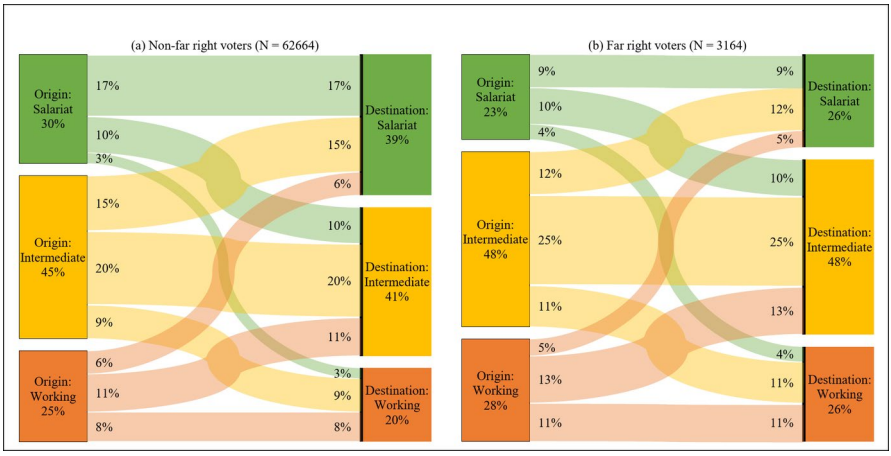

Fig. 2 Class mobility among non-far-right voters and far-right voters. Source: Authors' calculations based on ESS (2002–2010)

vote, but we also find that other types of mobility trajectories are linked to far-right voting in the expected direction.

Class Mobility and the Composition of the Far-Right Electorate

Thus far, our results have shown that individuals from salariat origins and working-class destination are more likely to vote for the far-right, thus suggesting that downward class mobility is an important predictor of far-right party support. What role does this trajectory play, however, in the electoral success of these parties? Research suggests that it is important to distinguish analytically between "support" and "success", or in other words, between the predictive power of certain characteristics, i.e. how strongly associated these characteristics are with an outcome– in this case downward class mobility– and the substantive importance of this characteristic for the phenomenon in question, in this case, how widespread these characteristics are among the far-right voter pool (Stockemer et al. 2020; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020). To assess the extent to which downward class mobility is an important factor for far-right party success, beyond the likelihood of downwardly mobile individuals voting for the far-right, it is also important to establish how prevalent downward mobility is among the far-right electorate. As such, we conclude our analysis by examining the share of downwardly mobile individuals within the far-right electorate. Specifically, we explore the analytical distinction between predictive power and substantive importance by calculating the composition of class position and mobility in our overall sample and comparing non-far-right voters and far-right voters.

Figure 2 visualizes non-far-right voters and far-right voters by their class mobility trajectories (for the class mobility trajectories for each country, see Figures S2-S13 in the supplementary materials). Among non-far-right voters, we observe a substantial intergenerational upgrade in class structure as the share of the salariat class increased by almost 10% points for the offspring generation with the corresponding shrinking of intermediate and working classes. By contrast, the origin and destination class

structure among far-right voters indicates that they experienced more intergenerational class stagnation: these voters only marginally benefited from the expansion of the salariat class.

Moreover, in comparison to non-far-right voters, fewer individuals among far-right voters maintained their origin position in the salariat class. The majority of the far-right voter pool is in the salariat and intermediate classes, and only a small share of far-right voters in these two classes experienced downward mobility. Overall, the described associations suggest that while downward class mobility is likely associated with far-right voting, downwardly mobile individuals constitute a numerically small group, not in itself sufficient to drive far-right large-scale mobilization. This is in line with our argument that downward class mobility matters significantly for the rise of the far-right party but only under specific circumstances. To understand what facilitates far-right party success we should focus on the ability of these parties to mobilize different groups of voters, including individuals experiencing actual downward mobile individuals, but also other dissatisfied individuals, for example those experiencing subjective decline. Downward class mobility is, in other words, one small but important piece of the puzzle as this group plays a key role in the discontent voter coalitions that facilitate widespread far-right party success.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the literature on the relationship between economic insecurity, broadly defined, and far-right party support (e.g. Kurer 2020; Rydgren 2007), by systematizing theoretically and demonstrating empirically the distinct effects of actual downward class mobility. Specifically, our results allow us to draw three important conclusions.

First, our analysis using the DRM approach shows that actual downward class mobility matters for understanding the far-right vote, thus complementing research that focuses more explicitly on the relative decline (e.g. Kurer 2020). Yet, we show that only downward mobility from the salariat class to the working class is significantly associated with far-right support. This trajectory likely involves a more significant loss in both status and economic security compared to other forms of downward mobility, such as moving from the salariat to the intermediate class. The salariat class is typically associated with higher levels of education, income, and job security, as well as greater access to social networks and cultural capital. Falling from this position to the working class can thus represent a dramatic decline in social status, leading to feelings of disillusionment, resentment, and alienation. These emotional and psychological responses are fertile ground for far-right narratives, which often capitalize on feelings of loss and grievance. In contrast, downward mobility from the salariat to the intermediate class might not trigger the same level of economic insecurity or social dislocation. The intermediate class, while lower than the salariat, still offers a relatively stable and secure position, which might mitigate the emotional impact of downward mobility. Similarly, moving from the intermediate class to the working class may be perceived as a less dramatic fall, with fewer implications for one's social status and identity.

Second, we add value to existing debates by documenting not just *whether* but also *how* downward social mobility is linked to far-right party voting. Theoretically, we develop a conceptual framework that distinguishes between loss, discontent and blame as three analytically distinct channels shaping voting behavior. Empirically, our mediation and moderation analysis reveal some interesting patterns regarding the mechanisms that underpin this relationship. With regards to mediation, our results highlight that while this relationship is mediated by life satisfaction and income insecurity, trust in institutions and anti-immigration attitudes do not have an effect, thus showing that downward social mobility is more likely to be associated with far-right party support through discontent and loss rather than blame attribution. This suggests that the class route to far-right voting is largely linked to existential and material issues, thus confirming theoretical approaches that focus on overall well-being and life satisfaction (Chan 2018; Kaiser and Trinh 2021), social status decline (Gidron and Hall 2017), as well as economic insecurity (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020). It also points to the possibility that the effects of position and mobility are associated with far-right party voting via different attitudinal mechanisms and provides a novel explanation for how social class may itself partly shape the attitudes that had been shown to influence far- right party voting. With regards to moderation, we find that while mobility effects do not appear to vary depending on these individual traits, however, overall national-level mobility does moderate the effect of downward mobility. Country-level class mobility, therefore, matters for individual-level associations between class mobility and far-right voting. We can interpret this finding by the adverse psychological effect of downward mobility on an individual being less strong in a country with widespread downward mobility than in a country where most people have not experienced downward class mobility (Day and Fiske 2019).

Third, our analysis illustrates that while individuals from salariat origin and working-class destination are the most likely far-right supporters, these individuals constitute only a small percentage of the far-right electorate. This suggests that while downward class mobility is an important factor in far-right party support, it does not necessarily drive the electoral success of these parties. This finding contributes to the emerging literature on far-right intra-partisan heterogeneity and highlights the importance of the size of disaffected groups within the far-right electorate (Damhuis 2020; Stockemer et al. 2020; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2023).

Future research can extend our findings by examining a range of issues that were outside the scope of this article or that we could not examine because of data limitations. First, our sample is confined to Western European far-right parties therefore limiting the generalizability of our findings. In addition, because of the unavailability of detailed information on parental class in more recent ESS waves, we have only examined the initial five ESS biannual waves (2002–2010). Future research could analyze more recent data to examine the extent to which our findings about downward class mobility and far-right party support also apply to the more recent surge of far-right voting in Western Europe, as well as to other regions in Europe and beyond. For instance, Eastern and Central European countries have experienced a surge in support for far-right parties, but the dynamics are likely to be different from Western Europe, as far-right party success there has been characterized by the radicalization of the mainstream. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the extent to which

different classes and movements between classes affect far-right party support across these regions. It would also be interesting to examine whether our results are transferable beyond the European context, for example, the United States, Latin America, Australia, and India, which have experienced far-right populism, albeit within very different contexts.

While our DRMs allow us to distinguish between class origin and destination, thus yielding some original results, this method does not allow us to draw causal inferences. Future research could apply causal methods in order to identify why and under what circumstances certain downwardly mobile or socially immobile individuals, more generally, vote for the far-right. This could further unpack the various mechanisms discussed in this article, including, for example, economic insecurity and anti-immigration attitudes.

This article has focused specifically on far-right parties. It would be interesting to examine the effect of downward class mobility on other "challenger" type parties that employ anti-establishment narratives in their rhetoric, including far-left and/or populist parties. This is especially pertinent at a time of increasing electoral polarization and voter dealignment. Studies drawing on our findings could delve more into the extent to which class mobility affects voter movement, especially away from parties that, to a great extent, "own" economic issues. Finally, our article has predominantly focused on demand-side dynamics. Future research could investigate relevant supply-side dynamics to identify the ways in which far-right parties attempt to capitalize on downward class mobility in their programmatic agendas.

Overall, our article has attempted to shed new light on the relationship between class mobility and far-right party support within the Western European context. One of the main implications of our findings is that downward class mobility is an important driver of far-right party support, yet it affects only a small proportion of the far-right electorate. This suggests that to understand the rise of challenger parties, scholars should pay more attention to the heterogeneity of their electorates. If, similarly to other party families, the far-right is becoming increasingly successful by broadening its electoral base, then understanding coalitions between different voter groups is the key to understanding far-right party success.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest None.

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Authors and Affiliations

Alexi Gugushvili[1] · Daphne Halikiopoulou[2] · Tim Vlandas[3]

✉ Alexi Gugushvili
alexi.gugushvili@sosgeo.uio.no

[1] Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Harriet Holters hus, Moltke Moes vei 31, Oslo 0851, Norway

[2] Department of Politics, University of York, York YO10 5DD, UK

[3] Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, 32 Wellington Square,

Oxford OX1 2ER, UK