Who drives the increase in authoritarian values?

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Electoral support for authoritarian-populist forces has increased substantially since the 1980s. Authoritarian parties are now in government in eleven European countries. Three competing hypotheses account for this surge. According to the standard economic rationale, populism is arising when growing inequality mobilize the poor. For other scholars, authoritarianism can best be explained as a cultural backlash against social change. One alternative hypothesis assumes that younger citizens have become more critical of democracy and more likely endorse authoritarian attitudes.

This presentation will address the notion that authoritarian values are on the rise in Europe. In contrast with much of the extant research that emphasize the influence of voting behaviors and authoritarian values at the country level, I will tackle this issue at the individual level. More specifically, I will examine which subgroups drive the increase (if any) in authoritarian values. Building on previous studies, I conceptualize authoritarianism as a multi-faceted phenomenon made up of three components: authority, conformity and security. The research will focus on the EVS items tapping public demand for authority since 1981.

Preliminary findings using a three-level modeling strategy show that public demand for authority is rising only in a few liberal and affluent democracies (e.g., Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands). Most importantly, this increase is not due to the most extreme fringe of the electorate but stems from the most progressive subgroups (e.g., the youngsters, the most educated and left-wing sympathizers). Thus, exploratory results suggest that in consolidated democracies, a rising demand for authority may primarily express a growing need for public order and regulation from the most liberal segments of the population.

References


