

# **Representation Gaps: Changes in Popular Preferences and Party Positions over the Long Term in the Developed Democracies**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the quality of electoral representation in the western democracies. By considering movements in the positions of citizens and political parties over both short and long terms along two dimensions of the electoral space, we compare the contentions of studies which find that parties are responsive to voters when examined along a single dimension over electoral cycles with the arguments of a political economy literature suggesting that mainstream parties are no longer responsive to voters. We find that mainstream parties were largely unresponsive to citizens on economic issues over the two decades between 1990 and 2010. As others predict, niche parties became more extreme on their core issues, but on secondary dimensions they often became more moderate. The results reveal representation gaps and that citizens suffering the most from them are more likely to lack confidence in the legislature and less likely to vote.

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Are political parties in the western democracies responsive to the views of the electorate? This is an important question, not only because the capacity of parties to represent citizens is widely seen as a crucial feature of democracy (Huber and Powell 1994; Mansbridge 2009), but because failures of representation may be contributing to the decline of mainstream political parties and the rise of new challengers (Berger 2017; Spruyt et al. 2016).

On this issue, there is a bifurcation in the literature. On one side is a party responsiveness literature composed of important studies examining whether parties respond to changes in the position of the mean voter from one election to another. It yields nuanced results. Some works find that the responsiveness of parties increases with the competitiveness of the previous election (Abou-Chadi and Orłowski 2016). Others find that parties of the center left are less responsive than those of the center right (Adams et al. 2009); and some find that niche parties, such as Green and radical right parties, are less responsive to the mean voter and more likely to move toward the extremes of the political spectrum between elections (Adams et al 2006; Kitschelt 1994; Klüver and Spoon 2014). However, the bulk of this literature finds that mainstream parties are responsive to shifts in the mean positions of voters with regard to the policies they espouse and the issues they prioritize (McDonald and Budge 2005; Soroka and Wlezién 2010; for a review see Adams 2012).

By contrast, another literature, influential in comparative political economy, argues that, although mainstream political parties may once have been responsive to voters, after about 1980 they became less responsive. Three sets of developments are generally held responsible for this. The first is a set of changes in the international economy associated with globalization. As the prosperity of nations grew increasingly dependent on international flows of goods and finance, parties in government or aspiring to it may have had to become more responsive to the views of prominent actors in international markets and institutions and correspondingly less responsive to voters (Crouch 2004; Jahn 2006; Strange 1995; Ezrow and Hellwig 2014; Sanders and Tóka

2013)). The European Union institutionalized pressures to which all governments are susceptible.

The second development often cited to explain the declining responsiveness of mainstream parties is their transformation from mass or catch-all parties into cartel parties that delegate policy-making to independent agencies and deliberately limit what they promise electorates, thereby reducing the responsiveness of policy to voters (Blyth and Katz 2005; Mair 2013). Some argue that these two developments reinforce each other on the grounds that governing parties can be more responsive to the demands of international actors precisely because the cartelization of national politics allows them to resist competing demands from voters (Hopkin and Blyth 2018).

The third development emphasized in constructivist accounts is the conversion of many policy-makers to neoliberal economic views holding that prosperity requires market-oriented policies even if these are unpopular among many voters (Centeno and Cohen 2012; McNamara 1998; Mudge 2018). This view sees policy as a response to evolving imaginaries of what globalization requires rather than to globalization itself. For these types of reasons, this comparative political economy literature does not expect mainstream parties to be responsive to the views of voters, especially on economic issues.

Several considerations have made it been difficult to resolve the debate between these two literatures. One is an issue of time frame. The studies finding parties responsive to voters usually focus on short-term movements over election cycles. By contrast, those who argue that parties have become unresponsive generally point to long-term movements occurring across decades. As far as we know, however, the latter have not yet offered empirical support based on the correspondence between party platforms and voter opinion over long time frames (for a review see Kayser 2007). Another issue involves measurement. Most studies finding parties

responsive to voters measure the positions of voters and parties on a single left/right spectrum. This approach can be illuminating, but the meanings of ‘left’ and ‘right’ can be ambiguous and, since they are especially susceptible to change especially over time, the approach might not pick up shifts in the positions of parties and voters over long time frames (Thomassen 2012; Adams et al 2019).

There is also now widespread agreement that the western electoral space is multi-dimensional (Kitschelt 1994; Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschieer 2010). In that context, the ambiguities in left/right placement become more intense; and to assess the contention that globalization has rendered parties unresponsive to voters on *economic* issues, the movement of parties and voters on separate issue dimensions must be identified. Indeed, an important study of globalization and responsiveness calls for further research based on a two-dimensional electoral space (Ezrow and Hellwig 2014).

The objective of this paper is to speak to these gaps in the literature. In line with studies of party responsiveness, we explore whether the movements of western political parties correspond to movements in the positions taken by citizens. Instead of using a unidimensional spectrum, however, we examine this association within a two-dimensional electoral space; and we look at it over a long time frame, across the two decades from 1990 to 2009, as well as over electoral cycles.

Our findings confirm the core contention of the comparative political economy literature. Across these two decades, mainstream parties in western democracies were largely unresponsive to the views of citizens on economic issues: as center-left parties moved to the right to converge with the positions of center-right parties, the economic views of most citizens moved to the left. On cultural issues mainstream parties were barely more responsive to the views of average citizens. We also confirm, but nuance, a key proposition in the party

responsiveness literature which holds that niche parties will move toward the extremes of the electoral space regardless of the views of mean voters. However, we find such movements only on the issue dimensions most central to a party's appeal; on secondary issue dimensions, niche parties often converge toward the more moderate positions of mainstream parties. Finally, we find that the citizens least well-represented in these cases are more likely to be alienated from electoral politics.

### **Theory and hypotheses**

In line with many studies, we posit an electoral space characterized by two cross-cutting issue dimensions, one economic and the other largely cultural (Kitschelt 1994, 1995; Kriesi *et al.* 2006, 2008; Bornschier 2010). There is broad consistency in the core set of issues associated with each dimension (Kriesi 2008: 271; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015). The positions of voters and parties on the economic dimension reflect their levels of support for income redistribution, state intervention and market competition, while their positions on the cultural dimension indicate their stances on immigration, race, gay rights and gender relations. We term positions at one end of the cultural spectrum 'cosmopolitan' and those toward the other end 'traditional' and refer to positions along the economic spectrum as 'left' or 'right'. There are good reasons for thinking that citizens and parties have changed their positions on both dimensions over recent decades. Here we set out expectations for these movements and the rationale for them.

#### *The movement of parties*

For hypotheses about movement in the policy positions of political parties over the two decades 1990 to 2010, we draw from both the political economy and party responsiveness literatures. Like the latter, we distinguish between parties of the mainstream center-left and center-right, which generally have some governing experience, and niche parties defined as smaller parties

with strong commitments on some specific issues. These include Green parties, radical right or left parties and, as we note below, liberal parties.

Our core hypothesis for movement in the positions of mainstream center-left and center-right parties on economic issues follows the comparative political economy literature. We predict convergence to the right in response to processes of globalization. There are good reasons for taking that view. International flows of goods and capital accelerated during the 1990s and early 2000s, rendering parties in government or aspiring to it more susceptible to demands from international markets and institutions for budgetary restraint and deregulation of product or labor markets.<sup>1</sup> In a major contribution examining the responsiveness of parties on a left/right spectrum over electoral cycles, Ezrow and Hellwig (2014) find that mainstream parties no longer respond to mean voters when the national economy is highly integrated into the world economy; and studies of partisan positions find a general movement to the right on economic issues over this period (Iversen 2006; Kriesi et al. 2008; Manow et al. 2008).

However, pressure from international markets affects parties of the center-left and center-right differently. Because center-left parties have long been exponents of government intervention, globalization puts them under greater pressure to shift their economic platforms to the right. In a similar context, center-right parties face less pressure because their platforms are already market-oriented, leaving them some room to move in order to compete with the center-left, provided that they remain to the right on economic issues.

Moreover, even when international constraints are not binding, the extent to which parties move in response to the views of mean or median voters is likely to be limited by another factor, namely, inter-party strategic interaction. As many scholars have noted, parties respond strategically to the positions of other parties in ways that might limit their responsiveness to mean voters (Kitschelt 1994; Meguid 2008; Ferland 2018) and our predictions

about party behavior take this into account. We begin from the premise, defended by Adams (2012; Adams et al 2006), that, *ceteris paribus*, movements in party positions will follow movements in position of the mean citizen. But we qualify that point with two propositions drawn from the literature on strategic interaction. The first suggests that, to the extent that parties are vote-seeking, they will tend to converge toward the positions of their near competitors.<sup>2</sup> The second suggests that, to the extent that the parties are also policy-seeking and/or concerned to hold onto core supporters, that tendency toward convergence will be tempered by a desire to retain positions that are distinctive compared to their competitors (McDonald and Budge 2005).

In a unidimensional electoral space, these propositions yield the prediction that office-seeking mainstream parties will move toward each other over time, generally toward positions held by mean or median voters, but without fully converging. However, we are looking at a two-dimensional electoral space where parties have the option of moving toward one another on one dimension, while remaining distinctive on the other. That yields two propositions. First, if a party converges toward its competitors on one issue dimension, it is likely to retain a distinctive position on the other dimension. Second, a party should choose the issue dimension on which it will converge and the one on which it will remain distinctive based on which issue dimensions are more salient to its supporters. We expect parties to seek distinctive positions on the dimensions most salient to their supporters and to converge on other dimensions.

These formulations yield several predictions about the movements of mainstream and niche parties. Since we expect mainstream parties to be constrained to converge to the right on *economic* issues, we anticipate that those parties may be responsive to the electorate on *cultural* issues but only up to a point where they retain distinctive positions on those issues. Our expectations for niche parties also follow from these formulations. We begin from a key contention of the party responsiveness literature, namely that niche parties tend to follow the

views of their core supporters and move toward the extremes of the political spectrum across elections rather than follow the movement of mean voters (Abou-Chadi and Orłowski 2016; Adams et al 2009; Ezrow et al 2010). Because we examine a two-dimensional electoral space, however, we can nuance that contention. We expect it to hold for the issue dimensions most central to a niche party's appeal; but, if the second issue dimension is less central to the party's appeal, we expect even niche parties to follow a standard vote-seeking logic and move closer over time on it to the positions taken by mainstream parties.

Following the literature, we see cultural issues as the ones on which Green and radical right parties primarily compete, albeit at opposite ends of the cultural spectrum. Green parties distinguish themselves from other parties largely through intense commitments to environmental issues and cosmopolitan values more generally (van Haute 2016). Radical right parties also emphasize cultural issues, notably opposition to immigration and multiculturalism, as well as hostility toward the cosmopolitan values associated with educated elites (Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2007). Although there are economic planks in their platforms, these parties do not depend primarily on economic issues for their electoral appeal.

By contrast, parties of the radical left and liberal parties generally distinguish themselves from their competitors through commitments to specific economic positions, again on opposite sides of the economic dimension. Radical left parties mount stringent critiques of contemporary capitalism and call for a more activist and redistributive state (Ramiro 2016). The position of liberal parties is more nebulous. Many have some governing experience which may incline them to behave as mainstream center-right parties. However, most liberal parties distinguish themselves from center-right competitors by espousing stronger free-market positions, and there is evidence that their electoral support depends heavily on those economic positions (Close 2019; Kurella and Rosset 2017). Accordingly, we expect liberal parties to behave like niche parties whose principal source of appeal is their commitment to free-market

positions, thereby moving to the extreme on economic issues regardless of movements in the preferences of average citizens.

With regard to the movement of radical left and liberal parties on cultural issues, our expectations are more open. Our theoretical stance suggests that their movements on such issues should depend on how central such issues are to their electoral appeal. If cultural issues are not especially central to that appeal, vote-seeking strategies may move these parties closer to the positions of mainstream parties on such issues. But if cultural issues are just as central as economic issues to their appeal, we should expect these parties to retain distinctive stances on both issue dimensions. On balance, the literature leans in that direction. A core constituency for liberal parties is managerial and technical workers with strong attachment to both right-wing economic views and cosmopolitan values (Gidron 2016; Oesch and Rennwald 2018). Despite their emphasis on economic issues, radical left parties also secure substantial support from socio-cultural professionals attracted by the cosmopolitan stance of those parties on cultural issues (Ramiro 2016). In short, the appeal of liberal and radical left parties may be based in roughly equal measure on their positions on economic and cultural issues and, if so, they are likely to want to retain distinctive positions on both issue dimensions.

Therefore, our hypotheses for the movement of mainstream parties over the 1990-2009 period are as follows:

***H1** On economic issues, mainstream center-left parties will move to the right on economic issues regardless of the views of the average citizen.*

***H2** On economic issues, mainstream center-right parties will remain on the right regardless of the views of the average citizen.*

***H3** On cultural issues, mainstream center-left and center-right parties may respond to the views of average citizens but will not fully converge.*

*H4 On the issue dimension most central to their electoral appeal, niche parties will move toward the relevant extreme regardless of the views of the average citizen.*

*H5 On issue dimensions less central to their electoral appeal, niche parties will tend to move toward the positions of mainstream parties.*

#### *The movement of citizens*

Our expectations for the movement of citizens in this electoral space draw from the literatures on comparative political economy literature and political behavior. Along the cultural dimension, both literatures lead us to expect the values of average citizens to have become more cosmopolitan between 1990 and 2009. The *locus classicus* for that expectation lies in the work of Inglehart (1990) who identifies a cultural shift rendering western electorates more cosmopolitan on such issues since the 1960s. Several factors propel it. Since younger generations are more cosmopolitan, generational replacement should be rendering average citizens more cosmopolitan. Because tertiary education confers cosmopolitan values, steady increases in the share of the population with tertiary education should be reinforcing such effects (Weakliem 2002). Even at the secondary level, western curricula have put growing emphasis on cosmopolitan cultural frameworks (Bromley 2009). The works of Kriesi and others (2008) suggests that the attitudes of western voters are indeed moving in that direction.

The comparative political economy literature reaches similar conclusions, albeit for different reasons. In influential work, Oesch (2006) and Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) argue that people's attitudes on cultural, as well as economic issues, are influenced by their occupational position. They contend that the interpersonal interaction associated with service-sector positions inclines people toward more cosmopolitan values (see also Häusermann and Kriesi 2015). Therefore, shifts in occupational structure which saw the share of services in OECD

employment increase from 61% to 71% between 1990 and 2010 should be moving the electorate in more cosmopolitan directions.

However, three considerations suggest these trends may not be monolithic. The same occupational logic implies that manual workers are less likely than non-manual workers to embrace more cosmopolitan cultural frameworks. Traditional values may remain more prevalent in countries where religious attendance remains high. And a backlash against rising rates of immigration may limit the extent to which citizens embrace cosmopolitan values. Accordingly, we expect electorates to have become more cosmopolitan between 1990 and 2009 but manual workers and citizens in countries with high religious attendance, such as Italy and the US, to retain more traditional values.<sup>3</sup>

On economic issues, citizens' views are likely to be influenced by two prominent changes in the western economies over this period: increasing income inequality and declining employment security. Scholars remain divided about the impact of income inequality on citizens' attitudes. However, there is evidence that, as levels of income inequality increase over time, support for redistribution among median voters rises (for overviews see Schmidt-Catran 2016; Kevins et al. 2018). Employment insecurity is associated with more left-wing economic attitudes (Cusack et al 2006; Rehm 2016). And Rosset and Stecker (2019) find that, by 2016, voters were relatively supportive of redistribution. Accordingly, our expectation is that the views of average citizens on economic issues will have moved to the left between 1990 and 2009.

Because we are interested in integrating a comparative political economy literature with party responsiveness accounts, we also look in more detail at the predictions political economists make about the political preferences of people in various occupations. Although the subject of cross-sectional studies, as far as we know, no one has looked at how the preferences

of such occupational groups change over time. The literature distinguishes occupational groups based on their position within organizational hierarchies as well as their levels of autonomy and interpersonal interaction at work (Oesch 2006; Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). More autonomy and interpersonal interaction are said to be conducive to cosmopolitan values, while lower levels of autonomy are deemed conducive to left-wing views on economic issues. Thus, the predictions that emerge from this literature include (i) that socio-cultural professionals and service sector workers will have more cosmopolitan values than manual workers or managers and small employers, (ii) that managers and small employers will have right-wing economic views, and (iii) that manual workers and low-skill service workers will have the most left-wing economic views. Moreover, if these attitudes are rooted in occupational characteristics, we can expect the placement of occupational groups relative to one another within the electoral space to remain roughly the same over time.

Accordingly, our hypotheses about changes in the views of citizens over 1990-2009 are:

*H6 On cultural issues, citizens will generally become more cosmopolitan over this period.*

*H7 On economic issues, most citizens will move to the left over the period.*

*H8 Citizens in countries with high levels of religious attendance should retain more traditional values than those in other countries.*

*H9 The relative placement of occupational groups in the electoral space should correspond to the predictions of the comparative political economy literature and remain roughly stable over time.*

### **Empirical Strategy**

Since we are especially interested in the long-term movement of parties and of citizens, we concentrate initially on locating parties and citizens in this space at the beginning and end of a

long period. Our focus is on the western democracies.<sup>4</sup> For this purpose, we need comparable cross-national data adequate for constructing measures of citizens' attitudes on both economic and cultural dimensions over a relatively long time span. The best data we have been able to find with these features is the World Values Survey (WVS) which allows us to compare citizens' attitudes in 1990-91 and 2006-2009 in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States. These countries offer some variation across electoral systems, political cultures and types of political economies. In the first step of the empirics, we compare the positions of parties and citizens at the outset of the period with their positions after two decades, focusing on how the views of citizens in different occupational groups changed over that time.

However, as a check on the results, in the second step of the empirics, we adopt the approach of the policy responsiveness literature and analyze the association between movements in the positions of various types of parties and movements in the mean positions of citizens at intervals roughly corresponding to electoral cycles during these decades. Instead of focusing on a single left/right dimension, however, we examine the movement of parties and citizens on each of the two dimensions structuring the electoral space. For this purpose, we use intervening waves of the WVS conducted in 1995-98 and 1999-2004 as well as the initial 1990-94 and later 2005-09 waves. Because the timing of the World Values Surveys does not coincide precisely with elections, we cannot duplicate the policy responsiveness approach exactly. However, we approximate it by pairing each survey with the election held closest to the fieldwork for it in each country.<sup>5</sup> This provides a preliminary assessment of whether the levels of responsiveness found over the long-term corresponds to responsiveness over electoral cycles.<sup>6</sup>

In this step of the analysis, we estimate separate equations for each of the economic and cultural dimensions of the following form:

$$\Delta P_{it} = b_1 + b_2 \Delta MV_t + b_3 PF_{a...f} + b_4 PF_{a...f} \times \Delta MV_t + b_7 \Delta P_{t-1} + \varepsilon$$

where:

$\Delta P_{it}$  is the change in the position of party family  $i$  from time  $t-1$  to time  $t$

$\Delta MV_t$  is the change in the position of the mean citizen from time  $t-1$  to time  $t$

$PF_{af}$  is a type of party (Christian Democrat/conservative; Social Democrat, Green, Liberal, Radical Left, Radical Right) as coded by the Comparative Manifesto Project.

$\Delta P_{t-1}$  is the change in the position of the party on the relevant dimension from time  $t-2$  to time  $t-1$ . The lagged dependent variable is included to account for autocorrelation and the possibility that parties alternate the direction of their movements across elections (Budge 1994; Ezrow et al 2010).

Therefore, the movement of a party family when there is no movement in the position of mean citizens is given by  $b_3$  and the response of a party family to movements in the mean position of citizens on this dimension is given by  $b_3 + b_4$ . As we have noted, there is room for argument about whether this type of model corresponds well to the party behavior that spatial electoral analysis would expect (for a defense see Ezrow et al 2010 and for critique Ferland 2018). However, because this has been a workhorse specification for the policy responsiveness literature, we adopt it here.

### *Positioning parties in the electoral space*

To position political parties in this electoral space, we use the Comparative Manifesto Project dataset (Volkens et al. 2018). In comparison to expert surveys, it has the advantages of covering the entire time-period we examine and of yielding measures based on the actual positions taken by parties in their electoral manifestos without any biases that expert evaluations

might entail. Parties generally seem to pursue the policies outlined in their manifestos (Thomson et al. 2017). For each dimension, we use all the clearly relevant items in the CMP dataset. We use the proportion of sentences in each manifesto devoted to specific issue positions as a measure of the emphasis parties place on each position along with a simple measure of whether they endorse that position. For comparison with attitudes, we use the manifesto in the election immediately preceding each of the time periods for which we have citizens' data.

To assess the position of parties on economic issues, we use positive references to Keynesian demand management, nationalization, welfare state expansion and labor groups to indicate left positions; and we take positive references to a free market economy, market deregulation, limitations on the welfare state and negative references to labor groups to indicate right positions. To assess the position of parties on the cultural dimension, we use positive references to multiculturalism and underprivileged minority groups and negative references to nationalism and traditional morality to indicate cosmopolitan positions; and we take negative references to multiculturalism and positive references to nationalism and traditional morality to indicate more traditional views.

To aggregate these variables into indices for each party's position on economic and cultural issues, we follow the widely-used procedure of Lowe et al. (2011) based on logit scores. Compared to an approach that uses additive scales, this has the advantages that only variables associated with economic or cultural issues influence the estimated position of a party on economic or cultural issues respectively, and the contribution each additional sentence on a topic makes to the construction of the scale is weighted by reference to how many other sentences already address that topic (details in Appendix B).

### *Positioning citizens in the electoral space*

To measure the movement in citizens' views from 1990 to 2009, we draw data from wave 2 (1990/91; about 13,000 respondents) and wave 5 (2006/09; about 19,000 respondents) of the World Values Survey (WVS) using demographic weights to secure a representative sample of each national population and country weights to count each country equally in cross-national averages.<sup>7</sup> Using these surveys, we measure citizens' views about economic issues with questions about their attitudes to income inequality, private vs. state ownership of business, the responsibility of the government to provide for all, whether the unemployed should be forced to take a job, and whether competition is good or harmful. We measure their views about cultural issues with questions about whether homosexuality and abortion are justifiable, how respondents feel about having immigrants, Muslims and people of a different race as neighbors, whether men have more of a right to work than women, whether working mothers can be good parents, and whether respect for authority is good or bad.

Based on these questions, we construct indices for views on economic and cultural issues by estimating a confirmatory model for multidimensional item response parameters, based on Samejima's (1969) multidimensional ordinal response model because the data are ordinal (Chalmers 2012). Given our premise that these questions tap two distinct factors, we constrain most of the variables to load onto one dimension. Details of the estimation procedure, question wording and issue loadings are in Appendix A of the supplementary materials. In all subsequent analyses, we report the positions of citizens in this issue space using a metric based on standard deviations on the relevant dimension in the 1990 sample.

### *Occupational categories*

As noted, we are especially interested in where different occupational groups are located and how they have moved over time in this electoral space. For this purpose, we assign respondents

to occupational categories designed to conform as closely as possible to the influential categories of Oesch (2006) which capture features of the workplace situation said to condition a person's views on economic and cultural issues. Limitations in the WVS data mean that we can only approximate those categories, but we do so by grouping people into seven occupational classes according to the tasks associated with their employment: managers, professional workers, small employers, skilled service workers, low-skill service workers, skilled manual workers, and low-skill manual workers (for details see Appendix C).

## **Empirical results**

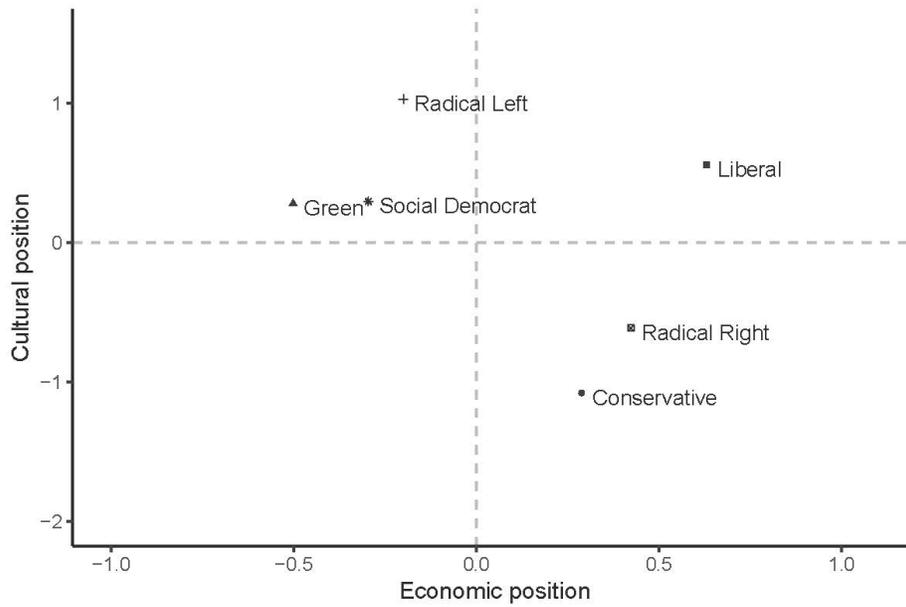
### *The movement of political parties over the long term*

We turn first to the position and movement of political parties in the electoral space over these two decades. Aggregating across our eight countries, Figure 1 shows the positioning of the principal party families in 1990 (panel a) and in 2009 (panel b). The metric on the axes is scores on the two indices standardized across the full two-wave sample and centered on the 1990 mean. Panel (a) shows that in 1990 the principal party families were located along a diagonal running from the north-west (NW) to the south-east (SE) quadrants of the electoral space. Liberal parties were the exception: they occupied a distinctive place in the northeast (NE) quadrant, seeking voters who combine cosmopolitan cultural views with right-wing positions on economic issues.

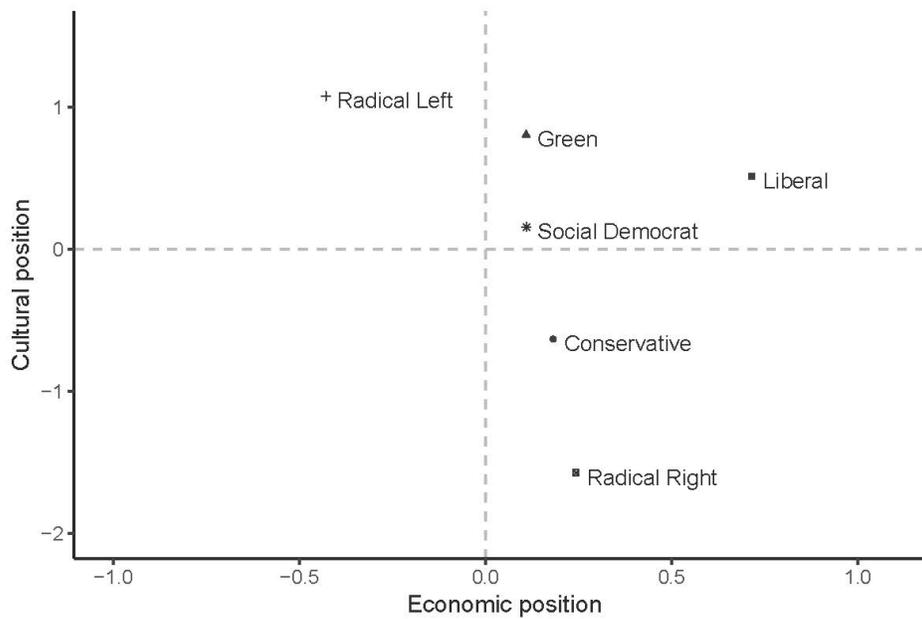
By 2009, however, the axis of party competition parties had shifted toward the vertical, highlighting competition on cultural as compared with economic issues in line with Kitschelt's (2004) observations. As a check on these results, we use the schema devised by Wagner and Meyer (2017) to group parties into the categories of mainstream left, mainstream right and radical right and examine the movement of these party families across all eight countries for the period between 1990 and 2009. The results in Figure 2 confirm that the most pronounced

**Figure 1: Positions of party families in the electoral space**

**Panel (a) circa 1990**



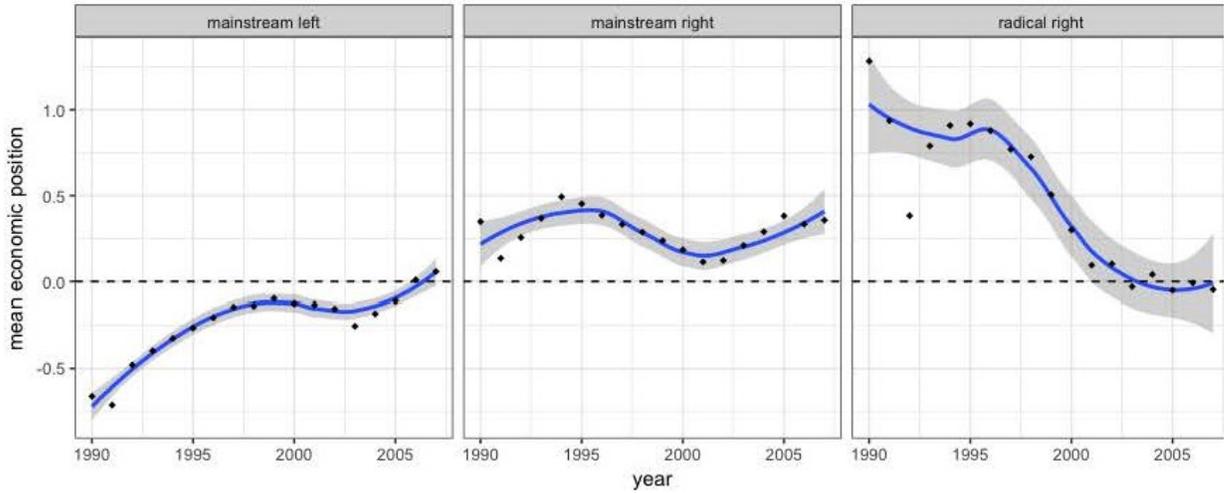
**Panel (b) circa 2009**



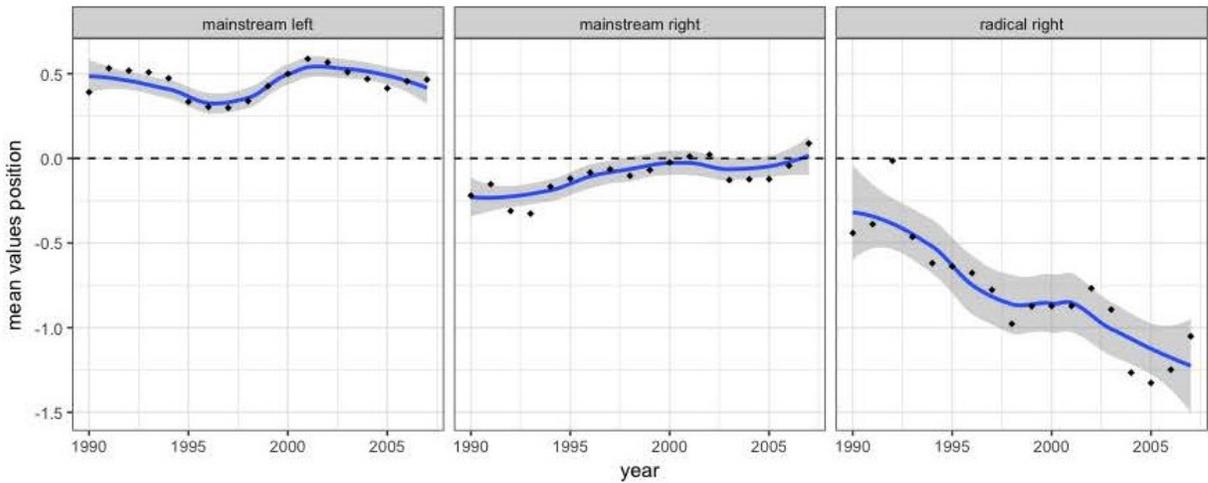
Source: CMP.

**Figure 2: Movement in party positions, 1990-2009**

**Panel (a) Movement on economic issues**



**Panel (b) Movement on cultural issues**



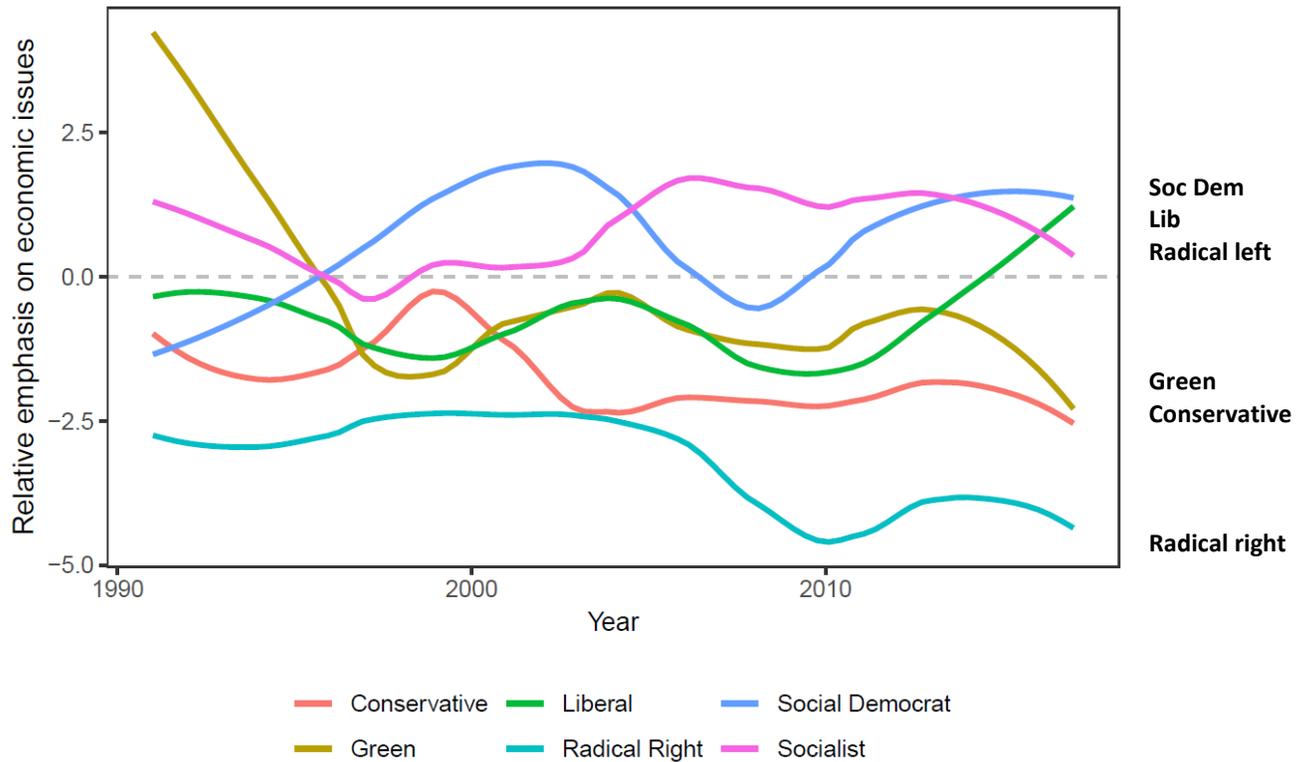
*Note:* Scatter plot and Loess smoothed curve for mean party family position on economic and cultural indices. Metric on y-axis is number of standard deviations above or below the 1990 mean in the sample. Higher scores indicate more right-wing positions on economic issues and more cosmopolitan positions on cultural issues. *Source:* CMP.

changes were the movement of mainstream left parties to the right on economic issues as well as the movement of radical right parties toward the center on economic issues and in traditionalist directions on cultural issues (for national-level results see Appendix G). Although liberal parties offered a voice to citizens whose views placed them in the NE quadrant, it is notable that, on average, no significant party family was in the south-west (SW) quadrant in 1990 or 2009. Radical right parties moved closer to that quadrant and in some countries a few were just inside it in by the end of the period (see Appendix G and Rovny 2012; Hartevelde 2016). But political parties were largely absent from the quadrant occupied by citizens with left economic and traditional cultural views (see also Hiller and Steiner 2018).

By and large, the movement of mainstream parties over these two decades conforms to our expectations. The Figures show that the platforms of center-left parties moved significantly to the right on economic issues, even though the views of most citizens moved substantially to the left. This is broadly supportive of H1 and congruent with comparative political economy arguments that mainstream parties were largely unresponsive to electorates in this period. The movement of center-right parties is in line with H2: their economic platforms remained on the right, although they converged slightly toward the center in search of votes. On cultural issues, where the pressures of economic globalization were less intense, we expected mainstream parties to be marginally more responsive to an increasingly cosmopolitan electorate while retaining distinctive platforms (H3); and we find center-right parties moving in cosmopolitan directions but not enough to yield convergence with center-left parties.

The results also broadly confirm our expectations for the movement of niche parties. Since our hypotheses about niche parties anticipate movements that vary across issue dimensions based on which dimensions are most central to a party's appeal, we provide in Figure 3 a measure of the relative centrality of each issue dimension to the appeals mounted by

**Figure 3: The relative emphasis on economic v cultural issues by type of party**



Source: CMP data

each type of party based on the extent to which they emphasized economic versus cultural issues in their platforms over the 1990-2010 period.<sup>8</sup> It indicates, as we anticipated, that cultural issues are central and economic issues subsidiary to the appeals of Green and radical right parties, while economic issues are central to the appeal of radical left parties and cultural issues subsidiary for them. Liberal parties are in a more ambiguous position: cultural appeals are prominent in their platforms with economic appeals becoming more important in later years.

In line with the party responsiveness literature, we argued that niche parties would move toward the extremes on the dimension most central to their electoral appeal, regardless of movements in the electorate (H4). In keeping with this, we find Green parties and radical right parties moving toward the extremes on cultural issues, while radical left and liberal parties

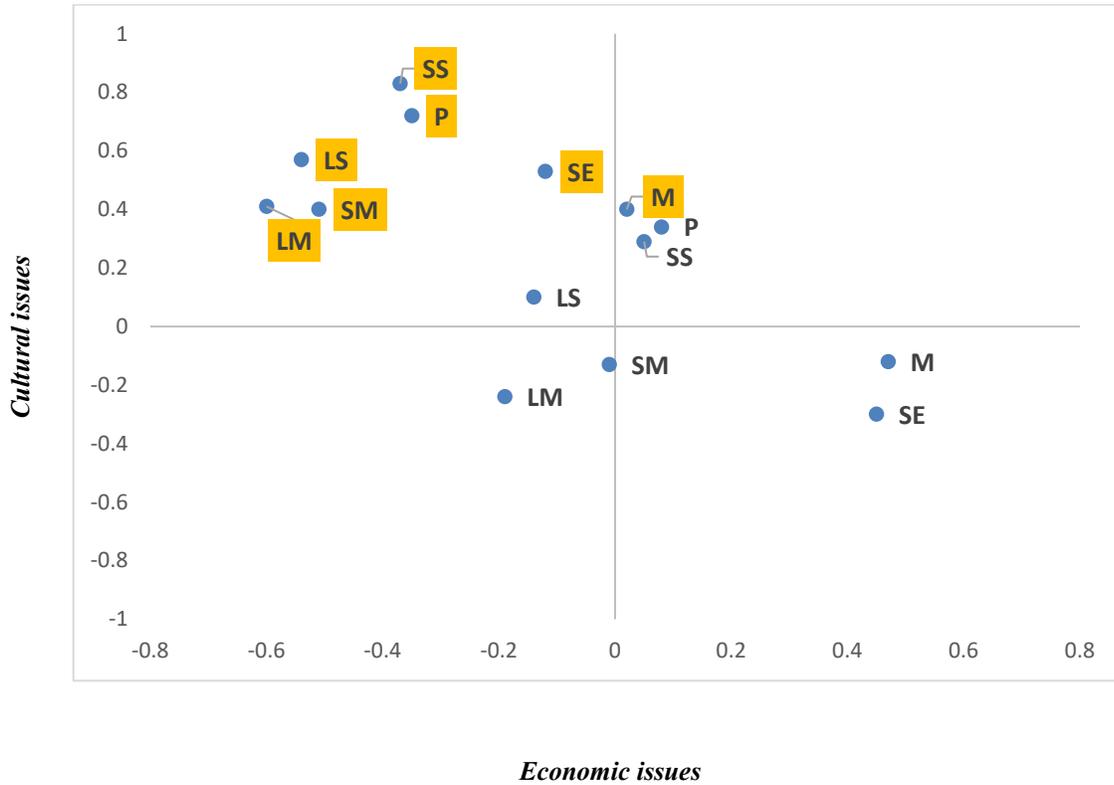
moved toward the extremes on economic issues. On the electoral dimension less central to their appeal, we expected niche parties to converge toward the centrist positions of mainstream parties (H5) and we find that Green and radical right parties did so on economic issues. However, liberal and radical left parties did not significantly shift their positions on cultural issues, perhaps because cosmopolitan values are also central to their electoral appeal, as Figure 3 indicates is the case for liberal parties.

#### *The movement of citizens over the long term*

In order to assess whether these movements in party positions were responsive to movements in the views of citizens over these two decades, we examine citizens' positions using the two indices and occupational categories described above. Figure 4 compares the mean position within this two-dimensional electoral space taken by citizens in each occupational group in the 1990-91 and 2006-09 waves of the WVS (for national level data see Appendix F). The axes are set at the 1990 means of the two indices. The positions taken by these groups in 2009 are labeled in boxes and in 1990 without boxes.

Two striking observations emerge. First, on economic issues, the views of all occupational groups moved sharply to the left. Table 1 reports the mean positions of citizens in each country, indicating that on average their position on economic issues moved almost half a standard deviation to the left between 1990 and 2006-09.<sup>9</sup> Second, on cultural issues, all occupational groups within the electorate moved in cosmopolitan directions. To some extent, this finding is an artefact of the broad terms in which we measure cultural views. If the analysis focused only on immigration issues, for instance, we might not see as much movement. But this confirms that historic shifts of the sort described by Inglehart and Welzel (2005) are occurring. However, although the distribution of citizens' views on economic issues remained

**Figure 4: The movement of occupational groups in the electoral space from 1990/91 to 2006/09**



*Note:* M: managers; P: professionals; SS: skilled service workers; LS: low-skilled service workers; SE: small employers; SM: skilled manual workers; LM: low-skilled manual workers. Axes set at mean of indices for the 1990 wave. 2006/09 wave labeled in boxes. *Source:* WVS.

fairly stable over this period around a shifting mean, their views on cultural issues became more polarized. The range of positions among occupational groups narrowed modestly on the economic index (from 0.66 units in 1990 to 0.58 units in 2006-09) but widened on the cultural index (from 0.62 units in 1990 to 0.79 units in 2006-09).

These findings support hypotheses H6 and H7 about movements in the views of citizens on cultural and economic issues. Table 1 confirms hypothesis H8: on cultural issues, average views remain significantly more traditional in Italy and the U.S., the two countries with high

**Table 1: Changes in the mean scores of citizens on economic and cultural indices**

		<b>Economic index</b>	<i>Change</i>	<b>Cultural index</b>	<i>Change</i>
<b>France</b>	1990	-0.13		-0.04	
	2006-09	-0.58	<i><b>-0.45</b></i>	0.48	<i><b>0.52</b></i>
<b>Germany</b>	1990	0.17		-0.09	
	2006-09	-0.38	<i><b>-0.55</b></i>	0.39	<i><b>0.48</b></i>
<b>Britain</b>	1990	-0.27		-0.21	
	2006-09	-0.18	<i><b>0.09</b></i>	0.22	<i><b>0.43</b></i>
<b>Italy</b>	1990	-0.16		-0.21	
	2006-09	-0.40	<i><b>-0.24</b></i>	-0.19	<i><b>0.02</b></i>
<b>Netherlands</b>	1990	-0.31		0.56	
	2006-09	-0.47	<i><b>-0.16</b></i>	0.62	<i><b>0.06</b></i>
<b>Norway</b>	1990	0.07		0.07	
	2006-09	-0.39	<i><b>-0.46</b></i>	0.95	<i><b>0.88</b></i>
<b>Sweden</b>	1990	0.22		0.29	
	2006-09	-0.24	<i><b>-0.46</b></i>	1.31	<i><b>1.02</b></i>
<b>United States</b>	1990	0.41		-0.36	
	2006-09	-0.03	<i><b>-0.44</b></i>	0.09	<i><b>0.45</b></i>
<b>Full sample average</b>	1990	0.0	<i><b>-0.33</b></i>	0.0	<i><b>0.48</b></i>
	2006-09	-0.33		0.48	

*Note:* Negative movements in the economic index are to the left and positive movements in the cultural index are in a cosmopolitan direction. Metric is standard deviations based on 1990 sample.

levels of religious attendance, even though Americans became more cosmopolitan over these years.

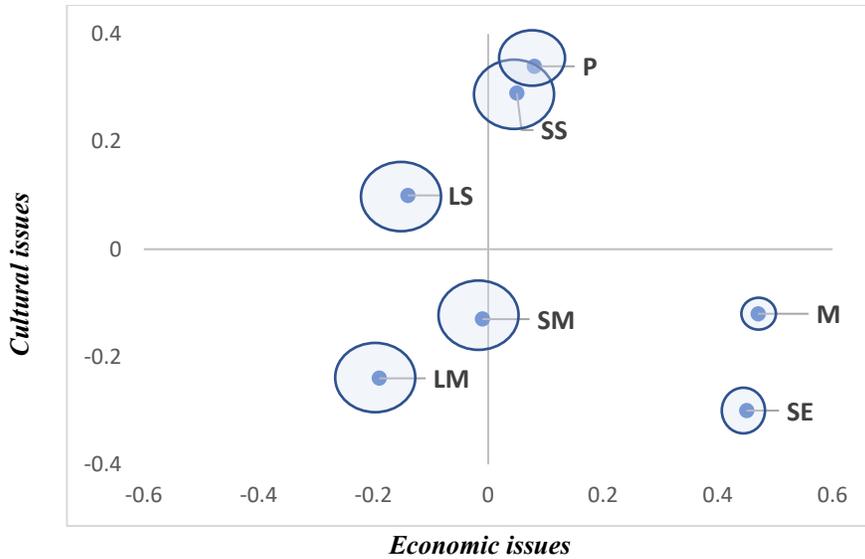
To examine in more detail the propositions from the comparative political economy literature about the location of different occupational groups in the electoral space, Figure 5 locates the mean position of people these groups in 1990-91 (panel a) and 2006-09 (panel b). For the purposes of comparison, the axes in these panels are set at the sample means for the relevant wave and the size of the circles reflects the proportion of the electorate from each occupational group. By and large, the positions of occupational groups conform to the expectations of H9. Workers in the service sector hold more cosmopolitan cultural views than manual workers or small employers and managers; and manual workers and low-skill service workers hold economic views to the left of others, while the economic views of small employers and managers are located to the right. Moreover, the locations of these occupational groups relative to one another remain roughly stable over the two decades.

#### *The responsiveness of parties over the long term*

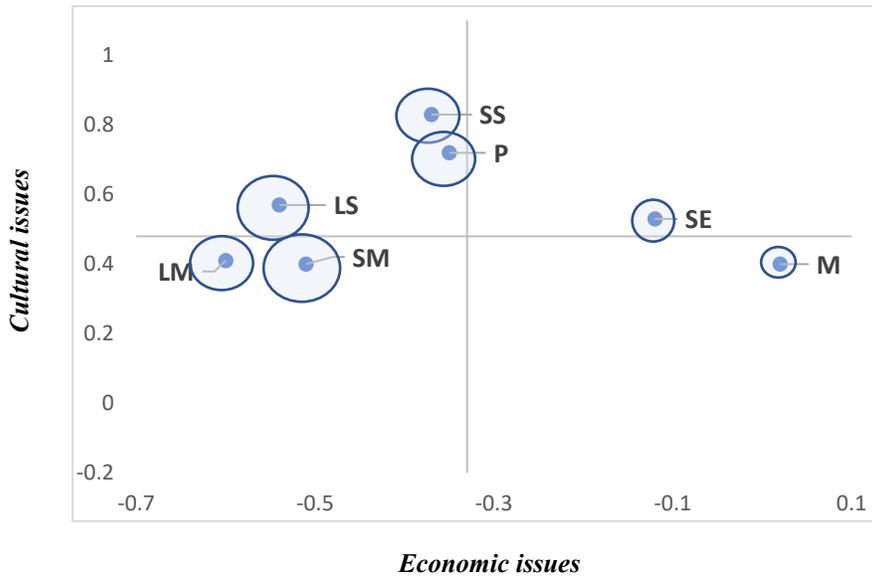
By comparing the movement of parties and citizens, we can reach some tentative conclusions about the responsiveness of parties to the views of citizens over these two decades. Overall, these movements support the comparative political economy contention that, on economic issues, mainstream parties were largely unresponsive to a citizenry whose views were moving to the left. The two types of parties whose movements were responsive on economic issues are those of the radical left, for which left-wing economic policy was a key plank in their platforms, and those of the radical right, which could afford to follow the electorate and converge toward mainstream party positions because economic issues were a subsidiary component of their appeal. On cultural issues, only the Greens and to a lesser extent conservative parties moved

**Figure 5: The location of occupational groups in the electoral space in 1990/91 and 2006/09**

**Panel (a) 1990**



**Panel (b) 2006-09**



*Note:* M: managers; P: professionals; SS: skilled service workers; LS: low-skilled service workers; SE: small employers; SM: skilled manual workers; LM: low-skilled manual workers. Axes set at mean of indices for each wave. *Source:* WVS.

toward more cosmopolitan positions, despite dramatic moves in that direction by citizens.

Because the indices on which we measure the positions of parties and citizens are not entirely commensurable, it is possible that the citizenry was moving toward positions that many parties already espoused, but, even then, it would be difficult to describe the movements of most parties as responsive to movements in the views of citizens. However, these results confirm findings in the party responsiveness literature about niche parties. In general, they remained extreme or became more extreme on the issue dimension most central to their appeal. However, on the subsidiary dimension, Green and radical right parties moved to more moderate positions. In the case of radical right parties, that was in line with movements in the views of voters; but overall, as we conjectured, even niche parties seem to be more responsive to the positions taken by other parties than to movements in the views of voters.

#### *The responsiveness of parties over electoral cycles*

Our results on the movement of niche parties over the long term are broadly consistent with the findings of the policy responsiveness literature (Abou-Chadi and Orłowski 2016; Adams et al 2009; Ezrow et al 2010). However, our findings about the long-term movement of mainstream parties are more congruent with the contentions of the comparative political economy literature, suggesting that the unidimensional left/right measures commonly used in the party responsiveness literature might not be fully revealing about the shifts of parties and citizens along specific issue dimensions. Accordingly, in the second step of the analysis, we examine the responsiveness of each type of political party to movements in the mean views of citizens along separate economic and cultural dimensions over periods approximating electoral cycles between 1990 and 2009. If our findings about the responsiveness of parties to citizens over the long-term movements are valid, we should find that they correspond at least generally to the responsiveness of different types of parties to citizens over these shorter electoral cycles.

Table 2: Short-term responsiveness of mainstream parties to citizens on economic issues

	$\Delta_t$ party position
$\Delta_t$ mean voter	1.477 (1.354)
Christain dem/Conservative	0.049 (0.638)
Green	1.242 (0.854)
Liberal	0.984 (0.710)
Radical left	-1.117 (0.874)
Radical right	-0.0005 (1.112)
Social democrat	1.393** (0.657)
$\Delta_{t-1}$ party position	-0.368*** (0.093)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Christain dem/Conservative	-3.001 (1.821)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Green	-2.393 (2.448)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Liberal	-1.199 (1.844)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Radical left	-5.546** (2.480)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Radical right	-1.765 (2.761)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Social democrat	-0.479 (1.780)
Constant	-0.337 (0.493)
N	128
R <sup>2</sup>	0.226
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.130
Residual Std. Error	2.005 (df = 113)
F Statistic	2.356*** (df = 14; 113)

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table 3: Short-term responsiveness of mainstream parties to citizens on cultural issues

	$\Delta_t$ party position
$\Delta_t$ mean voter	-2.450** (0.943)
Christain dem/Conservative	-0.419 (0.527)
Green	0.034 (0.611)
Liberal	-0.060 (0.574)
Radical left	-0.718 (0.640)
Radical right	-2.057*** (0.705)
Social democrat	-0.453 (0.534)
$\Delta_{t-1}$ party position	-0.385*** (0.077)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Christain dem/Conservative	2.052* (1.182)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Green	3.332** (1.482)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Liberal	2.083 (1.292)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Radical left	4.099*** (1.452)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Radical right	6.141*** (1.834)
$\Delta_t$ mean voter: Social democrat	1.669 (1.220)
Constant	0.636 (0.415)
N	128
R <sup>2</sup>	0.316
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.232
Residual Std. Error	1.336 (df = 113)
F Statistic	3.737*** (df = 14; 113)

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

The results of this analysis are reported in Tables 2 and 3. On economic issues, the paucity of statistically significant coefficients suggests that most parties, including both types of mainstream parties, were not responsive to movements in the views of mean citizens over these electoral cycles; and the coefficient on the binary variable implies that, even when the views of citizens did not change from one electoral cycle to another, social democratic parties tended to move to the right on economic issues. The one significant interaction term suggests that radical left parties were notably unresponsive to citizens on economic issues. On cultural issues, the insignificant coefficients suggest that mainstream social democratic parties, liberal and Christian Democratic/ Conservative parties were not especially responsive to movements in the views of citizens. By contrast, significant interaction terms indicate that the positions of Green and radical left parties moved in tandem with the views of citizens on cultural issues. By and large, these results are consistent with what the inspection of long-term movements in the positions of citizens and parties indicates about the responsiveness of parties.

The one anomalous result is that radical right parties, while inclined to move toward more traditional views when the mean views of citizens did not change, appear to have been responsive to changes in the mean views of citizens on cultural issues across electoral cycles, even though they moved away from those mean views over the long term. Of course, these findings must be treated with caution since we approximate electoral cycles and impute some of the items measuring citizens' views in some waves. However, in tandem with the long-term analysis, these results suggest that, when responsiveness is assessed on specific issue dimensions, mainstream parties may not be as responsive to movements in the views of citizens as they appear in analyses based on unidimensional measures of left/right position.

## **Political consequences**

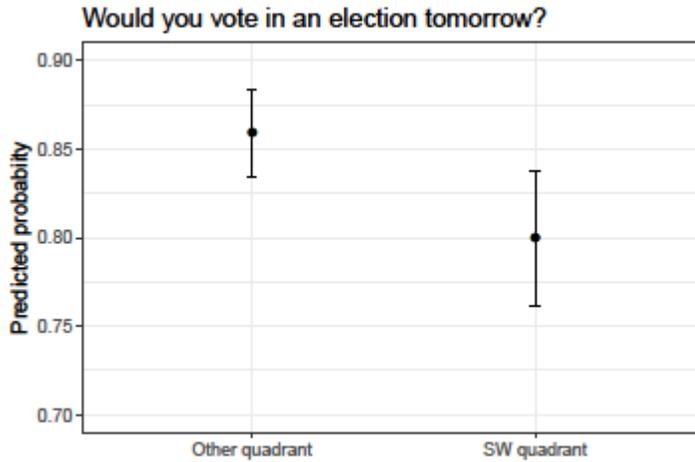
These findings reveal two representation gaps in western electoral systems. First, over a lengthy period in which the views of most citizens moved significantly to the left on economic issues, the positions of mainstream parties converged to the right. Second, although more than a fifth of the electorate have held views throughout this period which place them in the SW quadrant of the electoral space, political parties have largely been absent from it (see Table A1 in Appendix E; Lefkofridi et al 2014; van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). If the citizens located there cared only about economic or cultural issues, they might have been able to find a party to represent their views; but there is evidence that citizens in this quadrant care about both kinds of issues (Kurella and Rosset 2017; Lefkofridi et al 2014).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, given contemporary understandings of democracy, these representation gaps are manifest problems.

Moreover, the challenges they pose are even greater if these gaps lead citizens whose views are not well-represented to lose confidence in democracy and retreat from participation in it. There is already some evidence for this. Hillen and Steiner (2019) show that citizens who hold relatively left positions on economic issues and traditional positions on cultural issues are less likely to vote or to express satisfaction with democracy (see also Gidron 2016). We close by asking whether parallel effects show up in our data.

To assess that, we focus on citizens whose views place them in the SW quadrant of the electoral space on the grounds that they are least likely to feel that contemporary party systems represent them well. To examine political participation, we employ a question in the 2006/09 wave of the WVS asking ‘would you vote in an election tomorrow?’ and estimate the relationship between responses to that question and the quadrant in which citizens are located. We condition the estimation on standard variables affecting turnout, the respondent’s age, level of education, income decile as well as country fixed effects. Panel (a) of Figure 6, which

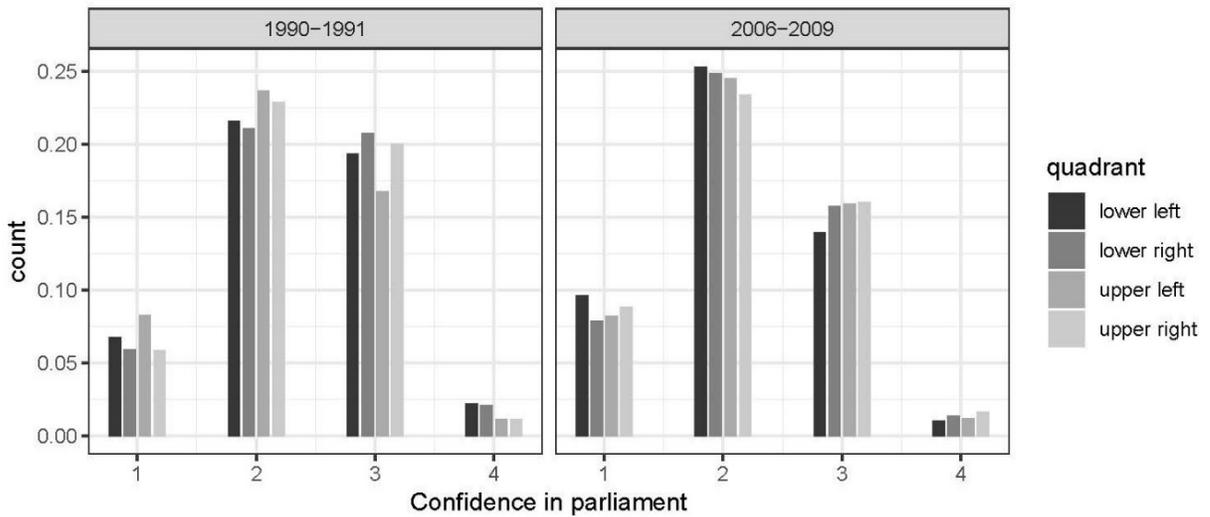
**Figure 6: The relationship between position in the electoral space and the likelihood of voting and confidence in the legislature in 2006/09**

*Panel (a) Predicted probability of voting by quadrant in the electoral space*



*Note:* Simulations from full estimation in Table A2. Age, income, education held at their medians.

*Panel (b) Predicted confidence in the legislature by quadrant and wave*



*Note:* Simulations based on Table A3. Confidence is measured from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

displays the predicted probability of voting when the control variables are held at their median values, indicates that citizens whose views locate them in the SW quadrant are less likely to vote than citizens located in the other three quadrants (estimation results in Tables A2 of Appendix E).

Using a question that asks (on a four-point scale) how much confidence respondents have in their nation's legislature, we create a similar estimate using an ordered probit model for the association between confidence in the legislature and the quadrant in which a citizen is located. Once again, we condition on age, level of education and income as well as country fixed effects. The results for parallel estimations on the 1990/91 and 2006/09 waves are in panel (b) of Figure 6 which reports simulations that hold the control variables at their medians (estimation results in Table A3 of Appendix E). Here the movement over time is of special interest. In the 1990/91 wave, placement in the SW quadrant is not significantly more likely to predict low levels of confidence in the legislature. But, after two decades in which the economic views of citizens move left while the positions of most parties do not, confidence in the legislature has declined across the board; and citizens in the SW quadrant are most likely to express low levels of such confidence. That in turn may be feeding support for populist parties whose rhetoric plays upon representational issues (van der Brug et al. 2003; Rooduijn et al. 2016).

## **Conclusion**

This paper assesses contentions in the party responsiveness and comparative political economy literatures about the responsiveness of parties to citizens in the western democracies. By comparing movements in the positions of citizens and parties within a two-dimensional electoral space over a long period of time, it moves beyond studies examining movement along a single dimension over shorter electoral cycles. The results confirm a key finding of the party

responsiveness literature: that niche parties tend to move toward the extremes rather than follow the mean voter on the issue dimension most central to their appeal, although we nuance that finding by showing that some niche parties moderate on a secondary issue dimension. However, we also find support for a core contention of the comparative political economy literature: that in an era of globalization mainstream parties have become unresponsive to citizens: their views moved to the left while those parties converged to the right. This is an important representation gap.

By examining the movement of occupational groups within this electoral space, we also find support for arguments about how occupational position conditions political attitudes. However, the analysis also indicates that most manual workers are located in a quadrant of the electoral space where there are few parties, and we find citizens in that quadrant more alienated than others from electoral politics. Moreover, inspection of where occupational groups are located in the electoral space underscores the formidable representational challenges facing contemporary political parties. The multiple groups found in modern political economies have diverse political preferences spread out across all quadrants of the electoral space. With such a fragmented electorate, the task of assembling viable electoral coalitions has become daunting. Of course, this fragmentation also helps to explain the rise of new parties and that makes it easier for some citizens to find organized vehicles for their views (cf. Ezrow 2007). But a proliferation of parties also shifts the representational dilemmas up to a level to the arena where uneasy compromises over policy must be found if governing coalitions are to be formed.

There are plenty of limitations to this analysis rooted in the difficulties of finding measures on which the positions of parties and citizens can be compared, especially over long periods of time. In an era when electoral systems are in flux, however, we see value in looking, as best we can, at long-term movements in the positions of parties and citizens, lest we miss the tidal waves on which the flotsam and jetsam of everyday politics floats. In this case, the picture

that emerges is one that calls into question the more sanguine elements in literatures focused on the movement of parties and mean voters along a single left/right spectrum. Our findings suggest that parties have been responding to international pressures and to each other at least as much as they have been to mean voters; and that may account for some of the difficulties mainstream parties have had holding onto their electorates. Moreover, when we see how dispersed occupational groups are across the electoral space, the issue of where the mean voter is becomes less significant than the question of how coalitions can be formed from such a fissiparous electorate (cf. Oesch and Rennwald 2018). That is ultimately the subject for further research that this analysis suggests.

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## Notes

Representation15

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<sup>1</sup> On the pace of globalization, see Dreher 2006 and on the nature of these demands Ezrow and Hellwig 2014.

<sup>2</sup> As Downs (1957) noted, full convergence can be expected only in two-party systems with voters whose views are normally-distributed. PR systems exhibit more stasis but, even there, it can be advantageous for a party to edge toward the position of its principal competitor, especially on a dimension not central to the concerns of its core supporters.

<sup>3</sup> In 2006-09, the proportion of respondents reporting that they attended church at least once a week was 31% in Italy and 34% in the US compared with an average of 8% in the other six countries in this sample.

<sup>4</sup> Since the electoral space of the new democracies in East Central Europe is somewhat different, we concentrate on western democracies.

<sup>5</sup> The distance between survey and election varies from 3 months to 24 months. For the timing of each survey and proximate election, see Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Because we need data only on mean attitudes, we are able to include additional countries in this part of the analysis: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand and Spain. In some waves, a few items used to construct the indices for citizens' views about economic and cultural issues were missing and imputed from the remaining items.

<sup>7</sup> For the sampling procedure see: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>

<sup>8</sup> The measure is based on the sum of the variables used to measure a party's position on economic issues divided by the sum of the variables used to calculate a party's position cultural issues. We interpolate scores for each party between election years and take the mean by party family across all countries for each year. The scores are then standardized.

<sup>9</sup> The exception is Britain where the average citizen became marginally more conservative on economic issues over these years, perhaps in line with the Thatcher effect identified by Grasso et al. 2019.

<sup>10</sup> For an argument that they care predominantly about cultural issues, however, see Gidron 2016.