



Symbolic universes, socio-political orientations and voting behaviors

Terri Mannarini, Sergio Salvatore, Alessia Rochira
University of Salento, Italy

Main models that explain electoral behavior

- **1. Sociological model:** the influence of social groups (socio-economic status, race, religion, area of residence).
- **2. Psychosocial model:** partisanship, acquired through a socialization process, influenced by the values and attitudes of family, colleagues and peers.
- **3. Economic model (rational choice theory):** self-interest; voters tend to choose the parties that are closest to their position. Crucial role of proximal variables (political and economic factors that characterize each election)
- Limitations
 - 1 & 2 do not explain the variations that occur in the behavior of voters in different elections
 - 3 does not explain why a considerable majority of voters vote with a remarkable stability; evidence that electoral choices are not based solely on self-interest

RECRIRE approach




- The fundamental tenet of the RECRIRE project is that symbolic universes (SUs) envelop the entire field of experience, thus affecting feelings, ideas, and behaviors.
- Working hypothesis: SUs affect voting behavior both directly and indirectly through the mediation of a pool of socio-political orientations
 - Survey on an Italian representative sample by age, gender and area of residence (N=1,300; 50.8% women; mean age = 46.6 years, St. Dev = 14.3)

Survey on symbolic universes, socio-political orientations, and voting behaviors

Measures/Variables

- **VOC questionnaire** (symbolic universes: ordered universe, interpersonal bonds, caring society, niche of belongingness, other's world)
- **Support for democracy** ("democracy is a good thing")
- **Trust in institutions**
- **Civicness** (respect for common goods and rules that protect common goods)
- **Tolerance for diversity** (openness to and acceptance of diverse people)
- **Social dominance orientation*** (the belief that some social groups have the right to dominate other groups)
- **Anti-elitism** (the core component of populism)
- **Vote**: voting (84%) vs. non voting (16%) in past national elections (2013); voting right-left candidates (86%) vs. candidates falling outside the right-left spectrum (14%) (conventional vs. non conventional vote)



Factor analysis (PCA):
Variance explained

Factor 1: 25.0%
(support for democracy, civicness, populism, egalitarianism)*

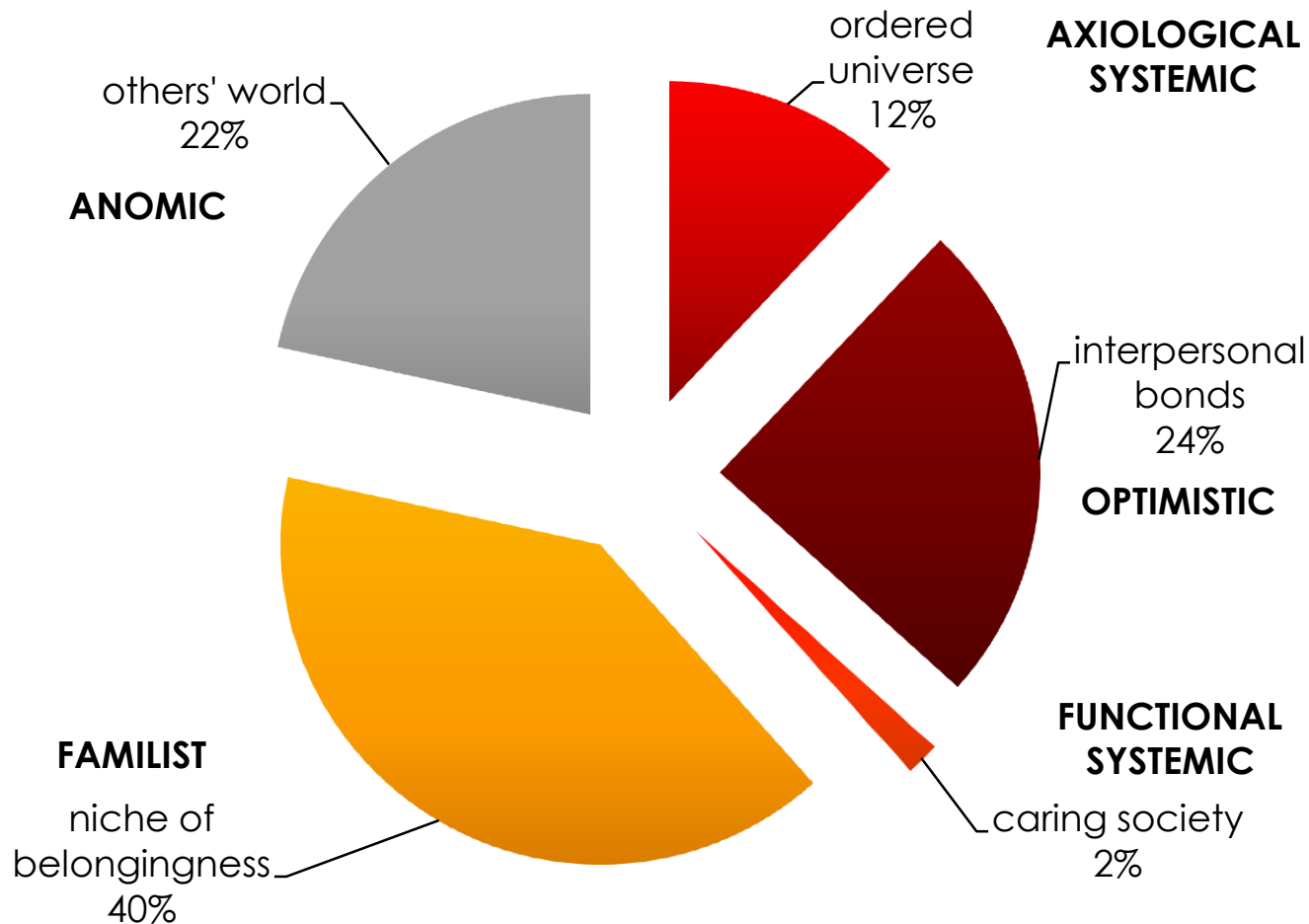
Factor 2: 21.2%
(trust, tolerance)

Symbolic universes

- **Ordered universe:** generalized positive attitude toward the world (institutions, services, future), perceived as trustworthy, identification with transcendent values (e.g. justice, solidarity, etc.), and commitment
- **Interpersonal bonds:** positive, optimistic vision of the world, reduced to realm on the interpersonal, affective bonds
- **Caring society:** vision of society and institutions as responsive to the individual needs. Belief in the possibility to pursue personal purposes via a supporting system.
- **Niche of belongingness:** anchorage to primary networks, combined with a negative connotation of the outside world (pessimism, fatalism, untrustworthiness of agencies and institutions). Primary networks as shelter from an anomic, threatening environment
- **Others' world:** a negative, desperate vision of the world (generalized distrust, hopelessness, lack of agency, anomy)



Distribution of symbolic universes



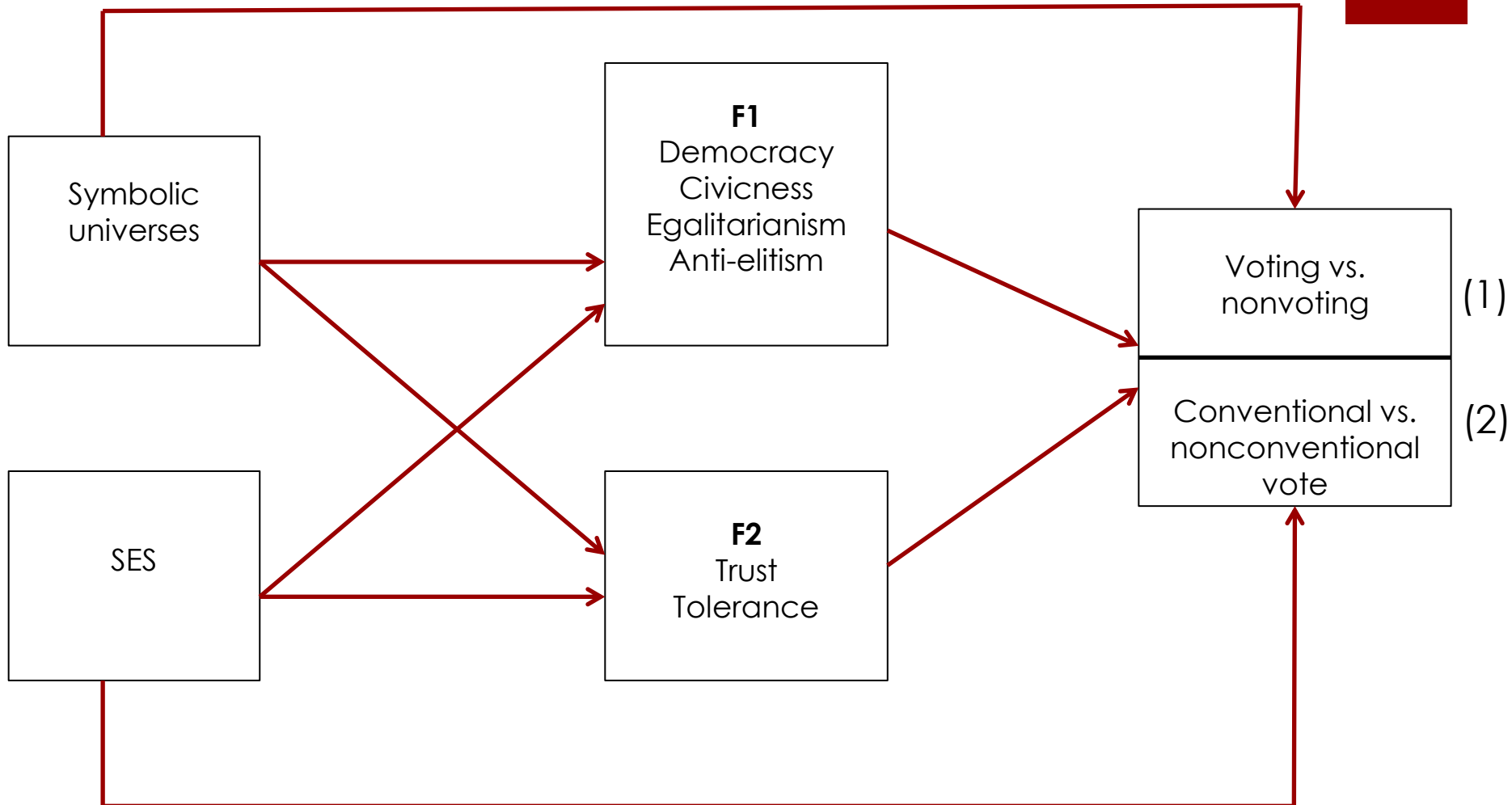
- In the anomic profile the highest number of nonvoters and of votes to 'non conventional' candidates
- In the optimistic profile the highest number of votes to 'traditional' (right-left) candidates

Significant differences between SUs in the scores of all the variables considered

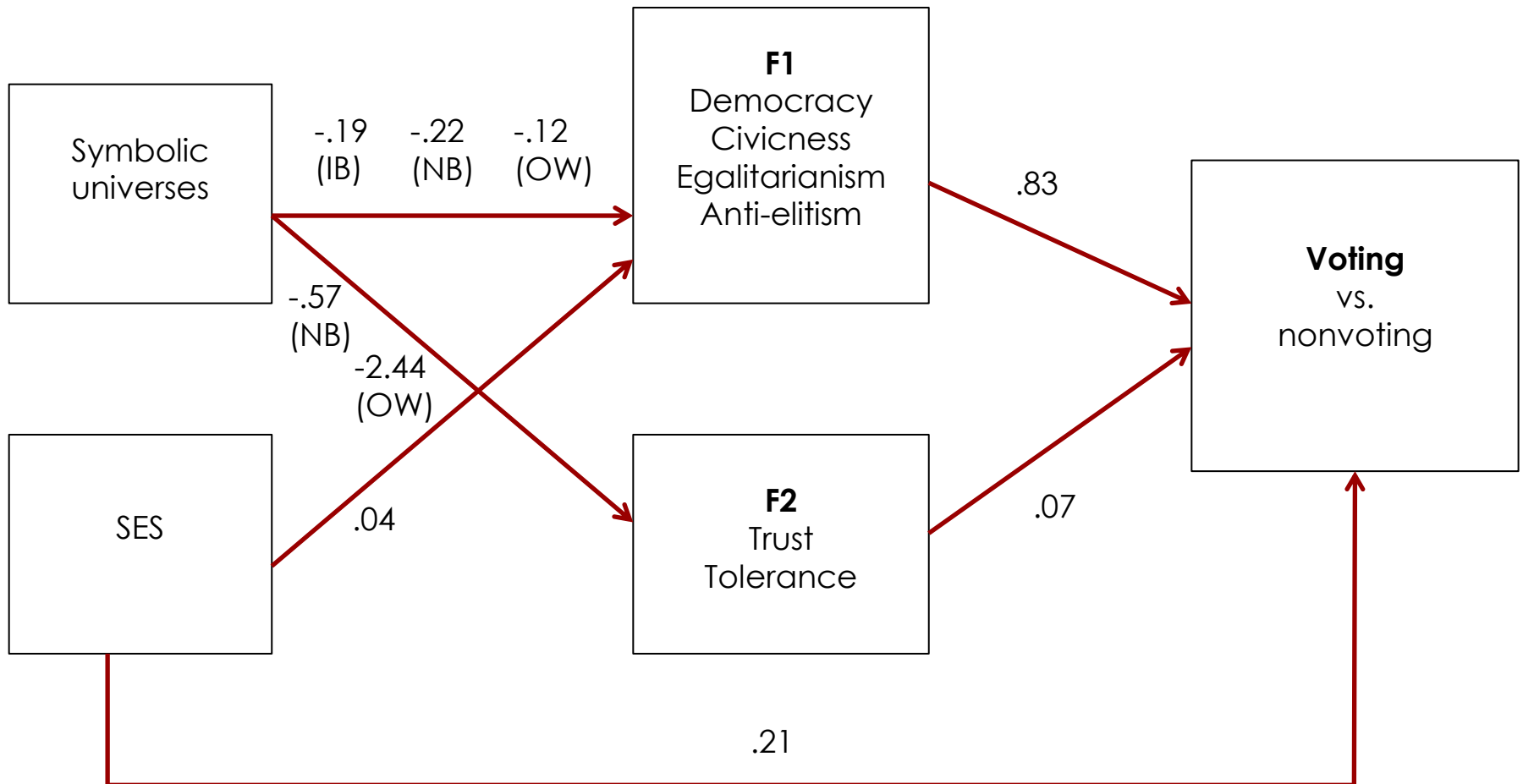


	Ordered universe	Caring society	Interp. Bonds	Niche of belong.	Others' world
Democracy	H	H (the highest)	M-H	M-L	L
Tolerance	H	H (the highest)	M	M-L	L
Civicness	H (the highest)	H	M-H	L	M
Trust	M	H (the highest)	M-H	M-L	L
Anti-elitism	L	L	L	M-L	H
Social dominance	L	L (the lowest)	M	M-H	M-L

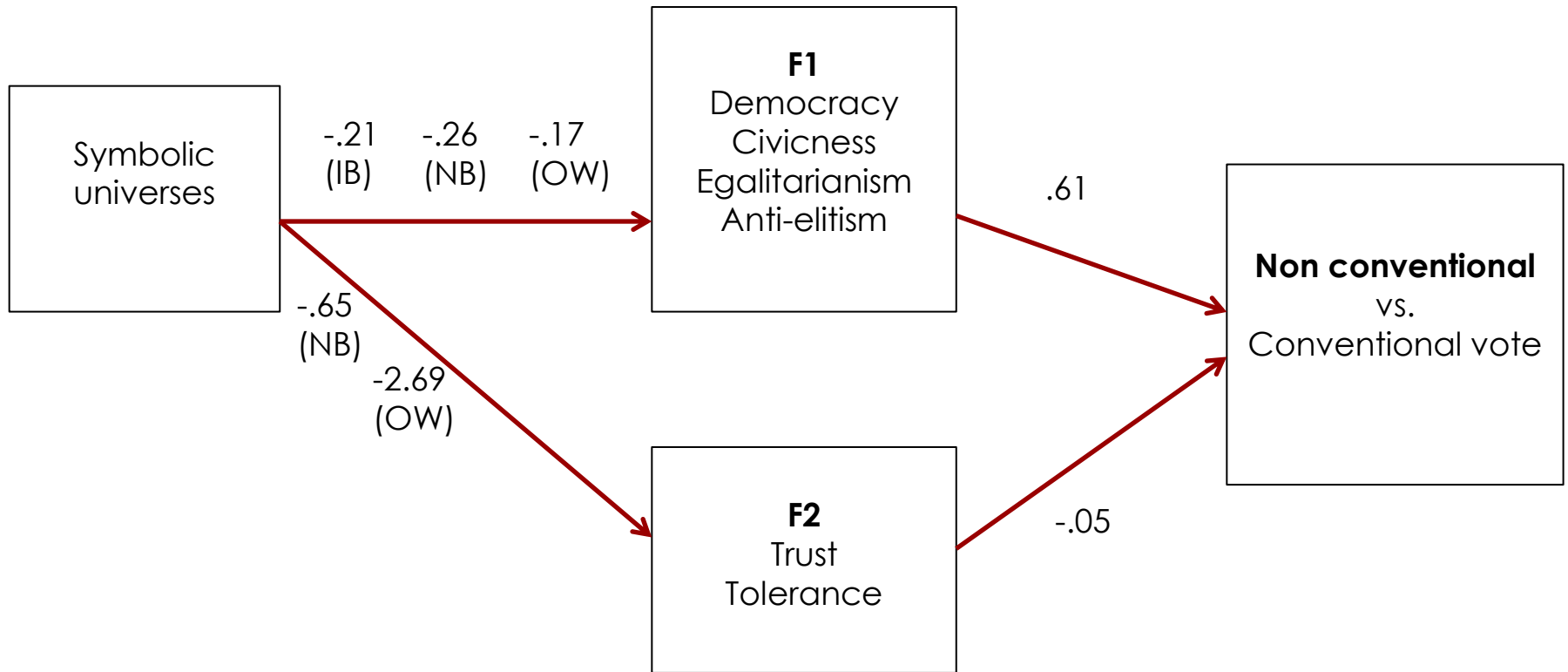
Model



Results



Results



Provisional conclusions



- SUs segment voters according to different patterns of socio-political orientations:
 - Three SUs (IntBonds, NichBelong. and OthWorld) are likely to promote (indirectly) nonvoting behaviors
 - The other two SUs, i.e. the systemic profiles (OrdUniv. and CarSoc.), are likely to favor (indirectly) nonconventional (i.e., populist) votes
- Implications
 - The 'virtuous' SUs are fostering forms of politics based on the devaluation of politics itself, resentment, and political incompetence
 - If "populist" votes are mostly motivated by democratic, egalitarian and civic demands, it is because the traditional parties have failed/are less able respond to these demands