



CENAA

Centrum pre európske a severoatlantické vzťahy



JUST A ROMA ISSUE?

THE THEORY AND THE SUPPORT FOR THE (SLOVAK) EXTREME RIGHT

Petr Voda and Peter Spáč

The Rise of New Far Right

The last decades of the 20th century witnessed an emergence of a new wave of far right parties in Western Europe. These subjects differed from their predecessors as they no longer followed the historical idea of fascism. Instead, they reacted to existing challenges of the postindustrial society, largely to changes on the labor market and to the phenomena of immigration from foreign countries. One of the main dilemmas was to conceptualize the far right as a party family and its features. Mudde (2000; 2007) provided a thorough clarification of this phenomenon. According to him the far right is characterized by the presence of nationalism, xenophobia, belief in a strong state and welfare chauvinism, which represents an understanding of the country's social policy that should help its own nation and not the 'other' people.

After 1989 the far right parties started to emerge also in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The conditions in these countries, significantly different compared to Western Europe, had a solid impact here. The local far right could thus not react to post-materialism, multiculturalism or immigration as these topics were irrelevant or not present in the region and it had to found its own specific themes. Slovak far right was no exception. Starting from the early 90s it gained quite a stable, even if rather weak position in the country's party system. The last years however showed a possible change. The traditional main protagonist of the Slovak far right -- the Slovak National Party (SNS), successful for nearly two decades, declined. Though this might have been seen as a decline of the far right in Slovakia in general, the development proved otherwise. A new formation-- The People's Party – Our Slovakia (LSNS), espousing an extreme right position with a strong negative stance against the Roma minority began to gain support. Although it was not able to enter parliament yet, in the 2013 regional election its leader Marián Kotleba got elected as one of the eight regional governors while beating the candidate of the ruling party Smer – Social Democracy. This paper serves as an initial step to our further research. It presents various theoretical insights about the electoral support of the far right parties. Its primary

outcome is the finding that the support of such parties is not based purely on the presence or absence of immigrants or minorities, but there are more influencing factors at play. The discussion has implications also for the Slovak case.

The Element of Otherness – Immigrants and Minorities

The first impression of the support of the far right parties could be quite simple. The negativist focus of these parties, whether vis-a-vis immigrants in Western Europe or historical minorities in Central and Eastern Europe, could lead us to believe that this topic is the only that matters. However this equation, that where there are immigrants or minorities, there are also supporters of far right, will just not suffice. The real story is more complicated. As there is a lack of literature regarding the situation in Central Europe, we have to apply the insights from the Western European countries. As expected, the existing literature shows a noticeable interest in the relation between the electoral support of the far right in this region and the phenomenon of immigration. This link is not entirely surprising as immigrants and multiculturalism were the primary topics of the far right parties since their emergence in the region in the close of the 20th century. The framing of immigrants by far right parties has been consistently negative and used in various ways. This social group was marked as the threat to the national identity, the main source of criminality and also as a subject which abuses the welfare system (Rydgren 2008). These points helped the far right to mobilize its voter support.

One may expect a positive correlation between the share of immigrants in the country's society and the support of the far right. Papers working with such a presumption may be found but they provide rather mixed results (Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers 2002; Golder 2003; Norris 2005).

As Rydgren (2008) critically points out, these analyses use data from the national level and thus they cannot present outcomes applicable for lower territorial units. The point is that it may be exactly the sub-national level, which is of key importance, as this is where the daily contact between people takes place. Rydgren correctly states that it is a fallacy to conclude that all people living in a multiethnic country also live in an ethnically heterogeneous locality.

This logic is backed up by a vast amount of research. In their work, Halla, Wagner and Zweimüller (2012) analyzed the territorial support of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and found a strong effect of immigration. Their results show that each percentage point of immigrants' share in the local community increased the electoral support of FPÖ by 0.4 percentage points. The authors also discovered that the skill composition of immigrants was important too as only low-skilled and medium-medium skilled immigrants helped FPÖ while this was not true for high-skilled ones. Similarly interesting study was conducted by Rink, Phalet and Swyndedouw (2008) who concentrated on the Belgian Flemish Bloc (VB). As they found, the raising share of immigrants on the municipal level increased the probability of voters supporting VB. Also, their work showed the importance of focusing on regional or local units, as the results of their calculations would not indicate such effects if done on the national level.

Literature thus points to more underpinning factors than just immigration alone. Several works (cf. Rydgren and Ruth 2013; Bowyer 2008; Bjørklund 2007; Golder 2003) showed that the support of far right parties is affected by the presence of immigrants, but also by the level of unemployment and education. In their study of Sweden Democrats (SD) Strömblad, Malmberg (2014) found unemployment to be the key factor. According to their analysis the rising contact with

the visible minorities led to higher support of SD in times of high unemployment. On the contrary, in locations with low unemployment, the stronger contact with the minority had an opposite effect.

Conflict and Contact, Emotions and Rational Thought

The theoretical discussion found more ways how immigration, unemployment, education and support of the far right may be related. While these parties receive support from all parts of the society, their core voters usually come from lower social groups who find immigrants a threat. Higher willingness to support the far right was found among men, younger age groups, people with middle education and those being self-employed or having manual and routine non-manual jobs (Arzheimer and Carter 2006).

The importance of socioeconomic factors for developing a demand for the far right is recorded in the so-called loser hypothesis (Rydgren and Ruth 2011; Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie 2005). Its idea is that several groups in the society, challenged by their unstable position on the labor market, seek someone they could blame. In Western European countries this aversion may point to immigrants and asylum seekers and thus it may result in the support of a political party which promises a more restrictive immigration policy.

The character of the contact with the minority and emergence of a negative stance against it which may lead to support of the far right is described by two contradictory theories (Strömblad, Malmberg 2014). The first of them is interpreted as a possible result of competition for limited resources. It presumes that members of the majority or a domestic group (in-group) will view the minority with suspicion or even hate. Because of this, the arriving immigrants need help from the

state, which is perceived as a burden, mostly by the people with weaker position on the labor market who thus feel endangered. If such people notice immigrants in their surroundings, their feelings may result in willingness to support the far right. Another theory holds that ethnic conflict may arise from rational action (Sherif and Sherif 1953). It sees xenophobia as a result of conflict between immigrants and lower social classes of the majority society for unstable resources, such as low paying jobs or social benefits. The discrimination against immigrants, advancing of racial stereotypes and the support of the far right may be interpreted not as an emotional reaction as was mentioned above, but as an instrumental strategy.

Despite their high unemployment rate and the fact that the Roma in Slovakia are not immigrants, but a resident ethnic minority, this theory may be easily applied to them. In case of Slovakia a theory may apply that for voters with lower education, unstable job or the jobless, the Roma may be perceived as a rival on the 'social welfare market.' Their negative stance may be even exacerbated by unfounded information about various social benefits and reputed advantages. The role of scapegoat (e.g., Dollard et al. 1939) may be attributed to Roma in Slovakia for several reasons. In public surveys they typically represent the group towards which the majority keeps the most distance. This stance is fully independent of age, sex, education, nationality (Slovak or Hungarian¹) or political preferences. Different culture and lifestyle of the Roma minority are perceived negatively by the majority. In accordance with that, the prevailing opinion of the majority is that a significant share of the Roma does not want or

¹ Hungarians are the most sizable ethnic minority in Slovakia, accounting for approximately for one tenth of the country's population and live in the southern regions alongside the borders with Hungary.

is not willing to get used to the mainstream norms (Vašečka 2003).

Conclusion

The theoretical discussion showed that for the support of the far right parties the presence of the 'out group' is of vital importance. In Western Europe this role is held by immigrants, mainly those with lower qualification and weaker social status. In the specific conditions of Slovakia, this model is slightly modified as the rhetoric and activities of the extreme right LSNS replaced the immigrants for the Roma minority.

The discussion in this paper also serves as evidence that the story about the support of the far right parties may be more complicated and is not limited to minorities. Their presence or absence either on the national or the local level may be an important factor, but not the only one which influences the chances for the far right to obtain votes.

Based on the existing research, various other aspects need to be taken into account. Although the mentioned studies were conducted in a different context, with some degree of abstraction the conditions for the support of the far right in

Slovakia may be similar to those in Western Europe. Alongside the presence of the 'out group,' the role of unemployment resulting in uncertainty among the low income groups should also be taken into account. The same applies for the influence of education as a tool for enhancing tolerance and the ability to empathize with the living conditions of different people. Our initial results in the case of Kotleba's victory in the 2013 regional elections (not discussed in this paper) support this. According to our findings, in towns with a Roma community both positive and negative showing for the LSNS leader were registered. More detailed research thus needs to be carried out in search for these other underlying factors, which the literature discussed in this paper hints at.

Petr Voda is research assistant and Peter Spáč is assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

This Policy Paper is brought to you with support of Open Society Foundations

Reference

Mudde, Cas. 2000. *The ideology of the extreme right*. Manchester : Manchester University Press.

Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. New York : Cambridge University Press.

Rydgren, Jens. 2008. Immigration sceptics, xenophobes or racists? Radical right-wing voting in six West European countries. *European Journal of Political Research* 47: 737–765.

Lubbers, Marcel. Gijsberts Mérove. Scheepers, Peer. 2002. Extreme right-wing voting in West-

ern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research* 41: 345–378.

Golder, Matt. 2003. Explaining Variation In The Success Of Extreme Right Parties In Western Europe. *Comparative Political Studies* 36(4): 432-466.

Norris, Pippa. 2005. *Radical Right. Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Halla, Martin. Wagner, Alexander F. Zweimüller, Josef. 2012. *Does Immigration into Their Neighbourhoods Incline Voters Toward the Extreme*

-
- Right? The Case of the Freedom Party of Austria.* Working Paper No. 1204.
- Rink, Nathalie. Phalet, Karen. Swyndedouw, Marc. 2008. The Effects of Immigrant Population Size, Unemployment, and Individual Characteristics on Voting for the Vlaams Blok in Flanders 1991–1999. *European Sociological Review* 25(4): 411-424.
- Rydgren, Jens. Ruth, Patrick. 2013. Contextual explanations of radical right-wing support in Sweden: socioeconomic marginalization, group threat, and the halo effect. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(4): 711-728.
- Bowyer, Benjamin. 2008. Local context and extreme right support in England: The British National Party in the 2002 and 2003 local elections. *Electoral Studies* 27: 611-620.
- Bjørklund, Tor. 2007. Unemployment and the Radical Right in Scandinavia: Beneficial or Non-Beneficial for Electoral Support? *Comparative European Politics* 5: 245–263.
- Strömblad, Per. Malmberg, Bo. 2014. *Ethnic segregation and xenophobic party preference. Exploring the influence of the presence of visible minorities on local electoral support for the Sweden Democrats.* Working Paper (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-33080>).
- Arzheimer, Kai. Carter, Elisabeth. 2006. Political opportunity structures and right-wing extremist party success. *European Journal of Political Research* 45(3): 419-443.
- Van der Brug, Wouter. Fennema, Meindert. Tillie, Jean. 2005. Why Some Anti-Immigrant Parties Fail and Others Succeed. A Two-Step Model of Aggregate Electoral Support. *Comparative Political Studies* 38(5): 537-573.
- Sherif, Muzafer. Sherif, Carolyn W. 1953. *Groups in Harmony and Tension.* New York: Harper.
- Dollard, Miller. Doob, Leonard William. Miller, Neal Elgar. Mowrer, Orval Hobart. Sears, Robert Richardson. 1939. *Frustrations and Aggression.* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Vašečka, Michal (ed.). 2003. *Čačipen pal o Roma. Súhrnná správa o Rómoch na Slovensku.* Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky.

CENAA Policy Papers

No. 8/2014, Vol. 3

Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs

Tolstého 9, 811 06 Bratislava

www.cenaa.org/publikacie/policy-papers/