

Left vs Right is dead: Politics is about anarchists vs centrists, new CAGE study shows

September 18 2019



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Politics should no longer be divided between "left-wing" and "right-wing" because the vital dividing line between groups of voters is now between "anarchists" and "centrists," claims a new study from the Centre

for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy (CAGE) based at the University of Warwick.

Voters who support populist politicians on both the left and right have more in common with each other than with "centrists" in their own parties, according to the research carried out by Dr. Mirko Draca, Director of CAGE, and published today by the Social Market Foundation.

The study also suggests that a majority of British voters still reject "anarchy" and populist approaches to politics. Despite widespread claims to the contrary, the paper concludes: "Centrist politics is not dead in the UK."

Dr. Draca and his fellow Warwick researcher Carlo Schwarz analyzed over two decades of survey results measuring the underlying values of voters across 17 countries in Europe and North America.

Rather than asking about party politics, values surveys ask voters for their thoughts on issues including divorce, prostitution and tax evasion, as well as their view of institutions including parliaments, trade unions, big business and the Press. The responses can reveal underlying political inclinations more accurately than conventional political polling.

Draca's analysis identifies distinct "clusters" of voters whose values suggest sympathy with populist causes and who can be found among voters classed as left-wing and right-wing. "Left-anarchists" make up an average of 17% of voters across the West, while "Right-anarchists" are 27%.

Focussing on the UK specifically, the paper finds that centrists who take a traditional approach to politics still make up a majority of voters. 33% of voters are classed as "liberal centrists" while 23% are "conservative

centrists," a total of 56%.

The same data show that there are more "anarchist" voters on the right of politics than on the left, something that might suggest the Conservative Party will face greater turbulence than Labour in future. "The prominence of the Right Anarchist ideology arguably makes UK right-wing politics more volatile and fractious relative to the left," the paper says.

Despite commentary suggesting recent and rapid changes in [voter](#) behavior across the West, Draca's paper shows that "anarchist" tendencies have been clearly present in survey data since at least the 1980s.

That suggests that the electoral forces powering populist politicians are not new but have simply been unexpressed by the political system for many years. Instead of being a sudden new phenomenon, the forces that are driving recent turbulence in many democracies have been "latently present for decades," the paper says.

Given that, Draca offers two possible explanations for why populist movements have only recently come to the fore. One possibility is that technology has facilitated the entry of new political movements that tap into anarchist sentiment. Another is that economic shocks—specifically, the financial crisis and associated austerity policies—triggered the populist mobilization.

Whatever the cause, the paper concludes that politicians seeking to respond to populism, and voters anarchistic tendencies should focus on restoring trust and confidence in institutions.

Dr. Mirko Draca, Director of the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy (CAGE), said;

"Our data shows that anarchist ideologies have been strongly present for decades, but are only now being fully vocalized. It's likely that new ways of communicating political ideas—particularly through [social media](#)—have provided a vehicle for these once latent views to be converted into powerful political movements.

"But centrist ideologies still have a strong presence and form a narrow majority in the UK. The big challenge facing centrist politics is competing against populism in the communication of ideas. The cozy media ecosystem enjoyed by politicians up until the end of the Blair era is not coming back. Centrist politics has to fight for its influence in a completely new and uncomfortable way."

James Kirkup, Director of the Social Market Foundation, said:

"This important analysis should be read by anyone who wants to preserve our democratic norms and return to calmer politics that brings people together to compromise instead of stirring up conflict between them.

"Responding to populism isn't easy, but the starting point should be a strong defense of the political, legal and social institutions that ensure all our rights are maintained no matter who is in power and which underpin a free society and an open economy."

More information: Anarchy in the UK (and Everywhere Else): The Ideological Roots of Populism. www.smf.co.uk/publications/anarchy-in-the-uk-and-everywhere-else-the-ideological-roots-of-populism/

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: Left vs Right is dead: Politics is about anarchists vs centrists, new CAGE study shows

(2019, September 18) retrieved 13 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-09-left-dead-politics-anarchists-centrists.html>

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