



Roads to the radical right

Understanding different forms of electoral support for radical right-wing parties in France and the Netherlands

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to shed new light on the electoral support for radical right-wing parties (RRP). Whereas most existing investigations assume a form of causal homogeneity, the starting point of this research project is based on what I call electoral equifinality: the coexistence of multiple causal paths leading towards different forms of support for the same political party. In order to discern and understand different forms of RRP support, the study takes both the supply and the demand side into account. Regarding the supply side, I link cleavage theory and conflict sociology to the Laclauian notion of equivalence, arguing that the electoral appeal of RRP relies on their capacity to coherently unify a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands along the same main antagonism: national versus foreign. Following Weber's and Parkin's thoughts on social closure, I theorize that this nativist core conflict is invoked according to a specific tripartite structure, which, to my knowledge, has remained quite unnoticed in the existing literature. In accordance with this theory, a new dataset is developed ($n = 1,378$), based on the tweets of Le Pen and Wilders, to compare the political supply of their parties in terms of forms of closure, reference groups and issue categories. Pertaining to the demand side, a sequential mixed methods design is followed, focusing quantitatively on the structural heterogeneity within RRP constituencies along three dimensions within a Bourdieusian framework of social space: social characteristics (who); political preferences (why) and political interest (how). Subsequently, the second qualitative research step is based on life history interviews with 125 RRP voters in France and the Netherlands, leading to a typology of radical right support. Taken together, these findings contribute to a more fine-grained understanding of RRP support in Western Europe and open up theoretical and empirical perspectives for future research.



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Bio

Before starting his PhD project at the European University Institute in September 2014, Koen graduated in public administration at Utrecht University and political sociology at University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His work has been published in journals such as *Party Politics* and *West European Politics*. A public-friendly version of the Dutch part of his doctoral research was published last year in book form under the title *Wegen naar Wilders* (Roads to Wilders). Koen currently works as an assistant professor at the Utrecht University School of Governance.