

Structural and cultural determinants
of voting for extreme right-wing
Party in Flanders (Belgium):
the case of « Vlaams Blok »

Jaak Billiet

ISPO/KU Leuven

<http://www.kuleuven.ac.be/sociologie/ENG/onderzoekeng/ispoeng/index.htm>

Introduction (1)

Region Flanders: 58% of the Belgian voters
(4.297.113 votes, null/invalid included)

Vlaams Blok: 9.7% in 1991
 11.3% in 1995
 14.4% in 1999
 17.1% in 2003 (733,884 in Fl)
 (+ another 27,353 in Brussels)

constant increase unless (or thanks to)

« **cordon sanitaire** » by all other parties

Introduction (2)

Questions:

- (1) who are these voters (background characteristics and attitudes/values)
- (2) where do they come from? (electoral shifts)
- (3) for what reasons?

Answers:

- by post electoral (panel) surveys of ISPO
- N=2700 in 1991; 2190 in 1995; 2.240 in 1999;
? in 2003 (running)

Introduction (3)

Some reading on past findings:

Billiet, J. & H. De Witte (1995), « Attitudinal dispositions to for for a ‘new’ extreme right-wing party: the case of ‘Vlaams Blok’ ». *European Journal of Political Research*, 27: 181-202.

Billiet, J. (1998), « Qui vote pour le Vlaams Blok? ». Pp. 181-202 in: P. Delwit, J-M De Waele & A. Rea (Eds.), *L'Extrême droite en France et en Belgique*. Bruxelles: Editions Complexe.

Lubbers, M., P. Scheepers & J. Billiet (2000), « Multilevel Modelling of Vlaams Blok ». *Acta Politica*, 35: 363-398.

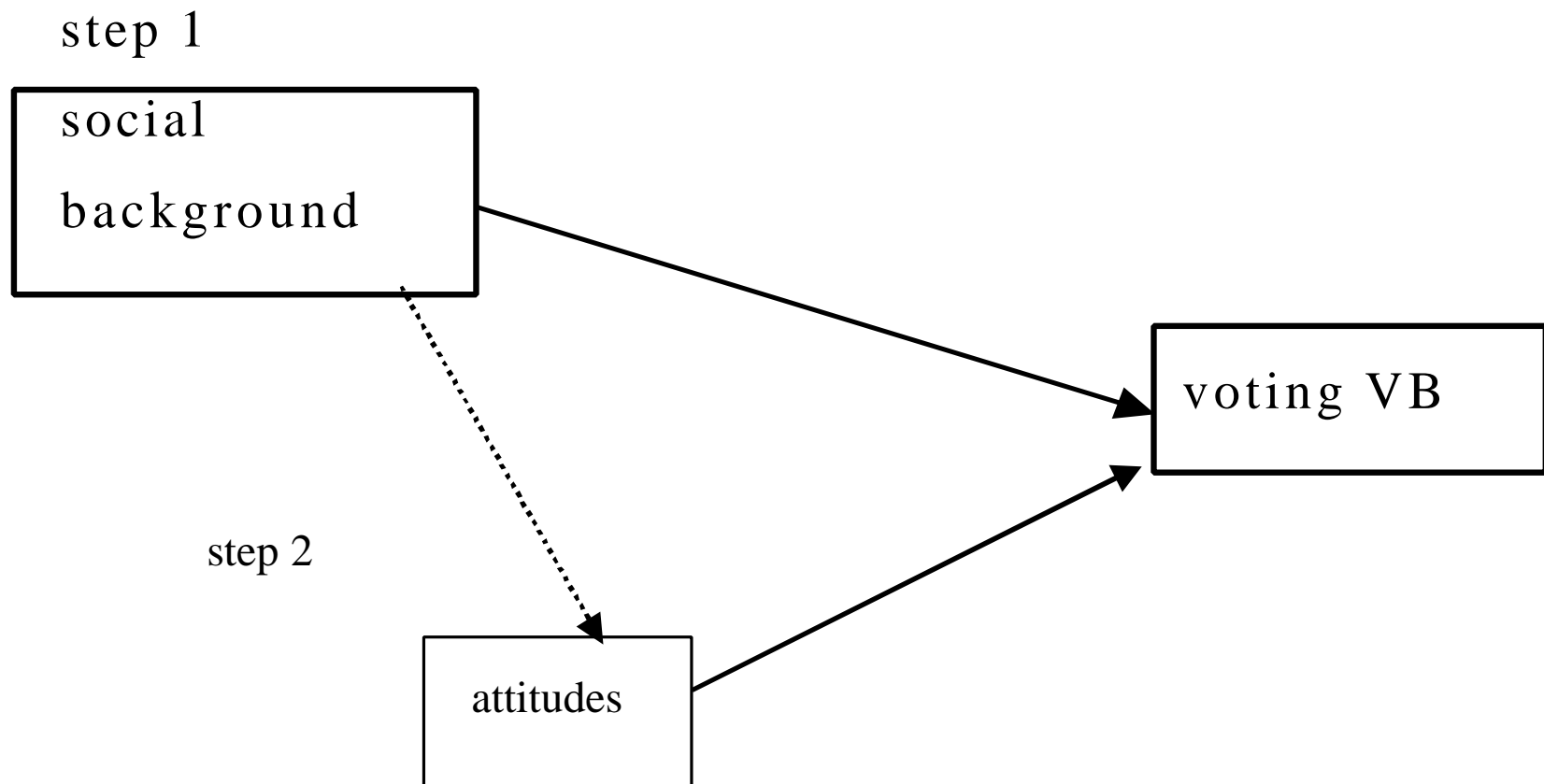
Some main results to start with...

- party was Flemish Nationalist in leaders but **NOT** in voters (although more in 1999 than 1991)
- Main reason still **immigrant** issue, but in 1999 and 2003 increasingly combined with **fear of crime**
- Coming from **all** other parties, but in beginning most from socialist party and Nationalist party (not as much in numbers), later from Liberal party and Christian Democrats
- Regional variation: mainly in **industrialised** areas

Theories behind ISPO data ...that oriented the content of questionnaires

1. **Economic interests:** scarcity and competition with newcomers as driving forces (Lipset, 1961) (information on employment, jobs, education, socio-econ position...)
2. **Psychological interests:** need for strong authority and adherence to traditional norms among political powerless (Lipset 1996, Adorno et al. , 1950) (measurement of large number of attitudes)
3. **Social disintegration:** caused by automatization in society (Scheuch & Klingemann 1967) (measurement of identity, social identification, social integration, memberships...)
4. **Protest vote:** political dissatisfaction (Maeyer & Perrineau, 1992 ; Klein & Falter, 1996) (measurement of political attitudes...)

Test of model for social background variables and attitudes in two steps



Findings: (1) Background variables (Analysis of variance table of logit model 1999)

Maximum Likelihood Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Chi - Square	Pr > Chi Sq
<i>ff</i>			
Intercept	1	302.27	<.0001
GENERATION (6 cat)	5	10.18	0.0704
EDUCAT (4 cat)	3	14.85	0.0020
OCCUPATION (7 cat)	6	17.66	0.0071
CHURCH INVOL (5 cat)	4	43.55	<.0001
SICK FUND (4 cat)	3	16.98	0.0007
MEMBERSHIP (yes/no)	1	4.73	0.0297
Likelihood Ratio	983	961.55	0.6816

Findings: (1) Background variables (Model parameters are logits expressed as deviations from mean) 1991 & 1999

	Vl.Blok 99	Vl.Blok 91
<i>Grand Mean</i>	14,7	9.7
Generation		
-24	2.1	4.9*
25-34	2.0	-0.9
35-44	-3.3	-0.8
45-54	-5.0***	-2.6
55-64	1.6	-2.11
+65	3.9*	4.1*
Education		
Lower	6.3***	2.8*
Low secondary	0.2	-1.0
High secondary	-3.1*	1.5
Higher	-3.5**	-3.9*

Occupation		
Managers, profess	-6.4*	-1.5
Employees	-0.8	0.6
Self employed	-5.0	-1.0
Schooled workers	6.8*	3.7*
Unschool ed workers	4.3*	3.7
Retired	2.6	-2.9
Non-active	-1.8	-0.7
Church involvement		
None	9.3***	7.9***
Free thinker	0.7	5.7*
Marginal Christian	2.8	0.2
Members	-2.5	-2.4
Core members	-9.5***	-5.1**

Sick Fund			
	Christan	1.2*	-0.1
	Socialist	-1.1	0.2
	Liberal	-9.7***	-3.5*
	Other	3.1**	2.5
Active Membership			
	Yes	-2.2*	0.6
	No	1.5	-0.9

1999: $L^2 = 952,84$; $df = 969$; $p = 0,638$

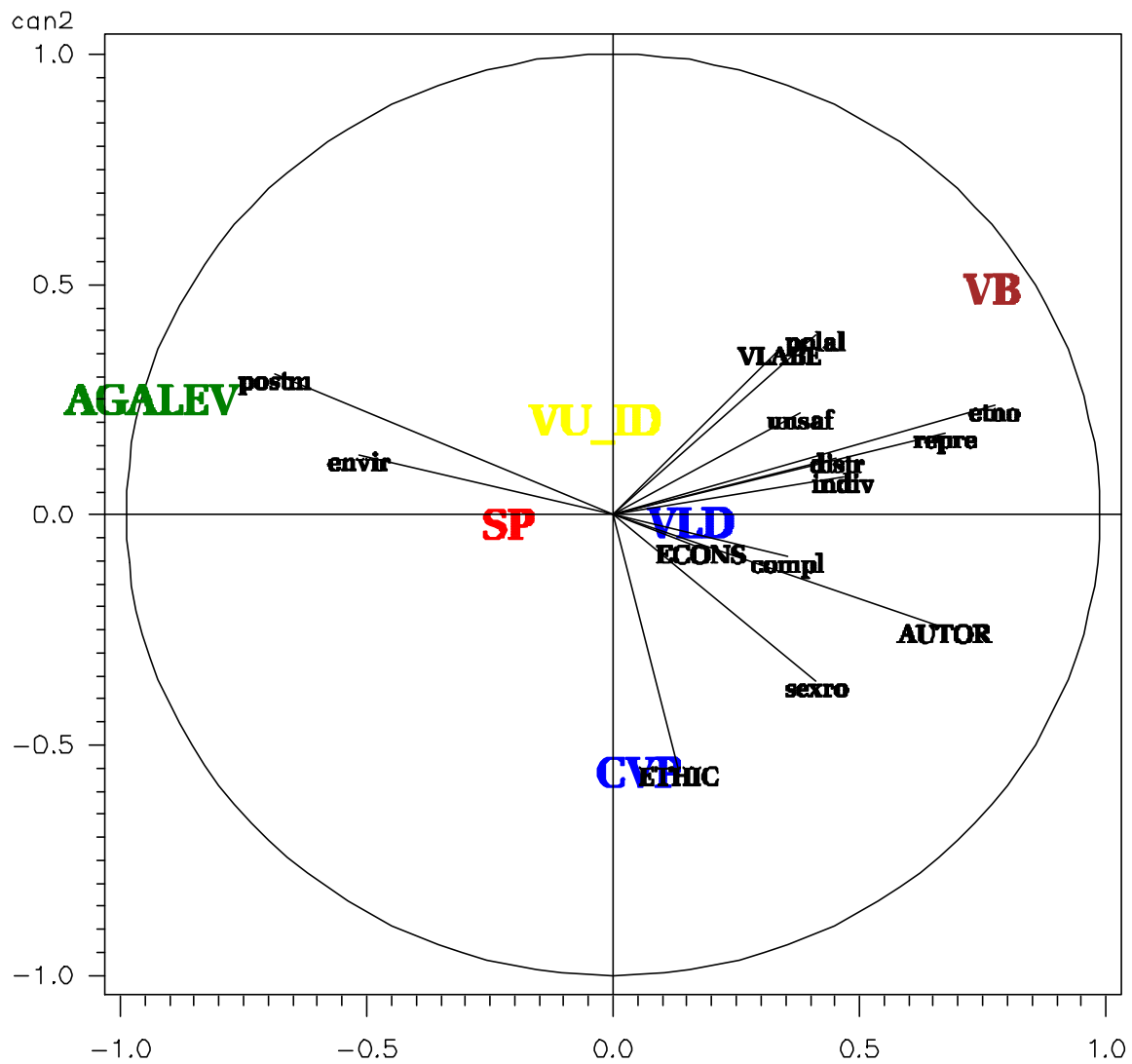
1991: $L^2 = 873,35$; $df = 1.152$; $p = 1.0$

Findings: (2) Attitudes and subj. orientations

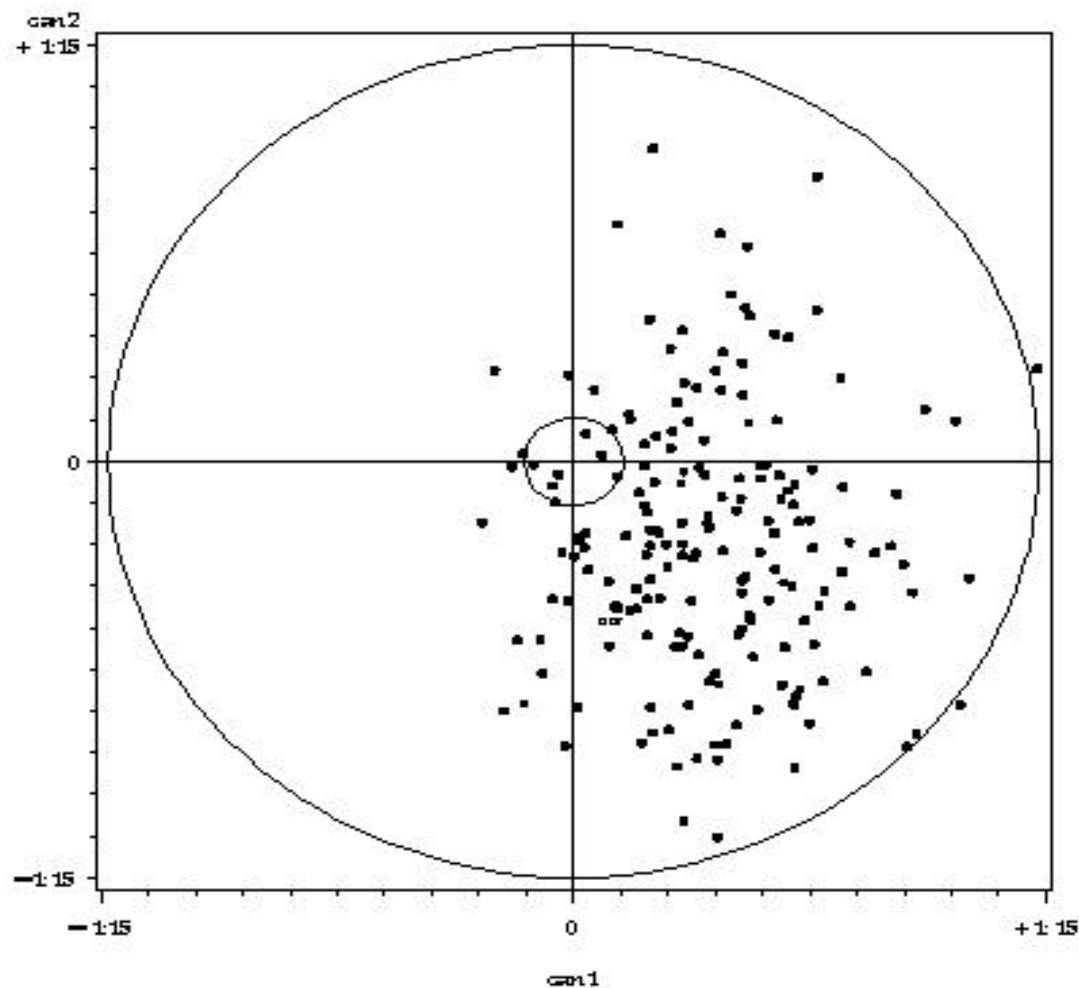
14 attitudes (latent variables) (in all waves)

- Feeling threatened by immigrants (ethno)
- Repression against criminals (repres)
- Unsafety feelings (unsafe)
- Authoritarianism (author)
- Political alienation (polal)
- Social distrust (distrust)
- Social disorientation (complex)
- Utilitarian individualism (individ)
- Economisch left/right (econs)
- Ethical conservatism (ethic)
- Traditional gender roles (sexrol)
- Post materialism (postmat)
- Defense of milieu (environ)
- Flemish national consciousness (Vlabel)

•Biplot: descriptive presentation of relations between electorates (means) and attitudes



Biplot: descriptive presentation of relations between Vlaams Blok voters and attitudes (first and second latent axis)



See for methodology: Vuylsteke, M., J. Billiet, H. De Witte & M. Vuylsteke (1997), "Contrasting the electorates of eight political parties". In J. Blasius & M. Greenacre (eds.), *Visualising of Categorical Data*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 377-390.

Findings: (2) Background variables (Analysis of variance table of logit model 1999: significant attitudes in model with background vars = step 2)

Source	DF	Chi - Square	Pr > Chi Sq
<i>ff</i>			
Intercept	1	259.20	<.0001
Generati on	5	8.07	0.1522
Eduati on	3	2.50	0.4757
Occupati on	6	8.79	0.1860
Church invol v	4	33.03	<.0001
Sick Fund	3	13.76	0.0032
Membershi p vol un	1	0.01	0.9058
Ethno (threat)	1	86.07	<.0001
Unsafe	1	22.27	<.0001
Pol. alienation	1	8.66	0.0033
Flem nat consc	1	37.58	<.0001
Likelihood Ratio	2E3	927.25	1.0000

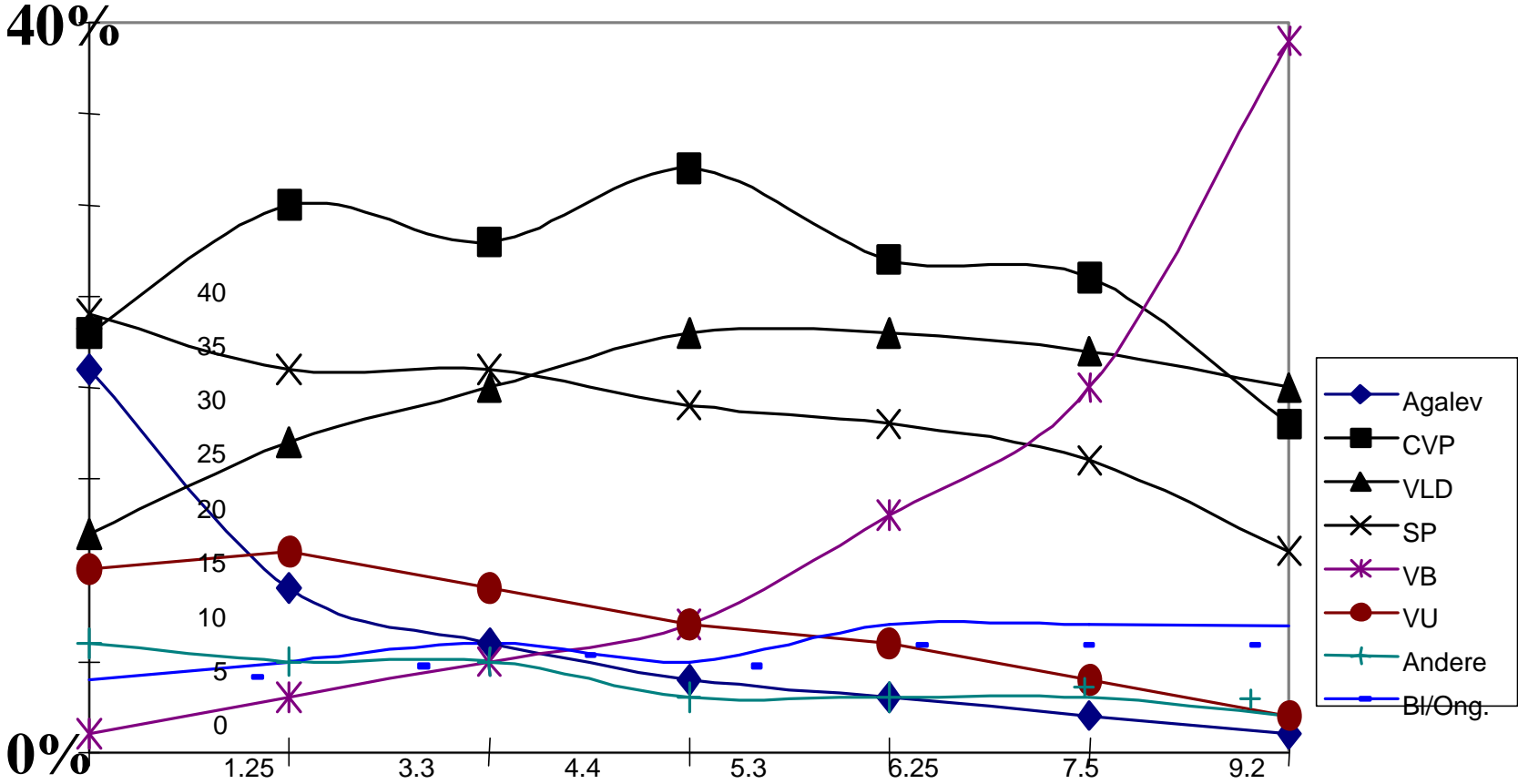
Multiplicative logistic regression parameters for attitudes

Att. orientation	b (=exp(l))	SE	prob.
Ethno (threat)	1.71	0.0575	<.0001
Unsafe	1.21	0.0405	<.0001
Pol alienation	1.17	0.0519	0.0033
Flemish nat cons	1.28	0.0403	<.0001

interpretation

The ratio VB/other (0.15) increases in the average with 71% per unit (sd) increase on the ethnocentrism scale etc...

**Net probability on vote for each party
according to attitude towards
Immigrants (logistic regression estimation)**



Meaning of these attitudinal orientations

Most important factor still feeling threatened by immigrants for economic and cultural reasons. This is closely related to feeling of unsafety and to political alienation. These citizens have the impression that politicians belonging to traditional parties are not capable to solve these problems. This is presumably increasingly linked with Flemish nationalism (in-group feelings), although these feelings are not so widely distributed.

Moreover, traditionally, the FN's belong to other social categories (more educated...) than those who are sensitive for the threats and for political alienation (lower educated and not integrated in social organisations)

Reasons (exit poll 1999, N=7500)

This is confirmed by the reasons expressed in the exit polls:

Important reasons for VB vote in 1999

- Political renewal:	15.40%	(average = 9/8%)
- Personnel interests:	9,1%	(2,1%)
- Anti-politics:	17.2%	(6.2%)
- Immigrants:	26.8%	(3.2%)
- Fl nationalism	3.8%	(1.5%)
- Repression criminals	10.8%	(1.4%)

conclusions

- Elements of each of the theories are confirmed (mix of explanations)
- Additional structural explanations needed (party structure, relations with social organisations, historical context....)
- Still open questions for research:
 - real effect of cordan sanitaire?
 - is commitment with VB a learning enterprise (new groups open for Flemish nationalism Because of program and leaders ???)
 - other