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The success of radical right-wing parties in Western European regions – new challenging findings

Daniel Stockemer

School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

ABSTRACT

This study tries to explain regional level variation in the far right-wing vote across more than 160 regions in 17 Western European countries from 1990 to 2013. With the help of a panel Tobit model, I first examine the impact of nine regional-level structural indicators on the dependent variable, the percentage of the far right-wing vote. I find that the far right performs better in territorial units with a high percentage of university-educated individuals, in rural regions and in areas that have a high percentage of foreigners. Second, I use a dynamic specification in first differences to evaluate how changes in the independent variables trigger changes in the dependent variable. The results of this second specification highlight that increases in unemployment rates and in the number of college-educated citizens trigger a better performance of the far right.

KEYWORDS

Electoral success of the far right; regional variation; Western Europe

Introduction

Embracing populism, anti-immigrant rhetoric, xenophobic ideas and cultural monism,¹ far right-wing parties have enjoyed various degrees of popular support in different parts of Western Europe (Hainsworth 2008). Parties like the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Italian Liga Nord (LN) or the Swiss Peoples' Party (SVP) have gained seats at various levels of government and become significant players in the political arena in their respective countries. Yet, in other states including Portugal, Germany and Iceland, the far right has remained marginalized. Explaining this national variation in the radical right-wing vote, scholars (e.g. Rydgren 2007; Ellinas 2013) have conceived, applied and tested famous theories such as the ethnic competition hypothesis, the crisis breeds extremism thesis or the modernization hypothesis. Operationalizing these theories, researchers (Golder 2003; Arzheimer 2009) among others, find that immigration and unemployment matter for the success of these parties.

Operationalizing structural theories on the success of the radical right at the national level implies that the effect of immigration, unemployment or any other factor for that matter on the radical right-wing vote is rather constant throughout the country. However, the empirical reality shows that this is not the case. For example, while nationally the vote shares of radical right-wing parties ranged between 0 and 28.9% of the popular vote for 16 Western

European countries between 1990 and 2013, the gap between Western European regions stood between 0 and 48% for the same countries and for the same time frame. In addition, there is strong within-country variation in electoral support for the respective far right-wing party. For example, support for the Austrian radical right, currently one of the countries where the far right is the most successful, ranged from 21.7 to 47% in the country's 2008 general elections. Given that the same within-country variation exists for many of the salient determinants of the radical right-wing vote (e.g. number of foreigners, unemployment rates and population density),² a more fine grained analysis at the sub-national level is probably better suited, than an analysis at the national level, to measure the determinants for the radical right-wing success in Western Europe.

By presenting and analyzing a new data-set capturing information on the radical right-wing vote and seven structural indicators – turnout, the percentage of foreigners, unemployment, the number of foreigners, population density, the percentage of citizens with a college degree, two interaction terms between unemployment and the percentage of foreigners and population density and education, respectively, as well as a time trend across more than 160 regions in 17 Western European countries for the time span from January 1990 to June 2013, this quantitative study allows me to test the salience of traditional explanatory theories of the radical right-wing vote at the regional level. To tease out the importance of these structural factors at the regional level, I engage in a two-step process. First, I use a panel Tobit model to investigate the relative and absolute strength of nine socioeconomic and political factors hypothesized to influence the regional vote share of far right-wing parties.

Second, I employ a dynamic specification in first differences to detect how changes in the independent variables trigger changes in the dependent variable. My findings are quite nuanced. First, my results from the level analysis indicate that the far right-wing vote is lower in areas with a high percentage of individuals with a college degree, rural regions and in territorial units that have high numbers of foreigners. Second, I find, with the help of a dynamic specification in first differences that the far right profits from both increases in unemployment and increases in the number of college-educated citizens.

This article proceeds as follows. The following part defines a radical right-wing party. The third section then offers some background information pertaining to the electoral success of the radical right between 1990 and 2013 and exposes the main theories of the structural demand side of far right-wing support. In the fourth part, I illustrate the methodological procedures adopted for this study. Second to last, I extensively explain the results of the quantitative analyses and situate them within the far right-wing party literature. Finally, I summarize the main tenets of this study and provide avenues for future research.

Defining a radical right-wing party

Unfortunately, it is not an easy endeavor to determine the characteristics of a far right-wing party, since there is no consensus in the literature of what constitutes such a party.³ A first stream of scholars (e.g. Hainsworth 2008) defines radical right-wing parties based on a single criterion such as xenophobia. While such a definition is straightforward and easy to operationalize, it does not take into consideration the complexity of far right-wing party platforms, which often include a mixture of populism, anti-Europeanism, anti-Islamism, nationalism, authoritarianism and cultural monism. A second group of scholars (e.g. Ignazi 2003;

Klandermands and Mayer 2006) identifies a party as far right-wing, if the party is the most rightist in any given country. However, this definition is relative. For one, a party that fully adheres to the democratic pluralistic principles, but happens to be the most rightward party in a given country could theoretically be labeled as far right. In addition, this definition does not consider the fact that several Western European countries (e.g. Austria with the FPÖ and BZÖ) have several far right-wing parties.

A third array of scholars (e.g. Mudde 2010, 2012) distinguishes between parliamentary and non-parliamentary far right-wing parties. The former, which are often labeled as radical right-wing parties, normally operate within the constitutional framework and accept democratic institutions and procedures, but oppose liberal features, such as guarantees for minority rights, checks on executive authority, social equality and the acceptance of multiculturalism. The latter, frequently called extreme right-wing parties are more extreme in their party positions and might embrace violence (Larsson and Ekman 2001). These most rightist parties frequently embrace cultural monism, neo-Nazism and historical revisionism (Rydgren 2007, 243). While this definition nicely distinguishes between more and less radical far right-wing groups, it has three caveats. First, and most importantly, the ideology of most far right parties is fluid, and even established parliamentary far right-wing parties have very extremist elements.⁴ Second, and relatedly, it is very difficult to determine where to draw the line between these two types of far right-wing parties. For example, is the German People's Union (DVU) or the British National Front (BNF) more radical right or more extreme right? Third, far right-wing parties (e.g. the German NPD) embracing very radical elements have captured seats in local, regional or national parliaments throughout Western Europe. Hence, the definition between parliamentary and non-parliamentary far right-wing parties is not really logical anymore, if both types occupy legislative seats.

While it is impossible to create an ideal definition of a far right-wing party, I use an encompassing definition, which defines a far right-wing party as such if it comprises three features: authoritarianism, populism⁵ and the issue ownership of national identity against foreign influences (see Mudde 1996 and Balent 2012). Many of the other features of radical right-wing parties such as xenophobia or strong anti-immigrant rhetoric, anti-pluralism, (strong) nationalism, racism, (strong) anti-European rhetoric and anti-Islamism can be subsumed under this definition (Betz 1994; Rydgren 2005; Art 2011). This definition also allows for the inclusion of the same far right-wing parties prior cross-national research on the topic has included (e.g. Golder 2003; Rydgren 2005; Art 2011). In total, I define 31 parties as far right (see Appendix 1). In the analysis, I include the combined vote share of the radical right per region. I compare the regional success of these parties across more than 160 regions in the following 17 West European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the U.K. However, prior to this I will situate this study within the existing literature.

The existing literature

Following the electoral breakthrough of the prototypical far right-wing party, the French National Front (FN), in the mid-1980s, various far right-wing parties have entered the European political landscape and won upward 10% of the popular vote in local, regional and national elections. In fact, the far right has possibly been the largest growing party family in Europe over the past two decades. The average support of the far right in the 17 countries

covered by this study has increased from 5.7% in the early 1990s, to 6.7% in the late 1990s, to 7% in 2000s, to 9% in the final years of the first decade in the new century to 10.4% for the most recent electoral cycle. In spite of this overall increase, national-level differences in the far right-wing vote have always remained considerable. For example, in national elections between 1990 and 1992, the far right garnered 12% of the popular vote in Italy, 16% in Austria and 22% in Switzerland. However, in other countries including Germany, Finland or Iceland, the far right has remained a marginal force gaining less than 2% of the popular vote in the early and mid-1990. This trend of various degrees of popular support for far right-wing parties has persisted until now. In the 2000s, far right-wing parties, garnering up to 30% of the popular have joined coalition governments in Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland and supported minority governments in Denmark and Sweden. However, in other states (e.g. Germany, Spain and Portugal) the far right has remained marginal and unrepresented in parliament.

Attempting to explain both the rise of the far right and variation in the national success of far right-wing parties, the literature (e.g. Norris 2005; Van Van Der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005) has put forward some famous theories and intervening explanations. For example, traditional explanations for the success of the far right are the losers of modernization thesis or the economic hardship breeds extremism hypothesis. The former of these two hypotheses states that regions that fall behind in development and living quality in the rapidly changing globalized economy might be the most prone to support the rather simplistic and populist rhetoric of the far right. The second one affirms that economic hardship or the prospect of thereof can render individuals, communities and societies frustrated and more open to vote for the radical right (Arendt 1951; Klandermans 1997; Rydgren 2009). More recent structural theories focus on societal transformations over the past 30 years. For example, the ethnic competition hypothesis states that far right-wing parties take advantage of high immigration in Europe by portraying immigrants as the culprits for economic downturn (Lubbers and Sheepers 2000, 60–67; Lubbers and Scheepers 2005).

However, the empirical record for any of these theories is lukewarm at best. For example, while the economic hardship breeds extremism hypothesis provides one theoretical foundation for a positive relationship between higher unemployment rates and higher support for the radical right, many analyses contest this relationship (see: Swank and Betz 2003; Iversflaten 2005; Bloom 2012). Similarly, there is controversy over the absolute and relative value of the ethnic competition hypothesis. While many studies (e.g. Rydgren 2007, 250; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012) in fact, find that an increased number of immigrants in a geographical unit boost the electoral support for the radical right, others strongly contest this relationship and maintain that there is no link between the two concepts (e.g. Knigge 1998; Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Steininger and Rotte 2009).

Why is there so little consensus in the literature on the influence of many structural theories on the level of support for the radical right? The answer to this question might lie in the level of analysis. National-level studies might be too broad in scope to capture all the relevant variation in the vote share of the radical right. There are four propitious arguments in support of the idea that switching the unit of analysis from the national to a sub-national level would be beneficial. First, while between-country differences in the vote share for far right-wing parties are considerable, they are frequently trumped by regional variation. For one, there is more variation in the vote share of the radical right between regions than between countries in my sample of 17 countries (i.e. the standard deviation around the mean

is larger in the regional data-set than in the national data-set). Moreover, many of the countries in the data-set such as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands are characterized by huge regional deviations from the national mean in electoral support for the far right. For example, in Austria, between 1990 and 2010, the average deviation for any region from the mean election outcome for any given election year was nearly seven points. If we consider regional differences in potentially relevant independent variables such as the number of immigrants, unemployment or population density there is even greater regional variation than in the far right-wing vote share. For example, for all countries in the data-set except for Iceland, regional variation in the number of inhabitants per square kilometer trumps national variation.

Second, it is impossible to test some theories at the national level. For example, the country as unit of analysis is too large to test whether there is a rural–urban divide in the far right-wing vote. Post-modernization theory postulates that highly densely populated areas in Western Europe should generally be more cosmopolitan, multicultural and egalitarian, whereas rural areas are likely to be more traditional, conservative and patriarchal. These differences in the dominant value and belief system are likely to trigger various propensities of populaces to support the radical right. However only regional-level studies, measuring various degrees of urbanization, can capture these nuances.

Third, even for those variables (e.g. unemployment and immigration) that can be measured at the national level, their measurement might be too broadly based. Rather than being impacted by national-level trends, it is likely that citizens are more impacted in their vote choice by their immediate structural environment. For example, if increased immigration entices nationals to vote for the radical right, the variable's influence is likely to be larger in areas which see a high influx of foreigners than in regions with a stable immigrant population. The same should apply for unemployment. If unemployment is high or looming in the immediate environment of individuals, it becomes concrete thus rendering individuals fearful of their economic future and possibly inclined to support some more extremist parties.

The fourth argument is methodological. Adopting a regional focus not only increases the variation in the data, it also tremendously increases the degrees of freedom. Instead of comparing the radical right-wing vote share across 17 countries, I can evaluate the success of the radical right across more than 160 regions. Despite these sound theoretical arguments, research adopting a sub-national perspective is still relatively scarce and manly restricted to one country or even one region within one country. For example, Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir (2007) evaluate the influence of the Vlaams Beland in Flanders, Bowyer (2008) the local success of the British National Front, and Stockemer and LaMontagne (2007) look at differences in the vote share of the French National Front across France's 96 departments (see also Givens 2005 for an analysis of Austria's regions). More recently, Loxbo (2010), Rydgren and Ruth (2011), as well as Bloom (2013) evaluate sub-national variation in the far right-wing vote in Sweden for the first of the two studies, and Latvia for the latter one. To say the least, these handful of studies do not find unanimous support for two of the most prevalent hypothesis, the economic hardship breeds extremism hypothesis and the ethnic composition hypothesis.

In addition to these single-country studies, there is also one cross-regional study across Western European regions. In more detail, Jesuit, Paradowski, and Mahler (2009) evaluate the influence of the four independent variables, unemployment, percentage of foreigners, income inequalities and financial redistribution on the vote share of the far right across approximately 100 regions in 8 countries (i.e. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany,

Greece, Italy and U.K.). Interestingly, the authors find that while both immigration and unemployment individually have no influence on the vote share of the radical right, they also indicate that the interaction term between the two concepts is highly significant and positively related to a higher vote share for the radical right.⁶ I build on Jesuit, Paradowski, and Mahler (2009) in several ways. First, I increase the scope and time frame of their analysis. While Jesuit and co-authors rather arbitrarily picked eight Western European countries, my analysis is based on all major Western European countries. In fact, I only exclude the tiny nations Cyprus, Andorra, Monaco, Luxembourg and Lichtenstein from the analysis. In addition, I do not base my study on only one or two electoral cycles but an average of six electoral cycles per country covering 23 years from 1990 to 2013. Covering more than two decades allows me not only to test variation at the levels but also how changes in the independent variables impact changes in the dependent variable. In addition, I include more variables such as population density and the number of individuals per region with a college degree enabling me to test the influence of well-known theories such as modernization theory more precisely. In total, I test the influence of three widely cited theories and that of intervening factors on the vote share of the radical. In the next section, I will present these theories.

Hypotheses

Ethnic competition hypothesis

Embracing an ethno-pluralist worldview, Western European far right-wing parties focus on immigration as a threat to national identity and cultural homogenization (Alexseev 2006). More precisely, the far right portrays immigrants as parasites, who undermine economic and social welfare such as the labor market, housing and welfare state benefits (Rydgren 2007, 250). If this argument resonates, then there should be more resistance toward immigration and foreigners in areas with a high percentage of non-native citizens. There is some rather strong support in the literature for this stipulation. For example, Martin (1996) and Rydgren (2005), 15 affirm that, in the aggregate, citizens, who live in areas with substantial foreign populations tend to view these foreigners as job-market competitors, which, in turn, should increase the vote share of radical right-wing parties in these regions. Following the standard operationalization, I operationalize the ethnic competition hypothesis by the number of foreigners per region.

Economic hardship breeds extremism hypothesis

Since the rise of the NSDAP in the Weimar Republic and Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, the economic hardship breeds crisis hypothesis has fared as one of, arguably, the classical explanations for the electoral success of far right-wing parties. Several theories support this hypothesis. Most relevant, relative deprivation advances the argument that citizens do not normally vote for the radical right when they are satisfied with their daily lives. Rather, they are more inclined to support the far right, when they face dire economic conditions, whether real or perceived (e.g. Seidman 1994; Choi 1999). A second and related argument puts forward that some long-lasting economic degradations in citizens' economic environment undermines the credibility and trust into the government rendering large segments of the population more open to support the radical right. Third, the realignment hypothesis argues

that unemployment and negative growth over a long period of time can move part of the electorate away from moderate parties and toward more extreme parties such as radical right-wing parties (Ellinas 2013, for an explanation of the realignment thesis see Norris 2005).

There is also some widespread support for the economic hardship breeds extremism hypothesis in the literature. For example, in their pan-European national-level studies covering more than one dozen countries both Jackman and Volpert (1996), as well as Arzheimer (2009) find support for the thesis that high unemployment is beneficial for the radical right.⁷ Following these studies, I hypothesize that high unemployment should trigger higher support levels for the radical right. As it is standard in studies on right-wing extremism, I measure the economic hardship breeds extremism theory by the unemployment rate per region. I also add an interaction term between unemployment rates and the percentage of immigrants per region. For one, radical right-wing parties try to take advantage of immigration, as a means to make the population fearful about the negative influences of foreigners on unemployment (Crépon 2012). In addition, the literature has frequently found that this negative labeling of foreigners proves successful in areas that have both a high percentage of foreign inhabitants and high unemployment (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Golder 2003, 439; Jesuit, Paradowski, and Mahler 2009).

Post-materialism and the losers of modernization hypothesis

Inglehart (1990, 1997) describes the transformations of modern societies in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries in two phases. First, mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, societies transformed from agrarian to industrial societies. According to Inglehart and Welzel (2005), this first transformation brought women into the paid workforce, reduced fertility rates, and boosted literacy and education among both sexes. The second phase then transformed industrial societies into post-industrial or post-materialist societies. This second phase of human development should have advanced cosmopolitan values such as multiculturalism, environmental protection and equality between the sexes. However, these post-materialist values have likely not spread equally within countries. Rather the processes of modernization are incomplete processes, which have emerged more prevalently in both highly educated areas and in urban areas. For example, in more educated areas, all features of modernization such as modern forms of living, environmental protection and multiculturalism are widespread. In contrast, the increasing income inequality gap, the need for economic mobility and the dissolution of bonds between individuals, communities and nations hit regions with a low-qualified workforce more than booming centers, with a highly educated and cosmopolitan workforce (Rydgren 2007). Offering populism, nostalgia and scapegoating, far right-wing parties are well suited to gain the confidence of communities and societies that are left behind in the rapidly changing twenty-first century (Falter and Schumann 1988, 103; Lamontagne and Stockemer 2010; Mudde 2010).

In addition, I hypothesize that post-materialist values might have spread more in urban centers as compared to the countryside. In the aggregate, citizens in the countryside are more traditional and might not support the same policies as their counterparts in the cities. In more detail, rural dwellers, on average, might favor the protection of the national and local agricultural sector, emphasize moral and religious values, more authoritarianism and populism. Based on these observations, I hypothesize that leftist parties such as Green Parties or Social Democratic Parties are likely to have an edge over the radical right in urban areas

(Bornschiefer 2008, 33). However, the reverse should be true in rural areas, which have frequently remained rather traditional in many European countries including Austria, Switzerland or France. As a result the radical right should perform well in these rural areas.

I measure the two proxies for post-materialism as follows: first, I operationalize education by the percentage of the population per region that has obtained a college degree. Second, I gauge the level of urbanization by the regional population density. I also create an interaction term between education and population density, as these two features should have a reinforcing influence on the dominant values in a region. If Inglehart's post-materialist thesis is right then a very urban and highly educated population should see particularly low levels of support for the radical right. In contrast, a rural region with low education levels should display particularly high support for the radical right.

Turnout

Finally I test for turnout. Early studies affirm that the radical right might benefit from low turnout rates, because voters with rather extreme ideological views are likely to vote regardless of the stakes of the election (e.g. Whiteley 1979; Smirnov and James 2003). For the macrolevel, this would imply that if few citizens cast their ballot, electoral gains for the far right should be rather high. However, the more recent literature provides a more nuanced picture. For example Immerzeel and Pickup (2015), see two possibilities how turnout could influence the radical right-wing vote. For one, the radical right could benefit from high turnout, because these parties are good mobilizers and they may reach out to groups that have traditionally been disenfranchised such as individuals with low education (Smets and van Ham 2013). On the other hand, the radical right could benefit from low turnout, in particular, in a situation of distrust toward politics, parties and democracy. In such a situation, many mainstream supporters might stay at home, but the supporters of the radical right might still turn out and help the radical right to obtain a good result. While it is unclear, if any, which of the two scenarios is more likely, I still control for turnout to capture any possible influence high or low turnout might have on the radical right-wing vote in West European regions. I measure turnout in its standard way, namely by the percentage of registered voters per region that cast their ballot at the respective national election.

Methodology

In this article, I aim to explain regional variation in the far right-wing vote across all West European regions. In determining the geographical unit region, I follow the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS 2) put forward by the European Union. In total, the data-set comprises data for more than 160 regions across 17 Western European countries for a 23-year period. Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Monaco, Malta, Cyprus and Andorra are the only countries excluded, because these countries are too small to have regional subunits that correspond to the selected classification (i.e. NUTS 2). Pertaining to the more than 160 regions, the data-set is balanced and complete (i.e. the data-set includes regional-level data for all national elections between 1990 and 2013).⁸ The dependent variable is the combined vote for all far right-wing parties per region.

Table 1. Correlation analysis of independent variables.

| | Unemployment | Immigration | Education | Population density | Turnout |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|
| Unemployment | 1 | | | | |
| Immigration | 0.00 | 1 | | | |
| Education | 0.02 | 0.20 | 1 | | |
| Population density | 0.13 | 0.26 | 0.20 | 1 | |
| Turnout | 0.02 | -0.03 | -0.05 | 0.04 | 1 |

To measure the influence of the nine theoretically informed covariates on the dependent variable, the vote share of the radical right at the regional level, I engage in a three-step process. First, I run a correlation analysis to test for multicollinearity. Table 1 shows the pairwise correlation between the independent variables; it indicates that none of the variables is highly correlated. Second, to gage the level impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable, I specify three models. The first model is a panel data Tobit model. This type of model is widely used to study the success of radical right-wing parties (e.g. Golder 2003; Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007; Jesuit, Paradowski, and Mahler 2009). It is well suited if some values of the dependent variable are zero and the rest of the data are very roughly normally distributed (Wooldridge 2010). In my case, there are 321 out of 983 observations where the dependent variable is zero. In these regions, the radical right has been absent (e.g. regions in Spain or Ireland) or has gained either zero or too few votes to be listed in election statistics (e.g. in most of the regions in Germany). For the 662 observations that report official data for the radical right, the vote of the radical right fluctuates between 0.09 and 48.11%. To account for unobserved regional variation, I cluster the standard errors by region. I also include a time trend into the analysis, which is an ordinal variable that controls for the fact that the radical right-wing vote in Western Europe has considerably and steadily increased from 1990 to 2013 (from 6% of the vote for the period 1990 to 1994 to over 10% for the period 2010 to 2013). The ordinal variable captures the five electoral cycles my study covers (i.e. 1990 to 1994, 1995 to 1999, 2000 to 2004, 2005 to 2009 and 2010 to 2013). While the first specification is run without the interaction terms, I add a second Tobit model with the interaction terms.

Third, I run a dynamic specification in first differences, which allows me to determine how much a change in the independent variables triggers a change in the dependent variable. This second specification takes out all level differences and only looks whether an increase/decrease in any of the independent variables (e.g. in the number of foreigners or the unemployment rate) leads to changes in the radical right-wing vote. From a theoretical point of view, this second model is of great value, as, for instance, voters might be concerned less with actual levels of foreigners that are already in the country, but rather with newcomers. Regardless of the given economic and social conditions, voters might also be concerned with rising unemployment. This second model allows me to test whether and to what degree this is the case. More generally, this second equation responds to some of the recent literature on the far right-wing vote (e.g. Poznyak, Abts, and Swyngedouw 2011), which suggests that changes in structural conditions on the ground lead to changes in electoral support for the far right. I also add country dummies to this second model, because electoral trends in a region might be reflexive of electoral trends in a given country.

Results

The results of the three regression analyses provide some nuanced findings. First, they provide support for the ethnic competition hypothesis. I find that the actual number of foreigners influences the electoral success of the radical right. Holding anything else constant, the model predicts that per every 1% the percentage of foreigners is higher, the radical right-wing vote augments by approximately 0.6 percentage points. This result supports the claim that the far right might succeed more in placing their message, in areas where there are many foreigners. Yet, and in order to determine the robustness of the finding, this study should be complemented by individual-level studies, because, individuals, in order to vote for the radical right also have to believe that there are too many immigrants and that these immigrants hurt the economy or social climate. In addition, I find that increases in foreigners in a region do not directly translate into increases in the vote share of the radical right. Yet, there is one caveat with this finding. The data-set, which I collected ends in 2013, two years before the height of the refugee crisis. Currently, the influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in countries such as Germany or Sweden creates resentment and increased support patterns for the radical right in the respective countries.

Second, the results with regards to the post-modernization or post-materialist thesis are rather nuanced. For one, the model confirms that the radical right-wing vote is higher in the countryside. The model predicts that per every 1000 more inhabitants per square kilometer, the radical right-wing vote sees a boost of three points. Empirically, it is also true that the radical right is normally weakest in large conglomerations. For example, in the two Alps countries, Switzerland and Austria, where the radical right is strongest in all of Europe, large urban centers such as Zurich, Bern and Basel in the former of the two countries or Vienna and Salzburg in the latter state are relatively spared from the far right-wing tide. Third, and contrary to my initial hypothesis, there is a positive relationship between the percentage of individuals with a college degree and the far right-wing vote. The Tobit model predicts that for every 10 percentage points education is higher in one region, the vote share for the radical right is about 1.6% higher. However, it is also important to recall that the models here only measure the aggregate relationship and do not give us any indication as to what type of individuals vote for the far right. Rather than the educated, it is likely and supported by individual-level research (e.g. Stockemer 2012) that the lower less-educated classes more frequently vote for the radical right. These popular strata might feel the more disoriented the more they are in an environment, in which the upper classes dominate.

The interaction term in model 2 between education and population density further contextualizes the assumptions derived from modernization theory. Its coefficient is negative supporting the notion that regions with a high population density and a high education are less likely to support the radical right. Yet, the same is not true for the countryside. There higher aggregate levels of education lead to higher support for the radical right. It is also worth noting that in the first difference equation (see model 3) education has a positive influence; increases in education levels in regions are associated with higher support for the radical right. In more detail, model 3 predicts that for every 2.5 points more individuals that have a college degree, the radical right-wing vote is expected to increase by 1 percentage point. At first sight this is surprising given that the radical right's simplistic rhetoric is not geared toward an educated public. Yet, at

Table 2. Results of the three regression models.

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Percentage of individuals with a college degree | 0.165** (0.063) | 0.211** (0.065) | 0.419*** (0.088) |
| Unemployment rate | 0.136 (0.076) | 0.184 (0.122) | 0.183** (0.064) |
| Percentage of foreigners | 0.629*** (0.098) | 0.671 (0.144) | 0.146 (0.111) |
| Population density | −0.004** (0.001) | −.0008 (0.002) | −0.002 (0.005) |
| Turnout | 0.071 (0.040) | 0.077 (0.040) | 0.036 (0.033) |
| Interaction unemployment percent foreigners | | −0.006 (0.011) | |
| Interaction education population density | | 0.0001** (.00004) | |
| Time trend | 0.660** (0.247) | 0.648** (0.247) | |
| Constant | −11.45** (3.51) | −13.18*** (3.61) | −0.47 (0.75) |
| Log likelihood | −2368.22 | −2364.55 | |
| R-squared | | | 0.116 |
| N | 986 | 986 | 817 |

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Model 1 is a panel Tobit regression model with robust standard errors clustered by region.

Model 2 is a panel Tobit regression model including the two interaction terms with robust standard errors clustered by region.

Model 3 is a dynamic specification in first differences.

second sight this finding reflects an empirical reality. Since the 1990s, education levels have increased in nearly all West European regions and countries, but despite this increase in the number of individuals with post-secondary education, the radical right has gained popularity both inside and outside of the electoral booth. Hence, it might well be that citizens with low education feel more and more disconnected in today's globalized, multicultural and highly educated societies. Consequently, they might support the far right in larger numbers.

In contrast to these three findings, the level analysis does not find support for the economic hardship breeds extremism thesis. In the aggregate, regions with high unemployment have no higher or lower propensities to vote for the radical right than regions with low unemployment. Empirically, it is also true that in some contexts of high unemployment such as some of Greek's regions (e.g. Central Greece) and some of France's regions (e.g. Lorraine) the radical right-wing vote is high (e.g. around 20%). Yet, high unemployment does not seem a sufficient criterion for the radical right to gain votes, as in other regions (e.g. in basically all of Ireland's and Spanish regions) unemployment has been reaching 25 or 30% during the 2008 to 2013 economic crisis, but the radical right-wing vote still remained at zero. Model 2 also does not offer any support for the stipulation that high unemployment and high immigration together provide a propitious mix of the radical right to gain momentum. Rather, the interaction term between the two variables is neither statistically significant nor substantively irrelevant (Table 2).

However, while I find that unemployment rates at the levels do not influence the radical right-wing vote, the same cannot be said for changes in unemployment. Increases in unemployment trigger increases in the far right-wing vote share. For sure, the variables substantive influence is weak to medium strong, but still perceivable. Model 3 predicts that an increase in unemployment of 1 percentage points triggers an increase in the radical right-wing vote of 0.2 points. In other words, if unemployment increases by 10 points, the radical right is expected to gain 2 points in its vote share.

Finally, I find that turnout does not influence the radical right-wing vote. This implies that the radical right can fare well in a context of strong mobilization and in a context of relative

disengagement. Implicitly, this finding indicates that the potential clientele of the far right has increased beyond a core that has always voted for the far right. In the twenty-first century, it seems that the far right can mobilize regardless of a possible voter fatigue or not. The dynamic specification in first differences confirms that the mobilization potential of the far right neither increases nor decreases with boosts or declines in turnout.

Conclusion

This research greatly adds to our understanding of the radical right-wing vote in Europe. Through the use of fine grained data at the regional level, it has allowed me to test three well-established explanatory theories for the success of the radical right. First, as predicted by post-materialism the vote share for parties like the Norwegian Progress Party or the Swedish Democrats is higher in rural regions. However, the second postulation of the modernization hypothesis – that is that higher education should trigger decreased support for the radical right – is wrong in the aggregate. Rather contrary, higher aggregate education levels and increases in education lead to more support for the radical right, albeit not in cities. Second, I confirm the ethnic competition hypothesis, that is, regions with more foreigners, in the aggregate, have a higher vote share for the radical right. Third, the findings with regards to the economic hardship breeds extremism hypothesis are nuanced. For one, I disconfirm the long held belief that high unemployment per se drives the radical right-wing vote. Rather it is increases in unemployment from which the radical right benefits.

While this research discovers some interesting patterns (e.g. highly educated regions are less immune to the far right-wing tide and increasing levels of education have not stopped parties like the French National Front to increase their vote share), the study of sub-national-level support for right-wing fringe parties is still at its relative infancy and much more research is needed. For example, it would be interesting to determine whether the same factors that explain regional variation in the electoral support of the far right hold on the district level. Moreover, there is a need for multi-level modeling. For instance, a two-level model could determine how much of the variance in an individual's vote choice in favor of a far right-wing party is explained by individual factors and how much of the variance is explained by on the ground regional structural factors.

Despite leaving room for future research, this article nevertheless allows me to draw some tentative conclusions pertaining to the future success of the radical right in the years to come. Three factors might greatly influence the radical right-wing vote: first, the capacity of the moderate right to do both keeps its voters and re-attracts those, who have been drifting to the fringes, might influence the fate of the radical right. Second, the radical right is likely to perform comparatively well in rural regions. Such regions are likely to remain more traditional and adverse to modernization; a condition that the radical right might tremendously benefit from as it glorifies the 'good old times', has a strongly anti-European Union platform and rejects multiculturalism on ethnic grounds. Third, the radical right seems to be successful in scapegoating foreigners, the more a region actually has foreigners. This also allows for the prediction that the current refugee crisis might benefit parties like the True Finns or the Danish Peoples' Party in the months and years to come.

Notes

1. Cultural monism states that multiculturalism goes counter to social conformity and integration. Consequently, minorities should adapt the dominant values of the superior culture (Smolicz 1983).
2. For the 2008 election in Austria, there was strong regional variation in, among others, unemployment, which ranged from 3.5 to 7.7 and population density, which ranged from approximately 60 inhabitants per square kilometer to 4000 inhabitants.
3. For example, Fennema (1997, 474) reports that the literature on far right-wing parties uses 26 characterizations, including 58 different features to define the radical right.
4. For example, in 1988 the leader of the prototypical parliamentary extreme right-wing party, the French National Front, Jean Marie Le Pen called the Holocaust a detail of history, and questioned whether millions of Jewish people were killed in the gas chambers (Crif 2002).
5. Following Mudde (2004, 543), I define populism as a 'thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.' According to this definition, populism has an exclusionary character, which juxtaposes the popular will with the corrupt elites on the one hand, and non-nationals and immigrants on the other hand (see also Art 2011; Berezin 2013).
6. The other two indicators regional inequalities and financial redistribution also do not prove to be strong predictors of the radical right-wing vote in their models.
7. However, it should be noted that the list of studies that finds no relationship between economic crisis, in general, or high unemployment, in particular and increased support for the radical right, is nearly as long as the list of studies that reports a positive association (e.g. Swank and Betz 2003; Iversflaten 2005; Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007; Bloom 2013).
8. It took me over two years to compile the data-set. The data come from more than 100 sources. Some of data come from EU or international databases such as the European Election Database or the OECD Factbook. Other data come from national agencies (e.g. a country's ministry of labor), a state's statistical office or a country's census. In some cases, the data were also sent to me by email by the respective national agency. The whole codebook comprises nearly 200 pages. I will send it along with the data-set to any interested person.

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Appendix.

Table A1. List of all parties coded as radical right.

| Country | Party | Party acronym |
|----------------|---|---------------|
| Austria | Freedom Party of Austria | FPO |
| | Alliance for the Future of Austria | BZO |
| Belgium | Flemish Block | VB |
| | Flemish Interest | VB |
| Denmark | Danish People's Party | DF |
| | Progress Party | FP |
| Finland | Perus True Finns | PS |
| | Alliance for Free Finland | VSL |
| France | National Front (Front National) | FN |
| | Movement for France (Mouvement pour la France) | MPF |
| Germany | The Republicans (Die Republikaner) | REP |
| | National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands) | NPD |
| | Deutsche Volksunion | DVU |
| Greece | Popular Orthodox Rally (Laïkós Orthódoxos Synagermós) | LA.O.S |
| | Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avigni) | ANOIX |
| Iceland | — | — |
| Ireland | — | SF |
| Italy | Italian Social Movement – National Right (Movimento Sociale Italiano – Destra Nazionale) | MSI-DN |
| | LOMBARDA – Northern (Lombardy) League (Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania) | LEGA |
| | North League (Lega Nord) | LN |
| Netherlands | Party for Freedom – Group Wilders (Groep Wilders/Partij voor de Vrijheid) | PVV |
| | List Pim Fortuyn (Lijst Pim Fortuyn) | LPF |
| Norway | Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet) | FRP |
| Portugal | National Renovator Party (Partido Nacional Renovador) | PNR |
| Spain | — | — |
| Sweden | Swedish Democrats (Sverigedemokratema) | SD |
| Switzerland | Swiss Peoples' Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei) | SVP |
| | Freedom Party of Switzerland (Freiheits-Partei der Schweiz/Parti suisse de la liberté) | FPS/PSL |
| | Tessinian League (Lega dei Ticinesi) | Lega |
| | Swiss Democrats | SD/DS |
| | Federal Democratic Union (Eidgenössische Demokratische Union/Union Démocratique Fédérale) | EDU/UDF |
| United-Kingdom | British National Party | BNP |
| | UK Independence Party | UKIP |