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**Referee's Reply to
Can the Crisis Shift the Balance to the Left?
By Tatiana Rudneva**

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This article examines the political, and more specifically, the electoral implications of the credit crunch/global economic crisis of 2007-10. The focus of the article is on the exploration of whether or not the global economic crisis has led to a manifest improvement in the electoral fortunes of left-wing and left-leaning political movements in parliamentary systems across the globe. All in all, the electoral results in 38 nation-states, and across 45 political parties of a particular left-wing hue, were analysed. The concluding results tested the hypothesis that deteriorating economic conditions during a so-called “crisis of capitalism” might cause a surge in support for leftist parties, as voters used the ballot-box to “punish” right-wing parties, or reward those who seemed to offer an alternative (of some description) to the present arrangements. The evidence attested here appears to suggest that there is no connection between the economic downturn and the electoral performance of left-wing parties.

There are some very strong points to this article. The section on methodology and data selection seems sound. The criteria to be used to select the countries for inclusion in the “democratic group” seems perfectly appropriate, with due regard taken for variables, exceptions and the melding of countries across 3 different lists helps to iron out any idiosyncrasies from reliance on a particular view of what constitutes a “democratic” state.

I think the approach and ideas of the article need to be elaborated a bit more fully in the following directions:

1. Historical contextualization

There needs to be a greater awareness of both the unique elements of the current crisis, and also similar patterns to previous crises of capitalism. The hypothesis itself could have been informed by an examination of developments pre-and post WW2, most notably the Great Depression of the 1930s and also the crashes of the late 1980s. Do we see a similar boost for leftist parties, or for the popularity of leftist-type policies (ie New Deal etc.) in the 1930s?

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Secondly, the post-Cold War landscape needs to be taken into account. One of the key elements which marks this current crisis out as different is the absence of the USSR or a communist bloc in existence. This is significant as the existence of “really existing socialism” was often used as a stick to beat the socialist/left-wing parties by their political opponents. This was a new scenario, electorally speaking. Also the extensive globalisation and increasing interconnectedness could also be explored to examine the way in which crisis spread around the globe.

2. The Nature of the Economic Crisis

I think some analysis (brief) is required of the nature of the economic crisis. It was manifest in different ways in different places. It was more severe in some places less so in others. A more nuanced impact (which also relates to the timing issue: for example the budget crises in Greece, Spain, Ireland etc.) might help to contextualise the electoral analysis.

3. The Electoral Dimension

I think the question of voter preference or voter identification with leftist parties perhaps needs to be nuanced slightly by an examination of the “leftwingness” of their manifestos/public claims. Did these parties all respond by advancing clearly left-wing policies/alternatives? Was there rhetoric directed at the problems of capitalism per se? The question of how far it was clear that the left-wing parties were articulating a left-wing alternative to neo-liberalism needs to be considered a little too. In particular, the analysis might examine the questions of: critique and alternatives. Was there a clearly articulated left-wing critique of the causes of the crisis? Were there left-wing solutions being advanced?

4. Methodology/Assumptions

I think the analysis section needs to be done with reference to some actual case studies from some of the countries which illustrate the assumptions being proven or disproven. This would help to illustrate some of the wider points being made here. It might allow for a more finely grained evaluation of the underlying hypotheses. This might improve the explanatory strength of the hypothesis by grounding it in the actual events of an election (or two). This need not be the “proof”, but instead outlines how the economic crisis, as a factor in voting intentions, actually impacts upon an election in a parliamentary democracy.

5. Chronology and Longitudinal Studies

The analysis needs to have some broader awareness of the chronological dimensions of the financial crisis itself. Often there are waves of the crisis which hit, and to take a sounding at this point, is not necessarily an accurate guide to the impact upon voting preferences *in the long-term*. This I think makes a wider point about the lack of synchronicity between a global economic crisis hitting, its impact at different times

and in different ways, and the electoral cycle. A more finely-grained analysis might be required by drilling down into particular countries, at specific times, or setting up a series of longitudinal studies in different states as part of an ongoing research project. Overall, the article raises some interesting issues around left-wing politics, the economic situation, voter identification and electoral outcomes. More work needs to be done in tracking these developments longitudinally, comparatively and historically (but not necessarily all in the same article!). A further issue to explore might also be the media reporting of the economic crisis, and the mechanisms used by capitalist states to preserve the status quo.