

PART OF **UNDERSTANDING RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT**

# THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

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## ESTONIA AND LATVIA



### **ESTONIA**

Estonian Conservative People's  
Party (EKRE)

### **LATVIA**

National Alliance (NA)



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Daphne Halikiopoulou** is Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Reading. She has published extensively on nationalism and the cultural and economic determinants of right-wing populist parties support.

**Tim Vlandas** is Associate Professor of Comparative Social Policy in the Department of Social Policy and Intervention and Fellow of St Antony’s College at University of Oxford. His research explores the political and economic determinants and consequences of social and economic policies in Europe.

FES REGIONAL OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION  
DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE

Reichsratsstraße 13/5, A-1010 Vienna

**RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTENT:** Johanna Lutz, Director, Democracy of the Future

**PROJECT LEAD:** Michael Jennewein, Researcher for Democracy & Economics

Project website: <https://democracy.fes.de/topics/right-wing-populism>

Contact: [democracy.vienna@fes.de](mailto:democracy.vienna@fes.de)

**DESIGN:** Caroline Plank-Bachseltens | [www.bueroblack.at](http://www.bueroblack.at)

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UNDERSTANDING RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# THE RISE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN EUROPE

Since the early 2010s, right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) have been on the rise across Europe. This development has taken place at the expense of the mainstream: while the average electoral score of RWPPs has been steadily increasing over time, support for both the mainstream left and right has declined.

The right-wing populist momentum sweeping Europe since the early 2010s has three features:

## 1. ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE

Many RWPPs have improved their electoral performance over time. The French Rassemblement National (RN) (formerly Front National - FN), the Austrian Party for Freedom (FPÖ), the Greek Golden Dawn (GD) and the German Alternative for Germany (AfD) have all increasingly managed to mobilise voters beyond their core support groups. Countries previously identified as ‘outliers’ because of the absence of an electorally successful RWPP are no longer exceptional in this respect – for example, Portugal with the rise of Chega and Spain with the rise of Vox.

## 2. ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT

A substantial number of RWPPs have either recently been part of governing coalitions, or served as formal cooperation partners in right-wing minority governments. These include the Lega (Italy), the FPÖ, the Polish Law and Justice (PiS), the Hungarian Fidesz, the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) and Independent Greeks (ANEL), the Finns Party (PS), the Danish People’s Party (DF), the National Alliance (NA) (Latvia) and the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE).

## 3. ABILITY TO INFLUENCE THE POLICY AGENDA

RWPPs such as the RN (France), the SD (Sweden) and UKIP (UK) have successfully competed in their domestic systems, permeating mainstream ground and influencing the agendas of other parties. As a result, mainstream parties on the right and, in some instances, on the left have often adopted accommodative strategies – mainly regarding immigration.

# PATTERNS OF RWPP SUCCESS ACROSS EUROPE

A close look at the parties' support trajectories reveals interesting regional patterns:

## WESTERN EUROPE

In much of Western Europe, RWPP success takes the form of systemic entrenchment – i.e. the gradual ability of niche parties to permeate mainstream ground. Most Western European RWPPs commenced as niche actors operating on the fringes of the political system. They increased their support beyond their secure voter base by becoming progressively embedded in the system either as coalition partners or as credible opposition parties.

## SOUTHERN EUROPE

RWPP success has varied significantly across Southern European countries. Greece has had RWPPs both in government (LAOS, ANEL) and opposition (GD). In contrast, RWPPs in Cyprus, Spain and Portugal for a long time failed to make substantial electoral gains despite economic grievances and immigration. But this trend is changing. These countries are no longer 'exceptional' cases. ELAM has gradually increased its support in Cyprus. Spain and Portugal have been experiencing the rise of Vox and Chega, respectively.

## THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

The Nordic countries have witnessed considerable RWPP success. The Danish DF has exerted substantial policy influence as a recognised cooperation partner of the centre-right parties since the early 2000s. The Finns Party (PS) turned in its first good result in 2007, making its electoral breakthrough in 2011, and in 2015 even joining a centre-right coalition government. In Sweden – a 'deviant' case until recently – the Sweden Democrats' (SD) achieved their electoral breakthrough in 2010. While a *cordon sanitaire* strategy has kept them out of government, this consensus may be changing, as the SD has recently become more influential in local coalitions.

## EASTERN EUROPE

Eastern Europe has some of the most electorally successful RWPPs, including Fidesz in Hungary, PiS in Poland, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and the NA in Latvia. The dominant pattern is a radicalisation of the mainstream. Formerly mainstream parties have radicalised in government, increasingly adopting populist, illiberal and authoritarian policy positions. Given the low levels of immigration in the region, Eastern European RWPPs tend to target domestic minorities. In the more ethnically homogenous countries such as Poland, Hungary and Slovenia, mobilisation occurs along socially conservative lines. In the more ethnically pluralistic societies, such as Estonia and Latvia, RWPPs have mobilised against larger politicised ethnic groups, most notably the Russian minorities that reside in these countries.

# UNDERSTANDING THE SUCCESS OF RWPPS

**What factors are influencing support for RWPPs across Europe? Conventional wisdom emphasises the political climate of RWPP normalisation and systemic entrenchment, where issues 'owned' by these parties are salient: immigration, nationalism and cultural grievances. The importance of cultural values in shaping voting behaviour and the strong empirical association of cultural concerns over immigration and RWPP support at the individual level have led to an emerging consensus that the increasing success of RWPPs can be best understood as a 'cultural backlash' (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020).**

This report contests the view that the rise of right-wing populism should be predominantly understood as a 'cultural backlash'. A sole focus on culture overlooks:

- (1) the predictive power of economic concerns over immigration and the critical distinction between galvanising a core constituency on the one hand and mobilising more broadly beyond this core constituency on the other (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020)
- (2) the strategies RWPPs themselves are pursuing to capitalise on multiple insecurities, including both cultural and economic; and
- (3) the role of social policies in mitigating those insecurities that drive RWPP support.

**To address these issues, the report looks at three levels – what we call the Three Ps: People, Parties and Policies:**

**1. People:** How do cultural and economic grievances affect individuals' likelihood of voting for a RWPP? How are those grievances distributed among the RWPP electorate? And how does this distribution compare to the distribution of the same types of grievances among the centre-left and the entire country electorates?



**2. Parties:** What strategies do RWPPs adopt to capitalise on their core and peripheral electorates? How do they employ nationalism, populism and welfarism in their narratives and programmatic agendas?



**3. Policies:** Do policies matter, and if so, what type of policies can mitigate the economic risks driving different social groups within the electorate to support RWPPs?



We address these questions using empirical evidence from both quantitative and qualitative analyses. First, we perform statistical analyses using nine waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) to analyse objective and subjective individual characteristics associated with RWPPs' support and thus identify the conditions that drive the RWPP vote at the individual level (demand). Second, we analyse RWPP manifestos using the Comparative Manifestos Project (MARPOR) dataset to map RWPP positions and identify the supply-side conditions that facilitate their success (supply). Third, we draw on our research matching ESS data with social policy datasets to determine the extent to which social policies mediate the risks that drive individuals to vote RWPP (policy).

## OUR ANALYSIS SHOWS THE FOLLOWING

At the **people** level, both cultural and economic concerns over immigration increase the likelihood of voting for an RWPP. While cultural concerns are often a stronger predictor of RWPP voting behaviour, this does not automatically mean that they matter more for RWPP success in substantive terms because people driven by economic concerns are often a numerically larger group. The main issue to pay attention to here is **size**: both the size of the effect, and also the size of the voter groups that are subject to this effect. Voters primarily concerned with the cultural impact of immigration are core RWPP voters. Although they might be highly likely to vote RWPP, they also tend to be a numerically small group. By contrast, voters that are primarily concerned with the economic impact of immigration are peripheral voters. They are also highly likely to vote for RWPP, but in addition they are a numerically larger group. Since the interests and preferences of these two groups can differ, successful RWPPs tend to be those that are able to attract both groups. What determines RWPP success is therefore the ability to mobilise a coalition of interests between core and peripheral voters (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020).

At the **party** level, we emphasise the importance of nationalism, as opposed to populism, as a mobilisation tool that has facilitated RWPP success. We argue that RWPPs in Western Europe employ a **civic nationalist** normalisation strategy that allows them to offer nationalist solutions to all types of insecurities that drive voting behaviour (Halikiopoulou et al. 2013). This strategy has two features. First, it presents culture as a value issue and justifies exclusion on ideological grounds; and second a focus on social welfare and emphasis on welfare chauvinism. Eastern European RWPPs, on the other hand, remain largely **ethnic nationalist**, focusing on ascriptive criteria of national belonging and mobilising voters on socially conservative positions and a rejection of minority rights.

At the **policy** level, this report documents the previously overlooked importance of welfare state institutions (Rathgeb and Busemeyer 2021; Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2021). Our analysis illustrates that welfare state policies moderate a range of economic risks individuals face. This reduces the likelihood of support for RWPPs among insecure individuals – for example, the unemployed, pensioners, low-income workers and employees on temporary contracts. Our key point here is that political actors have agency and can shape political outcomes: to understand why some individuals vote for RWPPs, we should not only focus on their risk-driven grievances, but also on policies that may moderate these risks.

## HOW SHOULD PROGRESSIVES RESPOND? POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Our analysis suggests that co-opting right-wing populist policy agendas is, by and large, not a winning strategy for the centre-left. This finding is consistent with the recent literature suggesting that the centre-left and RWPP electorates are considerably different (Abou Chadi et al. 2021) and that employing accommodative RWPP ‘copycat’ strategies may attract a small number of RWPP voters, but alienate a much larger proportion of their own voters (Chou et al. 2021).**

The current hype about ‘new’ issues such as immigration and cultural grievances often overlooks significant economic concerns among voters. Indeed, a large share of the electorate is concerned about inequality. These concerns are not niche, nor are they confined to a shrinking voter group that is becoming irrelevant. Even within the context of emerging cleavages, inequalities are embedded in – and shape the salience of – ‘new’ issues.

Instead, a more beneficial strategy for the centre-left is to try to (re)capture these voters by reclaiming ownership of (in)equality. Articulating a vision of an equitable society will allow progressive parties to re-build their broad voter coalitions and pioneer a strategy that mobilises voters on an issue the left already ‘owns’.

THE BALTIC COUNTRIES: ESTONIA AND LATVIA

ESTONIA

Estonian  
Conservative People's Party (EKRE)

LATVIA

National Alliance  
All for Latvia! –  
For Fatherland  
and Freedom/  
LNNK (NA)

PATTERNS OF SUCCESS

Eastern European RWPP trajectories are the product of historical conjectures that include, in particular, the communist experience. The dominant pattern in Eastern Europe overall is that of radicalised mainstream parties that increasingly adopt populist, illiberal and authoritarian policy positions based on ethnic nationalism. This differs from Western Europe, where most RWPPs commenced as niche actors operating on the fringes of the political system and progressively increased their support beyond their secure voter base by adopting civic nationalist narratives and progressively permeated mainstream ground either as coalition partners or as credible opposition parties.

There are notable variations among post-communist countries. One important distinction is between, on the one hand, the more ethnically homogenous countries such as Poland, Hungary and Slovenia, where mobilisation takes place along socially conservative lines, and, on the other hand, the more ethnically pluralistic societies such as Estonia and Latvia, where RWPPs mobilise against larger politicised ethnic groups. The Baltic states, therefore, display a pattern different from the homogeneous states of Eastern Europe. RWPPs in Latvia and Estonia draw on ethnic and language-based cleavages and attempt to mobilise against larger, highly politicised ethnic groups (Bustikova 2018). The refugee crisis has also played a significant role in the development of RWPP politics since 2015.

Figure 1: RWPP national election history in Estonia 2000-2021

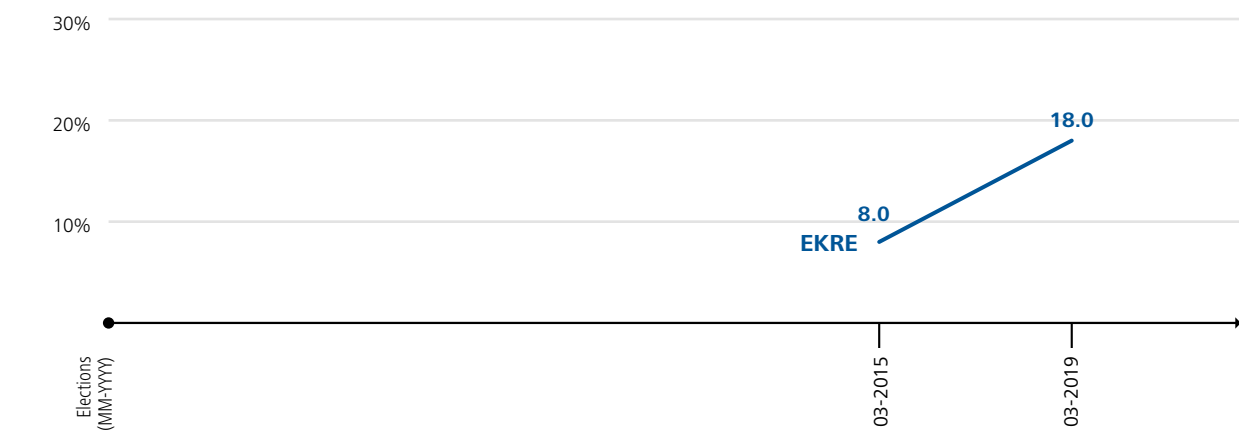
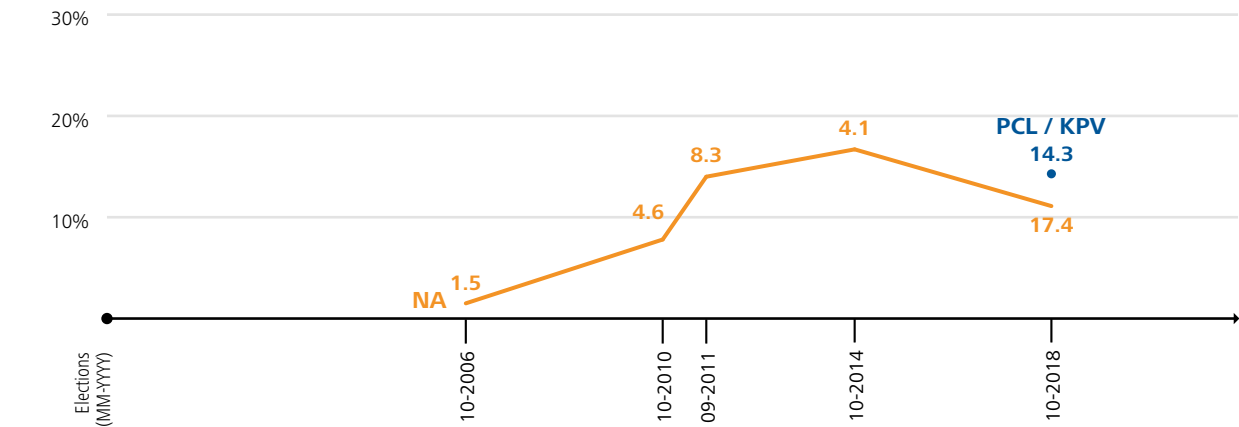


Figure 2: RWPP national election history in Latvia 2000-2021

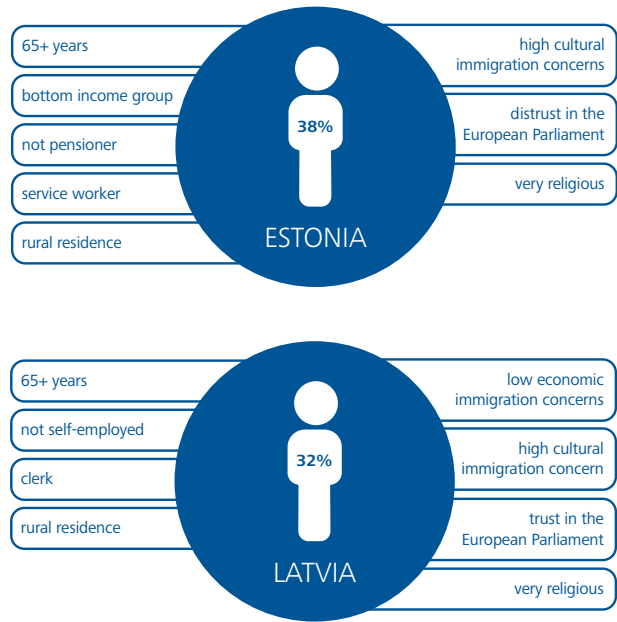


DEMAND: WHO VOTES RWPPS IN THE BALTICS?

In Estonia, older, educated, religious individuals who reside in the countryside and belong to the bottom income group or are employed in the service sector are more likely to vote for RWPPs. These individuals distrust the EU and have cultural, but not economic, immigration concerns.

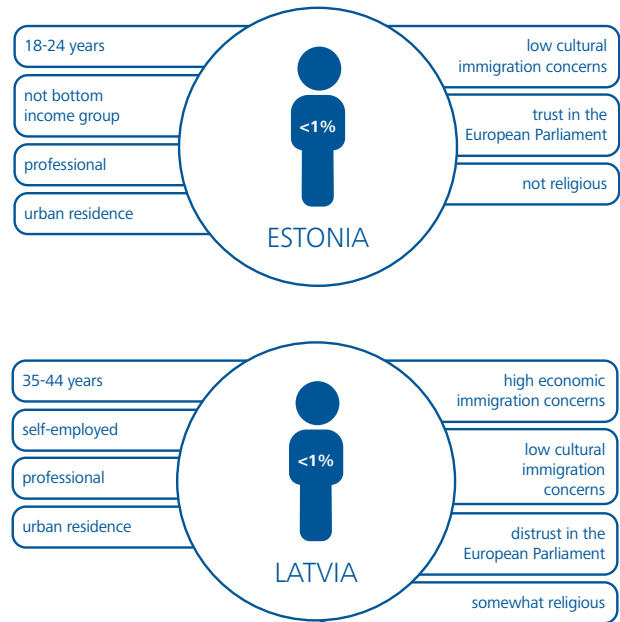
In Latvia, older, educated individuals who live in the countryside and are in low-skill occupations such as clerks and operators, but not in the service sector, are more likely to vote for RWPPs. These individuals have cultural concerns over immigration.

Figure 3: Who is the most likely right-wing populist party voter?



Probability to vote for a Right Wing Populist Party (%)

Figure 4: Who is the least likely right-wing populist party voter?



Probability to vote for a Right Wing Populist Party (%)

## SUPPLY: WHAT MAKES THESE PARTIES' NARRATIVES [UN]SUCCESSFUL?

RWPPs in both Latvia and Estonia have been increasingly successful in attracting voter support by linking campaigns over immigration and the refugee crisis to narratives of 'colonisation' under the Soviets and collective anxieties of becoming 'colonised' again (Braghioli and Petsinis 2019). They pin their anti-immigrant narratives on the alleged threats posed to the cultural homogeneity of their respective countries by Russian migrants. Their nationalism is ethnic-based and directed against (mainly Russian) ethno-linguistic minorities, although EKRE's discourse is overall more populist with some civic references, while NA's discourse is more explicitly nativist. However, there are also important variations between the two cases: The Latvian party system has been more consistent in allowing the inclusion of the NA in government as a coalition partner. In Estonia, EKRE has been the subject of a *cordon sanitaire* policy, which excluded it from office until it joined a centre-right government in 2019.

## PARTY PROFILES

# ESTONIAN CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE'S PARTY (EKRE)

**The Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) was established in 2012 as a coalition of formerly centre-right and more nationalistic/Eurosceptic groups. The party has been steadily consolidating its support, increasing from 8.1 percent of the popular vote in 2015 to 18.4 percent in January 2018. Although EKRE was treated as a pariah in Estonian politics, in 2019 it was invited to join a right-wing government with the Centre Party and Fatherland after coming third in the 2019 general election. Although the government collapsed in January 2021, the party's popularity has been increasing.**

## EKRE'S VALUE PROFILE: PRESERVING ESTONIAN TRADITIONS

EKRE promotes nativist identity politics, emphasises out-group threats to national survival and adopts economic nationalism. The party rejects liberalism and communism and sees its mission as preserving Estonian traditions and national interest. It adopts a more openly populist discourse than its Latvian counterpart. Its party programme commences with the line 'People first! If one has to choose between politics and the people, one has to choose the people' and links populism to nationalism by arguing that domestic elites and their EU collaborators have 'caused immeasurable damage to the Estonian state, economy, Estonian people and Estonianness' (EKRE 2021).

EKRE's nationalism is predominantly ethnic, although the party itself rejects the 'racist' label and makes some efforts to include civic statements in its discourse to avoid the racist branding. Their online party programme includes a '2030 vision' in which they envisage an 'Estonian-cultural, Estonian-speaking and pro-Estonian population' (EKRE 2021). According to this vision, national minorities 'are loyal to the Republic of Estonia and have a positive relationship with the Estonian people, language, culture and history' (EKRE 2021). During recent electoral campaigns, leader Martin Helme has emphasised that EKRE's anti-immigration platform is based on economic, cultural and security concerns. As part of the security narrative, EKRE targets Muslims and emphasises the crime dimension of immigration concerns, for example using the series of sexual assaults that took place in Cologne in 2016 to argue that immigration is a crime problem (Braghioli and Petsinis 2019). Euroscepticism is also key to EKRE's agenda – a narrative common to RWPP platforms across post-communist states. The party criticises the EU for its policies, for example, its guidelines on LGBT rights and for underestimating Russia's security threat for the Baltic States (Braghioli and Petsinis 2019).



## EKRE'S ECONOMIC AND WELFARE POLICY PROFILE: ECONOMIC NATIONALISM AND WELFARE CHAUVINISM

Compared to other RWPPs, EKRE devotes a relatively substantial proportion (2.5 pages) to the economy. Its economic policy is nation-centric and focuses on 'increasing the well-being and living standards of the Estonian people' (EKRE 2021). This policy follows the RWPP line of tax-cuts plus welfare chauvinism. The party supports the creation of 'a favourable economic environment for the development of domestic business, banking, trade and agriculture' and pledges the reduction of taxes and state fees as well as the elimination of red tape in order to encourage small, family and medium-sized domestic enterprises (EKRE 2021). At the same time, they propose 'flexible employment opportunities for the elderly, a pension commensurate with the general prosperity of society and the effective implementation of national support mechanisms for people with disabilities' (EKRE 2021). Their welfare chauvinist policies are also explicitly directed towards supporting large families with children, which aligns with their conservative social programme and its anti-immigrant agenda. In its vision, the party highlights that by 2030, 'due to the natural increase of the population and high productivity, Estonia will not need foreign workers from abroad (EKRE 2021). Finally, EKRE portrays refugees as scroungers of social welfare and pledges to deport them.

The party's economic policy is centred around economic grievances and anti-EU narrative. In its programme, EKRE suggests that Estonia has been transformed from a sovereign nation-state into 'a vassal state representing the interests of the European Union, foreign capital and stagnant career officials', where all social strata, including workers, entrepreneurs, rural dwellers, young people and the elderly, suffer equally (EKRE 2021).

## NATIONAL ALLIANCE (NA)

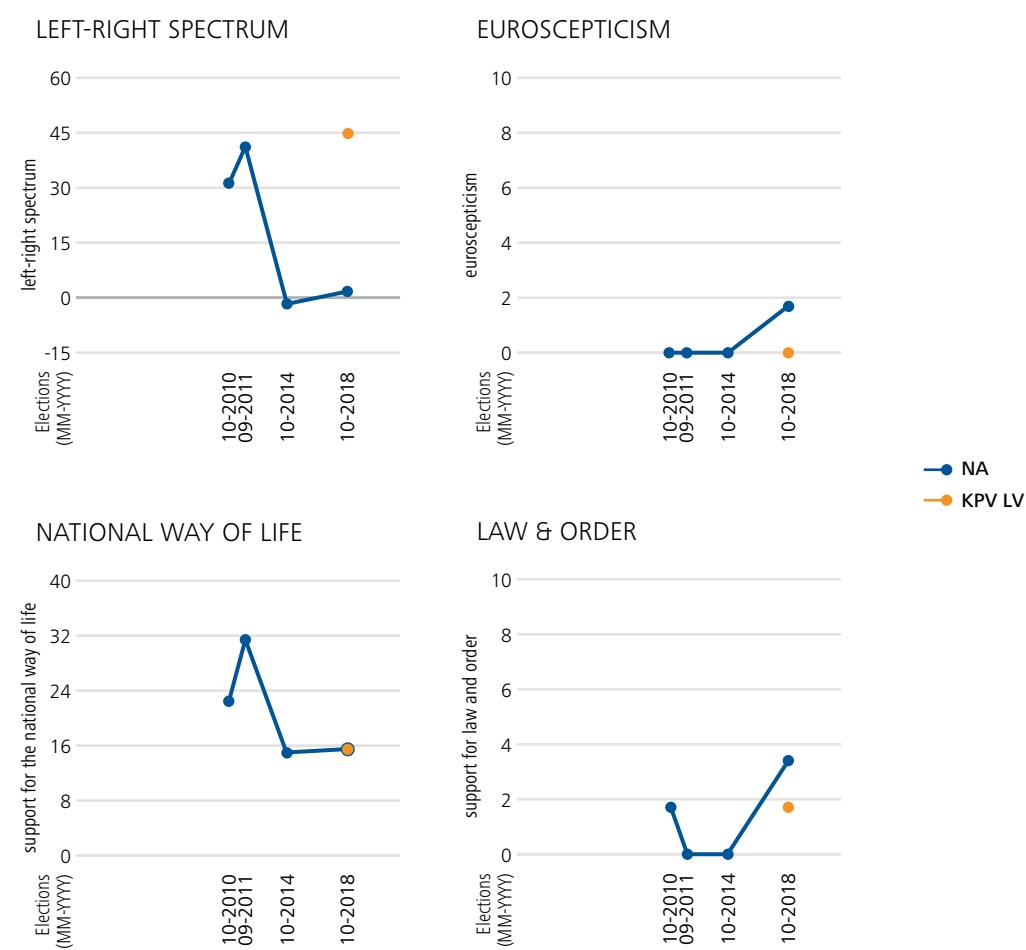
**The National Alliance All for Latvia! – For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (NA) was established in 2011 from the merger of two parties: the right-wing 'For Fatherland and Freedom', which itself was founded in 1993 and describes itself as centre-right, supporting the free market and national conservatism; and the more nationalistic 'All for Latvia!', which originated as a nationalist youth group and was registered as a political party in 2006. NA has enjoyed consistent support since its inception within the 14-16 per cent range, although in the 2018 elections this support declined to 11.1 per cent. Unlike its Estonian counterpart, it has long been treated as an acceptable political force in Latvian politics and participates in government coalitions. NA belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in the European Parliament together with other RWPPs, including the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Greek solution, the Spanish Vox and the Polish Law and Justice (PiS).**

### NA'S VALUE PROFILE: ETHNIC NATIONALISM FOR A 'LATVIAN LATVIA'

The NA has a long tradition of activism and shows a more explicit preference for radical forms of political engagement compared to the Estonian EKRE (Braghirolli and Petsinis 2018). The party's main goal is a 'Latvian Latvia' (NA 2021). It espouses an ethnic form of nationalism which links identity, ethnicity and religion and seeks the promotion of the Latvian language and traditional Latvian 'Christian' values (Figure 5). In its party programme, NA describes its values as the need to preserve the Latvian nation, language and culture; honour and commemorate national heroes; pursue Latvia's independence, growth, prosperity and justice; preserve the family and marriage; and cherish nature and God (NA 2021). The party explicitly positions itself against the decline of moral values, a narrative which it links to ethnic nationalism, claiming, for example, that homosexual values are intrinsically alien to Latvia. This suggests that the ethnic nationalism component of the party's discourse is more explicit than EKRE's. At the same time, this discourse is less populist, making fewer references to the people and anti-establishment politics (Braghirolli and Petsinis 2018).

The NA is explicitly anti-immigrant, supporting ‘the increase in the proportion of Latvians in Latvia and preventing an irresponsible immigration policy’ (NA 2021). However, the party is less Eurosceptic than its Western European counterparts (Figure 5). Its immigration scepticism is directly focused on the ‘Russian question’, i.e. ‘the consequences of migration imposed by the USSR’ (NA 2021). The party stresses the alleged threats posed by the large politicised Russian population in Latvia, suggesting that Soviet-era Russian migration made Latvians ‘a minority’ with devastating consequences for Latvian unity and the preservation of the Latvian language (NA 2021). As a result, the NA’s key aim is to ensure Latvian national survival. This can be achieved by preventing pro-Russian forces from entering the government, rejecting the EU’s migrant and refugee redistribution plans and opposing EU refugee quotas, and ensuring that Latvians do not leave Latvia and those who have left will return (NA 2021).

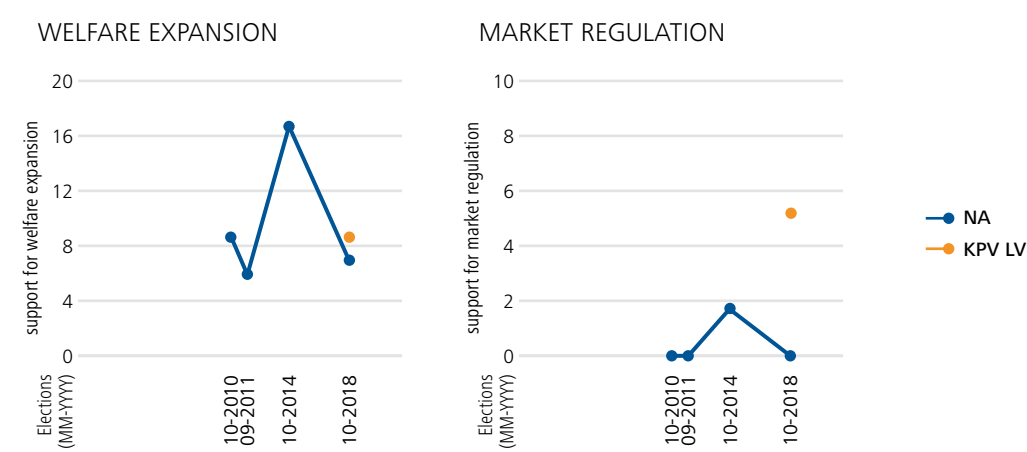
Figure 5: NA’ and KPV’s stance on the left-right spectrum, euroscepticism, the national way of life, and law & order



NA’S ECONOMIC AND WELFARE POLICY PROFILE: FREE MARKET AND WELFARE CHAUVINISM

The NA follows the inconsistent ‘free market and tax-cuts plus welfare chauvinism’ pattern: it supports liberal economic policies and at the same time it makes references to economic nationalism which, similarly to EKRE, are all aimed at supporting the national economy and the family (Figure 6). The main premise of their economic policy is to reduce emigration and support Latvians who desire to ‘return to live in the Homeland’ (NA 2021). They also focus, like EKRE, on economic grievances, blaming the EU for a range of economic problems. While the ‘economy’ section in their party programme is shorter than that of EKRE, they still dedicate a page that proposes a number of specific welfare policies, including support mechanisms for families aimed at making ‘Latvia the most family-friendly country in Europe’ (NA 2021); a significant expansion of the housing program for young families; and ensuring that social contributions to the pension capital for the period of childcare are made in full from the child benefit.

Figure 6: NA’s and KPV’s stance on welfare expansion and market regulation





## ANALYSIS

## UNDERSTANDING THE SUCCESS OF RWPPS IN THE BALTICS

**The Baltic States are among the most successfully consolidated democracies in post-communist Europe. Estonia and Latvia, in particular, are highly comparable cases: both countries have sizable Russian minorities with great politicisation potential, which sets them apart from the more ethnically homogenous countries of eastern and central Europe. They also engaged in successful reforms that made them frontrunners in the path towards European integration (Braghiroli and Petsinis 2019).**

At the party level, the presence of a substantial number of ethnic Russian minorities has resulted in an association between the immigration and refugee distribution debate to the alleged threat these minorities pose to cultural homogeneity and national survival. There are therefore significant similarities between EKRE and NA, which also formalised, together with their Lithuanian partners Nationalists Union-Tautininkų Sąjunga, their cooperation in 2013 on the basis of their joint commitment to address ‘the detrimental impact of the looming ideas of cultural Marxism, post-modern multiculturalism and destructive liberalism’ across Europe (Braghiroli and Petsinis 2019).

In terms of electoral support, both parties have been able to mobilise a substantial body of voters. A key difference between the two is the NA’s more long-standing participation in government coalitions, suggesting that the party is seen as a legitimate actor in its domestic political arena. While EKRE was treated as a pariah in Estonian politics, it was invited to join a right-wing coalition government in 2019, putting an end to Estonian exceptionalism. The party’s popularity has further increased since its participation in government.

RWPP support in the Baltics should be understood both within the context of the wider conditions that facilitate the rise of right-wing populism across Europe – immigration, economic hardship and the refugee crisis – as well as the specificities of the case studies in question. In both countries, RWPPs have been able to mobilise voters on ethnic nationalist appeals that hinge on national survival narratives. The immigration question is explicitly linked to the ‘Russian question’ as well as a Eurosceptic narrative that portrays the EU as indifferent – or even hostile – to domestic national interests.

The 2015 refugee crisis was used successfully by EKRE, which managed to dominate the debate over the EU refugee quotas for Estonia. Sentiments against Muslim refugees were echoed in the ballot box for both cultural and economic reasons. Our empirical analysis confirms that cultural concerns over immigration increase the probability of voting for RWPPs. Religion and age are also predictive factors. Finally, Estonian RWPP voters are more likely to reside in the countryside, come from lower socio-economic backgrounds (bottom income group, service sector workers) and distrust the EU (Figure 8). Among the RWPP electorate, over one-third (34%) have no concerns over immigration. Most of those that do have a combination of economic and cultural concerns, while a substantial proportion has economic concerns alone (16%) (Figure 7).

In the Latvian case, the context is favourable to RWPP because of two specific conditions, one cultural and one economic: first, Latvians constitute numeric minorities in several cities; and second the country was hit hard by the 2008 economic crisis, forcing the government to implement harsh austerity measures (Bloom 2013). Some research reports that at the subnational level neither deteriorating economic conditions nor the presence of minorities appear to augment RWPP support. In fact, as minority populations increase, the vote for the extreme right decreases (Bloom 2013). This, however, could be because of ‘contact’ with minorities. Analyses at the individual level suggest that voters who feel they have little or nothing in common with Russians are twice as likely to vote for the far right than for the centre-left (Stefanovic and Evans 2019).

Our empirical analysis also reveals interesting patterns among Latvian RWPP voters and some important differences with their Estonian counterparts. The probability of voting RWPP increases with age. Latvian RWPP voters tend to be well-educated and live in the countryside. They have cultural, but not economic, concerns about immigration. They tend to be employed in low-skill occupations as clerks and operators, but not in the service sector and are not professionals (Figure 9). These results complement research that finds that Latvian RWPP supporters are opposed to state ownership of the economy and to wage controls, and that they are strongly supportive of free enterprise, although they are most concerned with the future standard of living in Latvia (Stefanovic and Evans 2019). Although Latvian far-right voters are well educated, they tend to hold more traditional values, opposing the expansion of ethnic minority rights, inclusive citizenship, and use of minority languages (Stefanovic and Evans 2019). Among the RWPP electorate, the majority (a significant 63%) do not have immigration concerns. Those that do, however, have either exclusively cultural concerns (17%) or a combination of economic and cultural concerns (18%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Distribution of immigration concerns

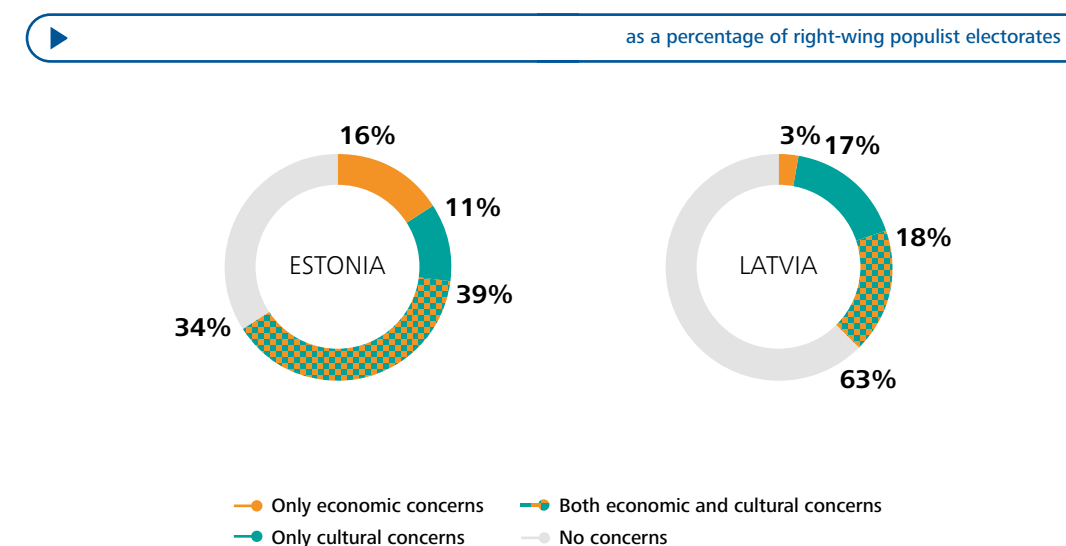
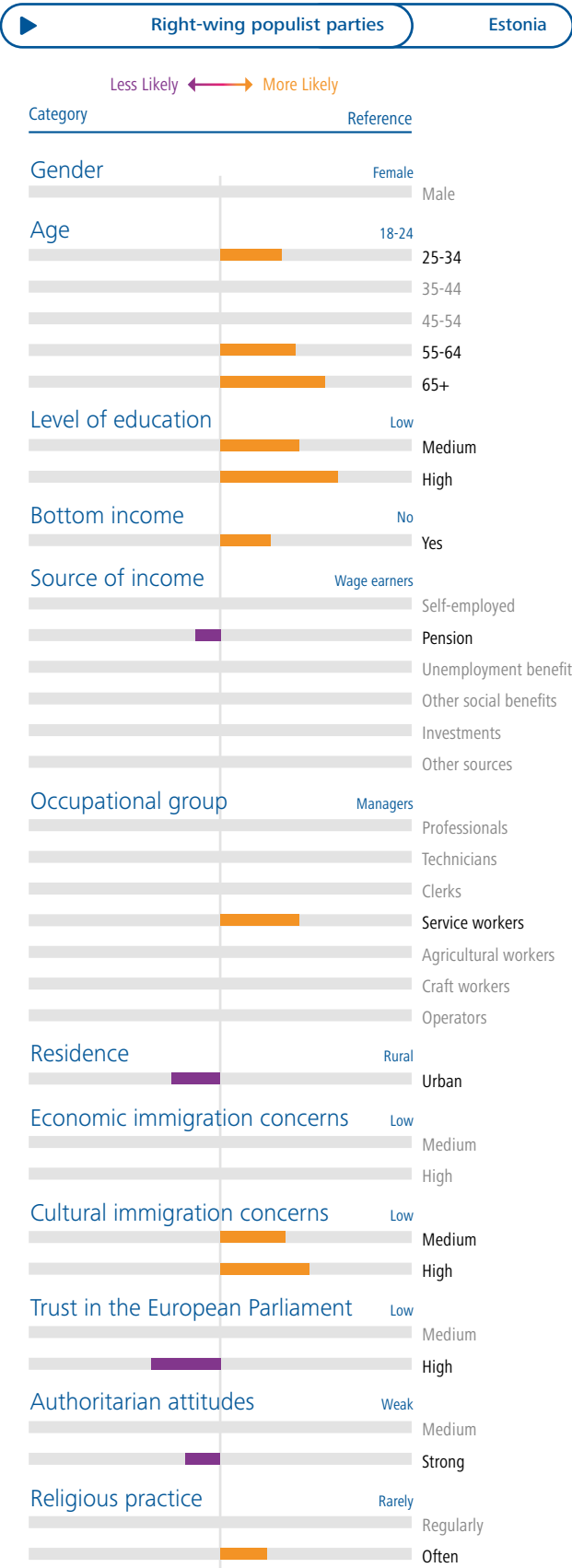
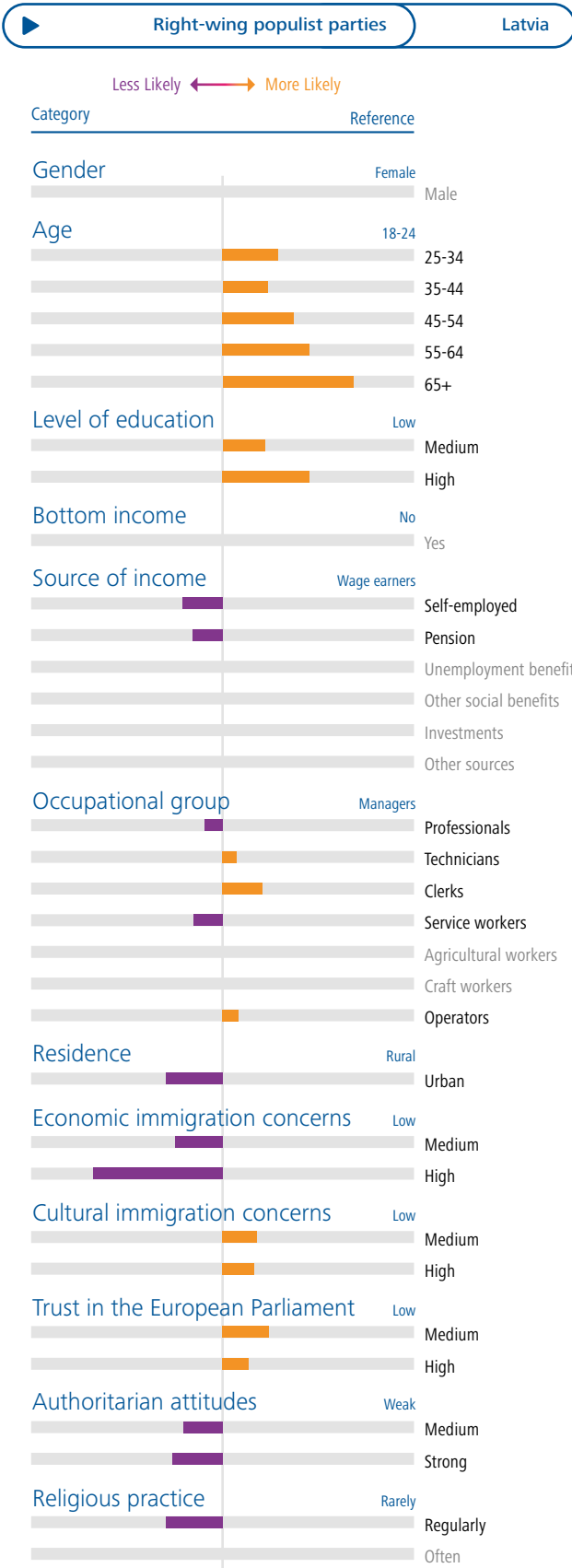


Figure 8: Characteristics affecting the probability to vote



Only statistically significant results are shown.

Figure 9: Characteristics affecting the probability to vote



Only statistically significant results are shown.

CONCLUSION

COMPARING BALTIC RIGHT-WING POPULIST AND CENTRE-LEFT ELECTORATES

Our analysis of the RWPP electorates in the two countries, and a brief comparison between the RWPP and the centre-left electorates highlight the following:

- Latvia and Estonia are unique when compared to Western Europe and other parts of Eastern Europe in that both countries have sizable Russian minorities with great politicisation potential. This suggests that the electorates in these two countries are motivated by these considerations.
- There are some important similarities and differences between Estonian and Latvian RWPP voters (Figures 8+9). Older, educated individuals who live in the countryside are more likely to support RWPPs in both countries. In Estonia, these individuals are more likely to belong to the bottom income group or are employed in the service sector. In Latvia they are in low-skill occupations such as clerks and operators, but not in the service sector. In Estonia, it is particularly religious individuals who distrust the EU and have cultural, but not economic immigration concerns that have the highest probability of voting for RWPPs. In Latvia, RWPP voters are less religious and actually trust the EU. In both cases the probability of voting RWPPs increases with higher cultural concerns over immigration. In terms of the composition of the RWPP electorates, in Estonia, individuals with exclusively cultural concerns over immigration (i.e. core voters) account for 11% of the RWPP electorate. In addition, 39% have combined cultural and economic concerns and 34% have no immigration concerns. In Latvia voters with exclusively cultural immigration concerns account for 17% of the RWPP. Just over two-thirds (63%) have surprisingly no immigration concerns at all, while only 18% have a combination of cultural and economic concerns (Figure 7).
- RWPP core voters, i.e. those voters who oppose immigration on principle and have strong cultural concerns over immigration, are a minority among the whole electorate in the two countries, making up 9% of the Estonian electorate and 10% of the Latvian one (Figure 10). These voters are principled RWPP voters and are unlikely to switch to the centre-left even if it adopts ‘copycat’ strategies. They identify more staunchly with a right-wing platform and are more likely to switch from ‘far’ to centre-right. They are the least likely centre-left constituency and do not constitute a centre-left target voter group.

- A comparison between the RWPP and centre-left voter profiles shows some interesting similarities and differences. The centre-left voter in Estonia is more likely to be an older, secular, educated female individual in a high-skill occupation. This individual is unlikely to have either cultural or economic concerns over immigration (Figure 11). As such, this individual is unlikely to be attracted to RWPP cultural narratives. In Latvia, the centre-left voter is also an older, educated female, most likely secular and employed in a higher-skill occupation and who distrusts the EU (Figure 12). Self-employed individuals and those on pensions are unlikely to vote for the centre-left in Latvia. Among the centre-left electorates in the two countries, the RWPP signature theme (i.e. exclusively cultural concerns over immigration) has little salience: 7% in Estonia and 7% in Latvia (Figure 10).
- The proportion of voters with no immigration concerns among the centre-left electorates in the two countries is fairly high: 61% in Estonia and 65% in Latvia (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Distribution of immigration concerns

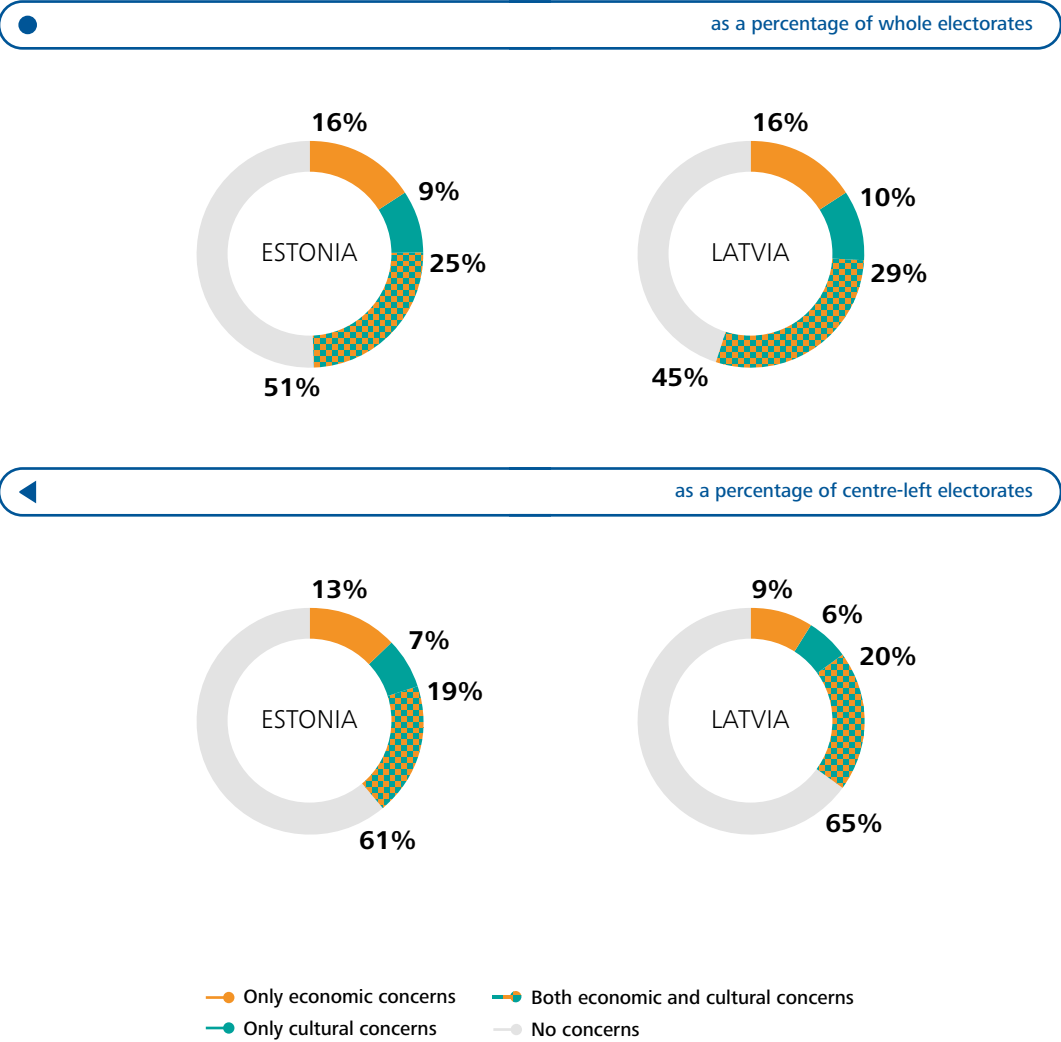
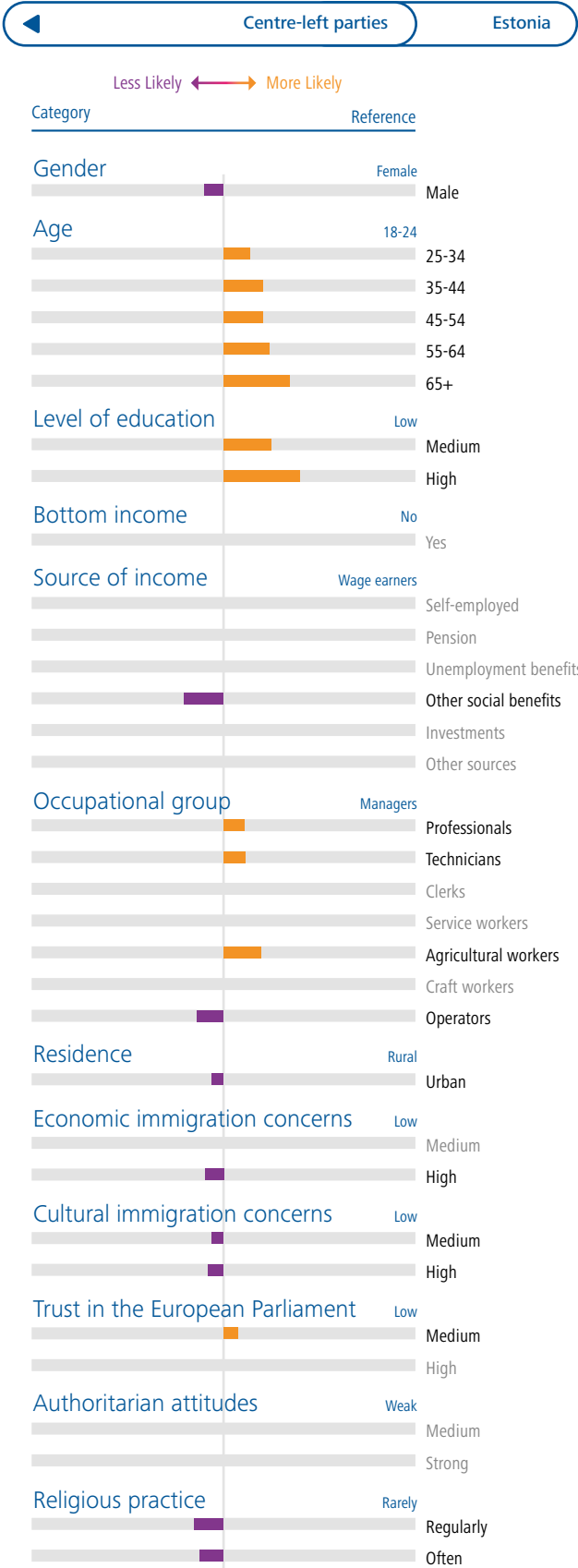
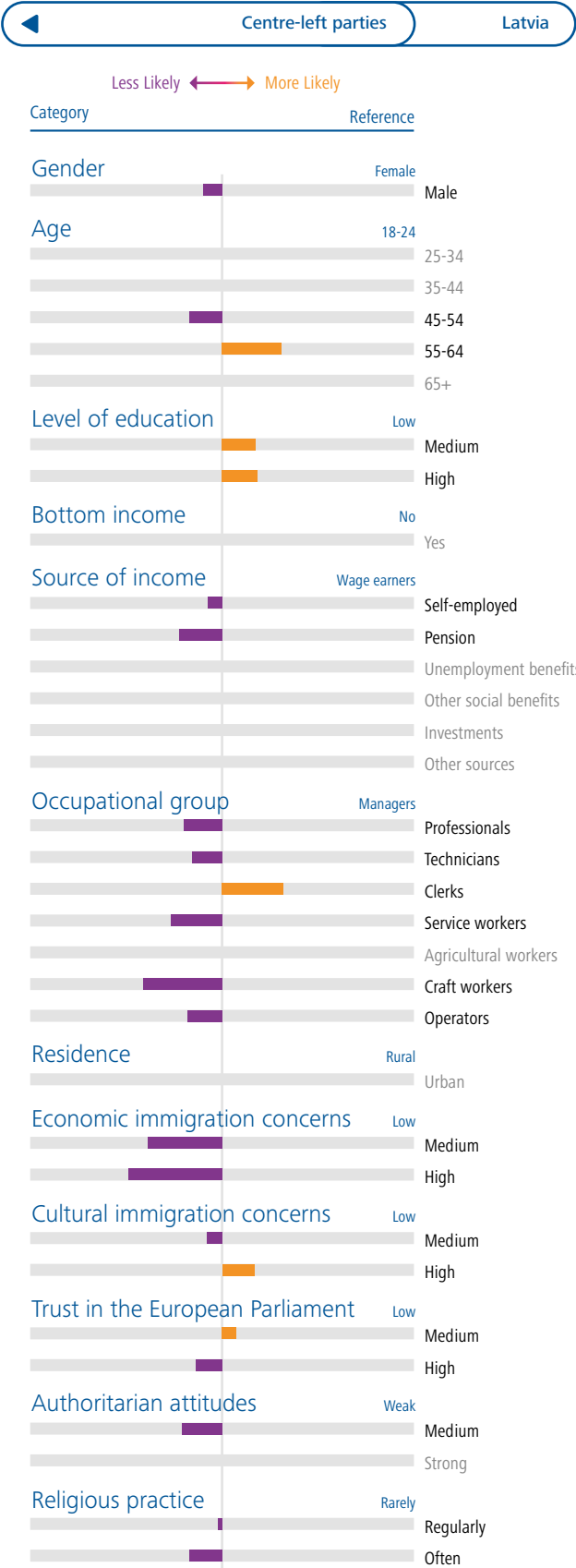


Figure 11: Characteristics affecting the probability to vote



Only statistically significant results are shown.

Figure 12: Characteristics affecting the probability to vote



Only statistically significant results are shown.

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