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

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This chapter profiles the social base of electoral support for the parties of the Extreme Right[1] in Western Europe, i.e. the question of whether some groups in society are more susceptible to the appeal of these parties than others. This issue is relevant for a number of reasons: First, by looking at the social composition of European societies we might be able to better understand why parties of the Extreme Right *are more successful* in some countries than in others. Second, a careful analysis of the link between the social and the political might help us to gauge the potential for *future* right-wing mobilisation in countries which currently have no electorally successful parties of the Extreme Right. Third, knowing *who* votes for a party might help us to get a clearer understanding of the underlying *motives* to cast a vote for the Extreme Right.

Over the last 15 years or so, analyses of the Extreme Right's electorate(s) have become a minor industry within the larger context of (comparative) Political Sociology. By necessity, this chapter aims at summarising the main findings from this research program, but cannot strive for a comprehensive presentation of all that has been achieved during these years. More specifically, findings from national and small-n studies are (almost) completely ignored. Much by the same token, I will not delve into the fascinating literature on the social bases of the Interwar Extreme Right in Germany and in other countries (Childers, 1983; Falter, 1991; King, Tanner and Wagner, 2008; Küchler, 1992; O'Loughlin, 2002).

Recent events in Central and Eastern Europe (Mudde, 2005) provide a fascinating complement to this Western perspective. However, much like Central and Eastern European parties and electorates themselves, our (comparative) knowledge of the social base of the Extreme Right in CEE in still very much in flux. Therefore, the chapter aims to provide a comparative perspective on developments in West European electoral politics since the 1980s.

1 Theory

1.1 Definitions

Much of the early literature on the Extreme Right is devoted to the twin debates on the correct label and on criteria for membership in this party family. Initially, the newly successful parties of the "Third Wave" that began in the late 1970s were seen as closely linked to the Extreme Right of the Interwar years (Prowe, 1994). While such connections *do* exist in many cases, scholars soon began to pinpoint the differences between a) the current and the Interwar right and b) between different members of the emerging new party family. As a result,

[1] A staggering number of labels and definitions have been applied to the parties whose electorates are analysed in this chapter (see section 1.1). For simplicities sake, I use the term "Extreme Right", arguably the most prominent in the international literature. This does not imply that all or indeed a majority of the relevant parties are "extremist", i.e. opposed to the values of Liberal Democracy.

scholars came up with a plethora of definitions, typologies and labels, including (but not limited to) the "New Right", "Radical Right", "Populist Right" and "Extreme Right", to mention only the most popular ones. As recently as 2007, Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2007, pp. 18-24), one of the most prolific scholars in this area, made an attempt to bring a semblance of order to the field by suggesting that "nativism", the belief that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the "native" group, is the largest common denominator for the parties of the Third Wave including those in Central and Eastern Europe. Like a Russian doll, this family contains two subgroups which are nested into each other: Parties of the "Radical Right" combine nativism and authoritarianism, whereas the "Populist Radical Right" add populism as an additional ingredient to this mixture. In a departure from his earlier work, the label "Extreme Right" is reserved for anti-democratic (extremist) parties (Mudde, 2007, p. 24) within the all-embracing nativist cluster.

While Mudde's proposal is remarkably clear and was very well received in the field,[2] it matters most to students of *parties*. Scholars of *voting behaviour*, on the other hand, tend to go with a rather pragmatic approach that was concisely summarised by Mudde (Mudde, 1996, p. 233) a decade earlier: "We know *who* they are, even though we do not know exactly *what* they are." As this quote suggests, there is (definitional questions not withstanding) actually a very broad consensus as to which parties are normally included in analyses of the Right's electoral base. These include the Progress Party in Norway, the Danish People's Party and the Progress Party in Denmark, New Democracy and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden, the National Front, National Democrats and British National Party in Britain, the National Front and the National Republican Movement in France, the German People's Union, Republicans and National Democrats in Germany, the Centre Parties, Lijst Pim Fortuyn and the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, the Vlaams Blok/Belang and the National Front in Belgium, the Freedom Party and the Alliance for the Future in Austria, the Italian Social Movement/National Alliance, the Northern League and the Tricolour Flame in Italy, the Falange Parties in Spain, Political Spring, the Popular Orthodox Rally and various smaller and short-lived parties in Greece, and the "Christian Democrats"(PDC) in Portugal. There is even a remarkable agreement on which parties should best be seen as borderline cases: the Scandinavian Progress Parties before they transformed themselves into anti-immigration parties during the early 1980s, the National Alliance after Fini began to develop its "post-fascist" profile in the mid-1990s, the Swiss People's Party in Switzerland before it became dominated by its "Zurich Wing" lead by Blocher and the True Finns in Finland and the Social Democratic Centre/Popular Party in Portugal.

Amongst scholars of voting behaviour, there is little doubt that these parties attract similar voters and should be grouped together in a single, albeit very heterogeneous, party family. "Extreme Right" is currently the most popular label for this group. Its use does not (necessarily) signify the respective parties' opposition to the principles of liberal democracy but rather adherence to a convention in the field.

This is not to imply that differences between these parties do not exist, do not matter for voting behaviour or should be analysed by different typologies. The German NPD, for instance, is unapologetically neo-fascist, whereas

[2]Cf. the symposium in Political Studies Review 2009.

the Norwegian Progress Party is, at least on the surface, remarkably moderate and libertarian. Rather, it is next to impossible to incorporate the existing differences between parties into studies of voting behaviour, because it is very rare to concurrently observe two or more electorally viable parties of the Third Wave competing for votes. Therefore, party sub-type effects are inseparable from constant and time-varying country effects.

1.2 Explanations

Over the last eight decades or so, historians, sociologists and political scientists have developed a multitude of theoretical accounts that aim to explain the electoral support for the Interwar and modern Extreme Right. While many of these accounts are highly complex, they can usefully be grouped into four broad categories (Winkler, 1996).

A first group of scholars focuses on largely stable and very general attributes of the Extreme Right's supporters, that is, *personality traits* and *value orientations*. The most prominent example of this line of research is without doubt the original study of the so-called "Authoritarian Personality's" support for the Nazi party by Adorno and his collaborators (Adorno et al., 1950). More recent contributions include work by Altemeyer and Lederer, who both aim at developing "modern" scales for measuring authoritarianism.[3] In a related fashion, authors like Ignazi and Kitschelt (Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995) have proposed a link between allegedly stable value orientations and voting for the Extreme Right. Both authors interpret the success of the Extreme Right as part of a authoritarian-materialistic "backlash" against the Green and Left-Libertarian parties that emerged from the New Social Movements of the 1970s (Inglehart, 1977).

If there is a correlation between one's social position on the one hand and one's personality traits and value orientation on the other, these approaches should go some way towards identifying the electoral base of the modern Extreme Right. And indeed, ever since the first studies on the social bases of the original Nazi movement were published (See e.g. Parsons, 1942), social scientists have suspected that the working class, the lower middle-classes and particularly the so-called "petty bourgeoisie" exhibit stronger authoritarian tendencies than other social groups. This alleged link between class (and, by implication, formal education) was made explicit by Kitschelt (Kitschelt, 1995, pp. 4–7), who argued that the very nature of jobs in certain segments of the private sector predisposes their occupants towards a mixture of market-liberal and authoritarian ideas that was at one stage promoted by the National Front in France and the Freedom Party in Austria.

A second strand of the literature is mainly concerned with the effects of *social disintegration*, i.e. a (perceived) break-down of social norms ("anomia") and intense feelings of anxiety, anger and isolation brought about by social change. Allegedly, this mental state inspires a longing for strong leadership and rigid ideologies that are provided by the Extreme Right. A classic proponent of this approach is Parsons in his early study on the Nazi supporters. More recently, these ideas have returned in the guise of the "losers of modernisation" hypothesis, i.e. the idea that certain segments of Western societies feel that

[3]See Altemeyer, 1996; Lederer and Schmidt, 1995; Meloen, Linden and Witte, 1996.

their position is threatened by immigration and globalisation and therefore turn to political parties which promise to insulate them from these developments.[4] Interestingly, the losers of modernisation hypothesis identifies more or less the same social groups – (unskilled) workers, the unemployed and other persons depending on welfare, parts of the lower middle classes – as the main target of Extreme Right mobilisation efforts.

A third class of accounts draws heavily on theories from the field of social psychology. In this perspective, *group conflicts* are the real cause of support for the Extreme Right. Unlike the two aforementioned approaches, this strand is relatively heterogeneous. At one end of the spectrum, it includes classic theories of purely emotional, hardly conscious scapegoating (See e.g. Dollard et al., 1939). In this perspective, ethnic minorities including immigrants provide convenient targets for the free-floating aggression harboured by a society's underclass. These minorities are at the same time a) suitably different from and b) even more power- and defenceless than the members of this group.

At the other end of the spectrum, theories of Realistic Group Conflict that can be traced to the early work of Sherif and Sherif (See e.g. Sherif and Sherif, 1953) emphasise the role of a (bounded) rationality in ethnic conflicts over scarce resources like jobs and benefits. This idea is especially prominent in more recent accounts (E.g. Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998).

Theories of "ethnic competition" (Bélanger and Pinard, 1991), "status politics" (Lipset and Bendix, 1951), "subtle", "modern", "symbolic" or "cultural" racism (Kinder and Sears, 1981) and social identity (Tajfel et al., 1971) cover a middle ground between these two poles, while the notion of "relative deprivation" – the idea that one's own group is not getting what they are entitled to in comparison with another social group – provides a useful conceptional umbrella for these somewhat disparate ideas (Pettigrew, 2002).

Again, no matter what specific concept from this research tradition is applied, again, the usual suspects emerge: those social groups who deem themselves threatened by immigration and related processes. But not all members of these groups vote for the Extreme Right. Rather, the Extreme Right vote shows a considerable degree of variation both between and within countries in Western Europe. Some of the differences between countries might be explained by differences in the social composition of the respective societies. However, these differences cannot explain the huge differences in Extreme Right support between otherwise reasonably similar countries: Norway is hardly more deprived than its neighbour Sweden. By the same token, it is difficult to imagine that the authoritarian underclass in Austria is six or seven times larger than its counterpart in neighbouring Germany. Moreover, personality traits, value orientations, group membership and even social and economic position change slowly, if at all, whereas support for the Extreme Right often exhibits a great deal of variability *within countries*.

One factor that is often overlooked, perhaps because it seems *too* obvious, is the core variable of the social-psychological model of voting, i.e. party identifications. Historically, West European parties of the centre left and the centre right have been able to absorb considerable authoritarian potentials in their respective societies, and even today, some voters who might otherwise be lured by the

[4]See Scheuch and Klingemann, 1967 for the original, rather complex approach, and Betz, 1994 for a modern and more streamlined take.

Extreme Right are simply not available for those parties because they are still firmly attached to one of the more established parties (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009a). Similarly, ties to other organisations, notably churches and trade unions, are likely to reduce the probability of an Extreme Right vote. This implies that the ongoing processes of de-alignment in West European societies (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck, 1984) will increase the potential for right-wing mobilisation, everything else being equal.

However, varying degrees of de-alignment are not the only differences between West European societies that can help to explain levels of support for the Extreme Right. Moreover, party identifications are also supposed to be stable over time. Therefore, processes of de-alignment and re-alignment cannot explain short-time fluctuations of Extreme Right support within the same country.

These insights have triggered interest in a fourth, additional perspective that has come to the fore in recent years and aims to complement the three major approaches. In Winkler's original survey of the literature, this emerging perspective was presented under the label of a "political culture" that constrains the posited effects of individual factors on the Extreme Right vote. However, since the mid-1990s, interest in a whole host of other, more tangible contextual factors has grown tremendously, and it is now widely believed that the interplay between group conflicts and system-level variables can help explain the striking differences in support for the ER over time and across countries. Building on previous work by Tarrow and Kriesi and his associates (Kriesi et al., 1992; Tarrow, 1996), Arzheimer and Carter have argued that these factors should be subsumed under the concept of "political opportunity structures", which compromise short-, medium- and long-term contextual variables that amongst them capture the degree of openness of a given political system for political entrepreneurs (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, p. 422). As it turns out, however, the concept of "opportunities" for new political actors might be too narrow: Many context factors like unemployment or immigration will not only provide the political elite with an incentive to mobilise, but will also have a direct and possibly more important impact on voters' preferences. Empirically, it is not possible to separate these two causal mechanisms since we have no reliable information on the mental calculations made by (would-be) politicians. Therefore, it seems reasonable to subsume the notion of opportunity structures under the even more general concept of contextual factors.

Over the last 15 years or so, studies have looked at a whole host of such contextual variables, including but not limited to:

1. Opportunity structures
   (a) In a strict sense: political decentralisation and electoral thresholds (E.g. Carter, 2005)
   (b) In a wider sense: positions of other parties (Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002), media coverage (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007, 2009) and "discursive opportunity structures" (Koopmans and Muis, 2009; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Wal, 2000; Wimmer, 1997)
2. Variables related to the Extreme Right parties themselves (e. g. availability of "charismatic leaders", policy positions, reliance on populism, party subtype)

3. Macroeconomic variables: unemployment, growth, and their trends

4. Other political variables: immigration figures

All accounts of the role of contextual variables assume – sometimes explicitly but more often implicitly – some sort of multi-level explanation in the spirit of Coleman's ideal type of sociological explanations (Coleman, 1994). Put simply, these explanations assume that changes at the macro-level (a declining economy, rising immigration figures, a new anti-immigrant party) bring about changes in individual preferences, which lead to (aggregate) changes in individual political behaviour, i.e. an increase in electoral support for the Extreme Right. Since different groups in society have different prior propensities to vote for the Extreme Right, and since they react differently to changes in the social and political environment, both micro and macro information are required to fully model and understand the processes that transform latent or potential support for the Extreme Right into real, manifest votes

2 Data

All empirical analyses of the nexus between the social and the political require data, which fall into two broad categories: aggregate (macro) data which provide information on the behaviour and properties of collectives (electoral districts, provinces, countries ...), and micro data, which relate to individuals and are typically based on standardised interviews. Both categories can be further subdivided by including additional dimensions:

1. Macro data
   (a) Source: census data, electoral results, macro-economic and government data
   (b) Temporal coverage: cross-sectional vs. longitudinal data
   (c) Geographical coverage: one, few or many countries
   (d) Level of aggregation: wards, constituencies, subnational units or the whole country
2. Micro data
   (a) Source: national opinion polls vs. comparative multi-national studies
   (b) Temporal coverage: cross-sectional, trend and panel studies
   (c) Geographical coverage: one, few or many countries
   (d) Level of aggregation: individual cases vs. aggregated survey results

The analytical leverage of the data depends on these sub-dimensions as well as on the reliability of the information and the level of detail they provide. As a result of technological progress and huge individual and collective investments into the infrastructure of social science research, the quality and availability of comparative data on the electorates of the Extreme Right in Western Europe have vastly improved over the last decade. Consequentially, scholars of the Extreme Right are nowadays in a much better position to analyse the social base of these parties than fifteen or even five years ago.

Nonetheless, they still face some awkward trade-offs. Generally speaking, micro-level data is preferable to macro-level data, especially if the level of aggregation is high. After all, aggregate measures are usually restricted to human behaviour but provide no information on the motives behind the aggregated actions.[5]

Moreover, aggregation discards individual information. Therefore, inferences from correlations at the macro-level to the behaviour of individuals are plagued by the infamous ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950) unless the aggregates are homogeneous. This is most easily illustrated by an example: At the level of the 96 departments of metropolitan France, there is a sizable positive correlation between the number of foreign-born persons and the vote for the National Front. It is, however, highly unlikely that immigrants have an above-average propensity to vote for the Extreme Right. Rather, the aggregate correlation reflects a mixture of a) the below-average propensity of immigrants to vote for the Front National[6] and b) a hostile reaction of other voters to the presence of immigrants. Without individual-level data, it is not possible to disentangle these two effects.[7]

A famous *historical* example for the perils of aggregate correlations concerns two time-series that moved in sync: electoral support for the NSDAP and the unemployment rate in Weimar Germany. Their positive relationship suggests that the unemployed turned to the Nazi party as their economical situation declined (Frey and Weck, 1981). However, at lower levels of aggregation (*Länder* and *Kreise*), the relationship between unemployment and the NSDAP vote was actually *negative*. Presumably, the unemployed were *less* likely to vote for the NSDAP while those who (yet) had a job had a higher propensity to support the Nazis that further increased as the economy deteriorated (Falter and Zintl, 1988; Falter et al., 1983).

So why would anyone want to base their analyses on macro data? As it turns out, quite often there is no alternative, because (comparable) surveys were simply not conducted at some point in time relevant to the intended analysis, at least not in all countries that are supposed to be studied under a given design. The United Kingdom is a point in case. Until recently, the parties of the Extreme Right in this country were so weak that it was next to impossible to study their supporters by means of survey data.

Moreover, survey studies suffer from a number of limitations of their own: Even seemingly simple questions do not translate well into other languages, interviewers are tempted to take shortcuts, respondents might not be able (or willing) to accurately recall past behaviour and might be too embarrassed to admit to racist feelings and (presumably) unpopular opinions, and so on. As a result, survey data are often plagued by relatively high levels of systematic and random error. Macro data on the other hand are usually collected by government agencies and are therefore highly reliable. In summary, researchers are forced to choose between richness and reliability, in-depth and "broad picture" perspectives, theoretical adequacy and data availability.

But not all is bleak. (Relatively) recent initiatives in the collection, dissemination and processing of survey data have gone a long way to improve the

[5] Aggregated survey data are a somewhat degenerated special case.

[6] This is illustrated by very *low* levels of support for the National Front in those departments around Paris which have the highest shares of immigrants.

[7] See the exchange between Arzheimer and Carter, 2009b and Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007b; Kestilä-Kekkonen and Söderlund, 2009.

situation of the subfield. The European Social Survey[8] with its module on immigration (2002/2003) provides a pan-European, state-of-the-art perspective on the hearts and minds of the voters of the Extreme Right. Similarly, the Mannheim Trend File[9] represents a major effort to harmonise and document the multitude of Eurobarometer surveys that have been collected in the EC/EU member states since the early 1970s. Finally, electoral support for the Extreme Right is now often analysed by means of statistical multi-level models (Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002), which allow for the joint analyses of micro and macro data, thereby alleviating some of the problems outlined above.

3 Findings

While men were always overrepresented amongst the French Front National's voters, it is well-documented that its electoral base has changed considerably over time (Mayer, 1998; Mayer and Perrineau, 1992). Initially, the Front appealed primarily to the petty bourgeoisie, but it quickly transformed itself into a non-traditional workers' party. In between, it managed to attract occasional support from segments of the middle classes. The Front has been dubbed the "master case" of a successful New Right Party, and its strategies have been adopted by other parties of the European Right (Rydgren, 2005). Therefore, it seems at least plausible that other parties of the right have followed a similar trajectory of "proletarianization" (Oesch, 2008). At any rate, it seems safe to assume that new, relatively unknown parties rest on relatively fluid and less than well-defined social bases, whereas older parties that have competed for votes in three or four consecutive elections build a more consolidated electoral base, often with a distinct social profile.

As it turns out, the electorates of most parties of the Extreme Right do indeed consist of a clearly defined social core that is remarkably similar to the French pattern. The most successful of these parties – the Freedom Party in Austria, the Norwegian Progress Party and some others – have regularly managed to attract votes from beyond this core so that their profile became less sharp, whereas those that project the most radical political images (e.g. the German NPD or the British BNP) were bound to frighten off the middle classes and have therefore been unable to achieve this feat. This not withstanding, a very clear picture emerges from three decades of national and comparative studies of the Extreme Right.

3.1 Socio-Demographics

3.1.1 Gender

Most national studies have found huge differences in the propensity of men and women to vote for the Extreme Right, even if other factors such as occupation, education and age are controlled for. While findings vary across time, parties, countries and details of operationalisation and model specification (Givens, 2004), men seem to be roughly 40% more likely to vote for the

[8] See `http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/`.

[9] See `http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data/survey-data/eurobarometer-data-service/eb-trends-trend-files/mannheim-eb-trend-file/`.

Extreme Right than female voters. Even amongst the voters of the Norwegian Progress Party and the Danish People's Party (which have been both lead by women for the last four/fifteen years respectively), about two thirds are male (Heidar and Pedersen, 2006). An important exception from this general observation, however, is the Italian National Alliance, which appeals to both men and women. This somewhat unusual finding seems to coincide with the party leadership's attempts to re-define the Alliance as a Christian-conservative party that eventually paved the way for the AN's merger with Forza Italia in 2009.

Comparative studies that rely on various data sources confirm this general pattern (Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002). A whole host of explanations for this phenomenon have been proposed in the literature, spanning a multitude of approaches from psychoanalysis to rational choice. Common arguments include that

- Some parties of the Extreme Right (like the Interwar Right) still project images of hyper-masculinity that are intrinsically off-putting for women
- Women are moving towards the left of men in most post-industrial societies (Inglehart and Norris, 2000)
- Women are inherently conservative and therefore more likely to be offended by the Extreme Right's radicalism and more likely to identify with parties of the centre-right.

Related to the last point is a methodological argument: If effects of conformism and social desirability are stronger in women, they might simply be less likely to admit that they support the Extreme Right in an interview situation. However, analyses of the "German Representative Electoral Statistics", a special sub-sample of ballot papers that bear marks which record the gender and age-bracket of the elector, have shown that the gender gap is real, at least in Germany. Moreover, gender effects do not completely disappear when attitudes are controlled for. As Betz noted more than 15 years ago, the magnitude of the right-wing voting gender gap is and remains "a complex and intriguing puzzle" (Betz, 1994, p. 146).

3.1.2 Education

Like gender, education is a powerful predictor of the Extreme Right vote in Western Europe. Virtually all national and comparative studies demonstrate that citizens with university education are least likely to vote for the Extreme Right. Conversely, the Extreme Right enjoys above average levels of support in lower educational strata.

This relationship is neither perfect nor necessarily linear. Some parties of the Extreme Right – most notably the Austrian Freedom Party – have managed to attract considerable numbers of graduates in some elections. Moreover, there is scattered evidence that the Extreme Right is even more popular amongst those with middle levels of educational attainment than in the lowest educational strata, although differences between these two groups are rarely statistically significant. By and large, however, the statistical association between educational attainment and right-wing voting is remarkably strong.

There are basically three types of explanations for this relationship. A first approach claims that citizens with higher levels of educational attainment for

various reasons tend to hold more liberal values than others (Weakliem, 2002) and are therefore less likely to support the authoritarian policies of the Extreme Right.

A second argument holds that supporters of the Extreme Right are primarily motivated by ethnic competition (Bélanger and Pinard, 1991). Since immigration into Western Europe is mostly low-skilled, it poses a threat only to those with low to medium levels of attainment. In fact, low-skilled immigration might be seen as a benefitting graduates, as it might bring down wages in some sectors of the service industry (e.g. childcare or housekeeping), thereby increasing their ability to purchase these services.

Third, graduates might be more susceptible to effects of social desirability, which would lead them to under-report support for the Extreme Right. This attainment-specific bias would result in overestimating the effect of education.

3.1.3 Class and Age

Social class is a notoriously complex concept, but voting studies usually rely on either some variant of the classification developed by Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, 1979) or some simple typology that pits the "working class" against one or more other broadly defined occupational groups. Either way, class (in this sense) is closely related to formal education.

As outlined above, many parties initially appealed primarily to the so-called "pettty bourgeoisie" of artisans, shopkeepers, farmers and other self-employed citizens. As this group has been subject to a constant and steady numerical decline in all European societies, the Extreme Right has been forced to broaden its social base. Nowadays, non-traditional workers, other members of the lower middle classes and the unemployed form the most important segment of the Extreme Right's electorate. Conversely, managers, professionals, owners of larger businesses and members of the middle and higher ranks of the public service are the groups least likely to vote for the Extreme Right. This chimes with the effect of educational attainment, although both variables are not perfectly correlated and operate independently of each other.

Apart from the effect of class, many studies demonstrate an effect of age, with younger (< 30) voters being more likely to vote for the Extreme Right. Presumably, this age group is less firmly attached to the established parties, has a more intensive sense of ethnic competition, is subject to lower levels of social control and more prone to experiment with their vote.

3.1.4 Social ties and other socio-demographic factors

Various studies have looked at the respective effects of other socio-demographic factors, often inspired by a varieties of disintegration, reference-group or cleavage theories. For rather obvious reasons, trade union membership is often a strong deterrent to right-wing voting. Slightly less self-explanatory is the negative effect of church attendance, which contradicts earlier American findings. As Arzheimer and Carter demonstrate, this effect is mostly due to pre-existing party loyalties that tie religious voters to Christian/Conservative parties (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009a).

Other alleged factors include household size and marital status, which are both interpreted as indicators of social isolation and anomia. The effects of these variables are, however, weak and inconsistent.

3.2 Attitudes

Especially during their early years, parties of the Extreme Right were often seen as vehicles for "pure", allegedly non-political protest.[10] To be sure, the parties of the Extreme Right have very mixed roots,[11] and attitudes such as distrust in and disaffection with existing parties and Euro-Scepticism have strong effects on the probability of a right-wing vote. Yet, as immigration emerged as their central issue during the 1980s, anti-immigrant sentiment arose as the single most powerful predictor of the right-wing vote.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is a complex attitude, and there is no consensus as to which sub-dimensions it entails and how it should be operationalised. Just as not all parties and politicians of the Extreme Right are extremists, not all immigration sceptics are xenophobes or racists (Rydgren, 2008). But what ever their exact nature is, concerns about the presence of non-Western immigrants go a long way towards understanding support for the Extreme Right. While not all citizens who harbour such worries do in fact vote for the Extreme Right (many support parties of the Centre Left or Centre Right), there are next to no right-wing voters who have a positive view of immigrants and immigration. Even if the "single-issue thesis" (Mudde, 1999) of right-wing support does not paint an accurate picture of these parties and their voters, it is difficult to overstate the importance of immigration for the modern (post-1980) Extreme Right.

Finally, identifications with either a party of the Extreme Right or another party compromise another important class of attitudes that help to understand and predict the Extreme Right vote. As outlined above in section 1.2, party identifications are often ignored in models of right-wing voting, presumably because their likely effects are self-evident. This is, however, a grave mistake, as this omission can seriously bias the estimates for other variables and ignores the fact that many right-wing parties have consolidated their electoral base over the last decades.

3.3 Contextual Factors

Since the mid-1990s, contextual (mostly system level) factors have attracted a great deal of interested as they were increasingly seen as key variables for explaining the huge variation in right-wing support. Some technical issues not withstanding, the analysis by Jackman and Volpert (Jackman and Volpert, 1996) was groundbreaking in many ways. In an aggregate study that spans 103 elections held in 16 countries between 1970 and 1990, Jackman and Volpert analyse the impact of various economic and institutional variables on the Extreme Right vote. Their main results are that the Extreme Right benefits

[10] See Brug and Fennema, 2003 for a highly critical assessment of this thesis.

[11] Anti-tax movements in the case of the Scandinavian Progress Parties, regionalism for the Leagues in Italy and the Vlams Blok/Belang in Flanders, a social movement to improve local infrastructure for the Dutch LPF and Liberalism for the Austrian Freedom Party, to name just a few.

from high unemployment, PR voting and multi-partyism, whereas high electoral thresholds are detrimental for the Extreme Right.

Later studies have elaborated on these findings by dealing with some of the technical and conceptual problems (Golder, 2003), using aggregated survey data (Knigge, 1998), and considering mediating effect of the welfare state (Swank and Betz, 2003). Around the turn of the century, the view that immigration (usually operationalised by the number of refugees or asylum seeker applying or actually taking residence in a country) has a substantial positive effect on right-wing voting was firmly established, whereas the effects of inflation and of (aggregate) unemployment appeared to be much less consistent.

The useful study by Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers (Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002) represents another important step forward, as these authors were the first to model right-wing voting in a multi-level perspective that combines individual-level and system-level predictors. From a methodological point of view, multi-level modelling s is currently the most appropriate approach to the research problem. The study by Lubbers et al. was also important because they complemented their model with political factors, namely characteristics of the Extreme Right parties.

This approach was taken one step further again by Arzheimer and Carter, who include various measures for the ideological positions of *other* parties as well as institutional characteristics, unemployment and immigration rates into a comprehensive model of "opportunity structures" for the Extreme Right (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006).

As it turns out, immigration and unemployment work in the expected direction, though their effect is moderated by welfare state interventions that insulate vulnerable social groups from their impact. Moreover, the established parties have a substantial impact on the success of their right-wing competitors: If they publicly address issues such as immigration, the Extreme Right benefits, presumably because it gains some legitimacy and relevance in the eyes of the public. If, however, they simply ignore the issues of the Extreme Right, these parties seem to suffer(Arzheimer, 2009).

The studies discussed in this section provide a detailed and nuanced account of the interplay between social, economic, institutional, political and individual factors required to transform the Extreme Right's electoral potential into actual votes. There is, however, a rather large elephant in the room: the media. If, as Arzheimer argues, party manifestos (that are usually of little relevance for the general public) have a sizeable impact on the right-wing vote, it is reasonable to assume that media effects of agenda setting and priming are even more important. Country-level studies for the Netherlands and for Germany demonstrate that this is indeed the case (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007, 2009). There are, however, no comparative studies on media effects (yet), because the necessary data are not available.

4 Summary and Outlook

Conceptual and data problems not withstanding, Political Sociology has come up with a clear image of the "typical" voter of the Extreme Right: male, young(ish), of moderate educational achievement and concerned about immigrants and immigration. While some parties of the Extreme Right have been

remarkably successful in making inroads into other strata, this group forms the core of the right-wing electorates in Western Europe, making the Extreme Right a family of non-traditional working class parties.

As the size of this group is largely stable and roughly similar across countries, the interest in contextual factors that may trigger the conversion of potential into manifest support has grown during the last decade. While immigration, unemployment and other economic factors emerge time and again as variables that play a central role, recent studies demonstrate that political factors, which are (up to a degree) subject to political control and manipulation, act as important moderators.

The most glaring omission so far is the lack of *comparative* studies on the impact that media coverage of immigrants and immigration policies has on the prospects of the Extreme Right. Another area where more research is needed concerns the effects of smaller spatial contexts on the right-wing vote. After all, social, political and economic conditions vary massively at the sub-national, e.g. across provinces, districts, towns and even neighbourhoods. It stands to reason that citizens rely on these *local* conditions, which have a massive impact on their everyday lives, to evaluate politicians, parties and policies at the national level. This approach has been fruitfully employed at the *national* level (Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007a; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2002). *Comparative* studies, however, have been hampered by vastly different subnational divisions and a lack of comparable micro- and macro-data. New initiatives for the geo-referencing of survey data and the pan-European harmonisation of small-area government data will hopefully help us to overcome that impasse in the future.

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