Changing Winds: An Analysis of Right-Wing Political Rhetoric

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Abstract

In the study of political rhetoric, research has not yet established connections between exogenous influencing factors and the tone taken towards the “outgroup” by extreme right political parties. This paper addresses the issue of the effect of a nation’s political environment on rightwing party rhetoric. National environment relates to various indicators, both economic and immigration-related, that are used as independent variables. Rhetoric against the “outgroup”, defined as any non-native group in a nation-state, is measured through a series of codings from election data from 12 European postwar democracies. I find statistically significant results for my hypothesis that a decline in economic conditions is related to an increase in anti-outgroup rhetoric. These results suggest that some rhetoric in rightwing parties’ platforms relies on increasingly negative portrayals of the outgroup, with possible implications that rightwing parties utilize this rhetoric to appeal to the median voter.

Introduction

During a meeting of the European Parliament in November 2007, chaos erupted between the members of an ultra-conservative right-wing caucus known as Identity, Tradition, and Sovereignty. Composed of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) across Europe, this caucus was a unique group composed of ultra-conservative members of the infamous French National Front and members of conservative parties from Italy, Romania and Belgium. The disruption culminated with Alessandra Mussolini, an MEP from Italy, declaring that all Romanians were criminals, an outburst that drove the Romanian members of the caucus to quit. The group was then disqualified from being called a caucus in the European parliament for having too few members, and it disbanded (UK Guardian, 11/15/2007).

Xenophobic political rhetoric played an important role in the collapse of the Identity, Tradition, and Sovereignty caucus. The group’s charter was reported to be largely anti-immigration, anti-EU constitution, and anti-Turkish EU membership (Mahoney, 2007). The charter, similar to a political platform, is the basis for establishing a group identity, detailing its beliefs and goals. The rest of the European Parliament criticized the group’s charter for being too nationalist, even though the group is a supra-national institution. As the caucus collapsed, the rest of the European Parliament broke out in applause.

While the collapse of the caucus might show a weakening of rightwing groups, the rest of European politics shows quite a different story. The most well-known rightwing party in Europe, France’s National Front, has been steadily gaining support in elections since 2000, winning 17 percent of the electorate in the 2010 national election. The National Front has recently been involved in controversies related to its members denying the Holocaust, an illegal act in France, and their censors in leftwing newspapers in towns that their party controls (Le Monde, 1996; Le Monde, 2006).
Elsewhere in Europe, other rightwing parties are gaining a firm grasp on the electorate. The Hungarian Jobbik party (“Jobbik” is a play on the Hungarian language, combining the words “right” and better” in the same word) gained 17 percent of the vote in the 2010 election and now has parliamentary representation. Jobbik has its own paramilitary force, the Hungarian National Guard, which is a civilian militia that has on several occasions attacked Jewish and migrant Hungarian citizens (LeBor, 2008). Austria’s Freedom Party and the Norwegian Progress Party gained 27 and 16 percent of votes, respectively, in their last national elections.

The European right is clearly gaining power, and it is important to understand how they gain public support. This paper theorizes that rightwing rhetoric aimed at immigrants, minorities and, more generally, outsiders, is rooted in indicators from exogenous factors, namely immigration levels and economic conditions. Much of the literature conducted on Western European politics looks at the other side of elections, focusing on results. While this research is undoubtedly important, it fails to delve into the roots of the causes of rightwing success; it fails to ask the question, Why do political parties say what they say in the first place? This paper attempts to fill that gap.

This research is important because rightwing politics in Europe has become an event dominated by propaganda, and has largely ceased to be about true politics. If, for example, the electorate in Europe were to know the extent to which their rightwing parties exploited their sentiments towards immigrants based on only marginally rising levels of immigration, they might re-think their support of these conservative parties and educate themselves on issues that are more politically relevant, such as economic and health issues. A political party that gains support in an election by espousing anti-outgroup propaganda distorts the political process, by fostering a climate of fear mongering rather than substantive debate. It is an example of the way in which, increasingly, European politics has abandoned platforms of improvement and innovation.

Theory

Many empirical studies have shown a relationship between rising immigration levels and success of rightwing parties in elections (Knigge 1998, Husfeldt 2006). Likewise, research establishes a positive relationship between dissatisfaction with the current administration and the success of rightwing parties (Knigge, 1998). Countless other exogenous factors could be researched in order to find exactly which variables most affect the success of parties, but the common denominator is that political party success is subject to outside influence.

Exogenous factors that have been empirically confirmed to affect the success of rightwing parties also affect the rhetoric the party uses. Several antecedent arguments are present in this theory. Most obvious is the argument that rightwing parties respond differently than leftwing parties to exogenous factors in the national environment such as immigration and economic conditions. This difference stems from logistical and logical reasons. Logistically, including leftwing (and centrist) parties in the analyses and correlations presented in this paper would more than double the number of observations. While this would improve the generalizability of the results of this paper, it would also be too large an undertaking for the terms of the project. The number of observations included in this paper is already high.
enough to provide a high t-statistic, which implies a low p-value, which in turn implies higher likelihood of statistical significance.

Based on the traditional distinctions between leftwing and rightwing, the argument that leftwing and rightwing parties will respond differently to changes in national environment is logical. The dataset used in this paper corresponds to Klingemann, Volkens et al. (2006) *Mapping Policy Preferences*, in which the right-left scale is used to determine a particular party’s ideological position. The formula used for this purpose is mathematical in nature and simple in principle. Using data from party platforms collected in the dataset, the authors combine variables they believe relevant to determining a party’s position and then rate an individual party’s response. The table that follows gives examples of factors that contribute to leftness and rightness.

### Table 1. Right-Left Composition of a Political Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors contributing to rightness</th>
<th>Factors contributing to leftness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military: Positive</td>
<td>Anti-Imperialism: Anti-Colonialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and Human Rights:</td>
<td>Military: Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Peace: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutionalism: Positive</td>
<td>Internationalism: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Authority: Positive</td>
<td>Economic Planning: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Enterprise: Positive</td>
<td>Controlled Economy: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives: Positive</td>
<td>Nationalization: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protectionism: Negative</td>
<td>Welfare State Expansion: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Orthodoxy: Positive</td>
<td>Education Expansion: Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare State Limitation: Positive</td>
<td>Democracy: Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Way of Life: Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Morality: Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Order: Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Harmony: Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The observations listed on the left of Table 1 refer to factors that are believed to be consistent with conservative politics, while the ones on the right are considered consistent with liberal politics. The percentage of a party’s platform devoted to those characteristics that are listed as variables in the right column are subtracted from those listed in the left column to give a scale of overall right-left position. The variables are coded in the dataset, all beginning with “per###”. For example, the code “per104” relates to a “positive reference to military...need to maintain or increase military expenditure, modernizing armed forces and improvement in military strength” (Klingemann et. al. 2003). The higher a number is, the more rightwing a party is considered to be.

This scale is used in testing the hypothesis that right and leftwing parties will respond differently to changes in the national environment. The scale is simply a composite of variables that relate to a party’s position. These observations include many of the dependent variables commonly thought to indicate left-right position, with codings contributing to leftness such as “positive references to labor groups” and “positive references to education expansion”. In this paper, rightwing rhetoric
is used to define a party as "rightwing". Therefore, the more a party references facets of conservatism in a positive way, the more rightwing they are considered to be.

This paper hypothesizes that rightwing parties will direct more rhetoric against the "outgroup" when the national environment is poor. I define the "outgroup" as a group specific to each culture that exists outside that culture, including but not limited to immigrants, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, and the handicapped. This definition is in keeping with much of the literature (Branscombe et. al., 1993, Mummundey et. al., 1983; Robbins et. al., 2005) and embodies all facets of groups that could be perceived as being outside of an orthodox national identity. A fitting example of an outgroup is the Roma in Europe. The Roma is largely targeted by extreme rightwing groups throughout Europe, with much of their concentration in Eastern and Central Europe. The Roma is composed of both immigrants and ethnic minorities, making them subject to extreme prejudice.

The dependent variable in my theory is "anti-outgroup" rhetoric. For the purposes of this paper, I define rhetoric as the speech that political parties use to convey their stances on key issues. Based on the data source for rhetoric, which observes rhetoric and codes it for key meanings and influences, political rhetoric is the language a party uses to get its message across.

A political platform is the incubator in which a party’s rhetoric and positions evolve, one in which the party’s positions can be viewed without exogenous variables. Platforms are the purest form of political rhetoric, in that known influences are built in to the platform; a party anticipates responses and criticism of its platform while still in the process of forming it. Thus, a party’s true sentiments on any given issue can be seen in its platform.

Moving to the linkages that can be drawn between changes in national environment and parties’ responses to those changes, we can assume that rightwing parties are more successful during periods of high immigration, and then analyze how parties voice their positions, underlining the importance of political rhetoric. The purpose of this paper is to understand how parties change their platforms and adjust their rhetoric to gain support.

The results of some empirical research on party success (Knigge, 1998) can be translated into a visual concept:

**Diagram 1:** High immigration > Success of rightwing parties

The intervening variable in the above diagram must be political rhetoric. Periods of high immigration lead to success of rightwing parties, but rightwing parties must first address immigration to gain attention. The equation can therefore be modified as follows:

**Diagram 1’:** High immigration > High anti-immigrant (outgroup) rhetoric > Greater Success of rightwing parties

Only after addressing political rhetoric, in this case through political platforms, can we fully understand the phenomenon behind rightwing success. This paper
addresses the intervening variable in the above equation of political rhetoric by anticipating that exogenous independent variables (e.g., rising immigration, declining economic conditions, etc.) lead to more anti-outgroup rhetoric on the part of rightwing parties.

The hypotheses in this paper are based on various assumptions. The most notable is the assumption that party rhetoric has meanings other than those presented directly in their platforms. An example I will use throughout this text is the reference a party makes to a “national way of life”, part of the dependent variable for this paper and an example of anti-outgroup rhetoric. The assumption here is that when a party makes a positive reference to a “national way of life”, they are concurrently making a negative, opposing reference to ways of life other than the “national” or standard way of life.

Evidence for this subliminal negative reference can be found in the philosophical arguments about rhetoric. One theory of rhetoric is that it represents a kind of coercion aimed at impacting the subject in a specific way. For the purposes of this paper, I look at rhetoric as a combination of a method of coercion and a reasonable expression of logic, combining several dominant theories of rhetoric (Krebs and Johnson, 2007; Habermas, 1994; Olson; 1990). Following this theory of rhetoric, it is not only logical but necessary to assume that political rhetoric, such as that presented in party platforms, has underlying meanings.

Several viable hypotheses can be drawn from connections between environmental factors and anti-outgroup rhetoric. Many of these hypotheses can be drawn from simple logic and prejudice regarding the common perception of extreme right parties. Luckily, data exist to confirm or disprove many of the most common perceptions regarding the behavior of these parties. The first hypothesis relates to the specific way in which rightwing parties organize their rhetoric.

**H1**: As the state of the economy declines, the amount of anti-outgroup rhetoric included in rightwing party platforms increases.

This hypothesis is based on the idea that parties, and the public they represent, tend to look for scapegoats to distract from endogenous problems, in this case measured by per capita income. In other words, the public tends to need someone to blame. I expect parties on opposite ends of the political spectrum to respond differently to this need; perhaps extreme leftwing parties will act similarly to extreme right parties, or perhaps they blame conditions on exogenous factors such as too much private enterprise or individual greed. This hypothesis speculates that rightwing parties will target the groups already somewhat disenfranchised by society.

The second hypothesis addressed in this paper relates to the effect of immigration levels on the perception of the outgroup. Immigration causes heated debates in European elections, and thus, I expect parties to address the issue of immigration in increasingly dramatic terms.

**H2**: As levels of immigration into a state rise, levels of anti-outgroup rhetoric in rightwing party platforms increase.

An assumption of this hypothesis is that people react to immigration in a universally consistent way. That is, an immigrant is an immigrant, whether the sending country is five hundred or five thousand miles away.

The logic employed in this hypothesis is based largely on observations in the United States, largely through immigrant reception in the southwest. Immigration
to the United States has risen fairly steadily since the beginning of the twentieth century. Beginning with heavy restrictions to U.S. immigration with the Immigration Reform and Control Act, there has been increasingly tight border control (Bean et. al., 1990), and conservative political parties have responded by including greater restrictions on border control in their party platforms (GOP platform, 2008). I expect this pattern to continue in European politics as well.

Data

“Rhetoric” refers to xenophobic language used by parties in platforms and “manifestos”, detailed in the Comparative Manifesto Project. Rhetoric is the dependent variable and is measured using a specific data set that measures, among many other factors, nationalistic rhetoric in party platforms. The manifesto codes almost 100 details found in party platforms, from “technology and infrastructure”, “labour groups”, “social harmony”, and “primary education”. The researchers coded the variables further to include positive and negative references to the codings.

The codings that are included in the analysis of this paper are based on subjective choice. They represent the topics in party platforms that are most relevant to anti-outgroup rhetoric. They are coded below, and these will act as a reference guide for the dataset included at the end of this paper.

per109 Internationalism: Negative
Favourable mentions of national independence and sovereignty as opposed to internationalism; otherwise as 107 [Internationalism: Positive], but negative.

per110 European Community/Union: Negative
Hostile mentions of the European Community/Union; opposition to specific European policies that are preferred by European authorities; opposition to the net-contribution of the manifesto country to the EU budget; otherwise as 108 [European Community/Union: Positive], but negative.

per601 National Way of Life: Positive
Appeals to patriotism and/or nationalism; suspension of some freedoms in order to protect the state against subversion; support for established national ideas.

These particular codings do not exert an obvious, extreme anti-outgroup sentiment; however, if political statements have connotations other than their stated meaning, it is reasonable to assume that the kinds of statements referenced above exhibit an anti-outgroup attitude.

The source for economic data on GDP per capita is the Penn World Table, compiled by the Center for Comparisons at the University of Pennsylvania. The per capita GDP data are presented in Geary dollars, also known as international standard dollars (Heston et. al., 2006). The GDP levels shown in the data represent the levels of GDP per capita based on a fixed base year, in this case 2006 American dollars. The data show the real purchasing power of GDP per capita in 2006 terms. The theory behind the Geary dollar is that it combines the generalizability of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and also internationalization into a single,
hypothesised unit (Geary, 1958). It is a useful measure for the purposes of this paper because (a) the base currency is American dollars, which are easy to understand for an American audience, and (b) the standardization makes it possible to regress the data without further standardization; every country's data is measured in the same unit.

Immigration data is standardized in a similarly useful way. Gathered from the U.S. Census bureau, the data is presented in migrants per thousand in population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). This method of standardization is also useful because it avoids the subjectivity of migrant levels. Simply using levels would include bias in favor of countries with bigger populations, falsely leading to stronger (or weaker) relationships in the data. The U.S. Census is a reliable data source as the data are gathered internally from a variety of sources such as Eurostat, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the OECD, all of which are widely recognized as reliable sources (International Data Base, 2010).

A look at the variables alone before regression reveals interesting trends and outliers. GDP per capita data generally follow expected trends with little variation. With few exceptions, per capita GDP rises every observed year, generally by small increments between 1%-5%. Denmark experienced the highest increase in GDP per capita in a one-year period with growth of 5% (Heston et. al., 2006). Interestingly, in 2003, per capita GDP in both the Netherlands and Switzerland fell by 1%. This decline has been attributed in part to a decreased German demand for Swiss Francs, causing a currency depreciation, which in turn causes GDP loss (OECD report, 2004).

Second, I look at immigration data, which do not follow such predictable rises and falls. European migration is incredibly volatile, with extreme cases such as Switzerland in 1999, in which there was a ten-fold increase in migration. Granted, the absolute value change was incrementally negligible, from 2 to 22 migrants per thousand in the population, but the change is nonetheless reflected in the data. The one discernable pattern is vaguely spatial, in that Southern Europe tends to have much higher overall migration rates than the rest of Europe, with countries like Spain and Portugal exhibiting migration rates between 10-14 migrants per thousand of population.

Northern Europe has far more predictable immigration flows than Southern Europe, limited to relatively minor changes in immigration flows. A Southern European country like Spain, however, has experienced upwards of 23 percent growth in a single year. This particularly large increase was due to a liberal change in Spain's immigration policy (Perez, 2003). Portugal experienced a similar increase. Overall, Southern European immigration fluctuates annually between -5 – 23%. A negative immigration rate such as -5% reflects higher outflow of migrants (emigration) than inflow (immigration).

My anti-outgroup rhetoric variable also fluctuates. For a single party, measured over several elections, the use of particular rhetorical components fluctuates dramatically. For example, the German Christian Democratic Union/Social Union’s mention of a “national way of life” varies from 1.35-4.19 instances between elections. To better understand the empirics of this paper, let’s look at a tabular analysis of the independent and dependent variables for Belgium and Denmark.
Table 2. Representative Data Set for Belgium and Denmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>code</th>
<th>countryname</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>party name</th>
<th>population</th>
<th>percap of</th>
<th>Imm year of</th>
<th>avg rhet change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>10136.81</td>
<td>21936.72</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>10136.81</td>
<td>21936.72</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>10273.79</td>
<td>23793.33</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>10273.79</td>
<td>23793.33</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>10378.93</td>
<td>25262.25</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>10378.93</td>
<td>25262.25</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>KF</td>
<td>5206.91</td>
<td>23855.49</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>KrF</td>
<td>5206.91</td>
<td>23855.49</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>KF</td>
<td>5295.47</td>
<td>26365.39</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>KrF</td>
<td>5295.47</td>
<td>26365.39</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>DF</td>
<td>5359.98</td>
<td>27825.00</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>KF</td>
<td>5359.98</td>
<td>27825.00</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>KrF</td>
<td>5359.98</td>
<td>27825.00</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows a brief segment of the total data used in this paper, looking at immigration during the election year (imm year of), GDP per capita during the election year (percap of) and the change in average anti-outgroup rhetoric, “national way of life: positive”. Denmark has three parties that are considered rightwing: the DF People’s Party, the KrF Conservative People’s Party, and the KF Christian People’s party. For the empirical analysis, the regressions are run between the immigration growth variable and the change in average rhetoric variable. The average anti-outgroup rhetoric variable is calculated as the average of three rhetorical observations in platforms, as detailed above. The formula is as follows:

**Eqn 1:** \[
\text{Average rhetoric} = \frac{\text{per109} + \text{per110} + \text{per601}}{3}
\]

The number three in the denominator of Equation 1 is the number of variables in the numerator, so the variables are averaged. This average rhetoric variable is then applied to a growth formula identical to the one given at the beginning of the Data section, using data from the last election. This gives the dependent variable for this paper, change in average anti-outgroup rhetoric. The data used in this paper on rhetoric was gathered for two consecutive years for each observation, the year before the election and the year of the election. The change in the observations between years, for example between year 2000 and year 1999, is calculated as a rhetoric growth rate for a particular year.

**Eqn 2:** \[
\Delta \text{Average rhetoric} = \frac{\text{(avg rhet(t) – avg rhet(t-1))}}{\text{avg rhet(t)}}
\]

I control for population in this model because countries with larger populations are more likely to have a small number of political parties (Laasko, 1979). This is due to numerous factors, such as the relative ease and cheapness
with which a party can be established. Whereas large democracies have correspondingly large populations that vote and must be convinced that a new party is worth voting for, smaller countries require significantly smaller startup funds for parties. Advertising, campaigning, travel, and number of staff workers are all smaller in smaller countries and translate into lower costs. The inverse correlation between country size and number of political parties is relevant for this paper because the small number of parties in large countries makes the relative influence of a nation's political parties' rhetoric deceptively small. A country with a large number of parties has more influence in regression until population is included as a control.

**Results**

My hypotheses are tested simultaneously by using a time series multivariate regression formula. I test the hypotheses together in order to capture the effects that both independent variables, GDP per capita and immigration, have on one another. The equation is as follows:

\[
\Delta \text{Average Rhetoric} = b_1 + b_2 \text{[GDP per capita}(t)\text{]} + b_3 \text{[immigration (}t\text{)]} + b_4 \text{[population (}t\text{)]}
\]

where \( b_1 \) is the intercept and \( (t) \) indicates that the variable is measured for the election year. This type of multivariate regression allows the two independent variables to interact with each other. A consequence of this interaction is that, to a certain extent, the model mixes the effects of the independent variables, which makes it difficult to determine whether there is a causal relationship between them. Still, mixing them has its own logic. One interaction between them, for example, could be that, as a result of increasing GDP per capita, immigration rises because migrants want to take advantage of a booming economy.

After running regressions between immigration growth rates and economic growth rates and anti-outgroup rhetoric from rightwing parties, I find a statistically significant relationship between per capita GDP and anti-outgroup rhetoric. This relationship is strong support for the model used in this paper, that higher growth rates of GDP per capita shares a negative relationship with anti-outgroup rhetoric.
Table 3. Regression results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Δ Average Rhetoric = b₁ + b₂ + b₃ + b₄</th>
<th>Mean/ St Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (t)</td>
<td>-.0001023**</td>
<td>24257.96 (3739.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration (t)</td>
<td>-.0983311</td>
<td>2.8 (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (t)</td>
<td>-7.67 e-06</td>
<td>25158.51 (24600.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.150155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.0709</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (**) indicates significant at p<.05 level

This model does not present a statistically significant relationship between immigration growth rates and anti-outgroup rhetoric. The lack of a significant relationship between immigration and rhetoric does not necessarily mean that a relationship does not exist. Measuring immigration is an extremely complex process, and receiving accurate, timely information from states is bureaucratically difficult. In addition, finding information sources that have complete data that is standardized across states is nearly impossible. Consequently, there may be a relationship between immigration levels and right-wing rhetoric, but the relationship is not present in these results.

Having both GDP per capita and immigration levels as part of the model could also present a problem if the variables are too similar in nature. That is, if GDP per capita and immigration are highly correlated, running both variables in the same regression would be akin to having a single independent variable counted twice; it would skew the results. To check for this multi-collinearity issue, I ran a correlation between the two independent variables and found a correlation coefficient of -.12. This level of correlation means that, in short, the independent variables are sufficiently different that both can be used in the same analysis. Although immigration and GDP per capita may be correlated, the correlation is not so great that using both simultaneously skews the results of the model.

Analysis

The results of this paper present strong support for my first hypothesis, showing that higher levels of GDP per capita are related to lower levels of anti-outgroup rhetoric. The assumption is that, as a nation’s wealth increases, political parties focus more of their platform on other issues, whether economic or social in nature. This change in focus is consistent with the notion that, when times are good, political parties focus more attention on positive statements that highlight general welfare improvement. As a nation’s welfare increases, they feel less of a need to target specific groups because, overall, the nation’s citizens are happier with the current state of affairs.

Using multivariate regression my model captures the relationship between economic conditions and anti-outgroup rhetoric. A consequence of using this
multivariate model is that the effects of both variables may be muted, perhaps because there has been no evidence found that would suggest that immigration and economic conditions are exclusive. Quite the contrary, there is a strong theoretical argument for causality between economic conditions and immigration: as economic conditions improve, migrants may enter the country in order to profit from better wage and employment conditions. If the two variables are not causal, they are still certainly not exclusive, which leads to a muting of both variables in a multivariate regression.

This mitigation of independent variables in the regression could help explain the lack of statistically significant results on the part of immigration. In a way, rising levels of migration are included in improving economic conditions, resulting in two effects. First, the impact of immigration on anti-outgroup rhetoric is muted because improving economic conditions mask the effect of rising immigration levels. Second, the effect of improving economic conditions may be exaggerated by higher levels of immigration. While this exaggeration is not problematic for the purposes of this model (the correlation between GDP per capita and immigration is low), the effect of immigration when considered concurrently with GDP per capita may boost the effect of GDP per capita on anti-outgroup rhetoric.

Capturing all or even part of the variation in anti-outgroup rhetoric via statistical means is difficult. Rhetoric against the outgroup is a highly complex mechanism that parties use for reasons that are not entirely clear. It is possible that parties use anti-outgroup rhetoric in order to gain support from xenophobes who practice extreme nationalism. It is equally possible that parties actually share these sentiments and soften them in their manifestos, because no party has ever been elected on a platform of brazen racism. When studying social science phenomena such as political rhetoric, the complexity and difficulty of capturing the effects statistically are made clear.

Given that complexity, the lack of statistically significant findings for an effect of immigration on anti-outgroup rhetoric does not necessarily negate my second hypothesis, even though the empirical results show that it does. The lack of findings might simply mean that the data used in our observations – that obtained from the U.S. census bureau migration database and the Comparative Manifesto project – are not the most accurate representations of true migration and rhetorical data, respectively. Political parties have many other rhetorical methods of communicating to the public – through rallies and candidate speeches, for example – which are not included in the dataset for rhetoric.

Other issues affect the reliability of my results, such as missing data. In order to compile all of the data needed for economic indicators, immigration rates, and political rhetoric, three separate data sets from three separate sources were combined to form a compilation dataset. Problems arise when trying to combine data because countries only keep track of (and make public) certain data for certain years. For example, economic data for Western European countries for most of the twentieth century are widely available. Immigration data are not. This could be due to the relative importance that countries placed on economy versus immigration for most of the twentieth century. Similarly, economic data are not available from many sources for the most recent elections from which rhetoric is observed.

The presence of missing data necessitates that many observations be dropped from the regressions in this paper. While this affects the reliability of
results, it is the most appropriate way in this case to deal with missing data. Other options would have included finding other sources for variables, which presents problems in finding and standardizing the data. A similar option would be to apply growth rates from other sources that include observations for years that other sources miss. For example, one source may have missing data for immigration rates in 2003, and another source has data for that year and the year before. Knowing this information, I could calculate a growth rate and apply it to the first data source, thus interpolating the observation. But this approach presents further issues with standardization and reliability, and thus I have omitted from my analysis any observations that included missing data.

Another possible explanation for the existence of anti-outgroup rhetoric is that it is a response to rhetoric from other parties. Research has found that parties respond to both changes in the national environment and changes in mainstream and competing parties’ platforms (Adams, Somer-Topcu, 2009). In other words, parties communicate with one another through their platforms. Thus, future research would need to trace the changing rhetoric exhibited by a particular party and correlate it with that party’s success in a particular election. We would then see whether or not other parties changed their rhetoric in response to another successful party’s rhetoric in the following election.

An alternative explanation of my results is possible. If an improving economy attracts immigrants who seek to profit from the gains of the receiving country, it may be that the increase in immigration is the sole reason for the increase in anti-outgroup rhetoric. In this case, GDP per capita would be an antecedent variable that leads to higher anti-outgroup rhetoric. This would suggest that higher immigration does indeed lead to higher anti-outgroup rhetoric, but through different means than those I hypothesized.

Conclusion
My results indicate a distinct possibility that European politics and, perhaps, the electorate’s mindset as a whole has changed track. My results suggest the possibility that rightwing political parties use more anti-outgroup, nationalistic rhetoric when economic conditions decline. This possibility is inconsistent with traditional political morality, which dictates that politics should be run based on substance rather than fear mongering and scapegoating. However, this rhetoric implies that the blame cannot be placed entirely on political parties.

The Median Voter Theorem (Cho and Duggan 2009; Black, 1948) makes several predictions regarding party behavior during an election. Its first, most direct implication is that in a public democracy, the party that most accurately represents the median voter, the average public opinion of the electorate, will win the election. If the Median Voter Theorem is accurate, and further, if parties create their manifestos with the goal of winning the election, the existence of anti-outgroup rhetoric in party platforms indicates that parties believe that the electorate responds positively to such rhetoric. Simply put, if we assume the Median Voter Theorem is true, then it follows that rightwing political parties think that the average person approves of, or is swayed by, anti-outgroup rhetoric.

The second implication of the Median Voter Theorem suggests a need for future research. During the “knockout stages” of an election, as the frontrunners emerge, political parties adjust their rhetoric to more accurately match the median
voter. This adjustment suggests that measuring a party’s rhetoric at a single point in time may be an inaccurate or incomplete measure of a party’s actual position. Therefore, further research could look at the way party rhetoric changes over time and use the overall rhetorical observations in analyzing the effects of economic conditions and immigration levels.

Several assumptions made in my model raise questions for future research as well. First, this paper makes the assumption that political rhetoric connotes and implies more than is explicitly stated in a party’s platform. While evidence for these connotations exists, research should investigate the extent to which rhetoric is translatable into more direct expressions of unrest. A simple example could involve a case study of a particular party that comes into power and imposes restrictions on immigration, or limits outgroup rights. Researchers could then look at that party’s platform for evidence of anti-outgroup rhetoric. If such rhetoric exists, further research could replicate this process on similar parties.

This paper also assumes that left and rightwing parties will respond differently to changes in the national environment, specifically immigration and economic levels. Leftwing parties are not included in this paper for logistical reasons, but also because I believe that they will respond differently to these factors, for reasons detailed in my earlier discussions on theory. Future research could explore this topic further. The same dataset, The Comparative Manifesto, could be used to explore this data.

A final assumption that begs further research is that immigration affects rhetoric in a universal way. As an example, the assumption is that a man from France will perceive a migrant from Portugal the same as he would perceive a Turkish migrant and, further, that a rightwing party would react the same to both migrants in their political platform. While this paper limits its area of focus to Western European, EU member countries, moving beyond these boundaries may alter the assumption that immigrants are perceived the same regardless of sending country. Such studies would be important in obtaining results that are more generalizable. Research should question whether or not migrants from different sending areas affect political rhetoric in different ways.

Notes

1. The method of calculating the overall left-right position is through the following equation, in which factors contributing to leftness are subtracted from those contributing to rightness, shown in Table 1:

   \[(\text{per104} + \text{per201} + \text{per203} + \text{per305} + \text{per401} + \text{per402} + \text{per407} + \text{per414} + \text{per505} + \text{per601} + \text{per603} + \text{per605} + \text{per606}) - (\text{per103} + \text{per105} + \text{per106} + \text{per107} + \text{per404} + \text{per406} + \text{per412} + \text{per413} + \text{per504} + \text{per506} + \text{per707} + \text{per202})\]

2. See Appendix 1.
3. See Appendix 2.
4. See Appendix 2.
Works Cited


Appendix 1: GDP per capita over time

GDP per capita
in Geary dollars

GDP per capita In Election year

Election Year

percap of
Linear (percap of)
Appendix 2: Immigrants per thousand over time

![Immigration During Election Year](chart.png)
Appendix 3: Average rhetoric change over time

![Graph showing average rhetoric change over time.](image-url)