Is Demonstrating Against the Far Right Worth it? Evidence From French Presidential Elections

Nicolas Lagios[1] Pierre-Guillaume Méon[1] Ilan Tojerow[2]

[1]CEBRIG, DULBEA, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

[2]DULBEA, CEBRIG, IZA-Bonn, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

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Introduction

- Far-right and right-wing populist parties have seen their influence grow in many countries

- Those parties share some common traits
  - Anti-immigration and xenophobic positions, anti-elite discourse, charismatic leaders, etc. (Guriev and Papaioannou, Forthcoming)

- Another common trait: They have prompted demonstrations aimed at lowering their influence

- Can those demonstrations reach their aim and, if so, how?
  - Those are the questions we will address in this paper
  - Important because such demonstrations have been repeatedly observed around the world

- Answer not straightforward as our understanding of how demonstrations work is still limited
  - Aggregate information about the importance of the cause to decision makers or fellow citizens (Lohmann, 1993, 1994; Bataglini, 2017)
  - Create or strengthen networks of activists (Madestam et al., 2013)
  - Affect the news agenda of the press (Wasow, 2020)
  - We argue: they can signal a social norm (unexpected election results à la Bursztyn et al. 2017 and Giani and Méon, 2021)
  - No previous evidence on demonstrations *against* a party or candidate

Context

We consider a historical event

- 2002 French presidential election
- Far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen made it to the second round on April 21
- Competed against incumbent right-of-centre president Jacques Chirac
- Four days before the second round (on May 1), around 300 demonstrations took place across the country

The 2002 election offers an ideal natural experiment

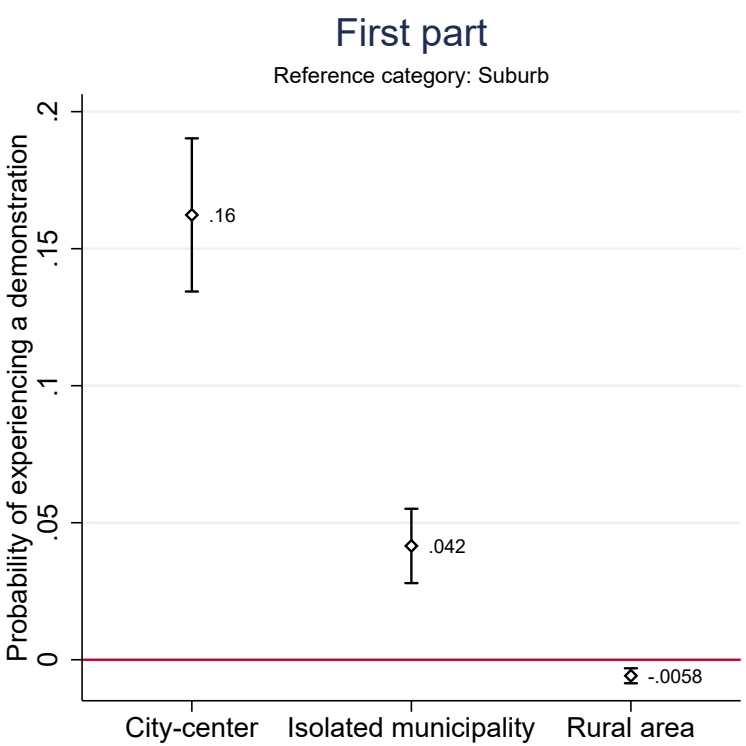
- The demonstrations took place only four days before the second round
- The two-round system allows studying the variation of votes
- Heterogeneous weather: can be used as an exogenous source of variation in rally attendance to address endogeneity
  - Rain discourages some individuals to join a demonstration

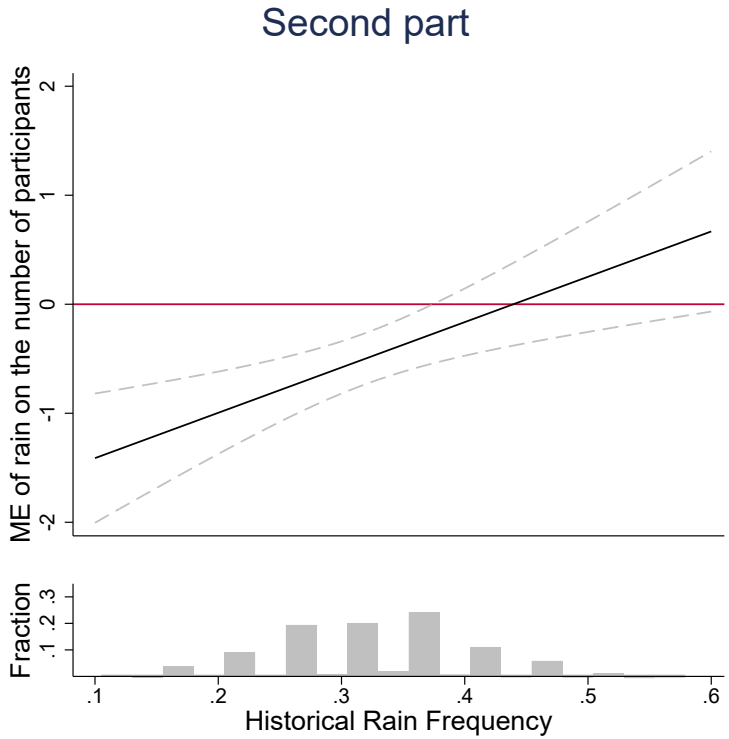
- Regress voting outcomes on number of participants = naive
- "Natural" approach: use rainfall on the day of the demonstrations directly as instrument in a 2SLS framework
  - Strong evidence that rainfall is exogenous
- However, many municipalities never host a demonstration...
  - Rainfall irrelevant for predicting rally attendance in municipalities that will never experience a demonstration
- Hence, we construct a rain-based synthetic instrument by estimating a two-part model (Belotti, et al., 2015; Cameron and Trivedi, 2009)

A rain-based synthetic instrument

- First part: probability of hosting a demonstration based on municipality characteristics
  - Suburb, rural municipality, isolated municipality, or city-center
- Second part: conditional on experiencing a demonstration, number of participants based on rainfall on the day of the demonstrations
  - A day is said to be rainy if rainfall $\geq$ 1mm
  - Historical rain frequency
  - Interaction between rainfall and historical rain frequency
- The instrument is the number of participants predicted by the model

Estimation of the two-part model





Baseline results

	(1) J.-M. Le Pen	(2) J. Chirac	(3) Abstentions blank/invalid ballots
Second-round outcome			
Number of participants (ln)	-0.399***	0.818***	-0.304***
	(0.124)	(0.273)	(0.0997)
First-round outcome	0.875***	0.478***	0.524***
	(0.0221)	(0.0341)	(0.0142)
F Statistics	127.3	127.5	127.5
Observations	36,153	36,153	36,153

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- More participants
  - $\downarrow$ the vote share for J.-M. Le Pen
  - $\uparrow$ the vote share for J. Chirac
  - $\downarrow$ the share of abstentions and blank and invalid ballots

Quantitative meaning of the results

Back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that without demonstrations

- J.-M. Le Pen would have gained 0.9 to 2.8 points in the second round
- J. Chirac would have lost 2.9 to 5.3 pts
- The number of abstentions and blank and invalid ballots would have been higher by 1 to 5.9 pts

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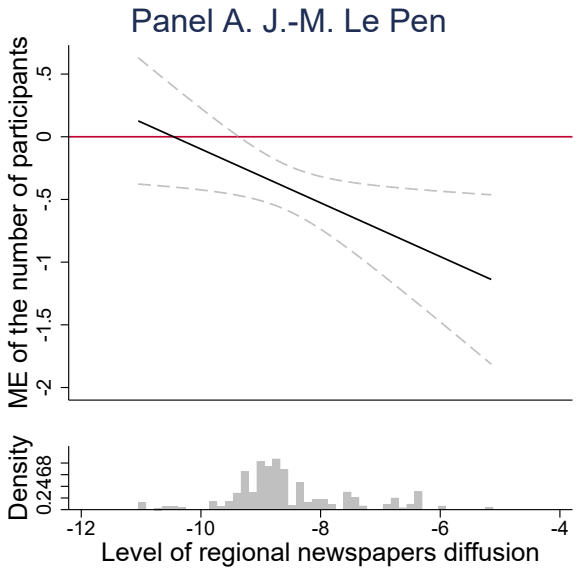
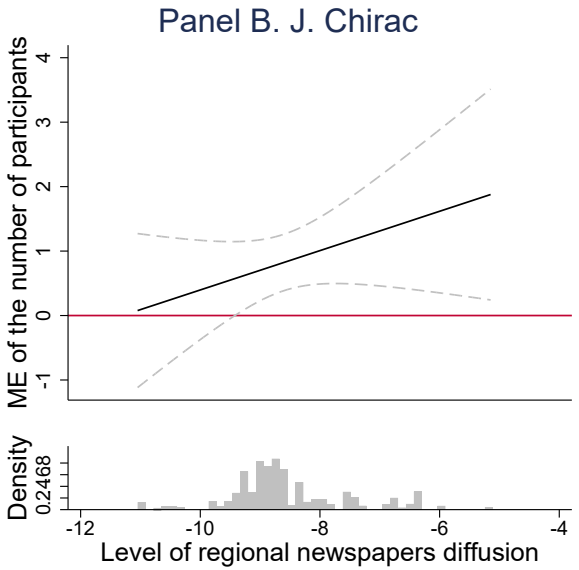
+ Robustness checks

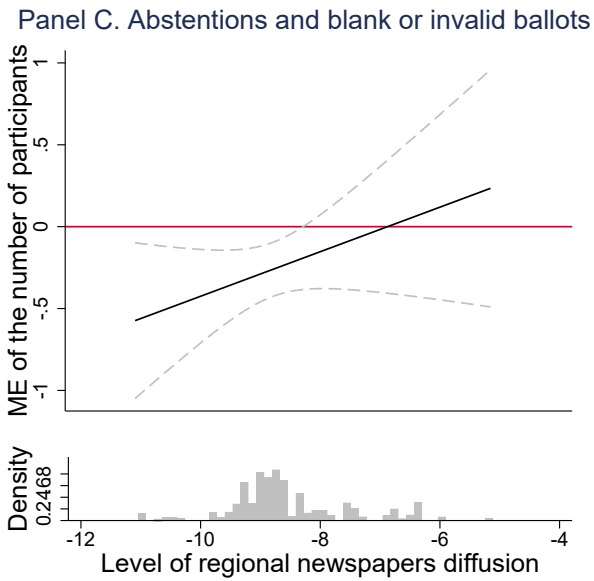
How information spread

- Most voters did not directly witness demonstrations
- Learned about them in the media or interacted with participants
- We investigate how information spread
  - The role of the press
    - Interaction with the level of local press diffusion in a department
  - Spatial spillovers
    - Spatial models

The role of the press







Spatial spillovers

- Up to now: we assumed that the effects of demonstrations were confined to the municipalities in which they took place
- We now relax this assumption by introducing the spatial lag of the number of participants
  - Allows the voting outcomes of each municipality to be affected by the number of participants in all other municipalities
- The spillover effects are qualitatively similar to direct effects

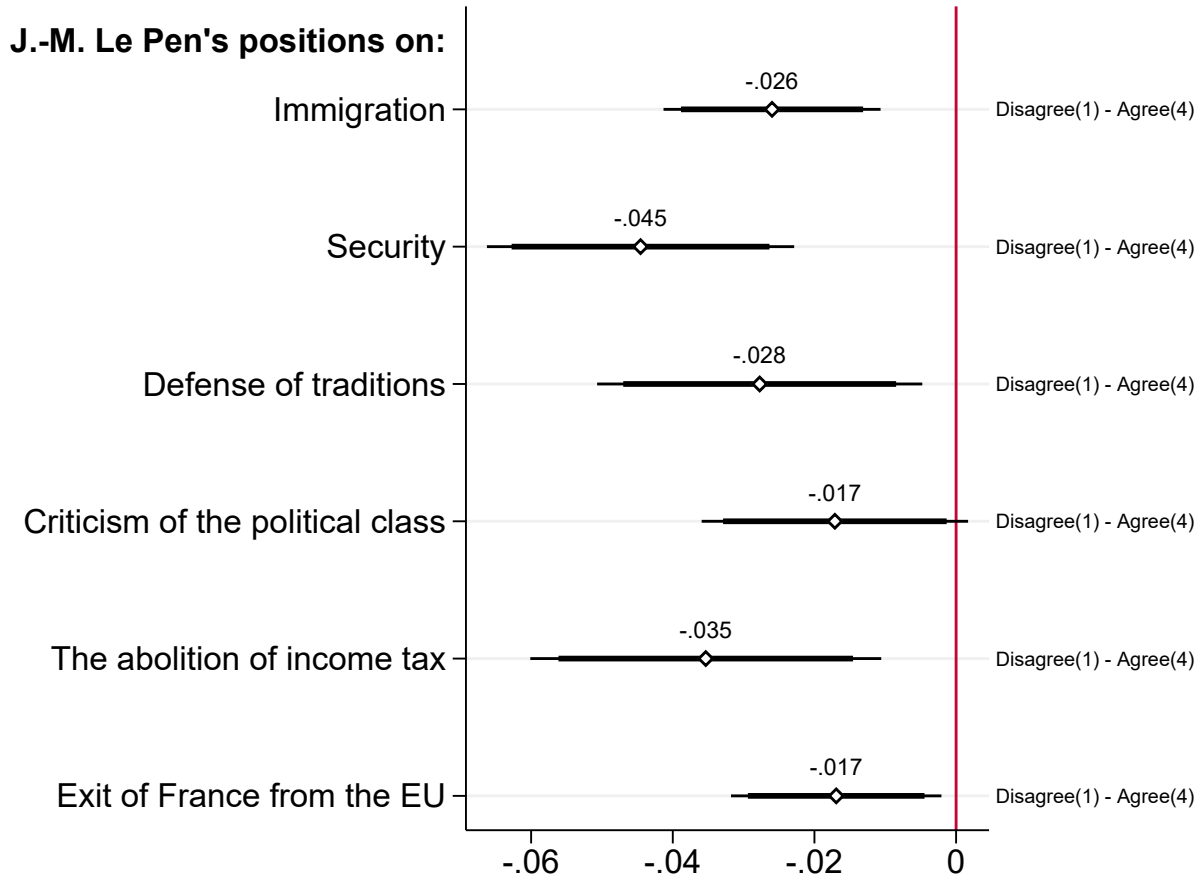
  $\Rightarrow$ The effect spills over to other municipalities

  $\Rightarrow$ Not only direct interactions

Individual behaviors

- Leverage survey data to better understand the behavior of individual voters
- Panel électoral français 2002
  - Survey carried out after the 2nd round
  - Questions on policies and world views
  - Votes in the 1st and 2nd round
- Same empirical strategy
  - The unit of observation is an individual
  - The dependent variable codes individual answers

Changes in the perception of policies



- demonstrations ↓ support for the policies advocated by Le Pen

Social desirability

	(1) J.-M. Le Pen	(2) J. Chirac	(3) Blank/invalid ballot
First-round declared vote			
Number of participants (ln)	-0.0106***	-0.00201	-0.00192
	(0.00369)	(0.00284)	(0.00179)
F Statistics	155.79	155.79	155.79
Observations	3,241	3,241	3,241

Social desirability

First-round declared vote	(1) J.-M. Le Pen	(2) J. Chirac	(3) Blank/invalid ballot
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F Statistics	155.79	155.79	155.79
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- The effect on reporting a vote for Le Pen in the first round is negative and statistically significant
  - No effect for Chirac and blank/invalid ballots
- But first-round votes pre-determined

$\Rightarrow$ Evidence that demonstrations $\downarrow$ the social desirability of reporting a vote for Le Pen

Take-away message

- We study how demonstrating against a far-right candidate can change election results
- To do so, we study the 2002 between-the-rounds demonstrations against J.-M Le Pen that occurred in France
- We find that larger demonstrations
  - $\downarrow$ the number of votes for J.-M. Le Pen
  - $\uparrow$ the number of votes for J. Chirac
  - $\downarrow$ abstention and the number of blank and invalid ballots
- Why
  - Information spread
  - Changed the assessment of the far right program and views
  - Social desirability

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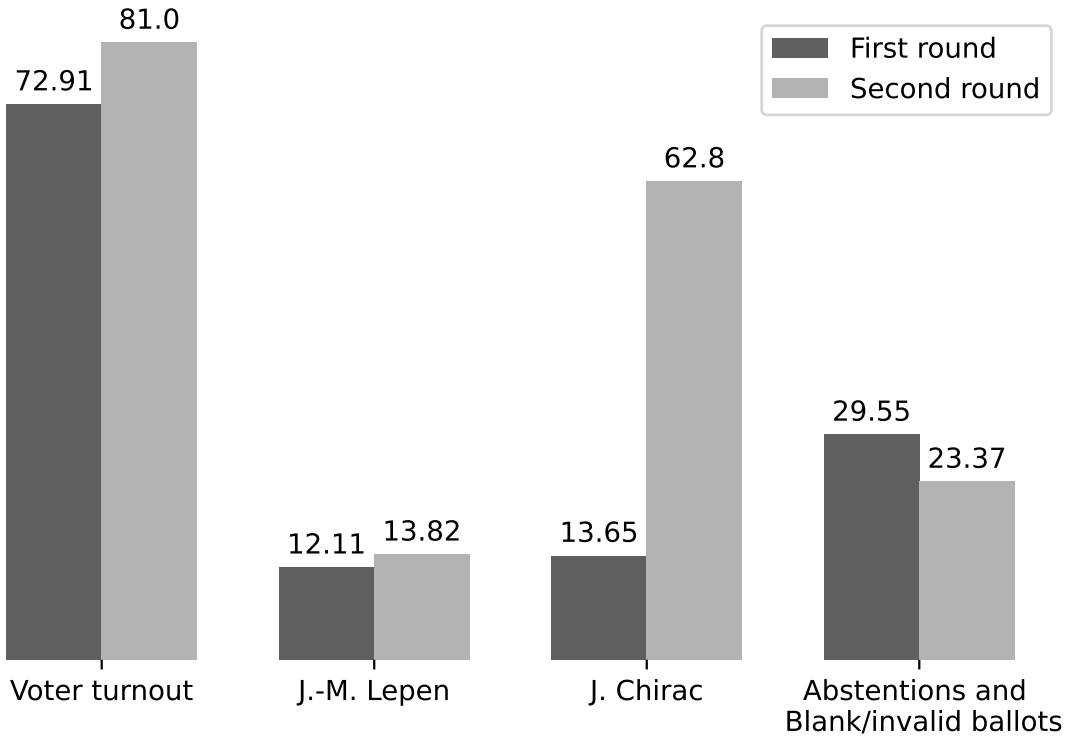
Thank you for your attention!

nicolas.lagios@ulb.be

Outcome of the election



Identification strategy

Baseline specification:

$$y_{2,m} = \zeta_0 + \zeta_1 y_{1,m} + \zeta_2 \log(Participants_m) + \xi_m + \epsilon_m,$$

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- ξ_m is a vector of dummy variables coding the municipality type (city-center, isolated municipality, rural area, or suburb)

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Synthetic instrument

- First part: Probability to host a demonstration

$$\Pr(Participants > 0 \mid X_1) = F(X_1'\alpha) = 1 - \exp\{-\exp(X_1'\alpha)\}$$

  - Suburb
  - Rural municipality
  - Isolated municipality
  - City-center

  - Estimated using a binomial regression with a complementary log-log link function

Synthetic instrument

- Second part: Number of participants conditional on experiencing a demonstration

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}(\ln(Participants) \mid Participants > 0, Q, X_1, X_2) \\ = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Rainy\ Demonstration + \beta_2 Historical\ Rain \\ + \beta_3 Rainy\ Demonstration \times Historical\ Rain + X_1'\gamma + X_2'\delta\end{aligned}$$

  - Estimated using a linear regression

Synthetic instrument

- The overall expected value

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}(\ln(Participants) \mid Q, X_1, X_2) \\ = \Pr(Participants > 0 \mid X_1) \\ \times \mathbb{E}(\ln(Participants) \mid Participants > 0, Q, X_1, X_2).\end{aligned}$$

- The instrument

$$\begin{aligned}z = \left(\widehat{\ln(Participants)} \,\middle|\, Q, X_1, X_2\right) \\ = (\hat{p}|X_1) \times \left(\widehat{\ln(Participants)} \,\middle|\, Participant > 0, Q, X_1, X_2\right)\end{aligned}$$

Synthetic instrument

- Model estimated through ML
- Let d be a binary indicator that is equal to 1 when $Participants > 0$, and 0 otherwise, then the density for observation m is given by

$$\phi(\ln(Participants) \mid Q, X_1, X_2) = \left(1 - F(X_1'\alpha)\right)^{1-d} \times \{F(X_1'\alpha)h(Q'\beta, X_1'\gamma, X_2'\delta)\}^d$$

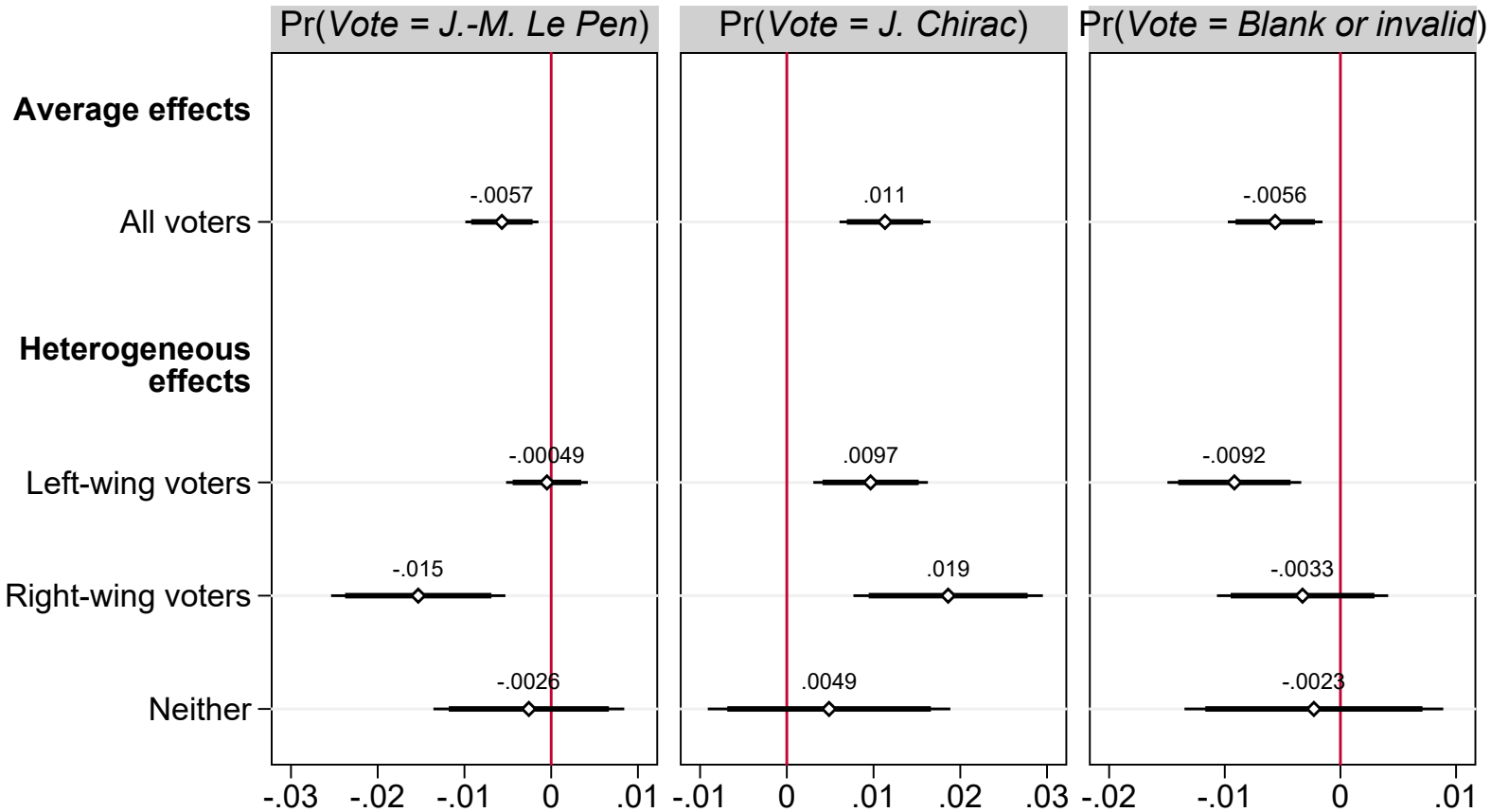
- Log-likelihood function given by

$$\mathcal{L}(\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta) = \mathcal{L}(\alpha) + \mathcal{L}(\beta, \gamma, \delta)$$
$$= \sum_{m=1}^{n} \left((1 - d_m) \ln \left(1 - F(X_{1,m}'\alpha)\right) + d_m \ln \left(F(X_{1,m}'\alpha)\right)\right)$$
$$+ \sum_{m=1}^{n} d_m \ln \left(h(Q_m'\beta, X_{1,m}'\gamma, X_{2,m}'\delta)\right).$$

Data sources

- Voting outcomes
  - Ministry of the Interior
- demonstrations
  - Collected from national and local newspapers
  - Search "manifestants", "manifestations", or "Front National"
  - Between May 1 and May 18
  - Sometimes several figures: maximum, mean, and minimum
- Weather
  - Public data portal of Météo France
- + Control variables from INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

The specific trade-offs of left- and right-wing voters



- Left- and right-wing voters were facing different trade-offs