

Statistics II Spring Term 2023, ASDS, Trinity College Dublin

REPLICATION STATS

➤ **BY MELISSA CAMPBELL**

Are Irish Voters Moving to the Left?

REPLICATION PRESENTATION

Are Irish Voters Moving to the Left?

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Authors:



Stefan Müller
University College Dublin



Aidan Regan
University College Dublin

BY MELISSA CAMPBELL

In this study, I aim to replicate a paper by Stefan Müller and Aidan Regan, on the voting preferences of the Irish people. The paper asks the question "Are Irish voters Moving to the Left?"

The authors convincingly argue their case.

INTRODUCTION

Abstract of the paper, written by Müller and Regan:

The Irish party system has been an outlier in comparative politics. Ireland never had a left-right divide in parliament, and for decades, the dominant centrist political parties competed around a centre-right policy agenda. The absence of an explicit left-right divide in party competition suggested that Irish voters, on average, occupy centre-right policy preferences. Combining survey data since 1973 and all Irish election studies between 2002 and 2020, we show that the average Irish voter now leans to the centre-left. We also show that income has recently emerged as a predictor of left-right self-placement, and that left-right positions increasingly structure vote choice. These patterns hold when using policy preferences on taxes, spending, and government interventions to reduce inequality as alternative indicators. We outline potential explanations for this leftward shift, and conclude that these developments might be anchored in economic inequalities and the left populist strategies of Sinn Féin.

Left/Right Polarisation

"Our core claim is simple and parsimonious: we posit that the dominant macro-trend is an increasing left/right polarisation in preferences and political behaviour. We test and analyse this argument more concretely through examining left-right voter placement over time using various data sources, including a harmonised dataset of Irish election surveys between 2002 and 2020, and cross-national surveys published since 1973, including over 150,000 responses of Irish voters' left-right self-placements."

Stefan Müller & Aidan Regan

REPLICATION DATA

R Scripts

- `00a_filter_and_harmonise_lr_surveys.R` loads the replication file from Dassonneville (2021) and various recent Eurobarometer studies. It merges and harmonises these studies and returns the file `data_surveys_1973_2020.rds` which includes the harmonised surveys for Ireland and other European countries and is used in `01_analysis.R`. If you use this file in your research, please cite Dassonneville (2021) and our paper published in Irish Political Studies. The raw data to construct `data_surveys_1973_2020.rds` are not provided in this Dataverse, but links to the files are provided in the replication script.
- `00b_filter_and_harmonise_election_studies.R` contains the code to merge and harmonise Irish election studies between 2002 and 2016 (which are included in CSES) and the 2020 UCD Election Study. It returns the file `data_election_studies_ireland.rds` which is used in `01_analysis.R`. If you use this file in your research, please cite our paper published in Irish Political Studies, Elkink and Farrell (2020a), and CSES (2019a; 2019b). The raw CSES files are not provided in the Dataverse but can be downloaded from at cses.org.
- `01_analysis.R` contains the code to reproduce all tables and plots from the main paper and appendix. It loads the following files:
 - `data_surveys_1973_2020.rds` (created and stored in `00a_filter_and_harmonise_lr_surveys.R`)
 - `data_election_studies_ireland.rds` (created and stored in `00b_filter_and_harmonise_election_studies.R`)
 - `data_esri.csv` (relevant variables from ESRI survey; please cite Timmons et al. (2020) if you use this dataset.
 - *2020 Exit Poll.Rdata*: UCD-RTE-TG4-Irish Times-Ipsos MRBI Exit Poll; please cite Elkink and Farrell (2020b)

The paper based its research on data from several sources. 22 Eurobarometer surveys were downloaded, and from these, the countries were recoded and political preferences were rescaled, from left-right to 0-10. From this combined dataset, these variables were retained: country, year, decade, year_of_birth, generation, age, age_cat, gender, and left_right 0to10.

Two further datasets were downloaded from <https://cses.org>. Variables from these datasets included education, age, gender, religious, urban_rural, household_income, left_right_self, party_id_dummy party_id_party party_id_strength, party_vote, and satisfaction_democracy. The dates ranged from 2002 to 2020.

Political parties included Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin, Greens, Progressive Democrats, Socialist Party, Worker's Party, United Left Alliance, AAA - People Before Profit Alliance, Christian Solidarity, Irish Socialist Network, Father's Rights-Responsibility, Independents, and "Did not vote/no answer".

```
# load harmonised survey dataset (created in 00a_filter_and_harmonise_
data_surveys_1973_2020 <- readRDS("data_surveys_1973_2020.rds")

# load dataset with harmonised election studies
dat_electionstudies <- readRDS("data_election_studies_ireland.rds")

table(dat_electionstudies$left_right_self,
      dat_electionstudies$year)

# descriptive statistics of surveys with Irish respondents, 1973-2020
```

```

'''Independent Candidate'='Other and
Independents';

        'Independent'='Other and
Independents';

        'Green Party'='Greens and Left
bloc';

        'Greens'='Greens and Left
bloc';

        'Sinn Féin'='Sinn Féin';
        'Workers Party'='Greens and
Left bloc';

        'Socialist Party'='Greens and
Left bloc';

        'Social Democrats'='Greens
and Left bloc';

        'Labour'='Greens and Left
bloc';

        'Fianna Fáil'='Fianna Fáil';
        'Fine Gael'='Fine Gael';
        'AAA - People Before Profit
Alliance'='Greens and Left bloc';
        else = 'Other and

```

Political Party affiliations were then recalibrated and simplified. This made sense in that there are many political parties in Ireland. However, the Greens were put in the same category as the left parties, but Sinn Féin, which is to the left, was kept separate, presumably because of its electoral importance. Perhaps it might have been better to leave the Greens separate from the left.

Another dataset was downloaded and included in the study:
2020 UCD Online Election Poll.Rdata

Election Poll Data



```
mutate(party_vote = car::recode(firstPref,
  "'National Party'='Other and Independents';
  'Renua'='Other and Independents';
  'Green Party'='Greens and Left bloc';
  'Independent'='Other and Independents';
  'Irish Democratic'='Other and Independents';
  'Irish Freedom'='Other and Independents';
  'Labour Party'='Greens and Left bloc';
  'Social Democrats'='Greens and Left bloc';
  'Solidarity PBP'='Greens and Left bloc';
  'Inds. 4 Change'='Other and Independents';
  'Other'='Other and Independents';
  'Aontu'='Other and Independents'')) %>%
mutate(party_vote_recoded_precise = car::recode(firstPref,
  "'National Party'='Other and Independents';
  'Renua'='Other and Independents';
  'Independent'='Other and Independents';
  'Irish Democratic'='Other and Independents';
  'Irish Freedom'='Other and Independents';
  'Inds. 4 Change'='Other and Independents';
  'Other'='Other and Independents';
  'Aontu'='Other and Independents'')) %>%
mutate(party_vote_sffffgothor = ifelse(!firstPref %in% c("Sinn Féin",
  "Fianna Fáil",
  "Fine Gael"), "Other and Independents",
  as.character(firstPref))) %>%
mutate(university_degree = ifelse(education == "7 - Third Level Degree", 1, 0)) %>%
select(party_vote_sffffgothor, party_vote,
  party_vote_recoded_precise,
  left_right_self = leftRight, weights = weight2,
  retired,
  university_degree, age_cat = age,
  income_differences, taxes_spending,
  gender, income, urban) %>%
mutate(gender = as.character(gender)) %>%
mutate(year = 2020)
```

The data were combined, and ranged from 1973 to 2020.

```
# load harmonised survey dataset (created in 00a_filter_and_harmonise_lr_surveys.R)
data_surveys_1973_2020 <- readRDS("data_surveys_1973_2020.rds")

# load dataset with harmonised election studies
dat_electionstudies <- readRDS("data_election_studies_ireland.rds")

table(dat_electionstudies$left_right_self,
      dat_electionstudies$year)

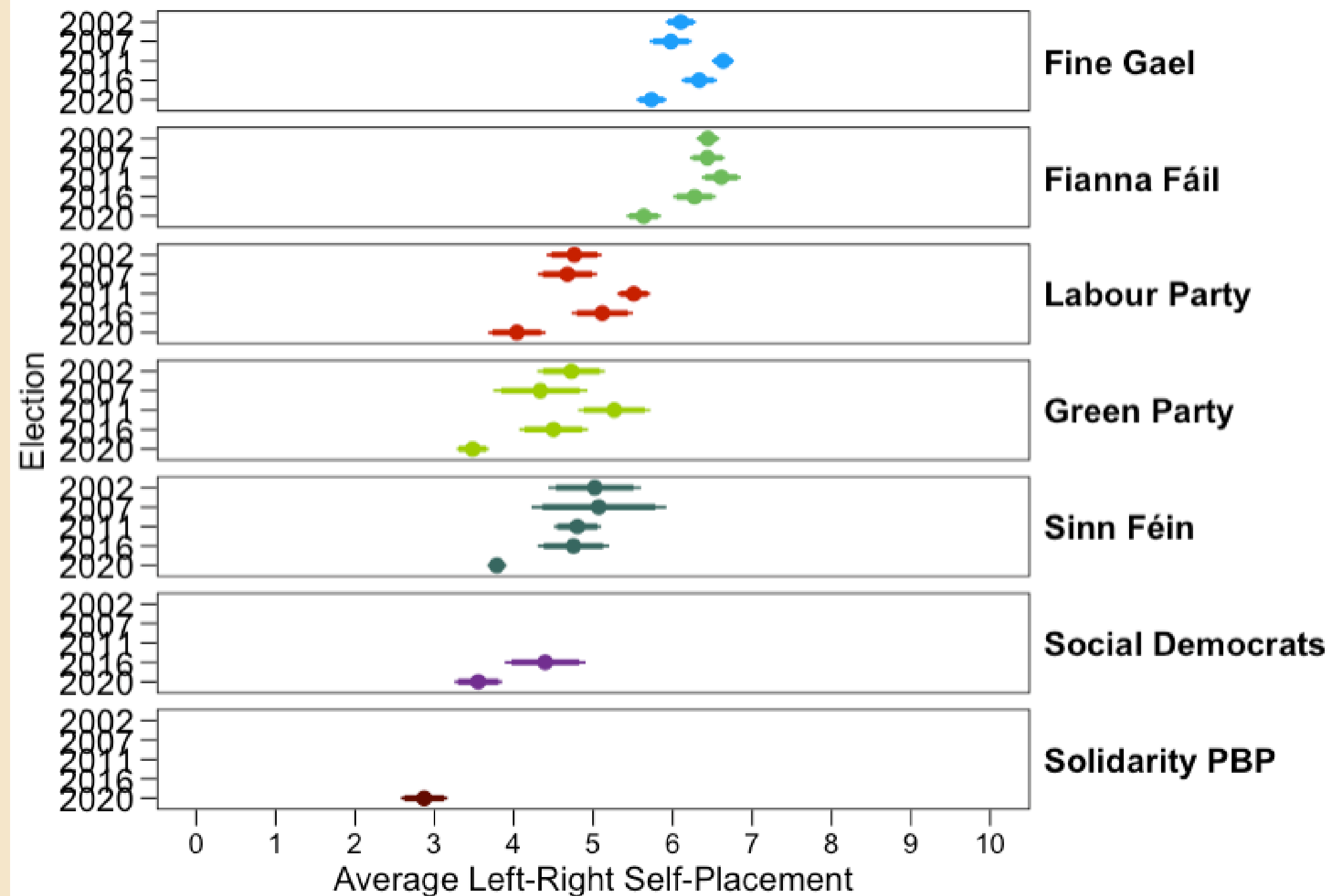
# descriptive statistics of surveys with Irish respondents, 1973–2020

# filter only Irish respondents
dat_ire <- filter(data_surveys_1973_2020,
                  country == "Ireland")
```

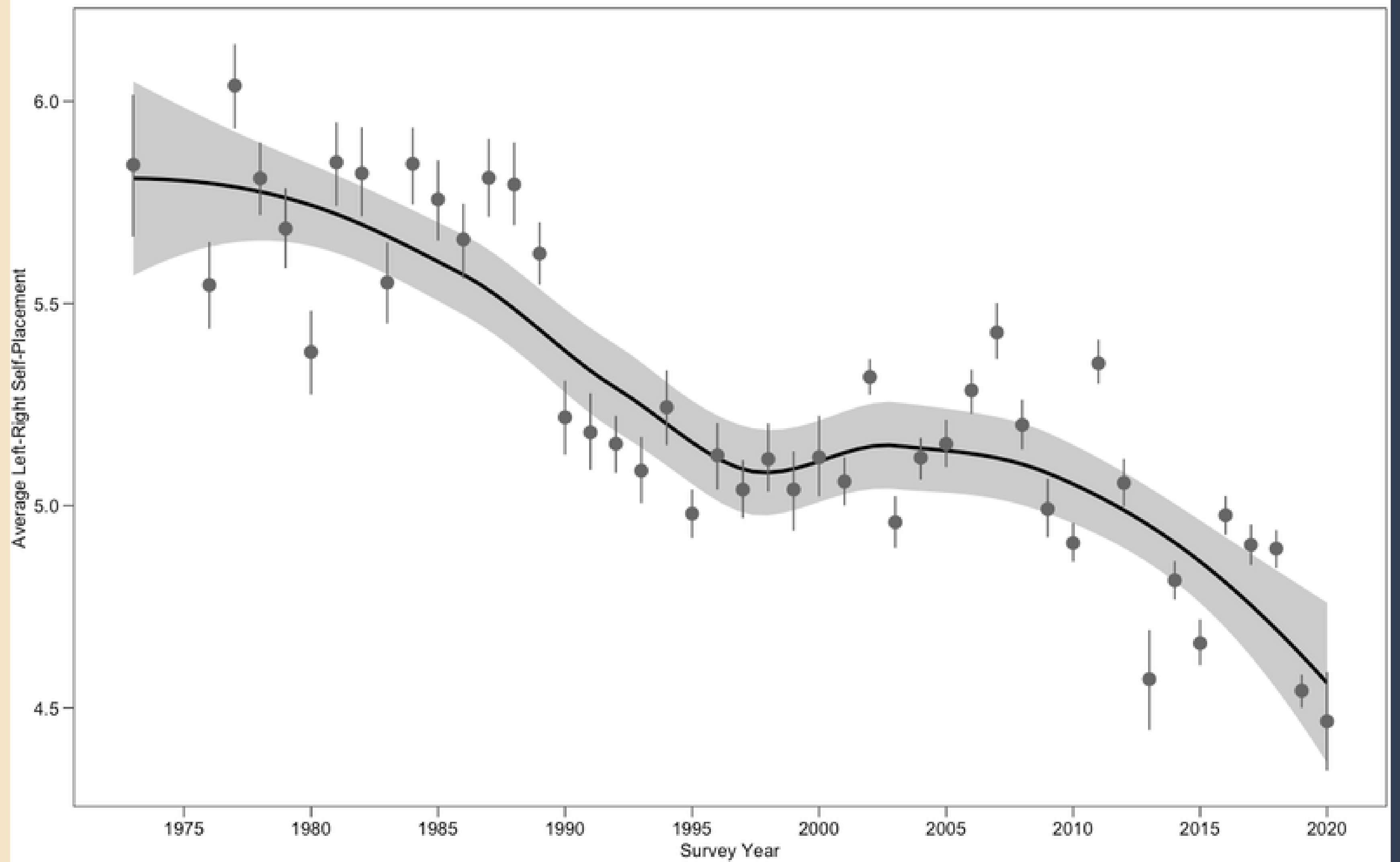

GRAPHS

The following graphs show a timeline over which voters have placed themselves as to the left or to the right in Ireland. The third one compares Ireland with other European countries.

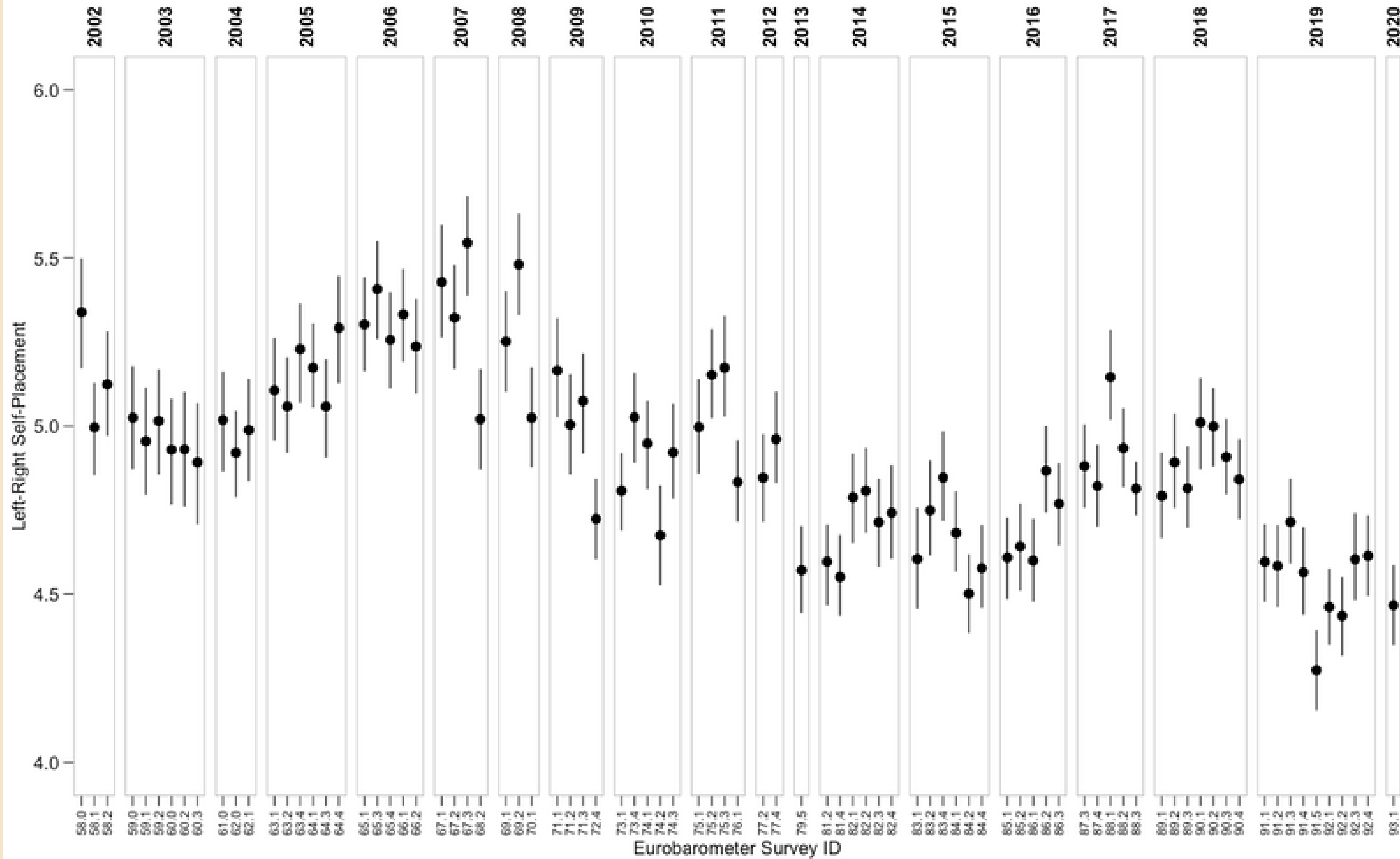
Here, a graph was made from a subset of parties, including information from 2002 to 2020.

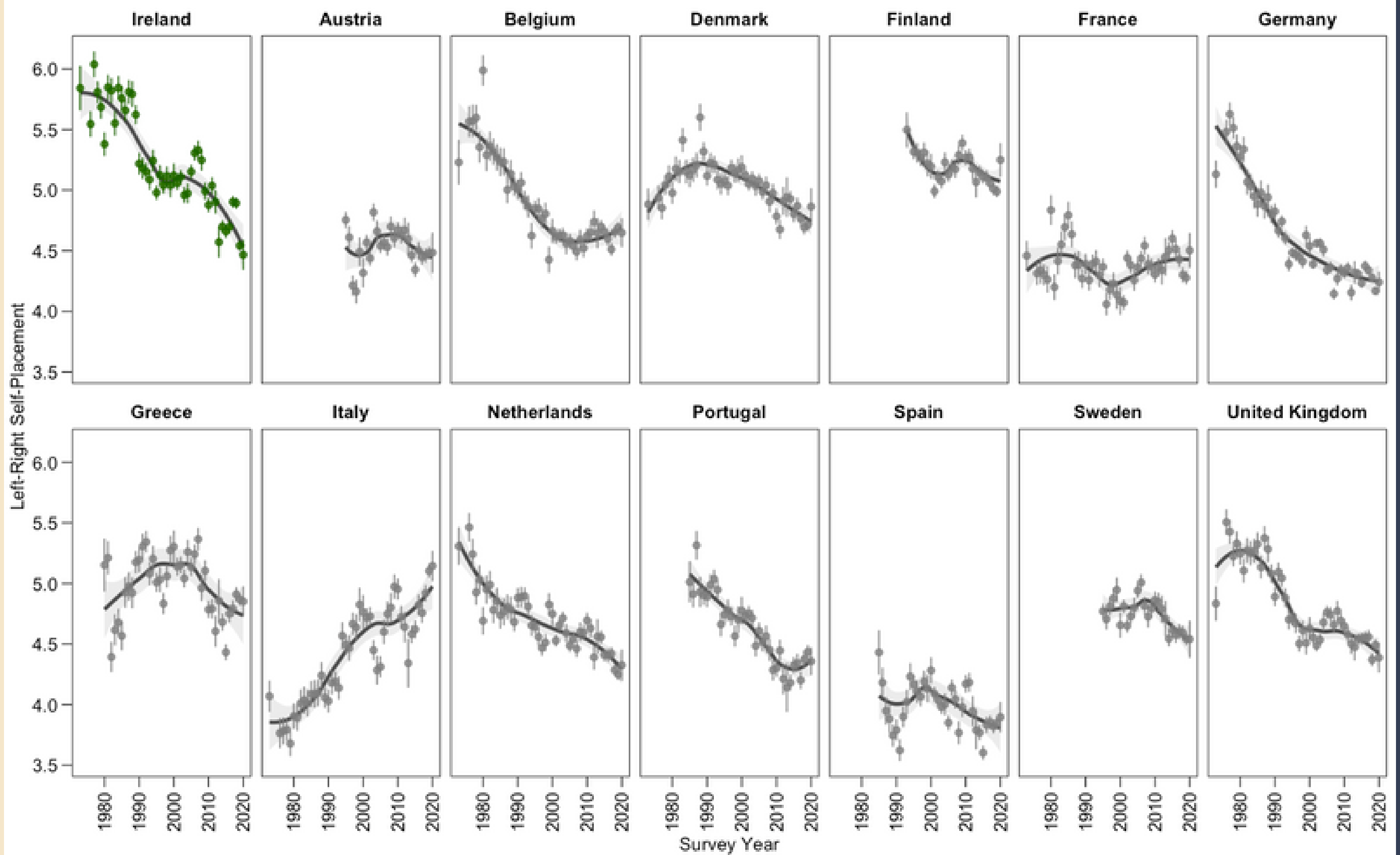


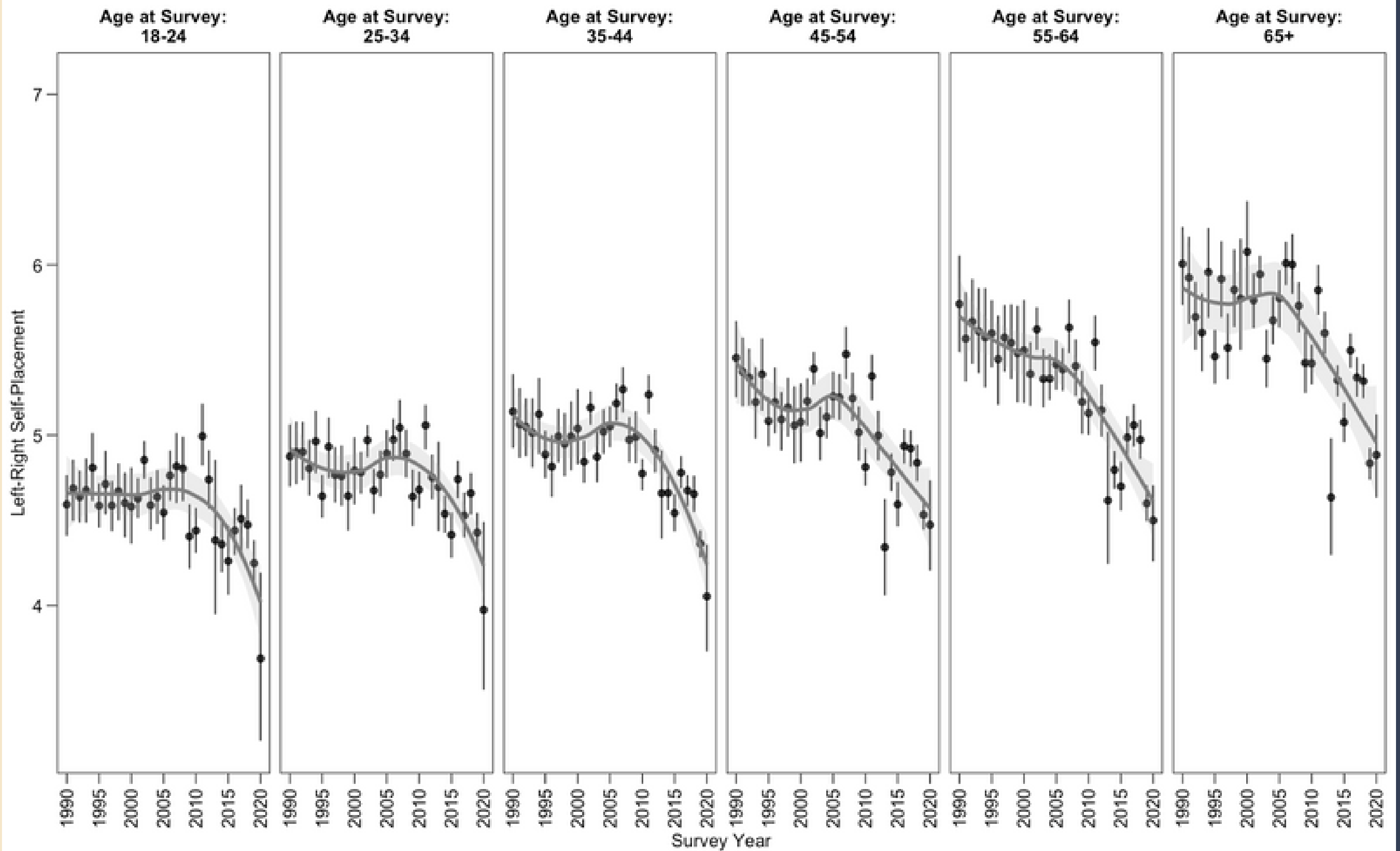
This graph shows how voters placed themselves on a scale, as to the left or right, politically, which has been calibrated here as from 0 (left) to 10 (right). The time span ranges from 2002 to 2020. The top two parties are almost identical in their positioning (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael), and the next three parties are also almost identical in their positioning, though slightly more to the left (Labour, Greens and Sinn Féin). Finally, the last two parties are the furthest to the left, and they are new parties (Social Democrats and Solidarity PBP). There are no right wing parties. The authors point out from the start that, traditionally, "the two dominant centrist and centre-right parties".



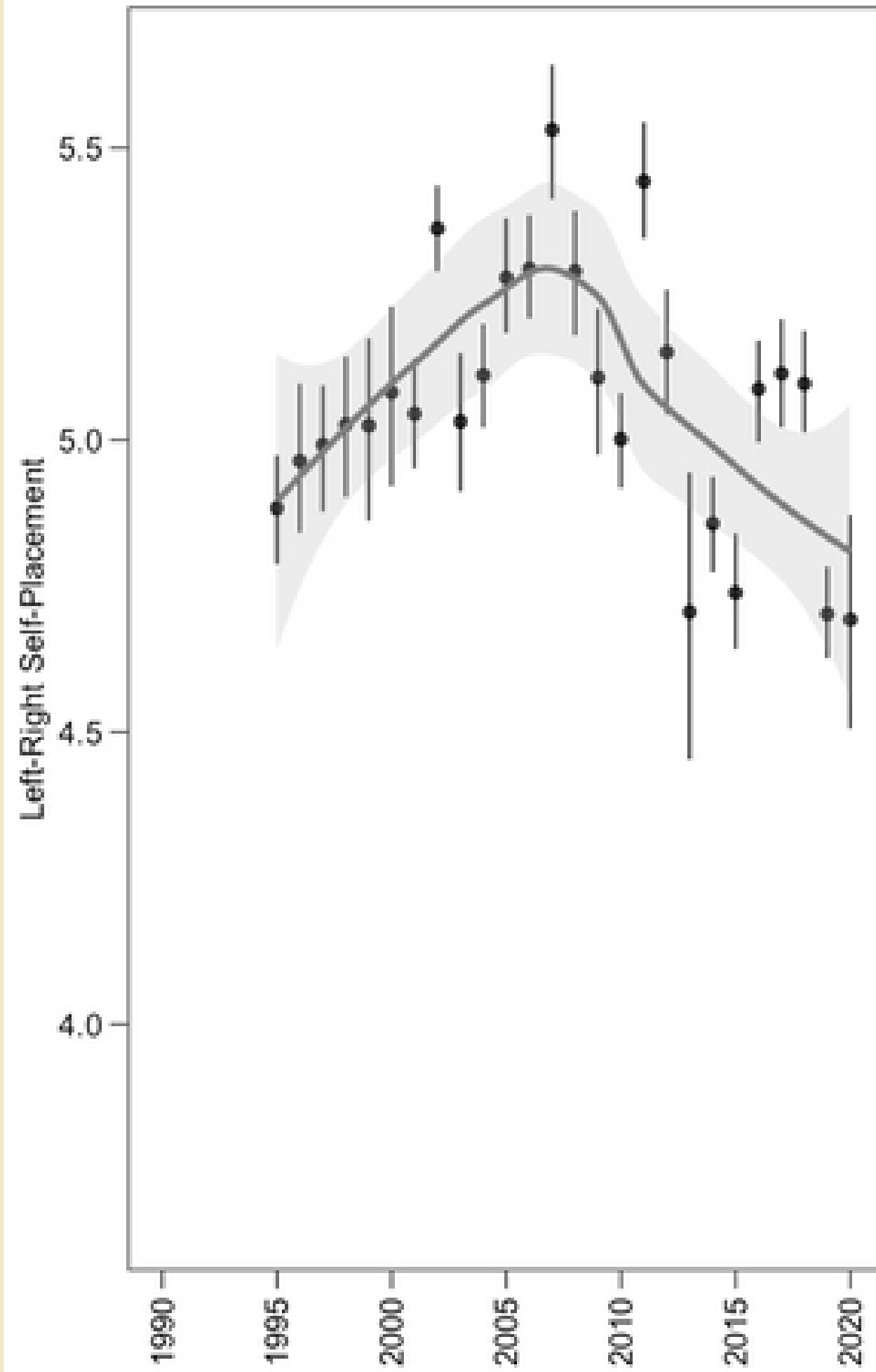




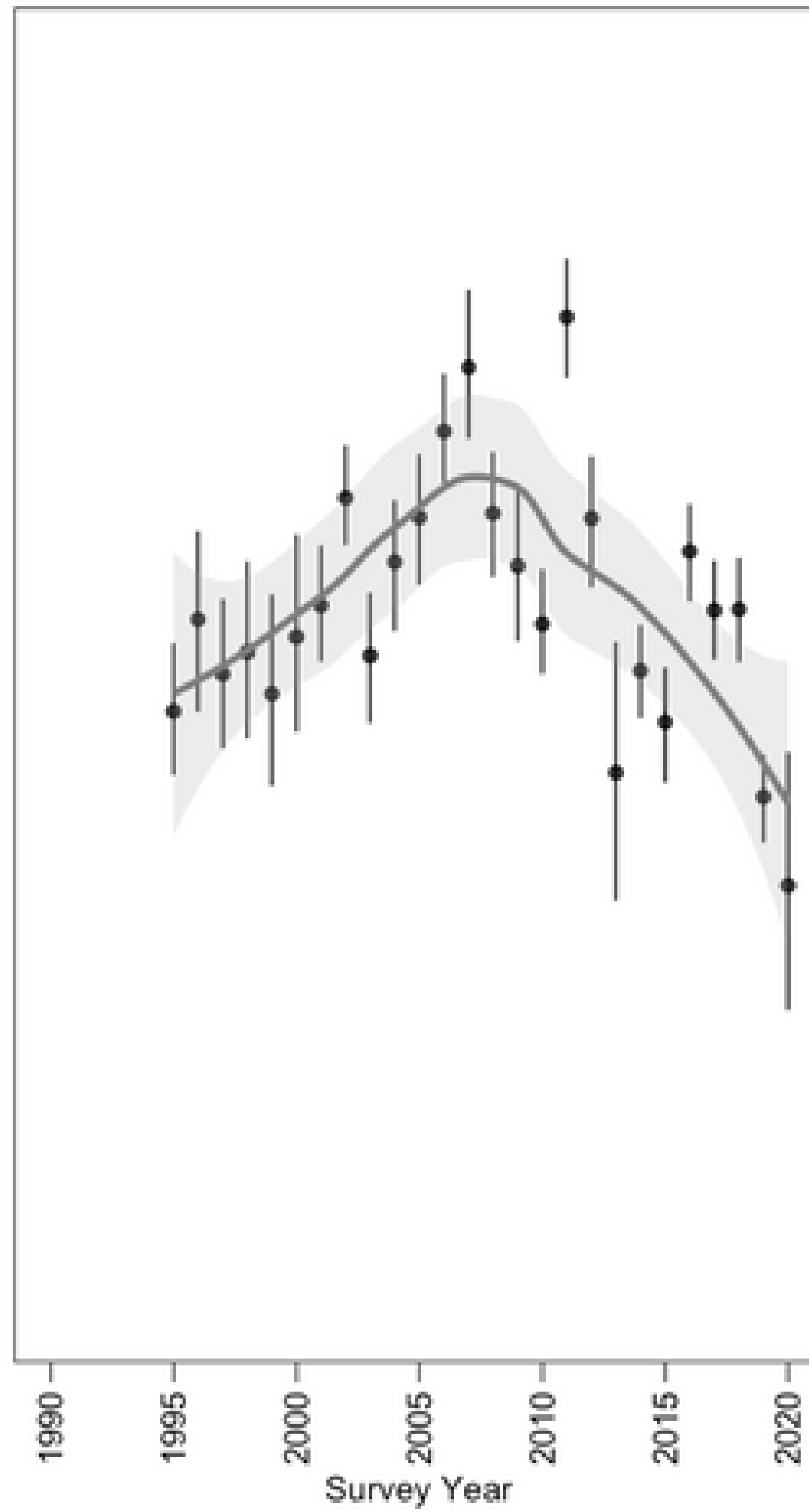




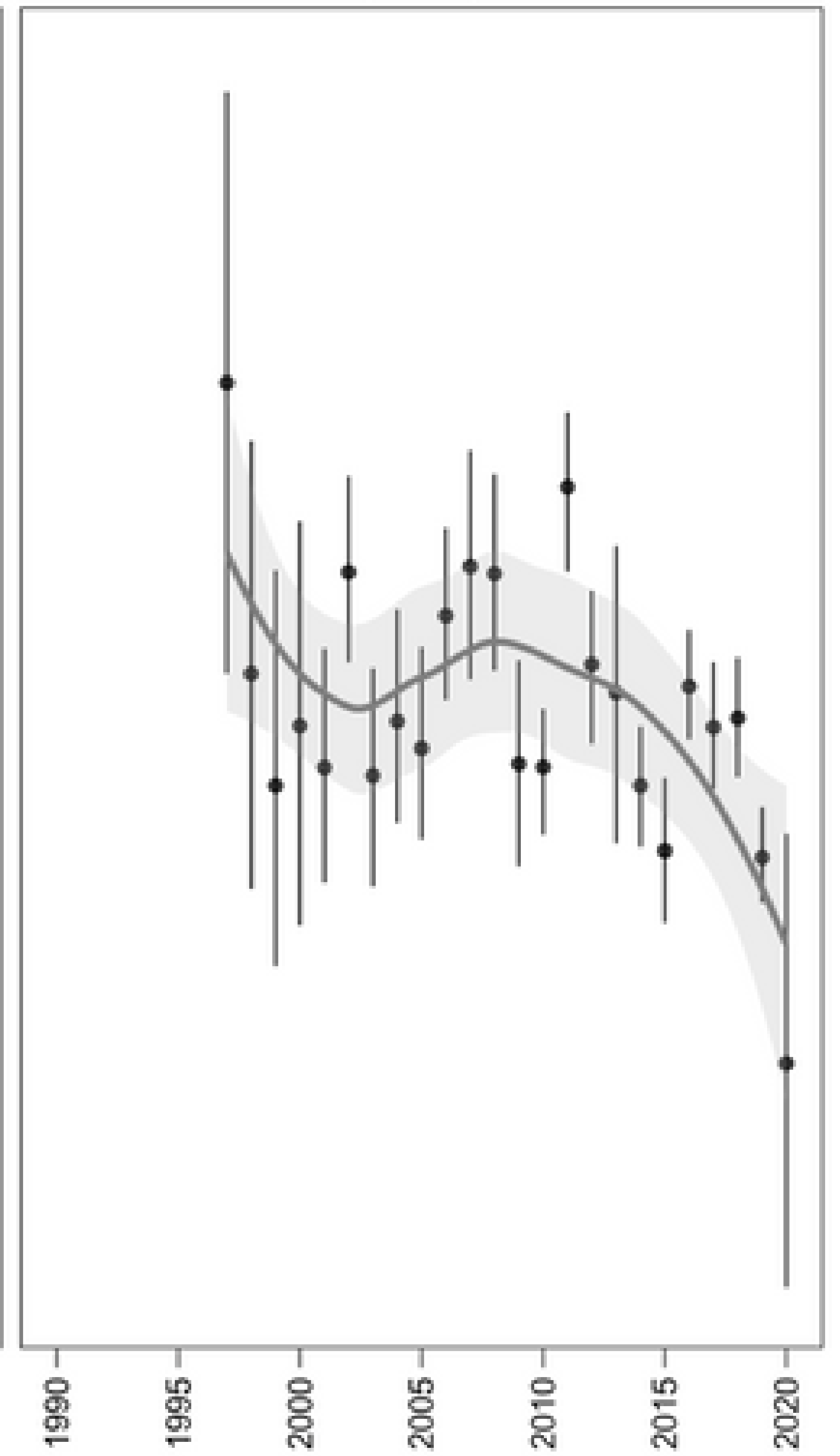
1945-1964
(Boomers)



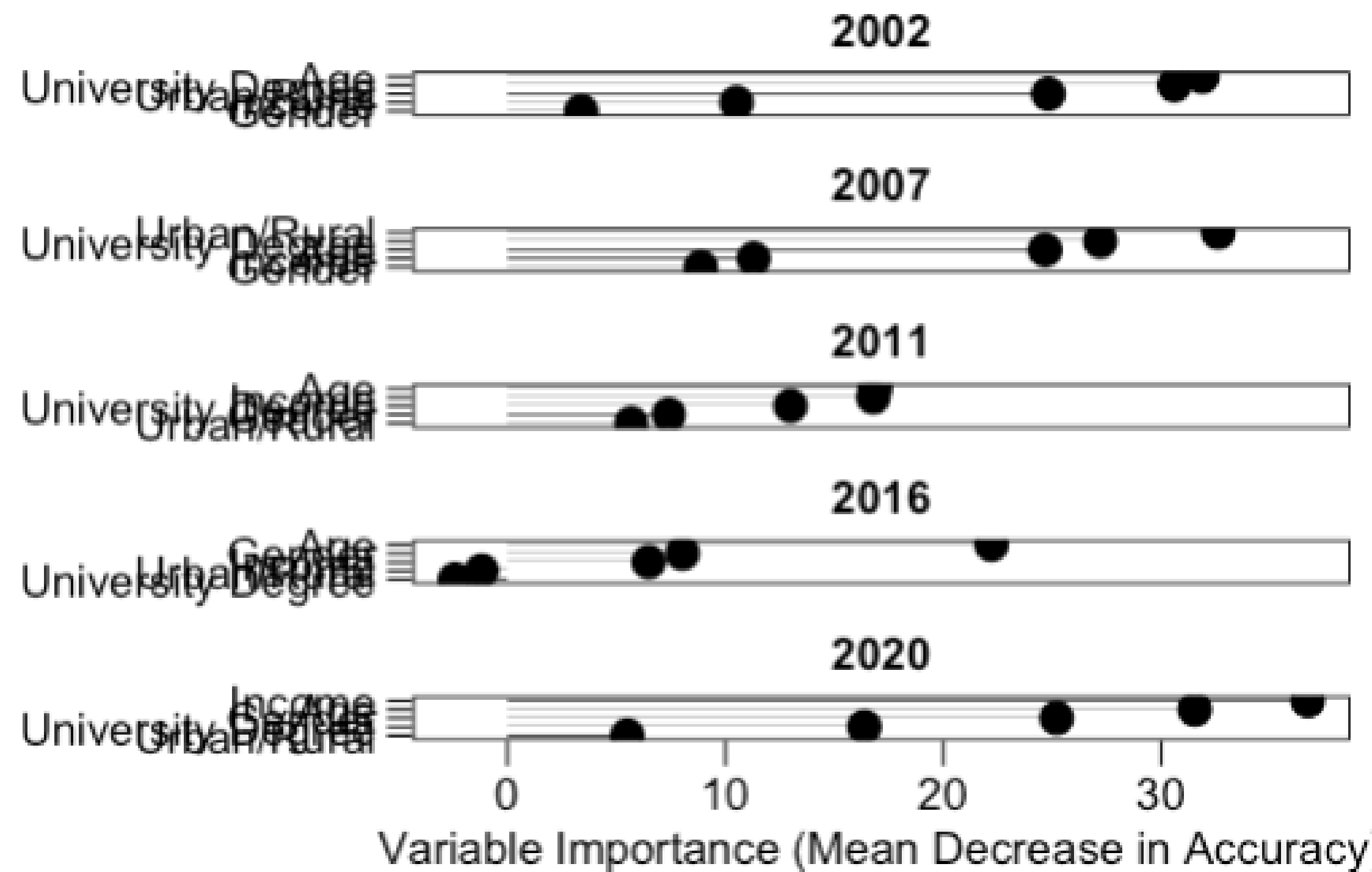
1965-1980
(Gen-X)



1981-1996
(Gen-Y)

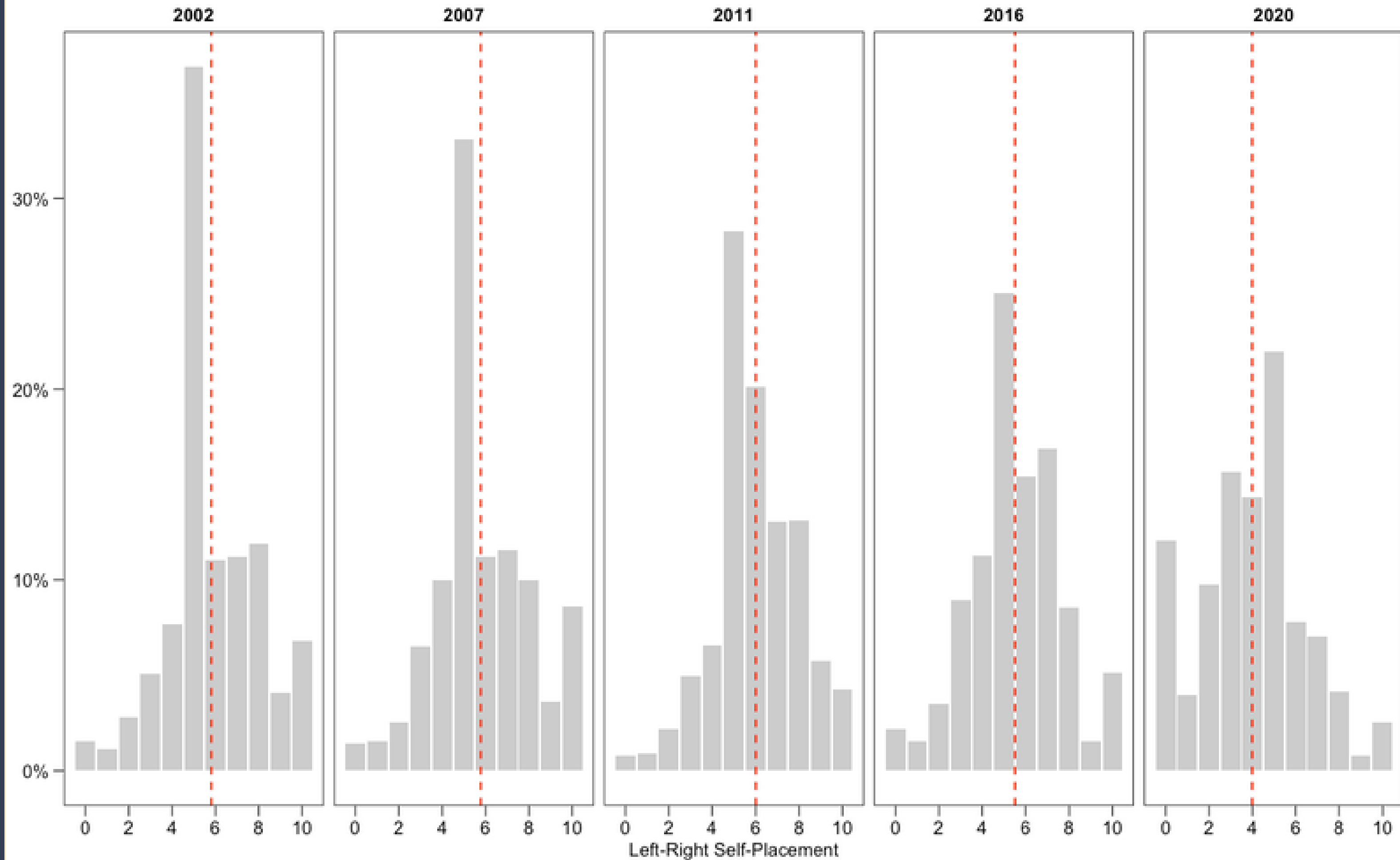


RESULT



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo.

Conclusion



ARE IRISH VOTERS MOVING TO THE LEFT?

It definitely seems so. From the introduction, the authors place the move within the context of the 2008 recession and the following decade of austerity. "Irish politics has experienced significant social change. This is observable in both electoral politics, and within social movements across civil society."

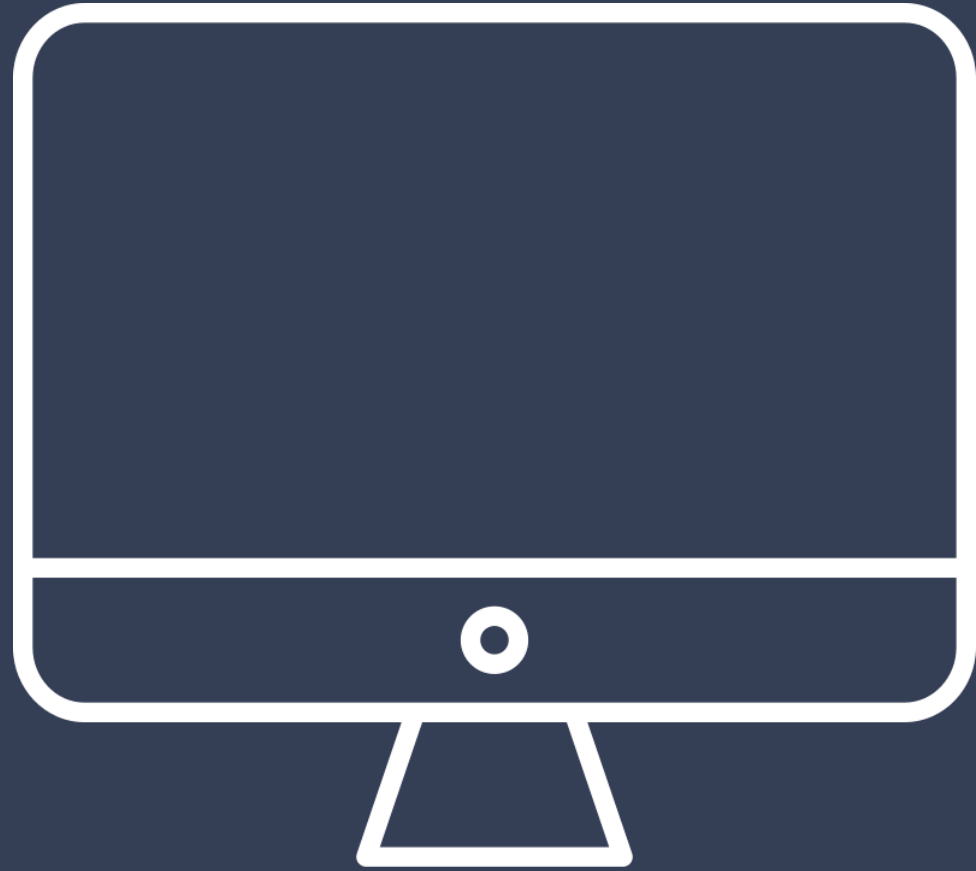
This period culminated in the two dominant political parties failing to win a majority in the 2020 elections, and entering into a grand coalition together, for the first time.

"One issue that clearly shaped the 2020 election was unequal access to housing (Elkink & Farrell, 2020b). Sinn Féin won more votes among those voters who cited housing as the number one issue facing Ireland than Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil combined. Sinn Féin also won more votes among the under 35s than Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil combined (Figures A1–A3). Unequal access to housing has been found to increasingly influence electoral politics within advanced capitalist democracies (see Ansell, 2019; Chou & Dancygier, 2021).



Housing: a major Under 35s: Move away from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil





Duplication

The paper is well written and well supported. It took time to find and download all the correct data, and it took time to go through the very lengthy code. The findings of the paper were backed up by the data. There were some elements I had trouble getting to work, but on the whole it ran very well.

I found this to be an exceptionally well written, researched and coded paper.

THANK YOU

