

Negative and Positive Partisanship in Ireland



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Background

- Voter-level phenomena:
 - Decline of partisanship (dealignment) in advanced democracies
 - Broader research agenda on erosion of mass-elite linkage (e.g. Mair)
 - But Ireland a peculiar case in European partisanship theory
- Recent transformations of the Irish party system
 - New parties with clear ideological platforms (e.g. IFP; Aontu)
 - New divisive issues have entered political debates (Environment, European integration, immigration)
 - Emergence of a clear Left-Right divide (polarisation)
- Comparative evidence that elite behaviour affects mass attitudes
 - ➔ top-down political effects

Negativity and the “dark side” of partisanship



- Negative bias: Default attitude towards unknown objects, stickier than positivity (Baumeister et al. 2001)
- Increased scrutiny into the role of negativity in voting behaviour:
 - Negative Partisanship (Medeiros and Noel 2014; Ridge 2020)
 - Out-group derogation (Iyengar et al. 2012; Reijlan et al. 2019)
- **Negative Partisanship:** "stable aversion to a political party", can be expressed towards multiple parties
- **Out-group derogation:** Tendency to view a social group (e.g. partisan) in disfavour.
- Most arguments based on intergroup behaviour and **affect** (Social Identity Theory) but role of ideology and competitiveness not discounted



Research questions

What are the recent trends in positive and negative partisanship in Ireland?

Who are Irish voters negative towards?

(To be done: What effect does negative partisanship have on political behaviour?)

Slide 4

Ro1

Maybe cut this? I can already see us being behind time at this point. It could be picked up in the conclusion

Rory.Costello, 2025-10-16T12:35:52.720

K1 0

ok!

Kevin.Saude, 2025-10-16T13:06:55.668

Data and measurement

NEDS GE 2024 INES 2002-2020	Which Candidate VAA 2024 ^{Ke1}	European Election Studies 2024
F2F + online samples, post-election Negativity measured from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PTV (=0)• Like-dislike towards parties• Like-dislike towards party leaders (0-10)	Online sample, pre-election Negativity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dichotomous: "Party particularly disliked and would never vote for"	Online (but previous waves mix of online, Phone, F2F), post-election Negativity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PTV• Like-dislike towards party supporters

Slide 5

Ke1

[@Rory.Costello] What the precise question wording?

Sample size?

Kevin.Saude, 2025-10-16T07:15:26.191

Ro1 0

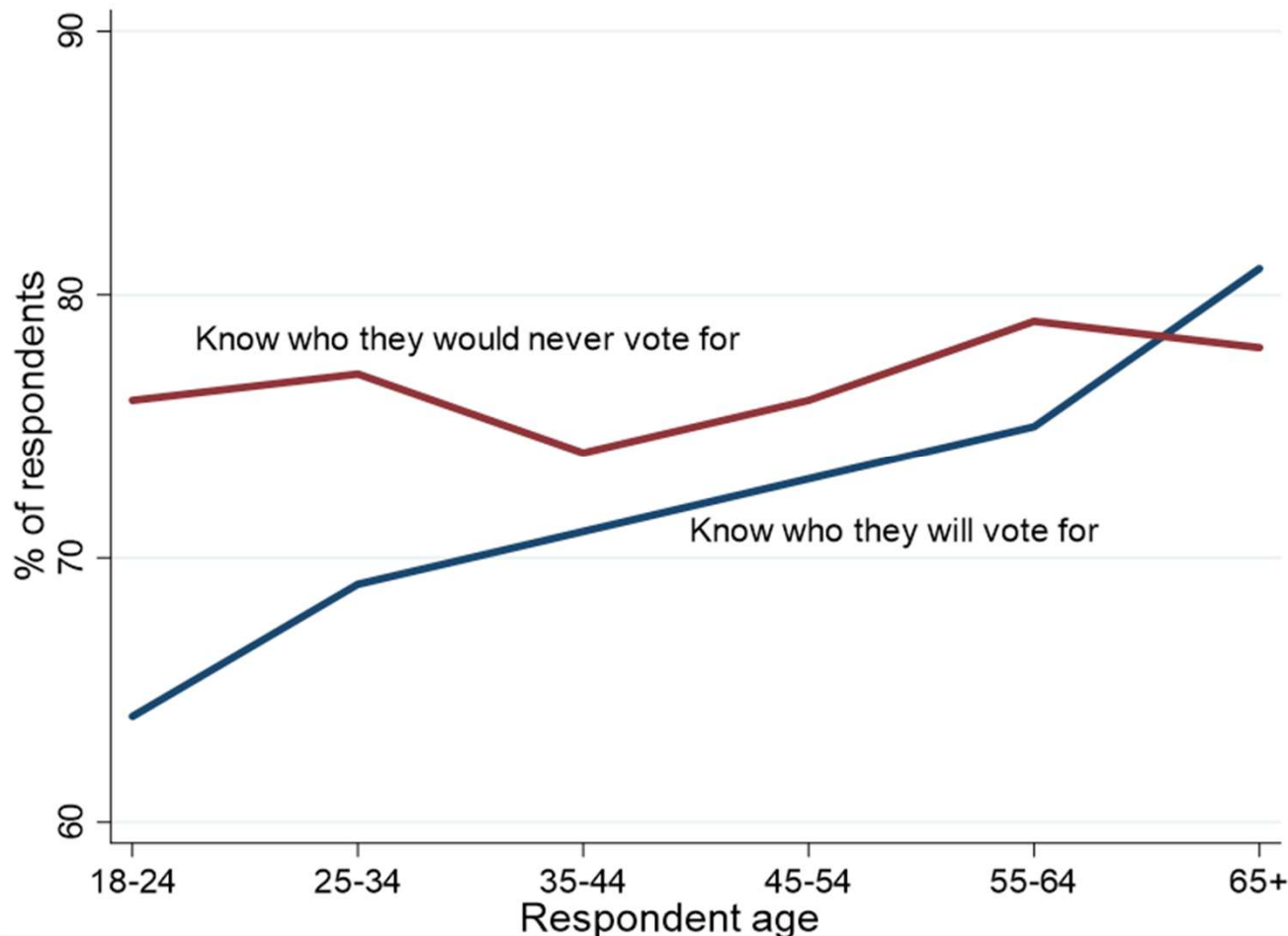
The question was:

"Are there any parties that you particularly dislike and would never vote for?"

The sample size was 114,500

Rory.Costello, 2025-10-16T09:26:08.425

High level of negative partisanship across age groups



WhichCandidate pre-election survey
N=114,000

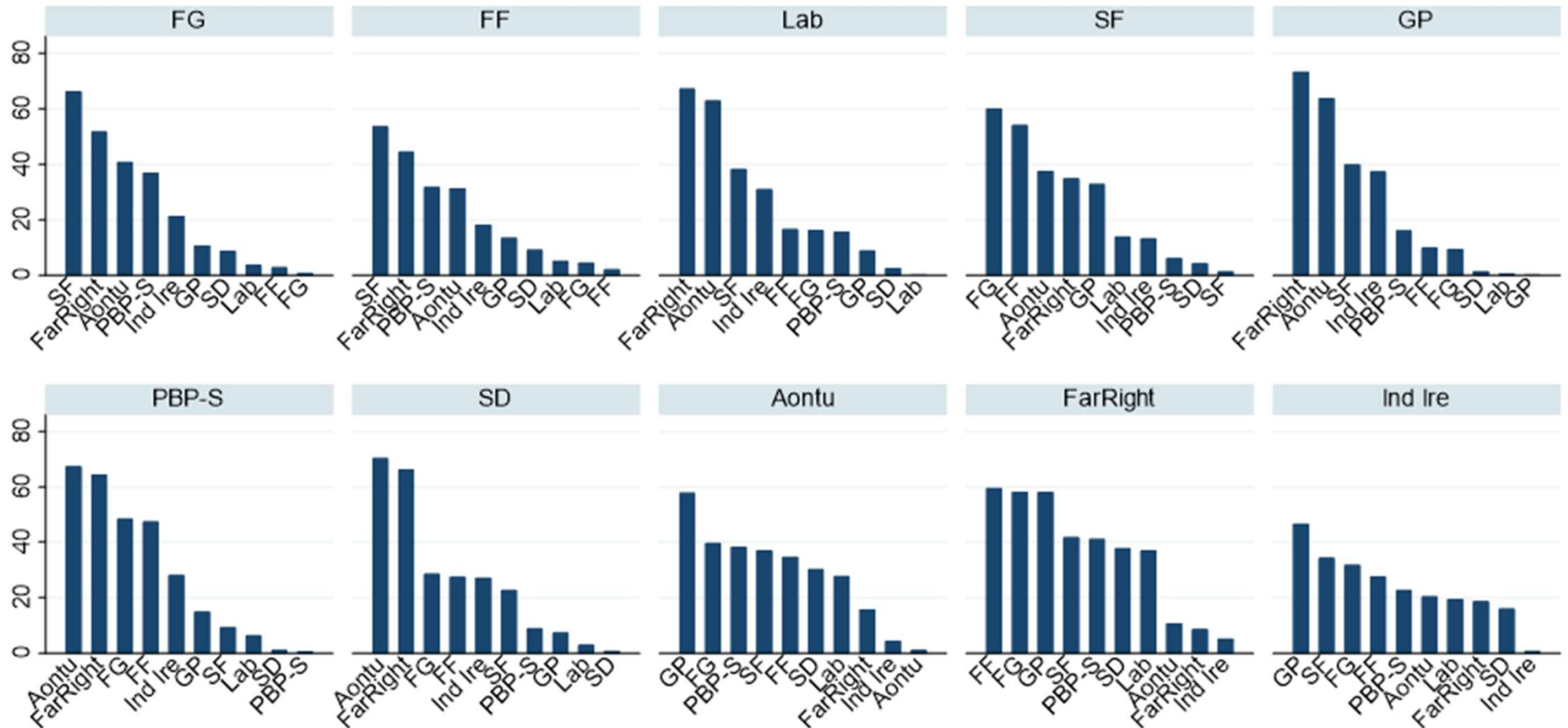
Q1: At the moment, who do you think you will give your 1st preference vote to?

➤ % Decided

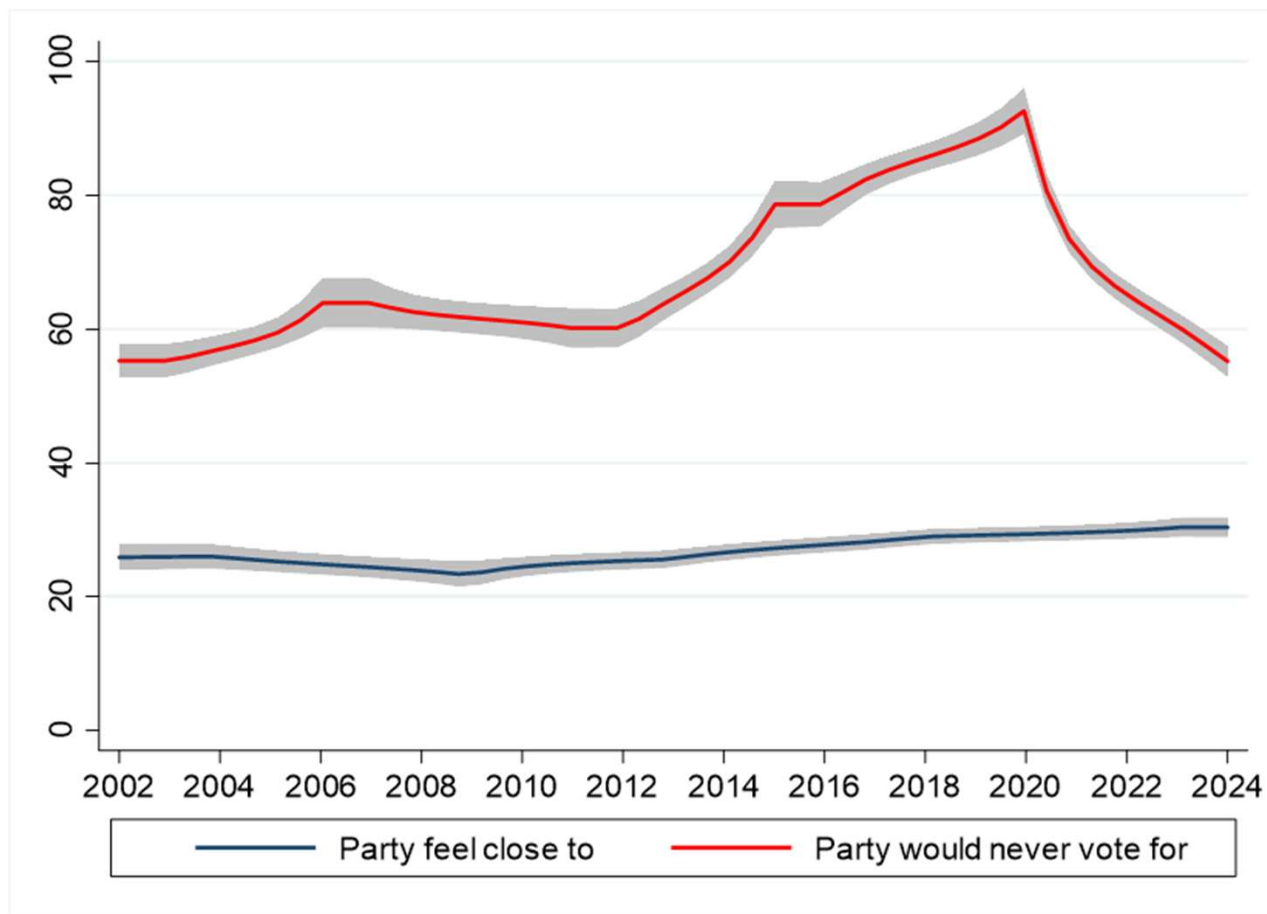
Q2: Are there any parties that you particularly dislike and would never vote for?

➤ % selecting one or more parties

Breakdown of negative partisanship by party voted for



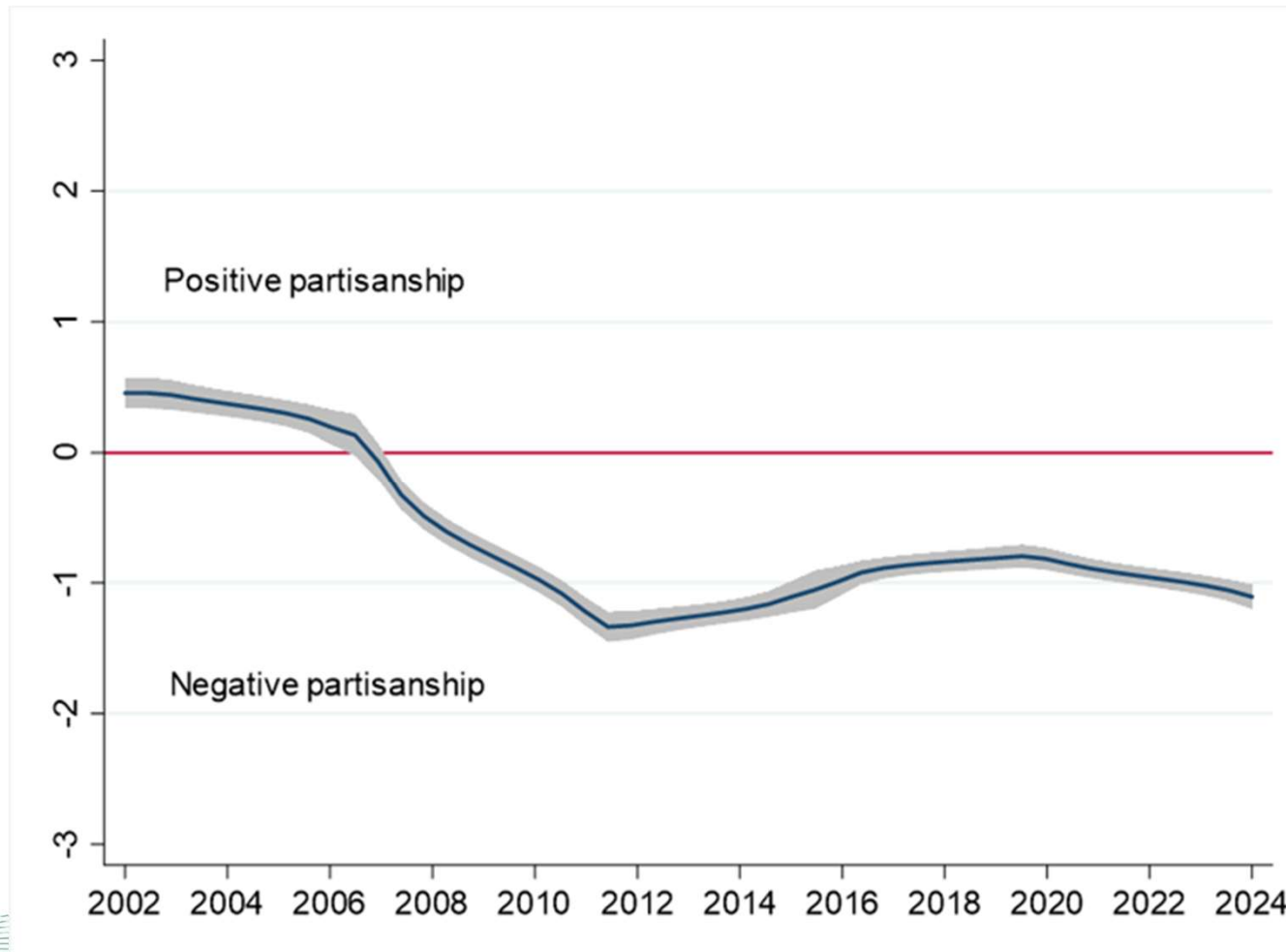
Positive and Negative Partisanship over time (1): Feeling close to a party vs knowing who you would never vote for



Data: INES/NEDS
surveys 2002, 2007,
2011, 2016, 2020, 2024

'Never vote for'=placing
party 0 on 'probability to
vote' scale.

Positive and Negative Partisanship over time (2): Intensity of like/dislike for most favoured vs least favoured party

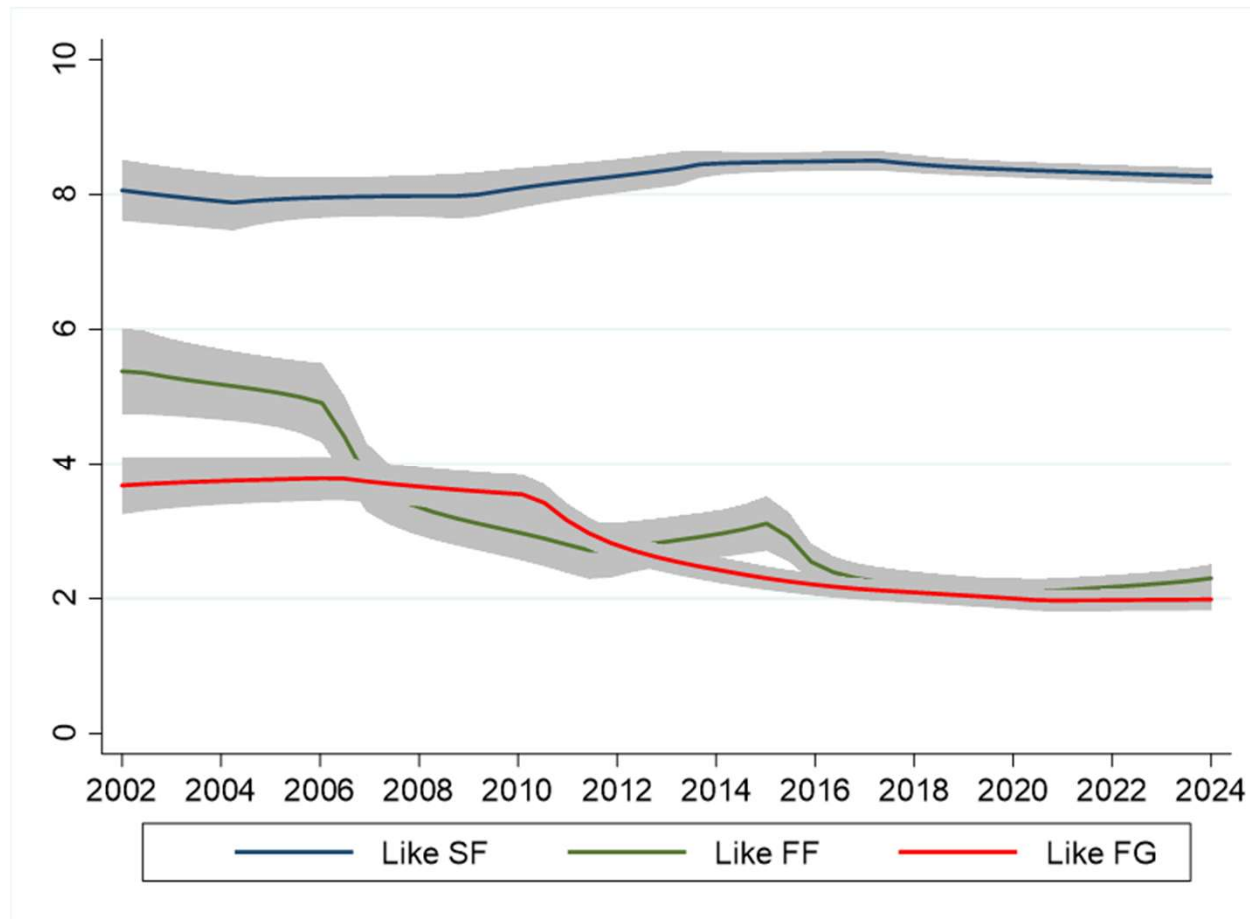


Data: INES/NEDS
surveys 2002-2024

Positive
partisanship=like most
favoured party more
than dislike least
favoured party.

Negative
partisanship=dislike
least favoured party
more than like most
favoured party.

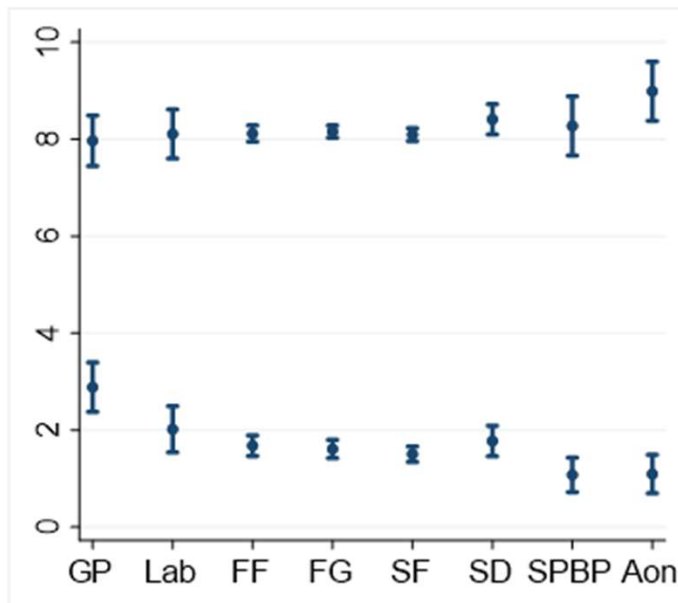
E.g. - Sinn Féin voters' views of SF, FF and FG



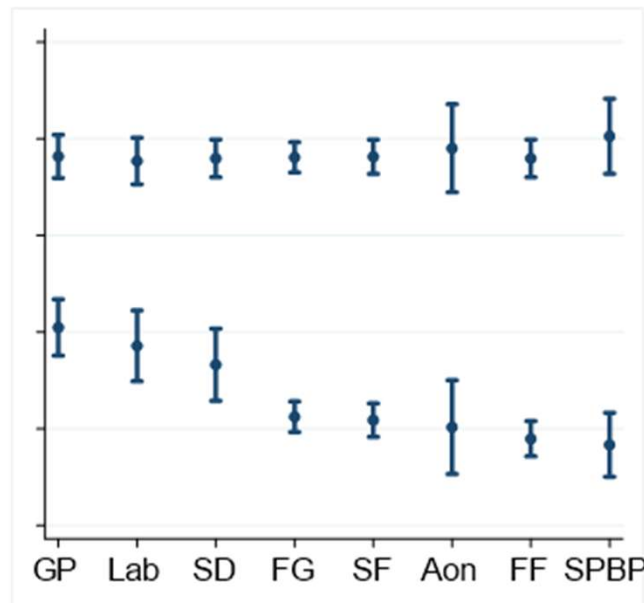
What are voters positive or negative towards?



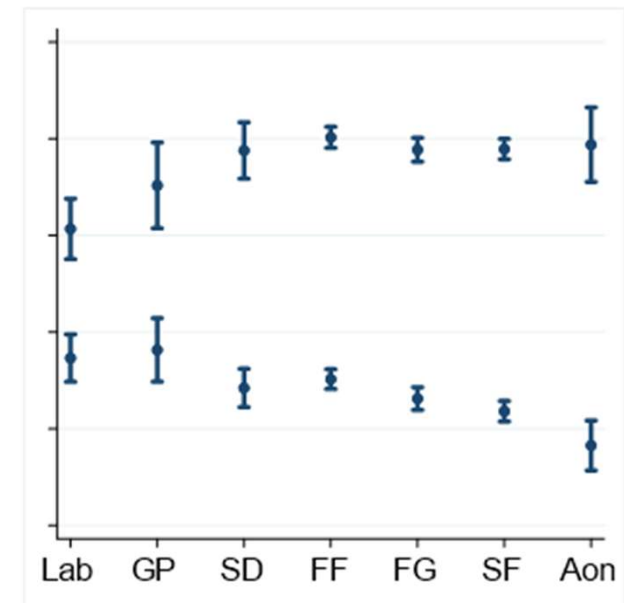
Like/dislike: Party



Like/dislike: Party supporters

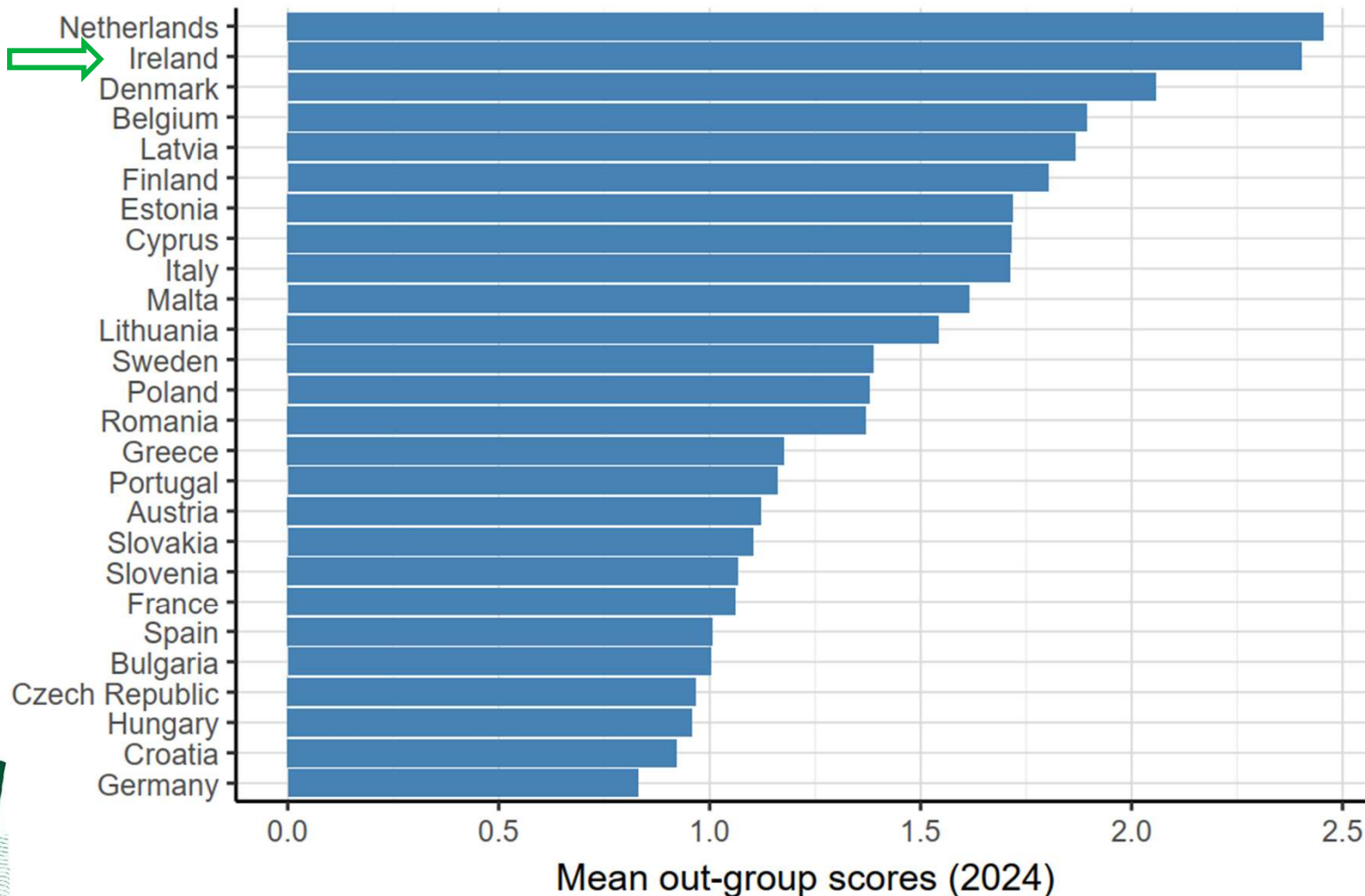


Like/dislike: Party leaders



Bars show the mean score on like-dislike scale for the party the respondent voted for, and for the respondents' least favoured party.
Data: NEDS GE 2024; NEDS EU/local 2024; EES 2024

Mean lowest dislike score towards out-groups in the EU (2024)



Data: EES 2024

Mean lowest out-group score based on like-dislike towards party supporters (0-10)

In-party = EP vote choice

Conclusions and future analyses



- Negative partisanship (strong dislike of a party that you would never vote for) more widespread than positive partisanship
 - Despite low levels of positive partisanship, Irish voters are not unanchored
 - Two main patterns to negativity: FF/FG vs SF; Lab/SD/GP/PBP vs Aontu/far right
 - Negative partisanship appears to have grown over time, while positive partisanship remains stable
- Downside of negative partisanship: can also signal polarisation, particularly if the negativity extends to supporters of that party.
 - Significant differences between parties in the extent to which voters dislike supporters of other parties
 - But Ireland comparatively very low on cross-partisan hostility
- Next steps:
 - Do negative attitudes drive electoral decisions?