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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Review of Jennifer Fitzgerald (2018). *Close to Home: Local Ties and Voting Radical Right in Europe*

Close to Home: Local Ties and Voting Radical Right in Europe (Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology). By Jennifer Fitzgerald. Cambridge University Press. 2018.
Reveiwed by Ronald F. Inglehart

This book provides new insight into a generally neglected aspect of an immensely important topic—the rise of "radical right" or authoritarian populist parties. Though a great deal has been written about this phenomenon, very little of it deals with the impact of local ties.

The author, Jennifer Fitzgerald, argues that human beings have a psychological need to belong to social groups, which provide a source of identity, self-esteem, and well-being. Consequently, when groups that structured peoples' social life lose their stabilizing powers, other forms of belonging are likely to take their place. In much of the world, modernization is systematically undermining people's sense of attachment to their local communities. She argues that people with the strongest sense of belonging to their localities are most likely to be attracted to radical-right parties, and evidence from a wide range of sources supports her claim (she uses European Values Study data from 20 European countries together with the Swiss Selects survey, the Swiss Household Panel survey, and the French Political Barometer).

But her findings are complex. She finds, surprisingly, that (1) the positive feelings people have toward their communities and (2) their actual participation in community life, have contrasting impacts on radical-right voting.

Having strong positive sentiments toward one's locality and its people tends to make the radical right appealing. But engagement in community life has the opposite effect—people who invest time and energy participating in civil society and neighborhood life are *less* likely to support the radical right. Locally tied individuals who feel that they would help their neighbors if asked are especially likely to support the radical right. But localists who actually *do* help their neighbors on a routine basis are unlikely to support the radical right.

The same thing is true at the community level: The most cohesive communities, characterized by strong feelings of solidarity among residents, are most likely to have high levels of support for the radical right. In contrast, in the most associational communities, with vibrant civil societies, one finds the opposite.

Feeling positive about your neighbors and feeling willing to help them out with things is associated with support for the radical right. But actually spending time with your neighbors and helping them out does not have this effect—people who participate in civil-society associations are less supportive of the radical right. These findings are puzzling. Normally, people's attitudes and behavior tend to be consistent, but in this case they are not. This finding does not seem to be an isolated fluke: Fitzgerald finds it with more than one dataset. It has interesting theoretical implications and, despite the author's explanations, merits further investigation.

State structure and electoral institutions also seem to have an important impact. Fitzgerald finds that the radical right does best where the locality is politically salient. Moreover, the link between strong community attachments and radical-right support is strongest when the locality has significant

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autonomous authority or where the locality has recently lost substantial power—and where local elections are temporally proximal to national elections. The latter factor may have influenced the result of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom: Local elections raise the political salience of local ties, and through an obvious and avoidable miscalculation on the part of the government, the referendum was held immediately after local council elections.

Fitzgerald argues that the localist retreat is partly a response to a perceived lack of control and a feeling of distance from power. A backlash against anonymity is prompting a retreat to local traditions for security in the face of globalizing forces. Modern life has not erased the importance of place; it may instead have increased the need for people to draw boundaries. Thus, while national governments and the European Union elicit low levels of citizen trust, local governments enjoy relatively high levels of public confidence. Devolving power to local authorities has been taking place in many democracies in recent decades, making localities increasingly meaningful politically.

Radical-right parties benefit from these localist sentiments when they applaud a traditional version of community, warning voters that their local areas are threatened by encroaching state authorities, supranational governance, ethnic diversity, and lack of economic protections. Some of them even campaign on a prodevolution platform, promising to guard or enhance local autonomy.

The positive psychic benefits of community are counterbalanced by potential negatives that come from perceived threat. "Buy local" movements have been criticized by economists as inefficient for the market, and place attachment can reduce incentives for young people to seek better job opportunities elsewhere.

Accepting a widely used convention, Fitzgerald refers to xenophobic authoritarian populist parties as "radical-right parties." This can be misleading—suggesting that they are just like the conservatives but even more so. In fact, the parties do not fall on the classic economically based Left-Right dimension. They are not economically hyperconservative—they occupy the extreme pole of another dimension characterized by authoritarianism and xenophobia.

Cultural Backlash argues that support for these parties is motivated by an authoritarian reflex against rapid cultural change—exacerbated by large-scale immigration from distant countries in an environment of declining security that results from living in what is increasingly a winner-takes-all economy. The knowledge society is bringing a growing concentration of attractive jobs and population in attractive urban areas, draining other areas of talented and ambitious people—and attractive jobs. Highly educated doctors, lawyers, academics, and MBAs necessarily make their careers in a national market. For those who were born in a small town, if you get a higher education, you probably will leave town. When you go on the job market, the most attractive possibility is unlikely to be in your hometown. And when you get married, it's unlikely that your partner will be from your hometown. The less educated can get a job in the town where they grew up and marry someone from the same town, but their salaries and job security are likely to be much lower. This creates a gradient in which people who are most closely tied to the locality in which they grew up tend to be older, less educated, and economically less secure than those with weaker ties—all of which reinforces the tendency of localism to be linked with radicalright voting. Older, less educated and less secure individuals are most likely to react in this fashion.

This explanation emphasizes different factors from those stressed by Fitzgerald, but the two explanations are complementary, not alternative. Fitzgerald emphasizes the importance of local ties and presents convincing evidence that they play a significant role. But her own analysis indicates that local ties explain only part of the variance in support for radical-right (or authoritarian populist) parties—and that age, education, and rejection of immigrants all have even more impact on voting for radical-right parties than does local attachment. Fitzgerald argues persuasively that localism helps shape this vote, but this claim is fully compatible with the explanation presented in *Cultural Backlash*. In drawing attention to a generally neglected factor, *Close to Home* moves us toward a fuller understanding of why people vote for radical-right (or authoritarian populist) parties.

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