

*Congrès AFSP Toulouse 2007*

**Table ronde 1**

**"Réflexions sur les méthodes en science politique des deux côtés de  
l'Atlantique"**

*Session 3*

**ROUX Guillaume (Pacte)**

**[groux30@aol.com](mailto:groux30@aol.com)**

The electoral influence of security issue: does local context matters?

*The role of local disorders*

*Work in progress*<sup>1</sup>

*(NB: La responsable de la table ronde ayant invité les participants à communiquer en anglais, il nous a paru plus commode de rédiger, avec son accord, notre présentation dans cette langue)*

**INTRODUCTION**

Law and order, youth delinquency and security generally appear as major political issues in modern democracies, and particularly in France. The salience of the issue has been shown to

---

<sup>1</sup> *English language corrections also are in progress...*

have consequences for electoral results and voting behaviour, concern for security being associated with right and extreme right wing voting. It thus appears of crucial importance to understand why voters make security salient in their electoral decision: why do some voters attach more importance to the security issue?

Current explanations mainly refer to political identification and value systems: security reveals to be of crucial concern for voters from the right, holding authoritarian, punitive and ethnocentric attitudes and values. These explanations both appear theoretically convincing (building in particular on a huge research tradition on authoritarian attitudes), and empirically robust (having been replicated in several national and electoral contexts). Nevertheless, they seldom go beyond the individual level of the explanation: how may life experiences and contexts play a role in the electoral concern for security remains a less explored, still open question.

This communication aims at testing the effect on local context on the electoral concern for security. Local context shall be considered from one of its specific features, generally referred to as “disorder” or “incivilities” or “soft crimes”: Do local disorders influence the importance voters give to the security issue?

The notion of “disorders” appear of crucial importance in criminological research, where it designates “ visual signs of negligence and unchecked decay: abandoned or ill-kept buildings, broken street lights, trash-filled lots, and alleys strewn with garbage and alive with rats [...] that signal a breakdown of the local social order [SKOGAN p. 42, see also for France ROCHE]. Two features distinguish disorders from crimes. They are perceived as more acceptable, much less condemning, and appear from this point of view much softer (being sometimes referred to as “soft crimes”). On the other hand, disorders are much more frequent than hard crimes; they concern much more people, and tend to accumulate in specific neighbourhoods.

This would explain that they reveal to have many negative effects on neighbourhood or community life. Where local disorders occur, people tend to show higher degrees of fear of crime, retreat from the (local) public space, and consider public institutions like the police and municipal authorities not to play their role. As a consequence, they are associated with at least one kind of political behaviour: case studies in several European cities revealed that letters

sent to the mayor by local residents – a direct form of political claim – mostly related to political disorders.

This presentation aims knowing if local disorders may also influence the demands addressed to national politics through electoral behaviour. Do voters facing local disorders attach more importance to security in their electoral choice? And do they, as a consequence, tend to vote the right and the extreme right, that are historically associated, in France as other democracies, with the security issue?

This shall be studied through the case of the French 2007 presidential election. We shall use data collected before the first run of the election (*date*), in four contrasted French local areas (three French *cantons* and one small city), one of the only dataset to include individual measurements of local disorders. From a methodological point of view, the result lead us to defend individual measurements of local contextual phenomena, and prone the necessity to devote more efforts in building up individual measurements of local contexts.

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

From the point of view of theoretical and research background, the questions that we ask relate to three different research areas, that do not systematically encounter each other.

### Local disorders, contextual effects and issue voting (to be completed)

- **Local disorders and their implications**
  
- **Local context and electoral behaviour**

- **Issue voting and security**

## Hypothesis

- **Main hypothesis, and chances for refutation**

Our main hypothesis is that local disorders may increase the importance voters give, in their electoral choice, to the security issue. The related hypothesis is that local disorders should favour, as a consequence, right and extreme right wing voting. Central in these hypotheses is the expectation of a *proper* effect of local disorders: local disorders should show an effect even when controlled for the individual variables accounting for security salience. This means in particular that disorders effect is expected to hold whatever voters left-right identification, and levels of authoritarianism.

The hypotheses' relevance for the understanding of voting behaviour and contextual effects shall be best understood if one considers why it could be refuted. Security is by nature a consensual issue, as most voters agree about the goal related to it (insecurity should be reduced) [or “valence” as opposed to “position issue”, see Donald E. STOKES, “Spatial models of party competition”, *APRS*, 57(2), June 1963, p. 368-377].

On a consensual issue, voters traditionally evaluate parties and candidates according to their perceived performance on the issue. But what historically made security an issue, in France as other democracies like Great-Britain, is somewhat different: security did become a political issue when associated with ethnic minorities and the immigration issue [*The real majority*, see also Pierre MARTIN for France]. As a consequence, what historically opposes dominant leftist and rightist positions on the issue has much to do, on the right wing, with the acceptance to make security a major issue, what implicitly means to insist on problems associated (true or false) with ethnic minorities and immigration; and on the left wing, with the refusal to make security a major issue, and implicitly insist on problems associated with immigration and ethnic minorities. On other words, the security issue has much to do with

symbolic or identity politics: it directly relates to the core of left and right wing identities, and values associated, in particular, to ethnic minorities and immigration.

This is a way to understand that the strength of the relation between security concern on one hand, and left-right identification, authoritarianism and anti-immigrants attitudes on the other hand (the more bottom up, complementary, psychological explanation being that attitudes towards security universally belong to broader authoritarian value systems, see Adorno). Such a relation makes unsure that local disorders may affect security salience in the electoral decision: electoral choices in symbolic and identity politics are by definition best explained by political identities and values. Furthermore, it is often argued that the perceptions related to security do mostly relate to non local, i. e. non neighbourhood related events: - weight of national TV news // - “halo effect” (Perrineau P.): fear does not come from what people actually live (neighbourhood = familiar), but rather their perception of close areas as insecure.

We could then plausibly expect the (potential) influence of neighbourhood disorders on security salience to be overcome by the massive effect of non local phenomena, first of whose political identifications and values. By contrast, the empirical identification of a local disorders effect would have some implications for the understanding of security electoral salience and issue voting. It would indicate that issues voting – even on such a symbolic matter as security – do not only relate to political identification and values, but that what voter do actually live in their neighbourhood or local context have its place in the electoral equation.

- **Complementary hypotheses**

Local disorders are expected to influence security salience even when controlled for relevant individual variables. But this would not prevent the effect of local disorders to interact with the one of individual variables. In particular, the magnitude of local disorders effect on security salience may depend on voters’ political identification. Two opposed hypothesis are here possible. First, it can be argued that local disorders have greater political consequences for right wing voters, as their expected effect is in line with, and then exacerbate the effect of

their political ideologies. In this hypothesis, left wing voters are seen as ideologically resistant to the potential effect of local disorders. = reinforcement hypothesis

On the other hand, local disorders may counter the effect of political ideologies. They would then have greater consequences for left wing voters, who would change their minds due to local disorders, whereas right wing voters simply reinforce pre-existing positions. = U-turn hypothesis

## DATA AND MEASUREMENT

- **A pre-electoral, local scale survey**

- 2007 French presidential election, survey concerning the 1<sup>st</sup> run

- date =

- N = 1000 interviewees

- Scale = 4 French local areas (3 cantons and one city)

- Goal = belongs to a collective project aimed at understanding the formation of political judgements and electoral decision at a local level: Formation du Jugement Politique project, UMR Pacte / IEP de Grenoble / CNRS, dir. Bernard DENNI

National surveys generally do not allow considering so small units as cantons. Most of all, the survey include a variety of contextual indicators, concerning in particular local disorders, which are generally not available in electoral surveys.

- **Measuring local disorders at an individual level**

How to measure local, i. e. neighbourhood disorders? Contextual phenomena such as local disorders can be both measured at a contextual or individual level. At a contextual level, official institutions such as the police or the home office do not provide indicators of local disorders. Available related indicators are about more serious delinquency and crimes, which constitute quite different phenomena. Furthermore, these indicators are seldom available at a neighbourhood level (the one at which local disorders influence individual perceptions according to crime research).

This leaves us with individual measures of local disorders, based on interviewees self reports. Three questions have been included in the FJP survey:

Est-ce que, autour de chez vous... ? (*Are around your home... ?*)

*[Rotation aléatoire des items]*

1 Les abribus, cabines de téléphone, bancs, poubelles, jeux d'enfants etc. font l'objet de dégradations  
*Bus shelter, telephone booth, benches, garbage cans, children games [public equipments], etc., blighted (disrepair)*

2 On trouve des graffitis, des tags, des traces sur les murs

*One find graffiti, tags, marks on the walls*

3 Il y a des jeunes qui se rassemblent dans des lieux publics ou des montées d'immeubles

*There are some young people that get together in public sites or building halls*

Très fréquemment / Assez fréquemment / Peu fréquemment / Jamais

These items are based on previous research [LAGRANGE, ROCHE]: they were selected from larger batteries from two French local surveys as the best predictors of security related attitudes (fear of crime). They directly address the state of disorders in interviewees' neighbourhood. And as disorders tend to accumulate in a given area, they build an index that can be expected to reflect the general level of local disorders (including but also beyond the ones that are mentioned in the questionnaire)<sup>2</sup>.

But do interviewees self-reports constitute an accurate measurement of local disorders? It can be feared that self reports on such a symbolic matter as disorders directly depend on interviewees' attitudes and political identification. This has been shown to be the case for

---

<sup>2</sup> Correlations =

some self reported measures of local disorders, which explicitly induced both a descriptive and a normative evaluation<sup>3</sup> (Example). As a consequence, these measures are very closely linked with the individual predictors of security concern, first of whose political identification. And even though disorders are expected to favour security concern, these measures are so closely related to the latest that causality is a less plausible interpretation than measurement equivalence.

Despite all, this is not the case for the disorders indicators of the FJP survey, which do not explicitly induce any normative evaluation.

### Correlations

TABLE 1

	Left-right identification	Anti-immigrants attitudes (scale)	Punitiveness <sup>4</sup>
Public equipments disrepair	.03 (non sig.)	.13	.08
Graffiti on the walls	.05 (non sig.)	.07	.06
Young people occupy public sites	.01 (non sig.)	.02 (non sig.)	.06

No significant correlation with the left-right scale. Correlations with anti-immigrants attitudes and punitiveness very low, and may be interpreted as causal link rather than measurement equivalence (causal relation expected). These results are in line with previous research: [TAYLOR, SKOGAN, ROCHE for France]

Also note that the relation of local disorders to the kind of local area (advantaged/disadvantaged areas) is relatively modest, confirming the interest of an individual, neighbourhood related measurement of local disorders [correlations =]

<sup>3</sup> Skogan, (V aussi Q FJP insécurité augmente dans quartier)

<sup>4</sup> Justice should punish more severely young delinquents



- **Dependent and individual variables**

The importance voters give, in their electoral choice, to the security issue is measured through the following question:

Pour choisir ce candidat, avez-vous accordé beaucoup, assez d'importance, peu d'importance ou pas d'importance du tout à :

*So as to choose this candidate, are the following things of importance to you:*

*[Rotation aléatoire des items 1 à 12]*

- À ses idées et à ses propositions en matière de sécurité

- *Its ideas and proposals in matter of security*

Voting intentions for the first row of the election are measured as follow:

Si le premier tour de l'élection présidentielle avait lieu aujourd'hui pour quel candidat voteriez-vous ?

*If the first run of the presidential election took place today, which candidate would you vote for ?*

As expected, security electoral salience favour voting intention for a right or extreme right wing candidate:

TABLE 2

	<b>Voting intention</b>			
	S. Royal	F. Bayrou	N. Sarkozy	J-M Le Pen
<b>Security salience</b>				
Beaucoup	14	12	49	48
assez d'importance	43	50	42	35
peu d'importance	43	37	9	17
	100	100	100	100

Interviewees giving the maximum importance to the security issue (28%) mostly intend to vote for right and extreme right wing candidates, what if not the case of those considering the issue as “quite important”. As a consequence, the dependent variable shall oppose the first ones (maximum importance) to other interviewees.

Note that the relation holds despite the fact that S. Royal, the main leftist candidate, took rather strong positions on the security issue. But : - security is not a major motivation of the left wing electorate // - right wing parties are historically perceived as more efficient on the security issue.

Individual control variables include:

- Left-right identification
- Anti-immigrants attitudes (scale made of four questions): fundamental component of ethnocentrism and authoritarian attitudes
- Punitiveness (see *supra*): generally referred to in criminological literature as concern for security. Fundamental dimension of authoritarian attitudes, and a key predictor of feelings related to security (fear of crime)

Note that it can be argued that concern for security (as it is measured through punitiveness) and security electoral salience are one and the same attitude (relation between the two would then be circular). But it must be remembered that our concern is the contextual effect of local disorders. Individual variables are control variables, what means that the proximity between security concern and security electoral salience may only minimise the potential influence of local disorders: our model and testing procedure may then appear as methodologically demanding, then assuring the validity and robustness of the effect, if any, of local disorders.

Socio-demographic variables are:

- Age: have been shown to be related to attitudes about security, and particularly fear of crime
- Education level: both related to authoritarian and prejudiced attitudes
- Economic precariousness: as self declared income is not an accurate indicator, we used a compound measure made of the following items: (*to be completed*)

## THE ELECTORAL EFFECT OF LOCAL DISORDERS

## Local disorders and the electoral salience of security

A first model was testing so as regard to the electoral salience of security, that only included the individual, control variables that were mentioned above. Method used was logistic regression, which allowed deciding whether the effect of the independent variables would be best measured as a categorical or linear one, the latest solution having been finally retained.

As expected, political identification<sup>5</sup>, anti-immigrants attitudes and punitiveness revealed to be powerful, significant predictors of security electoral salience. Amongst socio-demographic variables, economic precariousness is the only one that revealed to have, controlled for other variables in the model, a significant effect. This was not an expected result, as the socio-demographic variable that usually registers the greater effect – and frequently cancels the effect of other socio-demographic variables – on phenomena associated to authoritarianism is education level. This shall be further examined and commented below.

Education level and age were consequently excluded. Local disorders were then added to the model, in the form of an additive scale including only two of the three available indicators: the “graffiti on the walls” question, which revealed to have a much weaker effect than the other ones one security salience, does not belong to the scale.

TABLE 3 Effect on security electoral salience

	WALD	SIG.
Punitiveness	17	.000
Attitudes towards migrants	12	.000
Left-right scale	9	.003
Economic precariousness	4	.04
<b>Local disorders</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>.001</b>
N=758		

---

<sup>5</sup> DK answers/refusals excluded from the model

As shows Table 3, local disorders reveal a strong, significant effect on the electoral salience of the security issue. This holds despite we controlled for the best known predictors of security related attitudes, whose magnitude made very uncertain the possibility to identify an additional, contextual rather than attitudinal predictor of security salience. Furthermore, the effect of local disorders is far from being a minor one, people who.... having 12 times more chances to attach much importance, in their electoral choice, to security than others.

### Do local disorders favour right and extreme right wing voting?

Local disorders increase the electoral salience of security, that itself favour right and extreme right wing voting. But this does not automatically mean that local disorders have a direct impact on extreme right wing voting: the electoral decision is a complex process, depending on a variety of motivations and issues, which may in some way dilute the specific effect of local disorders. Furthermore, survey answer about security salience may only partly reflect the actual impact of security on voters' decision.

By contrast, the existence of a direct disorders effect would confirm the impact of local disorders in the electoral decision process, and the relevance of such phenomena and its survey measurement for electoral studies.

So as to test it, we simply replaced security salience by voting intentions as the dependent variable in our model. As show results in Table 4, local disorders do have a significant impact on voting intentions, favouring right and extreme right wing candidates. This clearly shows that local context in general, and in particular local disorders, do influence the electoral decision. Local disorders do favour the electoral salience of the security issue, that itself increases right and extreme right wing voting. Both phenomena are strong enough so that the direct impact of local disorders on voting intentions can be empirically revealed.

*Note:* empirical analysis confirms the sequence: local disorders influence voting intentions through security electoral salience. Indeed, entering security salience as an independent variable in the model for voting intentions cancels the effect of local disorders.

TABLE 4. Voting intention (Sarkozy + Villiers + Le Pen vs others)

	WALD	SIG.
Punitiveness	13	.000
Attitudes towards migrants	31	.010
Left-right scale	140	.000
Economic precariousness	NS	NS
<b>Local disorders</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>.02</b>
N=665		

Let us now consider our complementary hypotheses. The magnitude of disorders effect may vary according to political identification: it may be maximal for voters identifying to the right (“reinforcement hypothesis”) or, on the contrary, to the left (the “U-turn hypothesis”). So as to test it, we added an interaction term (local disorders\*left-right identification) to the former model. As Annex 1 indicates, both hypotheses have been refuted: there is no significant interaction effect between local disorders and left-right identification (Note: neither with local disorders and other variables in the model).

*Following is work in progress, all results and analysis are provisional and may be reconsidered*

Let us now go back to the previously emphasized result concerning economic precariousness. Whereas education level generally is the socio-demographic variable that reveals the larger effect on authoritarianism related attitudes, this did not appear to be the case as regard to security electoral salience. On the contrary, education level showed no significant effect when

controlled for economic precariousness, which unexpectedly revealed to be the only socio-demographic variable to favour security electoral salience.

Nevertheless, economic precariousness does no more reveal any significant effect as regard to voting intentions (Table 4). This led us to consider whether economic precariousness could play a different role in the electoral equation. The hypothesis is that the disorders effect on voting behaviour may be conditional to economic precariousness. Below (Table 5) is the last model for two sub samples, respectively selecting the more and the less precarious interviewees. As results indicate, the effect of local disorders on voting intentions only holds for the more precarious interviewees.

TABLE 5. (Effect on voting intentions)

	<b>Precarious interviewees</b>		<b>Non precarious</b>	
	WALD	SIG.	WALD	SIG.
Punitiveness	11	.001	3	.01
Attitudes towards migrants	14	.000	18	.000
Left-right scale	62	.000	78	.000
<b>Local disorders</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>NS</b>
N=306			N=359	

Two complementary explanatory hypotheses:

1/ Positions on the disorders scale reflect quite different phenomena whether interviewees are more or less precarious. Precarious interviewees have more chances to live in disadvantaged areas; in these areas, local disorders tend to accumulate. This means that the specific disorders we asked for may be associated with much more ones, if not more serious delinquency and crimes. On the contrary, less precarious interviewees have more chances to live in more advantaged areas, where local disorders even though not absent keep contained, not degenerating in cumulative circles.

2/ Precarious people, even though suffering from local disorders, do not always have the possibility to move. Powerlessness would then mean frustration. Less precarious people generally have the possibility to do so. To stay means that the levels of local disorders keep acceptable.

If this is true, local disorders should show greater effect in disadvantaged as compared to economically advantaged areas. Results in Table 6 show that this is actually the case: .....

TABLE 6 (Effect on voting intentions)

	Disadvantaged areas		Advantaged areas	
	WALD	SIG.	WALD	SIG.
Punitiveness	9	.003	4	.06
Attitudes towards migrants	12	.000	20	.000
Left-right scale	72	.000	65	.000
Economic precariousness	6	.01	NS	NS
<b>Local disorders</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>NS</b>
N=326			N=339	

It may be noted that this holds despite the fact that economic precariousness has been included in the analysis (+ sig. effect for less advantaged areas). This indicates that economic precariousness and geographical disadvantage (at a *canton* level) do not completely overlap. That the effect of local disorders is conditional to both phenomena may indicate the existence of a complex interaction between the three variables.

So as to test it, we added an interaction term (economic precariousness\*geographical disadvantage\*local disorders<sup>6</sup>) to our statistical model, that is now applied to the whole sample.

TABLE 7. (Voting intention)

	WALD	SIG.
Punitiveness	12	.000
Attitudes towards migrants	33	.010
Left-right scale	137	.000
Economic precariousness	/**	/
Local disorders	/	/
Geographic Disadvantage	/	/
Precariousness * Geographic disadvantage * local disorders	3	.08

N=665

\*\* Coeff. no more interpretable when variable included in the interaction term

As results in Table 7 indicate, the interaction term reveals to be significant at a .08 level, what confirms our hypothesis and former interpretations: the effect of local disorders depends on variables related to general economic and social precariousness, including living in a poor, disadvantaged neighbourhood. *(To be further developed)*

CONCLUSION

- On local disorders and issue voting: security issue and more generally issue voting do not only have to do with political identifications and values, as well as national representations and stereotypes as they are broadcasted by the media and TV news. In is also rooted, to a

---

<sup>6</sup> Disorders and geographic disadvantage variables have been dichotomized



significant extent, in individuals' concrete, local, neighbourhood experiences of the issue at stake.

- Contextual analysis: illustrates how may benefit from the use of individual measures of local phenomena, relevance of taking into account the effect of local disorders for electoral and political studies.

- On the effect of economic precariousness (*to be completed*)

\*\*\*

Guillaume Roux  
[groux30@aol.com](mailto:groux30@aol.com)  
Chargé de recherche FNRS  
UMR Pacte / IEP de Grenoble / CNRS