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

Giuseppe Ciccolini (European University Institute)

7th EU-User Conference, 25-26 March 2021

European University Institute

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

EUI

Introduction

- Debate: *Have populist radical right (PRR) voters been 'left behind'?*

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

FINANCIAL TIMES

German election
East Germany's 'left behind' voters propel AfD to electoral gains

Saxony has few migrants yet rightwing populism prospers among disaffected citizens

© FT montage; Getty

Guy Chazan in Berlin SEPTEMBER 27 2017

Last year Clausnitz, a small village in Saxony, found itself at the centre of a nationwide debate on racism in Germany. A rightwing mob tried to block a bus

Search ⌄ **The Guardian** International ed

Older 'left-behind' voters turned against a political class with values opposed to theirs

The Ukip revolt has reshaped the traditional political landscape – and for both main parties the upheaval has only just begun

▲ Where do Nigel Farage and Ukip go next? Photograph: Ray Tang/REX/Shutterstock

O nce more, with feeling. The Ukip-led voter uprising that tore up the political map in 2014 and 2015 has now changed the face of

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

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)

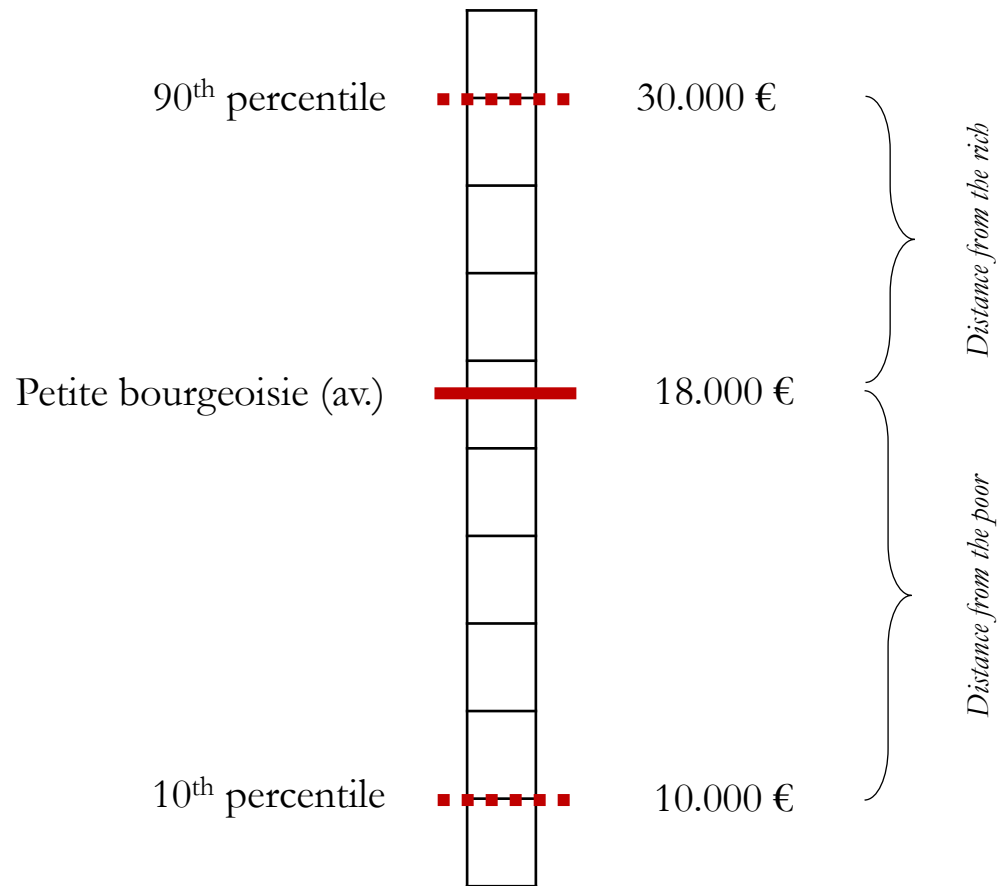 - Social class

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*

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

$$\Delta\ Positional\ Income_{t_0} = Positional\ Income_{t_0} - Positional\ Income_{t_{-T}}$$

90th percentile   30.000 €

Petite bourgeoisie (av.)   18.000 €

10th percentile   10.000 €

Distance from the rich

Distance from the poor

Data & methods

Data:

- Main analysis: ESS

- Class-level data: EU-SILC

Case selection:

- 19 elections (2008-2017)

- 9 countries

- PRR share > 5% (in sample)

- Voters, working or unemployed

Method:

- Multilevel logistic regression

→ Social classes as upper level

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2017
AT	■					■			■
CH				■				■	
FI				■				■	
FR					■				■
IT						■			
NL			■		■				■
NO		■				■			■
SE							■		
UK			■					■	

Data & methods

Variables

Dependent variable

PRR voting	ESS, classification PopuList

Independent variables | Random effects

| Class-level variables		Class	following Oesch class scheme
Δ Positional income	from EU-SILC	Class × country × year	
Δ Income	from EU-SILC		
Income	from EU-SILC		
Individual-level variables			
Age, gender, educ., HH income, migr. back.	ESS		
Country & year FE			

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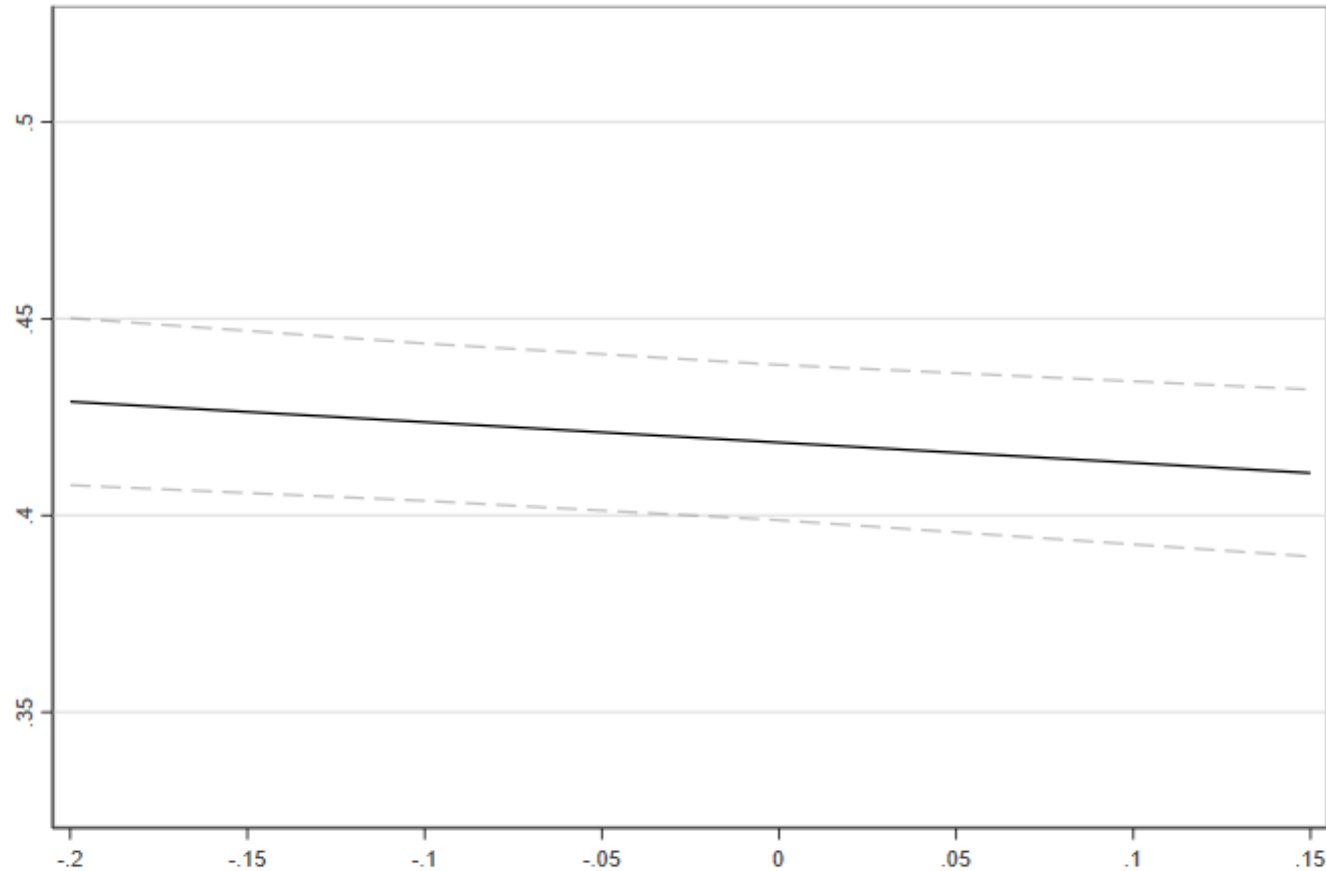
Which of these descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?

(a) living comfortably on present income

(b) <u>coping on present income</u>

(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*

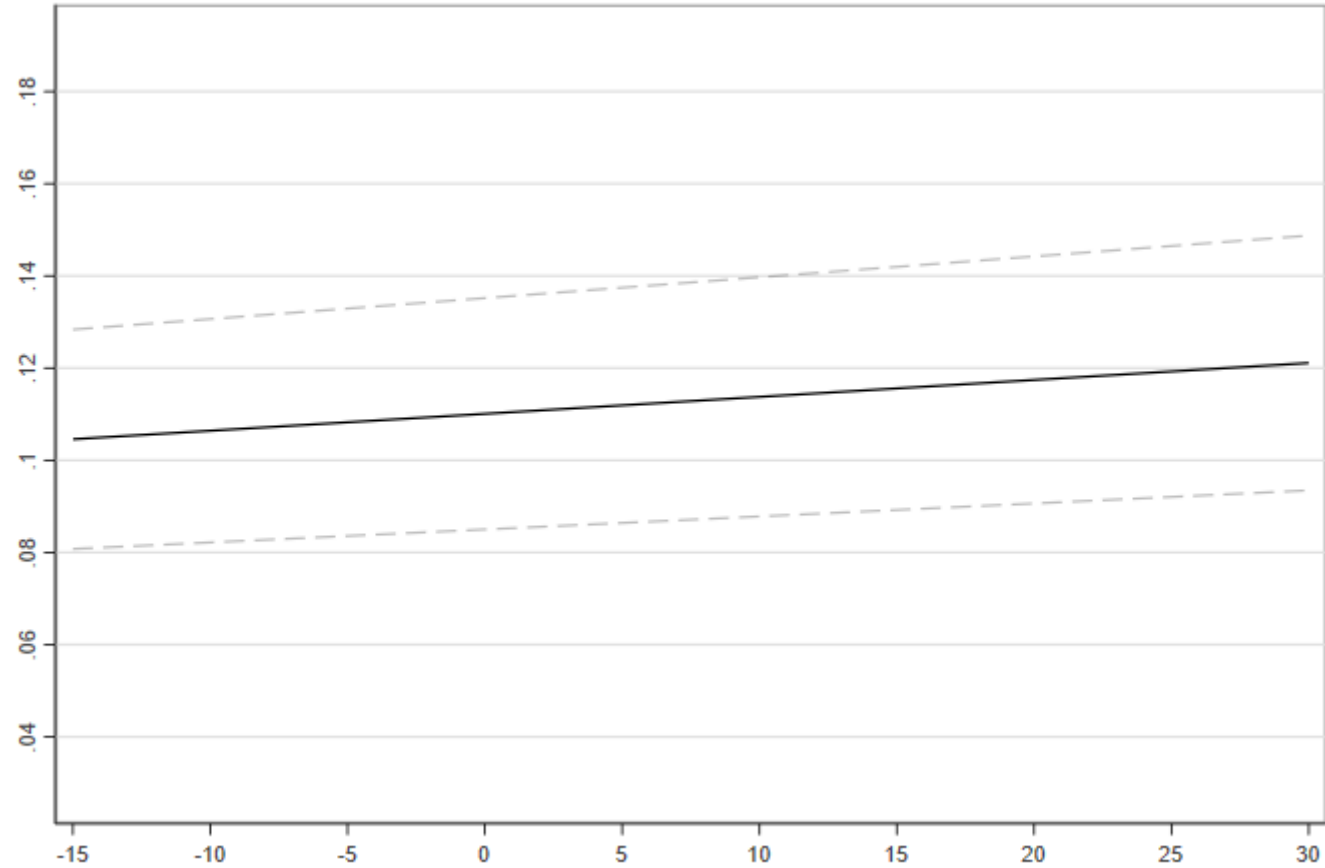Note: Regression coefficient significant at the 0,05 level.

Results
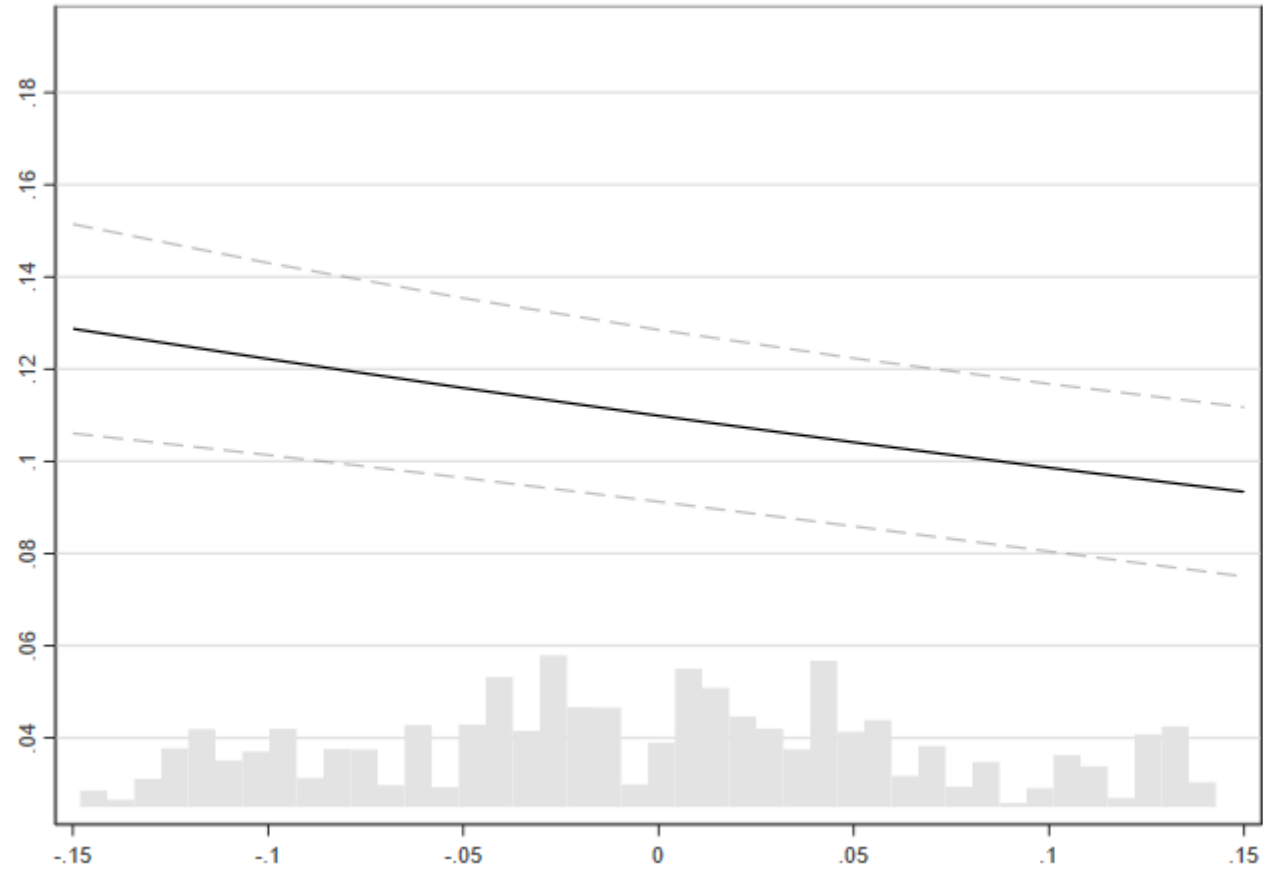
Predicted probabilities of PRR voting at different levels of *Δ Positional income*

Note: Regression coefficient significant at the 0,001 level. The gray histogram shows the distribution of the variable on *Δ Positional income*

Robustness checks

- Excluding class income

- Excluding household income

- Inclusion of abstention

- Different electoral threshold for case selection (PRR share > 8%)
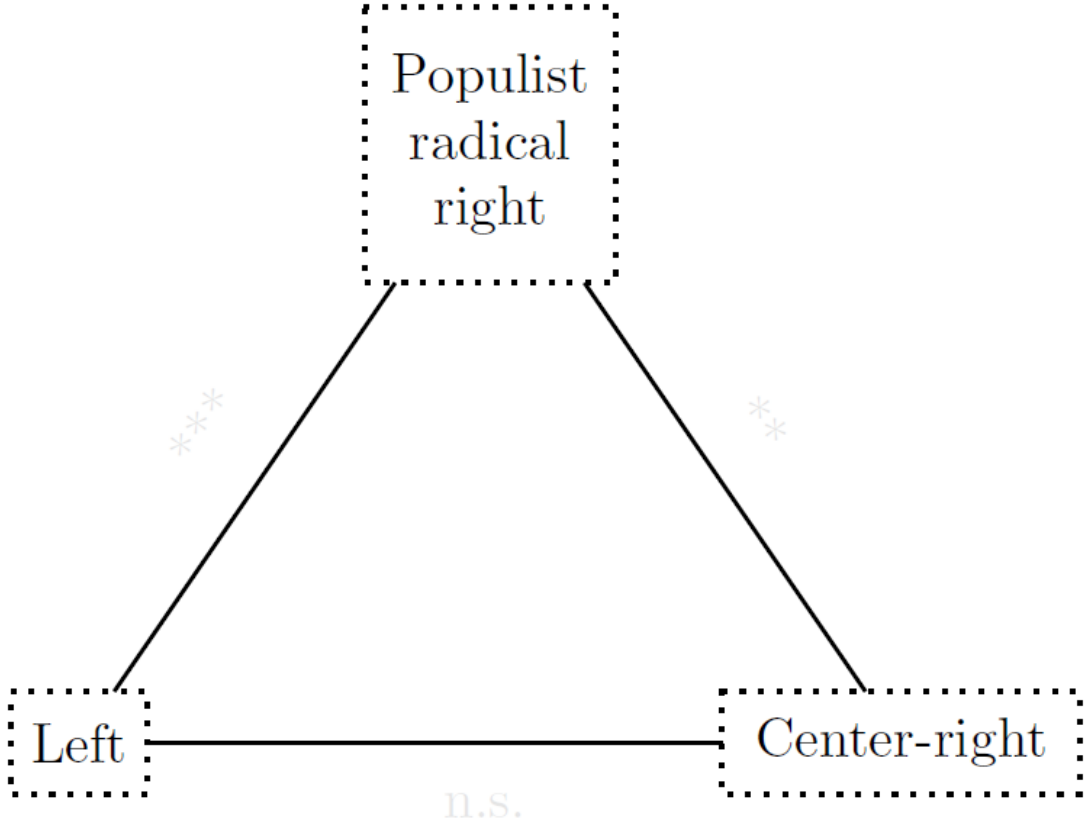
Additional analyses: material deprivation

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

Note: Regression coefficient <u>not significant</u> at the 0,05 level.

Additional analyses: voting choice in detail

Voting choice (multinomial model): significance of the odds ratios for *Δ 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)