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Voting “à la carte”: Electoral Support for the Radical Right in the 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections

Boyka Stefanova¹

Abstract: *This paper explores the sources of votes for radical-right parties using the example of electoral support for the Attack Party in the 2005 Bulgarian parliamentary elections. It expands theoretical propositions on the presence of extremist parties in electoral politics by proposing an analytical model which explains radical-right voting as the result of disequilibria between political supply and voter demand in the electoral market. The paper argues that support for the radical right represents unmet voter demand and combines à la carte elements of single-issue politics, xenophobia, protest and charismatic political agency in electoral choice valid for individual voters but not for clearly identifiable cohorts of voters. The paper examines the evidence on electoral support for the Attack Party against the premises of the à la carte model – the structure of electoral competition, radical-right political agency, and voter preferences – and finds that the radical-right vote in the 2005 election validates its key proposition: electoral support for the radical right lacks coherent social structure and correspondence between voter expectations and party programmatic appeal. Based on the Bulgarian case study the paper concludes that the ability to offer voting choices à la carte, regardless of its ideological positions and the political expectations of its own electorate represents a resource for the sustained presence of the radical right in the electoral market.*

Key words: *Bulgaria, post-communist party systems, parliamentary elections, radical-right voting, Attack Party, à la carte model of electoral choice*

Introduction

This paper sheds light on the sources of electoral support for the radical right in Bulgaria using the example of the 2005 parliamentary elections. Apart from change in the governing coalition, the election marked the surprise electoral breakthrough of a newly formed political structure of the radical right, the Attack (*Ataka*) Party.²

Attack first appeared in preliminary polls forecasting that it would collect around 1 per cent of the vote, just four weeks before the election. By the time the campaign ended, pollsters projected that it would reach the 4 per cent threshold necessary to

¹ The author wishes to thank BBSS-Gallup International for providing survey data from the period October 2005–May 2006. Thanks are due to Andrey Raichev, Marchella Abrasheva and Marin Stoychev at BBSS–Gallup (Bulgaria).

² The party names Attack, *Ataka* (in Bulgarian), and Attack Party will be used in the text interchangeably. The electoral coalition National Union Attack, NUA, is comprised of the Attack Party, the National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland, the Bulgarian National-Patriotic Party, Union of Patriotic Forces and Military of the Reserve “Defence” and *Zora* political circle.

obtain parliamentary seats. On election day, exit polls revealed that it ranked fourth among the 22 parties contesting the election, with 8.14 percent of the vote. Attack became the fourth largest parliamentary faction, outperforming all parties and coalitions of the mainstream right.

The electoral success of the Attack Party is a puzzle in Bulgarian parliamentary politics. The party was established just two months prior to the 2005 election, on a nationalist, xenophobic and anti-minority platform. Yet electoral support for Attack cannot be regarded exclusively as a xenophobic reaction of the Bulgarian ethnic majority, which accounted for 99.2 per cent of its national vote share. Nationalist parties outside the political mainstream have been present in Bulgarian electoral competition since the 1990s but none had gained parliamentary representation or managed to obtain more than 1.0–1.5 percent of the vote.³ Furthermore, the ongoing right-wing diversification has continued to offer electoral choices to conservative voters. The openness of political competition and new party entry would be expected to prevent the consolidation of an anti-establishment vote, especially taking into account the strong ideological foundations of the Attack Party. The long-term trends in Bulgarian party politics point to the decline of ideological factors in political competition. Although such trends are compatible with surprise electoral outcomes, Attack's entry into parliamentary politics was not the product of "flash" effects. Its broadly based voter support has been a shocking development, with the potential to undermine the prospects of democratic consolidation and sustainability of Bulgaria's ethnic model, often described as "exemplary".

Uncovering the sources of Attack's unanticipated electoral success is important also in view of the dramatic follow-up to its electoral fortunes in subsequent contests. As with the performance of the radical right in the 2002 presidential election in France, Attack's leader, Volen Siderov, was ranked second after the incumbent in the 2006 Bulgarian presidential election, receiving 21.5 percent of the vote in the first round and 24.1 per cent in the second ballot.⁴

With the objective of solving the puzzle of Attack's entry into parliamentary politics, this research builds on theoretical and empirical work on the sources and electoral behaviour of the radical right in Europe. Its principal approach is that of examining the phenomenon of *Ataka* from a long-term perspective, against broader trends of political change. One of the objectives is to expand theoretical propositions on the presence of extremist parties by emphasizing the role of structural disequilibria in the electoral market.

³ Such parties have won seats as part of right-wing coalitions only in a few instances. The moderately nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-National Movement (VMRO) gained parliamentary representation as part of the UDF coalition in 1997. It won three mayoral races in the southwest of the country in the 1997 and 2001 municipal elections. In 2005 it was part of the Bulgarian People's Union coalition.

⁴ In the first round of the 2002 election in France the candidate of the National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, came second after the incumbent, with 16.9 per cent of the vote and contested the second ballot, receiving 17.8 per cent.

Conventional views regard the electoral outcome as a point of equilibrium between party supply and voter demand. However, the complex realities of voting are informed by broader currents, social change and situational factors which often fail to converge at the point of market clearance. The main argument of the study is that electoral support for the radical right is not a “meeting place” between supply and demand; it is rather a residual category in electoral competition – an “escape” or a protest vote – which captures *unmet* voter demand and persists as an attribute of the electoral market, rather than a niche within its ideological spectrum. Voting for the radical-right has evolved into a self-sustained model of voting *à la carte*, which combines different elements of single-issue politics, xenophobia and intolerance, protest and charismatic political agency, into electoral choice valid for individual voters but not for clearly identifiable cohorts of voters. Rather than focusing on the proximity between parties and voters, it posits their relative distancing. Voting *à la carte* further isolates the electorate from the social, economic, or value-based foundations of electoral preferences.

Examination of the model with respect to votes for the radical right in the 2005 parliamentary election will proceed as follows. The analysis first reviews theoretical perspectives on electoral support for the radical right and derives the key referents of the *à la carte* model of voting: the long-term structure of electoral competition; radical-right political agency, and the socio-political context of voter preferences. It then examines the factors shaping the electoral outcome of the Attack Party in the 2005 election and points to the lack of correspondence between electoral mobilization and voter expectations, resulting in a customized *à la carte* model of electoral choice. Based on the evidence, the paper presents an argument about the factors likely to sustain the dynamics of electoral support for extreme right parties despite their problematic conformity with democratic pluralism.

Electoral support for the radical right in theory: market niches in electoral supply and demand

The radical right is comprised of diverse streams of political agency ranging from organizations to social movements and subcultures, analytically bound into the ideological family of radical-right political extremism.⁵ Studies on the electoral behaviour of radical-right parties, its by far most consequential political representative, concur that the wide variation which characterizes the field largely depends on the national context. Despite their diversity, the parties of the radical right share a core doctrine in nationalism (Mudde, 2000; Eatwell, 2003). They replace democratic pluralism with organic conceptions of political community, posit a direct relationship between leaders and electorate, and reject the political establishment as flawed and redundant.

The contemporary radical right does not necessarily follow the historical traditions of the old Fascist parties of the interwar period. It builds upon high-salience issues in

⁵ As Merkl and Weinberg (1993) point out, the terms “radical” and “extremist” may be used interchangeably.

current political discourse: chauvinist conceptions of the modern welfare state, xenophobic anti-immigrant appeals, anti-globalism, anti-regionalism and reaction against post-materialist values (Merkl and Weinberg, 2003).

The theoretical perspectives on radical-right voting reflect the foundational principles of electoral competition and are oriented along demand – supply lines. Key supply-side propositions explain electoral support for the radical right as the product of electoral rules, the relative positioning of the mainstream parties, electoral opportunity structures and diverse streams of political agency-party development and charismatic leadership. Demand-based propositions suggest socio-structural change, individual values and orientations, and economic protest as key explanatory variables of radical-right voting.

Supply-side theories

There is a consensus in the literature that proportional representation is a factor enabling the electoral breakthrough of radical-right parties. Relatively low thresholds (between 3 and 5 per cent) make it possible for new and small fringe parties to win a degree of electoral support – especially, in secondary elections – sufficient to secure parliamentary seats. The system of electoral rules which shapes the distribution of political parties and voter preferences, as well as the relative fragmentation of political representation (Duverger, 1954), is a source of conditions facilitating or restricting the opportunities for radical-right voting. Furthermore, electoral rules determine the institutional framework of the vote such as availability of public campaign financing, ballot access, and opportunities for ticket splitting (Norris, 2005; Givens, 2005). The electoral system affects also the structural environment in which party élites operate and thus expands or restricts space for political entrepreneurship at the fringes.

The prevalent neo-liberal, pro-globalization consensus imposes significant policy constraints on the parties in government. In two-party and multiparty systems alike, political actors converge towards median positions representing an ideological consensus on market liberalism, economic reform, and inclusive welfare. Such uniformity opens up political space at the fringes to channels of voter mobilization based on anti-establishment rhetoric.

Such premises are reflected in the “winning formula” thesis which posits radical-right voting as the product of political agency under conditions of programmatic convergence between the parties of the right and left (Kitschelt, 1995). Due to convergence, the right loses its appeal to conservative voters. The latter are likely to turn to the radical right if it offers a “winning formula”, combining market liberalism, xenophobic welfare, and conservative-authoritarian appeals. An alternative supply-side proposition holds that the presence of mainstream right-wing parties in governing coalitions is the key variable determining electoral support for the radical right. Conservative voters may turn to the right-wing fringes as an expression of dissatisfaction with government policies (Zimmermann and Saalfeld, 1993).

Such models share the assumption that political agency operates within a more or less stable political infrastructure, which enables political entrepreneurs to generate new or respond to existing voter demand.

The concept of a political opportunity structure, originally developed with regard to social movements theory, is consistent with supply-side theories of voting (Tilly, 1978; Kitschelt, 1986; Tarrow, 1988). The political opportunity structure is the infrastructure of collective action and combines political supply- and demand-side variables (Tarrow, 1988: 429; Kitschelt, 1986: 59). The link between political opportunities for (collective) action and social protest constitutes another analytical premise which connects political opportunity structures to radical-right voting. A multivariate electoral opportunity structure perspective runs the risk of becoming either underspecified or overdeterministic and therefore of limited utility to establish the causal links to radical-right voting. The strategic agency model proposed by Pippa Norris (2005) overcomes this potential deficiency by keeping institutional rules analytically distinct from political agency and individual demands. The model grants institutional factors primary explanatory power, without ignoring the influence that external shocks, shifts in public opinion and other demand-side factors have on voter choices.

Supply-side perspectives are conscious of the causal effects of radical-right political agency. Charismatic leadership and political entrepreneurship within the radical right are key explanatory variables of electoral support for such parties (Schain et al., 2002).

Electoral demand

Demand-side theories of the radical right refer to three clusters of variables to explain radical right voting: interests, values, and psychological orientations. Sociological accounts emphasize the role of social change and transformation in advanced industrial countries, which “unfreezes” the existing cleavage structure (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Traditional cleavages decline in importance, leading to voter dealignment (Dalton, 2002). In line with this proposition, radical-right voting may be explained as an unstructured vote, unrelated to particular socio-demographic and socio-economic variables. Alternative sociological accounts associate changes in the cleavage structure with the emergence of new societal categories and “new politics” dominated by individual high-salience issues and discourses. The traditional class structure of owners and workers is replaced by new divisions emerging between the global and the national, the national and local, as well as between national majorities and the non-citizen population, and/or among ethnic majority and minority groups. Empirical studies show that the cohorts of the lower working class and the unemployed are typically over-represented in the radical-right vote (Norris, 2005).

Elaborations on the transformed cleavage structure thesis state that the radical right constitutes either a reaction to the emergence of new social divisions in the post-industrial world, or the individual’s reaction to post-modernism (Kriesi, 1999; Ignazi,

2003). A related sociological thesis posits electoral support for the radical right as a “normal pathological” deviation; individual protest against mass society and modernization and a preference for traditional values and authority, leadership, and belonging (Wilcox et al., 2003; Zimmermann, 2003).

Value-based theories posit radical-right voting as the product of individual-level variables such as personal orientations and situational predispositions. A focus on values permits establishment of a link between party strategies and voter preferences evident, for example, in the “winning formula” thesis. Most studies conclude that conceptions of an organic political community, xenophobic and exclusionary notions of nationalism, and racism differentiate the extreme right from the mainstream right-wing parties and reveal the value-based foundations of radical right voting (Hainsworth, 2000; Merkl and Weinberg 2003).

A third branch of demand-based theories of radical right voting emphasizes the role of economic interests (Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1988). Government economic performance generates diverse voter reactions based on evaluations of personal situation and sociotropic assessments leading to continued support for the incumbent party or a vote for the opposition, often regardless of the ideological proximity between parties and voters. This argument is instrumental to the thesis of economic protest voting which treats protest as a purposive orientation, rather than a situational vote.

The protest vote hypothesis is an alternative explanation of radical-right voting, which posits electoral support for the radical right as a reaction typical of traditional non-voters (Ignazi, 2003). According to this “none of the above” proposition (Norris, 2005: 149), voters do not expect the party of their choice to win in the election. The radical right benefits from the protest vote as a vote against the political establishment.

Transcending demand- and supply-based explanations, Eatwell (2003) has advanced the micro-meso-macro hypothesis of radical-right voting, which emphasizes factor interactions across levels of analysis. Eatwell’s approach integrates political opportunity structure variables and voter perceptions of legitimacy, personal efficacy, and political trust as a causal stream which explains variation in electoral support for the radical right across national contexts. Eatwell’s model offers significant analytical advantages by capturing the multivariate determinants of the radical-right vote. One of the drawbacks of the model is the lack of a core structural referent. As empirical research has pointed out, electoral support for the radical right often cannot be explained as a consistent arrangement of individual factors and their additive effects (Mudde, 2000: 19). Such findings suggest that it is likely to be associated with a failure of the electoral market to reach equilibrium between the ideological positions, values, structural determinants, expectations, appeals and evaluations of parties and voters.

The *à la carte* proposition on radical-right voting advanced here is based on the assumption of persistent disequilibria between party supply and electoral demand, resulting in voter support for radical-right parties. Its core premise is that of unmet voter

demand. The model consists of three layers of factors whose impact on the electoral fortunes of the radical right varies depending on its capacity to influence the situational context of electoral campaigns. The outer layer is comprised of systemic factors, such as electoral rules and long-term attributes of the party system, which have indirect effects on the opportunities for radical-right voting. The intermediate layer is derived from the patterns of inter-party competition and includes both exogenous and endogenous variables of political agency: campaign strategies of the mainstream parties and ideological positioning and voter mobilization on behalf of the radical right. The centre represents residual voter demand produced by social change and individual voter expectations and unmatched by corresponding party supply. According to this model, the radical right appeals to diverse categories of voters. For some voters support for the radical right is protest, resentment, or xenophobia, for others – charismatic appeal, nationalism, insecurity, or negative performance evaluations. The vote is not necessarily consistent across time and individual categories of voters. Why is this mix-and-match pattern possible and, more importantly, sustainable? It is because elections are discrete events seeking equilibrium between party supply and voter demand in an otherwise dynamic context of social and political change. The possibility for diverse combinations between voter preferences, structure of party competition, and organizational capabilities accounts for considerable variation in electoral outcomes. Often, weak party structures receive considerable electoral support thanks to a charismatic leader, or simply due to a protest vote. The deeper reason for radical-right voting is the lack of conceptual innovation and the distancing between party élites and electorate within the political mainstream. While fundamentally demand-centred, the *à la carte* model accommodates supply-induced electoral outcomes depending on the proximity and intensity of political agency.

The validity of the model is examined with regard to Attack’s electoral outcome in the 2005 election. Such an analytical perspective allows us to address the question of whether *Ataka* created a niche for itself in the electoral market or whether it tapped into existing (and unmet) electoral demand, determined by social structure and value change. The evidence is explored through multi-level data analysis. Supply-side variables, such as electoral opportunity structure, party system and political agency, are based on summary national statistics and district-level data on party vote shares reported by the Central Electoral Commission (Bulgaria). Demand-side variables are derived from public opinion polls conducted by BBSS-Gallup International during the period October 2005-May 2006, exit poll summaries reported in the Bulgarian media, and World Values Surveys (Bulgaria 1990, 1997, 1999) and Eurobarometer data.

Political opportunity structure of the 2005 parliamentary election

The structure of Bulgarian political competition during the 1990s shared the common features of post-communist party systems on the road to democracy: parties without a developed civil society, low voter trust, and competition without institutionalization (Rose and Munro, 2003). Political parties have been the principal beneficiary

of the unsettled character of electoral politics. Proportional representation, high levels of competition, new party entry, and variation in voter turnout rates have established a typical “party-enabling” system which tends to privilege party initiative and control over the electoral process (Birch, 2003: 22).

In line with the *à la carte* proposition, we would expect the system of electoral rules to be relevant to Attack’s electoral breakthrough in several aspects: the principle of proportional representation, which determines the size of the system and the opportunity of new and minor parties to receive electoral support; the threshold for seat eligibility, which affects the proportionality between the vote and seat allocation; and conditions of ballot access.

The rules of electoral competition in Bulgaria include proportional representation with a 4 per cent threshold for parliamentary entry. The party vote is pooled at the national level, according to the d’Hondt method.⁶ Voting takes place in multi-member electoral districts with closed party lists ranging between 4 and 14 seats per district. District size is determined according to census data.

The proportionality system has been a positive factor in new party development by balancing consolidation and openness criteria. After the 1997 election openness prevailed over consolidation, thus reinforcing the long-term opportunity structure for new parties. A typical feature of the Bulgarian electoral politics is that since the 1990 constitutive election, every governing party or coalition has been voted out of power at the next election. Three political parties have preserved their place in parliamentary politics: the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) on the left, the right-wing Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), and the centrist, predominantly ethnic-Turk Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). In every election except 1997 new parties have gained parliamentary representation.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of the Bulgarian Electoral System (1990-2005)

Year	1990	1991	1994	1997	2001	2005
Voter Turnout (%)	90.6	83.87	78.05	62.93	67.03	55.76
Share of two largest parties (%)	83.4	67.50	67.73	74.33	60.92	50.82
Number of parties contesting an election	42	38	49	39	54	22
Volatility (%) ¹	–	21.6	26.3	25.50	32.53	35.53
Wasted Vote (%)	0.9	25.0	15.60	7.64	14.48	8.19
New party vote (% vote / % seats)	–	11.5/0.0	13.7/4.5	4.9/0.0	42.73/50.0	19.77/21.7

Sources: Birch (2003: 112), Siaroff (200: 36, 37) and author’s calculations. For voter turnout rates see the Bulgarian Mathematics Society (Izbori) (Elections) website, <http://www.math.bas.bg/izbori/> and Central Electoral Commission, Bulgaria, <http://www.electionsorg.bg> (18 September 2006).

⁶ For the method of conversion, see Gary Cox (1997: 59).

The data reveals that the pattern of Bulgarian electoral politics changed abruptly as a result of the 2001 election, with supply-side volatility, share of the new party vote, and the number of parties contesting the election increasing sharply, without a meaningful restructuring of electoral rules. The changes in the party system are associated with changes in the structure of interparty competition. A new liberal-populist party, the National Movement Simeon the Second (NMSS), received 42.73 per cent of the vote and 50.0 per cent of the seats in the 2001 election. The entry of NMSS into electoral politics replaced the bipolar left-right model of political competition by introducing a tendency towards populism and candidate-centred politics. The 2005 election confirmed this trend by increasing the number of parliamentary parties with the following distribution of vote and seat shares:⁷

Table 2: Distribution of electoral outcomes in the 2005 election

Party/Coalition	Vote (%)	Seats (%)
Coalition for Bulgaria, BSP; CfB	30.95	33.98
National Movement Simeon the Second, NMSS	19.88	21.83
United Democratic Forces, UtDF	7.68	8.44
Movement for Rights and Freedoms, MRF	12.81	14.07
National Union Attack, NUA	8.14	8.93
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria, DSB	6.44	7.07
Bulgarian People’s Union, BPU	5.19	5.70

Source: Central Electoral Commission (Bulgaria), official communication of electoral results, <http://www.electionsorg.bg> (20 September 2006).

Proportionality has ensured that electoral competition remains fragmented. While allowing new party entry, it also forces new parties to compete both among themselves and against the established parties in order to pass the 4 per cent threshold. In this situation, the system of electoral rules restricts the opportunities for radical-right voting. Two new right-wing parties, the DSB and BPU, both located further to the right than the main right-wing coalition, the UtDF, gained parliamentary representation as a result of the 2005 election besides *Ataka*, effectively constraining its opportunity to appeal to conservative voters.

Other indicators, such as system fragmentation, proportionality, and volatility, are also relevant in shaping the electoral opportunity structure. The moderate threshold

⁷ The list of party organizations relevant to the 2005 parliamentary election includes: National Union Attack, NUA, led by the Attack Party; Bulgarian People’s Union, BPU (a coalition of the Union of Free Democrats); Internal Macedonia Revolutionary Organization, (VMRO); Bulgarian Agrarian National Union-People’s Union, BANU-PU; Bulgarian Socialist Party, BSP and its electoral Coalition for Bulgaria, CfB; Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, DSB; Movement for Rights and Freedoms, MRF; National Movement Simeon the Second, NMSS; New Time; Union of Democratic Forces, UDF and its electoral coalition United Democratic Forces, UtDF. For the context and details of the 2005 election, see Spirova (2006).

for parliamentary representation raises the index of proportionality and reduces the dispersion between party vote and seat share. Throughout the 1990s, the level of proportionality of the Bulgarian party system has been higher than the average for Central and Eastern Europe (87 versus 84 per cent) leading to a lower percentage of the wasted vote (Rose and Munro, 2003: 28). The mirror indicator, the discrepancy between votes and seats, reveals a declining share of the two largest parties in all elections after 1990, reinforcing the character of the system as one of openness and moderate pluralism (Siaroff 2000: 72). Reduced system concentration has been beneficial to new, smaller parties. Three such parties and coalitions passed the 4 percent threshold in 2005.

The most prominent systematic feature of Bulgarian electoral politics has been the increasing volatility of the vote under conditions of system pluralization. Rose and Munro have defined this unstable, almost accidental equilibrium of electoral outcomes as “a floating system of parties” (2003: 77). Electoral volatility rose in 2001 and remained high in the 2005 election. It was produced both by structural (supply-side) volatility, entrance and/or exit of parties from electoral competition, and demand-side shifts in voter preferences among existing parties.

Besides the general influence over the conditions of electoral competition, the electoral institutions apply specific provisions effectively restricting the creation and ballot access of extreme-right parties. As Sarah Birch has noted, the Bulgarian electoral system is “entrenched” in the Constitution, which prescribes domestic and party politics according to pluralist rules (Article 1). The Constitution is highly restrictive vis-à-vis separatist and anti-system parties and prohibits parties on ethnic, racial or religious grounds (Article 11). The Constitutional Court interprets the ethnic principle more broadly by defining as “ethnic” parties restricting membership of other ethnic groups.⁸ Article 44 (2) prohibits political parties which incite racial, national, ethnic, or religious enmity or restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens.⁹

The Act on Political Parties also prohibits parties which undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the country.¹⁰ The Penal Code (Article 162) makes actions inciting ethnic and racial hatred punishable by law. More recent legislation, including the Anti-Discrimination Act passed in 1998 and the Framework Programme for Roma Integration (1999), envisages measures against hate speech, social exclusion and anti-minority politics.

Despite the generally open opportunity structure, it may be argued that electoral institutions have had an overall restrictive effect on the rise of the radical right. Constitutional constraints on ethnically motivated parties, increasingly restrictive rules of

⁸ Based on this interpretation, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, whose membership is open to all citizens but which derives more than 85% of its vote share from the ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, is not considered an ethnic party. See Ishiyama and Breuning (1998).

⁹ See *State Gazette* No. 56 (13 July 1991).

¹⁰ See Act on Political Parties, as amended, *State Gazette* 28/2005 (1 April 2005).

party registration,¹¹ and system openness, which dilutes competition among the small parties, historically have prevented radical-right parties from engaging in nationalist or xenophobic political mobilization. At the same time, the lack of system consolidation remains the principal factor sustaining a long-term open electoral opportunity structure. In line with the *à la carte* model electoral rules have had overall indirect conditioning effects over party supply on the extreme-right fringe. The next section will examine the structure of party competition, where the radical right positions itself as a political actor and electoral entrepreneur.

The structure of party competition as a source of radical-right voting

The Bulgarian mainstream parties have shared a commitment to pro-market and pro-individual freedom principles and sought reconciliation between market liberalism and social welfare. The idea of “social capitalism” is a common policy position for all political parties. By contrast, upon its arrival in the electoral competition the Attack Party rejected the existing political consensus by advancing an exclusionary nationalist, anti-market and anti-liberal campaign. Attack’s presence in Bulgarian politics is therefore at odds with the long-term perspective of party development.

It may be argued that despite its surprise appearance in the 2005 election, the ideological foundations of *Ataka* were laid down long before its organizational contact with the realities of voting and originally made no purposive reference to electoral mobilization. This discrepancy between the conceptual evolution and organizational development of the party is due to the unsettled role of nationalism in Bulgarian politics. The nationalist idea, as well as marginal political structures – nationalist and ethnic minority parties – have had a standing presence in electoral competition. However, prior to the 2005 election, nationalism was not an important factor in the distribution of electoral outcomes.

Political agency in a long-term perspective: Intellectual sources of the Bulgarian extreme right

Extreme right organizations do not typically attract societal interest in Bulgaria, although isolated expressions of right-wing extremism, negative stereotyping of ethnic minorities, especially of Roma people, or extremist tendencies within the political mainstream cannot be excluded (Ivanov and Ilieva, 2005: 2). A number of party structures based on a nationalist ideology were recreated or established after the fall of communism, ranging from parties espousing extreme radical-left nationalism associated with the communist past to far-right parties recreating populist movements of the interwar period to contemporary “homegrown” currents emerging as a result of the radicalization of the mainstream right.

¹¹ An amendment in 2005 to the Elections Act doubled the registration deposit requirement for parties and coalitions.

Left-wing radicalism includes the Committee for the Defence of the National Interests (CDNI), the intellectual radical-left nationalist circle and later the Dawn (*Zora*) party, and the political movement Defence, a radical-left formation, registered as a party in 1998 under the name Union of Patriotic Forces and Military of the Reserve “Defence”.¹² Both *Zora* and Defence became founding members of Attack’s electoral coalition, National Union Attack (NUA). The right-wing component of the Bulgarian radical right includes the “dark-blue McCarthyism” of the democratic mainstream right and a reactionary faction of the principal anti-communist democratic coalition, the UDF (Bell, 1999: 235). By 1991, the “dark-blue” splinter movement within the UDF developed a core doctrine of xenophobia, exclusionary nationalism, and opposition to party pluralism. Circles within the democratic right openly questioned the presence of the predominantly ethnic-Turkish party, the MRF, in Bulgarian politics, and later caused a series of divisions within the entire democratic movement.¹³ Parallel to such tendencies within the political mainstream, a number of extra-parliamentary party structures (re)emerged on the far right. Although more numerous than the radical-left nationalist-populist currents, they have remained marginal and include predominantly parties with a nationalist and xenophobic ideology.¹⁴ Two such parties, the Bulgarian National Union and the Bulgarian National-Patriotic Party, joined Attack’s electoral coalition in 2005.

Charismatic leadership and organizational development of the Attack Party

The political platform of the radical-right opposition and the creation of the Attack Party may be attributed to the political activities of its most prominent leader to date, Volen Siderov. Siderov’s political career developed within the anti-communist UDF circles in the early 1990s. He rose to the position of Editor-in-Chief of UDF party organ *Democratsia* Daily (1990-1992). During the second half of the 1990s, Siderov’s political views gradually refocused beyond the post-communist left – democratic right divide towards a new interpretation of political conflict anchored in a xenophobic populist-nationalist ideology.

Although in his early political commentary Siderov did not use the nationalist idea as a vehicle of mass mobilization, his career as a journalist was instrumental in sustaining those political forces which shared the conception of a monocultural Bulgarian state. His published work consists of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic writings based on variations of international conspiracy theories. A collection of his articles

¹² *Attack* Vice-chairman Peter Beron was originally a member of Defence (and prior to that, a founding member and Chairman of the UDF).

¹³ By the late 1990s the UDF had split into the UDF-Liberals, which failed to pass the 4 percent threshold in 2001, and the Union of Free Democrats (SSD), which contested the 2005 election as part of the Bulgarian People’s Union.

¹⁴ A detailed account of radical-right party structures and movements preceding the creation of the Attack Party is provided in Ivanov and Ilieva (2005).

originally published in the nationalist *Monitor* daily and other media outlets between 1997 and 2002 appeared under the title *Bulgarophobia* (2003). This book contains the four major themes of Siderov’s “national” political idea: one-nation state, anti-establishment populism, rejection of democratic pluralism, and single-issue discourses anchored in identity politics. Since 2003 regular broadcasts of Siderov’s Attack show on cable channel SKAT TV have broadened public access to such extremist political views. While at the early stages his nationalist-populist rhetoric attracted viewer interest mostly due to its criticism of the Establishment, in the context of the 2005 election nationalism became Siderov’s principal resource of electoral mobilization.

The creation of the Attack Party and its electoral coalition National Union Attack emerged as the next stage of crystallization of the political platform of the radical right. *Ataka* anchored its electoral campaign on exclusionary ethnic nationalism. From an organizational point of view, it neither subsumed, nor made an effort to consolidate the existing nationalist currents. On the contrary, Attack further marginalized them. Party leader Siderov claimed that Attack was the true opposition to the party establishment and the only organizational structure with a real contribution to the political mobilization of the electorate.¹⁵ In typical populist style, he pointed to the “awakening” and “soaring spirit” of the Bulgarian people and his personal input as sources of Attack’s electoral breakthrough. “I did not advance these ideas in the last few weeks [prior to the 2005 election]. They have been the essence of my personality for years. And when one possesses the faith and confidence to pursue them, it turns out one can be successful.”¹⁶ Such statements do not fit well with the “winning formula” thesis which explains the electoral success of the radical right through its capacity to attract conservative voters under conditions of programmatic convergence between the mainstream parties. *Ataka*’s ideological platform claimed its own political space regardless of the relative positioning within the political mainstream. It refused to identify its ideological standing as either a left- or a right-wing organization but underlined its populist-nationalist principles. Attack’s electoral behaviour also contradicts the winning formula thesis. It made no effort to capture the vote of particular categories of voters; it rather replicated the new-entry model of the centrist-populist NMSS from the 2001 election. The original NMSS electoral breakthrough model was based on several tenets: a loose electoral party, created just several months before the election, in coalition with minor “satellite” parties and dominated by a charismatic leader. While seeking to benefit from the success of the surprise strategy which brought the NMSS to power in 2001 through a vague combination of market populism and charismatic leadership, Siderov also significantly reshaped the model by enhancing its ideological content. It is questionable, however, to what extent that content met with genuine public receptiveness to the nationalist idea. Attack’s programmatic documentation, while intensely ideological, remained underspecified, incoherent, and unrealistic.

¹⁵ See Interview of Volen Siderov in *Nova Zora* Weekly, 20 July 2005, pp. 2–4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 2, author’s translation.

The party electoral manifesto consists of a list of twenty principles (the “Twenty Points,” personally written by Siderov but introduced as a collective party document) and a more detailed paper entitled *Programme Scheme of the Attack Party*, which lays down its programmatic positions.¹⁷ While the Twenty Points represents an eclectic compilation of electoral proposals under the motto “Let us give Bulgaria back to the Bulgarians,” the *Programme Scheme* is an effort to articulate a programme for government.

Attack’s founding ideology posits a one-nation state with no acknowledgement of the existence of ethnic minorities and multiculturalism. It seeks to enhance the spirituality of the nation by elevating the status of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to that of a political actor. Key national priorities are determined by the premise that Bulgaria needs to regain full independence from foreign (Western) interests, which had turned the country into a “protectorate”. Attack demands the immediate withdrawal of Bulgarian troops from Iraq, a referendum on NATO membership and the presence of US military bases in Bulgaria while proposing “adequate” defence capabilities in line with the “regional balance of power” and a national-interest approach to European integration. Economic independence is to be achieved through an “appropriate” mix of public and private property, Bulgarian ownership of industry, commerce and banking, and a strong interventionist state which, through active redistribution policies, defends the interests of national firms and ensures the welfare of its citizens. Attack is against free trade and globalization, which it associates with neo-colonialism and poverty. Typical of the issue positions of the extreme right, Attack’s domestic policy agenda is designed to eliminate ethnic multiculturalism. It combines xenophobic approaches to social welfare and political rights with law and order measures. In a rhetoric resembling the anti-immigrant and anti-minority appeals of the radical right in Western Europe (Hainsworth, 2000), Attack proposes anti-crime measures directly targeting the Roma and Turkish minority in Bulgaria¹⁸ and claims that the MRF should be banned from politics as unconstitutional. Although it does not explicitly state opposition to democratic pluralism and liberalism, Attack’s programmatic documentation fails to make reference to democratic principles of politics. Its manifesto suggests that the party seeks to offer voters political alternatives beyond single-issue politics by replacing the essence of the post-communist consensus on market liberalism and Euro-Atlantic integration.

¹⁷ *Ataka*’s leadership has sought to differentiate itself from the party’s electoral platform as articulated in the *Twenty Principles*, stating that the party manifesto originally focused on socio-economic issues and did not contain racist or xenophobic statements. See Interview with Yordan Velichkov (*Ataka* MP), *Standart News* (Internet edition), 29 August 2005, at http://standartnews.com/archive/2005/08/29/english/opinion/s4541_2.htm (14 September 2005). The *Twenty-Principles* list is available at http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=29. The *Programme Scheme* is available at http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=29 (20 November 2006).

¹⁸ See statement of *Ataka* representative Lubomir Ivanov to the effect that members of the Roma community with criminal record should be sent to labour camps, quoted in *24 Hours Daily*, 25 June 2005, p. 5.

Attack’s electoral programme positions it as a strongly ideological and reactionary political actor and, at the same time, as a demagogic and amorphous party with an incomplete and contingent organizational development. Although the party appears to launch a populist reform programme, the latter is more effective as a criticism of the political establishment, rather than a constructive programme of change. The poor fit between values and policy positions makes it an unlikely source of mass electoral appeal. Attack’s core ideological tenet is nationalism; however, apart from monoculturalism, which under certain circumstances may have attracted voters from the ethnic majority, its electoral programme contains diverse propositions which are at odds with the general consensus, especially with regard to European integration. Although Siderov had argued that Attack’s foundations in nationalism were long-established, he himself did not relate it to existing social sentiments. Siderov first mentioned nationalism as a political platform, the “messenger” announcing the “political death” of the party establishment, for the first time in 2002.¹⁹ He later personally acknowledged that a nationalist party was not feasible at that time (evidently, because nationalist predispositions within the electorate were lacking).

It follows that if political agency factors had a causal effect on electoral support for the radical right in the 2005 election, they should be sought within the specifics of Attack’s electoral campaign, rather than its programmatic appeal. If equilibrium models of political agency or voter proximity (Downs, 1957) were in place, the obvious disconnect between ideology, issue positions, and the context of voter demand would have isolated voters. But under the *à la carte* model voters did not form coherent expectations with regard to Attack’s ideological tenets, policy positions and electoral appeals. The anti-establishment rhetoric was instrumental in marketing the party as an acceptable electoral choice whereby voters could vote in a “mix-and-match” fashion without evaluating its ideological coherence, programmatic appeal, or capabilities for policy implementation. Most importantly, Attack presented the electorate with the opportunity of *à la carte* protest voting by combining anti-establishment rhetoric, reversal of the policy consensus, and anti-system bias.

Campaign strategies and electoral geography of the Attack vote

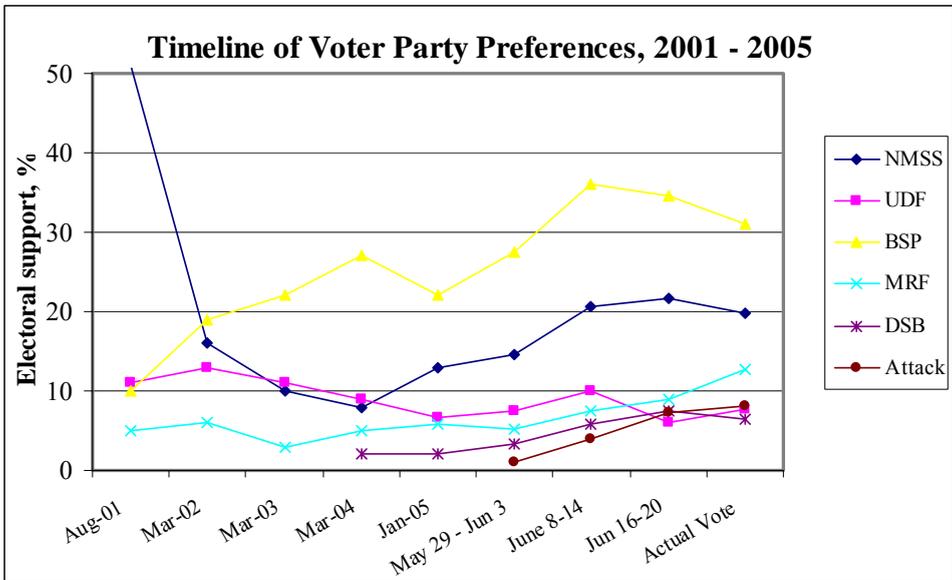
Ataka was in a position to present its electoral programme as an alternative to the mainstream parties due to the existing similarities and convergence of their programmatic positions. Throughout the 1990s, the imperatives of economic transition – macro-economic stabilization, privatization, structural reform, and European integration – often determined by the international institutions which guided the transition, left little room for policy alternatives to the parties in government. The “Europeanization” of Bulgarian domestic politics was shaped by the criteria for EU membership, defined as the rule of law, respect for human rights and protection of minorities, and a market

¹⁹ See *Nationalism Is Our Immune System*, (Siderov 2003: 362-64), quote on p. 364.

economy. All governments of the left (1994–1997), the centre-right (1991–1992 and 1997–2001), and the centre (2001–2005) implemented policies promoting economic liberalism and democratic pluralism. Policy convergence among the political parties was thus structurally determined. They offered voters no real issue alternatives.

Voter approval for the radical right rose as it intensified its anti-political-establishment rhetoric. Siderov’s *Ataka* show on cable television and other media outlets, especially the nationalist press, *Nova Zora* and *Between the Lines*, permitted it to gain national coverage. On the eve of the election *Ataka* had established regional party offices in 20 of the 31 electoral districts. Pre-election polls revealed that its popularity was rapidly increasing. The line graph of voter preferences after the 2001 election and voting intentions during the 2005 campaign shows the relative positioning of the radical right against the mainstream parties. The graph reveals considerable variation in voting intentions indicative of the lack of consistency in voter preferences.

Graph 1: Voting intentions, 2001–2005



Source: compiled from media reports. See News.bg online edition 4 June 2005, <http://www.news.bg/article.php?cid=7&pid=0&aid=159064> (3 July 2005).

By the end of May 2005 *Ataka*’s estimated support was around the 1 per cent threshold. It was gaining on average 2 per cent per week, parallel to sustained support for the left-wing (BSP), stabilization of support for the centre (NMSS), and increasing support for the mainstream right (UtDF, DSB and BPU) and the minority vote (MRF). Two weeks prior to the election, the share of non-voters consolidated at around 40–45 per cent (a number validated by the actual voter turnout) suggesting that electoral support for *Ataka* cannot

be directly attributed to the protest vote, otherwise typical of the non-voter.²⁰ While three weeks prior to the election the Attack vote was projected at 1.6 per cent, its actual vote reached 8.14 per cent. No structural factors could have anticipated such an outcome, as voting intentions for the mainstream parties were either stable or on the increase as well.

Correlation analysis conducted with district-level data on political supply reveals that the modalities of interparty competition and electoral behaviour of the mainstream parties were relevant to the electoral support for *Ataka*. The following variables measure the distribution of electoral outcomes: 2005 vote shares by district, percentage decline or increase in district vote shares 2001-2005 (relevant to BSP, MRF, NMSS, and UtDF), and share of ethnic minorities by district. Testing for association between Attack’s vote share and the electoral fortunes of the mainstream parties allows us to establish whether Attack’s vote share was derived from the relationship to the mainstream party vote, especially with respect to the electoral decline of the NMSS and UDF. Another set of bivariate correlations tests the thesis that electoral support for the Attack Party was the result of nationalist xenophobic sentiments directed against ethnic minorities.

Variable	BSP % change 2001–05 (BSP _{Δ01–05})	NMSS % change 2001–05 (NMSS _{Δ01–05})	MRF % change 2001–05 (MRF _{Δ01–05})	UtDF % change 2001–05 (UtDF _{Δ01–05})	NUA % Vote 2005	BSP % Vote 2005	NMSS % Vote 2005	MRF % Vote 2005	UtDF % Vote 2005	DBS % Vote 2005	BPU % Vote 2005	Ethnic minorities (% population by district)
BSP _{Δ01–05}	1	-.02	-.55*	.30	.02	.62*	.27	-.35	.01	-.16	.09	-.29
NMSS _{Δ01–05}		–	-.21	-.1	-.54**	-.18	-.25	.41*	-.32	-.09	-.28	.40*
MRF _{Δ01–05}			–	-.01	.26	-.40*	-.49**	.53**	-.79**	-.31	-.36*	.44*
UtDF _{Δ01–05}				–	.06	.27	-.06	.13	-.13	-.79**	-.36*	.19
NUA ₀₅					–	-.006	.27	-.42*	.16	.23	.25	-.27
BSP ₀₅						–	.38*	-.64*	.17	-.08	.33	-.61**
NMSS ₀₅							–	-.84**	.72*	.39*	.49*	-.81**
MRF ₀₅								–	-.70*	-.51**	-.70**	.96**
UtDF ₀₅									–	.52*	.51**	-.75
DBS ₀₅										–	.52**	-.56**
BPU ₀₅											–	-.74**
Ethnic minorities												–

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; $N = 31$.

Data Source: Central Electoral Commission, 2005.

²⁰ Attack’s projected vote share of 1.6% emerged in an Alfa Research poll on 3 June 2005. Source: <http://www.aresearch.org/doc.php?en=0&id=17> (20 September 2006).

The matrix of bivariate correlations indicates that the association between radical-right voting and voting for both the left-wing and right-of-centre parties at the district level is weak and not statistically significant. According to the winning formula thesis, we would expect Attack to have attracted right-wing voters, reflected in a meaningful negative correlation with the vote shares of the right-wing parties.

The matrix shows that the correlation between the Attack vote and the mainstream-party vote is statistically significant only with respect to the liberal centre – with the decline of the NMSS vote since 2001 (correlation coefficient $r = -0.539^{**}$) and with the MRF vote in the 2005 election (correlation coefficient $r = -0.416^*$). The negative sign of both correlations suggests that if Attack was able to capitalize on declining electoral support for the principal incumbent party NMSS, which lost on average 23.83 per cent of its national vote share in 2001, the electoral success of the ethnically based MRF had a potentially negative impact on radical-right voting.²¹ Such findings suggest that factors pertaining to the structure of party competition are relevant to Attack's electoral outcome, although not in the direction prescribed by conventional explanations. The relationship between the NMSS and MRF vote shares, on the one hand, and electoral support for *Ataka*, on the other hand, suggests that radical-right voting in opposition to the parties in government is a plausible explanation. However, the correlation matrix also shows that no statistically significant relationship can be established between the presence of ethnic minorities and radical-right voting. As Attack's candidates ran predominantly on an anti-minority platform, it would be logical to expect that in the ethnically mixed regions they would receive the support of voters with nationalist-authoritarian predispositions. By contrast, there is a strong negative correlation between the vote shares of the mainstream parties (except MRF) and the concentration of ethnic minorities: for example, with respect to support for the two new right-wing parties, the DSB and BPU (correlation coefficients $r = -.56^{**}$ and $r = -.74^{**}$, respectively).

Furthermore, summary statistics show that in the ethnically mixed districts the Attack vote was around or below its national average; an indicator that there was a lack of correspondence between its anti-minority campaign and voter preferences. The following comparisons between the distribution of the ethnic minority and radical-right votes confirm the results established through correlation tests.

²¹ The values of $NMSS_{\Delta 01-05}$ are negative.

Table 4: Geography of minorities and radical-right voting by district, 2005 (N = 31)

Highest MRF Vote Share		Ethnic Turk/ (Minority) in District		Attack Vote Share in District		Highest Attack Vote Share		Minority/ (Ethnic Turk) Population in District		Roma Population In District	
District	%	%	Rank	%	Rank	District	%	%	Rank	%	Rank
Kurdzhali	67.30	61.65 (65.89)	1 (1)	2.40	31	Ruse	12.30	19.82 (13.92)	9 (5)	3.65	20
Razgrad	46.00	47.21 (56.00)	2 (2)	6.50	23	Veliko Turnovo	11.40	11.62 (7.70)	19 (14)	2.07	24
Turgo- vishte	37.80	35.95 (44.59)	3 (3)	7.80	18	Burgas	10.90	20.05 (13.84)	8 (7)	4.59	15
Silistra	36.10	34.34 (40.72)	4 (4)	5.60	26	Sofia District	10.50	7.21 (0.23)	26 (27)	6.13	11
Shumen	27.50	29.14 (39.78)	5 (5)	10.40	5	Shumen	10.40	39.78 (29.14)	5 (5)	8.05	4
National Total	12.	9.42 (16.06)	–	8.14	–	National Total	8.14	16.06 (9.42)	–	4.68	–

Source: Central Electoral Commission (2005), Bulgarian Census (2001).

Examination of the extreme values in the distribution of the ethnic minority- and radical-right vote in the 2005 election confirms that electoral support for the Attack Party does not follow demographic patterns. By contrast, the MRF vote is entirely determined by the geographic concentration of minorities in the Bulgarian population. The statistics demonstrate that the Attack vote cannot be linked to ethnically mixed regions with a Roma minority, despite the aggressive anti-Roma focus of Siderov’s electoral campaign.

While these findings support the relevance of political agency to voter mobilization, they also suggest that voting may not be a predictable process of market clearance but rather a situational occurrence without foundations in the classical supply-side factors of voting. The differences between conventional propositions and the *à la carte* hypothesis become apparent. The evidence on the dimensions of political agency, notably the mismatch between Attack’s ideological appeals and the lack of minority-related distribution of the radical-right vote, lends support to the *à la carte* proposition that radical-right voting is most likely neither a positive vote for the radical right *per se*, nor a negative note against the establishment but a mix of contextual determinants, key among which is the lack of correspondence between voter expectations and party supply. The following section will examine the goodness of fit between voter preferences and party supply from the perspective of electoral demand.

Voter demand *à la carte*

The structure of voter demand was critical to Attack’s electoral outcome. The radical right benefited from a key attribute of the electoral campaign – voter receptiveness to

electoral mobilization strategies. While Attack's appeal is generally cited as a factor contributing to radical-right voting, it does little to explain *why* voters voted the way they did. The surprise electoral breakthrough of the Attack Party has remained a puzzle, at best too simplistically attributed to xenophobia, nationalism, and anti-establishment sentiments.

Three-dimensional change in voter demand

Similar to the long-term trends informing the context of political agency, voter demand has been in the process of change long before the 2005 election. Three interrelated trends – the prevalent structure of political cleavages, value orientations, and voter evaluations – were instrumental in sustaining a sizeable cohort of “free floating voters” (Dalton, 2002: 207) whose electoral preferences were unbound by social and ideological determinants.

The most significant trajectory of socio-political change has been voter dealignment and the resulting reorientation of electoral preferences according to individual issue mobilization, anti-establishment protest, or performance voting. A number of authors have identified such trends as a decline of the impact of cleavage patterns in party politics previously “frozen” along the formative structure of societal divisions (Dalton, 2002, Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, Mair 1997).

Siaroff (2000) has noted that during the 1990s, class has remained the most pronounced cleavage in Bulgarian party politics, followed by regional and religious cleavages.²² However, the surprise election victory of the NMSS in 2001 revealed that the role of class in voting had declined. Most importantly, the left-right distinction in political competition became less salient after the 1997 election. The socio-structural determinants of electoral behaviour for the majority of voters opened up to the influence of declining partisanship, vote-switching and greater receptiveness towards new parties. As Sarah Birch has noted: “The de facto duopoly [between BSP and UDF] served the interests of both parties while maintaining the outward appearance of democratic alternation of power. The vote for the former King's newly formed political grouping [NMSS] may be interpreted as an act of desperation by an electorate that could not imagine a leadership worse than the one they had, and was therefore prepared to ‘try anything’. [...] the electorate also demonstrated that it was not subservient to the two main parties” (Birch 2003: 144).

The continuing decline of the bipolar model of Bulgarian party politics after the 2001 election provides evidence to the effect that economic and retrospective models of voting have become relevant to large proportions of the electorate. Vote-switching developed into an important electoral factor. After 42.73 per cent of the electorate changed their party of choice by voting for the NMSS in the 2001 election, 19.63 per cent voted for new parties in 2005. On average, 32 per cent of voters switched to another party in the 2005 election. The data below demonstrate that electoral choices within the centre have been least stable. The principal centrist party NMSS lost 23.83 per cent of

²² Dalton (2002: 207) estimates that the association between religion and electoral choice in Bulgaria is the strongest in Eastern Europe (Cramer's V correlation of .29).

its vote share nationally. As 71.2 per cent of its 2001 voters supported it in 2005, the consistent share of NMSS voters in the electorate stood at 14.17 per cent in 2005.

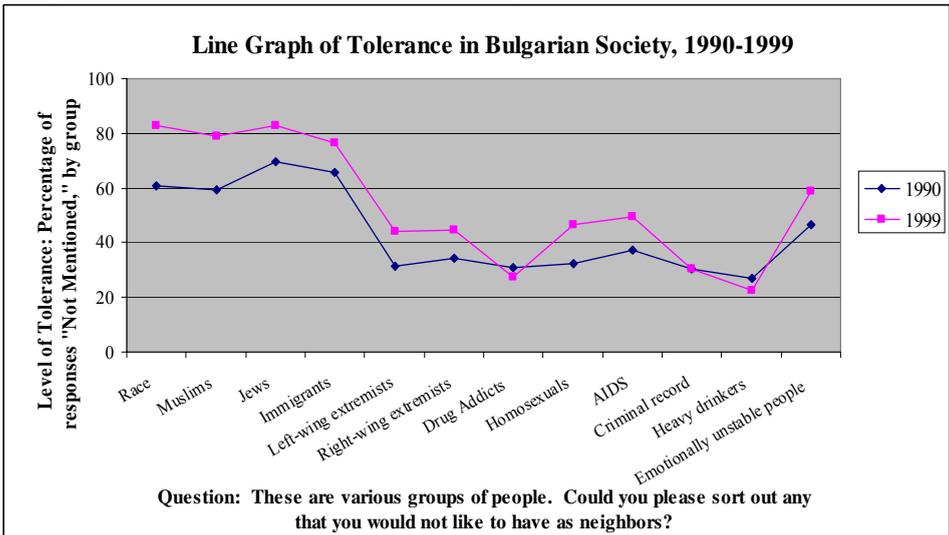
Table 5: Sources of party vote in the 2005 election, % of voting choice in 2001

Party	NMSS	UDF	BSP	MRF	Did not vote	Vote share 2005
BSP	14.20	3.80	70.80	0.60	8.40	30.95
NMSS	71.20	7.20	3.70	0.70	14.30	19.88
DSB	11.90	63.10	3.10	0.40	9.90	6.44
BPU	24.70	27.70	5.80	0.00	16.10	5.19
Attack	34.90	11.30	13.10	0.50	20.30	8.14
MRF	5.90	3.50	3.20	69.10	11.50	12.81
UDF	11.60	72.70	3.30	0.40	8.90	7.68
Others	25.20	16.30	17.20	6.50	17.20	8.90

Source: MBMD Exit poll, 25 June 2005, *Sega Daily*, (28 June 2005), p. 3.

Change in the distribution of individual values and political orientations has emerged as a second major development in voter demand since the 1990s. The contradictory evolution of tolerance in Bulgarian society represents one of the principal outcomes of value change. Three consecutive waves of the World Values Survey (1990, 1997, and 1999) indicate that during the 1990s, pluralism in Bulgarian society increased considerably. As the graph line below demonstrates, key aggregate measures of social and political tolerance experienced positive trends.

Graph 2: Tolerance and value change



Data Source: World Values Survey (Bulgaria) 1990, 1999. Data on race compares 1990 and 1997 data (question not asked in 1999).

Summary statistics show that the largest increase in tolerance was observed vis-à-vis people of different race (21.7 per cent), Muslims (19.5 per cent), people with AIDS, and homosexuals. Social intolerance persisted only with regard to drug addicts and heavy drinkers.

Furthermore, World Values Surveys and Eurobarometer data provide measures of public dispositions towards nationalism. Bulgarians are not more nationalistic than other Central and Eastern Europeans. Eurobarometer polls indicate that 70 per cent of Bulgarians are very or quite proud of their country versus 86 per cent of Eastern Europeans and 83 per cent of West-Europeans on average. The proportion of Bulgarians sharing exclusively national versus a common national and European identity is in line with European averages. In 2001 39 per cent of respondents saw themselves as Bulgarians only and 39 per cent felt both Bulgarian and European. In 2005 the respective figures were 45 per cent (national identity only) versus 49 per cent (national and European identity). In the Central and Eastern European EU member states, these indicators were 43 per cent versus 42 per cent in 2001 and 42 per cent versus 55 per cent in 2005.²³

Against the background of established trends of increasing pluralism and tolerance in Bulgarian society, more recent data reveal that such political indicators have been affected by negative change in interethnic attitudes developing within the Bulgarian ethnic majority. A nationally representative survey conducted in 2005 found that large proportions of Bulgarians prefer not to live in the same country with people from the minority groups, such as Roma (27 per cent of respondents), Turks (18 per cent), Jews (16 per cent), and Armenians (13 per cent) (Cohen 2005). The survey also established that racist attitudes are likely to influence electoral behaviour. Large segments of the ethnic majority regardless of age, education, residence, or income associate their voting preferences with ethnicity criteria.

Table 6: Partisanship and voting preferences, Bulgarian ethnic majority (2005)

Question: Would you vote for a candidate nominated by your party, if the candidate were a Roma?									
Answer: Percentage of negative responses by demographic group									
Gender		Age		Education		Residence		Income	
Male	75	18-30	75	University degree	68	Capital city	80	High	75
Female	77	60-70	80	Primary	69	Village	77	Low	84

Data Source: Cohen (2005: 14).

The data are indicative of a public tendency to formulate political preferences along alternative dimensions of party support: deepening centre-periphery and regional cleavages and the continued decline of class as the primary referent of electoral competition.

²³ Source: Eurobarometer 54.1 (2001) and 63 (2005).

Voter distancing from and disillusionment with political life and the establishment represents the third trajectory of long-term change in Bulgarian electoral politics, reflected in declining levels of political trust and measures of personal efficacy. Since the 2001 election personal satisfaction with life and confidence in political institutions has been consistently lower in Bulgaria than in other East-European countries. Cross-national research reveals that by the time of the 2005 election, the Bulgarians had emerged as the most pessimistic nation in Europe. Only 29 per cent of Bulgarians were satisfied with personal life in 2005 versus 80 per cent on average in the European Union. By contrast, Bulgarians have higher confidence in the European Union and other international institutions (72 per cent approval) than European citizens on average (59 per cent).²⁴

A social structure of radical-right voting?

The 2005 electoral campaign was affected by the enmeshing of such contradictory trends in voter demand. A number of relationships between socio-structural and political variables, on the one hand, and the distribution of voter choices suggest that electoral support for the radical right emerged as an expression of volatile predispositions and short-term preferences, an *à la carte* selection whereby different categories of voters opted for the radical right without a coherent approval of its principal tenets: nationalist ideology, populist appeal, anti-system rhetoric, and charismatic leadership style.

The foundations of voter party choices in the 2005 election varied widely. Pre-election polls found that 32 per cent of decided voters intended to support the party of their usual preference regardless of whether it included candidates who they personally did not like; 24 per cent intended to vote for the party of their preference only if it did not include candidates whom they personally did not approve; 26 per cent intended to vote based exclusively on candidate names in the party lists without a clear support for any of the parties in the election; and 18 per cent had no opinion on whether party or candidate approval would affect their motivation to vote.²⁵ The evidence suggests that the election was open to personalization of the vote, an occurrence particularly instrumental in Attack’s electoral campaign based on charismatic leadership.

A second important development in the 2005 election was the use of ethno-centrism and anti-minority rhetoric as tools of voter mobilization. While the electoral geography of the Attack Party reveals that the ethnic factor was not associated with the distribution of radical-right voting in the election, the fact that 99.2 per cent of Attack’s vote was derived from within the ethnic majority points to the relevance of ethnicity and interethnic attitudes to voting choices.²⁶

²⁴ See Eurobarometer poll data at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm (20 December 2006)

²⁵ See Alfa Research pre-election poll summary, 20 April 2005 at <http://www.aresearch.org/doc.php?en=08&id=21> (20 September 2005).

²⁶ For comparison, the ethnic majority accounts for between 94.20% (UDF) and 97.40% (DSB) of the mainstream party vote. The vote share of ethnic Bulgarians in the predominantly Turkish MRF is 13.60%. In the 2005 election, the MRF derived 80.0% of its national vote from ethnic Turks and 5.9%

Analysis of individual-level data permits to outline the socio-demographic profile of the Attack voters beyond their apparent identification as belonging to the Bulgarian ethnic majority. Post-election public opinion polls contain information on key dimensions of party support in the 2005 election: ideological, social, and performance-based indicators which may be examined as possible correlates of radical-right voting. One of the tasks is to compare the socio-structural characteristics of the Attack voters relative to the mainstream-party voters, and make inference with regard to the sources of electoral support for the radical right in Bulgaria.

Table 7 demonstrates that there are significant demographic differences between radical-right voters and mainstream-party voters. Such differences are established at two levels: ratios between individual sub-groups of voters in the national vote for the Attack Party and the mainstream parties and, depending on the significance of sub-group differences, the strength of association between individual demographic, socio-economic, and political variables and voting choices. Over- or, respectively, under-representation of individual voter categories in Attack's national vote share relative to the mainstream party vote indicates the extent to which electoral support for the Attack Party depends on the vote of particular cohorts of the electorate according to gender, age, location of residence, education, class, economic evaluations and political orientations.

Table 7: Comparative socio-demographic profile of the Attack Voter

Variable	Attack Voters (% in total)	Mainstream-party voters (% in total)	Over-/under-representation of group	Cramer's V correlation
Gender				.031 (n/s)
Male	53.7 (29)	47.4 (359)	1.13	
Female	46.3 (25)	52.6 (398)	0.88	
Age				.092**
18-29	5.6 (3)	13.9 (105)	0.40	
30-39	13.0 (7)	16.0 (121)	0.81	
40-49	18.5 (10)	16.0 (121)	1.16	
50-59	31.5 (17)	19.4 (147)	1.62	
60 and over	31.5 (17)	34.7 (263)	0.91	
Type of residence				.117*
Village	16.4 (9)	35.8 (271)	0.46	
Town	29.1 (16)	19.9 (151)	1.48	
Administrative city	43.6 (24)	30.0 (234)	1.45	
Capital	10.9 (55)	14.3 (108)	0.76	

from the Roma minority. Source: Exit poll data of the 2005 parliamentary election, *Sega Daily*, 28 June 2005, p. 3. Census data (2001) determines the ethnic composition of the Bulgarian population as 83.94% Bulgarians, 9.41% Turks, 4.68% Roma, and 1.97% other minority groups.

Education				.096*
College and higher	22.2 (12)	17.8 (135)	1.25	
Secondary	61.1 (33)	47.4 (359)	1.29	
Primary and lower	16.7 (9)	34.8 (264)	0.48	
Class⁽ⁱ⁾				.101 (n/s)
Blue-collar worker	26.5 (9)	20.7 (66)	1.27	
White-collar worker	44.1 (15)	40.4 (129)	1.08	
Manager/Director	20.6 (7)	16.6 (53)	1.24	
Routine non-manual	5.9 (2)	12.9 (41)	0.48	
Small business owner	2.9 (1)	6.0 (19)	0.48	
Employer	0.0 (0)	3.4 (11)	0.0	
Occupation				0.099 (n/s) ²
Full/part-time employed	60.0 (33)	43.1 (326)	1.39	
Student	1.8 (1)	2.8 (21)	0.64	
Unemployed	3.6 (2)	13.6 (103)	0.26	
Retired	32.7 (18)	38.3 (290)	0.85	
House person	1.8 (1)	2.2 (17)	0.81	

Notes: N=812 unless noted otherwise. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

⁽ⁱ⁾ N=353. ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ Numbers in columns two and three are percentages of party voters, with numbers of respondents in brackets. Column four reports the ratio between individual group support for the Attack Party and the combined mainstream party vote share of the respective group. Coefficients above 1.0 indicate that a given group is over-represented in the radical-right vote share relative to the national share of that group in the mainstream party vote (over-representation ratios in italics/bold). Coefficients below 1.0 indicate that a sub-group in the radical-right vote share is under-represented relative to its national proportion of the mainstream-party vote. See Norris (2005: 140-146) and McGann and Kitschelt (2005: 461-2).

Source: BBSS-Gallup poll, December 2005.

The descriptive statistics reveal that, relative to voters for the mainstream parties, Attack’s supporters are over-represented in the cohorts of male voters (1.1) residing in large cities and towns (1.46) but not in the capital, aged between 40 and 60 (50 per cent of all Attack voters), with secondary (1.29) and higher education (1.25). The statistics show that Attack’s vote share is derived predominantly from these categories of voters.

Chi-square tests conducted with respect to radical-right voting versus voting for the mainstream parties across all demographic and socio-economic variables reveal that differences by location, age, and education are statistically significant and the relationship between these variables and voting choice is weak-to-moderate. Such comparisons point to the potential relevance of socio-structural variables to explaining the Attack vote by the socio-demographic structure of the Bulgarian electorate. However, more contextualized comparisons with the socio-demographic profile of voters for individual parties reveal that the Attack voters are similar to NMSS (liberal centre) and right-wing voters (UtDF, DSB, and BPU combined) in key socio-economic variables, such as class

and education, status as self-employed, age, and location of residence.²⁷ Such findings fail to validate claims that Attack’s voters have a distinct socio-demographic profile despite the significant differences with the mainstream electorate as a whole.

Differences in political and economic evaluations?

Table 8 demonstrates that Attack voters differ significantly from voters for the mainstream parties according to performance evaluations; both with regard to personal economic situation and sociotropic assessments (the association between economic evaluations and voting, although statistically significant, is weak).

Table 8: Performance evaluations of the Bulgarian voters, 2006

Economic performance	Attack Voters	Mainstream party voters	Over-/under-representation of group	Cramer’s V correlation
Personal satisfaction with life ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	83.9 (73)	72.9 (717)	<i>1.17</i>	<i>0.09*</i>
Sociotropic evaluation	71.3 (62)	55.1 (549)	<i>1.29</i>	<i>0.09***</i>

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. On column four, see note ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ in Table 7.

N=1082. Personal satisfaction with life is reported as percent of respondents dissatisfied with personal life (answers “life is hard” and “hardly making a living”). Sociotropic evaluation is measured as percent of respondents dissatisfied with the situation in the country (answer “the country is moving in the wrong direction”).

Data source: BBSS-Gallup, May 2006.

Once again, such differences disappear in comparisons with individual parties. There is no statistically significant difference in sociotropic evaluations between Attack and UtDF voters, who otherwise report significantly higher rates of satisfaction with their personal life. UtDF voters are typical of those who would vote for centre-right opposition parties after the 2001 election. The UtDF has established itself as the principal opposition party in parliament. Furthermore, while there are significant sociotropic differences between Attack and MRF voters, such differences are not valid with respect to egotropic evaluations. MRF and Attack voters have the highest proportions of respondents dissatisfied with their personal economic situation. As with socio-demographic variables, performance evaluations problematize conventional explanations. The Attack voters share a dissatisfaction with life with voters of predominantly working-class and lower education cohorts (MRF voters), and share socio-demographic characteristics with centre-right voters from higher-education cohorts living in urban areas (NMSS and UtDF). Both sets of variables are instrumental in establishing a rather eclectic voter profile of the radical right.

²⁷ The difference with voters of the centre according to type of residence is significant at the .1 level ($p = .067$, Cramer’s $V = .137$). Summary statistics of tests conducted with respect to individual parties are not reported here but are available on file from the author.

Political attitudes constitute the third set of variables indicative of the electoral preferences of the Attack voters. Political self-identification, measures of political trust, confidence in the Attack Party and its charismatic leader Volen Siderov, as well as indicators of the stability of electoral choice provide conclusive evidence of the *à la carte* composition of Attack’s electorate.

Political views are the central political variable linking voters to party choice. Measured as self-placement according to the left-right scale, it constitutes a stable predictor of voters’ psychological attachments to political parties (Lewis-Beck 1988: 59). The sub-group composition of the radical-right vote according to political views in Table 9 reveals that the radical right is significantly different from the mainstream party vote and is comprised predominantly of voters from the liberal centre and those who cannot identify their political views according to left-centre-right categorization.

Table 9: Comparison of political views of Attack/ mainstream party voters

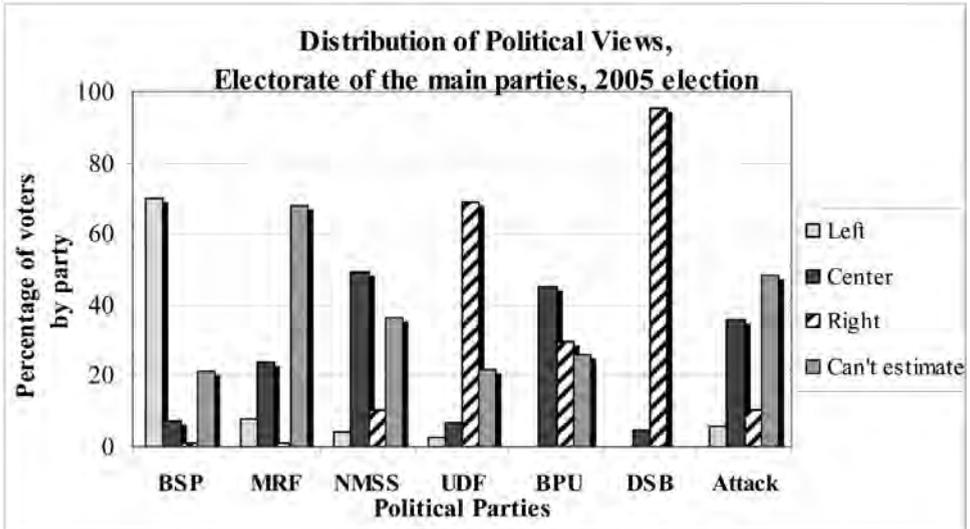
Political values of Attack’s voters by group relative to the party’s average electoral support in all groups: 8.0% (poll data)			Political values of Attack’s voters versus voters of all mainstream parties: Attack’s over/under-representation by group		
Group	Proportion of group according to political views	Over-/under-representation of group relative to Attack’s national vote share	Proportion of group within Attack’s voters	Proportion of group mainstream party vote share	Over-/under-representation of group relative to the group in mainstream party vote, national sample
Left	1.4	0.17	5.7 (5)	36.03 (361)	0.16
Right	5.4	0.67	10.3 (9)	15.9 (158)	0.68
Centre	15.0	1.87	35.6 (31)	17.8 (177)	2.00
Cannot estimate	12.3	1.54	48.3 (42)	30.1 (299)	1.60

*Note: N=1082. On column six, see note ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ in Table 7
Data source: BBSS-Gallup, May 2006.*

Individual party comparisons further reveal that, counterintuitively, Attack voters are similar to NMSS voters, i.e. with primarily centrist political views. Second, the radical-right vote is derived predominantly from voters who cannot identify their political views. Such results indicate that while the distribution of political views is associated with party choice, the left-centre-right placement is not a stable predictor in radical-right voting. There is an apparent mismatch between Attack’s strongly ideological platform and the structure of its electoral support, predominantly within the cohorts of voters with undefined and liberal-centrist political views. Such a discrepancy lends support to the disequilibrium thesis. The chart below shows a similar lack of stable political

identification within the MRF and BPU electorate. By contrast, the ideological self-placement is a strong factor for DSB and moderate-to-strong for BSP and UDF voters.

Chart 1: Political views of the party electorate



Source: Gallup-BBSS poll, May 2006.

To summarize, the disproportionately high proportion of voters with undefined political views for large segments of the party electorate as a whole also validates the disequilibrium thesis. Such voters constitute 31.6 per cent nationally, and are above the average for the NMSS (36.3 per cent), Attack (48.3 per cent), and MRF (67.9 per cent).

Attack’s voters differ significantly from the electorate of the mainstream parties according to political trust. The average confidence in political institutions on a 1–6 scale is 1.6 for the *Ataka* voters, versus 2.85 for mainstream voters. This difference is statistically significant also in individual comparisons with the parliamentary parties, except the DSB and UDF. The findings demonstrate that radical-right and right-wing voters are likely to associate trust in political institutions with their status as voters for the opposition.²⁸ The data reveal political similarities between the right-wing and the radical right and fail to validate the latter’s anti-system character from a voter’s perspective.

The propensity for vote-switching is another political attribute typical of the Attack voters. Post-election polls reveal that Attack’s electorate is on average 1.9 times more likely than the electorate of the mainstream parties to vote for another party in future elections suggesting that Attack’s electoral success in the 2005 election was in part the result of affective voter reactions but not of stable orientations. In May 2006 29.5

²⁸ The index of political trust is calculated as the total of individual positive responses to six questions on confidence in the following political institutions: the Bulgarian Constitution, Presidency, Parliament, the Government, the Chief Prosecutor’s office, and local authorities.

per cent of the Attack voters declared an intention to vote for a newly established liberal-populist party also led by a charismatic leader (GERB)²⁹ versus 15.5 per cent of the electorate of the mainstream parties. The evidence is at odds with the value proposition on radical-right voting, according to which we would expect Attack voters to be attracted by its ultra-nationalist content.

For comparison, between-group differences show that vote-switching is more common for the centre-right electorate. While intentions to vote for another party affect between 2.6 per cent (MRF) and 7.0 per cent (BSP) of the centre-left voters, the values of this indicator increase considerably for right-of-centre voters – 23.4 per cent (DSB), 26.5 per cent (UDF), 29.5 per cent (Attack Party), and 43.6 per cent (NMSS).³⁰ The Attack vote therefore may be regarded as an extreme case of vote-switching, typical of the electorate as a whole.

As Table 9 demonstrates, there are significant differences also in regard to issue-specific political evaluations of radical-right versus mainstream voters. However, introducing temporal comparisons yields surprising results. Key indicators of political confidence of the Attack voters change considerably outside the context of the electoral campaign. Only charismatic leadership and confidence in the Attack Party remain highly correlated with party choice, despite falling confidence in the party and its leader among the electorate.

Table 9: Evolution of political confidence, Attack versus mainstream-party voters

Variables	Attack Voters	Mainstream party voters	Over-/under-representation of group	Cramer's V correlation
Confidence in Volen Siderov <i>October 2005</i> <i>May 2006</i>	81.5 (32) 43.7 (38)	11.4 (105) 5.8 (56)	7.15 7.53	.385*** .270**
Confidence in the Attack Party <i>October 2005</i> <i>May 2006</i>	69.0 (29) 51.1 (45)	7.6 (73) 6.6 (66)	9.07 7.74	.408*** .419***
Confidence in NATO <i>October 2005</i> <i>May 2006</i>	28.6 (12) 40.8 (20)	37.7 (361) 38.2 (206)	0.76 1.06	.113 ** .041 (n/s)
Confidence in the EU <i>October 2005</i> <i>May 2006</i>	38.1 (16) 58.0 (51)	51.6 (494) 54.5 (542)	0.74 1.06	.083* .044 (n/s)

Notes: Sample size October 2005, N=1000; May 2006, N=590. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

On column four, see note ^(iv) in Table 7.

Data source: BBSS-Gallup, December 2005; May 2006.

²⁹ Party name GERB (“coat of arms”) is abbreviation of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria, a populist party established in 2006 by Sofia Mayor Boiko Borissov, former NMSS leader.

³⁰ Source: BBSS-Gallup survey data, May 2006.

Such individualized comparisons reveal that Attack's voters do not consistently agree with the principal issue positions of the party. Over time (removed from the influence of Attack's electoral campaign), the Attack voters are likely to follow the distribution of political confidence typical of the mainstream party electorate. While they have significantly lower confidence in NATO, the radical-right voters are not the most sceptical in that respect. May 2006 poll data indicate that left-wing BSP voters have the lowest level of confidence in NATO (31.1 per cent). Similarly, the *Ataka* electorate has a higher level in confidence in the EU than BSP voters (47.3 per cent) and MRF voters (44.3 per cent) and this difference is statistically significant.³¹ The findings once again point to a mismatch between party positions and voters, taking into account that anti-NATO appeals were central to Attack's electoral campaign and fully in line with its nationalist ideological platform. On the contrary, all mainstream parties emphasized pro-Euro-Atlantic integration positions.

In conclusion, the wide variation in political views and orientations does not allow the establishment of a clear-cut electoral profile of Attack's voters which would distinguish them from the political mainstream. While not a completely classless vote – individual categories of voters are significantly over- and under-represented in Attack's electorate – the radical-right vote is otherwise broadly based across social strata and does not conform to sociological accounts which identify its sources among the working-class, unemployed, self-employed, and lower-education cohorts. The distribution of political views also fails to validate propositions of association between political variables, while repeatedly pointing to the role of contextual and short-term factors of political agency. The various streams of social pessimism – socio-economic, demographic, and political – converge in an *à la carte* model of voter choice valid across social strata and political attitudes.

Conclusion

The findings along all dimensions of the *à la carte* model presented here validate its core proposition that electoral support for the radical right is not a coherent vote shaped by stable predictors, such as social structure, interests and values, but a voting choice in the context of disequilibrium between party supply and voter expectations. Radical-right voting represents an element of diverging and/or unmet electoral expectations.

Such findings, although counterintuitive, are not unusual. Studies of the radical right in Western Europe have found that although the extreme-right parties have a clearly defined nationalist-populist ideology, voters often ignore its profound implications for the political community and, in the context of social change and rising insecurity, vote for the radical right based on affective or single-issue appeals, lack of political trust, or charismatic leadership. Voters understand the radical right as a vehicle of mobilization

³¹ Ibid.

of diverse (positive and/or negative) affective reactions, not necessarily a rational choice reflecting stable individual orientations.

As the Bulgarian case study demonstrates, public confidence in the radical right is not consistent over time but it is sustained by the opportunity to vote based on individual aspects of its electoral appeals in the absence of clear ideological self-identifications. The flexibility of *à la carte* voting is not readily applicable to the mainstream parties generally evaluated according to substantive issues. As a result, this model of voting has become the electoral privilege of the radical right and a resource for its sustained presence in the electoral market.

The possibility for formulation of voting choice in terms of a menu selection points to two conclusions: Firstly, the *à la carte* model is deceptive. It grants public legitimacy to extremist political actors who do not provide voters with meaningful political alternatives. Outside the context of electoral competition, voter confidence in the radical right declines thus distorting the validity of its electoral outcome. Secondly, the efforts of building a public *cordon sanitaire* around the anti-system political behaviour of the radical right are likely to be ineffective. Regardless of its ideological and programmatic positions, at odds with the liberal-pluralist consensus and with the political expectations of its own electorate, the radical right will continue to appeal to voters due to unmet electoral demand in the mainstream political market, where political innovation has stalled or remains limited.

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