



WORKING PAPER 3

The social bases of the transnational cleavage in Europe

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Disclaimer

This working paper is based on the interventions on the conference “Europe at the Cross-Roads: Challenges of the EU for National Politics” held at Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, in October 15, 2018, a partnership between Institute of Public Policy, MAPLE, and FLAD. The rise of a new transnational divide on immigration and Europe raises fundamental questions about the character of party competition and the causal bases of voting. Using ESS data and panel data for the Netherlands and Switzerland, we find that those who vote for political parties established on the new cleavage - green and radical TAN parties - have more structured partisan preferences than supporters of mainstream political parties.

Working Paper

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Introduction

The rise of new political parties contesting immigration, European integration, and globalization raises fundamental questions about the social structure of politics.¹ Is the new line of conflict more than just a dimension on which individuals and political parties have preferences? Is the conflict evidence of dealignment, of diminishing association between party competition and social structure? Many use the term tribal to describe a cultural divide. The question we ask here is whether political parties on this divide are composed of individuals who have different locations in social structure as well as different values.

Our analysis is in four steps. The next section discusses alternative ways of coming to grips with the decline of the classic cleavages of class and religion. The following sections set out expectations for why and when political parties have socially distinct constituencies. We then measure and explain the extent to which contemporary European political parties are structured by higher education, occupation, rural/urban location, religion, and gender. We find that cross-sectional and generational variation in the social structure of political parties and party families is in line with a revised cleavage theory, which conceives that cleavage formation is an ongoing process punctuated by periods of dealignment as voters switch to new political parties. Panel data that compare voter volatility across political parties support these conjectures.

¹ This is a shortened and slightly updated version of a much longer (as yet unpublished) paper: Gary Marks, David Attewell, Jan Rovny, Liesbet Hooghe (2018). "Does the Cultural Divide have a Structural Basis?"

1. Dealignment or cleavage?

The point of departure for contemporary theorizing of party competition is the decline of the historical cleavages as described by Lipset and Rokkan in their 1967 paper (Dalton 2014: 155-82; Dalton et al. 1984; Knutsen 2004, 2006). The decline appears to be over-determined. The closed social milieus that bonded voters to parties no longer exist. The weakening of religion, the diversification of working life, and greater occupational and spatial mobility have weakened the social ties that bind individuals to traditional social strata. Individuals lead lives that are only tenuously encased by durable and homogenous social groupings. Trade unions have declined.

Fewer people go to church. Economic transformation has muddied the class divide. The proportion of the workforce in blue-collar manual jobs has fallen with the rise of service and professional employment. The intensity of the religious and class cleavages has been softened as mainstream parties have moderated positions. Socialist parties no longer wish to abolish wage labor. Religious parties accept that the state is secular. Social change points in the same direction. Because these trends are temporal, their effect increases with each new generation of voters (Walzcak et al. 2012).

There are several ways of making sense of this. One is to conceive the decline of traditional cleavages as part of an ongoing process of dealignment in which political choice becomes short term, oriented to particular issues and personalities that have little to do with a person's sense of self. Party-political preferences become a matter of individual choice. Political parties compete to attract voters by strategically framing manifestos, making populist appeals, and having appealing candidates. In short, dealignment produces destructure in which political parties are no longer tethered to particular social groups, but fish for voters in a fluid political environment.

Dealignment theory generates several testable empirical expectations. First, in contrast to the era of frozen cleavages, parties' electoral bases should no longer be socially distinctive. Second, higher levels of education should be associated with volatility. The more educated a person, the more they can be expected to have the cognitive sophistication to vote on issue positions and performance, and the less they will be motivated by durable loyalty rooted in their social background (Dalton et al. 1984: 18-19). Third, these phenomena should be most evident in the youngest generation of voters who are most removed from the dense organizational landscape which underpinned the class and religious cleavages of their parents and grandparents.

Alternatively, a broad stream of literature interprets the re-articulation of political conflict along cultural lines (Inglehart 1977; Kriesi 1998; Kriesi et al. 2006; Bornschieer 2010). It claims that cultural issues related to post materialism, individual choice, and community have produced a dimension of political conflict that is only loosely associated with traditional left-right competition. Lipset and Rokkan hint at this when they write that "the welfare state, the spread of the 'car and TV' culture, the educational explosion – all these developments have placed the governing authorities under increasing strains and made it very difficult for the old working-class parties to retain the loyalties of the younger generation" (Lipset & Rokkan 1967: 55). Thirty years later, Kriesi (1998: 180) diagnoses "the emergence of yet another new

cleavage – the cleavage opposing the new middle class winners of the transformation of Western European societies to the group of losers of the very same process.” Twenty years beyond, Hooghe and Marks (2018) label this a transnational cleavage because it has as its focal point the defense of national political, social and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods or exerting rule.

2. Social bases of transnational cleavage

At the core of the contemporary cultural divide is a sharp and prolonged rise in transnational exchange, oriented chiefly around immigration, European integration, and globalization, with profound social and economic consequences. Transnational exchange has become politically combustible because immigration, trade, and the reallocation of authority to the European Union are political choices that profoundly affect both the lives of both those who enjoy the benefits of openness and those who suffer its drawbacks. Immigration is a lightning rod. The commingling of people with diverse beliefs, norms, and behavior has the potential for intense conflict. To this one may add the economic consequences of transnational exchange. Immigration, European integration, and trade tend to benefit those with human and financial capital, while intensifying competition for jobs and housing for those without such capital.

Whereas occupation underpinned the class struggle, education appears to be the key to the transnational divide. Higher education is associated with attitudes sympathetic to transnationalism, including tolerance for ethno-cultural diversity and European integration (Ceobanu & Escandell 2010; Hakhverdian et al. 2013; Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007). Education tells us about a person's station in life, about the benefits that can be conveyed by one's parents, and about how a person was raised—in short, it tells us something important about a person's social and material background, and the effect of education reaches into feelings of solidarity and group identity (Stubager 2009; Stubager 2010).

There are reasons for believing that a political party competing on the cultural or GALTAN² divide will be occupationally distinctive (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014; Häusermann & Kriesi 2015). Professionals - e.g. managers, teachers, nurses, doctors, social workers - exercise discretion at work and are engaged in face to face relations with diverse others. Such people tend to have GAL values. Manual workers, low-grade service workers, and those whose work is chiefly technical tend to be more TAN. This is reinforced by an economic logic. Manual workers are precariously placed in the international division of labor. For those who have financial or social capital, immigration is a source of cheap labor. For those who sell their labor, immigration increases competition. For these reasons, the effect of the transnational divide cuts across social class, producing radical TAN parties that challenge socialist parties for the allegiance of workers.

Education and occupation are not merely choices that a person makes. They are related to inherited factors, and they shape a person's life, who one works with, who one's friends are, and in an increasing number of cases, who one marries. While it is true that organizational membership has declined, social networks of friends, family or co-workers may have a similar effect in reinforcing political preferences (Fitzgerald 2011; Kuhn 2009; Zuckerman et al. 2007).

In addition, one might expect political parties on the transnational cleavage to be distinguished by location, gender, and age. Cities have always been known for trade, the flow of ideas, and cultural openness. In Lipset and Rokkan's historical exposition, peripheral localities opposed the centralizing power of the national state. Today rural localities seek national protection from foreign influence. Radical TAN parties do exceptionally well in small

² GAL (green, alternative, libertarian) vs. TAN (traditional, authority, national).

towns and suburbs that are ethnically less diverse and economically peripheral, while GAL parties do best in cities.

3. Revising cleavage theory

The model we have in mind is not one of realignment in which new conflicts replace old ones. It is akin to a geological process in which cleavages are formed in succession and overlay each other so that the resulting structure of conflict reflects both emerging and eroding tensions.³ A historical cleavage may persist over an extended period of time, as will a political party founded on that cleavage. However, old divides may lose the power to shape human relations as the socializing effect of prior institutions attenuates from generation to generation. As prior divides exhaust their shaping force, there is the ever-present possibility that a new cleavage arises to overlay the old. So a revised cleavage approach builds on classic cleavage theory but relaxes the assumption that cleavages are frozen. Instead, deconstruction and restructuration may coexist.

What are the empirical expectations of a revised cleavage approach? Its core expectation is that education, occupation, gender, rural/urban location, and religiosity will distinguish the electorates of GAL and TAN parties but not those of parties which compete on the classic class or religious cleavages. In terms of volatility, a revised cleavage approach conceives of education as a structural variable that predisposes those with higher education towards stable support for GAL parties and those with low education towards stable support for TAN parties. Finally, it predicts that young voters socialized politically during the rise of the transnational divide to be equally or more stable in voting for GAL or TAN parties compared to older generations, though their vote for classic cleavage parties is likely to be more volatile.

Table 1 contrasts these expectations with those of dealignment theory and classic cleavage theory.

Theoretical Approach	Social structuration of parties' voter bases	Structural predictors of vote choice	Education's role in voting	Generational differences in volatility
Classic Cleavage Theory	Parties have socially distinctive constituencies.	Class, religion, and rural/urban location predict party	N/A	Generational differences are small.
Dealignment Theory	Parties' voter bases are no longer socially distinctive.	Class & religion are weak predictors of party support.	Educated voters are more volatile.	Younger voters are more volatile.
Revised Cleavage Theory	Radical TAN and GAL parties have more socially distinct voter bases compared to parties on prior divides.	Education, occupation, gender, rural/urban location predict support on the cultural divide.	Education divides GAL and TAN voters.	Younger voters are less volatile on the GALTAN divide, and more volatile on prior divides

³ To pursue the metaphor, one might add the possibility that the erosion of a more recent deposit may uncover prior layers, just as the erosion of left-right conflict in Britain has brought to the surface prior conflict about national autonomy for Scotland. Similarly, the national-transnational conflict that is taking shape across Western societies seems to revive a much older center-periphery cleavage, and, in the United States and in some parts of Europe, conflict about the role of religious values in public life.

4. Data and measurement

We use cross-sectional and panel data. Cross-sectional analysis pairs individual-level data from the European Social Survey (ESS) (2002 to 2014 for 23 countries) with estimates on party positioning from the Chapel Expert Survey on party positioning. We select those individuals who say that they ‘voted in the last national election.’ Individual-level information on vote and social characteristics is aggregated to the party family or, for the multivariate analysis, to the individual party.

The independent variables are five structural characteristics hypothesized to predispose an individual to transnationalism: higher education, professional occupation, urban location, secularism, and female gender.⁴ Party ideology is operationalized by party family—radical TAN, conservative, liberal, Christian democratic, social democratic, radical left, and green—and by estimating parties’ ideological positions on economic left-right and GALTAN.⁵

We turn to panel data from the Netherlands (2008-2015) and Switzerland (1999-2015) to examine volatility for individual political parties.⁶ The unit of analysis is party choice over two panels.

⁴ Higher education encompasses individuals with post-secondary or tertiary education. Professional, derived from Oesch’s ISCO categorization, consists of managers and socio-cultural professionals. Urban describes people in cities or suburban communities. Secular refers to those who never attend religious services or only on special occasions.

⁵ We control for party size and include country-fixed effects. We conduct analyses for European subregion (Northwest, South, East) as well as for the combined 23 countries, for younger and older generations, and for the subset of medium-sized parties (5-15 percent of the vote) as well as for the whole range of parties.

⁶ Eight annual waves of the Dutch LISS panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences), and seventeen annual waves for the Swiss Household Panel (FORS - SHP).

5. Cross-sectional results

We begin by a series of cross-sectional sets in which we compare party families. We expect social characteristics to be much more powerful in differentiating political parties on the transnational cleavage than on the class cleavage. And we expect social structuration on the transnational cleavage to increase over time as that on the left-right declines.

Figure 1 visualizes the difference between every paired combination of party families for five social characteristics.⁷ Black (or thickest) lines represent a difference of at least 30 percent, red lines a difference between 20 and 30 percent, yellow lines a difference between 10 and 20 percent, and green (or thinnest) lines a difference of less than 10 percent. In every case, the sharpest contrast between party family dyads involves green or radical TAN parties, and in three cases—education, occupation, and gender—it is precisely the green & radical TAN dyad that exhibits the greatest gap. So while it is valid to say that a cultural or value divide has emerged alongside the conventional left-right cleavage, this does not imply a decline in the role of social structure in differentiating political parties. Education most sharply distinguishes green and radical TAN voters, and while class location is almost imperceptible in differentiating parties on the class cleavage, the class gap is wide and significant across green and radical TAN parties.⁸

[Figure 1 about here]

To what extent has the social structuration of political parties increased or decreased from generation to generation? We split the sample into three roughly equally sized generations of voters and compare distinctiveness of each party. Figure 2 aggregates these comparisons for parties on GALTAN (green and radical TAN) and for parties on left-right (conservative, Christian democrat, liberal, social democrat, and radical left). The social distinctiveness for the pre-1950 generation of voters is the light blue bar, and that for the post-1970 generation is dark blue. The higher the bar, the more a generation sorts itself on a social characteristic into different parties.

[Figure 2 about here]

Two things stand out. First, social differentiation is considerably greater among parties competing on GALTAN than among those competing on left-right. This is the case for education, occupation, rural-urban location, and gender, and again, religion is an exception. And second, social distinctiveness on the GALTAN divide is sharper for the post-1970 generation than for the pre-1950 generation of voters on education, occupation, rural-urban location, and gender.

Overall, these comparisons are in line with neo-cleavage theory and fit poorly with dealignment theory.

Let us now put this in a multivariate model, and also disaggregate to individual political parties rather than party families (results not shown). Each of 161 political parties is in the dataset with its percentage of highly educated, socio-professional or managerial, urban, female,

⁷ See the table in the appendix for differences in percentages across social characteristics and party families.

⁸ One “old” cleavage—religion—still has considerable bite in differentiating party families.

and secular voters. The dependent variable is a composite, party structuration, which is a principal component factor of these characteristics. Parties with high scores have a surplus of educated, female, secular, professionals, living in urban areas; parties with low scores have a deficit. We expect parties that position themselves squarely on the transnational cleavage to define the edges of this dimension, and we test in two ways. First, indirectly, by seeing to what extent, a party's GALTAN or its economic left-right explains its score on party structuration.

Indeed, GALTAN appears powerful. Left right is much less so. The substantive effect of GALTAN is large: two political parties that differ by one standard deviation in their GALTAN position (i.e. 2.5 points on the 11-point GALTAN scale) will differ 24 percentage points in their proportions of highly educated voters or 19-percentage point in their proportions of professionals, keeping all other social characteristics at their mean. Then we test it directly. CHES provides expert estimates for party positioning on the two chief issues of transnationalism: immigration and European integration, and we find they are powerful predictors. These results are consistent with a revised cleavage theory and rather difficult to reconcile with a dealignment perspective.

6. Panel results

Dealignment theory sees the mass expansion of education and generational replacement as drivers of secular destructure in vote choice. Cross-sectional data can tell us about the role of structure in distinguishing parties electoral bases from one another, but they do not allow us to assess how the stability of vote choice varies. We use panel data from the Netherlands and Switzerland to probe the determinants of individual voter volatility, and Figure 3 summarizes voter shifts for the Netherlands, a country with notoriously high volatility. The figures in the nodes are the proportion of respondents who are stable, i.e. they re-select the same party, rather than a different party, in response to the question, ‘If parliamentary elections were held today, for which party would you vote?’

[Figure 3 about here]

The Party for Freedom (PVV) has the highest proportion of voters with stable preferences: 79 percent of those who say they will vote for the PVV say the same thing at the next panel. So radical TAN voters are fixed even in a country with low barriers for party formation and high levels of voter volatility. There is less fixity on the GAL side, where three parties vie for multicultural votes: Groenlinks, D66 and a resiliently GAL PvdA. But note that there is virtually no cross-over across the GALTAN divide. There is, in contrast, quite a bit of cross-over between left and right.

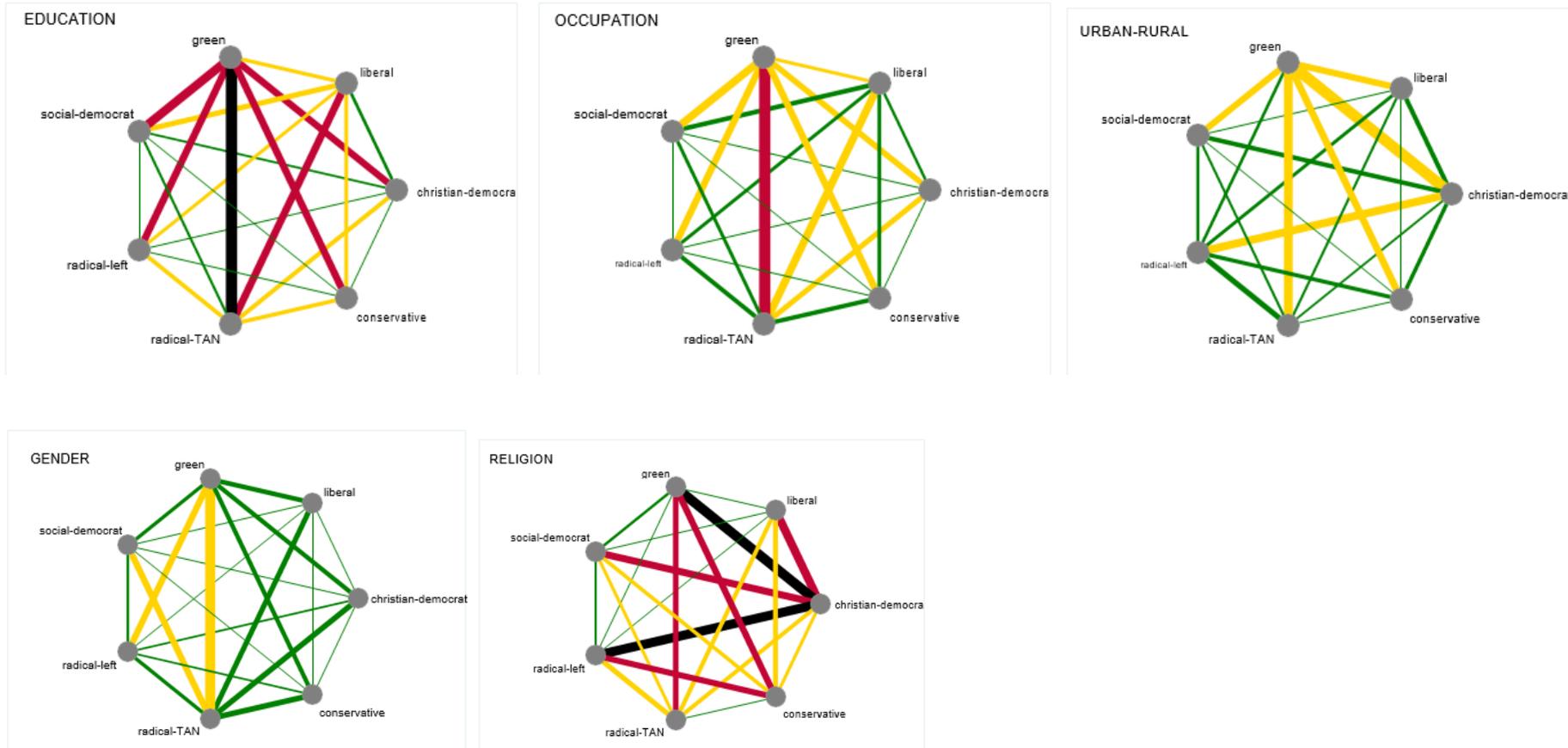
We next specify binary vote intention models predicting party preference as a function of past preference, and we interact age with prior party preference or education with prior party preference (with controls for gender, age, education, income and religiosity) (results not shown). Two findings stand out. Younger voters are more volatile than older voters only in the case of certain mainstream parties. On the transnational cleavage, younger voters are stickier. Education has a double effect. More educated voters are less volatile in their support of green parties. Conversely, less educated voters are less volatile in their support of radical TAN parties. So instead of general destructure, we find selective structuration along the lines suggested by a revised cleavage theory.

7. Conclusion

Europe and immigration are at the core of a fundamental restructuring of conflict signaled by the rise of new political parties with distinctive constituencies. Conflict over European integration emerged in the 1990s as a puzzling issue that seemed to cut across the left-right divide. Europe became politicized in national elections and referendums as mainstream political parties struggled to lower the heat and paper over the cracks of intraparty division. This is a familiar pattern. The class cleavage made its appearance in party politics by dividing mainstream, chiefly liberal parties, that wished to encompass the new issues within the existing structure of party competition. Liberal parties survived the rise of the class cleavage but saw a significant part of their constituency shift to socialist parties. One plausible outcome is a similar fate for contemporary mainstream parties struggling to straddle the transnational divide.

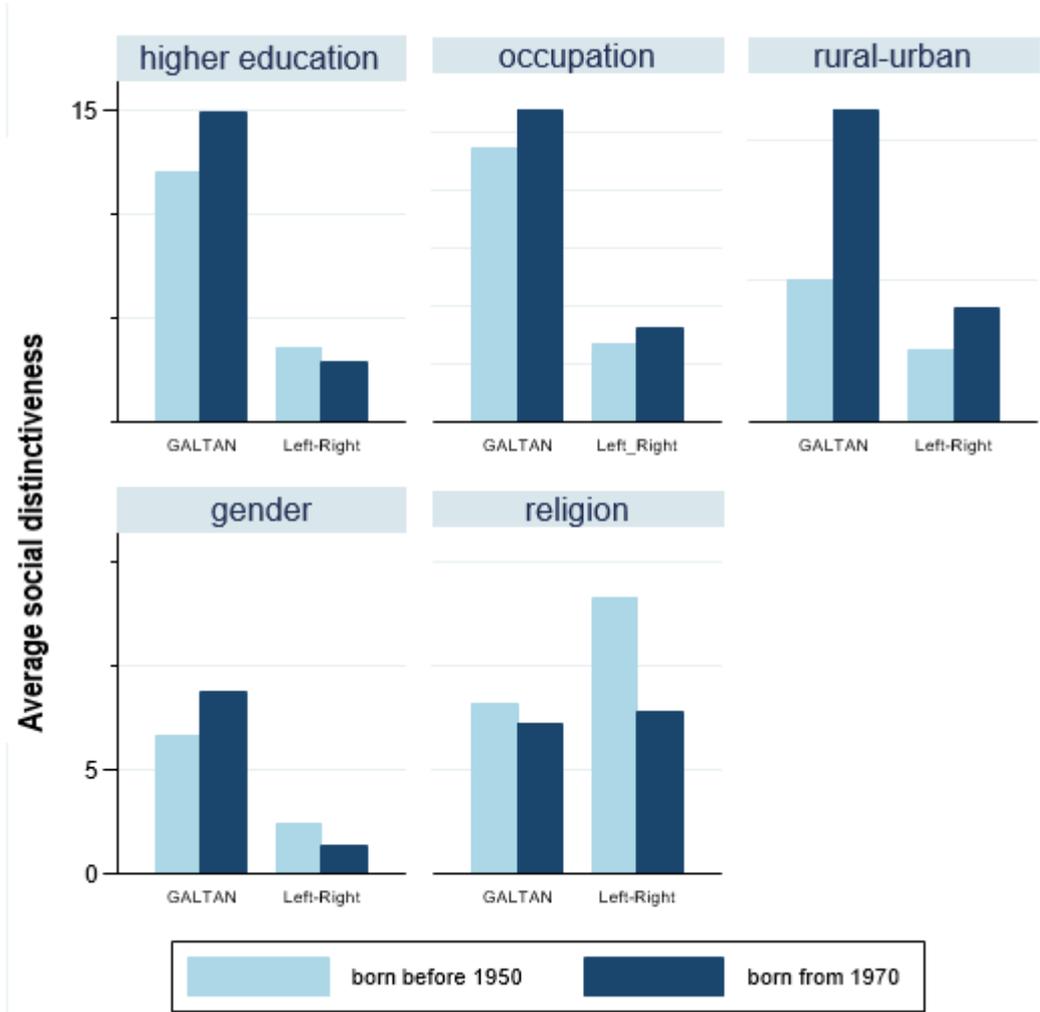
Appendix

Figure 1. Socio-structural differences between party families



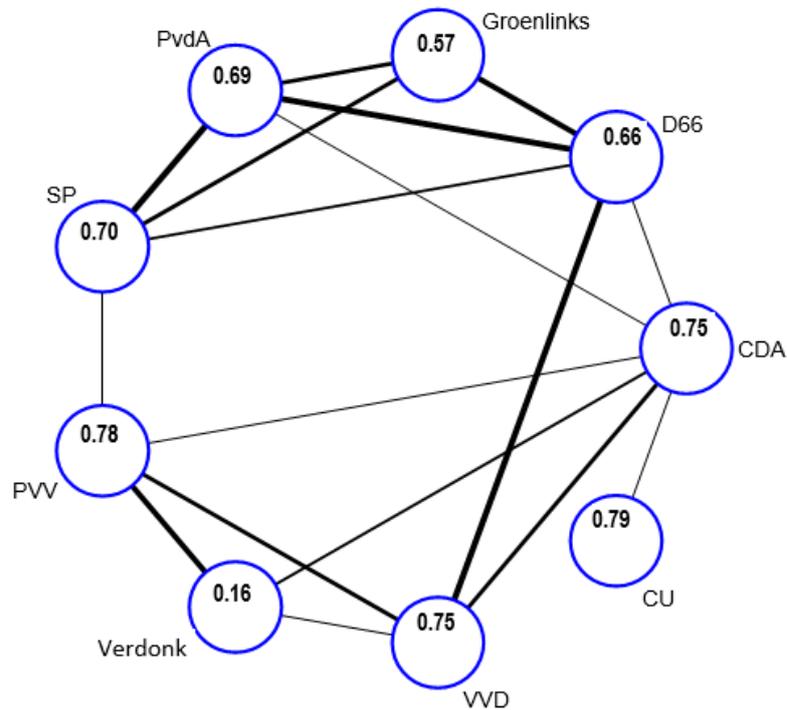
Note: data from 2002-2014 ESS. The thickness and color of the lines reflects the extent to which the electorate of two party families is distinctive on a social characteristic. **Black** (or thickest) = >30% difference; **Red** = 20–30% difference; **Yellow** = 10–20% difference; **Green** (or thinnest) = <10% difference

Figure 2. Social distinctiveness among younger and older voters: the GALTAN vs. Left-Right divide



Note: 2002-2014 ESS voting data aggregated to the party family. Structural distinctiveness is the percentage deviation of GALTAN parties and Left-Right parties from the population mean on a given social characteristic. The bars for GALTAN average the percentage deviation of Green parties and radical TAN parties. The bars for Left-Right average the percentage deviation of radical left, social democratic, Christian democratic and conservative parties.

Figure 3. Party stayers and party changers from wave t to wave t+1 in the Netherlands (2008-2015)



Note: node= proportion of panel respondents choosing same party at time points t and t+1; edge/ line = indicates size of vote flow from A to B and B to A between time points t and t+1.

Table 1. Socio-structural biases by party family (all countries)

	Education	Occupation	Urban-rural	Gender	Religion
	<i>Higher</i>	<i>Socio-professional or manager</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Secular</i>
Greens	+20.87	+12.41	+11.24	+6.96	+14.35
Liberals	+9.85	+6.10	+0.65	-0.35	+9.37
Radical left	-0.35	-0.66	+6.00	-3.14	+12.57
Social democrats	-5.59	-2.70	+0.72	+1.06	+5.35
Christian democrats	+0.79	+0.82	-6.93	0.00	-19.62
Conservatives	-0.96	-0.98	-0.37	-0.15	-7.85
Radical Tan	-12.63	-9.12	-3.31	-8.90	-5.84
Overall electorate	32.57%	26.29%	32.32%	53.05%	73.03%

Note: Each cell shows the overrepresentation (+) or underrepresentation (-) of a group having this characteristic in a party family compared to the overall population. Source: ESS (2002-2014) for 23 countries.

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