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Voting for extreme right parties in Israel: Evidence from the 2009 elections

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, extreme right parties have received considerable electoral support in Europe. Accordingly, many scholars have examined the factors attracting voters in many Western democracies to extreme right parties. In this study, we sought to determine what factors are responsible for the support of extreme right parties in Israel. Using Israel National Election Studies micro-data for the 2009 elections, we found evidence that political dissatisfaction and security issues significantly contribute to support for extreme right parties. In contrast to other countries where economic issues are more salient, our results suggest that economic views do not significantly explain one's support for extreme right parties.

1. Introduction

Extreme right parties are no longer a marginal phenomenon in many democratic regimes with considerable electoral support in Europe. For instance, in 2012, in the first round of the French political elections Marine Le Pen received 18 percent of the French votes (Baume, 2012). As a result of this growing phenomenon, scholars have examined the factors attracting voters to extreme right parties (Knigge, 1998; Lubbers et al., 2002; Ignazi, 2003; Norris, 2005).

In this study, we identify the factors responsible for the support of extreme right parties in Israel. Based on the current literature, we propose three explanations. First, we posit that as one's level of dissatisfaction with the democratic political institutions and procedures increases, one become more likely to support extreme right parties. Second, we propose that Israeli citizens are more likely to support extreme right parties if their perceived

economic conditions worsen. Finally, we hypothesize that one is more likely to support extreme right parties if one believes that peace with Palestinians and security are unlikely.

Utilizing the most recent Israel National Election Studies micro-data for the 2009 elections, we applied a probit regression model to evaluate our hypotheses. Our results present evidence that political dissatisfaction and security issues significantly contribute to support of extreme right parties. However, our results suggest that economic views do not explain one's support for extreme right parties.

2. Background

2.1. Extreme right parties

Extreme right parties are defined in various ways. While some scholars have used a more 'general' definition, others have identified more 'particular' streams. In terms of a general definition, the International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences explains that when political scientists use the term, they mean to designate parties that

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are characterized by attributes such as: (1) selective in-clusion; (2) selective exclusion; (3) racism; (4) and anti-pluralist political perspectives (Husbands, 2001). Simi-larly, the Manifesto Project maps out political parties on a left–right continuum using a Rile score that combines a wide range of variables.[1]

Using a more particular definition, Ignazi (2003) iden-tifies a 'new' type of extreme right. According to Ignazi (2003), the vote for the 'new' West European extreme right parties can be explained by several clusters of atti-tudinal positions: anti-immigrant attitudes, favorable in-group attitudes, authoritarian attitudes, and political dissatisfaction. In the Israeli context, we found this defini-tion more helpful (and easier to operationalize) than the more 'general' explanations.

2.2. Extreme right parties in Israel

Traditionally, the definition of Israel's extreme right refers primarily to issues of land and security and the future of the territories occupied in the 1967 Six Day War (Sprinzak, 1991). For example, Norris (2005) identifies *Ichud Leumi* (The National Union) and *Mafdal* (National Religious Party) as extreme right parties due to their sup-port for annexing the occupied territories. However, Pedahzur (2001) argues that the extreme right in Israel should not be defined primarily upon "territorial maxi-malist" issues, but upon definitions found in many Euro-pean political systems as Ignazi (2003) claimed. Thus, Pedahzur (2001) defines two types of extreme right parties in Israel: 'old' and 'new'. The 'old' extreme right is based on hawkish positions on territorial issues. In contrast, Pedahzur (2001) defines the 'new' extreme right as parties that espouse views motivated by nationalism, racism, anti-democracy, and xenophobia.[2] On this basis, Pedahzur defines *Shas* (Sephardi Keepers of the Torah) and *Yisrael Beitenu* (Israel is our Home) as extreme right parties since these parties espouse nondemocratic values.[3] We utilize Pedahzur's definition in this paper and examine how this definition is applicable to reality in the contemporary State of Israel.

In Fig. 1, we demonstrate how extreme right parties have fared over the last 20 years in Israel. We define the 'new' extreme right as *Yisrael Beitenu* or *Shas*, and 'old' as
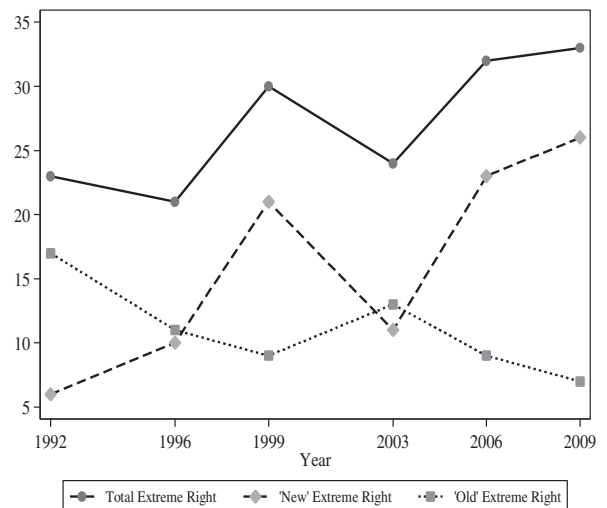
Fig. 1. Extreme right seats in Israel, 1992–2009. *Notes*: Total extreme right seats are the sum of the "new" and "old" extreme right. "New" extreme right refers electoral seats for *Yisrael Beiteinu* or *Shas*, while "Old" refers to seats for *Ichud Leumi*, *Mafdal*, *Moledet*, and *Tzomet*. (See also Pedahzur, 2001). Note that the seats for 2003, when *Ichud Leumi* and *Yisrael Beiteinu* ran together, are counted as seats for the "old" extreme right. *Source*: Knesset web site: http://knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res.htm.

seats for *Ichud Leumi*, *Mafdal*, *Moledet* (Homeland), and *Tzomet* (Crossroads).[4] The figure demonstrates that while the 'old' extreme right has declined in power over the last 20 years, the 'new' extreme right has grown and flourished as Ignazi (2003) demonstrated for Western European countries. According to the figure, the 'new' extreme right has grown from 6 electoral seats in the 1992 elections to 26 seats in the 2009 elections, while the 'old' extreme right has declined from 17 seats in the 1992 elections to 7 seats in the 2009 elections. In total, the figure indicates that extreme right parties enjoyed considerable success in Is-rael's most recent elections and that their combined elec-toral strength accounts for 33 seats—more than 25 percent of the total 120 parliamentary seats.

In our model, we consider several different definitions for extreme right parties: (a) the 'old' definition defined by its hawkish views on the occupied territories and the Arab–Israeli conflict; (b) a 'newer' definition similar to those of the European extreme right; (c) an 'expansive' definition that includes both the 'old' and 'new' extreme right parties.

2.3. Explanations for supporting extreme right parties

There are many explanations for why extreme right parties have become so popular in many Western coun-tries. Several studies on Europe see the rise in extreme right voting as reflecting anti-immigration attitudes (Lubbers et al., 2002). Other studies emphasize economic factors (Knigge, 1998). Studies focusing on the USA emphasize the role of religious fundamentalism (Woodberry and Smith, 1998). Consequently, like other papers, we consider economic, political, and cultural ex-planations for extreme right voting (Knigge, 1998; Lubbers et al., 2002).

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[1] The Manifesto project codebook defines a Rile score as "a measure of party positions on the left–right axis. It ranges from −100 (extreme left) to 100 (extreme right) and is calculated by subtracting the added per-centages of left scores from the added percentages of right scores." The measure is built out of seven marker variables (consisting of 28 items) that are factor analyzed together with all the remaining items, known as the 'standard' left to right scale (Volkens et al. 2012). See: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/uploads/attach/file/4491/codebook_MPDataset_MPDS2012b.pdf.

[2] For definitions of the Israeli political parties mentioned in the paper, we have attached a short separate glossary at the end of the paper.

[3] For example, *Shas* conducted an incitement campaign against the Israeli High Court of Justice after one of its party's senior parliament members was accused and found guilty of bribery (Pedahzur, 2001).

[4] Definitions based upon Pedahzur (2001). It is interesting to note that all of the Israeli extreme right parties received high right wing Rile scores in the 1999 elections – a measurement for the party platform – in the Manifesto Project. See: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/elections/515.