POVERTY VOTING AND THE EUROPEAN WELFARE STATE

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Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 3-6, 2003, Chicago, IL.

Abstract

Little research has been done on the direct effect of poverty on voting behavior outside the American context. Using data from a 1993 round of the Eurobarometer survey, we construct a profile of the poor in advanced European democracies. We then test the effect of poverty on incumbency voting and voting for parties of the left, following insights gleaned from research on economic voting and using American research on voting behavior as a guide. While several different measures of poverty are employed in successive regression models, it is surprising that none yields significant results. Part of the reason for this could be the lack of stigmatization of the European poor, which perhaps leads them to be more like non-poor voters than would be the case in the American setting. Although the data used here is almost a decade old, the results presented should have ripened with age: increasing pressures on the European welfare state from globalization and increased immigration over the past decade have made the problem of poverty more acute, and even more deserving of scholarly attention.
I. Introduction

Research on voter turnout in America is abundant, and has yielded some consistent results about how different groups of people in different social circumstances approach politics. One such consistent result is the fact that the American poor are not well-represented in politics, since being poor in America usually brings with it a whole host of impediments to political involvement (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). The research on the poor American voter generally ends here – the plight of the poor and their inability or unwillingness to go to the polls on election day is not a concern of most turnout research. Turnout in American elections is usually abysmally low, and so research on American voting patterns tends not to focus on groups like the poor, but rather on broader issues of mobilization and participation. In contrast to the American case, however, turnout in European advanced democracies is quite high (except in the United Kingdom, which sports a majoritarian electoral system that depresses turnout, and Switzerland, which is an outlier for many different reasons). Since a large percentage of the European population is voting, it seems safe to assume that even the groups that are continually underrepresented in the United States are showing up at the polls in Europe. This research will seek to uncover the voting behavior one of those underrepresented groups, the poor in Europe’s industrial democracies.

The phenomenon of poverty in advanced democracies is understudied, mostly because it is assumed that prosperous welfare states have cast their social insurance nets wide enough to capture the majority of society’s neediest. This is an unsafe assumption. A recent OECD study on poverty in six countries (Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States) notes that “between 12 and just under 40% of the population across the six countries is touched by poverty over a six-
year period, a much larger portion than would be suggested by ‘static’ poverty rates” (Oxley, et. al 2000, 9). Other studies of poverty in advanced societies concur with this assessment; Peter Townsend and David Gordon, for example, write that “a majority of member states [of the European Union] and intending member states have experienced a growth of inequality of living standards and of poverty, as measured by incomes relative to average income per household” (Gordon and Townsend 2000, 5). That poverty is spreading despite the generally high level of social protection provided by the welfare state emerges as a startling, yet uncontestable, fact.

Despite this fact, however, American political scientists have been reluctant to explore the issue of poverty in advanced democracies beyond the well-confirmed non-impact of the poor on voter turnout. This research fills a void in the literature on voting behavior and mobilization beyond voter turnout. Currently, literature on the topic of the economically disadvantaged falls into three major categories, each of which will be examined more closely: 1.) large-n studies utilizing the National Election Survey or American census data; 2.) studies of European voter turnout that usually neglect a direct discussion of the impact of the poor on democracy; and 3.) research on the phenomenon of poverty and its policy implications, with some use of case studies. The present research seeks to combine American politics-style quantitative analysis with existing European literature informed by policy research. More specifically, it reflects an attempt to broaden the research on economic voting by examining the voting behavior of a specific subset of the European population.
II. Voter Turnout and the Economically Disadvantaged: U.S. & European Research

Much of the work on the economically disadvantaged has been conducted in the American setting, using the National Election studies and plentiful U.S. Census data to assess the impact of the poor on voter turnout. This literature is important to examine because it is virtually the only quantitative literature that examines any facet of poverty, although it fails to examine poverty as a social condition in much detail. Stephen J. Rosenstone (1982) has neatly summarized the positions of American political scientists on the impact of economic hardship on voter turnout. Generally, the research falls into one of three camps: those who believe that economic difficulties increase voter turnout, those who believe economic adversity depresses turnout, and those who insist that economic adversity has no effect on turnout. The arguments for each are compelling. Schlozman and Verba (1979), for example, advocate the view that economic hardship mobilizes people, encouraging them to participate in politics. These people blame the government for their problems, and wish the government to correct those problems. This view is supported by proponents of the economic voting hypothesis who charge that the electorate, when the economic situation of the country adversely impacts them, will punish the government of the day by “throw[ing] the rascals out” (Lewis-Beck 1990, 8).

The other side of this argument generally receives more support. Past research has noted that people experiencing economic hardship have a “preoccupation with personal economic well-being, and as a result, the [individual] withdraws from such external matters as politics” (Rosenstone 1982, 26). The poor struggle for their very survival, so the argument goes, and thus have little time or energy left to participate in politics. Rosenstone and Hansen find empirical support for this view, noting that the “rates of turnout among the most affluent citizens are nearly 35 percentage points higher
than the rates of turnout among the most needy” (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 43). Arend Lijphart has also noticed the inequalities of political participation: “the inequality of representation and influence are not randomly distributed but systematically biased in favor of more privileged citizens… and against less advantaged citizens” (Lijphart 1997, 1). Lijphart laments that little can be done about this inequality except to encourage more people to vote, which he believes is an important goal for democracies worldwide. If more people vote, more interests will be represented, and the government will be more responsive to the true preferences of its full electorate. Highton and Wolfinger, however, recently take exception to Lijphart’s argument, showing through the use of cognate voters that the election result in the U.S. would not be substantially different even if the class of non-voters actually voted (Highton and Wolfinger, 2001).

Some influential studies have failed to reveal any relationship between economic adversity and voter turnout. Fiorina, for example, has concluded that “there is no discernible relationship between economic conditions and voting turnout” (Fiorina 1978, 439). Research that denies a relationship between economic hardship and turnout usually argues that people do not tend to blame the government for their problems – they blame themselves. Some research has even suggested that economic adversity produces little personal stress, since hardships such as unemployment do not usually last for long periods of time (Rosenstone 1982, 27).

The research on voter turnout in the United States has informed research on turnout in other countries, although turnout elsewhere is generally considered to be less problematic. Most studies of turnout outside the American context, however, have assessed the impact of political structure on voting. Robert Jackman is a leader in this regard, noting that competitive districts encourage turnout but disproportionality in the translation of votes into seats in the legislature discourages it in industrial democracies.
In addition, multi-party systems depress turnout, since voters “do not directly select the government that will govern them” (Jackman 1987, 408). Unicameralism and compulsory voting also have an effect, increasing turnout in industrial democracies. Arend Lijphart’s comprehensive study of 36 democracies arrives at largely the same results (Lijphart 1999).

Such structural accounts are dominant explanations for voter turnout in Europe, and this seems reasonable given the usually high rates of voter participation. Little quantitative attention has been paid, however, to the impact of specific groups and classes of people on voter turnout. As in the American case, the poor as a group are neglected. What issues are the poor most sensitive about? Do they use their vote to express their dissatisfaction with their personal economic situation or the economic situation of the country in which they live? If we can assume that the relatively high rates of voter turnout in European industrial democracies includes the poor, can we determine if the poor are different than other voters in their evaluations of the economic and political situations of their countries?

As aforementioned, most of the research on poverty (in Europe and elsewhere) is directed at policymakers. A large portion of Atkinson’s (1995) study of poverty and the welfare state is devoted to determining how best to capture poverty in national statistics, as well as how policymakers should address issues of redistribution and social insurance in the face of an ever-more expensive welfare state. McFate, et al’s treatment of poverty is comprehensive, encompassing everything from the effect of technological development on poverty to immigrants in poverty to the entire European system of social insurance. Their work is also sprinkled with case studies from European welfare states, which will prove useful in the present research. A relatively new addition to the literature on poverty in Europe is a collection of essays on the measurement of poverty in Europe, Breadline Europe (2000). This collection addresses the growing gap between rich and
poor in Europe and the decline in living standards for the large class of poor people, and
notes many reasons that poverty reduction in Europe has largely been a failure.
Additionally, the research provides case studies and policy recommendations for the
future of poverty studies in the European context.

The research that follows provides a clearer picture of the poor and their voting habits
in Europe as a whole, providing a stronger link between the advanced quantitative
literature prevalent in the American case with the structural and case study literature
outlined above. I intend to examine the following questions about the poor European
voter in detail:

1.) **Do the poor exercise their vote to reward or punish governments for
their situation? In short, does poverty have an effect on voting for an
incumbent?**

I hypothesize that the poor are not ignorant of economics, and that economics are at the
forefront of their concerns to be articulated on election day. In advanced welfare states
such as those in Europe, I hypothesize that the poor feel more empowered to make a
difference in their governments, to make their position known to the politicians in office.
Poor citizens in welfare states will have greater demands on their government, and
experience greater feelings of efficacy in having those demands met (or at least heard).
Thus, I suggest that the poor are the fiercest of the economic voters in Europe.

2.) **Do the poor vote for the parties that they believe will help them to
improve their economic position?**

Traditionally, it has been the reform- and welfare-minded parties of the left (socialist and
social democratic parties) who have appealed to the working class voters, promising
income redistribution and greater social protection than their center-right or right
counterparts. Many social democratic parties in Europe, however, have already
accomplished the goals they set for themselves and their countries as regards social
welfare, and some must now shift their focus to post-materialist values in order to maintain their electoral position vis-à-vis the small parties of the New Left (e.g., the German SPD and the Alliance 90/Greens). Herbert Kitschelt, in his study of European social democracy, suggests that the entire nature of social democratic parties is changing due to their ever-changing constituencies – blue-collar workers, for example, who are traditionally bastions of social democratic support, are declining in numbers, and so social democratic parties are increasingly relying on a white-collar constituency for votes (Kitschelt 1994, 32). Kitschelt argues that social democracy is moving away from issues of redistribution to address more current issues of technology, urban planning, and women’s rights. No research exists, however, that examines how this shift will affect Europe’s poor. Will they still support the party family that now seems to be moving away from addressing their concerns? Or will they cast their ballots elsewhere?

I hypothesize that the poor will indeed be more likely to vote for parties of the left despite the alleged shift in focus of these parties away from the prevalent concerns of the poor. The poor, I submit, may even be more likely to vote for parties of the extreme left than other voters if they perceive a decline in the attention social democratic parties give to issues about which the poor are most concerned.

To test these relationships, I will rely on survey data from Eurobarometer 40: Poverty and Social Exclusion. This data, collected in 1993 by Anna Melich and Karlheinz Reif, is one of the few datasets that taps into respondents’ attitudes toward poverty and what should be done about it. Although the data is almost a decade old, the results presented here should actually have ripened with age: increasing pressures on the European welfare state from globalization and increased immigration over the past decade have made the problems of poverty (and the related concept of social exclusion) more acute, and even more worth scholarly attention. (This increased pressure on the
welfare state is noted in recent literature on the effects of globalization [e.g., Evans, 1997; Iverson and Cusack, 2000].

III. Data on the European Poor

*Eurobarometer 40: Poverty and Social Exclusion* provides researchers with ample data on questions of economic hardship and its perception and maintains the same high level of demographic data as previous Eurobarometers. This makes the dataset an excellent choice for testing theories about the relationship between poverty and voting; it is a resource that should be more fully exploited in the literature, but is notably absent from it.

The dataset includes information collected in mid- to late 1993 in the countries of the then-European Community. For this research, I use the majority of the dataset; since I wish to focus my research on the advanced welfare states of Western Europe, I decided to exclude the less-affluent states of Greece, Spain, and Portugal, whose higher poverty rates might diminish the effect of poverty on voting behavior in the more advanced states. As with all multi-country Eurobarometer studies, the exclusion of some observations does not adversely impact that number of cases, which remains high enough for statistical analysis despite deletions (8,949 respondents). The countries that are thus under consideration are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Great Britain.

One of the many difficulties with studying the poor is that they are a moving target. As Leisering and Leibfried note: “Marginalized groups such as the homeless and street people are no more than segments of the poor population among which long durations of poverty are more commonplace, but they do not reflect the experience of the majority whose poverty is less visible” (Leisering and Leibfried 1999, 18). What this
means is that, contrary to what society generally “sees,” those people who are obviously poor are only a small percentage of the total number of people who fall below established poverty lines during the course of their lives. Even a survey instrument as well-designed and comprehensive as the *Eurobarometer* will have trouble, then, capturing the large category of “the poor” that actually exists at any given time.

What does the *Eurobarometer* capture about the poor? Raw frequencies reveal that in this survey, almost 23% of respondents identified themselves as “poor families.” When asked to consider their incomes and expenditures (including pensions, other social insurance benefits, rents, child allowances, etc.), nearly 20% of respondents said that their families fell into the lowest income quartile presented. Furthermore, 25% of respondents said that they have either witnessed or experienced poverty in the area in which they live (i.e., they themselves or someone in their immediate circle of family or friends have been in a situation of poverty or have been at risk of falling into a situation of poverty).

As will be described later, I construct two different variables (“Poverty Score” and “Poor”) in an attempt to isolate those *Eurobarometer* respondents who are truly disadvantaged. The variable “Poverty Score” is less refined than the “Poor” variable, as it includes those individuals who may not actually be poor themselves but who are exposed to poverty on a regular basis. The “Poor” variable, on the other hand, partially uncovers those respondents who are truly impoverished since it is an additive variable that gives them “points” for each answer they give that indicates true poverty. This variable, again, is described in detail below (in Section V). Tables 1-6 give a portrait of those individuals in this survey who described themselves as being in poverty.

[Insert Tables 1-6 here]

In general, the tables reveal that there is very little difference between those people whom the “Poor” variable classifies as “not impoverished” (those scoring 0 out of 3) and
those who are “impoverished” (1 out of 3) and “more impoverished” (2 out of 3). The real differences tend to emerge between all of these groups and the last, those people who are “severely impoverished” (scoring 3 out of 3 on the “Poor” indicator). This is a small subset of the entire survey population, but it is interesting to note that this small group is about half as likely to be married, slightly but significantly more likely to be female, and more likely to be over the age of 55 than their more “affluent” counterparts (see Tables 1 and 2). Table 4 shows that the very poor are also less likely to have children under age 15 living at home, and are about half as likely to have 1-3 children at home as compared to the group of non-poor. This is probably due to the fact that, as the tables show, most of the “severely impoverished” are older – their children have already left home.

We might expect that these “severely impoverished” people are less-educated than the other groups, and Table 3 shows that this is indeed the case. More than 35% of the very poor ended their formal education before they were 14 years old, as compared to only about 11% of those who were “not impoverished,” and only about 9% of the very poor were still in school (compared with 13% of those not in poverty). Generally, we might expect that the “severely impoverished” group would contain a substantial number of students (underpaid and overworked graduate students?), but this does not seem to be the case.

Politically, the “severely impoverished” are more likely to place themselves on the left of a left-right scale, and this also sets them apart from their “not impoverished” neighbors (see Table 5). Fully 40% of the very poor identified with the left, compared to only about 27% of the non-poor. This is in agreement with the argument presented above, that the poor will be more likely to vote for leftist parties since those parties are traditionally oriented toward social welfare. Interestingly, however, over half (52%) of
the very poor stated that they are not close to a political party at all, whereas only 44% of the non-poor made the same claim (see Table 6). So, while the poor are more likely to think of themselves as “leftist,” they are perhaps not as likely as the non-poor to join or support a political party.

Many of these details correspond nicely with Leisering and Leibfried’s study, which was mentioned earlier. Leisering and Leibfried advocate a “life-course” approach to studying poverty, using longitudinal rather than cross-sectional data (their study was limited to Germany). The “life-course” approach “means analyzing poverty in a dynamic perspective framed by both institutional arrangements and individual biographical horizons” (Leisering and Leibfried 1999, 6). They note that poverty is transient – it is only an “episode” in a person’s life, and not a long-lasting state of affairs. In general, they note that people will be most subject to poverty at specific periods in their lives: when they are children up until they are married (if they marry), when they are in “early middle life” (after marriage but before children leave home and earn their own incomes), and in old age (when they can no longer work) (ibid., 15). Although Leisering and Leibfried make no mention of the voting behavior or political leanings of the very poor, their study provides some validation for the figures provided in the Tables, despite the fact that using Eurobarometer-type data is not their suggested approach.

IV. Variable Construction and Model(s)

The dependent variable is constructed to allow me to examine the possibilities for economic voting among the poor in Europe. Since the basic hypothesis of economic voting is “when voters approve (disapprove) of past economic conditions, they vote for (against) the governing party (or parties),” my dependent variable is simply “Vote for Incumbent” (Lewis-Beck 1988, 34). Different variants of the basic economic voting
hypothesis, such as whether or not people vote retrospectively (in light of past economic experiences), prospectively (in anticipation of their economic futures) can be effectively examined with this dependent variable. The dependent variable was constructed by determining which parties constituted the incumbent governments in the election prior to the survey and assigning respondents a score of “1” if they voted for that party (or parties) and a “0” otherwise. (See Appendix for list of incumbent governments for each country.) This dichotomous variable presents some problems for basic OLS regression, discussed later.

The model also includes a number of controls\(^1\), most of them standard in survey research. The demographic controls include age (measured in exact years) and religious practice (measured as frequency of church attendance from “several times a week” [1] to “never” [5]). I have also added a control for ideology, since it is clearly a powerful determinant of vote choice. The ideology score is based on respondents’ self-placement on a 10-point scale, where 1 is the furthest left and 10 is the furthest right. To aid the interpretation of regression results, the raw ideology score was multiplied by +1 if the respondent’s incumbent government was rightist, and –1 if it was leftist\(^2\). This means that, when a respondent’s incumbent government is rightist, an increase in the ideology score will have a positive effect on their vote for the incumbent. The opposite holds true for respondents with a left-leaning incumbent government. Dummy variables were also included for each country in the study, with Belgium excluded as the reference category. Unfortunately, this dataset does not offer a clear variable for the level of education of the respondent; in its place, I use a variable which gives the age at which the respondent

\(^1\) See the Appendix for complete wording of all of the survey questions used in this research.
\(^2\) Incumbent governments were determined using information compiled by Roberto Ortiz de Zarate, “World Political Leaders, 1945-2002.” Available at http://www.terra.es/personal2/monolith. To see a list of incumbent governments at the time of this survey, please consult the Appendix at the end of this paper.
ended his/her formal education. This variable ranges from 14-22 years of age, and includes a category for those still studying.

I determine the effect of poverty on voting behavior by including a variable labeled “Poverty Score.” This is a combination of respondents’ answers to three different survey questions. Respondents were first assigned a score of 1 if they knew someone in their immediate family or circle of friends who are “in the situation of poverty and social exclusion.” The selection of this question was based on the work of Pamela Johnston Conover, whose research suggests that “people do distinguish between the economic interests of salient reference groups from both personal and especially national interests” (Conover 1985, 160). People are more likely to be sensitive to the changes in the situation of people they interact with frequently than the abstract interactions they have with their nation-state. I include this variable as part of the “Poverty Score” in an effort to determine if whether or not witnessing poverty among one’s closest friends and family affects one’s propensity to punish the incumbent government on behalf of that close group.

The other two variables that make up the “Poverty Score” are the respondents’ income (measured in quartiles) and the respondents’ subjective self-placement on a seven-point scale from “we are a rich family” (7) to “we are a poor family” (1). If respondents listed themselves in the lowest income quartile, they were assigned a score of “1.” Similarly, if the respondents placed themselves in the lowest two subjective categories of family economic status (i.e., “1” or “2,” with “1” indicating the poorest family and “2” indicating a slightly less-poor family), they were given a score of “1.” To capture the largest number of respondents, respondents were given a score of 1 if they answered received a 1 on any of the components of this variable (i.e., the “Poverty Score” variable ranges only from “0” to “1”).
The other variables in this first model capture respondents’ prospective and retrospective economic voting behavior. There are a series of questions in the Eurobarometer survey that ask the respondent to reflect on his/her personal and national economic situation over the past 12 months and also to predict what his/her personal and national economic futures hold. In a composite variable labeled “Retro,” I combine the respondents’ answers to three questions – their evaluation of the national economic situation, their household financial situation, and the national unemployment situation over the past 12 months – and divide by three to achieve a single, retrospective score. (Respondents are asked to choose a response between 1 [a lot better] and 5 [a lot worse].) I create a similar variable labeled “Prospective,” where respondents reveal their expectations for the same things in the next year. The list of possible responses is also the same.

I estimate the following model:

\[ V = a + b_1D_1 + b_2D_2 + b_3D_3 + b_4D_4 + b_5D_5 + b_6D_6 + b_7D_7 + b_8D_8 + b_9X_1 + b_{10}X_2 + b_{11}X_3 + b_{12}X_4 + b_{13}X_5 + b_{14}X_6 + b_{15}X_7 + e \]

where \( V \) = vote for incumbent, \( a \) is a constant, \( D_1 \) through \( D_8 \) are dummy variables for the countries under study (with Belgium, the reference category, excluded), \( X_1 \) is the interaction of personal ideology and incumbent government ideology, \( X_2 \) is the respondent’s score on “Prospective,” \( X_3 \) is the respondent’s score on “Retro,” \( X_4 \) is frequency of church attendance, \( X_5 \) is the respondent’s age, \( X_6 \) is the respondent’s “Poverty Score,” and \( X_7 \) is the age at which the respondent completed his/her formal education.

This model was estimated using OLS regression, which can present a problem for dichotomous dependent variables. The suggested approach is to run a logistic regression model, as it is well-suited to dichotomous variables and may yield more reliable results.
Logistic regression overcomes some of the inefficiencies of OLS regression (such as non-linearity, predictions that do not make sense because probabilities are extended past 1 or below 0, heteroskedasticity) when the variable is dichotomous (Pampel 2000, v). Logistic regression results, however, are much less straightforward in their interpretation, and sometimes the results do not differ much from those obtained from OLS. After running a logistic regression\(^3\) on the model presented above, I have discovered that the results differ only very negligibly. Because of the ease of interpretation of OLS coefficients and model-fit statistics, I have decided to use OLS regression for this analysis.

The results of OLS regression analysis are as follows:

\[
V = 0.073 + 0.068***D_1 + 0.087**D_2 + 0.607*D_3 + 0.210*D_4 + 0.253*D_5 + 0.004D_7 + 0.988*D_8 + 0.058*X_1 + 0.002X_2 - 0.040**X_3 - 0.037*X_4 + 0.003*X_5 - 0.020X_6 - 0.004X_7 + e
\]

\[
(1.11) \quad (2.05) \quad (2.66) \quad (11.16) \quad (11.65) \quad (5.92) \quad (6.20) \quad (0.13)
\]

\[
(17.41)
\]

\[
0.058X_1 + 0.002X_2 - 0.040**X_3 - 0.037*X_4 + 0.003*X_5 - 0.020X_6 - 0.004X_7 + e
\]

\[
(14.86) \quad (0.159) \quad (-2.80) \quad (-5.04) \quad (7.36) \quad (-1.27) \quad (-1.44)
\]

\[
\text{SEE} = 0.44 \quad \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.138 \quad N = 3,809
\]

where the variables are described as above, the values in parentheses are the t-ratios, * indicates significance at the .001 level, ** indicates significance at the .01 level, *** indicates significance at the .05 level, SEE is the standard error of the estimate, the adjusted \(R^2\) is the coefficient of multiple determination, and N is the number of cases.

V. Results and Refinements

The OLS results (as well as the logit results) are disappointing for the hypothesis about poverty and votes for the incumbent. The ideology variable is significant, as are the other controls, at the .001 level, which is to be expected. The variable that measures

\(^3\text{See Appendix for model fit and coefficient results of the logistic regression for this model.}\)
the respondents’ answers to the prospective economic voting variables, however, are insignificant; the responses to the prospective questions are ordered from better (1) to worse (5), and these results indicate that for each unit change on the prospective economic questions, the probability of voting for the incumbent increases by less than 1%. Retrospective economic considerations, however, do reach statistical significance in this model. As the respondent feels the economic conditions have deteriorated, she is slightly less likely to vote for the incumbent. This is consistent with the economic voting literature.

The “Poverty Score” variable, the one of the most interest for this research, fails to achieve statistical significance. This is disturbing, since it seems reasonable to believe that those experiencing economic hardship as well as those witnessing such hardship would be more likely, according to the economic voting hypothesis, to vote the current government out of office. The coefficient on the “Poverty Score” variable at least carries the correct sign; although it is not significant, the coefficient can be interpreted that a greater “Poverty Score” makes a vote for the incumbent less likely. This interpretation cannot be relied upon, however, since the result does not statistically allow us say with confidence that poverty and incumbent voting are indeed related at all.

For survey research, the R² in this model is not entirely bad. But the R² value in survey research may not be high enough if the model suffers from collinearity problems. Collinearity does not appear to be a significant problem in this model, however.

Despite the discouraging results for the relationship between poverty and voting for the incumbent in this model, I chose to recode the poverty variables in an effort to distinguish between two important concepts: witnessing poverty and actually being poor. The “Poverty Score” variable mixed the two concepts, perhaps inappropriately. In its place, I created two new poverty variables: “Witnesses Poverty” and “Poor.”
former is an additive variable that gives respondents a point for each question they answer that suggests they have witnessed poverty. This is an effort to again capture Conover’s notion of “group salience.” Respondents could “earn” a maximum score of 3.00 if they 1.) live in an area where people are experiencing poverty; 2.) have friends or family members who are living in poverty; and 3.) witness the living conditions of the impoverished on a regular basis. People who score at all on this variable have been exposed to poverty and might be more likely to vote on behalf of people living in its grasp.

The second variable, “Poor,” allows me to get to those people who are actually impoverished. “Poor” is also an additive variable, where respondents receive points as they exhibit more signs of poverty. The maximum is again 3.00. Respondents receive points if they 1.) place themselves in the lowest income quartile; 2.) classify themselves as a “poor family;” and 3.) note that they are able to financially manage their household with “difficulty” or “great difficulty.” Together, these variables allow for a clear separation of the poor from the rest of the population. People scoring a “1” on this variable compose 27% of the sample. Those scoring a “2” totaled 13.7%, and the poorest (those scoring a “3”) made up 6%. The remaining 53.3% of the sample did not answer in the affirmative to any of the “Poor” components. I initially included another question that asked respondents if they are forced to cut back on their spending on a regular basis, but decided against it because it did not seem to be confined to the poor; almost everyone could say that they must “cut back” on their spending for some reason.

Another refinement of the poverty variables is suggested by the literature, and not included at all in the former “Poverty Score.” Poverty can also be a gendered phenomenon – it affects women in a different way than it affects men. Research on women and poverty exists, and it suggests that cannot simply be “added in” to traditional
studies of poverty. Instead, research should attempt to determine the limitations that are placed on women “by the current gendered division of labor and by the (inherent) assumption that women are dependent on men” (Ruspini 2000, 108). Unfortunately, the survey questions asked limit my ability to capture the nuances of female poverty, and I am forced to resort to a “Female Poor” variable that combines the “Poor” variable described above with respondents’ gender. In future research, I hope to give the problem of female poverty more rigorous attention. At any rate, the “Female Poor” variable should give a sense of the way poor women vote as compared to the rest of the population.

I estimated the model again using both OLS and logit, this time replacing the statistically insignificant “Poverty Score” with the two more refined poverty variables and the female poverty variable. The results of the OLS estimation (again, provided for ease of interpretation) are as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
V &= .053 + .089D_1 + .094D_2 + .573D_3 + .565D_4 + .200D_5 + .189D_6 + .001D_7 +.953D_8 + \\
&\quad (.881) \quad (2.99) \quad (3.39) \quad (11.50) \quad (11.87) \quad (5.56) \quad (0.026) \\
&\quad (18.56)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
.055X_1 & - .005X_2 - .036**X_3 - .033X_4 + .037X_5 - .003X_6 - .001X_7 - .017X_8 + e \\
&\quad (15.26) \quad (-.38) \quad (-2.74) \quad (-4.73) \quad (9.33) \quad (-.27) \quad (-.06) \quad (-.86)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{SEE} = .44 \quad \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .133 \quad N = 4,448
\]

where the dummy variables as well as X, through Xs, are as described for the first model, Xo is the “Witness Poverty” variable, Xi is the “Poor” variable, Xs is the “Female Poor” variable, the figures in parenthesis are t-ratios, and the significance levels, the SEE, the R^2 and the N are as described above.

The results of this model are surprisingly similar to the first model, despite the refinement of the poverty score. The same variables are significant at the same levels,
and again the poverty variables do not come close to statistical significance. The $R^2$ changes by -.001. This is puzzling.

Undeterred, I estimated the model with yet another refinement suggested by the literature. American literature notes a possible relationship between the length of time a person is unemployed and their propensity to punish the incumbent government for their joblessness. Accordingly, I estimated the same model, adding a variable “Unemployment,” which captures the length of time a respondent has been out of work, ranging from “up to 6 months” to “between 2 and 5 years.” This addition adds explanatory leverage to the model: the adjusted $R^2$ increases to .172, the variable is significant at the .05 level, and the variable is correctly signed (i.e., the more time a person is unemployed, the less likely he/she is to vote for the incumbent). The problem with adding this variable, however, is that it is 70% correlated with the poverty variables created for the last model.

Given these results, it does not appear that poverty or the perception of it decreases the vote for the incumbent government in Europe. This is surely a surprising result from a plausible theory, but it is only one aspect of the question presented at the beginning of this paper. Next, we must determine if the poor are, as hypothesized, inclined to vote more left than the general population.

To determine if such a relationship between poverty and leftist voting (specifically extreme left voting) exists, a new dependent variable was created. Eurobarometer 40 asks respondents to choose the party they voted for in the last election, but gives each party a code to place it in a broader “party family.” I separated these party families into a seven-point scale, with 1 being a vote for parties of the extreme left and 7 a vote for the extreme right. Since this model does not have a dichotomous dependent variable, OLS is appropriate and logit is not required. The model is nearly the same as that for incumbent
vote, with the exception of $X_1$, which must be changed to capture only the respondent's personal ideology (i.e., not interacted with the incumbent government ideology, as in previous equations). The OLS estimation is as follows:

$$v = 2.57^* + .12D_1 + .26D_2 + 3.63^*D_3 + 2.11^*D_4 + .30D_5 - .71D_6 - .07D_7 + 1.77^*D_8 + .058***X_1 - .132X_2 + .034X_3 - .087^*X_4 + .008^*X_5 - .011X_6 - .093X_7 - .135***X_8 + e$$

$$\begin{align*}
(4.88) & \quad (-.064) & \quad (.527) & \quad (6.56) & \quad (3.52) & \quad (.366) & \quad (-.819) & \quad (-.012) & \quad (3.33) \\
(14.86) & \quad (-1.10) & \quad (.275) & \quad (-1.15) & \quad (1.67) & \quad (-.128) & \quad (-.767) & \quad (-2.184)
\end{align*}$$

$$\text{SEE} = 1.65 \quad \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .294 \quad N = 5,563$$

where $v$ = party voted for in last general election, $X_1$ is the respondent's personal ideology, the dummy variables as well as $X_2$ through $X_7$ are as described for the refined model, $X_8$ is the length of time the respondent was unemployed, the figures in parentheses are t-ratios, and the significance levels, the SEE, the $R^2$ and the N are as described above.

Once again, the poverty variables fail to achieve significance, or to even get close to it, therefore any interpretation of the coefficient for the poverty variables will be inaccurate and misleading. The non-dummied variables that did achieve significance are, fortunately, correctly signed and readily interpretable, although they bear little on the initial hypotheses put forth in the introduction of this paper. The one surprise in this model is that the retrospective variable, which was significant in every other model, does not appear as a significant determinant of party vote choice. We might expect that the more people are dissatisfied with their past economic situation, the more they will be inclined to vote for leftist, socialist parties focused on redistribution and social welfare. As with the poverty variables, however, this does not seem to be the case.
VI. Conclusions: Still Elusive?

The phenomenon of poverty and its political effects remains underrepresented in the political science literature, but it is an area that is ripe for research. Possibilities for research on poverty (and social exclusion, which was not dealt with specifically in this paper), however, vary greatly with context. In American research, poverty is difficult to capture in statistics; as noted at the beginning of this paper, most American research comments on the lack of representation of the poor in politics but cannot effectively capture how or why the poor, as a group, participate in society. In America, there is a stigma against the poor. As Lawson and Wilson note, the United States has not made an effort to create comprehensive programs to protect the social rights of its citizens: “Instead of helping to integrate the poor into the broader economic and social life of mainstream society, [antipoverty programs] tend to stigmatize and separate them” (Lawson and Wilson 1995, 712).

By contrast, the stigma of poverty is not so harsh in Europe, where welfare systems that benefit wide segments of the population are firmly institutionalized and unlikely to be the subject of retrenchment (for more on welfare state retrenchment, see Pierson 1996). Indeed, by some accounts the average European household income is 26% higher due to welfare state-supported pensions and other social benefits (Townsend and Gordon 2000, 12). Because the extensive system of social insurance is equally available to all citizens, European citizens are much less likely to be stigmatized and “hidden” from the researcher’s investigations. This, however, does not make the poor as a group easier to capture in survey data. Indeed, current life-course, longitudinal data such as that collected and analyzed by Leisering and Leibfried (1999) may more accurately depict the lives of the poor, allowing political scientists better access to their political behavior.
Bibliography


### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE ON “POOR” VARIABLE</th>
<th>% of All Survey Respondents</th>
<th>% Married or Living w/ Partner</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 of 3 (Not Impoverished)</td>
<td>53.3% (4,768)</td>
<td>67.2% (3,181)</td>
<td>49.6% (2,367)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 of 3 (Impoverished)</td>
<td>27.0% (2,412)</td>
<td>60.5% (1,448)</td>
<td>52.5% (1,266)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 of 3 (More Impoverished)</td>
<td>13.7% (1,228)</td>
<td>56.7% (693)</td>
<td>54.4% (668)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 of 3 (Severely Impoverished)</td>
<td>6.0% (541)</td>
<td>34.4% (184)</td>
<td>59.3% (321)</td>
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### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE ON “POOR” VARIABLE</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-39</th>
<th>40-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
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<tr>
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<td>19.8% (942)</td>
<td>31.0% (1,477)</td>
<td>25.3% (1,206)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15.7% (378)</td>
<td>30.1% (727)</td>
<td>22.8% (550)</td>
<td>31.4% (757)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 of 3 (More Impoverished)</td>
<td>18.1% (222)</td>
<td>28.7% (352)</td>
<td>21.1% (259)</td>
<td>32.2% (395)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13.1% (71)</td>
<td>29.6% (160)</td>
<td>18.3% (99)</td>
<td>39.0% (211)</td>
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Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE ON “POOR” VARIABLE</th>
<th>AGE AT WHICH FORMAL EDUCATION ENDED</th>
<th>Up to 14 Years Old</th>
<th>15-18 Years Old</th>
<th>19-22 Years Old</th>
<th>Still Studying</th>
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<td>10.8% (516)</td>
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<td>35.5% (192)</td>
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Table 5

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<th>LEFT-RIGHT SELF-PLACEMENT</th>
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<th>Center</th>
<th>Right</th>
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<tr>
<td>“POOR” VARIABLE</td>
<td>Party Attachment</td>
<td>Party Attachment</td>
<td>Party Attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Close to</td>
<td>Fairly Close</td>
<td>Merely a</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>to Party</td>
<td>Party Sympathizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>19.1% (856)</td>
<td>30.1% (1,351)</td>
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<td>7.0% (160)</td>
<td>17.2% (394)</td>
<td>29.7% (682)</td>
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<td>2 of 3 (More Impoverished)</td>
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<td>16.2% (189)</td>
<td>26.4% (308)</td>
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<td>15.4% (78)</td>
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Table 6

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<tr>
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<th>PARTY ATTACHMENT</th>
<th>PARTY ATTACHMENT</th>
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<td>Fairly Close</td>
<td>Merely a</td>
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</tr>
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APPENDIX

INCUMBENT GOVERNMENTS, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Name</th>
<th>Name of Prime Minister</th>
<th>Parties in Coalition (Party Families)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Eduard Dehaene</td>
<td>CVP/PSC + SP/SP (Christian Democratic, Social Democratic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Poul Holmskov Schlüter</td>
<td>KF + V (Christian Democratic, Liberal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Helmut Kohl</td>
<td>CDU/CSU + FDP (Christian Democrat, Liberal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Pierre Bérégovoy</td>
<td>PS + MRG +PSU (Socialist, Far Left)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Giuliano Amato</td>
<td>PSI + PLI + PSDI (Socialist, Social Democratic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Albert Reynolds</td>
<td>FF + LP (Conservative, Social Democratic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>Jean-Claude Juncker</td>
<td>CSV/PCS + LSAP/POSL (Christian Democratic, Social Democratic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Wim Kok</td>
<td>PVDA + CDA (Social Democratic, Christian Democratic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>John Major</td>
<td>Conservatives (Conservative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions Used in the Construction of Variables**

I. Variables that were not recoded.

**Age (D11)**  
How old are you?  
Multiple responses

**Religion (D27)**  
Do you attend religious services several times a week, once a week, a few times a year, once a year or less, or never?  
A. Several times a week.  
B. Once a week.  
C. A few times a year.  
D. Once a year or less.  
E. Never.

**Unemployment (D15d)**  
For how long in total have you been unemployed in the last five years?  
A. Up to 6 months.  
B. Over six months – up to a year.  
C. Over 1 year – up to 2 years.  
D. Over 2 years – up to 5 years.
“Prospective”
(Q6, Q8, Q10)
And over the next 12 months, do you think the general economic situation in this country will be…

And over the next 12 months, do you think that the financial situation of your household will be…

And over the next 12 months, do you expect that the employment situation in this country will be…

A. A lot better.
B. A little better.
C. Stay the same.
D. A little worse.
E. A lot worse.

“Retrospective”
(Q5, Q7, Q9)
Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in this country is…

Compared to 12 months ago, do you think the financial situation of your household is…

Compared to 12 months ago, do you think the employment situation in this country now is…

A. A lot better.
B. A little better.
C. The same as it was.
D. A little worse.
E. A lot worse.

II. Variables recoded to construct new variables.

“Poverty Score”
(D29d) Taking everything into account, at about what level is your family’s standard of living?

1. Poor family
7. Rich family

(D29) Here is a list of income groups. Please give me the letter of the income group your household falls into before tax and other deductions.

A. Highest Quartile.
B. Upper-mid Quartile.
C. Lower-mid Quartile.
D. Lowest Quartile.