Analysis of the impact of geographical provenance and income in political positions in the European Values Study 2017-2021 Dataset

INTRODUCTION

The research we intend to conduct within this short paper aims to see which political fractures polarize European societies. The starting point of our research is the political cleavages theory, which accordingto the definition given by Ceccarini and Diamanti can be summarized as "a particularly strong and prolonged conflict that has become embedded in the social structure and tends to polarize the political space". (Ceccarini & Diamanti, 2017). The critical fractures theorized by Lipset and Rokkan can no longer explain the divisions within western societies. Over time, many theories on the changing political space have been proposed: Ford and Jennings proposed one related to the cultural and social changes of European populations. They argue that "the geographical distribution of party supporters is not random (…) it creates a new critical fracture due to the polarization of people living in different areas: the young, educated and ethnically heterogeneous in the big cities, sharing liberal values. On the other hand, older, less educated and ethnically homogeneous, who share a more conservative view" (Ford e Jennings, 2012). So, the first point of our analysis will concern the effect that geographical location has on political placement. Secondly, we will analyze the effect the recent economic crisis has had. This fact potentially increased the support for populist and extremist parties over the years. "The rise in inequality is believed to be a major source of what has been labelled neonationalism. According to the current narrative, the more unequal economic resources are distributed, the greater the appeal of such extremist views" (Dorn et all, 2018). On an empirical level, recent national elections across Europe have seen a trend of rising support for right-wing populist parties (ISPI online publication).

We approached this study in parallel with our colleagues. After a meaningful discussion, we decided to investigate different social fractures as they focused on the relevance of education and job position on political placement. Given these conditions, we can make these hypotheses that will guide our research:

H1: People living within large cities have a greater propensity to vote for left-wing and progressive parties.

H2: People with low incomes have a greater propensity to embrace extremist ideas.

H3: Regardless of the size of the city in which one lives, the share of people who identify with right-wing ideas has increased over the years.

DATA AND METHODS

To try and answer the research questions we used the EVS dataset from 2017-2021. The variables examined were the following:

1- v102**:** which indicates political self-placement. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to answer this question: "In political matters, people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. How would you

place your views on this scale, generally speaking?" It was initially formulated on a scale from 1 (left) to 10 (right). We recoded this variable in three ways: the first (leftright5cat) by constructing 5 categories (left, center-left, center, center-right, right). We decided to keep five categories instead of three to see the attitudes of the extreme positions. The second variable (bipol1) splits in two categories the answers, concentrating both left and right extremist positions into one ("Extremist") and the most moderate and centrist answers in another one ("Moderate"). These two variables are used to create the contingency tables to answer the first and second hypotheses. The third variable (lrplac) was constructedby simply putting null observations as missing.

2- v276_r: the size of town where you live. We recoded the variable (threedimensioncity) by grouping all towns under 20,000 inhabitants into small-sized center, all towns under 500,000 inhabitants into medium-sized center, the rest into big-sized center.

3- V261: Total net income. We recoded this variable (lmhhincome) by dividing it into three groups: Low (up to the third decile), Medium (up to the 7th decile) and High (the highest deciles).

4- Year: lastly, we had to recode the variable concerning the year of the interview, as the observations of 2019 were insufficient. We merged the year with 2018.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of a cross-tab analysis of the dimension of the place of living and the political placement of the interviewee. The tabulation shows how in Small-sized centers there is a higher concentration of right-wing identifying people (11.88% compared to the 9.87% and 9.84%), as well as a smaller share of Left and Center-Left supporters (10.03% and 16.56% each) compared to Big Sized (10.21% and 20.15% each) and MediumSized centers (10.51% and 19.33% each).
By running a Pearson Chi-Squared test, we can find enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no correlation between the size of the city and the political positioning with a 95% degree of confidence, due to the 0.0000% probability of finding different distributions. As we can see in Table 1, the value of χ^2 is 101.71.

TABLE1. Tabulation of Size of city and political placement

	Left	Center-Left	Center	Center-Right	Right	Total
Small-sized center	10.03	16.56	41.62	19.91	11.88	100.00
Medium-sized center	10.51	19.33	40.07	20.22	9.87	100.00
Big sized center	10.21	20.15	39.91	19.89	9.84	100.00
Total	10.23	18.04	40.83	20.02	10.88	100.00
Pearson Chi2 = 101.71 Prob = 0.0000						

The higher concentration of people who identify themselves in Right-Wing ideas in smaller centers is shown as well in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of political self-placement (on a left-right scale) in different sized centers

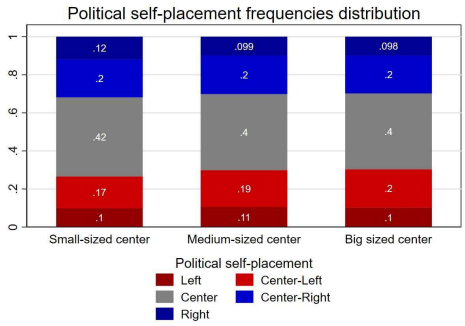


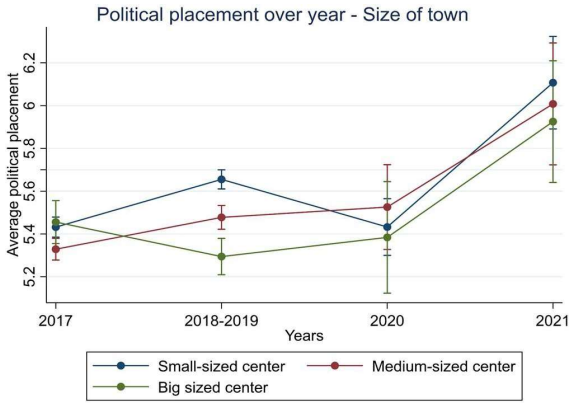
Table 2 shows a cross-tabulation of the Extremist and Moderate positionings among different income levels. We can see a rise in extremist tendencies as the income decreases (23.55% can be labeled "Extremist" among the lower incomes compared to the 20.36% in the middle incomes and the 16.84%in the higher incomes). The correlation is perfect: as income level increases, the tendency to identify as extremist decreases, and vice versa. We can reject a hypothesis of no correlation at a 95% confidence level due to the 0.0000% probability, while the χ^2 is 158.24.

TABLE2. Tabulation of income and political placement

	Extremist	Moderate	Total
Low	23.55	76.45	100.00
Middle	20.36	79.64	100.00
High	16.84	83.16	100.00
Total	20.57	79.43	100.00

Pearson Chi2 = 158.24 Prob = 0.0000

Figure 2. Time series of the evolution of political placement in the 2017-2021 years among different sizes of towns.



In Figure 2 we plotted the evolution of the average political placement (where lower values correspond to the left, and the higher ones to the right) per year among towns of different sizes. Every yearly average is adjusted for an error interval of 95%: the wider increase in errors for the 2020 and 2021 years is due to the smaller number of samples given in the dataset. However, we can identify a tendency for all the agglomerations to move towards the right-wing values, most notably for small sized centers. It is quite interesting to see the average trend in political positioning for "Big-sized center": in 2017 it was the most positioned to the right, but in 2018 it is positioned to the left compared to the other two groups. In the following two years it has shifted to the right, while remaining the most left-

wing group compared to the others.

Table 3 shows an ANOVA test run on the variablesinvestigated in H1. For all categories, we can reject the null hypothesis of no difference through time in the population at a 95% confidence level. The value of the statistical measure F is sufficientlyhigh for all three groups, especially for "Small-sized center" which is 24.7.

TABLE 3. ANOVA TEST - AVERAGE POLITICAL PLACEMENT PER YEAR

	n	sd	df	F	Prob > F
Small	21.276	2,34	3	24,17	0,0000
Medium	15.467	2,29	3	11,45	0,0000
Big	5.445	2,27	3	7,00	0,0001
	47.723,00	2,30	3	29,74	0,0000

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In conclusion we can say that our hypotheses can be confirmed: first, we have seen that there is a correlation between where you live and the relative political placement: the observations in the dataset show that the political positioning "center" has a homogeneous distribution, while if you live in large centers you are more likely to identify yourself as left or center-left than those who live in small centers. In contrast, those who live in small towns are more likely to identify as right-wing than others. Initiallyour idea was to identify large centers as "population centers of more than 1,000,000 inhabitants" but unfortunately the dataset did not allow us to have these data. It is probable that this type of division would have accentuated the relationship. Similar observations can be done for the other two hypotheses: on average, those with lower incomes tend to be more likely to be positioned at the extremes of political positioning. On the other hand, the average political positioning over the years hasshifted further to the right for all categories considered. The biggest limitation we found is the numberof observations: in the years 2017 and 2018 there was a consistent number, while for the other three years the samples were smaller, making it necessary to merge the 2019 observations with the 2018 ones. In the graph, this is shown by the wide confidence intervals for the years 2020 and 2021.

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