Crime and the success of rightwing populist parties

Uwe Remer*, Raphael Heiberger*, Marius Kaffai*,
Poster prepared for the 1st Workshop on Computational Linguistics for Political Text Analysis (CPSS), Sept. 6th 2021

1. Research Question

Rising public approval and electoral gains for populist radical right parties (PRR) Europe (Mudde 2007; Norris & Inglehart 2019: 9; Guth & Nelsen 2021).

D E F   PRR: "*[...] political parties with a core ideology that is a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.*" (Mudde 2007: 26)

The European refugee crisis 2015 demonstrated clearly, how RPPs strive for issue ownership on crime an immigration.

But on the empirical side, the findings are mixed and scarce. Neither the effect immigration, nor the effect of crime on the electoral success of populist right parties is uncontested. So we ask:

?   Does crime influence the success of populist radical right parties and if so, is this effect is moderated by the local presence of immigrants?
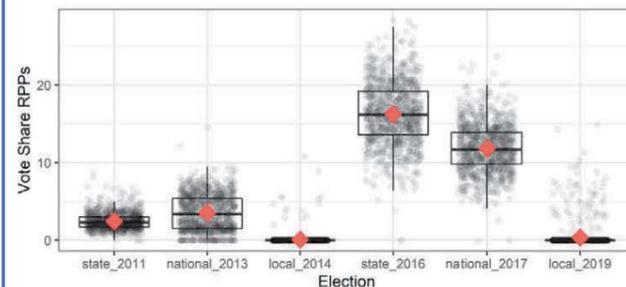
2. Theory & Hypothesis

Agenda setting and priming of law and order issues and strategic reframing immigration in terms of security threat serves as electoral core strategy of PRR (Mudde 2007; Dinas & van Spanje 2011: 661; Arzheimer 2018: 151).

By trying to establish a linkage between the issues of crime and migration, the PRRs specifically target voters that might be characterized by Adornos authoritarian personality. As an idealtype, such a person is said to attribute individual and socio-tropic encounters of uncertainty and perceived threat to outgroups and react with negative attitudes towards these outgroups and electoral support of PRRs.

Relating to Dinas & van Spanje (2011) we expect that, the higher the number of crimes and the higher the number of immigrants the higher the RPP vote shares (main effects and interaction).

3. Data & Measurement

Our analysis will be based on data for five subsequent elections (national, state and local elections) in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany, Level of analysis are the 1.101 municipalities. The **dependent variable is the vote share of PRR parties**. Here we observe high variation across municipalities and elections:
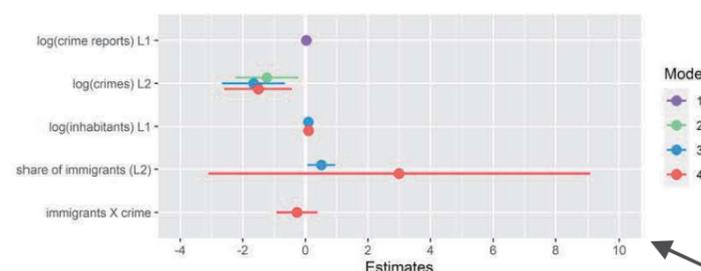

We standardize the vote share by z-scaling for each election to be able to compare the elections.

The independent variable crime is usually based on measures from the **crime statistics**. In Germany, the BKA publishes statistics on **unlawful crimes known to the police** on a yearly basis, but only available on the level of counties.
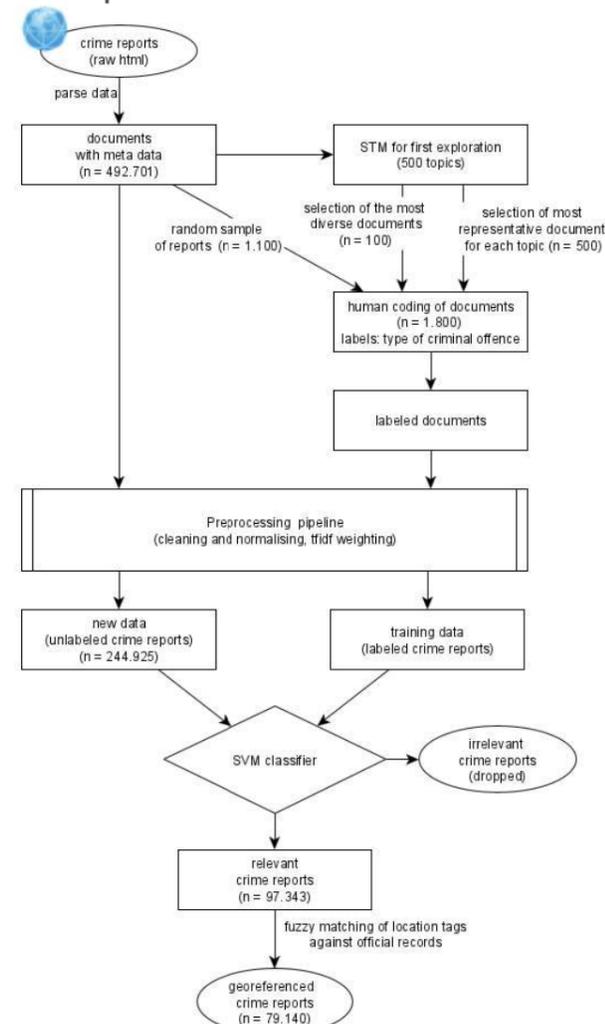
To be able to measure **crimes on the level of municipalities**, we utilize original data on a corpus of nearly 500.000 **police press reports** published since 2015 by the police departments in the state, of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany. We describe the process of data collection more closely in the next section.

Immigration is measured as share of people with migration background, as defined by the federal statistics agency. At the moment, the measure is only available on county level (see "further steps")

4. Processing of Crime Reports

We collected the crime reports by **webscraping** from an internet portal, where police departments centrally publish crime reports. As these reports include a large number of irrelevant reports (car accidents, events, crime prevention) we need to **classify relevant and irrelevant reports**. Therefore, **human coders annotate** a sample of the corpus for text classification. To be able to include also rare crimes, we additionally used a structural topic model to with 500 topics to purposely select reports for human annotation. The crimes that are identified by the classified documents are **aggregated on the level of municipal administrative units**.

5. Analysis

At the current time, we are able to provide preliminary results. To get a first impression of the relation between PRR vote shares, crime and immigration, we estimate cross sectional multilevel models for the PRR vote shares at the municipal level (L1) only for the national election 2017. A multilevel model is necessary, as crime measured by the official crime statistic and immigration rate are only available at county level (L2).

The **first model** includes the count of reported crimes on the local level. It urned out to have no significant effect on PRR vote shares (which might be due to problems concerning the geolocation).

The **second model** included the county level crime statistic measure. It explains about 10 percent of local variation in PRR vote share. Most surprisingly, the effect is negative. And it remains stable, when we control for the size of the municipalty (as cities experience higher levels of crime).

When we include the immigration variable (**third model**), we see a significant and positive influence on the PRR vote shares. The model now explains about 20 percent of the local variation.

Finally, the interaction between crime and share of immigrants in the **forth model** has no significant influence on PRR vote shares.

Summary & Further Steps

As we have seen at least for the general election 2017, crime and the share of immigrants significantly influence the PRR vote shares at the local level. The mutual reinforcement of the effect as expected from theory can not be observed,. The present analysis is only a preliminary view on work in progress. Currently, we collect data to include measures for immigration on the municipal level. Instead of cross sectional analysis of the data, we will apply a difference-in-dfference design and we will make use of the spatial character of the data.

References

- Arzheimer, K. (2018). Explaining Electoral Support for the Radical Right. In J. Rydgren (ed.), The Oxford handbook of the radical right, pp. 143–165. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Dinas, E. & van Spanje, J. (2011). Crime Story: The role of crime and immigration in the anti-immigration vote. Electoral Studies 30(4): 658–671. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2011.06.010.
- Guth, J.L. & Nelsen, B.F. (2021). Party choice in Europe: Social cleavages and the rise of populist parties. Party Politics 27(3): 453–464. doi: 10.1177/1354068819853965.
- Mudde, C. (2007). Populist radical right parties in Europe. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P. & Inglehart, R. (2019). Cultural Backlash. Cambridge University Press.

* University of Stuttgart, Institute for Social Sciences, CSS Lab, https://www.sowi.uni-stuttgart.de/en/departments/css/