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Book Review

Nicola Maggini, “Young People’s Voting Behaviour in Europe: A Comparative Perspective.” London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017, 145 pp.

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“Generation-related renewal has ceased to be a process by which something was replaced by something else, identical to the previous one. Rather, this renewal meant changing something with something else, different from the previous one” [p. 2]. This statement well synthesizes the salience of the generational issue in the study of political behaviour, which has been addressed by a large amount of literature. Nonetheless, while most of the previous studies have focused on youth political participation, by showing that younger generations are less engaged in politics than older ones and when participating they are more likely to adopt unconventional forms [Quaranta 2016], *Young People’s Voting Behaviour in Europe* sheds light on youth vote choice. The book moves around the following main research question: do the determinants of vote choice differ between youth and adults? Since social cleavages have been losing their explicative power in predicting vote choice, the drivers of voting behaviour are supposed to change between younger and older generations. Among the various reasons that have contributed to the fading of social cleavages, moving from Inglehart’s theory, Maggini highlights the emergence of a cleavage based on the dichotomy between materialist and post-materialist values. In line with this argument, the author expects that socio-structural factors are more relevant in explaining adults’ vote choice, while values weigh more in youth vote choice. Since when studying age-effects we need to disentangle the effect of different components, Maggini also aims at detecting which one between the life-cycle effect or the cohort effect is more salient in the explanation of voting behaviour. Through the adoption of a comparative and longitudinal approach, which analyses six European countries (Italy, France, Spain, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden) during the time span 1981-2000, the book provides an answer to the research questions.

Besides the introduction and the conclusions, the corpus of the book is structured in three main chapters. Moving from Mannheim and Ortega y Gasset’s seminal works, in Chapter 2 the author provides an accurate overview of the theory of generations, which plays a central role in his conceptual framework. After having reviewed various definitions of the concept of generation, it is argued that all those definitions share a common trait, namely the presence of historical events experienced by a group of individuals during their formative years. As a consequence, a certain generation can be characterized by specific patterns of voting behaviour, and factors explaining vote choice can weigh differently from a generation to another.

Then, the author illustrates the research design. The original units of analysis are the individuals eligible to vote.¹ Individual-level data come from three waves of the

¹ On p. 20, the author states that “the unit of analysis is young people between 18 and 35

European Values Study (1981, 1990, 1999) where all the six countries were included, and the waves of the World Value Survey in which one or more of those countries were involved during the time-span 1981-2000 (data available only for Spain and Sweden). Since both EVS and WVS are not post-electoral surveys, the dependent variable does not deal with the actual vote choice, but with the voting intention during the period in which the survey was conducted. However, since the book does not focus on short-term factors, it is argued that voting intentions can be used with “a certain accuracy” [p. 20] as proxies of voting behaviour. The determinants of vote choice are then presented through “an integrated and multi-level framework of analysis” [p. 18], in which micro-level (socio-demographics, age factors, values, attitudes, and ideology), meso-level (party characteristics, whose data come from ParlGov.org, and individual-party relationships), and contextual factors (country and year of the survey) are included.

Chapter 3 describes the independent variables, by showing their distributions among young voters (under 35) in three time-points, often compared to the same distributions among adults (over 35). Looking at the socio-demographics, among young voters, the average years of education have largely increased from 1981 and 2000, while the distribution of social class does not substantially vary, particularly concerning the percentage of upper-class individuals and manual workers. Young people have become less religious, more libertarian toward sexual, social, and family issues, and less materialist. A general pattern does not emerge when analysing political attitudes over time; while the interest in politics decreases, both trust in unions and to a lower extent in the parliament increase during the time span 1981-2000. Concerning left-right collocation, young people prove to be more leftist than adults in every survey, although the gap substantially diminishes over time. Nevertheless, while in Italy the percentage of rightist young people doubles from 1981 to 1999, mainly because of changes in the political supply, the opposite happens in Great Britain, while no variations over time are registered in the other countries.

The chapter also gives a detailed description of the political context for each of the six countries during the period analysed, and shows the distribution of vote choice in every country among youths. Despite some differences, youths’ vote shows a common pattern among countries. Compared to the adults, intentions to vote for radical left-wing parties and the Greens are overrepresented among young voters, while support for Christian-Democratic parties is underrepresented. Concerning the intentions to vote for the main centre-left and centre-right parties, as well as for right-wing parties, no substantial differences emerge between young and adult voters.

Chapter 4 employs multivariate analyses to answer the research questions, by using the analytical framework described in Chapter 2. The author adopts an original method to study the determinants of voting behaviour [van der Eijk *et al.* 2006] with a double aim: 1) to overcome the issue of rough categorizations of vote choice when adopting a comparative perspective, and 2) to include in the analyses even minor parties, which are often

years.” Nonetheless both the research questions and the analyses involve both young voters and older ones.

not considered. This method implies a reshape of the data matrix, from an unstacked to a stacked format, hence it can be referred to as stacked analysis. In such a matrix, the unit of analysis is no more the individual, but the combination individual*party (for instance, in a country with a six-parties system, the data matrix will contain six rows for every individual). Vote for a generic party represents the dependent variable, namely, in a given combination individual*party the variable will be equal to 1 when the individual intends to vote for that party, 0 otherwise. Since micro-level variables are referred to the individual and not to the combination individual*party, they need to be transformed in terms of affinity between the individual characteristics and the vote for a specific party. New variables are thus estimated through logistic regressions analysing the relationship between vote choice for every single party and the independent variable of interest, separately run country-year by country-year. The estimated log-odds are centered on their mean, separately for every party in every country-year. For every independent variable, the estimated probabilities (\hat{y}) computed by the centered log-odds represent the variable employed in the regression models.

Multivariate analyses consist in multi-level logistic regressions where level-one units correspond to combinations individual*party and level-two units to individuals, and with survey-dummies. First, a general model including all the independent variables and specific age factors measuring life-cycles (youth *vs* adults), cohorts, and periods, shows that the cohort-effect is more substantial than the life-cycle one when predicting vote choice. Second, by employing separate analyses for youth and adults, Maggini finds that between youth and adults the factors explaining vote choice are rather similar. In particular, church attendance, socio-economic status, trust in institutions, authoritarian-libertarian values and party-specific variables significantly predict vote choice both for youth and adults. Contrarily to the hypothesis, post-materialistic values explain vote choice better among adults than among youth. Interest in politics is instead more relevant among young voters. Models with interaction effects show that some factors weigh more in some specific countries for both youth and adults, such as church attendance in Italy and Spain or post-materialism in Sweden. Furthermore, some variables have a higher effect on vote choice in a certain year, such as religiosity in 1995 (nonetheless, such an effect is not theoretically expected, and no explanations are given in the book). Finally, after having studied whether determinants of party choice vary between younger and older voters, Maggini examines the bivariate relationship between every independent variable and vote for a specific party among young people in every country. Above all, these analyses show the substantial decline of the class cleavage among young voters, that did not explicitly emerge from the stacked analysis. Anyhow, further empirical evidence on the bivariate relationships among adults would have been welcomed to catch the differences between youth and adults.

Overall, I think the book is well organized and addresses an important topic that needs broader attention among scholars. The main research question is original and the answers provided rather convincing. I have mainly appreciated the structure of Chapter 4. It indeed offers general analyses on pooled data, and then goes “behind and beyond” [p. 104] those results to give a more substantial interpretation of the effects, by showing country-specific results party by party. Such a procedure is helpful when using the

stacked analysis, which has the great advantage to provide synthetic results, but does not provide insights on the way in which a factor has an impact on vote choice.

I would like to address some remarks on the empirical sections. First, although the advantages of the stacked analysis are acknowledged, it also leads to some shortcomings, mainly concerning the complexity to give a substantial interpretation of the coefficients, which comes out even in this book. Regarding the stacked analysis, I also did not understand why the author did not estimate a single \hat{y} variable for social class [e.g., Van der Brug *et al.* 2009], but a \hat{y} variable for every category of social class. Doing this, the advantage of the stacked analysis to provide a weight of every independent variable on the explanation of the dependent one is somehow losing. Second, although the theoretical framework highlights the role of generations in explaining vote choice, except for the first regression model [table 4.1, pp. 80-81] empirical analyses are focused on the life-cycle effects and do not take into account the cohort-effects. Third, a reader could find some hurdles in understanding which specific waves are employed in the different analysis. In regression analyses, the author indeed reports dummy variables for only some of the country-year combinations [see for instance table 4.2, p. 84], therefore it is not clear whether just those waves were included, and, if so, why. The continuity guide in the appendix does not provide clarifications on this point. Fourth, in Chapter 3 Maggini observes that among post-materialists the percentage of adults monotonically increases over time. This figure makes the author argue that the empirical evidence contrasts with Inglehart's theory on post-materialism [pp. 33-34]. However, more caution is needed in the interpretation of these results [figure 3.2, p. 34], since they are significantly affected by the age composition of the sample. Indeed, the baby boomers belong to the youth category in 1981, while they are included in the adults' category in 1999; thus the quota of adults in the sample is substantially higher in 1999 than in 1981.

□ Finally, the last observation deals with the time span employed in the analyses, which stops in 2000. The readers should have in mind that young voters in the book are not young voters in 2017. Further research employing more recent data could test whether a difference in the determinants of voting behaviour between young and adult voters now exists, in light of the economic crisis and the earthquakes that have characterized the political systems of a number of the countries analysed.

To conclude, I think the book is a valuable starting point of a field of research deserving further attention. It can represent an inspiring reading both for scholars, since it provides new interesting results on a little-investigated open-question, and to sociology and political science students, since it gives a clear and simple theoretical framework of the theory of generations, and gradually moves first to descriptive and then to inferential empirical analyses. Moreover, new findings coming from a broader comparative scheme (by employing post-electoral data on a higher number of European countries, such as the European Election Study data) and fine-grained statistical methods are welcome to give more leverage to the empirical evidence presented in the book.

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