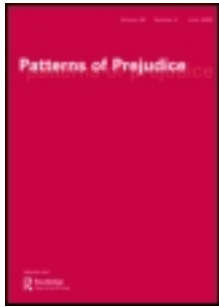


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# Are cross-national surveys the best way to study the extreme-right vote in Europe?

MARC HOOGHE AND TIM REESKENS

**ABSTRACT** In recent years, various authors have tried to develop a comprehensive explanation for the electoral success of extreme-right parties in Europe. While some authors stress individual-level factors (ethnocentrism, political cynicism, distrust), others stress macro-level variables (party strategy, electoral system). In this field of research cross-national survey data are often used to ascertain the strength of extreme-right parties and the motivation of those who vote for them. Hooghe and Reeskens question the external cross-cultural validity of these measurements, on the grounds of both response and measurement bias. Using the European Social Survey (29 observations) they find a huge diversity in the external validity of the data, with anything from 15 to 90 per cent of the electoral strength of the extreme-right party being covered in the survey. Using a multiple regression model, they identify survey response rate, voter turnout and the populist appeal of the party itself as possible causes for this selective under-representation. The only possible conclusion is that cross-national surveys do not succeed in establishing cross-cultural external validity for questions of extreme-right voting.

**KEYWORDS** cross-cultural validity, European Social Survey, extreme-right parties, survey research, voting behaviour

## Debating the rise of the extreme right

Extreme-right political parties have enjoyed remarkable electoral success in various Western European countries.<sup>1</sup> In the 2002 presidential elections in France, the veteran leader of the Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, obtained 16.9 per cent of the vote, more than the 16.2 per cent that was obtained by the incumbent prime minister, Lionel Jospin.<sup>2</sup> In Austria the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) received more than a quarter of the vote in 1999, and in the Belgian autonomous region of Flanders, the Vlaams Blok obtained a massive 24 per cent in the 2004 regional elections. What all these parties have

The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their constructive comments on an earlier version of this article.

1 For a review of the literature, see Pippa Norris, *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005).

2 Alistair Cole, 'A strange affair: the 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections in France', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 37, no. 3, July 2002, 317–42.

in common is an extreme right-wing ideology, a negative attitude towards foreigners and the fact that they use populist and nationalist rhetoric in their election campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

Following the success of extreme-right parties, academics have designed various research projects to explain their electoral appeal. Initially, most of these studies were based on single-country case studies but, since the mid-1990s, comparative research seems to have become the norm in the attempt to explain the rise of the extreme right. It is hoped that by collecting and comparing data and insights from various countries, it will become possible to develop a more comprehensive model to explain the electoral success of these parties.<sup>4</sup> However, more than a decade of comparative research on the extreme-right vote has, thus far, only led to a further intensification of the debate. Some authors tend to focus on individual-level variables, stressing demand-side explanations for the extreme-right vote: extreme-right voters, accordingly, are said to be motivated by ethnocentrism, a feeling of being threatened by ethnic and cultural minorities, or to be disillusioned with the functioning of the political system. Other authors focus on macro-level explanations, stressing the supply-side of extreme-right party politics. Strategic choices made by the extreme-right party and the other political parties determine the ideological and electoral space that is available for the extreme right. Rules concerning party finance, electoral systems and, in some countries, legislation prohibiting extreme-right parties have a bearing on the electoral success of the extreme right. In view of the current state of research, however, it remains uncertain what is the most important set of variables for explaining the rise of the extreme right: ethnocentrism, political dissatisfaction and protest voting, party strategies, electoral systems or other indicators.<sup>5</sup>

A fundamental problem is that both sides in this debate rely on different data sources. If one stresses individual-level variables as an explanation for extreme-right voting, one has few other options than to rely on cross-cultural survey data. On the other hand, if one stresses variables at the level of the political system, the obvious choice is to rely on election results as a

3 Herbert Kitschelt with Anthony J. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1995).

4 Pia Knigge, 'The ecological correlates of right-wing extremism in Western Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 34, no. 2, October 1998, 249–79.

5 For a review of this debate, see, for example, Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*; Norris, *Radical Right*; Wouter van der Brug, Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie, 'Anti-immigrant parties in Europe: ideological or protest vote?', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 37, no. 1, January 2000, 77–102; Wouter van der Brug, Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie, 'Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 38, no. 5, June 2005, 537–73; and John Veugelers and André Magnan, 'Conditions of far-right strength in contemporary Western Europe: an application of Kitschelt's theory', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 44, no. 6, October 2005, 837–60.

dependent variable. An implicit assumption in most of the debate is that both sets of indicators can be used interchangeably, as it is taken for granted that survey data give us a more or less reliable view of extreme-right party strength. In most of the surveys, extreme-right parties are under-represented to some extent but, if the under-representation is constant for all countries, this would mean that survey results could still be used in a reliable manner.

In this article, we want to question the assumption of external validity as we investigate the cross-cultural equivalence of questions on extreme-right voting in comparative surveys. If, for example, parties with an explicitly racist platform have been more severely under-represented in survey research than other types of extreme-right parties, because respondents find it hard to report such a vote, this would imply that survey results on this question could not be used for international comparisons. Such a comparison could only be made if the concept that is being investigated, in this case extreme-right voting, is measured in a cross-culturally equivalent manner. If this is not the case, survey results are not a valid source of data for comparative research.<sup>6</sup>

To put it technically, our main research question is whether there is sufficient cross-cultural equivalence in the measurement of extreme-right voting in survey research to allow the use of these survey results in a comparative manner. A lack of equivalence can be caused either by a response bias (extreme-right votes are not represented in surveys) or by a measurement bias (extreme-right voters do not answer sincerely about their voting behaviour), or by a combination of both factors. Cross-cultural equivalence is usually tested by using various psychological or attitudinal measurement scales; the basic question is whether all items on the scale perform in the same way across cultures.<sup>7</sup> In general, the rule is that, if this is not the case, the scale should not be used in comparative research.<sup>8</sup> In this specific case, however, we are not dealing with a multi-item measurement scale, but with a simple behavioural question: did the respondent vote for an extreme-right party or not? In this case, one cannot calculate the internal validity of the concept, but one can investigate the external validity of the survey response. If survey results have any cross-cultural validity, this would imply that the proportion of the extreme-right vote that is being captured by the survey should be roughly equal in all of the countries being investigated. If this is not the case, there is no cross-cultural external validity, and the survey results should therefore not be used for this kind of research.

6 Janet Harkness, Fons van de Vijver and Peter Mohler (eds), *Cross-Cultural Survey Methods* (New York: Wiley-Interscience 2002).

7 See, for example, Lieven Pauwels and Stefaan Pleysier, 'Assessing cross-cultural validity of fear of crime measures through comparisons between linguistic communities in Belgium', *European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 2005, 139–59.

8 Jaak Billiet, 'Cross-cultural equivalence with structural equation modeling', in Harkness, van de Vijver and Mohler (eds), *Cross-Cultural Survey Methods*, 247–76.

This would also imply that much of the contemporary debate about individual-level or structural-level determinants of an extreme-right vote is partly based on a flawed comparison of data. If some extreme-right parties are more strongly under-represented than others, it becomes all the more difficult to compare survey findings regarding these parties.

### Using survey data to explain the extreme-right vote

We do not want to defend a specific position in the debate about the cause of extreme-right strength. What we do want to show is that a number of articles and books that play an important role in this debate are based on data that are not cross-culturally equivalent as a result of response and measurement bias. It has become routine practice in this kind of research to compare survey data from a wide range of countries as an indication of the strength of extreme-right parties.<sup>9</sup> Usually it is assumed that this kind of survey material provides a reliable indicator of the strength of such parties.

A typical example would be the 2002 study by Marcel Lubbers, Mérove Gijsberts and Peer Scheepers that used survey data and country-level data in a multilevel approach. While the individual-level data are obtained from various surveys, the political-system-level data are based on real-life observations. The main problem in the research is that the authors acknowledge that survey data only partially inform us about the actual electoral strength of the extreme-right political party. For example, in their survey material 9.8 per cent of French respondents indicated that they had voted for the Front National, while in reality that party at the time obtained 15.5 per cent of the vote. In Flanders, the same phenomenon occurred: while 10.1 per cent of all respondents reported a vote for the Vlaams Blok, at that time the party had already obtained 15.5 per cent of the vote.<sup>10</sup> By itself, the

9 Examples include Knigge, 'The ecological correlates of right-wing extremism in Western Europe'; van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 'Anti-immigrant parties in Europe'; Wouter van der Brug and Meindert Fennema, 'Protest or mainstream? How the European anti-immigrant parties developed into two separate groups by 1999', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 42, no. 1, January 2003, 55–76; Matt Golder, 'Explaining variation in the success of extreme right parties in Western Europe', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4, May 2003, 432–66; van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 'Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed'; Norris, *Radical Right*; Marcel Lubbers and Peer Scheepers, 'Individual and contextual characteristics of the German extreme right-wing vote in the 1990s: a test of complementary theories', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 38, no. 1, August 2000, 63–94; Marcel Lubbers, Jaak Billiet and Peer Scheepers, 'Multilevel modelling of Vlaams Blok voting: individual and contextual characteristics of the Vlaams Blok', *Acta Politica*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2000, 363–98.

10 Marcel Lubbers, Mérove Gijsberts and Peer Scheepers, 'Extreme right voting in Western Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 41, no. 3, May 2002, 345–78 (357).

under-representation of extreme-right voters in population surveys is not necessarily a major reason for concern. After all, we know that these parties tend to recruit from those groups in the population that are less likely to participate in public opinion surveys due to various factors, including low socio-economic status, a lower level of education and a more distrustful outlook on life. We also know that, in most democracies, confessing a vote for an extreme-right political party does not sit easily with social norms.

When using these data in a comparative manner, the way Lubbers *et al.* do, however, the main problem is that the degree of under-representation is not constant for all countries. In Germany, for instance, the surveys used in the Lubbers *et al.* article show 2.3 per cent voters for the extreme right, which corresponds exactly to the percentage in the overall electorate. So, one can assume that German survey data adequately capture extreme-right voting behaviour while this is not the case in France or Belgium. In a footnote, Lubbers *et al.* acknowledge this problem, and they rightly note that the under-representation of extreme-right parties in public opinion surveys tends to be a problem in most of the surveys, and that little can be done to change that situation.<sup>11</sup> However, they fail to address the main reason for concern, which is that this variation clearly is not random. While the survey data for Germany apparently cover the entire electorate of extreme-right parties, this is not the case in France, Denmark or Belgium, where surveys include only those extreme-right voters who are willing both to participate in survey research and to disclose their preference for an extreme-right party. As such, it can be argued that the German survey data measure a different phenomenon than the French data, and that, therefore, the two sources of information should not be used in the same comparative analysis.

### Survey data and electoral results

This article attempts to assess whether survey data provide reliable and valid indicators of the strength of extreme-right parties and whether, therefore, they can be used in comparative research efforts. To answer this question we will investigate both response and measurement bias. Some researchers rely on different survey sources—for example, combining national surveys with national samples from the World Values Survey—but this in itself can introduce a bias, as the quality of the fieldwork and the wording of questions in various surveys tend to differ. To make the comparison as reliable as possible, and to make our test of cross-cultural equivalence as strong as possible, we will rely on only one specific source of data collection, namely the first (2002) and second (2004) rounds of the

11 Ibid., 374n5.

European Social Survey (ESS).<sup>12</sup> The ESS offers an ideal opportunity to test cross-cultural equivalence because, in the survey design, extreme care was taken to ensure this validity, both with regard to the quality control of the fieldwork and in translating the survey items.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, this can be considered a conservative test. If, even in the ESS, in which extreme care has been taken to ensure cross-cultural equivalence, this goal is not being reached, it is clear that we cannot expect cross-cultural equivalence in other data sources.

In the European Social Survey, the voting question explicitly referred to the most recent national elections: 'Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year] . . . Which party did you vote for in that election?' This question provides us with information on voting behaviour in twenty-one European countries.<sup>14</sup> To ascertain whether it provides us with reliable information about voting behaviour, we compared the ESS results with the actual election results.<sup>15</sup>

The nineteen extreme-right parties under investigation are: the FPÖ in Austria; the Vlaams Blok (VB) and the Front National (FN) in Belgium; the Schweizer Demokraten (SD) and the Lega dei Ticinesi (LDT) in Switzerland; the Republikáni of Miroslav Sládek (RMS) in the Czech Republic; the Dansk Folkeparti (DF) and the Fremskridtspartiet (FKD) in Denmark; the Front National (FN) in France; the Republikaner (REP) and the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) in Germany; the Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (MIÉP) in Hungary; the Alleanza Nazionale (AN), the Lega Nord (LNI) and the Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (MSFT) in Italy; the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and Leefbaar Nederland (LNN) in the Netherlands; the Fremskrittspartiet (FKN) in Norway; and the Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) in Poland. In the literature there is broad consensus that all of these parties can indeed be considered as belonging to the group of extreme-right or populist parties in Europe. Because not all of these countries were included in the

12 It should be noted that Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers use various data sources to perform their analysis ('Extreme right voting in Western Europe', 354). Using survey data from various institutes and sources with differing data collection routines, however, is usually a risky business. Therefore, we decided to limit this test to one high-quality data source, namely the European Social Survey. We used both the 2002 and the 2004 rounds of the ESS. These data can be obtained from Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), *European Social Survey Data* (Bergen: NSD 2003); they are available online at <http://ess.nsd.uib.no> (viewed 9 January 2007).

13 Roger Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, *European Social Survey 2002/2003: Technical Report* (London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University 2003).

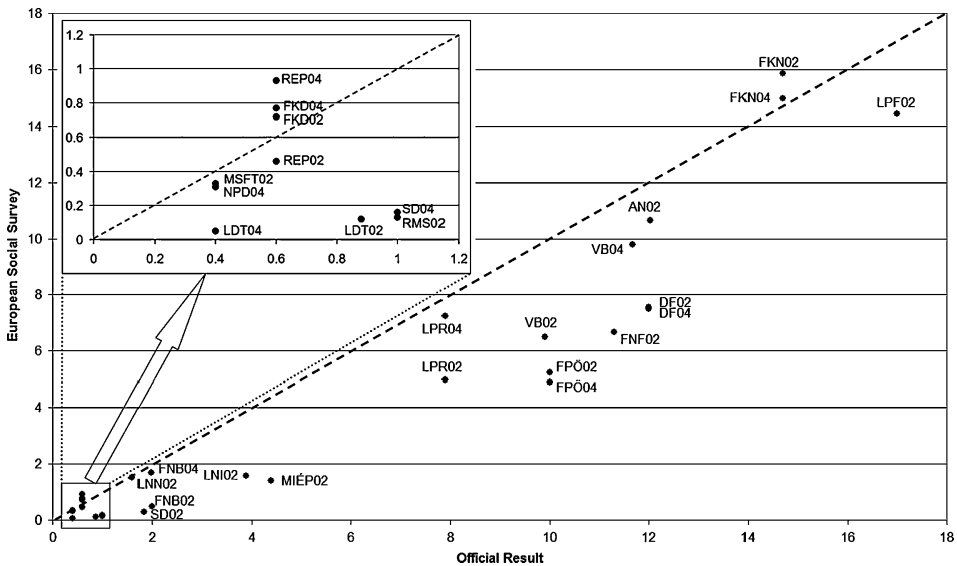
14 It should be noted here that the *name* of the party was being requested, not whether the respondent had voted for an 'extreme-right party'. This implies that a conceptual bias, which might be another cause of inequivalence, is not a problem here.

15 The latter are taken from the Electionworld database, available on the Wikipedia website at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Electionworld/Electionworld> (viewed 9 January 2007).

second round of the ESS, some of these parties do not have two measurements. Nonetheless, we have compiled a data file with 29 observations: 18 in the first ESS round of 2002 and 11 in the second round of 2004.<sup>16</sup>

If survey data are a reliable indicator of extreme-right voting behaviour, the scores for extreme-right parties in the ESS should approximate the electoral results. One might expect that the extreme right would be under-represented in survey research but, even so, if we want to achieve cross-cultural equivalence, this under-representation should be more or less the same in all countries. As the results shown in Figure 1 demonstrate, this is clearly not the case. The trend line represents a perfect match between survey results and election results. A position below that line represents an under-representation in the survey, a position above the line an over-representation (for details of these positions, see Table 1 overleaf). These results indicate that, in most cases, the ESS results underestimate the official election results for the extreme-right parties. Only in Norway and Denmark

**Figure 1** Electoral results and survey scores for extreme-right parties (2002, 2004)



Sources: European Social Survey and Electionworld

<sup>16</sup> Because some of our independent variables are related to party characteristics, the parties themselves function as units of measurements, and not the combined percentage of extreme-right votes in a country. For example, in Italy the dynamics of under-representation might be totally different for the AN than for the MSFT. We also investigated whether it was possible to use other survey sources to boost the number of observations. While this is theoretically possible, it would add the complications involved in comparing surveys (timing, procedures, ways of reporting responses, wording of questions etc.), which would actually make it more difficult to test the occurrence of response and measurement bias in a strict and reliable manner.



**Table 1** Electoral results and survey scores for extreme-right parties (2002, 2004)

Party	Country	ESS Round 1				ESS Round 2			
		Election year	ESS score (%)	Election result (%)	Difference ratio*	Election year	ESS score (%)	Election result (%)	Difference ratio*
FPÖ	AT	2002	5.25	10.0	0.475	2002	4.88	10.0	0.512
VB	BE	1999	6.51	9.90	0.342	2003	9.80	11.68	0.161
FNB	BE	1999	0.50	2.00	0.750	2003	1.70	1.98	0.141
SD	CH	1999	0.29	1.84	0.840	2003	0.16	1.0	0.840
LDT	CH	1999	0.12	0.88	0.864	2003	0.05	0.40	0.875
RMS	CZ	2002	0.13	1.00	0.870	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
DF	DK	2001	7.55	12.00	0.370	2001	7.51	12.0	0.374
FKD	DK	2001	0.72	0.60	-0.200	2001	0.77	0.60	-0.280
FNF	FR	2002	6.68	11.30	0.409	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
REP	GE	2002	0.46	0.60	0.233	2002	0.93	0.60	-0.550
NPD	GE	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2002	0.31	0.40	0.225
MIÉP	HU	2002	1.39	4.40	0.680	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
AN	IT	2001	10.65	12.00	0.113	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LNI	IT	2001	1.57	3.90	0.597	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
MSFT	IT	2001	0.33	0.40	0.175	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LPF	NL	2002	14.41	17.00	0.152	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LNN	NL	2002	1.51	1.60	0.056	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FKN	NO	2001	15.84	14.70	-0.078	2001	14.96	14.70	-0.020
LPR	PL	2001	4.97	7.90	0.371	2001	7.24	7.90	0.080
Chisquare statistics			$\chi^2 = 61.168$ ; df = 17; p < 0.0001			$\chi^2 = 44.605$ ; df = 10; p < 0.0001			

\* The difference ratio, the degree of under-representation in the survey, is  $1 - [(\text{survey-score})/(\text{election-result})]$ .

are the votes achieved by extreme-right parties consistently overestimated in the survey.<sup>17</sup>

The most problematic element, however, is that the under-representation is not constant for all the parties. This suggests that the electorate of some extreme-right parties is better captured in survey research than that of others. However, neither is the variation random. Both in 2002 and in 2004 the scores of extreme-right parties are systematically underestimated.<sup>18</sup> In Table 1 we give the survey and the election results for the extreme-right parties.

The results reported in Table 1 confirm the impression given in Figure 1, namely that the data have no cross-cultural validity with regard to extreme-right voting behaviour. While the survey covers most of the voting for the AN in Italy (11 per cent underestimation) and the LPF in the Netherlands (15 per cent underestimation), it fails to capture the vote for the Front National in Belgium (75 per cent underestimation in 2002) or the FPÖ in Austria (51 per cent underestimation in 2004). Apparently, electoral appeal is more easily captured in survey research for some extreme-right parties than for others.

### Explaining the discrepancy

In the remainder of this article, we will try to explain why there is no cross-cultural external validity for the question on the extreme right. A word of caution is in order here: since we only have 29 observations, the number of variables that can be introduced in a multiple regression model remains rather limited. For a good understanding of the analysis, it is also important to remember that the *party* is our level of observation, not the country; for example, in Belgium the dynamics of the Vlaams Blok might be completely different than those of the Front National. In our effort to explain the discrepancy between survey scores and election results, we can distinguish two different kinds of variables. First, we have rather technical variables that are related to the survey or the election process. These variables can be used to assess response bias. A second set of variables is related to the kind of party we want to investigate, implying that some extreme-right parties are simply harder to capture in survey research than others. These variables indicate measurement bias.

17 For the extremely small parties (those receiving less than 2 per cent) it could be argued that it makes little sense to try to capture their electorate in a general population survey. The pattern of under-representation, however, remains exactly the same if we limit ourselves to the larger extreme-right parties, i.e. those receiving more than 2 per cent of the vote. In separate analyses (available from the authors) we also used the square values or the log values of the party results, but this did not lead to substantially different results.

18 The underestimation is statistically significant:  $\chi^2 = 111.352$ ;  $df = 28$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ .

First, we will consider the variables that are related to the survey and the electoral process. The response rate of the survey might have an effect on the validity of the survey results.<sup>19</sup> Lower response rates typically mean that a less successful effort has been made to reach subgroups of the population that are more resistant to survey research, like less educated people, more distrustful or older respondents. Since we know that these groups are more susceptible to extreme-right voting than other groups of the population, it is plausible to assume that the differences in under-representation might be due to different response rates. Indeed, despite the care that has been taken to provide uniform fieldwork procedures for all ESS countries, response rates vary from 74.4 per cent in Poland (Round 2) to a meagre 33.5 per cent in Switzerland (Round 1). The most straightforward hypothesis, therefore, would be that under-representation of extreme-right parties will be highest in those countries where the response rate of the ESS survey is lowest and where response bias is most likely.

While this hypothesis refers to the overall validity of the survey results, we next have to question the validity of the question on extreme-right voting. Results from questions on voting behaviour tend to be unreliable because of social desirability factors, bandwagon effects or respondents simply not remembering how they voted.<sup>20</sup> Given the fact that the ESS question referred to the previous elections in the country, one can assume that the more time had elapsed between those elections and the moment of the survey, the more likely it is that the respondent will not have accurately remembered his or her voting behaviour. To capture this effect, we also include the number of months that separate the previous elections and the moment of the survey. In addition, we include a measurement here for the average level of political interest in the country. Our hypothesis in this regard is that, if political interest is low in a country, respondents are less likely to remember correctly the party they voted for in the previous elections.

Third, it might not be the survey but the elections themselves that do not offer a good representation of public opinion. Low turnout figures in elections typically mean that some groups are not adequately represented in the election results.<sup>21</sup> If the response rate of the ESS survey were higher than the actual

19 Robert M. Groves, Don A. Dillman, John L. Eltinge and Roderick J. A. Little (eds), *Survey Nonresponse* (New York: John Wiley 2001); Floyd J. Fowler, Jr, *Survey Research Methods*, 3rd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA, London and New Delhi: Sage 2001), 39–57.

20 Jeffrey A. Karp and David Brockington, 'Social desirability and response validity: a comparative analysis of overreporting voter turnout in five countries', *Journal of Politics*, vol. 67, no. 3, August 2005, 825–40; Robert F. Belli, Michael W. Traugott, Margaret Young and Katherine A. McGonagle, 'Reducing vote overreporting in surveys: social desirability, memory failure, and source monitoring', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 1, Spring 1999, 90–108.

21 Marc Hooghe and Koen Pelleriaux, 'Compulsory voting in Belgium: an application of the Lijphart thesis', *Electoral Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, December 1998, 419–24.

turnout rate in the elections, it might even suggest that the survey offers a better reflection of public opinion than election results do, and that this could be a source for the difference between the survey and the election results. Therefore, the turnout rates for the elections are also included in our model.

While these first three variables refer to more technical measurement errors, it might also be the case that it is precisely the elements we want to investigate, namely, the character of extreme-right voters and parties, that might be a source of under-representation. For example, while some extreme-right parties clearly adopt a (neo-)fascist profile, others explicitly refuse such a label. It is conceivable that this kind of ideological difference has a bearing on the willingness of survey respondents to report a vote for a specific party. The occurrence of this form of measurement bias would represent the 'worst case scenario' for future research, since it would imply that the variables we want to study in the first place are themselves responsible for an unreliable measurement. The literature on social desirability as a source of invalidity of survey answers suggests various possible explanations for such an occurrence.<sup>22</sup>

First of all, the size of the extreme-right party might have an effect, as it is easier to admit voting for a major party like the FPÖ or the Vlaams Blok than for an extremely small and probably unknown party. Second, extreme-right political parties are involved in a process of mainstreaming: if they are around long enough, some of them are gradually accepted as 'normal' political parties by the other political actors.<sup>23</sup> This would imply that the acceptability of reporting a vote for an older party is stronger than reporting a vote for a new and, most likely, extremist party. Therefore, we also take into account how long the party has been active.

In addition, we know that not all extreme-right parties appeal to the same kind of sentiments in the electorate. While some parties stress their anti-immigrant rhetoric, for other parties distrust of the political system or even a lack of trust in general or a fear of crime function as the main focus of their election campaigns.<sup>24</sup> The prevalence of these attitudes among the general population, therefore, might also be a source of contamination. For example, in a country with high levels of ethnocentrism, it is relatively easy to report a vote for an ethnocentric party, while it might be more difficult in a country with low aggregate levels of ethnocentrism. To take account of this effect, we also include the average levels of political powerlessness, ethnocentrism and generalized trust in the country (aggregate measurements taken from the ESS data set).

22 Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser, *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys* (Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage 1996).

23 van der Brug and Fennema, 'Protest or mainstream?'; Mogens Pedersen, 'Towards a new typology of party lifespans and minor parties', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1982, 1–16.

24 Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*; Norris, *Radical Right*.

Despite the fact that all extreme-right political parties generally share a common ideological agenda, there are also various differences, for example, in the way they emphasize ethnocentric, nationalist or populist rhetoric in their electoral campaigns. Here, too, differences have to be included in the model since it is conceivable that specific types of extreme-right parties are more easily under-represented in survey research than others. As early as 1995 Herbert Kitschelt made a distinction between right-authoritarian parties (such as the French National Front and the Scandinavian 'progress parties'), populist anti-statist parties (namely the Austrian FPÖ and the Lega Nord in Italy) and social-fascist parties (such as the German Republikaner and the Italian parties founded after the split of the Movimento Sociale Italiano).<sup>25</sup> In 2003 Matt Golder expanded on this distinction, by constructing separate neo-fascist and populist groups within the extreme-right political family.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Wouter van der Brug and Meindert Fennema suggested that it would make sense to develop separate models for extreme and 'unacceptable' anti-immigrant parties, and more mainstream populist parties.<sup>27</sup> All these various distinctions within the family of extreme-right parties probably bring more confusion than clarification to the analysis but, given our present purpose, we do not feel the need to take a position in this debate. All we need to do is include all of the distinctions in our model, as any one of them may indicate a source of selective under-representation.

### **Model and results**

Thus far we have identified various variables that might have a bearing on the pattern of selective under-representation of extreme-right voting in cross cultural surveys. Therefore, our dependent variable will be the *difference ratio* (Table 1), expressing the difference between election results and survey score for every party under investigation. The lower this ratio, the better the coverage of extreme-right voting in the European Social Survey.

Because we are faced with the problem that we have a substantial number of independent variables, and a limited number of cases (29 observations), we proceed in two separate steps. First, we simply calculate bivariate correlations between the independent variable and the difference ratio (Table 2). The variables tested together with the difference ratio are the size of the extreme-right party (electoral score), the generalized trust level in the country and the aggregate scores on ethnocentrism and political powerlessness, the number of years the party has been active, the response rate of the ESS in that country, the turnout in the national elections held prior

25 Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*, 90.

26 Golder, 'Explaining variation in the success of extreme right parties in Western Europe', 448.

27 van der Brug and Fennema, 'Protest or mainstream?'

**Table 2** Correlation matrix for under-representation of extreme right and independent variables

	Difference ratio	Party size	Ethnocentrism	Political powerlessness	Trust level	Political interest	Response rate	Voter turnout	Months since elections
Party size	-0.174 (0.368)								
Ethnocentrism	-0.0327 (0.866)	0.050 (0.797)							
Political powerlessness	-0.066 (0.736)	0.018 (0.925)	0.318 (0.092)						
Trust level	-0.196 (0.307)	0.131 (0.498)	-0.489 (0.007)	-0.862 (<.001)					
Political interest	-0.117 (0.545)	-0.083 (0.669)	-0.595 (0.001)	-0.577 0.001	0.771 (<.001)				
Response rate	-0.472 (0.010)	0.392 (0.036)	0.150 (0.437)	0.012 (0.951)	0.141 (0.465)	0.169 (0.380)			
Voter turnout	-0.500 (0.006)	0.238 (0.214)	0.448 (0.014)	-0.216 (0.260)	0.191 (0.321)	-0.029 (0.881)	0.369 (0.048)		
Months since elections	-0.027 (0.889)	-0.030 (0.879)	-0.213 (0.267)	-0.196 (0.309)	0.123 (0.524)	-0.006 (0.974)	-0.061 (0.755)	-0.015 (0.938)	
Party age (years)	0.160 (0.406)	-0.044 (0.822)	-0.210 (0.274)	-0.211 (0.271)	0.286 (0.132)	0.285 (0.134)	-0.299 (0.115)	-0.038 (0.847)	0.157 (0.416)

Entries are correlation coefficients between two variables (probability level).

to the ESS survey, and the number of months between those elections and the ESS data collection. Most of these data are measured on aggregated country level, and are obtained from the ESS data set, except for the electoral and the turnout figures for which we use official sources.

This correlation table makes clear that most of the variables we included are not related at all to the difference ratio with regard to extreme-right voting. Small parties are not more difficult to capture in survey research than large parties, the number of years in existence does not seem to make a difference, and the same can be said about the number of months that had elapsed since the previous elections. The aggregate generalized trust level, and the level of ethnocentrism or political powerlessness in the country turn out not to be significant either. The two 'technical' variables, however, prove to be highly significant. The higher the response rate of the ESS survey in the country, the lower the difference ratio, and the same can be said for voter turnout in the elections. An obvious conclusion would be: the better both surveys and elections reflect public opinion as a whole, the smaller the difference ratio. A response bias therefore is clearly present although, to make things complicated, it has to be remembered that elections too might contain a form of measurement bias.

The classifications developed by Matt Golder, Wouter van der Brug *et al.* and Herbert Kitschelt could not be included in the correlation matrix because of their categorical status. Therefore, we ran a separate analysis of variance for these classifications (Table 3). Neither the Golder nor the Kitschelt classification shed any light with regard to the average of the extreme-right results in the elections and the ESS. However, when we look closer at the van der Brug *et al.* classification of extreme-right parties, we observe a linear relation: the more ideological the extreme-right party, the

**Table 3** Analysis of variance for the under-representation of extreme-right parties

	Average mean of difference ratio	Test statistic
Golder classification:		
Populist	0.255	F-value = 1.32
Neo-fascist	0.505	df = 2
Missing cases	0.502	p = 0.285
van der Brug <i>et al.</i> classification:		
Ideological	0.335	F-value = 2.47
Middle position	0.101	df = 3
Not ideological	0.099	p = 0.085
Missing cases	0.503	
Kitschelt classification:		
Right-authoritarian	0.341	F-value = 1.44
Populist anti-statist	0.363	df = 3
Social-fascist	0.039	p = 0.254
Missing cases	0.483	

stronger the under-representation. This implies measurement bias: less ideologically motivated extreme-right parties apparently are better captured than ideologically 'harder' extreme-right parties.

The next step in our investigation is to develop and to test a multiple regression model that can explain the variation in difference ratios across countries (Table 4). Because of the fact that we only have 29 observations, it proved not to be possible to build a solid and reliable model with all the variables included simultaneously. Therefore, we gradually developed the model, eliminating the independent variables that did not contribute to the overall variance explained by the model.

In the bivariate analysis, the two more 'technical' variables, namely voter turnout at the national elections and the ESS response rate, correlated most strongly with the difference ratio. The starting point in the multiple regression analysis, therefore, is those two technical variables. In what follows, we will test every relevant block of additional variables together with these technical variables: first, the aggregated attitude scales on political powerlessness, generalized trust, ethnocentrism and political interest; second, the size of the extreme-right party, the number of months between the national election and the ESS data collection and the number of years the extreme-right party had been in existence; third, the different classifications developed by Golder, van der Brug *et al.* and Kitschelt. In the final test, we include all variables contributing to the explanation of variance in our dependent variable, the difference ratio, in a stable and reliable manner.

The first multiple regression, Model I, merely confirms the findings of the correlation matrix: voter turnout and response rate correlate significantly with the difference ratio so that the higher the voter turnout, the lower the discrepancy between extreme-right scores in elections and in the ESS. The higher the response rate of the ESS in a specific country, the better the coverage of extreme-right electoral strength.

Model II includes the aggregated attitudinal scales, together with the 'technical' variables on voter turnout and response rate. The analysis demonstrates that the aggregate levels of political powerlessness and generalized trust are significantly related to the difference ratio. The higher the political powerlessness and the generalized trust level in a specific country, the better the coverage in the ESS data set. As can be seen from the difference between the  $R^2$  and the Adjusted  $R^2$  scores, however, Model II already suffers from some degree of instability, hinting at the occurrence of multicollinearity between these four aggregate measurements.

Model III does not lead to any new conclusions. The size of the extreme-right party, the months between the last national election and the ESS data collection, and the age of the party: none of these contributes to an explanation of the variance in the difference ratio.

In Model IV, we include the three classification systems already mentioned. These categorical variables are recoded to dummies in order to



**Table 4** Multiple regression model of five different models for the difference ratio

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV		Model V	
	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value
Intercept	1.531***	4.58	3.538	1.69	1.529***	3.70	1.848***	4.34	4.614***	3.99
Voter turnout	-0.821**	-2.21	-1.667**	-2.79	-0.842**	-2.13	-0.400	-0.69	-1.003***	-2.94
Response rate	-1.059*	-1.95	-0.635	-1.21	-1.067	-1.66	-2.024***	-3.60	-1.124*	-1.96
Political powerlessness			-0.382***	-2.93					-0.335**	-2.70
Trust level			-0.366**	-2.20					-0.297**	-2.33
Ethnocentrism			0.219	0.90						
Political interest			0.309	0.74						
Party size					0.004	0.27				
Months since elections					-0.002	-0.36				
Party age (years)					0.002	0.32			0.007*	2.04
Golder's classification:										
Neo-fascist party							0.030	0.17		
Missing cases (Populism is reference)							-0.168	-0.46		

**Table 4** (Continued)

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV		Model V	
	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value	Coefficient	T-Value
van der Brug <i>et al.</i> 's classification:										
Middle position							-0.308*	-2.00		
Not ideology							-0.246	-1.11		
Missing cases (Ideological is reference)							-0.068	-0.40		
Kitschelt's classification:										
Populist anti-statist							0.169	1.21	0.391***	3.23
Social-fascist							-0.364*	-1.87	-0.047	-0.28
Missing cases (Right-authoritarianism is reference)							0.431	1.52	0.357	2.05
	R <sup>2</sup> = 34.54%		R <sup>2</sup> = 56.64%		R <sup>2</sup> = 35.37%		R <sup>2</sup> = 74.04%		R <sup>2</sup> = 76.57%	
	AdjR <sup>2</sup> = 29.51%		AdjR <sup>2</sup> = 44.82%		AdjR <sup>2</sup> = 21.32%		AdjR <sup>2</sup> = 59.61%		AdjR <sup>2</sup> = 67.20%	

\* p &lt; 0.10; \*\* p &lt; 0.05; \*\*\* p &lt; 0.01

Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients and t-values; dependent variables are the difference ratios, reported in Table 1.

develop an adequate model. In this model, the Golder classification shows no effect on the difference ratio. The van der Brug *et al.* classification is only significantly related in its middle category: the difference ratios are smaller when the ideological motivation of the party is more moderate. It remains unclear, however, why exactly this middle category would result in this specific effect. In the Kitschelt classification, the 'social fascist' parties are best captured in survey research, although it has to be noted that the effect is not very strong.

Combining the results from these four preliminary models into our final model proved to be quite a difficult challenge. Because of the limited number of observations, not all independent variables could be included simultaneously. It also became apparent that some of the variables were too strongly correlated to be included together in the analysis. After several rounds of model testing, however, we succeeded in constructing our Model V, which can be considered as our final model as it offers a stable explanation for the variance in the difference ratio. Both the  $R^2$  as the Adjusted  $R^2$  scores for Model V are sufficiently high.<sup>28</sup>

The model shows that voter turnout and response rate remain significant, even after controlling for all other variables. Response bias, therefore, is clearly present. Aggregate levels of political powerlessness and generalized trust continue to exert a negative effect on the difference ratio. Of all the classifications we investigated, only Kitschelt's category of populist parties remained significant: the difference ratio for these populist parties was consistently greater than for other kinds of extreme-right parties. In this final model, it also becomes apparent that the longer an extreme-right party exists, the more difficult it becomes to capture the electoral base of the party in survey data, although this effect is only weakly significant. These findings imply that measurement bias is just as strongly present in these survey results as response bias.

### **Cross-national surveys of voting behaviour: the need for caution**

We have demonstrated that survey data on extreme-right voting behaviour lack cross-cultural external validity because of a combination of response and measurement bias. Partly because of variables related to the survey process and the electoral process, and characteristics of the parties being investigated, there is a systematic error in estimating the electoral strength of extreme-right parties in comparative survey research. Despite the fact

28 To avoid the problem of the limited number of cases, we also conducted a multilevel analysis, using simultaneously information about individual respondents and country-level characteristics as independent variables (not reported here for lack of space, available from the authors). This multilevel model also confirms the notion that both response and measurement bias are clearly present.

that we used just one, highly reliable, data source like the European Social Survey, we clearly observed a lack of cross-cultural external validity in this measurement. We are fully aware of the fact that the multiple regression analysis we reported in Table 4 does not give us the final word in explaining this under-representation, as there are some obvious weaknesses in a model that is based on just 29 observations. As we get access to more observations in the years ahead, we hope to develop this model further. However, given our purpose, there is no need to offer a final and complete explanation for the variance in the difference ratios. Our main purpose in this paper is to demonstrate that there is a systematic difference in survey results and electoral results of extreme-right parties. How exactly we can explain this difference is, for the moment, a matter of secondary importance.

A pessimistic interpretation of our findings might be that cross-national surveys are not really suited to studying this form of electoral behaviour in a comparative manner. Surveys already have a hard time being representative of the population as a whole. When we study electoral behaviour, and more specifically electoral results, however, we do not want to portray public opinion in general but only that part of public opinion that takes part in elections. In some countries this will be little more than half of the eligible population. Maybe we simply expect too much from comparative surveys if we assume that they, despite all the obvious problems of sampling and reliability, still offer a cross-culturally equivalent representation of the voting population. Both surveys and elections are but imperfect representations of public opinion, and perhaps we are naive to assume that one imperfect form of measurement can provide us with valid information about another imperfect form of measurement.

We do not wish to adopt this pessimistic conclusion, as a degree of response and/or measurement bias is inevitable when conducting survey research. But we do think some caution is called for. It is already extremely difficult to measure populism, ethnocentrism, racism, political discontent and other attitudes in a reliable manner in a cross-national survey. If we also want to explain voting behaviour, based on these attitudes, we also, by implication, have to take account of electoral rules, electoral participation and party characteristics. If, in addition, we try to answer such a question with an analysis of cross-national survey material, as various authors do, leading to quite divergent results, the need for caution only becomes stronger.

**Marc Hooghe** is Associate Professor of political science at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). His recent work on social capital and political participation has been published in various journals, including the *British Journal of Political Science*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Electoral Studies*, *Party Politics*, *Political Behavior*, *International Political Science Review*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and *Environmental Politics*.

**Tim Reeskens** is a doctoral student in political science at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). His main research interest is the relationship between ethnic and cultural diversity and social cohesion indicators, using the data from the European Social Survey. His research has been published in the *Journal of Women, Politics and Polity*, *Social Indicators Research*, *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie*, *Ethische Perspectieven* and *Samenleving en Politiek*.