

# Extremism and the Gender Gap: Explaining Women's Increasing Internationalism

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## Abstract

Why is the gender gap in support for international economic integration in Western Europe closing? Traditionally, women have been less supportive of processes of globalization—including free trade and European integration—than men. However, over the last two decades, this gender gap has been shrinking in several countries. In this paper, I argue that one of the reasons for this shrinking gender gap is the fact that opposition to globalization, European integration, and immigration is increasingly associated with right-wing extremism in these countries, as populist radical right parties and politicians have made anti-internationalism a key element of their platforms. Since women are on average less comfortable with extremism and more sensitive to the social stigma associated with the radical right, they increasingly move away from the policies these politicians and parties are known for. This in turn leads women to become more internationalist at a faster rate than men, producing the shrinking gender gap in support for international economic integration. Using survey data drawn from the European Social Survey (ESS) and Eurobarometer surveys, as well as an unexpected event during survey design, I show that women's attitudes toward international economic integration are affected more strongly than men's when anti-internationalism becomes associated with right-wing extremism. This research has important implications for our understanding of the role of gender in public opinion and of the current backlash against globalization.

In advanced democracies, women have for decades been less supportive of (some forms of) international economic integration than men. This gender gap has primarily been documented with regard to support for international trade (Guisinger 2009; Guisinger 2017; Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Mayda and Rodrik 2005; Scheve and Slaughter 2001) and European integration (Gabel 1998; Liebert 1999; Nelsen and Guth 2000), while the evidence on support for immigration has been more mixed (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006; Ponce 2017; Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky 2006). However, recent survey data from Western Europe indicates that the gender gap this region has historically seen with regard to international economic integration appears to be shrinking. What explains this shift in the relationship between gender and support for international economic integration?

I argue that one reason for this shrinking gender gap in Western Europe is the fact that opposition to international economic integration has become more strongly associated with the populist radical right—and, in particular, with the extremist rhetoric they employ. In response to this linking of anti-internationalism with right-wing extremism, individuals who are opposed to right-wing extremism and sensitive to the stigma it carries shift their attitudes to become more supportive of international economic integration (Obermeier 2021). As women are on average more sensitive to social norms, they respond more strongly to this linking of anti-internationalism with right-wing extremism. Women's support for international economic integration therefore increases at a faster rate than men's, leading to the reduced gender gap we observe in the data.

I use two separate studies to show that women change their attitudes on international economic integration in response to the linking of anti-internationalism with right-wing extremism more strongly than men. In Study 1, I combine Eurobarometer survey data with a measure of the link between Euroskepticism and right-extremism in eight Western European countries between 2000 and 2019. Using these data, I find that while men's support for the European Union (EU) also increases when Euroskepticism is more strongly linked to extremism, women's support increases significantly more. In Study 2, I use an unexpected event

during survey design based on the 2016 murder of Jo Cox in the United Kingdom (UK). Analyzing British Election Study (BES) survey data (Fieldhouse et al. 2020) from the time of the murder reveals that women became more supportive of the EU and of immigration following the murder and media coverage that tied anti-internationalism to political violence and right-wing extremism, while men's attitudes did not shift significantly.

This research sheds new light on the relationship between gender and support for economic policies by showing how it can be moderated by party positioning and social stigma. As research on other types of gender gaps in political attitudes has shown, these gaps are not automatic or static, but respond to changing economic factors, political environments, and social norms (Bush and Clayton 2022; Dassonneville 2021; Jennings 2006; Kaufmann 2006). In the same way, we can study gender gaps in support for international trade, European integration, and immigration as dynamic phenomena that respond to changes in the party landscape and rhetoric. My findings also contribute to our understanding of the relationship between gender and the populist radical right, by showing how gender is not only a factor in determining support for the populist radical right, or a tool of populist radical right rhetoric, but can also shape public responses to the rise of the populist radical right.

## **The Gender Gap in Support for International Economic Integration**

A number of studies have found that women are less supportive of certain forms of international economic integration than men are. The majority of these studies has focused on support for international trade. In the United States (US), studies consistently show a gender gap in support for international trade (Guisinger 2009; Guisinger 2017; Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). A similar gender gap has also been found cross-nationally (Mayda and Rodrik 2005) and in Latin America (Beaulieu, Yatawara, and Wang 2005).

In Europe, a similar pattern has been found with regard to European integration, with

a number of earlier studies reporting that women are on average less supportive of the EU (Gabel 1998; Liebert 1999). However, scholars also noted that this gap was not present in all EU member states (Nelsen and Guth 2000). Interestingly, more recent work has found instead that the gender gap has reversed, making women more supportive of the EU than men (Boomgaarden et al. 2011; De Vries 2018: 109–110).

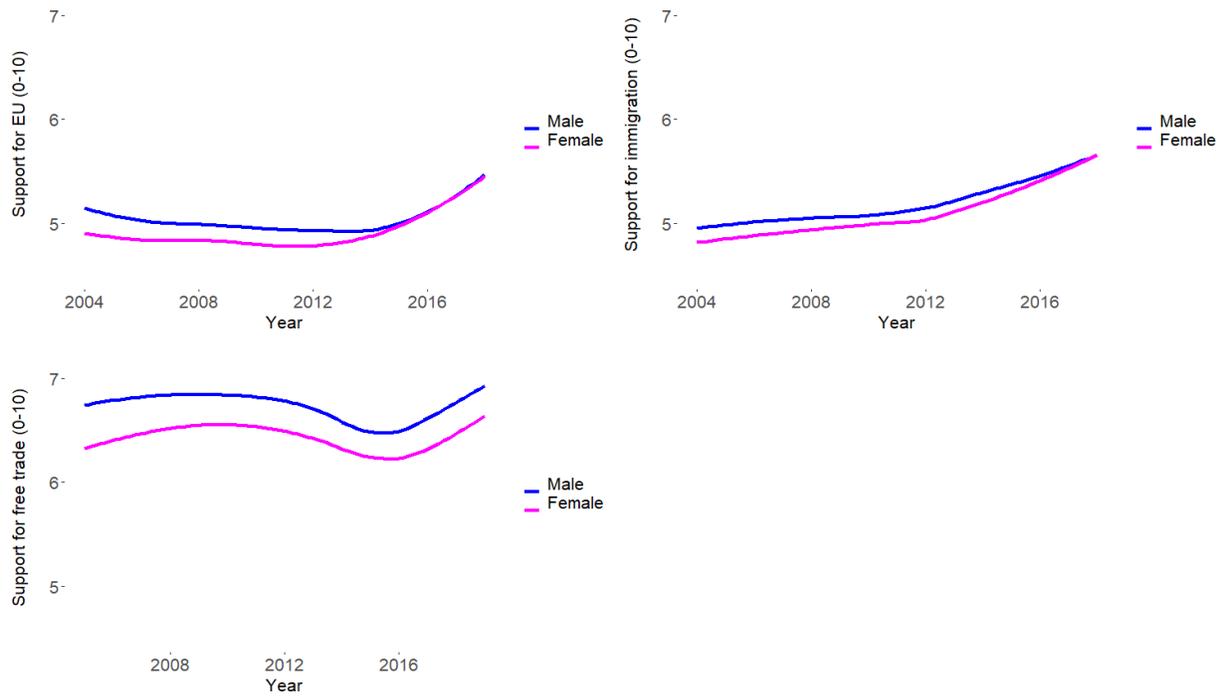
On immigration, the literature has produced mixed findings. In a cross-national analysis, O’Rourke and Sinnott (2006) find suggestive evidence that women are less supportive of immigration than men. By contrast, focusing on Western Europe, Semyonov, Raijman and Gorodzeisky (2006) show instead that men are more opposed to immigration than women. Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) present more nuanced findings from Europe, suggesting that the only significant gender gap on support for immigration is with regard to immigration from rich countries, which women are more opposed to. Ponce (2017) similarly finds little difference between genders on support for immigration in general, but shows that women are more hostile toward Muslim immigrants.

As many of these studies are based on survey data from a single year, rather than over-time analyses, I use data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and Eurobarometer surveys to trace the evolution of the gender gap in support for free trade, European integration, and immigration in Western Europe from 2004 to 2019. Figure 1 shows these trends over time.<sup>1</sup> On support for the EU and immigration, the gender gap starts out relatively small but closes completely by 2018. By contrast, on support for free trade, the gender gap is larger to begin with and narrows only slightly by 2019. Nevertheless, on all three measures, there is a persistent gender gap throughout the 2000s that shrinks over time.

Why is the gender gap in support for international economic integration narrowing in

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<sup>1</sup>For support for the EU and support for immigration, ESS data from 2004 to 2018 were used. The countries included in these analyses are Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK—the Western European EU member states for which ESS data are available for the entire period in question. The data are based on responses to the question whether European unification should go further or has gone too far and the question whether immigrants make the respondent’s country a better or worse place to live. For support for free trade, Eurobarometer data from 2005 to 2019 were used. All Western European EU member states are included in this analysis. The data are based on responses to the question whether free trade brings to mind something positive or negative.



**Figure 1:** The gender gap in support for the EU, immigration, and free trade in Western Europe over time, based on ESS and Eurobarometer survey data.

Western Europe? Previous studies on the gender gap in support for international trade, European integration, or immigration put forward a number of reasons for the existence of the gender gap, but few that would explain a shift over time on all three components. Alexandra Guisinger (2017), for instance, argues that women are less supportive of international trade because they are more concerned about the risks of economic volatility and potential job market disruption that trade liberalization can bring. Diana Mutz (2021) shows that the gender gap in support for international trade only applies when the trade agreement in question is viewed through the lens of competition rather than mutual benefit. On support for European integration, Nelsen and Guth (2000) suggest that women are less knowledgeable about the EU and therefore more distrustful of it.

Some research has suggested explanations for change in the gender gap over time. With regard to immigration, for instance, Aaron Ponce (2017) argues that women are more affected by the new gendered discourse about the supposed threat Muslim immigrants pose to gender equality in Europe and thus become less supportive of immigration over time. However, according to this account, the gender gap in support for immigration should be *widening*, rather than narrowing, as we observe in the data. Catherine De Vries (2018) suggests that support for European integration among women has increased due to greater gender mainstreaming in EU policy making. While this explanation is very plausible, it does not account for the simultaneous narrowing of the gender gap in support for immigration and for international trade. Instead, below, I develop a theoretical framework that helps explain the over-time dynamics we observe on all three measures.

## **The Linking of Anti-Internationalism to Extremism and Gendered Sensitivity to Social Norms**

In developing a framework that explains the shrinking gender gap described above, I draw on previous research in which I show that support for international economic integration

has increased in response to the linking of anti-internationalism with right-wing extremism (Obermeier 2021), as well as on the literature on the gender gap in support for the populist radical right (Harteveld and Ivarsflaten 2016; Harteveld et al. 2017; Mayer 1999; Oshri et al. 2022). I argue that the gender gap in support for international economic integration in Western Europe is shrinking because opposition to European integration, immigration, and (in some cases) free trade is increasingly being linked to the extremist positions and rhetoric of the populist radical right. In reaction to this, individuals who are uncomfortable with right-wing extremism become more supportive of international economic integration, with women reacting more strongly due to their greater discomfort with political extremism.

In previous research (Obermeier 2021), I argue that the growing prominence of populist radical right (PRR) parties in Western Europe in the wake of the euro and migrant crises have fundamentally reshaped public discourse on international economic integration. PRR parties gained prominence in this period largely by politicizing issues related to international economic integration, emerging as the most vocal political actors in this area and thus the predominant voices in the discourse. However, the internationalism/anti-internationalism dimension politicized by the populist radical right has not remained free-floating, but has instead been “bundled” with their broader ideology and platforms. Besides their anti-internationalism, PRR parties tend to be best known for their right-wing extremism. As these parties have become more prominent—and more vocal in the discourse on international economic integration—their anti-internationalism becomes increasingly tied to their extremism in the minds of the public.

As strong social norms against (explicit) right-wing extremism are prevalent in Western Europe (Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten 2013), many individuals who are ambivalent toward or even opposed to international economic integration are likely to feel pressure to alter their attitudes in order to avoid the association with right-wing extremism that anti-internationalism now signals. As a result, aggregate public opinion becomes more internationalist in response to the changing discourse on international economic integration.

How does this shift in public opinion narrow the gender gap in support for international economic integration? I argue that it does so because women’s attitudes are shifting more than men’s in response to the linking of anti-internationalism with extremism. Studies on the gender gap in support for PRR parties have found that one of the reasons women are on average less supportive of the populist radical right is because they are more sensitive to the social stigma associated with these parties and less comfortable with their extremist rhetoric (Harteveld and Ivarsflaten 2016; Harteveld et al. 2017; Mayer 1999; Oshri et al. 2022). I argue that these same characteristics should make women more prone to shift their attitudes in favor of international economic integration. As I have argued above, the increasing association of anti-internationalism with right-wing extremism makes individuals who are sensitive to social norms feel pressure to alter their preferences so they no longer align with right-wing extremism. Given women’s higher average sensitivity to social norms and greater discomfort with extremism, women should be more likely than men to alter their preferences. Greater shifts in attitudes among women than men in turn lead to the narrowing of the gender gap we observe in the data.

These dynamics are more likely to occur in contexts in which PRR parties are the primary political actors promoting anti-internationalism. Where other political actors—such as populist radical left parties or even mainstream parties—similarly engage in anti-internationalist rhetoric, the public can draw on alternative narratives of anti-internationalism promoted by non-PRR parties. As such, they are less likely to feel pressure to shift their attitudes even as PRR parties increasingly tie anti-internationalism to extremist positions and rhetoric. If the narrowing of the gender gap is driven by the differential response by men and women to the changes in discourse on international economic integration, we should expect stronger a stronger shift in women’s attitudes in countries where PRR parties are the primary political actors promoting anti-internationalism.

Importantly, this framework can help explain why the gender gap in support for European integration and immigration appears to have closed in Western Europe, while the gender gap

in support for free trade has only narrowed slightly. International trade is, in general, much less salient in Western European politics than either the EU or immigration. This also means that PRR parties in the region have devoted much less of their rhetoric and campaigning to the issue, especially when compared to European integration and immigration. In addition, while Western European PRR parties in the last two decades have relatively consistently adopted Euroskeptic and anti-immigration positions, there has been much greater variance in their positions on international trade (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020; Ostermann and Stahl 2022). Given these circumstances, it would make sense for protectionism to be much less tightly linked to right-wing extremism than Euroskepticism or anti-immigration sentiment, and therefore for women's attitudes to have shifted less on this issue in response.

Based on this framework, I test the following hypotheses:

H1: The effect of closer links between anti-internationalism and right-wing extremism in public discourse on support for international economic integration will be stronger among women than among men.

H2: The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between changes in public discourse and support for international economic integration will be stronger in countries where PRR parties are the primary political actors promoting anti-internationalism.

## **Study 1**

To test the hypotheses outlined above cross-nationally, I conduct an analysis of the effect of gender on the relationship between change in media discourse on Euroskepticism and public opinion toward the EU in eight Western European countries. For this analysis, I use a measure at the country-year level of how closely Euroskepticism is linked to right-wing extremism based on quantitative text analysis of newspaper articles (Obermeier 2021).

## Data and Methods

The key variables in this analysis are gender, a measure of the link between Euroskepticism and right-wing extremism in media discourse, and support for the EU. Data on gender and support for the EU are drawn from Eurobarometer survey data from 2000 to 2019. I operationalize support for the EU as responses to the question whether membership in the EU has been a good or bad thing for the respondent’s country.<sup>2</sup> To operationalize the link between Euroskepticism and right-wing extremism in media discourse, I use a measure that captures how many newspaper articles linked Euroskepticism to right-wing extremism as a percentage of the total number of articles in each country-year.<sup>3</sup> Due to data limitations, I include eight Western European EU member states in my analysis: Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK.

I use multilevel models with country random intercepts in order to account for the nested nature of the survey data. The models take the following form:

$$\text{Support for EU}_{ict} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Female}_{ict} + \beta_2 \text{Euroskepticism-extremism link}_{ct} + \beta_3 (\text{Female} \times \text{Euroskepticism-extremism link}_{ict}) \gamma \mathbf{Z}_{ict} + \delta \mathbf{W}_{ct} + \nu_c + \epsilon_{ict}$$

where  $i$ ,  $c$ , and  $t$  index individuals, countries, and years, respectively;  $\beta_1$  reports the effect of being female;  $\beta_2$  reports the effect of the *Euroskepticism-extremism link* measure;  $\beta_3$  reports the effect of the *Euroskepticism-extremism link* measure for women;  $\mathbf{Z}_{ict}$  is a set of individual-level control variables;  $\mathbf{W}_{ct}$  is a set of time-varying country-level control variables; and  $\nu_c$  and  $\epsilon_{ict}$  represent the country-level random variable and the individual-level error term, respectively. Given the moderating effect of gender expected in H1,  $\beta_3$  is the

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<sup>2</sup>Responses are coded as 0 (“A bad thing”), 1 (“Neither good nor bad”), or 2 (“A good thing”). This question was asked at least once each year between 2000 and 2019.

<sup>3</sup>This measure is described in greater detail in Obermeier (2021). I constructed corpora of newspaper articles drawn from two newspapers per country for the years 2000 to 2019. I then hand-coded between 400 and 1,000 articles per country, classifying them as either linking Euroskepticism to right-wing extremism or not. Based on these hand-coded texts, I trained machine learning algorithms to categorize the remaining articles in each country-specific corpus.

coefficient of interest for this analysis.

To test H2, I add an additional explanatory variable to the model: *PRR Euroskepticism*, a binary variable that captures whether or not a respondent’s country is one in which PRR parties are the primary political actors promoting Euroskepticism.<sup>4</sup> I interact *PRR Euroskepticism* with gender and *Euroskepticism-extremism link* to determine whether the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between the linking of Euroskepticism with extremism and support for the EU is stronger in contexts in which PRR parties are the primary political actors promoting Euroskepticism.

## Results

The results from these analyses are reported in Table 1. Models 1 and 2 test H1, while Models 3 and 4 test H2. Models 2 and 4 also include a number of control variables: age, education, political ideology, unemployment rate, growth in gross domestic product (GDP), and PRR party vote share (the last three variables are measured at the country-year level). The coefficient on the interaction term in Models 1 and 2 is positive and statistically significant, as expected if women are in fact changing their attitudes toward the EU more strongly than men in response to changing public discourse on Euroskepticism. In Model 3, the coefficient on the triple interaction term (*female* x *PRR Euroskepticism* x *Euroskepticism-extremism link*) is positive but not statistically significant, while in Model 4, it is positive and statistically significant. I therefore find mixed evidence on the hypothesis that the moderating effect of gender is stronger in countries in which the populist radical right are the primary political actors promoting Euroskepticism.

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<sup>4</sup>Austria, Germany, and Spain are classified as countries where PRR parties are the primary political actors promoting Euroskepticism. Ireland does not have a prominent PRR party, while in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the UK other parties have also been active in promoting Euroskepticism. This coding is based on the 2002–2019 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (CHES) (Bakker et al. 2015; Bakker et al. 2020; Polk et al. 2017) and validated using adjusted data on party positions developed by Bakker, Jolly, and Polk (2020).

**Table 1:** The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between the Euroskepticism-extremism link and support for the EU.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Female	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.06*** (0.00)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Euroskepticism-extremism link	0.05*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Female x Euroskepticism-extremism link	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)
PRR Euroskepticism			-0.05 (0.16)	0.02 (0.19)
Female x PRR Euroskepticism			0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Euroskepticism-extremism link x PRR Euroskepticism			0.47*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.03)
Female x PRR Euroskepticism x Euroskepticism-extremism link			0.07 (0.04)	0.08** (0.04)
Control variables		✓		✓
Observations	303,206	229,674	303,206	229,674
Countries	8	8	8	8
AIC	652,363.51	486,706.53	651,666.81	486,492.38

Note: Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Results for control variables and country random intercepts omitted from the table. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## Study 2

I complement the cross-national analyses described above with an unexpected event during survey design focusing on the murder of UK Member of Parliament Jo Cox in 2016. Using this design allows me to avoid endogeneity issues with regard to the relationship between changes in public discourse and changes in public opinion.

Cox’s murder tightened the link between anti-internationalism—in particular, Euroskepticism and anti-immigration sentiment—and right-wing extremism in UK media discourse. Cox was well-known for her pro-EU and pro-immigration views and media coverage after her death emphasized her position on these issues (Tapsfield 2016). By contrast, her murderer, Thomas Mair, was a right-wing extremist and white supremacist who appears to have been motivated to commit the murder due to his support for Brexit (Cobain, Parveen, and Taylor 2016). Almost immediately after the attack, media coverage began explicitly linking Mair’s political violence and his extremism to his anti-internationalism and, more broadly, to the Brexit campaign that was occurring at the time (Obermeier 2021). In the wake of this shocking occurrence and the subsequent media coverage, it is reasonable to expect that the British public would more strongly associate Euroskepticism and anti-immigration sentiment with right-wing extremism.

## Data and Methods

To estimate how gender moderates the effect of Cox’s murder and the subsequent change in public discourse on support for international economic integration in the UK, I use survey data from Wave 8 of the British Election Study (BES) Internet Panel. This wave was fielded between May 6 and June 22, 2016, allowing me to compare survey responses that were collected prior to Cox’s murder on June 16 to responses collected after the murder. Due to the unexpected nature of Cox’s murder, this design should allow me to avoid issues of endogeneity, as long as the core assumptions of excludability and temporal ignorability hold

(Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020).

I use two variables to measure support for the EU: the first is *Remain vote*, which captures whether the respondent planned to vote for the UK to remain in the EU in the Brexit referendum (which was held on June 23, 2016, exactly one week after Cox’s murder), and the second is *support for EU*, which captures to what extent respondents believe the UK should unite fully with the EU.<sup>5</sup> To measure support for immigration, I use three variables: *general support for immigration*, which captures to what extent respondents believe that the UK should admit more or fewer immigrants, *immigrants enrich*, which captures to what extent respondents believe that immigration enriches Britain’s cultural life, and *immigrants good for economy*, which captures to what extent respondents believe that immigration is good for Britain’s economy.<sup>6</sup>

I estimate the following model, using my measures of support for the EU and immigration as outcomes:

$$\text{Outcome}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Post}_i + \beta_2 \text{Female}_i + \beta_3 \text{Post} \times \text{female}_i + \epsilon_i$$

where  $\beta_1$  reports the effect of responding to the survey after the murder (compared to before the murder);  $\beta_2$  reports the effect of being female;  $\beta_3$  reports the effect of responding to the survey after the murder for women, and  $\epsilon_i$  is the error term. I use two different bandwidths for the number of days prior to and after the murder that are included in the analysis:  $-6$  to  $+6$  days and  $-14$  to  $+6$  days (as the survey wave ends on June 22, it is not possible to go beyond 6 days after Cox’s murder).

## Results

Results from the analyses using support for EU as the outcome of interest are reported in Table 2, while results using support for immigration as the outcome of interest are reported

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<sup>5</sup>*Remain vote* is a binary variable, while *support for EU* takes values from 0 to 10.

<sup>6</sup>*General support for immigration* takes values from 0 to 10, while *immigrants enrich* and *immigrants good for economy* take values from 1 to 7.

in Table 3. Across different specifications—including and excluding control variables, and using different bandwidths—the coefficient on the interaction term remains positive, though not always statistically significant. In particular, results are more robust to different specifications when looking at support for immigration than when looking at support for the EU.

**Table 2:** Effect of Cox’s murder on support for EU, moderated by gender.

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
		± 6 days	± 6 days	−14 to +6 days	−14 to +6 days	
Remain vote	Post	−0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	
	Female	−0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.02)	
	Post x female	0.05** (0.02)	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	
	Control variables		✓		✓	
	Observations	8,365	1,879	13,595	3,122	
	Support for EU	Post	−0.03 (0.10)	0.16 (0.16)	0.02 (0.08)	0.07 (0.14)
	Female	−0.01 (0.10)	0.00 (0.18)	0.09 (0.06)	−0.07 (0.12)	
Post x female	0.31** (0.14)	0.13 (0.25)	0.20* (0.12)	0.21 (0.21)		
Control variables		✓		✓		
Observations	8,373	1,900	13,635	3,155		

Note: Coefficients from OLS regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Overall, the results from the unexpected event during survey design support my hy-

**Table 3:** Effect of Cox’s murder on support for immigration, moderated by gender.

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
		$\pm 6$ days	$\pm 6$ days	-14 to +6 days	-14 to +6 days	
General support for immigration	Post	0.07 (0.09)	0.02 (0.14)	0.12 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.12)	
	Female	-0.28*** (0.09)	-0.10 (0.16)	-0.17*** (0.06)	-0.12 (0.11)	
	Post x female	0.29** (0.13)	0.43* (0.22)	0.18* (0.11)	0.44** (0.19)	
	Control variables		✓		✓	
	Observations	8,366	1,839	13,144	3,061	
	Immigrants enrich	Post	0.06 (0.06)	0.05 (0.10)	0.09 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.09)
	Female	-0.08 (0.06)	0.03 (0.11)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.08)	
Post x female	0.17* (0.09)	0.22 (0.16)	0.08 (0.07)	0.29** (0.14)		
Control variables		✓		✓		
Observations	8,448	1,906	13,800	3,170		
Immigrants good for economy	Post	0.10 (0.06)	0.03 (0.10)	0.14*** (0.05)	-0.06 (0.08)	
	Female	-0.34*** (0.06)	-0.11 (0.11)	-0.27*** (0.04)	-0.21*** (0.07)	
	Post x female	0.15* (0.08)	0.31** (0.15)	0.08 (0.07)	0.40*** (0.12)	
	Control variables		✓		✓	
	Observations	8,387	1,884	13,703	3,137	

Note: Coefficients from OLS regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

pothesis that women reacted more strongly to the change in discourse surrounding anti-internationalism in the wake of Cox's murder than men did. In fact, while results from Study 1 seem to suggest that men become more supportive of the EU as well in response to the linking of Euroskepticism to right-wing extremism (though their attitudes do not change as much as women's), results from Study 2 provide little evidence that men's support for international economic integration was affected by Cox's murder.

## Conclusion

Gender gaps in political attitudes occur for many different reasons and can shrink or widen in response to structural, societal, or political dynamics. In this paper, I show that the gender gap in support for international economic integration in Western Europe has narrowed over the last twenty years. I argue that the reason for this shift in the relationship between gender and internationalism is the increasing link in public discourse between anti-internationalism and right-wing extremism that is a result of the growing prominence of PRR parties during this time period. In response to this change in public discourse, women shift their attitudes on international economic integration more than men do, as they are on average more sensitive to social norms against extremism.

Two studies provide evidence broadly in support of this argument. First, a cross-national media and survey analysis of eight Western European countries indicates that women's attitudes toward the EU are more strongly affected by changes in public discourse linking Euroskepticism to right-wing extremism. Second, an unexpected event during survey design shows that while women became more supportive of European integration and immigration following the murder of Jo Cox and the subsequent linking of anti-internationalism with violence and extremism in the media, men's attitudes did not appear to change significantly. The results from these studies suggest that, over time, differential responses to the growing link between anti-internationalism and right-wing extremism in Western Europe contributed

to the closing gender gap in support for international economic integration.

This conclusion raises important questions for the future relationship between gender and support for international economic integration. In particular, it suggests that this relationship may be dependent on both the evolution of public discourse on anti-internationalism and on the way gender shapes interactions with the populist radical right. With regard to the evolution of public discourse, the fact that many PRR parties and politicians have recently softened or sidelined some of their anti-internationalist rhetoric in favor of a greater focus on domestic issues, such as energy prices and climate change mitigation, may mean less close links between anti-internationalism and extremism in future discourse. Similarly, efforts by some PRR parties—such as the *Rassemblement national* in France—to tone down their extremist rhetoric may also weaken the link between anti-internationalism and extremism.

The relationship between gender and reactions to the populist radical right may also be undergoing change. PRR parties have conventionally been supported more by men than women (Givens 2004; Immerzeel 2015; Mudde 2007). However, in some countries, that gender gap appears to be closing. Studies show that PRR parties can increasingly attract female voters by softening their extremist image and making greater efforts to represent women’s preferences (Mayer 2015; Chueri and Damerow 2022). In fact, in some contexts, PRR parties are strategically electing more women in order to attract female voters (Weeks et al. 2022) or positioning themselves as defenders of gender equality (Akkerman 2015). If these efforts are successful and the gender gap in support for the populist radical right erodes, this may lead once again to a widening of the gender gap in support for international economic integration.

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