

Party competition, party behaviour and the electoral support for radical left parties (RLPs) in Western Europe

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Goal

- Examine role of:
 - party competition,
 - party strategies and
 - internal party factorsin explaining the cross-national and over-time differences in the vote for RLPs in Western Europe

Why should we be interested in RLP voting?

RLPs constant relevance in West European party systems

- Electoral decline almost general until end of 1990s
- But West European radical left was always relatively diverse and the electoral evolutions of these parties also differed
- RLPs have experienced moderate growth since 2000s, heterogeneous electoral trajectories, and since the 2007-2008 economic crisis some parties show significant electoral gains

Yet...

- Limited academic attention to RLP voting from a comparative, cross-national or longitudinal perspective
- Some previous work on voters' profiles but considerable gap in knowledge about party related factors shaping the vote for RLPs in Western Europe

Our contribution:

- We study effects of competition dynamics, party strategies and party behaviour on RLP voting from a comparative, cross-national or longitudinal perspective
- We focus on:
 - (i) spatial competition along the left-right divide,
 - (ii) strategic decisions about government participation, and
 - (iii) party unity

What is the role of parties' and party competition factors in shaping the electoral support for RLPs in Western Europe?

Theory

- Party agency;
- Niche parties' performance is very dependent upon mainstream parties' strategies (Meguid 2007);
- Niche parties tend to move less along the competition dimensions, and their moves receive significantly less electoral reward ('Costly Policy Moderation Hypothesis' by Adams *et al.* 2006)

1. *The Importance of Space and Strategic Moves*

- If left-to-centre space occupied by larger Social-Democrat and/or Green parties → likelihood of voting for RLPs will diminish (*Spatial Availability Hypotheses*)
- Whenever Social Democrats and Greens hold positions closer to left end of ideological space → propensity to vote for RLPs will diminish (*Radicalized Competitor Hypotheses*)
- When Social Democrat and Green parties choose to stress some of the most traditional left-wing issues → RLPs will attract less voters (*Selective Left Issues Emphasis Hypotheses*)

2. Other Aspects of Party Strategy and Behaviour: Government Participation and Internal Unity

- When Social Democrats and Greens participate in government → RLPs will be the electoral beneficiaries of voters' disappointment (*Beneficial Competitor Incumbent Hypotheses*)
- On the other hand, if RLPs are partners in a government → likely to harm their electoral prospects (*Costly Government Participation Hypothesis*)
- Acute internal strife → will decrease likelihood of voting for RLPs (*Internal Conflict Penalty Hypothesis*)

Data and methodology

- Period: Since the worst moment of their electoral decline (2nd half of 1980s) to the most recent period (2014)
- Cases from 13 countries where RLPs have had parliamentary representation (National or European parliament elections)
- Data sources:
 - All waves of the European Election Studies: 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014
 - Comparative Manifesto Project data
 - Expert surveys on party positions
 - Secondary sources on party conflict and other sources

- Dependent Variable: voted for a RLP in previous national legislative election
- Independent variables
 - Size of Social Democrats and Green competitors: % votes gained in the prior national elections
 - Parties' strategic behavior/left-right position of RLPs, Greens and Social Democrats: using a series of expert surveys
 - Emphasis given by different parties to traditional left-wing issues: using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP)
 - RLPs, Greens and Social Democrats participation in government: dichotomous variable
 - Internal party conflict variable

- Multi-level logistic regression models: controlling for survey year, time elapsed between national elections and survey, and system-level and voters' sociodemographics and political attitudes

Preliminary Findings

- *Spatial Availability Hypotheses*: RLP voting less likely where/when other left-wing competitors are large
- *Radicalized Competitor Hypotheses*: only mixed support in the data; RLPs voting increases when Social Democrat parties are closer to the right, BUT when/where the Greens are moderate voting for RLP is lower
- *Selective Left Issues Emphasis Hypotheses*: support for RLPs significantly decreases when either the Social Democrats or the Greens stress traditional left-wing issues

- *Beneficial Competitor Incumbent Hypothesis: No support; there is no significant effect arising from either the Social Democrats or the Green's being incumbents*
- *Costly Government Participation Hypotheses: voters are significantly less likely to support RLPs after they participate in government.*
- *Internal Conflict Penalty Hypothesis: voters tend to punish RLPs which have recently suffered from splits*