We have been left behind, haven’t we?
Economic status loss, class voting and
the populist radical right

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Introduction

• Debate: Have populist radical right (PRR) voters been ‘left behind’?

• Losers of modernization / globalization (Betz 1994; Kriesi 1999)
Introduction

• Debate: *Have populist radical right (PRR) voters been ‘left behind’?*

• Losers of modernization / globalization (Betz 1994; Kriesi 1999)

• Material deprivation cannot explain PRR voting (Bornschier and Kriesi 2013; Gidron and Mijs 2019)

• Relative economic deterioration → *status politics* (Gidron and Hall 2017)

→ R.Q.: *Do the classes supporting PRR parties face economic status loss?*
Economic status is:

- Inexpansible (Hirsch 1976; Milner 1994)
- Zero-sum game (Jackson and Grusky 2018)
- Status quo maintenance (Jost et al. 2004)

→ PRR resentment (Betz 1993)

Whose economic status:

- Individual (Duesenberry 1949)
- Group (Smith and Ortiz 2001)
  - Region (Rodríguez-Pose 2018)
  - Neighbourhood (De Lange et al. 2020)
  - Household (Abou-Chadi and Kurer 2020)
- Social class
A class phenomenon

Classics:

• Bourdieu (1974): “collective trajectories”
• Lipset (1959, 1960): “relative” economic decline

More recently in sociology:

• Class inequality in income (Albertini 2013; Albertini et al. 2020; Weeden et al. 2007; Wodtke 2016)
Measuring economic status loss: *positional income change*

From Lupu and Pontusson’s (2011) measure of *skew*

\[
\text{Positional Income} = \ln \left( \frac{\text{distance from the poor}}{\text{distance from the rich}} \right) = \ln \left( \frac{\text{class income} / 10^{\text{th percentile}}}{90^{\text{th percentile}} / \text{class income}} \right)
\]

\[
\Delta \text{Positional Income}_{t_0} = \text{Positional Income}_{t_0} - \text{Positional Income}_{t_{-\tau}}
\]
Data & methods

Data:

• Main analysis: ESS
• Class-level data: EU-SILC

Method:

• Multilevel logistic regression
→ Social classes as upper level

Case selection:

• 19 elections (2008-2017)
• 9 countries
• PRR share > 5% (in sample)
• Voters, working or unemployed

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## Data & methods

### Variables

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<td>PRR voting</td>
<td>ESS, classification PopuList</td>
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<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Random effects</th>
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<td><strong>Class-level variables</strong></td>
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<td>Δ Positional income</td>
<td>Class</td>
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<td>Δ Income</td>
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<th>Individual-level variables</th>
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<td>Age, gender, educ., HH income, migr. back.</td>
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Country & year FE
Measure validity

Which of these descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household’s income nowadays?

(a) living comfortably on present income
(b) **coping on present income**
(c) difficult on present income
(d) very difficult on present income

Predicted probabilities of response: coping on present income at different levels of Δ Positional income

Note: Regression coefficient significant at the 0.05 level.
Results

Predicted probabilities of PRR voting at different levels of $\Delta$ Positional income

Note: Regression coefficient significant at the 0.001 level. The gray histogram shows the distribution of the variable on $\Delta$ Positional income.
Robustness checks

- Excluding class income
- Excluding household income
- Inclusion of abstention
- Different electoral threshold for case selection (PRR share > 8%)
Additional analyses: material deprivation

Predicted probabilities of PRR voting at different levels of *Income growth*

Note: Regression coefficient *not significant* at the 0.05 level.
Additional analyses: voting choice in detail

Voting choice (multinomial model): significance of the odds ratios for $\Delta$ Positional income
Conclusion

• Debate: *Have populist radical right (PRR) voters been ‘left behind’?*

• R.Q.: *Do the classes supporting PRR parties face economic status loss?*

• Previous studies do not provide sufficient empirical evidence

• Leverage a novel measure on EU-SILC and ESS data on 19 elections

• Finding: collective loss in economic status does predict PRR voting
Conclusion

• Implications for future research:
  • Economic (vs cultural) explanations of class voting & PRR
    • Combination of the two (Gidron and Hall 2017)
    • Economic motives are still central (Bartels 2006; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020)
  • Electoral consequences of inequalities
    • Between-group widening economic gap and electoral politics (Chetty et al. 2017; Piketty 2020)
    • From a social class perspective (Weeden et al. 2007)