



The geography of discontent: Explanations and policies

Special session coordinated by Jorge Díaz Lanchas (JRC – European Commission)

The European Union (EU) is facing a political and economic challenge as a result of the emerging wave of radical political parties. Although these extreme parties have different aims and scopes, they have in common both an opposed EU integration message and a spatial pattern according to which lagging-behind regions are turning their political spectrum toward these extreme positions.

Up to now several economic-based hypotheses, from globalization trends to economic decay factors passing through lack of opportunities, have been raised to explain the vote for the anti-system parties. Concretely, job polarization becomes, as a consequence of economic inequality, automation processes and international migration effects, the leading explanation of the individual characteristics of anti-system voters. These are: older, working-class with few qualifications and male voters in low income contexts, are more likely to change their vote in favour of radical parties.

On the contrary, new theories from public opinion literature propose that not economic leading factors but the role of personal attitudes and individual perceptions are the drivers of individual voting behaviours. To say in other words, the vote for anti-EU parties is the result of individual perceptions toward certain social dimensions such as the EU integration process, international migration or economic insecurity. As a consequence of these perceptions, individuals are choosing nativist and more nationalistic political options as a way to push for different policies more in line with their political preferences.

Even when this debate is still open and far from being closed, the empirical evidence points out to spatial differences between rich and poor regions in both economic factors and personal attitudes explanations, where the urban-rural dichotomy turns out to be crucial element on this spatial voting puzzle.

Within this context, the aim of this session is to raise a scientific debate on the regional factors and possible spatial consequences of the prominent political wave that is challenging the EU integration process. The session covers either theoretical or empirical works attending to both literature branches explained and whose nature relies on regional differences and urban-rural dichotomies. Research articles based on evidence from the EU or different parts of the world are invited to apply. Not only this but submissions on the set of economic policies needed to alleviate this new political wave are also welcome.