

Explaining Electoral Support for the Radical Right

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1 Introduction

Within the larger field of Radical Right studies, the question of why people vote for Radical Right Parties (RRPs) has attracted a large (perhaps disproportionately so) chunk of scholarly attention. There are at least three reasons for this. First, the early (and rather humble) electoral successes of the Radical Right in Western Europe during the early 1980s stirred memories of the 1920 and 1930s, when parties such as the Italian Fascists or the German Nazis rose from obscurity to overturn democracy (Prowe, 1994). Given these traumatic experiences, scholars were understandably eager to analyse the motives behind such potentially fatal electoral choices.

Second, when it became increasingly clear that the most electorally successful of these RRPs were not just clones of the old fascist right of the inter war years but rather belonged to a *new party family* (Mudde, 1996), researchers wanted to understand the social forces that brought about the rise of this largely unexpected phenomenon. After all, even non-extremist RRPs are still widely seen as problematic, because they promote a political ideal that has been dubbed "illiberal democracy" (Mudde, 2007), and often disrupt the political process.

Third, support for the Radical Right displays an unusual degree of variation across time and space. In Southern Europe, Cyprus (until 2016), Malta, Portugal and Spain never had a relevant RRP, whereas RRPs have been more or less consistently successful in Austria, Denmark, France, Italy, and Norway. Electoral support for the Radical Right has been volatile in Germany, Greece, Sweden and the UK. In the Netherlands, which featured extremist but tiny right-wing parties in the 1980s and 1990s, modern RRPs only emerged in the early 2000s. As of 2016, the radical right PVV is the country's largest political party in terms of voting intentions. Belgium

provides perhaps the most striking example of variability: While the Walloon National Front always remained at the margins in Wallonia, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang went from strength to strength in the Flemish part of the country during the 1990s and early 2000s, but lost roughly three quarters of their support between 2004 and 2014. To summarise, there is ample reason for treating support for the Radical Right as an unusual and potentially even dangerous phenomenon.

The most obvious way to study Radical Right voting would be to apply the standard tools of electoral research. Modern election studies usually rely on an eclectic blend of variables and alleged mechanisms, but at the core, there is usually the assumption that voters respond to short-term factors (candidates and political issues) on the one hand, and long-to-medium forces (party loyalties, value orientations, ideological convictions and group memberships) on the other. Almost sixty years ago, Angus Campbell and his associates (Campbell, 1960) have proposed a conceptual framework that encompasses these and other variables: In their “funnel of causality” metaphor, the proximate determinants of a given electoral choice are causally linked to more distant antecedents, forming a “funnel” that gets wider as more and more stable attitudes and earlier events are being considered. Decades of criticism notwithstanding, this framework still explicitly or implicitly undergirds most empirical research into voting behaviour.

In the subfield of Radical Right voting, however, researchers habitually seem to ignore most of what constitutes the “normal science” (Kuhn, 1962) of electoral research, either because they are unaware of it, or because they are chiefly interested in “deeper” explanations that are located towards the far side of the funnel. Nonetheless, the funnel metaphor still provides a useful template for organising and comparing competing and complementary explanations for Radical Right electoral support.

However, the distinction between “supply side” and “demand side” factors, which can be traced back to an early article by Klaus von Beyme (Beyme, 1988), proved to be a much more popular schema for structuring potential explanations. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear what is meant by “supply” and “demand” in this context and whether these two exhaust the full set of relevant factors, although the dichotomy has a certain heuristic value: The notion of a “supply side” usually refers to all variables pertaining to the RRP itself. This includes, but is not limited to, the stylistic and substantive content of the party manifesto and other texts, speeches or statements produced by the party, the party’s organisational structure and resources, and the presence or absence of a “charismatic leader”. The “demand side”, on the other hand, encompasses traits, experiences and attitudes that may predispose voters to support an RRP.

A number of other relevant factors, however, do not sit easily within the confines of this dichotomy. The ideological positions of mainstream right parties, for instance, could be considered part of the “supply” in a wider sense, but the same is not true for institutional variables such as the electoral system or the degree of decentralisation. These features of the wider political system may explain why would-be political entrepreneurs decide to enter the political arena to provide a RRP supply, or why a given demand for RRP policies may help or hurt the mainstream right parties. Put differently, many institutional factors should be seen as mediators of supply and demand rather than as members of either category. Other system-level variables - most prominently unemployment and immigration - are best understood as distal causes of demand, or as an incentives to provide supply.

Therefore, it seems more fruitful to distinguish between *variables* on the micro, meso, and macro level, and the remainder of this chapter will proceed accordingly. Most *approaches*, however, more or less explicitly follow the logic of a multi-level explanation (Coleman, 1994), requiring occasional cross-references between the sections.

The literature on this topic is already vast and keeps on growing quickly. My self-consciously eclectic bibliography on the Radical Right in Europe (<http://www.kai-arzheimer.com/extreme-right-western-europe-bibliography>), which is nowhere near complete, currently stands at more than 600 titles. The literature review in this chapter is therefore by necessity highly selective and idiosyncratic: I will focus on (Western) Europe, and on a small number of contributions that I consider landmarks. Although comparative multi-level analyses are now something like the gold standard in the field, I will also consider single-country case studies where they present results that (probably) generalise beyond the polity in question, or designs that are of a more general interest. Moreover, while there is always the danger of aggregation bias lurking in the background, I will frequently discuss findings from field-defining aggregate studies, without re-iterating the usual warnings about the ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950) time and again. Consider yourself trigger-warned.

2 Micro-level Factors

2.1 Party Identification

Party identification is arguably the most important factor when it comes to explaining voting decisions, but it is conspicuously underrepresented in

the literature on the Radical Right. One possible explanation for this is the fact that party identification is supposed to be acquired through years, if not decades of political socialisation. As many RRP only rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, identification with them could hardly be a major factor behind their ascendancy. As a consequence, most early studies completely ignored party identification, and one of those few assessing its effect (based on data from the mid-1990s) concluded that “the identification motive is clearly significantly under-represented among VB [Vlaams Blok] voters” (Swyngedouw, 2001, p. 228).

A more modern approach highlights the *negative effect of identifications with other parties*. Building on the notion (derived from the older literature, e.g. Kitschelt (1995) and Ignazi (2003)) that the rise of the Radical Right only became possible once there was a sufficiently large pool of voters that were no longer attached to any of the established parties, Arzheimer and Carter (2009a) focus on (the lack of) identifications with mainstream right-wing parties. Using data from the 2002/03 wave of the European Social Survey, they demonstrate that voters who are still attached to a Christian Democratic or Conservative party almost never vote for a Radical Right party. Put differently, they see the absence of other identifications as a necessary (if insufficient) pre-condition for Radical Right-wing voting. However, some of the most successful RRPs (e.g. the French National Front, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Danish People’s Party or the Norwegian Progress Party) have been electorally relevant for two decades or more now, so the impact of *identifying with the RRP* should be modeled, too, but very few authors (e.g. Arzheimer, 2009b) account for this potential *positive effect* of party identification.

2.2 Candidates: The (ir)relevance of charismatic leaders

While party identifications have been more or less neglected as a key explanatory variable for RRP support, candidates and more specifically “charismatic” party leaders have attracted a great deal of attention (e.g. Taggart, 1995). There are two reasons for this: First, many observers mistook the rise of the RRPs in the 1980s for a “Return of the Führers” of the 1920s (Prowe, 1994). Second, many RRPs appeared to be personal parties, especially during the break-through phase (Eatwell, 2005, p. 106). Third, agency is always more attractive than structure.

However, what is meant by “charisma” is not usually clear. There are serious doubts that Weberian “charisma” - a personal bond between

the (party) leader and his followers - was in any way relevant for the rise of the Radical Right (Eatwell, 2005), and even those two parties most commonly associated with their “charismatic” leaders - Joerg Haider’s Austrian Freedom Party and Jean-Marie Le Pen’s French National Front - underwent a process of “institutionalisation” (Pedahzur and Brichta, 2002). Even more importantly for the question of electoral behaviour, Brug and Mughan (2007) demonstrate that RRP benefit from candidate effects in exactly the same way as established parties: While having an appealing candidate is certainly linked to greater electoral support, the magnitude of this effect is not larger than it is for other parties.

2.3 Issues, Ideology and Value Orientations

2.3.1 Pure Protest Voting, Anti-Immigrant Sentiment, and Unemployment (threat)

When it comes to explaining Radical Right support, the notion of a “pure protest vote” is still prominent. In its most extreme guise, the pure protest thesis claims that Radical Right support is driven by feelings of alienation from the political elites and the political system that are completely unrelated to policies or values and hence have nothing to do with the Radical Right’s political agenda (Eatwell, 2000). A more realistic variety of the protest thesis suggests that voters do indeed care about policies but hold less extreme preferences than the Radical Right manifestos would suggest. In this scenario, voters instrumentally support the Radical Right in the hope that mainstream right parties will reconsider their position and move somewhat closer to the Radical Right without copying all of their policies. Once the mainstream right has made this adjustment, Radical Right support would collapse. This logic is akin to directional voting (Merrill and Grofman, 1999) but puts more emphasis on emotions.

Empirically, pure protest voting remains elusive. Starting with Billiet and Witte’s (1995) study of Vlaams Blok support in the 1991 General Election in Belgium, a host of single-country and comparative studies have demonstrated time and again that anti-immigrant sentiment is the single most important driver of the Radical Right vote (Mayer and Perrineau, 1992; Brug, Fennema, and Tillie, 2000; Brug and Fennema, 2003; Norris, 2005; Mughan and Paxton, 2006; Arzheimer, 2009b; Ford, Goodwin, and Cutts, 2011). That does not mean that the prototypical voter of the Radical Right is not alienated from the political elites and susceptible to the populist rhetoric of many RRPs. But the vast majority of their voters support the Radical Right because of their anti-immigrant claims and demands, and their sense of frustration and

distrust may very well result from their political preferences on immigration not being heeded by the mainstream parties.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is a handy but slightly awkward catch-all term for negative attitudes towards immigrants, immigration, and immigration policies. In a seminal contribution, Rydgren (2008) distinguishes between “immigration sceptics”, “xenophobes”, and “racists”. For Rydgren (2008, pp. 741-744), *xenophobes* have a latent disposition to react with fear and aversion to outsiders, but this only becomes an issue if the number of outsiders is too high by some subjective standard, or if the outsiders otherwise seem to pose a threat to in-group. *Racists* always hold outsiders in contempt irrespective of any exposure to “strangers”, with “classic” racism being based on notions of biological hierarchies, whereas “modern” or “cultural” racism subscribes to the idea of incompatible but (nominally) coequal cultures.¹ Finally, *immigration sceptics* want to reduce the number of immigrants in their native country (Rydgren, 2008, p. 738), but not necessarily because they hold racist or xenophobic attitudes. As Rydgren (2008, p. 740) suggests, the most plausible structure for these attitudes is a nested one, where xenophobes form a subgroup of the immigration sceptics and racists form a subgroup of the xenophobes.

The distinction between immigration sceptics, xenophobes, and racists is particularly useful because not all Radical Right voters are full-blown racists. Moreover, many of the approaches that are discussed in the literature may help to explain deep-seated, stable racism but not necessarily a more specific and volatile scepticism regarding current immigration policies.

“Deep” explanations for Radical Right support have been developed since at least the 1930s. The monographs and articles on the roots of rightist political views fill several libraries by now and any attempt to classify them is crude by necessity. Nonetheless, it makes sense to distinguish between three very broad groups.

A first class of explanations focuses on *personality traits*², with *authoritarianism* being the most prominent amongst them. Authoritarianism as a concept is most closely associated with the (controversial) Berkeley Study (Adorno et al., 1950) but has more recently been modernised and promoted by Bob Altemeyer (1981; 1996). For Altemeyer, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) consists of three key elements: a desire to submit to established and legitimate authorities (*authoritarian submission*), a hostility towards deviants and other out-groups (*authoritarian aggression*), and an

¹At least at the attitudinal level, old and modern racism seem to be closely related (Walker, 2001).

²Although *value orientations* are sometimes grouped together with personality traits, they will be discussed in a separate section below.

exaggerated respect for traditions and social norms (*conventionalism*).

Authoritarianism and similar concepts such as *dogmatism* (Rokeach, 1960) or tough-mindedness (Eysenck, 1954) go a long way towards explaining the relevance of xenophobia and the appeal of other right-wing ideas and movements to some voters, but there are a few important caveats. First, compared to classic right-wing extremist groups, authoritarianism is much less important for the ideology of the modern populist Radical Right (Mudde, 2007). Unlike the Fascists or the Nazis of the interwar period, the most successful of these parties do not seek to replace democracy by some authoritarian type of regime but rather promote a narrow, “illiberal” concept of democracy. Second, support for the Radical Right has surged (and sometimes declined) over relatively short periods, whereas personality traits are by definition stable. They may thus help us to explain why there is potential for authoritarian parties in the first place. The exploitation of this potential by political entrepreneurs and the channeling of this general hostility towards out-groups into a more specific anti-immigrant sentiment, however, are political processes that must be understood by means of different concepts.

Theories of *group conflict* and *deprivation* form a second and more immediately relevant cluster of explanations. This cluster can be subdivided in four broad categories

1. Theories of “realistic group conflict” (RGCT) and “ethnic competition” (EC)
2. Theories of “status politics” and “symbolic racism”
3. Theories of “social identity”
4. Theories of “scapegoating”

The ordering is deliberate: From the top to the bottom, these approaches put less and less emphasis on material conflicts and conscious mental processes and instead focus on the importance of visceral hostility (which might still be induced by political entrepreneurs) towards members of the out-group.

Both for proponents of RGCT (see Jackson, 1993 for a review) and EC (e.g. Bélanger and Pinard, 1991), tensions between (ethnic) groups are rooted in conflicts over the distribution of material resources in a society, which is often perceived as unfair. The main difference between both approaches is that RGCT is more interested in the micro-dynamics of group psychology whereas EC is primarily concerned with the societal level. Either way, the

distributional conflict is couched in collective terms, even if the resource in question is a personal good (e.g. a secure job). Both strands of the literature as well as the other approaches discussed in this section are therefore closely related to classic theories of collective relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966, pp. 33-34, see also Ellemers, 2002 and Taylor, 2002). While students of electoral behaviour rarely investigate the lengthy and complex causal chains that link social change, group dynamics, and inter-ethnic contacts to psychological processes, feelings of material threat that is allegedly posed by immigrants have become a staple explanatory variable for analysing anti-immigrant sentiment, and by implication the Radical Right's electoral support. On the contextual level, (potential) exposure to material threats is often captured by incorporating macro-economic variables in statistical models of Radical Right voting (see below).

Similarly, proponents of the "status politics" approach (e.g. Hofstadter, 2002b) argue that (recent) immigrants are perceived as a collective threat by members of the in-group. Here, the collective good in question is not a material one but rather the collective social status of the in-group, or the cultural hegemony of their values, norms, and social practices (Hofstadter, 2002a) - ideas which in turn bear some resemblance with the idea of "symbolic racism" (Kinder and Sears, 1981; see Walker, 2001 for a critical review of this and some related concepts). Again, psephologists usually take the alleged causal mechanisms for granted and focus on the effect of perceived cultural threats on anti-immigrant sentiment and the Radical Right vote.

(Modern) theories of social identity provide another approach for explaining anti-immigrant sentiment. "Social Identity Theory" (SIT) and its successor, "Self-Categorisation Theory" (SCT), were developed in response to an empirical puzzle: Even in a "minimal effects" experimental setting where subjects were randomly assigned to socially meaningless groups, where there was no interaction whatsoever between subjects, and no material incentive to put members of the out-group at a disadvantage, a large proportion of subjects was willing to discriminate against the outsiders. Tajfel and Turner (1986) interpret this unexpected finding as the result of a *cognitive* process during which one's *social identity* becomes the yardstick for assessing a given situation, whereas the importance of one's *personal identity* declines. As a corollary, members of the out-group are subject to a process of stereotyping. In combination with an innate desire for positive distinctiveness, stereotyping and self-stereotyping *can* bring about discrimination and prejudice against out-group members, because they represent one avenue towards a more positive self-image. However, whether discrimination actually occurs depends on a number of conditions (Reynolds and Turner, 2001, p. 166). Crucially, these mechanisms are independent of any material or cultural threat that the

out-group may seem to pose to the members of the in-group.

Once more, psephologists have mostly ignored the details and instead focused on the impact of a single variable (identity) on Radical Right voting intentions, and even this alleged mechanism is often problematic, because most items available in representative surveys do not capture the complexity of the concept. Nonetheless, SIT/SCT has the potential to make a crucial contribution to a fuller explanation of the Radical Right vote: While most group dynamic processes must remain under the radar of mass surveys, SIT/SCT informs experimental and observational research on the conditions under which stereotypes and prejudices that may result in anti-immigrant sentiment become activated. It also provides a useful framework for the analysis of party documents and social and mass media content, which play an ever more important role in the study of Radical Right electoral support.

Finally, theories of “scapegoating” need to be addressed. These hark back to the late 1930s (Dollard et al., 1939) and have even older roots in the Sumner’s early work on ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906), maintain that members of the ethnic majority who experience feelings of frustration and deprivation that are *objectively unrelated to the presence of other ethnic groups* nonetheless turn towards immigrants simply because those provide a conveniently defenceless target for the in-group members’ aggression. Due to the “cognitive turn” in social psychology, theories of scapegoating have somewhat fallen out of fashion, and for the applied psephologist relying on secondary data analysis, the result of simple scapegoating will often be indistinguishable from the more complex stereotyping processes.

All theories of group conflict are complemented by the “contact hypothesis”, which maintains that under certain favourable conditions, inter-ethnic contacts (which often presuppose immigration) can *reduce* prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008) and hence anti-immigrant sentiment. Some of the newer research aims at incorporating the contact hypothesis by either using micro-level information on inter-ethnic contact or by deriving the probability of such contacts from small-area data on the spatial distribution of ethnic groups. Unfortunately, both approaches are subject to endogeneity bias, because voters who are less prejudiced are more likely to seek inter-ethnic contacts.

2.3.2 Anti Post-Materialism and Other Social Attitudes

A Silent Counter-Revolution? Immigration emerged as the core issue of the Radical Right in Western Europe and Australia in the mid-1980s, making anti-immigrant sentiment the single most important attitudinal driver of Radical Right support. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE),

hostility towards ethnic minorities seems to act as the functional equivalent. But very few RRPs have ever been single-issue parties (Mudde, 1999). Many of them have a broader right-wing agenda, and Radical Right support has been linked to a host of other attitudes than anti-immigrant sentiment.

The Rise of the RRP family in the 1980s and early 1990s has therefore been interpreted as a reaction to large-scale social change.³ In a seminal article, Ignazi (1992) claims that these new right-wing parties embody the backlash against post-materialism and the New Left politics which it has inspired: a “silent counter-revolution”. Similarly, Kitschelt (1995) has argued that globalisation has created a new class of authoritarian private-sector workers, who combine market-liberal preferences with an authoritarian outlook on society and find their political representation in the Radical Right. While the market-liberalism of the Radical Right’s electorate remains elusive (Kitschelt and McGann, 2003; Arzheimer, 2009b; Mayer, 2013), it has become ever more evident that non-traditional working-class voters form the Radical Right’s core electoral base (see the contributions in Rydgren, 2013).

Moral conservatism, homophobia and more generally anti-postmaterialism may have played a role, too (and probably are still relevant for party members and activists), but they seem to be much less important than they were for the classic Extreme Right, at least in some countries. As early as 1988, the French FN voters were slightly “more permissive in sexual matters” than the voters of the mainstream right (Mayer and Perrineau, 1992, p. 130). 25 years later, the FN is lead by a single mother of three, twice divorced (Mayer, 2013, p. 175), whose attendance at homophobic rallies seems to be more a matter of strategy than of convictions. Even more strikingly, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, the Netherland’s first successful RRP, was founded and led by an openly gay libertine (Akkerman, 2005), and its *de facto* successor, the PVV, claims that defending the freedom of the LGBT community is part of their commitment to Dutch values. But even in the Netherlands, culturally progressive values are not an important driver of the RRP vote, at least not when anti-immigrant sentiment is controlled for (De Koster et al., 2014). One way or the other, for many RRP voters in Western Europe, homophobia and social conservatism do not seem to matter too much any more.

Religion The Extreme Right of the interwar years could be roughly divided in two groups (Camus, 2007): In some cases (most prominently Portugal and

³Similar arguments have been made about the rise of the right-wing extremist movements in the 1920s as well as about their resurgence in the postwar years (e.g. Scheuch and Klingemann, 1967).

Spain), they aligned themselves with the most authoritarian and reactionary elements of the (Catholic) church. In other instances (e.g. Germany and Austria after the “Anschluss”), the Extreme Right distanced itself from Christianity and/or relied on the traditional loyalty of the (Protestant) church to the political leadership.

Today’s RRP’s have inherited some of this historical baggage. While religious conservatism may inspire some of their members and voters (see the previous section), church leaders have often spoken out against the Radical Right’s anti-immigrant policies. To complicate matters further, the Radical Right is now often couching their anti-immigrant message in terms of a clash between “Western Values” and “Islam”. In a sense, criticising Islam abroad and at home has become the socially acceptable alternative to more openly xenophobic statements (Zúquete, 2008).

In a bid to disentangle this relationship, Arzheimer and Carter (2009a) estimate a Structural Equation Model of religiosity, anti-immigrant sentiment, party identification with mainstream right parties, and Radical Right voting intentions in seven West European countries. Their results show that in the early 2000s, religiosity had no significantly positive or negative effect on either anti-immigrant sentiment or RRP voting intentions. Religious people are, however, much more likely to identify with a mainstream right party, which in turn massively reduces the likelihood of an RRP vote. Using a slightly different model and data collected in 2008, Immerzeel, Jaspers, and Lubbers (2013) arrive at very similar conclusions.

Crime Law and order politics is traditionally the domain of both the mainstream and the Radical Right (Bale, 2003), with some authors going as far as saying that the Radical Right “owns” the crime issue (Smith, 2010). At any rate, talking about crime and immigration is a core frame of Radical Right discourses (Rydgren, 2008). Data from the European Social Survey clearly show that many West Europeans associate immigration with crime, and panel data from Germany suggest that that worries about crime have a substantial effect on anti-immigrant sentiment (Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss, 2012). Many authors subsume such immigration-related crime fears into the larger complex of subjective threat that immigration poses to susceptible voters. Others model the effect of objective crime figures on the Radical Right vote (see below).

Euroscepticism Mudde (2007) has convincingly argued that *nativism*, i.e. the desire for an ethnically homogeneous nation state, forms the core of the Radical Right’s ideology. Accordingly, RRP’s reject the European Union as a

general rule, although Vasilopoulou (2011) has demonstrated that opposition to the European projects is by no means uniform within the Radical Right camp. Unsurprisingly, individual eurosceptic attitudes come up as predictors of Radical Right voting intentions in some studies (e.g. Arzheimer, 2009a; Brug, Fennema, and Tillie, 2005), although anti-immigrant and even general dissatisfaction with the elites exert a stronger effect (Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers, 2013). Given that at least some countries feature leftist eurosceptic parties whose voters hold opinions which differ markedly from those of the RRP voters (Evans, 2000; Elsas and Brug, 2015), it seems safe to assume that euroscepticism *per se* does not predispose voters to support the Radical Right but needs to be linked to more general nativist beliefs.

3 Meso-level Factors

3.1 Party Strength

It is more than plausible that organisational assets and other party resources including leadership should be important pre-conditions for RRP success, but in applied research, they are often overlooked, because they are difficult to measure and tend not to vary too much over time. Carter (2005) is one of the very few studies that systematically incorporates party strength into a quantitative model of Radical Right support. Distinguishing between “(1) weakly organised, poorly led and divided parties, (2) weakly organised, poorly led but united parties, and (3) strongly organised, well-led but factionalised parties” she finds that the latter group performs substantially better than the former two (Carter, 2005, pp. 98-99).

David Art’s qualitative study of Radical Right party organisations in twelve West European countries (Art, 2011) provides an important complement to this finding. Taking a longitudinal perspective, Art shows that prospective RRPs need to attract ideologically moderate, high-status activists early in the process to build sustainable party structures and become electorally viable. Otherwise, there is a high probability that they will be subject to factionalism and extremism, which renders them unattractive for most voters.

While Art and Carter compare parties and countries, it is also possible to incorporate information on organisational strength in a within-country model of Radical Right voting. Erlingsson, Loxbo, and Öhrvall (2012) identify a positive effect of “local organisational presence” on the vote of the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 and 2010 elections. On the one hand, this modelling strategy is advantageous, because it maximises the number of cases and can

avoid aggregation bias. On the other hand, the validity of Erlingsson, Loxbo, and Öhrvall’s findings is threatened by *endogeneity*: parties will be more inclined to invest resources and prospective activists will be more inclined to create and join a local organisation if there is a prospect of success in the first place.

3.2 Party Ideology

As a general rule, RRP’s take political positions that are in some ways more radical than what the mainstream right is offering, but the ideological heterogeneity of the RRP’s is sometimes baffling. It took therefore more than a decade to establish some sort of consensus that these parties do indeed form a party family (Mudde, 1996), and twenty years down the line, scholars still find it difficult to agree on a name for this family, although “Radical Right” is arguably the most popular label at the moment. There are various attempts to distinguish between subgroups within this large cluster. Mudde (2007) identifies a small number of parties that he classifies as “Extreme Right”, i.e. aiming at replacing democracy with some authoritarian system. Similarly, Golder (2003b) draws a line between “populist” and “neo-fascist” parties. Summarising electoral data from Western Europe for the 1970-2000 period, Golder (2003b, p. 444) notes that support for the “neo-fascist” group was very limited in the first place and further declined over time, whereas the appeal of the “populist” parties has grown enormously since they emerged in the 1980s. By and large, this finding still holds today: In Western Europe, where democracy has become “the only game in town”, the vast majority of voters deems openly non-democratic parties unelectable.⁴ In other European countries where democracy is newer, however, even overtly extremist parties may be electorally successful (see Ellinas 2013; Ellinas 2015 for Greece, Mudde, 2005 and Mareš and Havlík, 2016 for Central and Eastern Europe after 1990, and Stojarová, 2012 for former Yugoslavia).

A different classification, which is not based on the fundamental question of support for democracy but rather on policy positions, was developed by Herbert Kitschelt in his seminal monograph (Kitschelt, 1995). Kitschelt aims at locating RRP’s in a policy space that is spanned by two dimensions: a purely economic left-right axis (state vs market) and a more complex dimension that encompasses issues of citizenship (“group”, see Kitschelt, 2013) on the one hand and individual and collective decision making (“grid”) on the other. Originally, Kitschelt claimed that the then unusual blend

⁴Marine Le Pen’s attempts to soften the image of the Front National (Mayer, 2013) and her public clashes with her father over his unreformed anti-semitism are a case in point.

of market-liberalism and authoritarian social conservatism represented an “electoral winning formula”. While this may still hold in the US, RRP voters in Western Europe are no longer interested in market liberalism (Lange, 2007; Arzheimer, 2009b), if they ever were. Moreover, electorally successful RRPs have recently de-emphasised their positions on the “grid” (authoritarian) dimension (Kitschelt, 2013, see also section 2.3.2).

3.3 Party System Factors

RRPs do not operate in a vacuum. While they may have a degree of control over their leadership/candidates, their organisational structure, and their ideology, they are but one part of the larger party system, and the words and actions of other parties may have as big an impact on the Radical Right’s electoral fortunes as anything that the RRP themselves do. Presumably, there are two major and partly competing mechanisms at work: From a Downsian logic, it follows that a successful RRP will eventually emerge if there is a demand for more restrictive (migration) policies, which is not satisfied by the existing parties in general and the mainstream right in particular. In this view, a mainstream right party that is soft on immigration and/or the existence of a formal “Grand Coalition” between centre-left and centre-right parties will have a positive impact on the Radical Right vote.

The psychological counter-argument is that political demands are rarely fixed, and that an elite consensus to de-emphasise immigration as a political issue (Zaller, 1992) and to impose a *cordon sanitaire* might rob the Radical Right of its potential support. Whether this latter strategy is politically feasible is quite a different question. Centre-right parties may have strong incentives to shore up the Radical Right in a bid to strengthen the rightist bloc (Bale, 2003). Centre left parties may want to split the right-wing vote: Mitterand’s decision to hold the 1986 legislative election under PR and Kreisky’s kind words for Haider are cases in point.

The empirical evidence is somewhat mixed. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find no statistical effect of the mainstream right’s ideological position, or of ideological convergence between the centre left and centre right, but note a substantial positive impact of Grand Coalitions. This result, however, may be shaped by the inclusion of respondents from Austria, which features a long and almost unique history of Grand Coalitions *and* a consistently strong RRP. On the other hand, Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers (2002) report that a restrictive “immigration climate” (operationalised as the vote-share weighed average of the other parties positions on immigration) increases the likelihood of a Radical Right vote. Using a slightly different approach that is derived from Zaller’s work, Arzheimer (2009a) notes that the Radical Right

benefits from an increasing *saliency* of their issue, *regardless of the direction* of the statements, and Dahlstroem and Sundell (2012) find a positive effect of anti-immigrant positions held by local politicians from other parties. Again, endogeneity could potentially be a problem in these studies, although this seems less likely in the case of data based on an expert survey (Lubbers, Gijssberts, and Scheepers, 2002) or party manifestos (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Arzheimer, 2009a).

3.4 Social Capital

In line with classic theories of the “mass society” (Kornhauser, 1960; Bell, 2002), the rise of the Radical Right has sometimes been linked to widespread feelings of isolation and Anomia. If this relationship holds, higher levels of Social Capital (Putnam, 1993) should curb support for the Radical Right.

Once more, the empirical evidence is limited and contradictory. In a series of case studies in Western and Eastern Europe, Rydgren (2009; 2011) finds that membership in civic organisations does *not* reduce the probability of casting a vote for the Radical Right. But this does not necessarily disconfirm the Social Capital hypothesis, because Social Capital is not an individual-level but rather a meso-level concept. Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir (2007), on the other hand, demonstrate in their model of RRP voting in Flanders that the Vlaams Blok performs significantly worse in municipalities with higher levels of associational life, *ceteris paribus*, but this finding might be the result of aggregation bias as the authors rely exclusively on census data and electoral counts. Finally, Fitzgerald and Lawrence (2011) combine micro and meso data to estimate a multi-level model of support for the Swiss People’s Party. Even after controlling for a host of variables at the person and at the “commune” level, they find that a municipality’s “social cohesion index” has a substantial *positive* effect on the probability of a vote for the Radical Right. But while their research design and statistical model are close to ideal, it is not quite clear what they actually measure. Their index includes the proportion of the working population who are not commuters, the proportion of residents who speak the most common language in a given municipality, and the percent of residencies inhabited by their owners. These variables may relate to “bonding” Social Capital, which could explain the positive effect on the RRP vote, but further research is clearly needed.

4 Macro-level Factors

4.1 Institutional Factors

The impact of institutional factors - most prominently, features of the electoral system, decentralisation, and welfare state protection - are very difficult to assess, because they change very slowly or not at all over time and are hence highly correlated with any idiosyncratic unit (=country) effects. Somewhat unsurprisingly, empirical findings are mostly contradictory and inconclusive. As regards electoral systems, Jackman and Volpert (1996) claim that the Radical Right benefits from lower electoral thresholds, but Golder (2003a) argues that this conclusion is based on an erroneous interpretation of an interaction effect and a somewhat idiosyncratic data collection effort. In the same vein, Carter (2002) reports that electoral support for the Radical Right is unrelated to the type of electoral system that is in place in a given election, whereas Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find a *positive* effect of more disproportional systems but maintain that this might be an artefact.

As regards features of the welfare state, Swank and Betz (2003) find that higher level of welfare state protection seem to reduce the appeal of the Radical Right. However, their analysis is based exclusively on macro data. Using a more specific indicator (generosity of unemployment benefits) and micro data, Arzheimer (2009a) finds that more generous benefits, which may cause “welfare chauvinism”, are linked to higher levels of support but only if levels of immigration are below average (see also next section).

4.2 Immigration and Unemployment

For obvious reasons, the two macro-level variables whose effects have been most extensively studied are immigration, unemployment, and their interaction: a high immigration / high unemployment situation represents perhaps the most clear-cut scenario for ethnic competition for scarce jobs. Nonetheless, the findings are far from conclusive, as can be seen by looking at two of the first comprehensive comparative studies: While Jackman and Volpert (1996) find a substantial *positive* effect of aggregate unemployment on the Radical Right vote, Knigge (1998), who uses a design that is quite similar, reports a *negative* effect. So do Arzheimer and Carter (2006). Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers (2002), in their first multi-level model of Radical Right voting in Western Europe, find no significant relationship between the unemployment rate the Radical Right voting intentions, whereas Golder (2003b), whose analysis is once more based on aggregate data, reports a positive (main) effect as well as a positive interaction between

unemployment and immigration. Finally, Arzheimer's (2009a) results from a rather complex multi-level model of Radical Right voting suggest that unemployment may have a positive effect under some scenarios when unemployment benefits are minimal and contributing factors (both individual and contextual) are already favourable.

Although measures for immigration are hardly ideal and differ across studies, results for the effect of immigration are less equivocal: Knigge (1998), Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers (2002), Golder (2003b), Swank and Betz (2003), and Arzheimer and Carter (2006) all find a positive effect of (national) immigration figures on the likelihood of a Radical Right vote. Arzheimer (2009a) by and large confirms this, although with an important qualification: In his study, the interaction between unemployment and immigration is *negative* so that a high levels of both variables, their effects do not reinforce each other any more but rather hit a ceiling. Moreover, generous unemployment benefits reduce the effect of immigration.

4.3 Crime

Like immigration and unemployment, high crime rates are supposed to benefit the Radical Right, but there is not much empirical evidence to back up this claim. Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir (2007) conducted one of the first studies that tests the alleged relationship. In an aggregate model of Vlaams Blok support in Flemish municipalities, they find that high crime rates increase the likelihood of the Vlaams Blok contesting an election, presumably because the party anticipates higher levels of support. However, once this selection mechanism is accounted for, crime has no positive effect on the Vlaams Blok's result.

The study by Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir has three distinct advantages: It models the decision to compete in an election and the results of that decision separately, it is built on a large number of cases, and the level of aggregation is low. But unfortunately, their design does not allow for comparisons across time or political systems. In a sense, the article by Smith (2010) provides the complement to their work: Smith studies the relationship between support for the Radical Right and crime rates at the highest possible level of aggregation by analysing 182 national parliamentary elections that were held in 19 Western European countries between 1970 and 2005. Controlling for unemployment, inflation, immigration, and various interactions, he finds that higher crime rates are associated with stronger support for the Radical Right. This relationship becomes stronger if immigration rates are higher.

Finally, the contribution by Dinas and Spanje (2011) specify a multi-level

model of Radical Right voting in the Netherlands in 2002. Like in the case of Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir (2007), their results are confined to one election in a single country. As they combine individual and contextual data, there is no aggregation bias, and they can even tease apart the effects of objective crime rates and subjective attitudes towards crime. Their results suggest that the effects of crime and immigration do not operate across the board but rather only affect those citizens who perceive a link between the two.

4.4 Media

One final variable at the macro level that attracts considerable interest is the media coverage of the Radical Right's issues. While voters will be exposed to crime, immigration and unemployment to one degree or another, media reports may have a stronger effect than personal experiences or non-experiences via two alleged mechanisms: Theories of *agenda setting* claim that the media, by focusing on certain topics, select a handful of politically relevant issues from a much larger pool of problems. Those issues on the agenda then serve as yardsticks for evaluating parties, an effect known as *priming* (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). In extreme cases, an issue may become so closely associated with a party that this party "owns" the issue (Petrocik, 1996) and will almost automatically benefit whenever it achieves a high rank on the agenda. Green parties and the environment are an oft-cited example, but the Radical Right and immigration have become a close second in the eyes of many observers (Meguid, 2005).

Notwithstanding the importance of the alleged nexus between media coverage and Radical Right support, the evidence is limited once more. The main reason for this is that data on media content are difficult to come by and expensive to produce in the first place. This is slowly changing now, with automated coding methods and open data bases such as GDELT providing new avenues for research, but even so, matching media with micro-level data is next to impossible, because mass opinion surveys do not normally collect detailed (i.e. per item) information on media consumption. Most of the existing research is therefore based on aggregated (i.e. time-series) data.

In their pioneering study, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2007) find a positive relationship between salience of immigration in Dutch media and aggregate support for Radical Right parties during the 1990-2002 period, net of any changes that can be ascribed to the unemployment and immigration rates and their interaction. This article is complemented by Koopmans and Muis (2009), who focus on the end of that period (i.e. Pim Fortuyn's 2002 campaign) and aim to identify a number of "discursive opportunities" that facilitated Fortuyn's breakthrough. In another study that resembles

their 2007 piece (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009), Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart can further demonstrate a link between news content and anti-immigrant sentiment in Germany for the 1993-2005 period.

Finally, in a bid to overcome the dearth of micro-level data on media consumption from mass surveys as well as the limits of the *ex-post-facto* design, interest in experimental studies has grown considerably over the last decade. One such study is that by Sheets, Bos, and Boomgaarden (2015), who exposed members of an online-access panel to an synthetic news article. Some small parts of this article were systematically varied to provide “cues” that would prime the issues of immigration, anti-politics, and the RRP itself. While Sheets, Bos, and Boomgaarden can demonstrate some effects of these cues on anti-immigrant attitudes, political cynicism, and ultimately on PVV support, some question marks remain. First, the effects on anti-immigrant attitudes are weak compared to those on political cynicism. Second, like with any experimental intervention, it is not clear if effects of a similar magnitude occur “in the wild”, and if so, how long they persist. Third, the experiment was designed in a way that means that the immigration and anti-politics cues were always combined with an RRP cue, which will in all likelihood bias the estimates for their respective effects either upwards or downwards. Clearly, further (cross-national) research is needed.

5 Small Area Studies

By now it should be clear that nearly all authors in the field treat support for the Radical Right as a multi-faceted phenomenon that must be explained at multiple levels, with unemployment, immigration, and political factors and media cues being the most prominent contextual variables. Most studies measure these variables at the national level, but living conditions in European states vary considerably across regions, so designs that compare provinces, districts or even neighbourhoods within countries are becoming more and more prominent. One of the first of these studies was conducted by Bowyer (2008), who looks at electoral returns for the British National Party (BNP) in several thousand wards in the 2002/2003 local elections in England. He finds that the BNP was strongest in predominantly white neighbourhoods that are embedded within districts which are characterised by the presence of large ethnic minorities, a pattern that has been described as the “halo effect” (Perrineau, 1985). Economic deprivation (though not necessarily unemployment) also played a role. Similarly, Rydgren and Ruth (2011), who analyse support for the Sweden Democrats in the 2010 election across the country’s 5668 voting districts, show that the party did better in

poorer districts with bigger social problems. Once these factors are controlled for, there is also some evidence for the existence of a “halo effect”.

Other studies have focused on units that are larger but politically more meaningful than census districts or electoral wards, e.g. departements, provinces, or sub-national states (Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007; Jesuit, Paradowski, and Mahler, 2009), accepting possible aggregation bias in exchange for the ability to include political and/or media variables in the model. The former study reports positive effects of unemployment and some institutional variables but no effect of immigration, whereas the latter identifies some complex interactions that link immigration and unemployment to Radical Right support via an increase in inequality and a lack of social capital.

Studies in small(ish) areas are currently one of the most promising avenues of research into the Radical Right vote, be it on the level of subnational political units or in even smaller tracts. Either way, researchers need to account for the fact that an increasing number of voters are either immigrants or the offspring of immigrants, who will be disinclined to support the Radical Right. Estimates from small area studies that are based on aggregate data will therefore be biased downward (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009b). Hence, multi-level analyses that combine micro data with information on local living conditions are the way forward in this particular branch of research.

6 Conclusions

Over the last three decades, Radical Right parties have become a permanent feature of most European polities. Their rise, persistence, and decline can be quite well explained by the usual apparatus of electoral studies. On the micro level, the most important factors are value orientations, attitudes towards social groups, candidates and political issues as well as (the lack of) party identifications. At the macro level, social change (broadly defined) undoubtedly plays an important role, while parties, the media and all other sorts collective actors operate at the meso-level in between.

Because RRP are often perceived as divisive, disruptive, or outright dangerous, a great deal of intellectual energy has been spent looking for “deeper” explanations. And indeed, there can be very little doubt that the presence or absence of immigrants and immigration, the frequency and nature of contacts between the immigrants and the native population, and the way immigration is framed by other political actors and the media is a major contributing factor to Radical Right support. However, given that immigration, ethnic tensions, and RRP actors are almost ubiquitous in

Western societies, their success is not a major surprise. Ultimately, trying to understand why they are *not* successful in some cases might be more rewarding, both politically and intellectually.

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