

Party Competition and Public Demand after the Financial Crisis: the Case of Radical Right

Parties

Stefan Stojkovic

Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

Stojkovic_stefan@student.ceu.edu

Abstract. While major theoretical work on the Radical Right (RR) was developed before the 2008 Financial Crisis, electoral results over the last decade have initiated an extensive debate within the Radical Right voting literature. Nevertheless, even though we already know a great deal about those who vote for the radical right in Western Europe, it is still not very clear what is the relationship between party- and voter behavior, years after the opportunity structure was created. Is the radical right vote still just the protest vote, i.e. punishment for mainstream parties, or it can be better understood through voting based on issues over which newly (re)emerged RR parties managed to establish ownership? I will address these questions consulting both micro and meso-level data. My findings do not provide me with enough evidence to believe that political issues determine political competition between the RR parties and their competitors.

Introduction

Extensive work has been produced in an attempt to understand Western Europe's radical right (RR) upsurge, providing supply-side and demand-side explanations for its success (Golder, 2016; Mudde, 2007). On one hand, supply-side analyses place an emphasis on party behavior. While Downsian (1957) model is often taken as a deductive tool for studying mainstream party behavior, explanations of electoral successes of niche parties who do not chase the median voter required certain modification of the original spatial models. Instead of looking solely at issue proximities, recent theoretical work sheds light on the importance of issue salience and issue ownership in accounting for the success of these parties (Meguid, 2005). Therefore, issue ownership-based analyses have become more common, whereby positions of radical right parties are hardly understood without taking mainstream party positions into account (Meguid, 2005; Mudde, 2010). In fact, analyses based on issue salience and issue ownership have become more relevant as the emergence of a new structural conflict in Europe has transformed traditional

dimensions of political competition, moving the focus to cultural issues and creating space for new political parties (Kriesi et al., 2006).

On the other hand, studies on the demand-side, examine factors that produce demand for political parties at the micro-level. Literature on the radical right electorate often links support for these parties to modernization, socio-cultural, and/or economic grievances (Golder, 2016). We have learned that citizens who vote for radical right parties in Western Europe are EU sceptics, they often hold *populist attitudes* and have high levels of political distrust (Akkerman, Zaslove, & Spruyt, 2017; Alexander & Welzel, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Oesch, 2008; Rooduijn, 2017; Voogd & Dassonneville, 2018; Zhirkov, 2014). We have also learned that the radical right voter base in Western Europe is predominantly composed of service and production workers (Oesch & Rennwald, 2017), and citizens with anti-immigration attitudes (Goodwin, 2011; Green, Sarasin, Baur, & Fasel, 2016; Rydgren, 2008; Stockemer, 2016).

Euroscepticism and anti-immigration are commonly considered to be core issues on the basis of which RR in Western Europe receives electoral support. Recent evidence on electoral volatility in Europe suggests that mainstream parties have difficulties competing with the radical right for ownership over these issues, because immigration and EU skepticism have nothing to do with traditional social divisions (Bakker, Jolly, & Polk, 2018; Hong, 2015; Kriesi, 2010). Rather, some authors argue that these issues constitute a new dividing line termed *transnational cleavage* on which niche parties outperform political mainstream (Hooghe & Marks, 2018).

In order to avoid assuming individual-level mechanisms behind party strategies, I aim to take both into account and examine how different party behavior scenarios relate to how people vote. To do so, I proceed in three steps. First, I determine radical right parties' competitors on the

basis of micro dimension of political competition. Second, I comparatively examine how radical right parties and their competitors position themselves on salient issues, and also analyze voting behavior patterns. On one hand, this will enable me to see if voting behavior can be explained on the basis of issues that parties emphasize. On the other, this micro-level data will indicate those party behavior scenarios in which the radical right *outplayed* its competitor on particular issues and, more importantly, if the same RR and competitors' party strategies result in the same voting behavior patterns across cases. Lastly, my analysis will allow me to differentiate instances in which electoral support for radical right comes as a result of issue-based voting from those where this support derives from protest voting.

Below I first review theoretical work and empirical findings on radical right issue- and protest voting. In addition, I define hypotheses of the present study. Finally, I employ micro-level data together with an expert survey on salient political issues and party positioning on these issues. My motivation stems from previous work on radical right voters but, more importantly, from party competition literature based on the meso-level data (Downes & Loveless, 2018; Meguid, 2005). However, while this scholarship largely assumes voter behavior on the basis of party behavior analysis, I attempt to contribute by simultaneously analyzing both and differentiating those cases in which voter behavior comes as a result of parties' issue positioning, from those where it is more a product of protest voting against the incumbent.

Radical Right supporters: issue-based voting

Economy

In a chapter of his book entitled *It's not the economy stupid!*, Mudde (2007) disputes one of the core principles of Kitchel's winning formula for the radical right, claiming that RR

economic program does not constitute a key principle of this party family. On one hand, the radical right cannot be described by neoliberal economic views for this substantially varies across cases. Mudde describes RR economic position as a combination of neoliberal and welfare chauvinist policies in which core is nothing else but the *nativist economy* (p. 122). On the other hand, given that radical right parties are often far from political power, they seem to benefit by emphasizing identity issues and keeping economy secondary, as an instrument to pursue their nativist/authoritarian/populist agenda (p. 132). In addition, rather rare studies that compared radical right and moderate parties on socioeconomic issues have shown that radical right voters are not significantly different from mainstream parties with regard to economic policy preferences (Ivarsflaten, 2002). While the RR is similar to mainstream parties regarding economic policies, their radicalism comes to the fore in socio-cultural issues (Ivarsflaten, 2002).

However, the post-2007/2008 financial crisis literature finds that the demand for redistribution policies generally increased among the European electorate (Olivera, 2014). Interestingly, it also seems that some radical right parties changed their programmatic focus. The case study on the National Front in France shows that this party placed more emphasis on economic policies in its 2012 portfolio moving towards the left on micro- and macroeconomic issues, while giving cultural issues less importance (Ivaldi, 2015). On the other hand, it seems that the weakening party polarization in the UK accounts for the support for UKIP. In other words, the two main parties' move towards political center has left some voters disoriented, which UKIP took advantage of. This is more noticeable in the case of Labor Party whose voters, due to the weakening of party's distinctive features after its move to the center, first defected to the Conservative Party and then to UKIP, once this party became politically significant (Evans & Mellon, 2016).

In light of their economic nationalism, radical right parties are skeptical of the common market, they advocate protectionist policies and adopt anti-globalization political agenda. For instance, the National Front in France adopted a strong protectionist position in its 2014 European manifesto, claiming that the party would *stop the country's contribution to the European budget, introduce taxes at France's borders, stop all EU bailout plans, regulate the banking system, and vote against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (Ivaldi, 2015, p. 11). RR support for the capitalist economy together with economic protectionism and skepticism of the free market is perhaps best captured by the term *social market economy* (Mudde, 2007, p. 124), which implies that the RR electorate is perhaps cross-class. Recent findings have lent some empirical support for this thesis. On one hand, mixed results are found on the redistribution preferences and satisfaction with the economy (Rooduijn, 2017; Zhirkov, 2014). On the other hand, Oesch and Rennwald (2017) suggest that this voter base is composed of both working- and middle-class segments in society, while the RR receives its strongest support from service and production workers.

Non-economic issues

In the recent debate on democratic deconsolidation in the Journal of Democracy Alexander and Welzel (2017) qualify an argument that the progressive cultural shift produced a growing divide between those holding illiberal- and liberal moral values. This homogenized marginalized social classes and made them easier to mobilize. Put another way, these authors suggest that liberal democracy has changed its meaning in a relatively short period of time, which made older and marginalized social groups more distant from younger, educated, and more liberal generations. The essence of this argument is that right wing populist electorate did not follow the cultural shift, and was left behind holding illiberal moral values. These values

include some of the relatively new liberal norms, such as those related to sexuality which is why the radical right attracts voters who oppose same-sex marriages.

In addition, a number of non-economic issues on which the RR mobilizes its voters emerged as a reaction to progressive cultural change. In other words, cultural backlash hypothesis suggests that vote for the RR comes as a reaction to the change towards post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). One of these post-materialist issues is associated with the environmental protection to which the Green parties are committed.

Immigration

Mudde (2007) uses the term nativist democracy to describe radical right ideology. While radical right parties claim to be democratic and often advocate for more direct democracy, their democracy is almost always nominal, for these parties oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracy (ibid. p. 31). These fundamental values are above all, but not exclusively, related to the protection of minority rights. It is not uncommon to hear a far right politician claiming, whether implicitly or explicitly, that they are in favor of democracy as long as it serves the natives. Ever since the 80s and 90s immigration crisis, immigration has been seen as one of the main issues over which the radical right successfully mobilizes its voters in Western Europe. Indeed, previous research has proven the centrality of immigration issue in lending support to a radical right party (Goodwin, 2011), whereby it is the perception of threat that mostly accounts for anti-immigrant attitudes (Green et al., 2016; Stockemer, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to note that anti-immigrant attitudes do not necessarily mean that radical right voters also hold xenophobic attitudes (Rydgren, 2008).

Political dissatisfaction and protest voting

When writing about the protest vote and dissatisfaction in this section, I predominantly think of these terms in light of the 2008 financial crisis. While I am interested in grievances resulted from the economic crisis, I will evaluate the literature on economic voting in somewhat broader terms. The role of economic concerns among voters in their support for political parties shows great variation across cases and depends on a range of variables. However, generally speaking, we know that economic concerns account for roughly one third of election outcomes (Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). When thinking about economy-based voting, there are few aspects one might want to consider, such as temporal dimension of economic evaluation or personal vs. national economy-based assessments.

Starting with temporal dimension, one can differentiate between retrospective and prospective voting (for an overview, see Dalton, 2013). On one hand, the former refers to citizens' evaluation of incumbent's past economic performance. Based on judgements related to how the governing party performed during its time in office, citizens decide whether to reward or punish it on the election day. On the other hand, prospective economic voting refers to expectation about how a party would perform if it were elected, and this is usually based on party's past performance except if it has never been in power.

Moreover, it is worth noting that in order to make up their mind about whether political parties perform well or badly, voters can rely on cues from their own environment (Fiorina, 1981). One of these cues come from citizens' personal experience and refers to their economic well-being. In other words, when voters decide to vote or not vote for the incumbent based on their (dis)satisfaction with personal economic situation, we speak of 'pocketbook' hypothesis

(Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). By contrast, according to “sociotropic” hypothesis, voters are rather rely on their judgements about national economic situation when deciding who to vote for (Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). For instance, Kinder & Kiewiet (1979) look at congressional elections between 1956 and 1976 and find that perceptions of national economic situation considerably outweigh the impact of personal economic concerns on election outcomes.

In general, voters neglect long-term economic performance and mostly care about recent economic changes, they more often take national than personal economic situation into account when going to the polls, and negative economic changes are more likely to trigger economic concerns among electorate than positive ones (Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000). Nevertheless, a direct contribution of one’s economic considerations to their voting remains difficult to observe and this becomes more complex in multiparty systems compared to two-party ones.

In the same vein, the relevance of economic concerns in understanding the radical right support base is a disputed matter. Analyzing post-economic crisis literature on radical right voting, Stockemer (2017) notes that *the list of studies that find no relationship between economic crisis, in general, or high unemployment, in particular, and increased support for the radical right is as long as the list of studies that report a positive association* (pp. 3-4). Hernández & Kriesi, (2016) find that incumbents and other mainstream parties have been electorally punished after the economic crisis which they see as an event that only accelerated long-term dealignment process (Chiaromonte & Emanuele, 2017; Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Pharr, Putnam, & Dalton, 2000). Recent research has also shown that, unexpectedly, regions severely hit by the crisis have not seen a significant increase in support for radical right parties. By contrast, regions which have mainly been immune to crisis have witnessed the highest increase in support for the radical right. However, the effect of the crisis itself, i.e objective economic situation, is either very small

or insignificant, while *it appears that it is more the “fear from the economic crisis” rather than a real economic crisis that fosters increased support for the radical right* (Stockemer, 2017). In a similar vein, Grittersova, Indridason, Gregory, & Crespo, (2016) demonstrate that austerity measures do not foster support for radical political parties. These policies rather reinforce the competition between mainstream left- and right-wing parties. The importance of the aforementioned *fear factor* is the reason why I include subjective perceptions of national and personal economic performance in this paper.

The present study

In her publication on party competition, Meguid (2005) reminds us that the behavior of competing parties was largely neglected in the analysis of niche parties ‘success. Therefore, she suggests the *modified special theory* according to which not only parties’ issue positioning matters in political competition, but also the way in which mainstream competitors alter salience of political issues. The author claims that competing parties have three choices how to respond to radical right issues: (1) they can ignore the issue and thus decrease its importance, for they more resources to influence the general public; (2) they can take up an issue position similar to RR the position, and therefore *steal* the RR’s exclusivity on an issue; (3) competing mainstream parties can also take an opposite stance on an issue, and, according to Meguid, reinforce issue salience and RR ownership over that issue. Hence, it is the third scenario that actually gives rise to radical right parties. Drawing on these recent theoretical developments, I will analyze if the aforementioned party behavior scenario on salient issues translates into how people vote on these issues. Therefore, accounting for issue salience and party positioning on the party behavior level,

I employ micro-level data and ask **will Radical right parties outperform their competitors on RR salient issues in those cases where the competing party takes up a stance opposite to RR position?**

In order to determine which issues were salient during 2014 electoral campaigns, I will consult an expert survey in each of the selected cases. This will be elaborated in more detail in the next section. Nevertheless, it is important to note that I do not expect party competition to be exclusively about the issues. As they are usually in opposition and political power is far from them, radical right parties often appeal to protest sentiments, i.e. voters disillusioned with the mainstream alternatives. Therefore, I assume that if RR opposition parties compete with mainstream parties, they are more **likely to benefit from the incumbents' electoral punishment**. I am interested in exploring when they benefit from issues and when from protest voting, as well as whether benefiting from issue-voting has anything to do with radical right and competing parties' positioning on these issues.

Data and research design

To be able to address my research question, I look at data on voter- and party level. First, I employ European Election Study, Voter Study 2014 dataset and analyze voting propensity measures in order to identify loyal RR voters and RR parties' competitors in different Western European countries on the basis of this micro dimension of electoral competition. Voting propensity questions consist of 10-item scales asking *how likely are you to ever vote for this party*, and these questions will be employed only for purposes of determining RR political competitors and RR loyal voters. I consider as loyal those RR voters who select numbers 7-10 on the aforementioned question. Furthermore, I look at the mean to determine which parties do

these respondents report as their second alternative. The party that they list as second will be treated as competing party in that country. There are two exceptions from this rule: (a) if the mean value for the second competitor falls below 3rd point on 1-10 scale, I will assume that RR voters in that case are not likely to switch, and will exclude that country from political competition analysis as defined in this article; (b) if second and third competitors differ by less than 0.5, I will consider both second and third alternative as competing parties and include them both in the analysis.

Additionally, I utilize the Chapel Hill expert survey which provides party-level information needed for answering my research question. Thus, this survey will be employed in order to determine (1) which parties were classified as radical right in Western Europe during the 2014 European elections, (2) salient political issues, and (3) RR and competitors' positions on salient issues. Assuming that parties do not compete on all issues in every elections, but that they rather emphasize those issues which they *own*, i.e. on which they are recognized as strong (Budge, Robertson, Derek, & Hearl, 1987), I will rely on expert survey to determine which issues were salient at the time and how parties positioned on them.

In the final step, I return to the European Election Study dataset and employ voter behavior analysis. In other words, I examine in which party positioning scenarios did the RR outperform its competitors on salient issues and in which instances did the RR benefit from incumbent's electoral punishment.

To sum up, party-level variables on issue salience help me determine which issues to include in the voter level analysis, while variables on party positioning provide me with information what to expect with regards to voter behavior. When it comes to my main analysis,

however, I rely on voter-level data and examine the role of issue- and protest voting in radical right vs competing party political battle. In doing so, I attempt to avoid assuming micro-level mechanisms behind party strategies. Rather, I utilize issues that turned out to be relevant on the party level and examine how parties performed on them looking at the voter level.

Analysis

The data come from the European Election study (EES) 2014 - Voter Study and Chapel Hill expert survey 2014. The list of parties included in the analysis, as well as the number of respondents for each party can be found in Table 1. Within the Chapel Hill survey political scientists who specialize on political parties rank them based on the ideological stance from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). For my analysis, I examine those Western European RR parties who are ranked above 8 in the survey. I do not take into account cases where there is no party ranked above 8 on average. This criterion leaves Scandinavian countries out of my analysis. While RR parties are selected on the basis of the aforementioned expert survey, competing parties are determined on the basis of voting propensity measures. A second preferred party by those respondents whose first preference is RR party is referred to as competing party.

Table 1. Radical right (RR) and Competing (CP) Western European parties; 2014 European Election study

Country	Party	How likely is it that you would ever vote for a party ¹	The number of voters included in the analysis
Austria	Austrian People's Party (CP)	4.1	2947

¹ Means are displayed in the column

	Freedom Party of Austria (RR)	10.02	1618
Germany	CDU/CSU (CP)	5.06	2234
	Alternative for Germany (RR)	9.48	936
Belgium	New Flemish Alliance (CP)	6.68	138
	Flemish Interest (RR)	9.32	104
Netherlands	Socialist party (CP)	5.16	1626
	Party of Freedom (RR)	9.54	582
United Kingdom	Labor party (CP)	4.15	966
	UKIP (RR)	10.0	865
France	Union for a Popular Movement (CP)	4.81	989
	National Front (RR)	10.04	876

Most important political issues were identified in within the Chapel Hill survey by asking experts to rank first, second and third most salient issue for a given political party, based on parties' manifestos, their public speeches, etc. After that, these answers were simply added together and ranked by a total number of points (Bakker et al., 2015). The most salient issues among radical right parties in Western Europe can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Salient political issues in 2014 per political party (data come from Chapel Hill expert survey)

Most salient issues	Freedom Party of Austria	Alternative for Germany	Flemish Interest	Party of Freedom	UKIP	National Front
1.	Immigration	EU integration	Immigration	Immigration	Immigration	Immigration
2.	Anti-elitism	Immigration	Security	Multi-culturalism	EU integration	Multi-culturalism
3.	Nationalism	Public services vs taxes	Anti-elitism	Ethnic-minorities	Anti-elitism	Anti-elitism

In addition, I analyzed RR and CP positions on these issues separately for each of the six countries included in the analysis (Table 3). The only *issue* on which it does not make sense to analyze party positions is anti-elitism. In other words, anti-elitism is position per se, and not a dimension which allows for opposing views. Therefore, in Table 3 I treat party position on this issue as not applicable (N/A). It is worth noting that anti-elitism is a commonly recognized feature of far right parties, and is also found in research based on the same dataset (Polk et al., 2017). With regards to other issues displayed in Table 3, I code party positions as follows: if a party averages between 1 and 3, I treat it as having opposed view on the issue; if it scores between 4 and 7 I treat it as neutral, while scores between 7 and 10 are considered as being In favour of the issue.

Table 3. Radical right parties and competing parties' positions on salient issues.

Country	Party	Party positions on RR salient issues²		
		1st	2nd	3rd
Austria	Austrian People's Party (CP)	neutral	N/A	neutral
	Freedom Party of Austria (RR)	opposed	N/A	in favor
Germany	CDU/CSU (CP)	in favor	neutral	neutral
	Alternative for Germany (RR)	opposed	opposed	in favor (cutting taxes)
Belgium	New Flemish Alliance (CP)	opposed	in favor	N/A
	Flemish Interest (RR)	opposed	in favor (law and order)	N/A
Netherlands	Socialist party (CP)	neutral	neutral	neutral
	Party of Freedom (RR)	opposed	opposed	opposed

² For salient RR issues see Table 2

United Kingdom	Labor party (CP)	neutral	neutral	N/A
	UKIP (RR)	opposed	opposed	N/A
France	Union for a Popular Movement	opposed	opposed	N/A
	National Front (RR)	opposed	opposed	N/A

Having determined radical right parties to be included in the analysis, competing parties, salient political issues during 2014 European election, as well as parties' positions on these issues, I proceed to the voter behavior analysis. Table 4 shows odds of ratio, the effect of a predictor on odds of the respondent's intention to vote for the radical right (RR) as opposed to voting for the competing party (CP) in a given country. RR parties are coded 1 while competing parties are coded 0, meaning that beta coefficients above one indicate positive correlation between a given predictor and voting for a RR party. Referent categories for independent categorical variables have the following values: job loss – yes = 1, income decrease – yes = 1, and gender – males = 1.

Table 4. Logistic Regression models, the likelihood of voting for radical right=1 versus competing party=0;

	Austria	Germany	Belgium	Netherlands	UK	France
Economy past	.795	.909	.917	1.156	1.095	1.082
Economy future	.933	.726	.997	.970	1.238	1.241
Job loss	1.106	.889	.412	.998	1.046	1.075
Income decrease	.868	.899	.906	1.216	1.093	1.056
Spending	N/A	.941	.N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
EU control	N/A	1.096	N/A	N/A	.982	N/A
Citizen of EU	.881	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Attached to country	.979	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Same-sex marriage	1.038	.970	1.044	1.008	.998	.994
Civil liberties	N/A	N/A	.946	N/A	N/A	N/A
Immigration	1.027	1.006	1.020	.966	.879	.884
Gender	.975	1.272	.818	1.036	.866	.879
Age	.985	.987	1.028	1.001	1.008	1.007
Hosmer and Lemeshow test	.09	.927	.095	.031	.930	.574

In voter behavior analysis (table 4), I utilize EES data and analyze two major group of variables. The first group covers four variables and refers to perceptions personal economic hardship and national economic performance. I treat this group of variables as indicators of protest voting against the incumbent, and I compare their relevance to the relevance of issue-based voting which represents my second group of variables. Issues that have been tested are based on salient issues identified on voter level. However, these issues are not the same in every case. Rather, I include those issues that have been found salient for a given political party and test their relevance on voter level. An issue which is not found salient for a given party in previous analysis, is referred to as N/A for that party. Given that EES contains items in its questionnaire almost identical to those asked in the Chapel Hill expert survey, this makes these two data sources comparable.

First of all, as we can see that data provide me with no evidence that my model fits linear function in the Dutch case, this case will not be interpreted (Table 4). Regarding other cases, the data provide me with no evidence to believe that model does not fit the data. Therefore, I will briefly interpret these results. First, in the Austrian case, we see that RR voters are concerned with previous economic performance which they evaluate negatively, they do not feel as EU

citizens, are opposed to same sex marriages, and in favor of restrictive policies of immigration. Nevertheless, while the evaluation of past economic performance and (non)attachment to the EU may seem to have some substantial effect, same-sex marriage and immigration effects are small enough to be treated as statistically, but not substantially significant. In addition, the anticipation of future economic performance exerts an effect on voting, with RR voters being more pessimistic about it than CP voters. Apart from this, statistical significance can also be found among EU-control and same-sex marriage variables. With regards to Belgium, there is a strong negative effect of job loss on voting, with RR voters reporting they or someone from their family experienced a job loss in the recent past. Finally, UK and French RR voters appear to see future economic performance better than competing parties' voters. Nevertheless, this might be connected with the support for restrictive policies on immigration which also exert a significant effect on voting for this RR as opposed to its competitor.

Discussion

In this paper I have asked which micro-level mechanisms are behind the party behavior strategies and what implication it may have to our understanding of voter behavior. To extend my domain of interference, I have included competing parties and analyzed characteristic of the RR electorate relative to the competing mainstream right parties' voters.

My findings draw attention to the possibility there is not enough evidence to believe that issues determine political competition between the RR and its competitors. Most of evidence found on position-issues does not seem to have a substantial effect on political competition and voting for the RR. It rather appears that indicators of the perception of personal and national economic performance have an effect on this competition and, possibly, that the relevance of

position issues comes as a byproduct of the protest (economic) voting. This perhaps lend some support for the "economics breeds extremism" thesis.

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