

Electoral Behaviour in Europa: Representation and Inequality

Judith Derndorfer

April 28, 2017

Abstract

Barack Obama declared during his farewell address that growing inequality is testing our democracy.¹ Today, we are confronted with the rise of populist parties, such as the Front National in France, Partij voor de Vrijheid in the Netherlands, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs in Austria. Müller (2016) points out that one of the most salient characteristics of populism is anti-pluralism. This stands in stark contrast with the way we perceive democracy. Our current political system is characterized as a representative democracy: politicians and parties should represent the substantive interests of the people (Mansbridge, 1999). Democracy is endangered when elected populist parties believe that only they truly represent the *people* and consequently can enforce the will of the *people*. This leaves no room for opposing views and pluralism. Other opinions are illegitimate, since they do not stem from the *people* but from the corrupt elites.

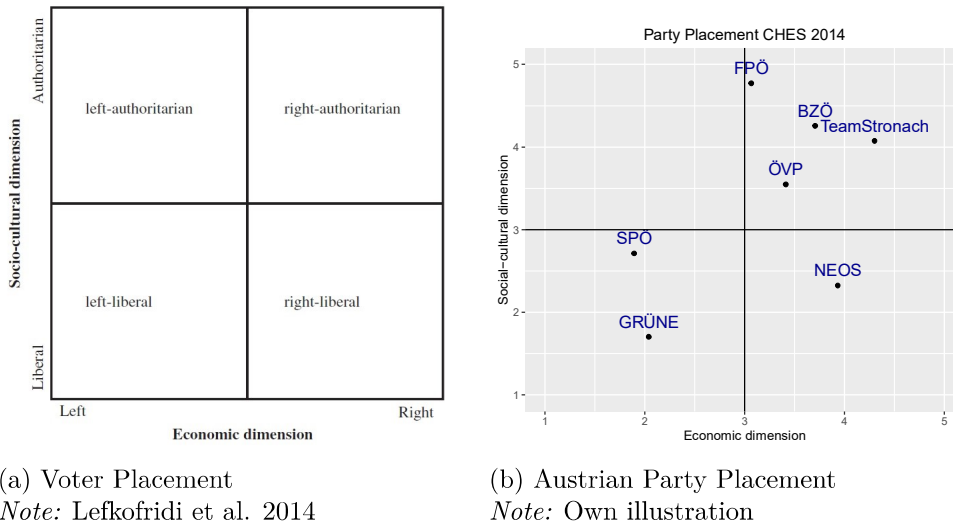
My proposed paper will deal with the electoral choice of a subgroup of voters, namely those with left-authoritarian viewpoints. Traditionally voters were categorized on a left-right dimension, based on their preferences concerning the economic role of the state. More recently, political conflicts in Europe are additionally conceptualized in a two-dimensional space. Besides the economic sphere, a socio-cultural sphere was introduced, ranging from liberal to authoritarian. This allows for a more nuanced characterization of voters' opinions. Therefore, a voter can be placed as either left-liberal, left-authoritarian, right-liberal or right-authoritarian, as illustrated in Figure 1(a). Lefkofridi et al. (2014) find that although a substantial share of voters across Europe hold left-authoritarian views², few parties represent these opinion package. Figure 1(b) shows the case for Austria. In general, voters elect politicians or parties who reflect their views best. In absence of left-authoritarian parties, left-authoritarian voters have to choose to vote for either left-liberal or right-authoritarian parties. Hence, they have to decide whether they value the economic or the socio-cultural dimension more highly. Lefkofridi et al. (2014) find

¹"A shrinking world, growing inequality; demographic change and the specter of terrorism – these forces haven't just tested our security and prosperity, but our democracy as well.", <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/10/politics/president-obama-farewell-speech/>

²e.g. in favour of redistribution, state intervention, restrictive immigration policies, restricting privacy rights in order to combat crime

that left-authoritarians are more inclined to privilege economic concerns and vote for left-liberal parties. However, their results are based on data from 2006 and 2009. Therefore, it is of great interest to test whether this still holds true, bearing in mind the impact of the financial and economic crisis, as well as the large migration movements.

Figure 1: Voter and party placement



This research project will examine whether income inequality influences the electoral choice of left-authoritarian voters and if so, in which direction (voting for right-authoritarians or left-liberals). When income inequality is high, voters may choose to rather elect left-liberal parties, who might reduce inequality with redistributive measures. Another conceivable reaction is that larger income disparities foster welfare chauvinism (i.e. the opinion that "immigrants are less entitled to welfare benefits and services than the native population" (Van Der Waal et al., 2013, 165)) and thus benefit right-authoritarian parties. Van Der Waal et al. (2013) study the support for distributing welfare to immigrants in Europe and find that welfare regime differences in the support can be explained by the different levels of income inequality.

The approach will be based on Lefkofridi et al. (2014). Voters preferences will be evaluated by the European Election Survey (2014) and party placement will be based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2014. The data will be analysed with the help of a hierarchical multiple linear regression model.

References

- Lefkofridi, Zoe, Markus Wagner and Johanna E Willmann (2014), 'Left-authoritarians and policy representation in western europe: Electoral choice across ideological dimensions', *West European Politics* **37**(1), 65–90.
- Mansbridge, Jane (1999), 'Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent "yes"', *The Journal of politics* **61**(3), 628–657.

Müller, Jan-Werner (2016), *What Is Populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Van Der Waal, Jeroen, Willem De Koster and Wim Van Oorschot (2013), 'Three worlds of welfare chauvinism? how welfare regimes affect support for distributing welfare to immigrants in europe', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 15(2), 164–181.