Right-wing populists and extremists in the European Parliament: a threat for European democracy?

Paul Stocker, Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies, Teesside University
Introduction

Electoral factors explaining increase in UK Eurosceptic representation in European Parliament over past 20 years

What impact do UK Eurosceptics have in the European Parliament?

Summary and questions for thought/discussion
Founded in 1992 as single-issue anti-EU party

Ideology can be summarised as ‘right-wing populist’

Eurosceptic, anti-immigration, socially conservative, economically liberal or ‘Thatcherite’, climate change-sceptic

Attract older, poorer, blue-collar voters who are comparatively less educated
European Parliament Elections as ‘Second Order’ Elections

- Low Turnout
- Perceived as less important than national elections/general elections
- Encourages ‘experimentation’ with smaller/new parties
- Enables smaller parties to gain a larger share of the vote
- Less strategic voting
Election Turnout: An Important Factor

Comparison of European Parliament Election (Blue) Turnout and Nearest National Election (Red) Turnout

- Year of Election
- % Turnout


- Blue: European Parliament
- Red: Nearest National Election
Ukip at European Parliament and UK Elections
## The laziest MEPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Participation rate, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukip, UK</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIE LINKE, Germany</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forza Italia, Italy</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C's, Spain</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens, UK</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, UK</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izquierda Unida, Spain</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCD-UdC, Italy</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouvement Democrat, France</td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD, Romania</td>
<td>87.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ukip in the European Parliament

Ukip vote against any law that gives EU more power

Impact on Parliament legislation is minimal given that over 70% of parliamentarians are not Eurosceptic

Eurosceptic parties tend to be bad at organising

Impact of Ukip success in European Parliament elections is indirect

Impacts UK government and major parties’ policy and rhetoric
Ukip thrive partly due to nature of European Parliament elections which encourage low participation and vote experimentation.

Ukip have not demonstrated any ‘threat’ to European legislative process or policy-making.

Impact of Ukip in European Parliament is **indirect**
Questions for Discussion

● What are the other ‘indirect’ effects of the election of Eurosceptics to the European Parliament? For example, hate speech during campaigning?

● How can we encourage voter turnout in European Parliament elections which are perceived as unimportant?

How much does Euroscepticism have to do with the voting of Eurosceptic parties?!