

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

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# Overview

Theory

Data

Findings

Who?

Why?

When and where?

Discussion

# What is the “Extreme Right” ?

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

# Theoretical accounts of Extreme Right Voting?

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2. Social Disintegration
3. Group Conflicts (scapegoating  $\Leftrightarrow$  rational choice)  $\rightarrow$  relative deprivation

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- ▶ Political Opportunities, public opinion
- ▶ Other Contextual Factors

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- ▶ Other Contextual Factors
- ▶ latent support  $\Leftrightarrow$  manifest support



# Which comparative data are available?

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- ▶ European Election Studies (2009: not yet)
- ▶ European Social Survey (2002/2003)
- ▶ Sweet but short, 10,000-15,000 respondents per wave

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  - ▶ 1980s-2000s
  - ▶ Contextual analyses across time and countries
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3. Contextual information: OECD, UNHCR, party manifestos, election statistics . . .

## Sociodemographics: gender

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

## Sociodemographics: education

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

## Sociodemographics: class and age

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

## Sociodemographics: summary

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

## Ideology and values

- ▶ Materialism vs. Postmaterialism
- ▶ Dissatisfaction with European Integration
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- ▶ Left-Right-Self-Evaluation

# Immigration and xenophobia

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

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

# Findings

- ▶ Immigration → Extreme Right support *ceteris paribus*)
- ▶ Higher levels of benefits → Extreme Right support (if immigration is low) – welfare chauvinism?
- ▶ Unemployment rate → Extreme Right support (if immigration or benefits levels are very low)
- ▶ At high levels of immigration, benefits curb effect of unemployment

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- ▶ Contextual factors can “tip the balance” in  $\approx \frac{1}{3}$  of all cases

## What have we learned so far?

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



## But ...

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

Thank you!