The containment strategy of extreme-right wing parties: a failure?

From theory to measurement: some disappointment

Patrick Italiano ESS NC BE(F)
Jérôme Pieters
Sébastien Fontaine
Petar Kovincic
Marc Jacquemain Pr. Dr.
The background

- In Belgium:
  - Flanders has high level of extreme right vote
  - Wallonia very low extreme right
- In France:
  - FN scores high since decades
  - Last presidential campaign showed UMP moving rightwards
- Other countries (Italy, Austria, Netherlands) allowed some government participation
- Xenophobe opinions spreading on social networks, in the media and among mainstream politicians.
- Public debate issues such as « Polish plumber », ROMs, muslim scarf
Would you say that immigration has generally had a positive or negative impact on [country]?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Very/ Fairly Positive</th>
<th>Neither Positive or Negative</th>
<th>Very/ Fairly Negative</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online panel n=17,601
The general hypothesis

In Flanders and France a « containment strategy » has been adopted: no governmental participation for extreme-right parties.

At the other end, extreme right parties went into government in The Netherlands, Italy, Austria.

Our hypothesis:
- It does not prevent diffusion of xenophobe attitudes within the general population once an xenophobe political offer is present.

If true, we should observe:
- 1. That attitudes toward migrants depend on the presence of an explicit xenophobe political party.
- 2. That the evolution of those attitudes does not depend on the presence of a containment strategy.

If hypothesis is confirmed, it should be an interesting heuristic background for more detailed national studies.
• Unfortunately, ESS doesn’t provide longitudinal data for Italy and Austria

• First possible strategy:
  ◦ Hypothesis: the difference in measured attitude toward immigrants between extreme-right voters and others should decline where containment strategy is applied

• Obstacles:
  ◦ 1. Too few extreme right voters in the sample
  ◦ 2. Strong underestimation of them even in countries where extreme right parties are quite strong

• Second strategy:
  ◦ Compare over time the evolution of attitude toward immigrants among a selection of countries
Our measurement from ESS data:

- An index (opinion scale) that sums up answers to three items:
  - Immigration bad or good for country’s **economy**
  - Country’s **cultural life** undermined or enriched by immigrants
  - Immigrants make country worse or better **place to live**

- An index (attitude scale) that sums up answers to three items:
  - Allow many/few immigrants of **same ethnic** group as majority
  - Allow many/few immigrants of **different ethnic group** from majority
  - Allow many/few immigrants **from poorer countries** outside Europe

- Both indexes range **from -2** (neg. toward immigrants) **to +2** (pos. toward immigrants)
A focus on Belgium (1)
A focus on Belgium (2)
• Perplexity:
  ◦ On both scales, the differences between regions are very small excepted for Brussels
  ◦ On the Opinion Scale, the Walloon region shows slightly more xenophobe feelings
  ◦ Evolution over time is very limited.

• Globally, the margin of variation looks very narrow and not clearly linked with the strength of extreme right-wing parties

• Belgian case seems to conclude against our hypothesis
A glance at some typical countries (1)
A glance at some typical countries (2)
Differences between countries are significant while remaining in a rather small range of variation.

Differences between countries do not go in the expected direction:

- Country with the biggest extreme-right party (Norway) is constantly less xenophobe than others.
- Xenophobe feelings in UK are constantly higher than in all other countries while there is no important extreme-right party in this country.
A glance at some typical countries (2)
Longitudinal evolution shows that

- If we except Germany with some « erratic » profile, the difference between rounds for each country are small
- Differences between the most « migrant friendly » and the less « migrant friendly » national opinions tend to slightly increase over time
- The mean for each country is around the neutral point of the scale

A glance at some typical countries (4)
A glance at some typical countries (5)
On the whole, we see that regardless of the presence of an extreme-right political offer, evolution is marginal over time:

- for all countries the difference between round 1 and round 5 is maximum 0.3 on a scale ranging from -2 to +2

Does it make sense to try and explain such small variations with sophisticated analyses?
Empiric results from ESS show that:
- Our first hypothesis does not match the data
- The data do not seem compatible with the rather widely spread vision of a xenophobe evolution across Europe.

Some explanatory hypotheses:
- The xenophobe trend is present but it is framed by the religious question (Islam) and not the migrant question
- The xenophobe trend is overestimated because of the dramatic impact of marginal electoral recomposition
- The xenophobe trend is emerging but has not yet been consistently measured.
The hypothesis of framing (1)
The hypothesis of framing (2)
The hypothesis of framing (3)
What can we see from the distribution for the various questions?

- For countries considered, the answers to «a better/worse place to live» correspond to an almost perfect centered **bell curve** which means that there is probably no «strong» opinion on that matter.
- For the same countries, the curve is slightly bimodal with a second peak around 7 when it is question of economy or culture.
- The shape of the curve for the three questions remains the same across time.
What can be concluded from the distribution for the various questions?

- Except for very few respondents, immigration would be a **consensual**, or **irrelevant** topic?
- The survey **fails to capture** the way the topic is actually grasped among the population?
What can be concluded about our research question?

◦ Are political analysts overinterpreting slight changes in voting behaviour?
  • « Myth of underlying trend? »
◦ Is attitude toward immigrants only marginally linked to the vote for extreme right?
  • *Is xenophobia only a secondary dimension of the extreme-right vote?*