

# Angry White Women? How Immigration has Become a “Women’s Issue” and why it Matters

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Over the last years, the rise of radical right-wing parties from the Front National in France, the Alternative for Germany, to the Sweden Democrats, has attracted considerable political and academic attention.

While it is still contested what makes these parties so successful, one of the most common findings about the radical right is that these parties are “Männerparteien”. They are more likely to be founded by men, supported by men, and led by men. Yet, I argue that this conventional understanding of the radical right misses a key part of their success story: women.

Using electoral survey data from 11 Western European countries (1989-2017), I show that there is much greater variation in the radical right gender gap than previously assumed. In countries such as France and Italy, the radical right gender gap has not

just closed, but reversed: women now support the radical right in greater numbers than men.

I argue that one explanation for this rise in female radical right supporters is the parties’ discourse on immigration. Radical right-wing parties have started systematically linking gender equality concerns to immigration, stating for example that “the migrant crisis signals the beginning of the end of women’s rights” (Marine Le Pen, 2016). Using data from two original survey experiments conducted in Germany and the UK, I show that these new immigration messages can indeed encourage women to express higher anti-immigration sentiment, as well as electoral support for the radical right.