Electoral Sociology: Who votes for the Extreme Right – and when?

Kai Arzheimer

University of Mainz, Germany/University of Essex, UK
Overview

Theory
Data
Findings
  Who?
  Why?
  When and where?
Discussion
What is the “Extreme Right”?

▶ Terminology: endless controversy
  ▶ Shopping lists of spatial, ideological and other criteria
  ▶ Radical/Far/Populist/New/Xenophobic Right . . .
▶ “We know who they are . . .” (Mudde 1995)
▶ Features
  ▶ Less than well integrated
  ▶ (Very) right on most issues, immigration as core issue
▶ The Usual Suspects: Front National, Vlaams Blok/Belang, Republicans . . .
▶ Plus Borderline Cases: AN, SVP . . .
▶ Immigration from outside Western Europe as main (or only) issue
Theoretical accounts of Extreme Right Voting?

1. Personality Traits and Value Orientations
2. Social Disintegration
3. Group Conflicts (scapegoating $\leftrightarrow$ rational choice) $\rightarrow$ relative deprivation
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- “Overlap”
- Cross-national and cross-temporal variation
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- Party Features
- Political Opportunities, public opinion
- Other Contextual Factors
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- Party Features
- Political Opportunities, public opinion
- Other Contextual Factors
- latent support ⇔ manifest support
Which comparative data are available?

1. Cross-sections of micro-data
   - European Election Studies (2009: not yet)
   - Sweet but short, 10,000-15,000 respondents per wave
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   - Eurobarometer
   - 1980s-2000s
   - Contextual analyses across time and countries
   - \(\approx 250,000\) respondents
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3. Contextual information: OECD, UNHCR, party manifestos, election statistics...
Sociodemographics: gender

- Men roughly 40% more likely to vote for the ER (not in Italy in recent elections)
- Even if we control for other factors (class, education, attitudes)
- More likely to admit? But: German “Representative Electoral Statistics”
Sociodemographics: education

- Citizens with University education least likely to vote for ER
  - Liberal values?
  - (Economic) interests?
  - Social desirability?
- Much, much more support in lower (but not necessarily lowest) educational strata
- Fear of competition worse than actual competition? – evidence is weak
Sociodemographics: class and age

- Members of the working/lower middle class much more likely to support the Extreme Right
- Young (30-45, < 30) voters more likely to support the Extreme Right
- Disproportional support from the unemployed
- Not affiliated with established parties
Sociodemographics: summary

- Non-traditional working class parties
- “Typical” voter: white, male, youngish, low (but not lowest) level of qualification
Ideology and values

- Materialism vs. Postmaterialism
- Dissatisfaction with European Integration
- Dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in one’s own country
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- Left-Right-Self-Evaluation
Immigration and xenophobia

- Cross-sections: 2002/2003 + 1990s
- High levels of xenophobia and perceived competition
- Focus on Non-Western European immigrants
- Non-religious concern about Islam
Which contextual factors?

- Why variation within/between countries?
- Theory → factors
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- Why variation within/between countries?
- Theory → factors
- Immigration (asylum seekers)
- Unemployment rates and benefits
- Salience (and variation) of Extreme Right issues in other parties’ manifestos
- (Media)
Findings

- Immigration → Extreme Right support *ceteris paribus*
- Higher levels of benefits → Extreme Right support (if immigration is low) – welfare chauvinism?
- Unemployment rate → Extreme Right support (if immigration or benefits levels are very low)
- At high levels of immigration, benefits curb effect of unemployment
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- Contextual factors can “tip the balance” in $\approx \frac{1}{3}$ of all cases.
What have we learned so far?

- Clear socio-demographic profile: young, male, working/lower middle class
- Clear attitudinal profile:
  - Not necessarily fully paid-up extremists
  - But dissatisfied with politics and suspicious of immigrants and elites
- Little support for disintegration thesis
- Personality traits?
- In line with theories of values, preferences, group conflict
- Contextual factors often make a difference
But . . .

- Very strong country effects remain after controlling for context
- Limits on contextual control variables
- More/better information on parties
- Comparative media studies
Thank you!