Comparing Political Systems

Political Parties

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Plan of the lecture

In this lecture, I will discuss different questions of political representation. To do so, I will:

1. show some patters of political representation in Europe.
2. introduce the idea of cleavage and develop the idea of how cleavages triggered different party systems.
3. review some political consequences of cleavages.

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Political representation in Europe

Party systems in Europe

1. Party systems are the political structure around which electoral competition is organized.
2. Research of party systems first focussed on explaining single-member or coalition governments (Duverger). However, *Sartori (1976),* uses ideology to make an important distinction: systems of moderate pluralism vs. systems of polarized pluralism.
    2.1 **Moderate pluralism party systems**: Characterised by large number of parties capable of generating stable coalitions along ideological lines.
    2.2 **Polarized pluralism party systems**: They are systems also with large number of parties which include anti-system parties on the extremes of the ideological axis. This system generates unstable governments and tendency to move towards the center.

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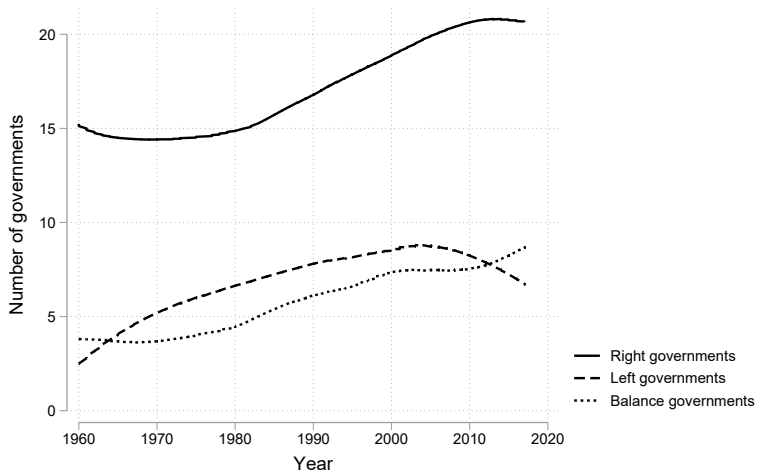
Number of parliamentary parties

Source: Comparative Political Data Set 2020 - https://www.cpds-data.org/
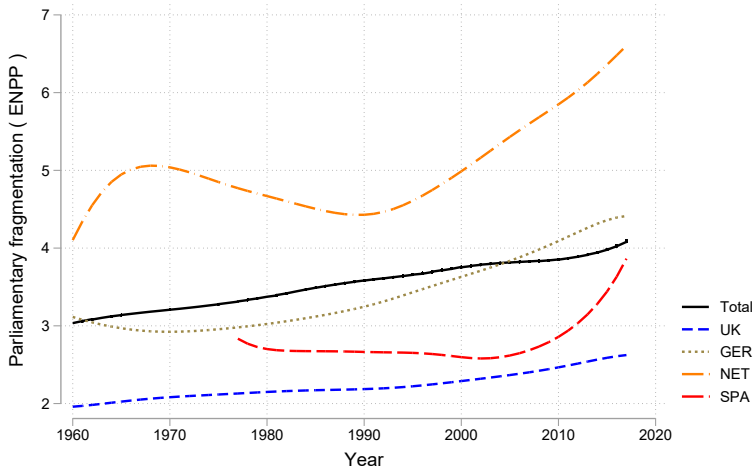
Number of parties in government

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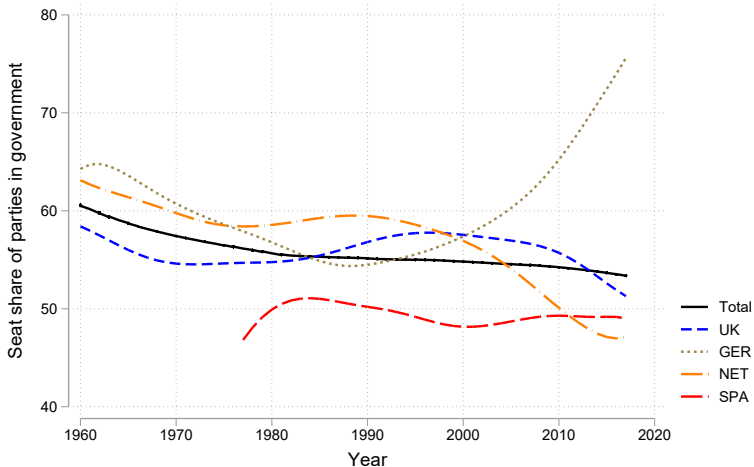
Ideology of government

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Patterns of political competition

1. Overall, parliamentary fragmentation has increased in Western democracies since 1960.
    1.1 The rise in the number of parties has been more evident in PR countries that in countries using majoritarian electoral systems.
2. Higher parliamentary fragmentation, however, has resulted in different government compositions:
    2.1 In some countries (Germany, Austria), grand coalitions have become normal.
    2.2 In most countries, governments have become weaker in terms of parliamentary support.
3. Ideology is probably the most decisive factor explaining political competition.
    3.1 Since 1945, there has been more conservative than socialdemocratic governments.
    3.2 There has been few cases of governments dominated by center parties.

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The Left-Right competition

1. Traditional support for the Left comes from the working class mostly.
2. Traditional support for Right comes from middle/upper classes.
3. Beyond the importance of social classes, political competition also depends on:
   3.1 Religion: religious vs. secular conservatives
   3.2 Modernization: rural vs. industrial population
   3.3 Culture: regional and linguistic issues.
4. Internal disputes
   4.1 Left: Socialist and Communist more likely to fight than cooperate (historical reasons)
   4.2 Right: Moderate and Far-Right unlikely to cooperate (but there are exceptions in Spain, Austria and Norway)

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Parties of the Left

1. Social-Democrats (currently with decreasing support)
2. Communists (currently with increasing support)
3. New Left and Greens (Increasing or retaining support)

Graph of the Left
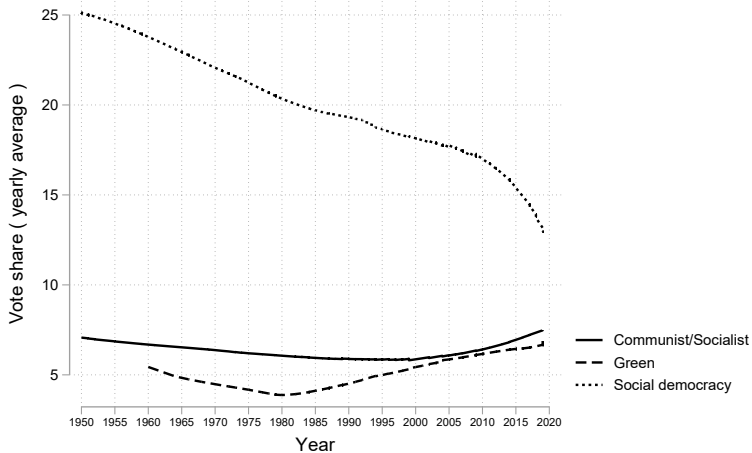
Source: ParlGov Dataset - https://www.parlgov.org/
Vote share calculated using yearly averages

Parties of the Right

1. Christian Democrats (Decreasing support but strong in Germany)
2. Secular conservatives (Declining support)
3. Liberals (Stable support)
4. Agrarian parties (Increasing support but stronger in Central Europe than in WE)
5. Far Right (Increasing support)

Graph of the Right
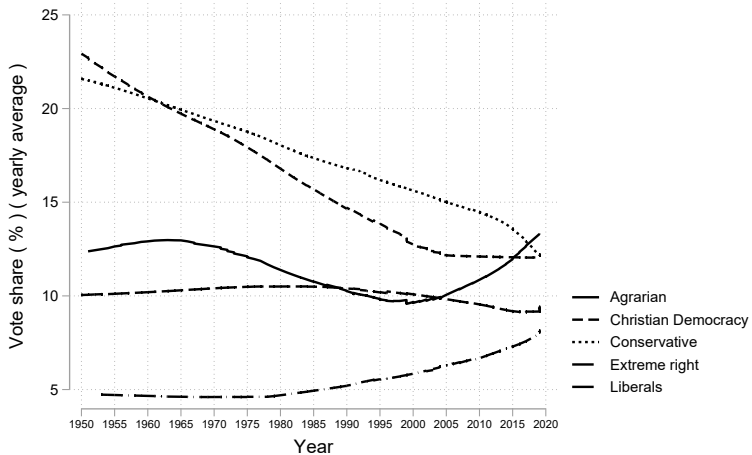
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Traditional patterns of intra-family competition

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   1.1 Strong and united Left (Austria)
   1.2 Divided and Strong Left (Italy)
   1.3 Weak Left (Luxembourg)
2. Countries where secular Right is strong
   2.1 Strong and united Left (UK)
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3. Countries where Right is fragmented (not necessarily weak)
   3.1 Strong support for social-democratic parties (mostly Scandinavia)

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Socioeconomic cleavages in Europe

Definition of cleavage

1. *Bingham Powell (1976)* offers a narrow definition of cleavage:
    1. "Political cleavage means an objective demographic division, such as class, ethnicity, or religion, in which particular membership categories are **strongly associated with a particular political party.**" (p.2)
    2. This definition links the intensity of support of a given individual who lives in particular structure of political cleavages.
        2.1 **Strong partisans:** "Individuals whose demographic group identity are all commonly associated with the same party." (p.3). *Example: Working class individuals and support for social-democracy.*
        2.2 **Weak partisans**: "Individuals for whom one group membership is commonly associated with one party, while a second membership is associated with another party..." (p.3) *Example: Individuals from a politically active region voting for a nationalist/regionalist party in regional*

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Definition of cleavage

- Other scholars - Gallagher, Laver and Mair - offer a broader definition of cleavage based on the following features:
    1. **Social division:** People should be distinguished from one another in terms of social-structures characteristics. However, political divisions do not reflect cleavages.
        1.1 A cleavage refers to, for example, the distinction between Catholics and Protestants in a country or between workers and employers.
    2. **Collective identity:** The collective identity must also be a source of mobilization. The strength of the identity defines the saliency of the cleavage.
    3. **Moral divisions:** Attitudes towards role of individuals in society can also generate a cleavage. Think for example of feminism or LGBT rights.
    4. A cleavage needs to be **expressed in organizational terms**. Cleavages needs instruments to channel their demands. For example, trade unions, parties, churches or chambers

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Why focusing on cleavages?
The birth of modern party systems.

1. Territorial, cultural or socio-economic cleavages are important concepts as they have been used to explain the birth of models of political representation in Western Europe.
2. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argued that the processes by which modern nation-states were created and, the consequences that emerged from the industrial revolution drove the formation of modern party systems.
3. Each of these two fundamental events shaped significantly the political structure of the nation.
4. The resulting cleavages "froze" into particular party systems. And these party systems shaped electoral dynamics when mass democracy emerged.

Two conflicts generated four distinct cleavages:

1. Conflicts emerging from the process of building nation-states.
2. Conflicts resulting from the Industrial Revolution.

Lipset and Rokkan (1967): Traditional cleavages

1. **Center-periphery**
   1.1 Originated when nation-states were forged. Center$\Longrightarrow$ seeks standards within territorial boundaries.
   Periphery$\Longrightarrow$ preserve their autonomy and independence
2. **Church-state**
   2.1 It refers to the relationship between authorities of state and church.
3. **Rural-Urban**
   3.1 It refers to the allocation and management of resources in these two distinct settings. (Conflicts between farmers and city dwellers)
4. **Social Class**
   4.1 The most salient cleavage for decades. It refers to the social structure of society and the different views embedded in it to manage economic and political resources.

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   1. Within boundaries of new nations, conflict between groups seeking to harmonized laws (center) and those defending independence and privileges (periphery).
   2. Outcomes of those conflicts:
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2. **Church vs. State cleavage**
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   2. Outcomes dependent mostly on past relation with Rome and strength of Protestantism.
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      2.2 Cleavage persists in countries with long Catholic tradition (Spain, Ireland, Italy…).
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2. **Social class cleavage**
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    2. Two ways the conflict was resolved:
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Lipset and Rokkan (1967) - From conflicts to party systems.

The way in which these conflicts were resolved, "froze" into the party systems of each country for the following reasons:

1. Underlying conflicts persist and as a consequence groups developed a collective identity.
2. Mass democracy, full suffrage, reinforced the activation of cleavages.
3. Evolution of electoral systems reinforced existing cleavages in particular social-class and center-periphery.
4. Electoral competition pushed parties to adopt strategies to exclude their voters from conflicts beyond their interests.

Cleavages and political outcomes

The role of ethnicity

- Bingham Powell published in 1982 his famous book *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence*
- In this book, Powell analyzed he relationship between social and economic cleavages and democratic performance in 29 established democracies between 1958 and 1976.
- One of the dimensions that he analyses is the impact of ethnicity on political stability. His logic is that given that ethnic cleavages are not permeable, the greater the saliency of ethnicity in a country the worst the performance of a democracy.
- Powell finds convincing evidence pointing at a relationship between stability and ethnicity: the more ethnically fragmented, the less stable a democracy is.
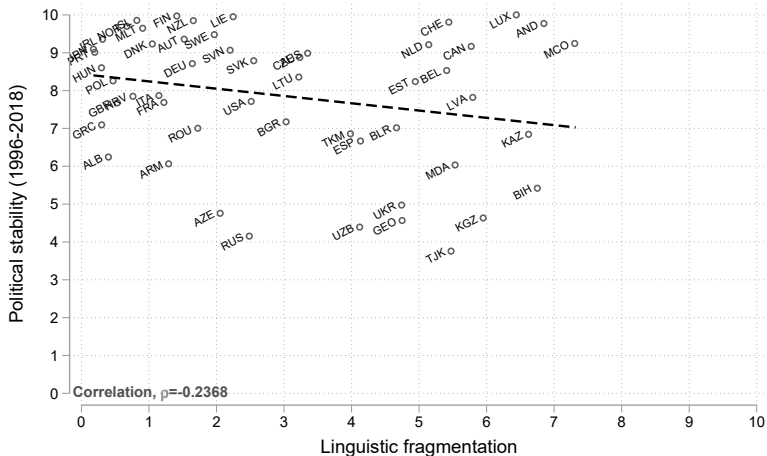
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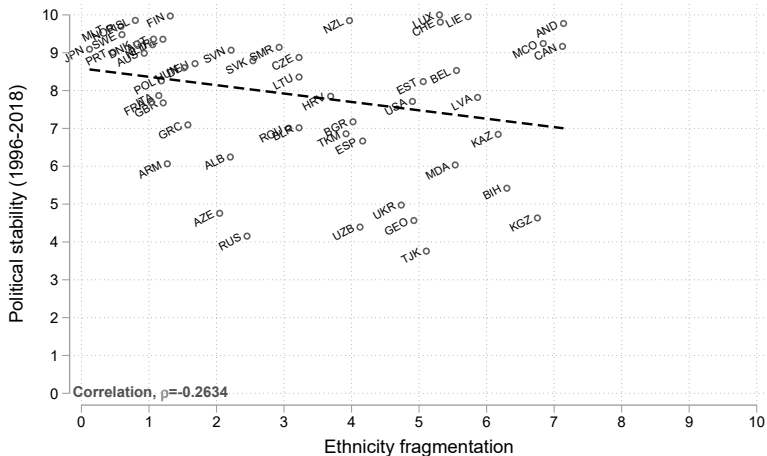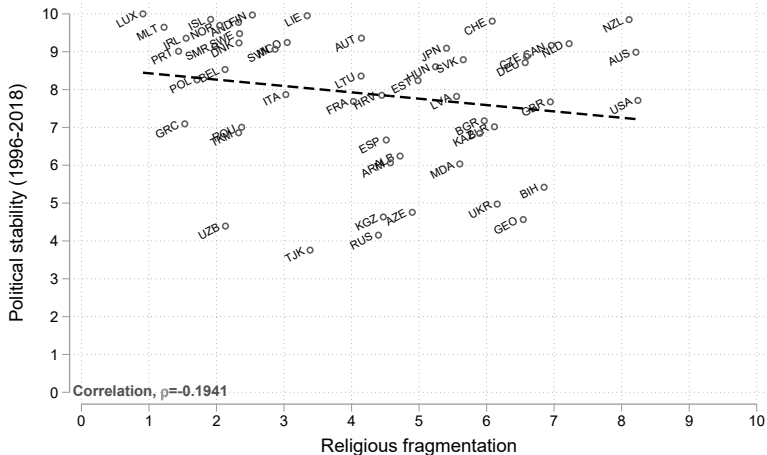

Source: *Quality of Government* - https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data
Political stability is measured as year mean in period 1996-2018

Ethnicity and political stability: Language

Y-axis: Political stability (1996-2018)
X-axis: Linguistic fragmentation

Correlation, ρ=-0.2368

Source: *Quality of Government* - https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data
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Ethnicity and political stability: Religion

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Cleavages and political outcomes - the role of inequality

- According Powell, inequality is a source of political instability. Why?
    - Unequal distribution of resources is a natural source of conflict.
    - Better-off social classes may have more resources to dominate the decision-making process and exclude low classes from it.

- Powell's main working hypotheses is democracies with higher levels of social inequality should produce less stability and less political participation.

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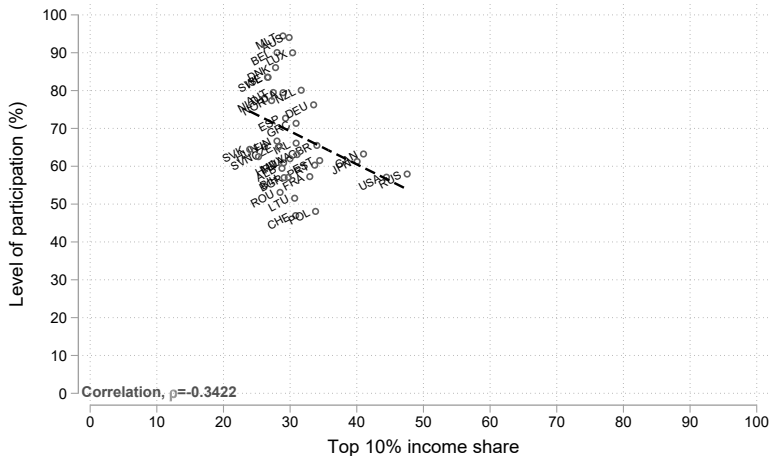
Source: *Quality of Government* - https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data
Variables are measured as year mean in period 1996-2018

Inequality and participation
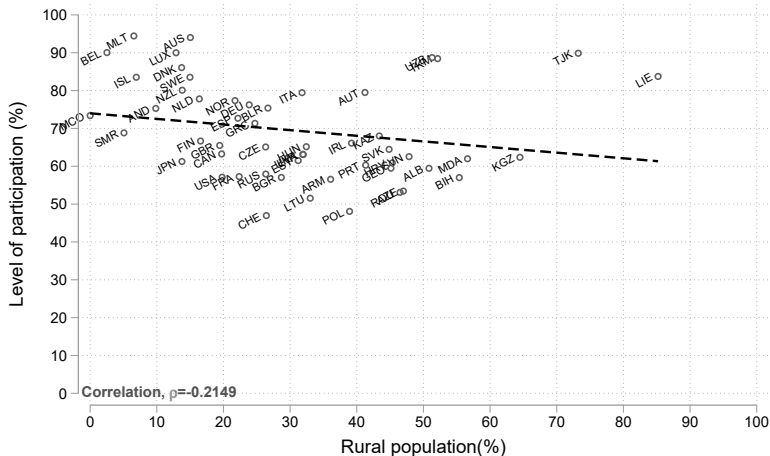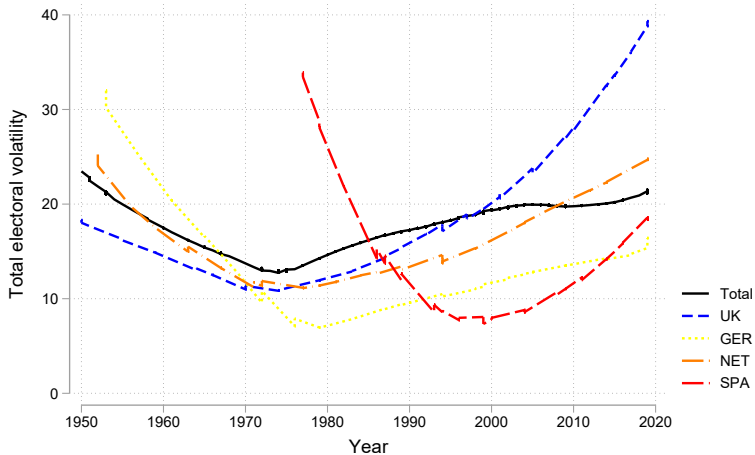

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New cleavages?

Change of paradigm since 1970?

Source: ParlGov Dataset - https://www.parlgov.org/
Volatility is calculated using Pedersen (1982)

Evolution of ideology
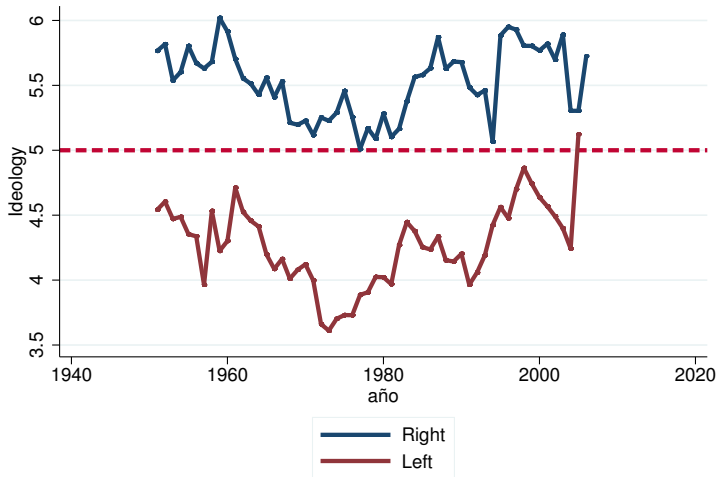
Source: Maravall 2013

Changes in social-structures

1. Surge of service sector as a new dominant class and decrease of agriculture and industry sector.
2. New class boundaries.
   2.1 Increase in education $\implies$ higher social mobility.
   2.2 Decrease of manual workers.
   2.3 Increase in relative affluence.
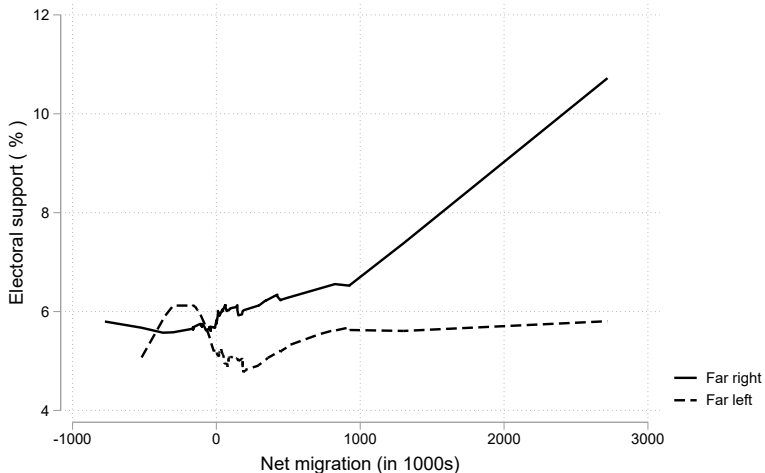   2.4 Importance of immigration.

Changes in voting behaviour

1. Voting still along class lines? Importance of religion?
2. Some reasons to understand such changes:
    2.1 Societies becoming more secular. Religion not playing important role.
    2.2 Higher level of education $\implies$ More sophisticated voters.
3. Possible dealignment with traditional parties.
    3.1 Decrease in party ID.
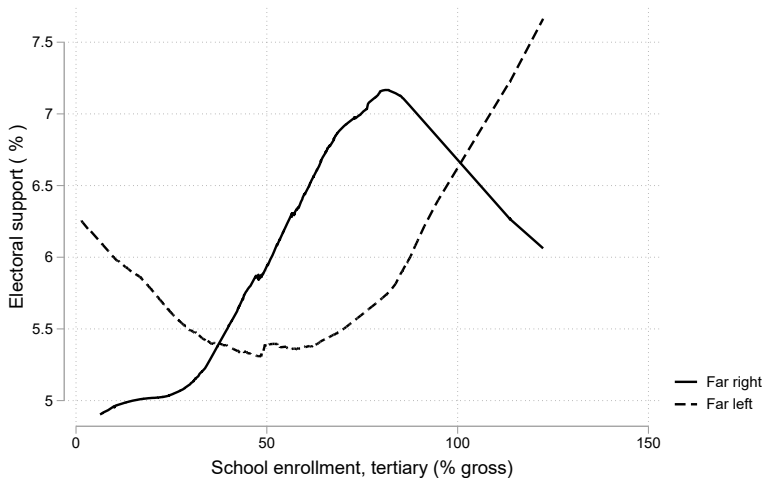   3.2 Increase of new parties.

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New cleavages and new parties?

Electoral support (%) vs Net migration (in 1000s)

- Far right
- - - Far left

New cleavages and new parties?

Source: *ParlGov Dataset* - https://www.parlgov.org/ and *Quality of Government* - https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data

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Towards a new party system realignment?

- Globalisation as a process of increasing economic interdependence may explain recent political changes

- A consequence of globalisation is that in order to reap benefits of economic interdependence, governments make institutional concessions that may reduce their room for implementing suitable policies.

  - **Job security**
    1. Workers whose jobs are more at risk are demanding more redistribution.
    2. Governing right committed to fiscal discipline while governing left little room to manoeuvre because of globalisation.
    3. The role of immigration is also important here especially among workers with unskilled occupations.

  - **Attribution of responsibilities**
    1. A consequence of globalisation is that identifying who is responsible for what becomes a difficult task.

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    2. Governing right committed to fiscal discipline while governing left little room to manoeuvre because of globalisation.
    3. The role of immigration is also important here especially among workers with unskilled occupations.

  - **Attribution of responsibilities**
    1. A consequence of globalisation is that identifying who is responsible for what becomes a difficult task.

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