



**Final Conference of the
European Election Study 2014**

November 6-8, 2015

A B S T R A C T S

of the papers presented at the conference

Friday, Nov. 6, 13:30 – 15:00 hrs

Panel 1: Candidates and Campaigns

The *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns in 2014: assessing the importance of information and news exposure for preference formation of voters

Katjana Gatterman, University of Amsterdam

Claes H. De Vreese, University of Amsterdam

Wouter van der Brug, University of Amsterdam

Abstract

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were characterised by a novel element in European Union (EU) politics. For the first time, the major European party families put forward top candidates for President of the European Commission, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. This paper seeks to enquire whether this innovation in European election campaigns had the potential to – at least partially – alleviate the alleged accountability deficit. We rely on original survey data to assess citizens' preferences for each of the main *Spitzenkandidaten* Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, and Guy Verhofstadt. Our research is guided by three questions: What explains whether citizens are able to formulate a preference towards a certain *Spitzenkandidat*? Which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And are these explanations moderated by citizens' political awareness? We show that three factors enable citizens to formulate a preference towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*: exposure to quality news as well as the acquisition of general EU political and campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Furthermore, we demonstrate that only the most knowledgeable citizens are able to use cues of party identification or ideological orientations in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. The implications of our findings are discussed with reference to the EU's democratic deficit debate.

Polarising Without Politicising. The Effect of Lead Candidates' Campaigns on Perceptions of the EU Democracy.

Robert Rohrschneider, The University of Kansas

Hermann Schmitt, Universities of Manchester and Mannheim

Sebastian Adrian Popa, University of Mannheim

Abstract

Has the presence of *Spitzenkandidaten*—“lead-candidates”—in the 2014 European parliamentary election achieved its desired goals? A clear objective of the development of this new institutions was to personify the EU and thus to make the Europe-wide polity more palatable to voters. In the long run, so the argument goes, visible candidates will convey to electorates the fact that they have a choice in the European parliamentary election, via the policy reputation of candidates and their parties. Ultimately, this was to increase interests in the election, raise turnout during the election, and help reduce the perceived distance between the EU and voters after the election. In short, hopes were pinned to the expectation that the EU becomes more relevant and democratic. Has this objective been achieved? This paper adds to an answer of this question by analysing whether evaluations of lead candidates influence voters' evaluations of the EU democracy.

Gender Differences in the Use of New Technologies: Candidates' campaigning in comparative perspective

Maarja Lühiste, University of Leicester

Laura Sudulich, Université Libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

The existing literature on politics and gender offers little insights into explaining potential gender variations in the use of different campaigning tools, especially with regards to cyber campaigning. While past research offers little evidence of gender differences with regards to the use of traditional campaigning tools, online campaigning might on the other hand display significant differences across men and women. In order to employ campaign websites and/or social media in one's campaign, a candidate (and her team) must have the relevant resources and skills to make the best use of them. To expect female and male candidates to campaign to the same extent online, women and men in general should have similar levels of digital literacy and competence. Hence we theorise that the political elites' employment of online campaigning tools is directly linked to the extent to which the general public uses internet. Moreover, we hypothesise that the demographic characteristics – such as respondent's sex and age – that predict the public's use of internet will also explain the variations in how candidates campaign online. We anticipate the effects of gender to be moderated by age, with the gender gap fading away across younger generations of users, both amongst general public and amongst political elites. This contention is tested on multiple data sources to capture the diversity in the use of new technologies. We analyse the general population usage side by utilising data from Eurobarometer 76.3 (2011) and the candidate component by exploring the European Candidates Study 2009.

When to talk about Europe? Selective Europeanization of the 2014 EP elections

Zoltan Fazekas, University of Southern Denmark

Sebastian Popa, University of Mannheim

Hermann Schmitt, University of Mannheim

Pablo Barbera, New York University

Yannis Theocharis, University of Mannheim

Abstract

The study of European Parliament (EP) elections has been dominated by the second-order election theory, according to which EP elections and campaigns are overshadowed by national issues and have very little to do with European issues. Nevertheless, recent studies show a shift in these preoccupations: since 2004 the pro vs. anti EU debate started to emerge as a secondary axis of competition in the EP elections, and the current economic and political crisis in Europe and the recent institutional changes (i.e. the introduction of the Spitzenkandidaten) were expected to further emphasize the salience of European issues (i.e. the debate over the extent and scope of the EU) in the context of the recent EP elections. The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which politicians resort to European references in the 2014 EP elections campaign. We do this by looking at the social media communication of the Spanish, Greek, German, and UK candidates for these elections. We use a supervised learning approach on the social media EP campaign communication content by all the candidates in the four countries and show that while the role of Europe in the recent EP elections campaign was on the rise, politicians selectively focus on Europe depending on the goals of their messages. European themes are more prominent in mobilizing messages (i.e. where the goal of the communication is to persuade the audience to turn out), but issue and policy oriented messages (i.e. message that aim at convincing the audience to choose the candidate/party) predominantly feature home-country topics.

Friday, Nov. 6, 15:30 - 17:00 hrs

Panel 2: Does Europe Matter More?

Three dimensions of vote choice: To what extent does the European level replicate the national vote dimensions?

Steven van Hauwaert, Université Catholique de Louvain

Pierre Baudewyns, Université Catholique de Louvain

Abstract

Politics can be described as a set of infinite issue continuums often reduced to a limited number of relevant dimensions (mat-postmat/GAL-TAN and Left-right). The growing salience of European issues is providing new challenges to this two-dimensional understanding of political competition. At the same time, politics is becoming more and more decentralized and spread out over different levels. Even though the European level is often portrayed as less salient, we still wonder whether the same issues are at play as on the national level. This research paper proposes to contribute to the debate of vote choice dimensionality by specifying how dimensions and to what extent different – attitudinal – dimensions contribute to vote choice. First, we seek to map and illustrate the exact dimensionality of vote choice (or attitudinal factors) and if (or how) this evolves through time. In short, we analyse whether European factors should effectively be seen as a separate dimension and to what extent European variables are collinear with socio-economic and socio-cultural variables. Second, we seek to model the exact relationships between different attitudinal dimensions, as well as their interaction with vote choice. Third, we compare this dimensionality on the European level with previous findings from national level dimensionality. The paper will use EES data.

“Ever-changing” impact of Europe on EP voting behavior: An analysis in Southern Europe

Ilke Toygür, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Abstract

Do ideas related to European integration influence vote choice in European Parliament elections in times of crisis? Economic crisis, bailout packages, and austerity measures have been the central agenda in Southern European countries for the last few years, and the strong, subsequent decline of trust in European and national institutions has been alarming. Citizens’ dealignment and realignment proved itself important in various demonstrations around Europe. This situation led citizens to cast votes for new political parties, and decreasing the vote share of older mainstream ones. Political scientists have a vivid interest in this topic, and there is an ever-growing literature available on the effects of economic crisis on elections. Voters, as well as political parties, have received a great deal of academic attention. Southern European countries have faced similar implementations of the crisis and congruent regulations from the European Union. However, there are different implications for their party system change and voting behaviour in these countries. Based on the European Election Studies (EES) data for the last three European Parliament elections of 2004, 2009 and 2014 this paper, however, does not find any major traces of EU issue voting.

The “nationalization of EU politics” vs the “Europeanization of national politics” in EU elections: A comparative analysis of Germany, Italy and Spain

Mariano Torcal, University Pompeu Fabra

Toni Rodón, University Pompeu Fabra

Abstract

This article shows that the current European crisis (economical, institutional and political) had distinctive effects on the spatial logic employed by voters on 2014 European Elections. While the pivotal role played by some countries (like Germany) has consolidated their “nationalization of EU politics”, in non-pivotal states (i.e. Southern Europe) citizens are more concerned about the consequences of European integration, but without bringing European issues back to the electoral arena. The practical implication is that in non-pivotal countries citizens do not base their voting decision on a spatial logic. Instead, they punish or reward the national government’s role in the management of the European crisis. On the contrary, in pivotal States decisions are congruent with a spatial directional logic, as citizens are aware that, with their vote, they can move the current European status quo to their more preferred policy position. Hypotheses are put to the test by employing three rich web survey panel studies conducted in Germany, Italy and Spain before and after the European Elections. Findings show that the role played by the country’s institutions on the EU crisis has affected the way citizens made their voting decisions: while in Italy and Spain they assessed cabinet’s job in dealing with the EU crisis, in Germany EU issues were fully integrated in the national arena and therefore the directional spatial logic was more relevant. These findings have important implications for our understanding of EU voting patterns and the heterogeneous effects created by the recent economic crisis.

Euroscepticism and Turnout in the 2014 EP elections

Constantin Schäfer, University of Mannheim

Marc Debus, University of Mannheim

Abstract

How do the positions of voters on European integration and EU policy alienation relate to electoral participation? We build on the recent literature on participation in elections in general and in the European level in particular and argue that positive positions on further steps in European integration boost the chances that a citizen participates in the European parliamentary elections. In addition, by building on a simple spatial model we argue that the European policy offers parties make before the election have an impact on participation in the election to the European Parliament: the more alienated a citizen is from the European policy positions parties offer, the more likely she abstains from going to the polls. Our analysis, which is based on the 2014 European Election Studies dataset, provides evidence for our argument, even after controlling for a battery of ‘standard’ factors that explain political participation.

Electoral Euroscepticism, turnout and the economic crisis: evidence from a 108-elections panel study across Europe.

Francesco Nicoli, Università di Trento

Abstract

The recent European elections have shown a sharp rise in parties and independent parliament members generally perceived as “Eurosceptic”. Against this background, this paper analyses the interconnections between distressed economies, the fall of confidence in traditional political parties, and the electoral success of hard-line Eurosceptic parties. On a panel of 108 elections between 2009 and December 2014, the random-effects model shows the relative impact of long and short-term political trust, economic performance indicators, and institutional variables in determining the rise of hard-line Eurosceptic parties. In contrast with previous studies, which tended to de-emphasize the impact of economic performance in determining the success of Eurosceptic forces, the results of this paper detect both a direct and a mediated impact of the economic crisis on the electoral success of hard-line Eurosceptic parties.

Friday, Nov. 6, 17:00-18:30 hrs

Panel 3: Parties and Party Competition

Patterns of party competition - analytical approach, EU-wide comparison and database

Cees van der Eijk, University of Nottingham

Abstract

Conceptualisation and subsequent operationalization of the notion of party competition is generally poor in the extant literature, and fraught with epistemological and ontological problems. From a systematic review of existing approaches this paper argues that the concept has to be defined for discrete moments in time (and not for intervals, as is frequently done), and that it therefore requires a basis in counterfactual reasoning (as is the case in economic theory). The paper subsequently argues that the 'propensity to vote' items that have been included in the EES at every EP election since 1989 provide a suitable basis for operationalizing the concept defined in this way. It then defines a family of interrelated measures of party competition, at different levels of analysis (individual, party, set of parties, and party system). These measures are implemented on the basis of the EES survey data, in any case for 2014, and as far as possible, for earlier years. The resulting data are used in a description of parties and party systems, and subsequently in a comparative analysis of causes and consequences of party competition. The resulting measures of party competition will also be made available (at the level of parties, dyads of parties, and party systems) in a database linked to the paper, and will be made publicly available.

Contextual factors and electoral support for radical left parties in Western Europe

Luis Ramiro, University of Leicester

Raúl Gómez, University of Liverpool

Laura Morales, University of Leicester

Abstract

Since the 1960s the party systems of many West European countries have experienced recurrent waves of change, attributed to the weakening of the cleavages and of the traditional loyalties of voters. New competitors have entered the party system, and electoral volatility has increased. In this context, the fate of radical left parties (RLPs) has not been homogeneous across the board. Whereas some RLPs disappeared and others have experienced an acute decline, others have resisted well this more challenging environment, and still others have experienced growth in certain periods and entered government coalitions. What factors drive the electoral support for these parties? Some research highlights the importance of institutional variables as facilitators of party success or failure, stressing the importance of factors such as electoral rules and their proportionality. Others emphasize the importance of social variables, individual and contextual, in the determination of the electoral fortunes of political parties. The explanations that focus on social structure and political attitudes do not take into account the behaviour of parties themselves and that of their competitors in the explanation of their electoral fortunes. This disregard of party competition and party behaviour in the study of radical left voting is a major shortcoming that this paper addresses. Using multilevel models, the paper shows that socio-structural and institutional explanations of the electoral fortunes of west European radical left parties are insufficient, and hence advocates for a systematic consideration of the strategies and behaviours of radical left parties and their main competitors as the main driving forces that shape their electoral fortunes. The paper makes extensive use of individual data from the European Election Studies surveys undertaken in 13 west European countries in the period between 1989 and 2014.

What type of Europe? The salience of Europe in EP elections reconsidered

Daniela Braun, University of Munich

Swen Hutter, European University Institute

Alena Kerscher, University of Munich

Abstract

How much and why do political parties emphasize Europe in election campaigns? The literature on EU politics has increasingly focused on both aspects of parties' issue competition, positions, and salience. However, recent studies on the salience aspect tend to ignore that Europe is a compound political issue. This article contributes to the debate by highlighting the crucial difference between constitutive and policy-related European issues. Using the new integrated data set from the Euromanifestos Project for 15 EU member states and the period 1979 to 2009, we first show that Europe is highly salient in elections to the European Parliament (EP). Second, EU issue salience depends on the polarization of party competition, mobilization potentials in the public, and on the positioning of individual parties toward Europe. Moreover, our findings show that very different explanations are at play once we bring in the constitutive -vs.-policy distinction. This has important implications for our understanding of party competition in EP elections.

Fleeing the Centre: The Rise of Challenger Parties in the Aftermath of the Euro Crisis

Sara B Hobolt, London School of Economics

James Tilley, University of Oxford

Abstract

The Eurozone crisis has altered the party political landscape across Europe. The most visible effect is the rise of challenger parties. The crisis not only caused economic hardship, but also placed considerable fiscal constraints upon many national governments. Many voters have reacted to this by turning their back on the traditional parties and opting instead for new, or reinvigorated, challenger parties that reject the mainstream consensus of austerity and European integration. This article argues that both sanctioning and selection mechanisms can help to explain this flight from the centre to challenger parties. First, voters who were economically adversely affected by the crisis punish mainstream parties by voting for challenger parties. Second, the choice of specific challenger party is shaped by preferences on three issues that directly flow from the Euro crisis: EU integration, austerity and immigration. Analysing both aggregate-level and individual-level survey data from all 17 Western EU member states, this article finds strong support for both propositions and shows how the crisis has reshaped the nature of party competition in Europe.

Saturday, Nov. 7, 9:30-11:00 hrs

Panel 4: Institutional Challenges

The Council's Congruence with the European Citizens

Nathalie Giger, University of Geneva

Zoe Lefkofridi, University of Salzburg

Abstract

The Council brings together the *sovereigns* and decides on the most important policy issues, which determine the political direction of the entire Union. In this paper, we inquire about two thus far neglected, yet important issues: the evolution of the Council's political centre of gravity and its ideological congruence with EU citizens. Firstly, we examine whether the enlargement, the economic crisis but also developments in MS' party systems (e.g. rise of the radical right) have affected the political centre of gravity in the Council. Secondly, we inquire about the Council's congruence with the EU citizenry as a whole and the public opinion in each of the MS. Our preliminary findings show that while congruence is rather high overall, there are significant differences across member states and income groups.

Addressing Europe's democratic deficit: An experimental evaluation of the pan-European district proposal

Damien Bol (King's College London), André Blais (University of Montreal), Sona N. Golder (Penn State University), Philipp Harfst (University of Greifswald), Jean-François Laslier (Paris School of Economics), Laura Stephenson (University of Western Ontario), and Karine van der Straeten (Toulouse School of Economics)

Abstract

Many academics and commentators argue that Europe is suffering a democratic deficit. Citizens do not feel represented in the European legislative process and are more and more sceptical about the benefits for their country of being part of the European Union. An interesting proposal that has been put forward to address this problem is to elect some members of the European parliament in a pan-European district. In this paper, we evaluate this proposal relying on the EuroVotePlus online experiment where we invited thousands of Europeans to vote on a pan-European ballot we created, and where we randomized the nationality of the candidates appearing on the party lists. We find that the voting behaviour of European citizens would be strongly affected by the presence or absence of candidates from their own country on the lists. In case a pan-European district is created, our findings thus provide an argument in favour of using a closed-list ballot, and fixing a maximum number of candidates from each country on the lists.

Decentralization, responsibility attribution and vote: Disentangling the avenues for accountability in multilevel contexts

Sandra León, University of York

Ignacio Jurado, University of York

Amuitz Garmendia Madariaga, Binghamton University

Abstract

Recent studies have emphasized how decentralization weakens accountability as a result of blurred responsibility attribution; voters do not know whom to hold accountable for policy outcomes, and thus, end up administering political evaluations in a random way. Alternatively, we follow conventional wisdom on the effect of partisanship on individuals' attitudes to argue that citizens tend to overcome confusion about who does what in their search for decision making efficiency by turning to simple cues, such as, party identification. Then, in multilevel contexts, partisan voters could and further incentives to sanction government performance selectively. The latter statement though lacks yet a comparative test and confirmation. Using 2004, 2009 and 2014 EES Voter Study individual level responsibility attribution for most important problems (MIPs), our results suggest that this debate is far from settled. This paper, then, contributes to the growing literature on the never unproblematic issue of accountability in institutionally complex scenarios.

Economic voting in European Parliament elections in the ‘bail-out’ countries

Martin Okolikj, University College Dublin,

Stephen Quinlan, GESIS, Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Mannheim

Abstract

Using data from the 2009 and 2014 European Election Studies (EES), we explore the impact of the economy on vote choice in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections. The paper demonstrates that the economy did influence vote choice in both contests. However, the impact of the economy was heterogeneous across the two elections. While voters in 2009 were motivated directly by economic assessments, in 2014 economic evaluations were conditioned by how much voters felt the national government were responsible for the economy, what we refer to as *clarity of economic responsibility (CER)*. Our analysis suggests that voters in 2009 were simply reacting to the economic tsunami that was the GFC but that by 2014, their economic judgments were influenced by responsibility attribution, suggesting a shift in the calculus underlying economic voting in the two elections. Our paper also reveals that economic voting was heterogeneous across countries in 2014, with the impact of attribution of responsibility and economic performance more potent in bailout countries compared to non-bailout countries. These findings have implications for our understanding of how the economy influences voters in European elections and also demonstrates that while the economy mattered in both the 2009 and 2014 EP elections, it shaped vote choice differently in both elections.

Saturday, Nov. 7, 11:30-13:00 hrs

Panel 5: Political Behaviour and EP Elections

The backbone of democracy: electoral availability and European elections

Federico Vegetti, Central European University

Cristiano Vezzoni, Università degli Studi di Trento

Paolo Segatti, Università degli Studi di Milano

Abstract

Electoral availability, namely voters' openness to switch their party allegiances, is a crucial condition for democratic performance. An electorate that is willing to change their party support across different elections represents what is at stake for party competition, providing incentives for parties to be responsive to public opinion's shifts. While many studies focus on the behavioural implications of availability, like vote switching or abstention, we propose a way to conceptualize and directly measure citizens' individual availability as a function of the distribution of their party preferences. We apply our concept to the study of *cyclicity* of European Parliament elections. European elections are regarded as “second order”, as voters' primary aim is to voice their dissatisfaction with their national parties or governments, rather than voting on genuinely European issues. This is reflected by a weakening of party loyalties and participation when EP elections are held distant in time from national elections. We ask whether this cyclicity, as a characteristic of the electoral context, is reflected in the structure of citizens' preferences. Based on past research on second-order cyclicity, we expect citizens' preferences to be weaker and less certain around the midterm – implying lower propensity to participate but higher propensity to switch – than at the beginning and the end of the cycle. We compare the 2014 elections with the previous ones, to assess whether the economic crisis and the related rise of European concerns have had an impact on cyclicity and therefore on the second-order nature of European elections. Moreover, we investigate some substantive aspects of cyclicity, such as the degree of party polarization on left-right issues and EU integration. We discuss the broader implications of our approach to the study of the impact of contextual factors on electoral competitiveness.

Towards convergence in times of crisis? Assessing opinion congruence between voters and parties in eight EU elections

Sofia Vasilopoulou, University of York

Katjana Gattermann, University of Amsterdam

Abstract

One criterion of the party representation model is that party positions and voter preferences are congruent. The aim of this paper is to identify and explain variation in ideological congruence between parties and their voters on the left-right and the pro-anti-EU dimensions in four EU elections over time. We expect that voters and parties become closer over time against the backdrop of further integration, combined with increased salience and contestation of EU politics up until the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis. We argue that time also matters for effects pertaining to domestic political contexts and the type of political parties themselves. To test our argument, we assess opinion congruence as a ‘many-to-one’ relationship. Our data comprise the EES studies from 1999 to 2014. Our results suggest that levels of voter-party congruence increase only on the EU dimension, while levels of congruence on the left-right dimension remain high and stable throughout the years. Moreover, we show that congruence between voters and parties on the EU dimension is specifically affected by party political contestation, political information, and Eurozone membership; with varying effects over time. Moreover, we find significant differences between Eurosceptic and pro-European parties as well as centrist and radical parties over time.

Policy Positions in the Eyes of the Beholder: Voters' Understanding of Parties' Positions on the left/right and on European Integration

Christopher Williams, MZES, University of Mannheim

Christine Arnold, Maastricht University

Abstract

How well can voters place the positions of parties in salient policy domains and what are the determinants of correct placement? A key prerequisite of the democratic linkage between voters and parties is that voters make the selection on the ballot for a party based on their understanding of where the party stands on key policies, while political parties take policy positions that are sufficiently close to the policy preferences of voters. One important assumption in this linkage is that voters are able to discern where different political parties stand in regard to salient policy issues. The aim of this paper is to examine the party and party-system level factors that affect the voter's ability to accurately place parties on a spectrum concerning left/right socioeconomic issues and European integration issues. While recent research has shown a connection between public opinion concerning European integration and party position on the issue, the question still remains, whether the public is able to properly place the policy position of political parties in this policy domain. Using data from the 2009 European Election Studies Voter Study and Euromanifestos Project, we measure the distance between individuals' assessments of party position on the question of left/right placement and on European integration, and the parties' actual positions on these issues. We employ linear mixed model regression in addressing this question. Our findings indicate that higher levels of party system fractionalization, and greater party size are associated with greater public accuracy when placing parties on an EU integration spectrum. Additionally, the public is less accurate in placing parties on a left/right spectrum when parties are larger, or party-systems are more polarized or more fractionalized.

Contextual Political Information and Timing of Vote Decision

Lilach Nir, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Abstract

The importance of vote decision timing to democratic processes is well recognized in the literature. The fewer the voters who decide early, the more late-deciding voters are susceptible to campaign effects and manipulation, the more unpredictable are election forecasts and outcomes, and the higher financial barriers to effective campaigns. Compared to past decades, however, fewer people know well in advance how they would vote on Election Day. Timing of vote decision has become increasingly long: National elections in the United States, Germany and Britain attest to a larger proportion of voters who decide late. Researchers previously established the contribution of individual level predictors (political interest; partisanship; news consumption) to late decision. Despite these contributions, however, we know very little about the predictors of late-decision in comparative perspective. This paper develops a rationale and tests whether two important political system cues – (a) party polarization and (b) press-party parallelism – affect decision-time in predictable ways. Analyses of the European Election Study 2014 (N=28 countries) mostly support the hypothesized relationship. Polarization and parallelism influence aggregate decisiveness. And attenuate the effect of individual-level predictors on decision-time. In conclusion, I discuss the implications of these findings.

Saturday, Nov. 7, 14:00-15:30 hrs

Panel 6: Voting Behaviour in EP Elections

Habituating to the New Normal in a Post-earthquake Party System: the 2014 European Election in Greece

Eftichia Teperoglou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Emmanouil Tsatsanis, University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-IUL)

Abstract

The article examines the 2014 European election in Greece. Conducted two years after the double-earthquake elections of 2012 and with the country still mired in a protracted economic crisis, our findings largely support the conclusion that this post-‘earthquake’ election can be classified as one of the most classic second-order elections in the history of Greek elections. Both ideology and attribution of blame for the ongoing economic crisis to the PASOK and ND governments to a large extent explain the victory of SYRIZA. At the same time, however, more fundamental positions towards European unification appear to have become more relevant to party choice for the first time since the early 1980s.

Slovakia and the turnout conundrum

Oľga Gyárfášová, Comenius University, Bratislava

Karen Henderson, Comenius University, Bratislava

Abstract

The Slovak Republic has produced the lowest turnout in every European Parliament election since it joined the European Union, and understanding the reason for this could have major implications for understanding public engagement with EU affairs as a whole. It has been variously suggested that turnout is reduced by hostility to the EU, satisfaction with the EU or lack of information. These propositions are examined by looking at Slovak public opinion as measured in the EES and party policies as analysed by the EUvox survey, and using as a control case the neighbouring Czech Republic, a state with a common history and which produced the second lowest turnout in 2014.

Marked differences in, for example, the percentage of Slovak and Czech citizens who think EU membership is a ‘good thing’ suggest that positive or negative views towards the EU as a whole cannot be key factors in motivating or discouraging voting. Failure to provide information – a factor frequently discussed in Slovakia, and which presents a greater possibility of finding a solution than other explanation – also appears inapplicable, since there is evidence that the EP election campaign was ‘Europeanised’ to a significant extent, and that domestic political issues did not dominate as in classic ‘second order’ elections. Two other factors do emerge, however, which may explain low turnout in post-communist member states as a whole. Firstly, very low levels of political trust in general seem to lower turnout, although EU institutions are frequently regarded as more trustworthy than domestic ones. Secondly, the EU is regarded primarily as providing solutions for domestic economic problems while other aspects of European integration appear less salient. Such an instrumental attitude to EU membership may ultimately prove more problematic than low electoral participation.

Authoritarianism and Support for the Radical Right

Erik R. Tillman, DePaul University

Abstract

Recent research has identified the importance of dispositional factors on public opinion and party support in various political systems. This study examines the effect of authoritarianism—a disposition characterized by a high need for order, an adherence to traditional norms and social roles, and strong in-group attachment—on support for radical right parties in West European political systems. The programmatic emphasis of the radical right on the maintenance of national cohesion against immigration and multiculturalism, on the preservation of sovereignty against European integration, and (in some cases) on the maintenance of traditional ‘national’ values are likely to appeal to those scoring high in authoritarianism. However, prior research has found mixed evidence of a relationship between authoritarianism and radical right support using data from earlier eras. This study examines data from recent cross-national election studies to identify whether, and under what contextual circumstances, authoritarianism predicts support for radical right parties.

The role of partisanship in governing turnout at EP elections

Mark N. Franklin, EUI

Abstract

Many years ago, Schmitt and Mannheimer (1991) observed that those who voted at EP elections were habitual voters – voters who would vote at any election. Recent research suggests that the motivations concerned amount primarily to partisan loyalty. In this paper I consider to what extent this insight provides a basis for explaining the especially low turnout that we find at EP elections among young voters and in post-communist countries. Young voters have not yet had the opportunity to develop strong ties to parties and post-communist countries are countries where partisanship is particularly lacking simply because unstable party systems and high rates of individual-level turnover in party support have left these countries with exceedingly low levels of partisanship. One might say that in new democracies all voters are new voters, making the especially low turnout in post-communist EU member states explicable on the same grounds as the especially low turnout among young voters at EP elections. The paper employs data from 2014 European Parliament election study to explore this topic.