

The Polish model of the populist party: a new perspective on the populist radical right

Master's thesis

Bc. Vojtěch Greger

Abstract

The rise of the populist radical right (PRR), a group of parties critical of the established norms of Western liberal democracy, in the 2010s, manifesting itself in events such as Brexit or the illiberal takeover of Hungary, has been a subject of considerable attention both from academics and the general public, and has been viewed with great concern. Academic studies of the PRR have often elevated the nativist elements in such parties' rhetoric while paying considerably less attention to the economic appeals thereof. However, in recent years, literature highlighting the importance of economic deprivation in fomenting support for Eurosceptic and PRR movements has begun to appear.

This thesis is predicated on this literature's argument that the electoral successes of the PRR are very often driven precisely by economic deprivation and the discontent stemming from it. To illustrate our argument, we examine the electoral support of the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party in the 2015 and 2019 elections using ordinary least squares regression (OLS) and geographically weighted regression (GWR). Our findings show that structural economic factors, mainly the share of workers employed in the primary sector, are key predictors of PiS performance, lending further evidence to the claims of previous studies. However, the share of Roman Catholics, a primarily cultural variable, was also found to be highly significant, wherefore we conclude that support for PiS is not based solely on either cultural or economic factors.