ARTICLE

Euroskepticism in European National Elections: The Rise of Voter Support for New Radical Right Parties

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This article systematically investigates, in a comparative perspective, the support for new extreme right-wing political parties (ERPs) in national elections across the Western European Union countries (WEU). The objective of the research is not to explain why or how the ERPs platforms can be convincing and persuasive, but to describe conditions that contribute to identify when this has occurred. Since the reactionary nature of ERP discourse met the spreading phenomenon of Euroskepticism, a vote for ERP candidates and platforms is considered Euroskeptic voting behavior. Our hypothesis is that the greater the political power a member state enjoys in European Union institutions, the fewer the incentives for voters to support ERPs. To test this hypothesis, a great amount of data was organized and a set of econometric exercises was established using panel data with fixed effects. Given the intertemporal variation captured by the panel data with fixed effects, it is possible to assess the political conditions for the growth of electoral support for ERPs across the WEU as a function of three classes of variables: representative variables, economic variables, and variables of perception. The findings suggest that representation in European institutions has greater impact on ERP support than economic circumstances.

Keywords: Extreme right-wing political parties; European elections; European Union; Euroskepticism.

Introduction

Respectable scholars have presented theories about the emergence of a new extreme right-wing ideology (Ignazi 1996; 2003; Ignazi and Perrineau 2000; Ignazi and Ysmal 1992; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Norris 2005) and explored the rise of the new extreme right political parties (ERPs) in Western European Union (WEU) countries, claiming that this phenomenon has taken place due to a shift in the political spectra in

certain countries. However, there is no comprehensive and satisfactory explanation for the support for ERPs; instead, there are different focuses and different studies that often contradict each other (e.g., Kestilä and Söderlund 2007; Art 2007; Kestilä and Söderlund 2007; Rydgren 2004; Jackman and Volpert 1996).

Arzheimer (2009a; 2009b) has demonstrated in different ways how complex it is to understand support for ERPs, also classified as "anti-system parties" and byproducts of "post-industrial" societies (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Ignazi 1996; 2003; Poguntke and Scarrow 1996).[1] The objective of the research is not to explain why or how the ERPs platforms can be convincing and persuasive, but to describe the conditions that contribute to identify when this has occurred. Since the reactionary nature of ERPs discourse met the spreading phenomenon of Euroskepticism, a vote for ERP candidates and platforms is considered Euroskeptic electoral behavior. Seeing European integration as an explanatory factor in domestic politics, the hypothesis is that the greater the political power a member state enjoys in European Union (EU) institutions, the fewer the incentives for voters to support ERPs in national elections.

The vote for ERPs has been associated with immigration and identity matters. Therefore, identity can be a function of representation as well. Several researches have tried to measure the relationship between immigration, economic issues and unemployment growth, on the one hand, and xenophobic behavior, on the other; but less effort has gone into investigating representation as an explanatory factor of the attitude against the European integration. This does not mean that immigration should be ruled out as an issue that threatens cultural and national identities from the perspective of the new extreme right ideology but, rather, that representation may also be considered an important matter.

This article suggests that the ERPs platforms somehow do not necessarily get more support in countries where the economy is under threat but, rather, in member states where national or local identity issues are not represented by the powerful leaders of the EU government. Moreover, this does not necessarily mean that the general electorate is aware of the balance of power of decision making in the EU, but merely that it is useful to look at political representation when identity matters.

The article considers that the European integration affects the domestic arena as well as international relations between member states. European institutions have defined preferences because of the phenomenon of "social learning" (Checkel 2001a, 562-63). In other words, institutions, such as EU institutions, do matter, as one of their outcomes, "social learning", changes interests and concerns. The constructivist literature is an important reference in shaping our argument (e.g., Radaelli 1995; 1997; 2004; Checkel 1998; Adler 2005; Risse 2000) because it focuses on the new, socially constructed European integration environment as providing European citizens with a new understanding of their interests,

preferences, and choices. As a consequence, crucial aspects of the integration process – polity formation through rules and norms, the transformation of identities, the role of ideas and the uses of language – are thereby opened up to systematic inquiry (Christiansen, Jørgensen and Wiener 1999).

Voters' preferences on national identity that might be under threat by European policies are considered in national elections. Kitschelt (1992), Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002) and Hooghe and Marks (2004; 2006) emphasize the emergence of identity issues (such as security, commitment to national symbols, sovereignty, and defense of national identity) as fundamental in explaining voter choice in national elections in Europe. According to the authors, the non-economic and non-material left/right dimension is understood as a more powerful predictor of voters' choices in the integrated Europe. Besides, the emergence of the renewed radical right as a new political actor calling for the safeguarding of new socio-cultural issues within the framework of the party system is likely to have consequences on the dynamics of this system. Hence, this research considers that resistance to European integration, the growth of Euroskepticism, and the European citizens' choice to support the new extreme right-wing ideology are all related. In this context, the deficit of representation in the EU decision-making process seems to be an impacting variable to be investigated, especially because the role a member state plays in the regional policymaking process can be seen as a decisive factor in influencing opposition or a skeptic mood toward European reforms.

The article is organized in two sections plus the results and conclusions. The first section discusses previous research on conceptual structures that inform specific problems addressed in the present study. The second section consists of a systematic examination of all national elections across Western European Union (WEU) member states. Economic, social and representative variables are tested in order to investigate the conditions of support for ERPs. Finally, the results suggest that the strength of a member state in decisive EU institutions is a significant variable in measuring support for ERPs in time series.

In what Direction does the EU Matter?

International politics and economic relations may be constrained by and may constrain the domestic foundations of international politics. Moreover, European disagreements and conflicts that were formerly played out in international relations are now negotiated in formal and informal meetings of the Council of Ministers, the Commission, and the European Parliament (EP) (Hooghe and Marks 2004). The multi-level game of European politics today has been the focus of important research, yet findings regarding the effects of EU institutions on national politics have varied widely (e.g., Putnam 1988; Keohane and

Milner 1996; Garrett and Lange 1995; Hix and Goetz 2000; Hix 1999). Also, different conclusions and views can be found about changes in political parties' organization in different European countries as well as in the positioning of political parties regarding the European integration (e.g., Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002; Marks *et al*. 2006; Gabel 2000; Taggart 1998).

The Europeanization debate focuses on linkage issues, notably the institutional arrangements that link national practices and policies to the EU. Betz (1993a; 1993b; 2002; 2003) and Kitschelt and McGann (1995) have argued that some populist right parties have moderated their neoliberal appeals and have started to focus more on the themes of reactive nationalism, ethnocentrism and more comprehensive protectionism, which could be seen as an important impact of the EU on political party structures. Goetz and Hix (2001) has opened an interesting debate about the links between the European integration and the European political party systems, providing different positions and arguments. According to Peter Mair (2001), the impact of the European integration process on national party systems has been minimal both in terms of their format and mechanics. Sitter (2001) argues that opposition to European integration is neither issue-specific nor indicative of a new cleavage line. Stefano Bartolini (2007) disagrees and says that there is in fact an impact of European integration on national party systems. In Bartolini's view, hardly any other issue in the European post-war electoral history has had similar wide and standardizing effects across European party systems. Gabel (2000) investigates European integration's intersection with national voting behavior. As contended by the author, research studies have not often measured how much the EU shapes voters' behavior, nor have they addressed the question systematically across EU member states (Gabel 2000). In short, the effort made thus far when considering European integration as an explanatory factor in domestic political continuity or change has been unsatisfactory (Harmsen and Spiering 2004). This article considers that the positioning of political leaders and member states regarding European policies on agriculture, immigration, trade, economy, currency, environment, social policies, and so on, can affect both national institutions and societies. European integration has already gone too far to not be seen as an important explanatory factor in the domestic politics of EU member states.

Constructivist approaches have demonstrated how European institutions can construct, through a process of interaction, the identities and interests of member states (Checkel 2001b, 52). However, the constructivist literature is not free from different interpretations and disagreements. For example, some constructivists follow scientific realism by relying on social mechanisms to explain social phenomena. Differently, Checkel (2001a) focuses on the "social learning" process to demonstrate that institutions define preferences. In the end, constructivist approaches find common ground with respect to the social world view

as "intersubjectively and collectively meaningful structures and processes" (Adler 2005, 100). Thus, when specifically applied to EU studies, the world that constructivists see is one that has been shaped by the social changes taking place in the region, as the integration process has affected values, beliefs and identity issues. According to Checkel (2001b, 52), "European institutions can construct, through a process of interaction, the identities and interests of member states." Therefore, it is clear that the socialization process and the perception of the constructive impact of Europeanization on EU citizens' lives is crucial to analyze their electoral preferences as well as the political parties' changes (e.g., Checkel 1998; Schimmelfennig, Engert and Knobel 2006; Radaelli 2004).

The socialization effects of European integration also generate a new conception of the "Europeanization process" that scholars have identified as taking place among member states of the EU and European citizens (e.g., Schimmelfennig, Engert and Knobel 2006; Radaelli 2004). Most of the works on the impact of "Europeanization" focus on domestic institutions and analyze whether and to what extent European processes, policies, and institutions affect domestic systems of interest intermediation, intergovernmental relations, national bureaucracies and administrative structures, judicial structures, macroeconomic institutions, national identities, and so on (Börzel and Risse 2000). "Top down" and "bottom up" perspectives have emerged to analyze the dynamics and outcomes of European integration, its institutions and processes. Hence, since the "Europeanization" of processes, policies and institutions may also refer to different issues, the major unsolved question is no longer whether the EU matters "but how it matters, to what degree, in what direction, at what pace, and at what point of time." (Börzel and Risse 2000, 7)

The emergence of identity issues related to regional integration may have consequences for political and social behavior, the preference of voters, and agenda setting, by making certain political issues more salient and others less so (Rydgren 2010). Thus, "it may influence the way political actors talk about certain issues (framing); and it may make mainstream parties change positions in order to win back votes or to prevent future losses (accommodation)" (Rydgren 2010, p. 67). A good example is that the EU´s development and policies have been seen as a mandatory theme on the agendas of national parties (Hix and Lord 1997; Bartolini 2007). In other words, in the context of the development of European integration, social detachments give rise to ideological commitments and political demands called "new political issues" (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002, 586). As a consequence, the multi-level face of politics in the European political game, the social impact of EU institutions, and the Europeanization of new political issues have appeared as new political concerns for voters.

This article argues that an investigation of voter choice even in national elections should take into account concerns about European policies and the position political

parties hold on European integration. Since the ERPs platforms are similarly and clearly Euroskeptic, populist and anti-immigration, it is expected that ERP voters understand platform differences when ERPs are compared to other traditional right-wing parties, which do not usually have a clear position against the EU, nor offer clear solutions for immigration problems.

Europe at home

After more than a half century of integration, European integration has also grown in importance among voters because the 'communitarization' of EU policies has internalized political issues that used to be the subject of bilateral and multilateral agreements between countries. Besides becoming an immediate issue on the agenda of national parties in Europe, the EU is taken into account not only in European elections, but also in national elections. A vote for candidates and platforms of the new extreme right-wing political parties (ERPs) that are openly against social and political integration is thus considered to be Euroskeptic voting behavior.[2]

The history of the European integration is a complex edifice of new laws and policies designed to decrease some of the material and "non-material conflicts" (Ignazi, 2003 201) between member states' societies. In other words, new laws to implement the free circulation of people, goods, capital and the exchange of services were necessary to make the integration efficient. Also, initiatives of cultural exchange and promotion of pluralistic values were seen as important tools for overlapping national differences. The European citizenship introduced by the Maastricht Treaty (1993) may be seen as the most important step of the social integration. For this reason, all kinds of intolerance and xenophobic behaviors have started to be seen as threats to the EU by the European Commission and the EP. A special Eurobarometer survey was conducted to provide information about "Racism and Xenophobia" (Eb 41 1989)[3] when the European Commission started to concern itself with the increase of xenophobia in Europe. Since the 1990s a "European Racism and Xenophobia Information Network" (known as "RAXEN"), as well as the "European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia", was established with its seat in Vienna (see Decision of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States of 2 June 1997, published in Official Journal C 194, 25.06.1997) to study the extent and development of the phenomena and manifestations of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in the region of integration, analyze their causes, consequences and effects, and examine examples of good practice. To these ends, information by research centers, member states, EU institutions, non-governmental organizations and international organizations started to be collected, recorded and analyzed.[4]

European integration as well as globalization has concurrently developed non-economic concerns to communities involved in the process (e.g. ideas, values, beliefs, identity, and security). As a result, the emergence and politicization of new issues such as immigration, national identity, and security – initially brought into the political agenda by the traditional conservative parties – have become important issues. The spreading phenomenon of Euroskepticism relates to "particular discursive formations within the battlefield of collective identities that is opened by European integration" (Trenz and de Wilde 2009). Accordingly, Ignazi (2003) argues that the success of the emergence of ERPs since the 1980s is associated to the fact that these parties respond to the unfulfilled demands of certain sections of the electorate that none of the other parties is able to meet.

Changing Europe

As already stated, the EU represents a new dimension of interactions among various institutions and new potential relationships among peoples and cultures. Europeans have increasingly perceived the social integration in their day-by-day lives since the implementation of the European citizenship. The rights to circulate, reside, work, vote and run for office anywhere in the European region of integration have converted the formerly remote process of integration between state governments and representatives into a new social realm. At the same time, gaps between regional interests and national interests tend to be commensurate with the development of the EU, and intolerance and xenophobic behaviors have been demonstrated to be inevitable. Looking for a better understanding of this, Marks, Wilson, and Ray (2002) have classified WEU political parties in terms of their cleavage location and their position on European integration (economic and political integration). WEU political parties support economic integration and political integration differently (more or less). The ERPs are not strongly against the economic integration, but absolutely against the social and political integration (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002). Thus, ERPs have reflected the preference of those that denounce the EU as a threat to local, regional and national identities. As a consequence, voters that support ERPs are strongly against the political integration because they represent the "new political cleavage" defending strongly nationalist principles, national culture, and national sovereignty (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002).

The process of social integration has increased the number of interactions between individuals of different national and social backgrounds (Master and LeRoy 2000); thus, xenophobic attitudes and fear of foreigners have negatively influenced support for integration. Support for ERPs in national elections, which grew by about 6% from 1981 to 2010[5] in the WEU region, is a warning sign that an assumed xenophobic attitude be measured. It suggests

that intolerant agendas tend to be more attractive to extremist voters as the European integration gets stronger. Many scholars have identified potential reasons to explain the support for ERPs as well as the tendency for the increase/decrease in such support: according to Jackman and Volpert (1996), for instance, support for extreme right-wing ideology is sensitive to factors that can be modified through policy instruments. The authors argue that "higher rates of unemployment provide a favorable environment for these political movements" (Jackman and Volpert 1996, 501). On the other hand, since the extreme-right parties focus their attacks on immigrants and foreign workers, the authors suggest that ERP campaigns are more successful when jobs are scarce rather than when they are more plentiful. Golder (2003), on the other hand, raises questions about the model proposed by Jackman and Volpert, especially their theoretical justification, and concludes that the effects of unemployment on ERPs depends on the number of foreigners in a country.

Although the debate between these scholars makes an important contribution to the study of ERPs, it fails to take into account the very clear distinction in the literature between the "new extreme-right" and the "traditional extreme-right" (e.g. Mudde 1996; 2007; Taggart 1996; Hainsworth 2008; Rydgren 2007; Ignazi 2003; Ignazi and Ysmal 1992; Ignazi and Perrineau 2000; Carter 2005). In cited articles, Jackman and Volpert, as well as Golder, investigated political parties from various right-wing families, not only the new extreme right parties. This article claims that making a distinction between traditional and new extreme right parties is critical because only the latter have enjoyed an increase in voter support. Thus, the different recent electoral performances between traditional and new extreme right parties can be better understood on the basis of their campaign priorities and the top issues considered in their political parties programs and proposals. A consequence of this distinction refers to the non-economic focus of most ERPs campaigns (Koopmans and Muis 2009; Hainsworth 2008). As already explained, undergirding the ERPs' set of beliefs is a more general pessimism and a lack of confidence in democratic institutions, with ERP followers representing a "new political cleavage" (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002). If this distinction were not relevant, why has support for ERPs been growing in Finland? Moreover, why have ERPs traditionally achieved electoral support in Sweden?

The average percentage of immigrants in the WEU region is around 7% (Table 1) when not considering the exceptional case of Luxembourg, which has become a country of immigrants since the emergence of the EU. Finland and Sweden, however, are among the countries with fewer immigrants in the region (about 2% of the population), while simultaneously experiencing the biggest decline of unemployment since 1995 – Finland from 15.4% (1995) to 8.4% (2005) and Sweden from 8.5% (1995) to 4.8% (2005)[6] –, thus before the international crisis. Although the growth of support for ERPs should not be solely attributed to immigration and economic factors, it is possible to observe from

Graphs 1 and 2 the percentage of votes obtained by ERPs in the last thirty years (since the foundation of the first ERPs in the respective countries). In general, support for ERPs is rising sharply in Finland and gaining new breath in Sweden. An opinion poll conducted in December 2008 showed that the strongest ERP in Sweden, Sweden Democrats (SD), was expected to obtain a 4.5 percent share of the votes in the general elections to be held in September 2010,[7] when actually the SD won almost 6%. In the case of Finland, where the last parliamentary election took place in April 2011, the True Finns Party finished just behind the conservative National Coalition Party (NCP), the biggest party in Parliament, and the Social Democrats, winning around 19% of the votes. As a consequence the True Finns increased their representation in Parliament to 39, from only 5 seats in comparison with 2007. The growth of the extreme right in Finland has been associated with the growth of Euroskepticism, especially at this crisis time.

Table 1 Non-national population compared to total population WEU, 2001

EU 15	% Immigrants	EU 15	% Immigrants
Finland	1.8	Greece	7.3
Portugal	2.2	Belgium	8.7
Sweden	2.3	Germany	8.9
Italy	2.5	Austria	9.3
Ireland	3.9	Luxembourg	37.3
UK	4	General Average	5.057
Netherland	4.1	Standard deviation	2.599
Denmark	4.8	Max	37.3
Spain	5.4	Min	1.8
France	5.6	Average without Luxembourg	7.429

Source: National Offices for Statistics, own calculations.
http://www.emz-berlin.de or www.emz-berlin.de/Statistik_2/eu/eu_03.htm (accessed October 1, 2010).

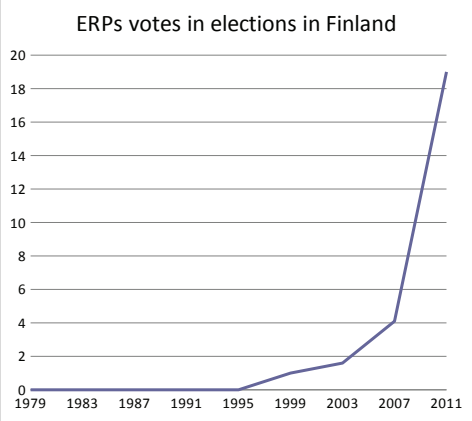
This article does not evaluate a temporal dimension that could provide a more accurate view of the impact of immigration on the growth of support for ERPs in WEU. However, "anti-immigrant skepticism" (i.e., wanting to reduce immigration) is among the main factors for predicting who will vote for a radical right-wing party (Rydgren 2008). So, regardless of the impact of the temporal dimension of immigration, right-wing radicals have indeed seen immigration as a threat to national interests. In contrast to much of the earlier research that used macro-level measures and comparisons, Rydgren (2008) used individual-level data from six West European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Norway). The author demonstrates in an innovative research the degree of ethnic heterogeneity of people's area of residence and highlights that xenophobic attitudes are a

far less significant factor than "immigration skepticism" for predicting who will vote for the new radical right.

Rydgren's findings (2008) show the extent to which anti-immigration frames employed by radical right-wing parties resonate with attitudes held by supporting voters, and to what extent they make a difference for people's decision to vote for the radical right. The analyses indicate that frames linking immigration to crime and social unrest are particularly effective for mobilizing voter support for the radical right.

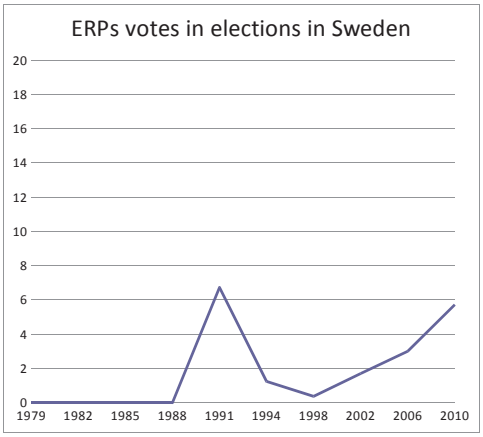
Graph 1 Finland: ERPs votes in Finnish elections

1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	2011
0	0	0	0	0	1	1,6	4,1	19



Graph 2 Sweden: ERPs votes in Swedish elections

1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
0	0	0	0	6,73	1,24	0,37	1,7	3	5,72



Source: http://www.electionguide.org/index.php; http://www.electionworld.org; http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/elections; http://www.electionresources.org; http://www.scb.se (accessed December 27, 2010).

Theory and Models

Though some major questions will remain unanswered, we attempt to contribute to answer a simpler one: what is the conjuncture and favorable circumstances that support intolerance and Euroskepticism in Europe? Apparently there are different national reasons; however, when the region of integration is observed and systematically analyzed across WEU member states since the 1980s, it is possible to find common partial explanations for the growth of extreme right-wing ideology in Europe.

The research focuses on Western Europe because the phenomenon of the new extreme right populism has developed in Western European countries over the last 30 years. As the new extreme right populism considers globalization and migration as multifaceted enemies, it follows that European integration should be seen as an unlikable phenomenon. According to Marks, Wilson and Ray (2002, 591), ERPs stem from post-industrial societies[8], characterized by a crisis of confidence in democratic and representative institutions, and have their roots in the defense of national sovereignty and of national culture and community against the influx of immigrants and against competing sources of identity within the state. Therefore, hostility toward immigrants is seen as the epiphenomenon of a more integrated set of beliefs that defines the ERPs' anti-system political culture (Ignazi 2003, 212). This research claims that beyond the xenophobic attitudes, the representation deficit in European institutions may impact on European national elections because radical right-wing voters do not want to lose control over their governments. The feeling that their country is open to sharing its sovereignty with others and following supranational decisions regardless of local and national interests has prompted the reaction of radical right-wing voters.

The most visible leaders of the integration, as well as their attitudes and discourses, somehow have not been seen as representative of sectors of national societies that identify themselves with the "new political cleavage" that has supported ERPs. The political integration has been claimed to represent a risk for those that defend strongly the national identity. Indeed, regional integration has created constraints on national sovereignty; it is also true that the more powerful a member state is and the more influence a member state has on the decision-making process, the more important is its position and the greater its capacity to protect national interests. Even though citizens have very little information or knowledge about the decision-making process of EU institutions, somehow ERPs have been seen as persuasive among citizens that do not identify themselves with the discourses for political and social integration in Europe. Thus, the test can contribute to verify when the ERPs were able to capture voters' preference and under which circumstances this happened during their existence across the WEU.

A set of econometric exercises using 1990-2006 panel data with fixed effects was determined to have "support for ERPs" as the dependent variable.[9] This period was chosen due to the significant amount of information available for testing. Before 1990 and after 2006 data are missing that could interfere in the result. Given the inter-temporal variation captured by the panel data with fixed effects, it is possible to assess the political conditions for the growth of electoral support for ERPs in all European member states as a function of representative variables, economic aspects, and indicators gauging the perception of the national populations concerning the development of European integration.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is "the support for ERPs", that is, the share of ERP votes per election. Consideration was given to the total number of votes achieved by all new extreme right parties in existence at any time during the period analyzed. Although the test will use the percentage of ERP votes in national elections between 1990 and 2006, the Appendix brings the result of a broader research with the classification of all the existing ERPs in the EU 15 and their performance since their respective foundations until the last election. Thus, the information provided in the Appendix allows identifying specific political parties and the desegregated data that was considered in the econometric exercise.

It was observed that the growth of support for right-wing extremist ideology has been the driver of far-right movements attempting either to create new ERPs or to reform traditional radical political parties. As a result, their number and names may vary from one election to the next. For instance, although some new parties have emerged, others have changed their names while, in many cases, retaining well known leaders and members. A good example was the creation of the party "Alliance for the Future of Austria" (BZÖ) as a consequence of considerable disagreement between Jörg Haider[10] and other members of the "Freedom Party of Austria" (FPÖ) in 2005. As a result, neither the names nor the number of parties each country has is decisive in this research. Instead, the Euroskeptic agendas of the ERPs sustain this investigation. Thus, political party programs and stances had to be analyzed to identify common missions.

As already explained, two important criteria have been followed: first, the difference between traditional extreme right-wing and the new extreme right-wing political parties (ERPs) was crucial for the selection of the political parties to be investigated; second, the number of seats obtained by ERPs in general elections is not relevant because those parties are still minorities in most Western European countries and allocation of seats in the legislature is mostly a function of the different electoral systems subsisting in member states. Thus, the share of votes is the relevant information to be tested regarding the argument of this article.

Independent variables

This section introduces the six independent variables that can be understood as taking part in three different and complementary categories spanning a host of voters' considerations: i) representative variables, ii) economic variables and iii) variables of perception.

i) "Council Votes" and "EP Seats": Representative variables

There are three major legislative institutions in the EU: the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the EP. The European Commission is responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, and upholding EU Treaties. The Council meets in different formations, each dealing with a particular department (e.g. the Foreign Affairs Council, the Agriculture and Fisheries Council), consisting of the heads of the respective departments in each particular national government. The Council is an intergovernmental institution that plays a strong executive role in the EU government. The most important task of the EP is to legislate. Different EU reforms have vastly strengthened the EP during the integration process. The most recent was implemented by the Treaty of Lisbon determining that the "affirmation" of the EP is necessary for almost every law; however, saying "yes" or "no" on the draft proposals of the commission is not enough. The EP still cannot initiate bills directly. The really meaningful change implemented by the Treaty of Lisbon concerned "affirmation" to approve every budget, since the old distinction between "compulsory" and "non-compulsory" expenditure was abolished. The Council remains as the EU's most important decision-making institution.

Following Ignazi's arguments (2003), feelings of misrepresentation and lack of confidence in representative institutions are assumed to be important conditions for the emergence of the new extreme right ideology. Therefore, the impact of a member state's representation on the institutions responsible for the EU decision-making process should be assessed. However, the variation of the weight of most national representatives in the European Commission over time is "0." Consequently, there is no reason to evaluate the variation of the weight each national member state had in the Commission, in contrast with the cases of the Council of Ministers and the EP, which have undergone important changes in the distribution of power over time.

The weight of votes each country holds in the EU's Council of Ministers was considered as the key explanatory variable. It is assumed here that measuring the weight of votes in the Council over time is fundamental for understanding the rise in popularity of the ERPs platform. Though a negative correlation is expected between "Council Votes" and "support for ERPs", this does not mean that voters are well informed about the weight of the Council

in the EU decision-making process. Still, somehow this can reflect how much voters have perceived their governments enjoying power in the EU structure. The members of the EU's Council of Ministers are members of the national executives. In other words, they are nominated by national governments and, therefore, do not represent the "communitarian interest" but, rather, national interests. The members of the Council of Ministers have more visibility in the domestic political life, especially because they depend on national nominations. Somehow, they still represent national interests and are seen as capable of defending their national states' preferences, especially when the member state enjoys power and has voice in the EU's Council of Ministers.

"EP votes," the other explanatory variable for representation, is not considered a decisive variable in the model because the EP is still a weak institution in the policy-making process. Although EP legislative power has increased, especially since 2003, it is still far from being a regular Parliament that plays a key role in national legislative processes (e.g. Jacobs and Corbett 1990; Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton 2007; Priestley 2008).

The most important European laws are regulations and directives, which must be approved by the co-decision procedures that were introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht (1993). However, it was only after 2003 (Treaty of Nice) that faster and more effective processes for strengthening the role of the EP were in fact implemented. Briefly speaking, the most important power the EP holds is veto power. In other words, the EP can stop changes, but it does not have efficient tools to implement and adopt policies. The EP has no power to initiate legislation, nor does it play an agenda-setting role in legislative procedures. There is intense debate about the powers of the EP and how it could be improved, but that is not the major objective of this research. The article follows the common view that the EP needs to continue being empowered through future reforms of the EU, especially because this is the only directly elected EU institution.

Because the number of seats in the EP is a function of the size of the population of member states, no clear-cut expectation exists about the effects of this variable. On the one hand, one could expect a negative correlation if it is assumed that the EP would be able to impact as much as the Council on the policymaking process. On the other hand, a positive correlation could also be expected because the EP has an absolutely different methodology to distribute power (seats). The number of seats at the EP does not correspond to an effective capacity to compensate for the losses of national legislative power by the member states. Indeed, the EP's legislative powers have been considered weak by various scholars, whose different arguments can be categorized into weakness before Maastricht (e.g. Dehousse 1989; Edward 1987; Fitzmaurice 1988; Lenaerts 1991; Lodge 1989; Wessels 1991) and after Maastricht (e.g. Tsebelis and Garrett 1997; Tsebelis 1994; 1995; 1996; 1997; 1999).

It is perfectly true that the EP has significantly increased its political power in the EU over time. Especially after the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), the European Parliament gained a bigger role in setting budgets, as the old distinction between "compulsory" and "non-compulsory" expenditure was abolished. However, there was no significant improvement with regard to empowering the EP in the policymaking process in the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty of Lisbon enlarged the fields of the EU legislation, but it did not change the role of the EP in the general policy making process. Shortly, the national legislative power transferred to European institutions is still more concentrated in the action of the Council than in Parliament.

ii) "Unemployment" and "GDP": Economic variables

Data on the economic variables "GDP" and "unemployment" were compiled from national and international official sources (CIS, EUROSTAT, IMF, OECD)[11] and released by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Statistical Division Database. The data are per country and per year from 1990 to 2006. "Unemployment" represents the rate of unemployed persons as a percentage of the labor force. The labor force is the total number of people employed and unemployed. Unemployed persons comprise those currently available for work and actively seeking work. The "GDP" is based on the gross domestic product (GDP) at purchasing power parity (PPP) per capita of the value of all final goods and services produced within a nation in a given year divided by the average population for the same year. Considering the motivations suggested by the literature about new extreme right ideology as being a function of distrust of representative institutions and other non-economic effects (Kitschelt 1992; Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2004; 2006; Ignazi 2003), it is predicted that "GDP" and "Unemployment" may have an impact on the increase in votes for ERPs in a time series analysis. However, this research is focused on showing how non-economic variables may impact the preference of voters even more than economic variables, particularly because ERPs are in favor of economic integration, but not of political and social integration (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002).

iii) "Knowledge" and "Nationality": Variables of perception

"Knowledge" and "Nationality" variables measure the perception of the national populations concerning the development of European integration. The variable "Knowledge" reveals the degree to which citizens feel they are informed about the EU, its policies and institutions (% per country). It is expected that the greater the level of information about the European institutions, the lower the support for ERPs. This expectation is based on the literature's assumption that ERP support comes mostly from blue-collar, low-income people (Ignazi 2003), who are less-informed about political institutions in general.

The variable "Nationality" is based on the perception of "feeling European vs. Nationality only." The question in Eurobarometer (Eb) surveys is the following: "In the future do you see yourself as 'European only,' 'European and Nationality,' 'Nationality and European,' 'Nationality only'?" The model included only the answers with regard to "Nationality only." In other words, the data help to measure strong national identity feeling per country. The data on "Nationality" were collected from several editions of Eurobarometer.[12] Taking into account that identity is a key factor in this new conservative ideology, a positive correlation was expected between "Nationality" and the "Growth of votes on ERPs".

Models and results

For the time-series data gathered, a panel data estimation was used with fixed effects having the "support for ERPs" as the dependent variable. Results of elections were considered for the period from 1990 to 2006. The years without elections required an interpolation of the score obtained by ERPs in the previous electoral episode.

The growth of ERPs in WEU national elections is expected to have a positive correlation with the development of European integration as a consequence of the decrease in political power of national governments. In other words, the defense of identity is a matter of defense of instruments to represent national will. In addition, the fact that the ERPs have grown all across the WEU suggests that an explanation for this phenomenon should be found for the entire region. In order to test the hypothesis, six model specifications were run.

Table 2 Panel data fixed effects of support for ERPs 1990-2006

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Votes Council	-36.801*** (13.992)	-110.216*** (28.606)	-110.917*** (28.943)	-112.445*** (29.227)	-145.205*** (56.099)	-124.370* (65.872)
Seats EP		104.460*** (35.673)	106.107*** (36.965)	109.312*** (37.828)	124.459*** (51.206)	122.303** (58.821)
Unemployment			-.0145 (.0833)	-.0150 (.0835)	-.0561 (.1572)	-.0271 (.1704)
GDP				-.0387 (.0934)	.0549 (.1596)	.0073 (.1724)
Knowledge					-.2453 (.5528)	-.1540 (.6041)
Nationality						.0490 (.2852)
Constant	7.082*** (.901)	5.012*** (1.134)	5.062*** (1.172)	5.042*** (1.175)	7.450* (4.004)	5.493 (4.905)
N	255	255	255	225	180	165
F-statistics	6.92	7.86	5.23	3.95	1.46	0.78

*Statistical significance denoted by *; where * equals p-value < 0.1, ** equals p-value <0.05, and *** p-value < .001. Standard Errors are in parenthesis.

Observation of Table 2 indicates that the coefficients of the variables "Council Votes" and "EP Seats" were statistically significant in all model specifications, which means that representation is an important predictor for a comprehensive understanding of voter choice for ERPs. Specifically, the model shows a negative coefficient for the first variable "Council Votes" that is in accord to the theoretical prediction: the greater the representation (more weight of votes) a member state has in the Council, the lower the electoral support ERPs tend to enjoy in national elections.

This result leads us back to the debate on how powerful the Council of Ministers has been among EU institutions and on how capable it has been to drive the decision-making process throughout the development of the EU (Wessels 1991; Weiler, Haltern and Mayer 1995; Wallace, Wallace and Webb 1983; Wallace 1982). The decrease in Council powers and potential increase of EP powers can be interpreted differently depending on the role each institution has in the policymaking process, particularly in light of the actual changes introduced by the co-decision procedure (Lodge 1987; van Hamme 1989; Tsebelis 1995; 2002; 2008; Tsebelis *et al*. 2001; Tsebelis and Kreppel 1995; 2005; Tsebelis and Garrett 1997; 2000.[13] However, even if we consider that formally the EP has 'equal' legislative power as the Council under the co-decision procedure,

> (…) a majority of EU legislation is still passed under consultation procedure, where the Parliament only has a limited power of delay. (…) And, although the EP now has that power to veto the government's choice for the Commission President and the team of the Commissioners, the governments are still the agenda-setters in the appointment of the Commission. (Follesdal and Hix 2005, 5)

In addition to being a powerful intergovernmental institution in the EU decision-making process, the EU's Council of Ministers represents national interests while not necessarily incorporating a "supranational interest". Ministers are nominated by national governments and are part of national executives. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the greater the political power a member state enjoys in the Council, the lower the propensity of voters strongly concerned about the defense of national interests to support ERPs' platforms.

Conversely, the greater the representation a member state has in Parliament, the higher the electoral support ERPs tend to enjoy in national elections. Though such result was not predicted, it may also denote dissatisfaction with the socio-dynamics of post-modernization and globalization, which the extremists believe to be more prevalent in larger countries with larger populations than in smaller countries with a smaller population. In fact, these findings contribute to a better understanding of the circumstances in which feelings of detachment and lack of confidence in the system of representation are present in European countries (Ignazi 2003, 204).

Finally, the variation of these results can also be better explored by taking into account two different features of the distribution of power in the institution. First, the criterion for the distribution of seats is different from that in the Council. As mentioned earlier, the distribution of seats in the EP is based on the size of the population; however, the fact that a country holds more EP seats does not necessarily mean that it has a corresponding importance in the EU policymaking process. Indeed, this evidences concerns related to the supranational aspects of the EU as well as concerns regarding the 'democratic deficit' of the EU (Weiler, Haltern and Mayer 1995; Follesdall and Hix 2005; Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002).

Moreover, Members of the European Parliament (MEP) are not expected to represent national interests but, rather, the general interest of the "Community of States". Thus, as long as the European Parliament acts as a pro-integration entrepreneur, EP policy positions under consultation will be more integrationist than Council positions. MEPs work together in parliamentary groups formed according to political party. In other words, the EP is organized on the basis of ideological links rather than of national interests. Hence, a greater number of seats in the EP does not necessarily mean that a member state holds more decision-making power, yet it does reflect a member state's supranational powers in the EU.

Second, the debate about the limited powers of the EP is as old as the creation of the EP itself. The design of the EU means that policy-making at the European level is dominated by executive actors: national ministers in the EU Council, and government appointees in the Commission. This, in itself, is not a problem, though the actions of these executive agents at the European level are beyond the control of national parliaments" (Follesdal and Hix 2005). Successive reforms of the EU treaties have increased the powers of the EP. Nevertheless, scholars still claim that the EP is weak compared to the national parliaments and executive representatives in the EU's Council. Most analysts of the democratic deficit argue that the EP is too weak in the EU decision making (Weiler, Haltern and Mayer 1995; Follesdall and Hix 2005; Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002). Thus, country representation in the EP neither reflects high expectation of defense of national interests, nor does it mean that the EP has a decisive voice in EU policymaking.

Another striking result is that, contrary to the expectation of the literature that does not deal with the entire region on a long-term analysis basis (e.g. Taggart 1996; Mudde and Holsteyn 2000; Rydgren 2004; Veugelers and Chiarini 2002; Veugelers and Magnan 2005), the economic performance and measures of European public perception were not statistically significant in all model specifications. The econometric exercises also demonstrate that the ERPs derive more support from member states with lower levels of unemployment. This calls for more thorough investigation, but we can speculate over that by highlighting the populist characteristic of the ERPs' rhetoric.

In other words, although ERP leaders, by and large, make use of strong rhetoric in citing economic reasons in their arguments against the opening of frontiers, economic explanatory variables do not appear to be relevant to explain voters' choice in favor of ERPs. How could this be interpreted? When we observe the results we note that the ERPs have received greater support from countries in which the economy is consolidated, GDP per capita is high, and unemployment is low; yet and most importantly, those countries have a representation deficit in the EU's Council of Ministers.

Results

The multi-level aspects of the European political game are the most important new issue in European politics nowadays. This research contributes to building an understanding of the growth of extreme right-wing populism as a phenomenon that should be understood neither as a random event nor as a national one. Moreover, voters' preferences about European policies are an important aspect in national elections, and ERP growth can be interpreted as a side effect of the European integration.

Especially in the case of ERP candidates in national elections, their positions regarding integration are always an important subject in political campaigns. This can be attested by looking at programs and platforms in general elections of WEU countries.

Data from national elections were collected from each country of the EU 15 from 1981 to 2007 in order to identify the growth of the share of votes for ERPs. The result is that ERP votes have been increasing in the region in step with the development of European integration. Moreover, we tested the potential correlation between the growth of "votes on ERPs" and several explanatory variables from 1990 to 2006. The findings show that stronger resistance to the EU is not related to the economic benefits delivered by the integration (Table 2). In other words, irrespective of economic performance and perceptions, the power held by each country in the EU representative institutions (Council and EP) is the most important predictor to increase in support for ERPs. It is widely known that the Council is the principal decision-making institution in the EU. The Council is part legislature, part executive, and when acting as a legislature makes most of its decisions in secret (Follesdal and Hix 2005). Since the EU Council ministers are members of national governments, national voters mostly know them. Thus, we can claim that voters may perceive they are better represented in the EU government when their national politicians are more active in EU politics. Hence, the results of the econometric test can be interpreted as a sign that voters tend not to reward ERPs when their national executive representatives have the power to directly influence the destiny of European policies.

The conclusion is that the new radical right populism is based mostly on identity and representation of cultural and national values, and that the weight of votes in EU institutions

should be observed. Since the Council is a powerful intergovernmental institution in the EU government, it may be seen as an important instrument to enhance the defense of national identity. ERPs reject both the supranational aspects of the integration and the sharing of sovereignty by stimulating ultra conservative attitudes and intolerance. The growth of votes for ERPs can also be interpreted as a regional overreaction of a broader crisis of political parties and representation. This research was not able to explain why and how ERPs can be convincing and persuasive, but it tried to describe common conditions when this has occurred.

Conclusion

The politics of "anti-system theory" has become a leitmotiv for those proclaiming discontent with current politics in Europe (Poguntke and Scarrow 1996). The ideological core of the ERPs is embedded in a broad socio-cultural conservatism, stressing themes like law and order, traditional family values and nationalism. Its central political program can be understood as a response to the erosion of the 'ethno-national dominance' system, which characterized much of the history of modern nation states (Rydgren 2010). Hence, while the article sought to explore when ERPs received more support from voters, it identified that representative variables help to understand the variation of this support.

The emergence of a new extreme right populism has been identified as a byproduct of the crisis of confidence in the democratic and representative institutions (Ignazi 2003). Thus, both xenophobic behavior and distrust of politics and politicians (protest vote) have been pointed out as the main reasons for voters to have supported ERPs. However, the new extreme right-wing ideology looks different from the older one especially because, though supporting potentially non-democratic policies, ERP representatives participate in elections in a democratic way. In this context, gaining representation democratically is primary to achieving their objectives. Curiously, despite their distrust of representative systems and institutions, ERP voters abide by the rules of representative elections to implement changes that may, in the future, constrain the very same democratic processes that enable their present participation.

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Notes:

1 Ignazi (2003) points out that extreme right parties are very popular among male industrial workers, the lower strata of white-collar workers in the administrative and services sectors, the poorly educated and the unemployed. In other words, among those social groups that can be regarded as post-industrial development's biggest losers.

2 See Mudde (2007) for a helpful distinction between a minimal and maximum definition for extreme right parties' ideology.

3 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_41_en.pdf (accessed February 1, 2011).

4 http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/other/c10411_en.htm (accessed February 1, 2011).

5 The appendix details the political parties, number of votes, and share of votes in each of the 15 WEU countries over the period used by the article in formulating its hypothesis and arguments and in calculating growth of votes.

6 Data from Eurostat Yearbook http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=2693,70381876,2693_70592044&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL (accessed December 27, 2010).

7 See SIFO poll at http://sydsvenskan.se/sverige/article398805/Gapet-halverat-mellan-partiblocken.html (accessed December 27, 2010).

8 According to Ignazi (2003), the extreme right family consists of two types of party: the 'traditional' type, which is loosely linked to the fascist tradition; and the newly-emerged, 'post-industrial' type, which denies references to fascism and displays instead a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes nurtured by new issues and needs of a post-industrial society.

9 The period of time tested was a result of the availability of European data from the same sources.

10 Along with France's Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jörg Haider, who died in an accident on October 11, 2008, was one of Europe's best known populist right-wingers.

11 www.unece.org and http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/selectionbasicFast.asp (accessed December 27, 2010).

12 Eb 42 1994, Eb 43 1995, Eb 46 1996, Eb 47.1 1997, Eb 49 1998, Eb 52 1999, Eb 54.1 2000, Eb 56.2 2001, Eb 57.1 2002, Eb 59.1 2003, Eb 61 2004, and Eb 64 2005. Also, the perceived "Knowledge" on the EU were collected from Eb 43.1 1995, Eb 45 1996, Eb 48 1997, Eb 49 1998, Eb 52 1999, Eb 54.1 2000, Eb 55.1 2001, Eb 57.1 2002, Eb 59.1 2003, Eb 61 2004, Eb 63 2005, Eb 65 2006.

13 The official interpretation of the EU government is that the new co-decision procedure has increased the power of the EP on the decision-making process of the EU. The Treaty says that the EP shares legislative power with the Council. However, this is neither as simple nor as obvious as the non-critical view of Maastricht has affirmed. Immediately after Maastricht, Tsebelis started to call attention to the complexity of the reforms. Since the 1990s, Tsebelis has started several empirical researches and co-authored different works motivating a necessary critical view of the role of EU institutions. The most important of Tsebelis and his co-author's argument is that "winning Council proposals under co-decision are often likely to be less integrationist than winning Commission/EP proposals under co-operation" (Tsebelis and Garrett 1997).The only substantive effect of co-decision is to give the EP veto power over proposals that it does not like. An obvious but superficial conclusion is that co-decision represents a significant increase in the

EP's powers. The authors claim for an institutional argument, "rational actors make decisions on the basis of their expected consequences. Therefore, they strategize 'backwards' from the end of a game-tree to the beginning. For example, if the Council knows that at the end of the game it will select from the set of all feasible outcomes the one it most prefers to the status quo (or to what it could obtain on its own, acting unanimously), it will not accept anything less in earlier rounds. The authors also debate about the important differences of the effects of agenda setting and veto player power in legislative environments. Polemic and disapproved by some of their peers, their contribution from late 1990s started to become respectable and changed the course of the official view that the EP increased power since the creation of the co-decision procedure as something taken as granted.

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