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ORCID:
NM: 0000-0002-6844-1641

New challenges for representative democracy: The changing political space in Western Europe

NICOLA MAGGINI

Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan “La Statale”
E-mail: nicola.maggini@unimi.it

Abstract. Globalisation and EU integration have reshaped political alignments in western Europe, with the emergence of new conflicts within a political space still ideologically structured in two dimensions (economic and cultural). However, recent challenger parties appear to question such alleged bi-dimensionality, e.g. combining anti-immigrant stances with progressive views on moral issues. In light of such challenges, the article aims to understand whether citizens' positions on policy issues can still be interpreted according to latent ideological dimensions, exploring possible differences across distinct party electorates and age groups (young vs. older people). The article analyses the ideological consistency of voters' issue preferences and the dimensionality of the issue space in seven western European countries through original survey data and scaling techniques. Results show that most citizens (especially young and right-wing voters) take ideologically inconsistent positions on cultural GAL-TAN and economic left-right issues, whereas are quite consistent on immigration and EU issues.

Keywords: voter issue preferences, ideological consistency, political space, generational differences, scaling analysis, survey data

INTRODUCTION

During recent decades, European democracies have been facing deep political changes at both the citizenry and party-system levels with the rise and success of new and/or anti-establishment nationalist parties and the emergence and politicisation of new issues related to the European Union, globalisation, immigration and climate change. These events are accelerating continuations of long-term processes. The individualisation of vote choices has weakened long-standing group loyalties. The development of the internet and online social networks is rapidly changing the formation and the dynamics of public opinion. Globalisation processes have transformed the economic landscape and reshaped political alignments, with the emergence of new conflicts (especially between the winners and losers from globalisation) in a political space still ideologically structured in two dimensions (economic and cultural). However, recent challenger anti-establishment parties appear to question even this alleged bi-dimensionality, e.g. anti-immigrant stances can be paired with progressive views on individual civil rights (De

Sio & Lachat, 2020). In other words, we might be experiencing a phase of ideological de-structuring (both in public opinion and in party supply). In the light of such challenges, the broad objective of this study is to gain a comprehensive and systematic understanding of whether and how models of the political space based on dimensionality can still describe issue stances among voters in western Europe or whether a deeper de-structuring of issue preferences is spreading among citizens, who then become open to innovative cross-cutting party platforms. In this regard, the type of voted parties (in terms of their ideological families) and birth cohort differences are the two variables to be considered in order to investigate thoroughly whether citizens' issue preferences differ in terms of the presence, type and level of ideological structuring. Answering these questions and the comparison between young and older people will inevitably provide (speculative) indications of future developments in European representative democracies. Indeed, as ideological orientations structure party choices (Thomassen, 2005), an eventual lack of ideological anchors among the young will be likely to make voting even more volatile in the long run, with potential implications for the quality of democracy and the stability of political systems.

The article is structured as follows. The first section briefly reviews the literature on the dimensionality of political space and introduces the hypotheses which will be tested; the second section presents the data and discusses the methodological approach; and the third section shows the empirical results and verifies whether the hypotheses are confirmed or disproved. First, it shows the findings of a scaling analysis to discover whether citizens' positions on issues can be interpreted according to broad latent ideological dimensions and whether there are generational differences in this regard; second, it analyses the preferences of main party constituencies on a variety of policy issues in seven western European countries, distinguishing between young people and older people; finally, it provides a systematic assessment of the ideological consistency of positions on policy issues through a consistency index of individual responses (averaged across countries, party constituencies and age groups) to determine an ultimate test of the hypotheses. The article ends with concluding remarks.

STATE OF THE ART, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), party systems emerged in Western European countries after a process of consolidation of the lines of political con-

flict, with the domination of a few social cleavages (cultural and economic) which ultimately coalesced around the class divide. Further developments in the 1970s led to a widespread pattern of electoral competition with two main rival parties (or party blocs) competing in a mostly unidimensional space (which is compatible with the key assumption of Downs's (1957) *Economic Theory of Democracy*), usually identified with a left-right continuum which is widely recognised among citizens (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989; Knutsen, 1995). It is, however, important to note that the left-right concept is a dynamic communication device subject to social negotiation (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989; Knutsen, 1995). Over time it has proved able to absorb new meanings (Dalton, 1984; Flanagan, 1982), thus preserving the unidimensional pattern of party competition. That age saw a "progressive-conservative" antithesis (Middendorp, 1978) between economic equality and cultural pluralism on the left and economic freedom and cultural uniformity on the right (Bobbio, 1994). This conceptualisation recognises that citizens' political attitudes can be organised on two main dimensions – socio-economic and cultural – but parties and their constituencies summarise their stances mostly along a single overarching left-right axis which divides economically and culturally progressive stances from economically and culturally conservative stances (Huber & Inglehart, 1995).

However, all these developments already suggested tension between a unidimensional framing of party competition (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989; Kitschelt, 1994; Lachat, 2018) and a bi-dimensional citizen attitude space (Grasso & Giugni, 2019). One dimension relates to issues of economic equality, dividing supporters of economic redistribution from supporters of *laissez-faire* economics (the traditional left-right economic distinction). The other dimension concerns issues of social order and cultural diversity and is based on the contrast between authoritarian and libertarian positions (Kitschelt, 1994). According to Beramendi and colleagues (2015), authoritarian-libertarian positions can be combined with concerns for group identity and diversity in an increasingly multicultural world.

In this regard, the debate about the cultural dimension differentiates scholars' positions: on the one hand, a group of scholars see this cultural dimension as contrasting post-materialist green, alternative and libertarian (GAL) positions with traditionalist, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) views (Inglehart, 1990; Hooghe et al., 2002; Bakker et al., 2012); on the other hand, the contrast is between "transnational" issues of "supranational integration" and "national demarcation" (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008), which have brought about new conflicts

(especially between the winners and losers from globalisation) which are politicised by new political entrepreneurs, but still in the context of a political space ideologically structured along two dimensions. New conflicts are mostly seen as redefining the meanings of these dimensions rather than challenging their structuring ability. In particular, the issues of immigration, political integration and globalisation have mostly transformed the cultural dimension into a new universalism-particularism dimension (Beramendi et al., 2015) rather than the economic dimension, because globalisation losers are mainly mobilised in identity-based terms (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008). Similarly, Hooghe and Marks (2018, p.109) identify what they refer to as a “transnational cleavage, which has as its core a political reaction against European integration and immigration.”

However, some argue that issues of European integration do not form part of the cultural dimension but constitute a separate dimension on their own (Bakker et al., 2012). Hooghe and Marks (2018) themselves suggest that although the transnational cleavage is highly correlated with GAL-TAN (such as in the cases of nationalism and global warming regulations), not all issues that are encapsulated in GAL-TAN are necessarily part of it (for instance issues of authority and law and order). In this regard, Kitschelt (2013) distinguishes this new divide from the libertarian-authoritarian elements of the GAL-TAN dimension and suggests an alternative three-dimensional model that comprises an economic left-right dimension, a libertarian-authoritarian dimension and an identity-based dimension. This recognises that the cultural dimension hides inner multidimensionality which has turned out to be more and more politically relevant. Indeed, recent challenger parties appear to question the alleged bi-dimensionality of the political space. Anti-globalisation stances are often decoupled from conservative moral views (see Mélenchon regarding France), while – see, e.g., the Dutch Party for Freedom – anti-immigrant stances can be paired with progressive views on individual civil rights. In other words, we might be experiencing a phase of ideological destructuring (both in public opinion and in party supply). This process calls for a detailed analysis of the different issue preferences and related overarching dimensions usually associated with spatial representations (if any) of the political space.

For this purpose, the present study focuses on two sources of variation: party family and birth cohort. Indeed, previous research on party competition has highlighted how parties of the populist radical right or new/anti-establishment parties strategically combine a-ideological issue packages to expand their electoral

bases (De Sio & Lachat, 2020). Furthermore, like any process of change, political change is produced not only by opinion change, but to a large extent by generational replacement. In this regard, young people as such have less stable political views compared to older people and are more open to innovation (Franklin, 2004). Furthermore, young people of late 2010s have been socialised into politics in a historical period marked by the rise of new issues concerning immigration, EU integration, globalisation and the environment. Conversely, older people grew up in the period of welfare state creation and consolidation, which was predominantly marked by the economic left-right dimension of conflict. All this can affect the kind of ideological structuration of political views in different age groups.

Therefore, the following are the main research questions in this study. Can voters’ preferences on economic, cultural and transnational issues be still interpreted in terms of an overarching conservative-progressive ideological dimension? Are left-wing voters more ideologically consistent than voters for right-wing/anti-establishment/new parties? Do younger and older people differ in the ideological structuring of their political attitudes?

This study aims to answer these questions by relying on original survey data from a comparative project (Issue Competition Comparative Project–ICCP) which focused on party competition through the lenses of issue yield theory (De Sio & Weber, 2020) in a deliberate sample of western European countries.

In this regard, it is necessary to better clarify what I mean by ideologically consistent policy positions. Consistency can be evaluated according to three criteria. First, party supporters should take policy positions that are consistent with the party’s profile/policy platform, although we know that the policy positions of parties and those of their voters do not usually fully overlap because voters “think much less ideologically” (Achen & Bartels, 2002) and their opinions on issues are hence less coherent (and even contradictory). I label this party-voter consistency. Second, party constituencies’ stances on policy statements are consistent when they take the same direction within a specific policy domain (e.g. when they support mostly left-wing or right-wing goals on economic issues and not a mixture of both). I label this within-dimension consistency. Of course, voters can take within-dimension consistent stances that are inconsistent with party positions. Finally, in line with the conceptualisation provided by De Sio and Lachat (2020), consistency can be evaluated in terms of a classical twentieth-century progressive-conservative ideological alignment (Middendorp, 1978), which is used to summarise both the economic and cultural stances of parties and their

constituencies. In this sense, citizens are ideologically consistent when they take progressive (or conservative) positions across different issues and dimensions (economic, cultural and transnational). I label this across-dimension consistency. Although these three aspects of ideological consistency are all important and somewhat intertwined, the second and third elements are more relevant for my purposes, given the focus on the demand side of the political space.

The aforementioned ICCP project has documented that several parties and their constituencies are no longer characterised by consistent ideological attitudes *à la* Middendorp (De Sio & Lachat, 2020). Moreover, Wheatley and Mendez (2021) tested on voters the three-dimensional model of the supply side of politics proposed by Bakker et al. (2012) and showed that some sets of issues fail to form a coherent dimension when viewed from a demand-side perspective. This discussion leads to my first hypothesis:

H1. Voters' preferences on economic, cultural and transnational issues no longer align with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological distinction.

From this, we can derive two follow-up hypotheses. As De Sio and Lachat (2020) show, parties differ significantly when it comes to the ideological configuration of issues on which they campaign: while mainstream parties are more path-dependent and hence their policy proposals are more consistent with the traditional left-right ideology (the progressiveness-conservativeness antithesis *à la* Middendorp), new political entrepreneurs of challenger parties strategically campaign on issues challenging the classic ideology to increase their electoral appeal. Indeed, cross-ideological voter availability emerged in terms of an increased relevance of issue voting since the '90s (Thomassen, 2005), with new challenger actors politicizing specific divisive issues among less ideologically constrained publics. This strategy based on post-ideological conflict mobilization skyrocketed in the 2010s, especially characterising not only new and anti-establishment parties, which explicitly reject the labels of left and right, but also the populist radical right. Indeed, on the one hand the Euro and migration crises of the early to mid-2010s increased the saliency of concerns related to immigration and European integration; on the other hand, at this point progressive attitudes towards gender and sexuality were widely accepted in Western Europe (Spierings et al., 2017). Hence, for radical right parties nationalism, including economic protectionism, rather than traditionalism is the new winning formula to attract new voters (Hooghe & Marks, 2018) and some of them tend to reframe their xenophobic nationalism

even in terms of defence of Western liberal values: "gender equality as part of a hegemonic national culture that is under threat from the cultural 'other'" (Meret & Siim, 2013, p.83).

Therefore, I expect that:

H2. Compared to voters for mainstream parties, voters for radical-right, anti-establishment and new parties take positions on economic, cultural and transnational issues that are less consistent with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological alignment.

Furthermore, de-ideologization can simultaneously affect all the population (period effect), but it is expected to be driven by the younger generation. This is, first, because of a life cycle effect: young people have no or little political experience and therefore are more prone to external influences as they are uncertain between independence and familiar conditioning (Plutzer, 2002). This produces a weaker political identity compared to the older generation (Smets, 2012; García-Albacete, 2014).

Second, it is because of a generation effect, which is related more to socialisation than ageing processes. Voting is a habit learnt over time (Franklin, 2004) and political opinions formed during one's youth are more stable afterwards. Since the 1980s, voters socialised in times of change or crisis have shown lower turnouts and a weaker involvement in politics (Rubenson et al., 2004). Value change in political culture and the rise of post-materialism (Inglehart, 1990; Welzel et al., 2003) have produced sophisticated yet a-partisan citizens (Dalton, 1984). Furthermore, different generations mentally organise the political space in different ways or use similar terms with different meanings. Together with ideological de-structuring, restructuring can also take place among the young generation with new different linkages between issues. Young people increasingly see a partial decoupling of the libertarian-authoritarian and left-right distinctions (Maggini, 2016), associate left-right meanings with unusual relationships with traditional economic issues (Tuorto, 2018) or combine libertarian attitudes on cultural issues with anti-immigration and nationalist stances, as is shown by the phenomenon of the "sexually-modern nativist" (Lancaster, 2019). All this can negatively affect the ideological consistency of political views among young people.

Therefore, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3. Compared to older people, young people take positions on economic, cultural and transnational issues that are less consistent with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological alignment.

DATA AND METHOD

This study aims to test the hypotheses outlined in the previous section by relying on original Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) surveys carried out between 2017 and 2019 for the previously mentioned ICCP project¹ in seven European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK) which are quite representative of the different geographical areas in western Europe. These surveys were based on quota samples of 1000 respondents (per country) over the age of 18² and were conducted a month before the election day. A team of two country experts listed 20 to 30 potentially relevant campaign issues of both positional or valence character at the outset of the electoral campaign. This study focuses only on positional divisive issues. On such issues, the respondents were asked about their preferred position on six-point Likert-type scales anchored at the extremes by the two rival goals.³ Some items are the same for all the countries, whereas many are specific to particular countries. Nevertheless, for the sake of comparison, all the items cover a multiplicity of issues on several policy domains that are the same in all the countries, namely economically divisive issues (related to taxation, the welfare state, job market regulations, government intervention in the economy, etc.), cultural issues related to personal lifestyle (such as same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, law and order, environmentalism, democratic participation, gender equality, etc.) and transnational issues related to Europe, globalisation and immigration. These sets of issues can be interpreted according to three dimensions: economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and integration-demarcation. The advantage of this design is that these issues were salient in political-electoral terms, thus enhancing the analysis of citizens' political preferences and the related ideological configurations.

The focus on the policy preferences of older and younger people entails a need to define the boundaries of age groups. Following previous studies (Maggini, 2016), I classified as "young people" respondents between 18 and 35 years old, for two theoretical reasons and one methodological reason. The first is that in Western societies phenomena such as non-inclusion in the labour market and an increasing dependence on the

family of origin have progressively blurred the boundaries of youth, to the point that the cohort of young people has been extended to include both the "young" and "young adults" (Cavalli & Galland, 1996). The second reason is related to theories of voting behaviour (Franklin, 2004): voting is a habit that is acquired over time, usually after the first three national elections in which an individual has turned out, consequently between ages 30 and 35. Finally, from a methodological standpoint, this age group is sufficiently large to perform reliable statistical analyses.

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, the analysis is divided into three stages. First, I analyse the extent to which citizens in the different age groups in different countries have coherent views on economic, social and cultural matters, which can be grouped into politically meaningful dimensions. Following the strategy proposed by Wheatley and Mendez (2021) for voting advice application data, this study uses a scaling approach to dimensionality of issue preferences, but on mass survey data. In particular, the analysis relies on psychometric scaling methods based on Mokken's (1971) monotone homogeneity model, often referred to as Mokken Scale Analysis (MSA), a scaling method from the item response theory family.

Previous research on issue preferences' dimensionality such as that by Otjes (2014; 2016), Walczak and colleagues (2012) and Wheatley and Mendez (2021) also uses Mokken scaling. Furthermore, like factor analysis, MSA can be used as both a confirmatory and an exploratory method. Nevertheless, when it comes to the analysis of Likert items, MSA has several advantages because factor analysis often leads to over-dimensionalisation when it is applied to ordered categorical survey items (Van der Eijk & Rose, 2015). Moreover, MSA avoids the rigid distributional assumptions required by factor analysis (Van Schuur, 2003).

Specifically, MSA tests the assumption that a group of items can be ordered on a continuum from the simplest (items answered correctly by most respondents) to the most difficult (items to which the fewest respondents answer correctly): a Guttman pattern. The quality of the unidimensional scale can be assessed in terms of deviations from a Guttman pattern, i.e. Guttman errors: the number of respondents that answer the "difficult" items correctly but answer the "easy" items incorrectly. As this study uses Likert items concerning policy statements, MSA evaluates the extent to which the items can be ordered from those for which most respondents give the progressive answer to those for which most respondents give the conservative answer (in economic and cultural terms). Hence, polytomous Mokken scaling is pre-

¹ The ICCP project collected both survey and Twitter data. These data are available as GESIS study ZA7499 (see De Sio et al., 2019).

² The samples were representative of the voting-age population in each country based on gender, age, geographic area, and level of education. Some of the results shown are also based on an additional weighting by past vote recall.

³ The detailed question wording for all the variables of interest is reported in online Supplemental Appendix A.

ferred to standard dichotomous Mokken scaling. This influences the Guttman errors, as huge deviations from the Guttman pattern (i.e. responding to all items in an extreme-progressive way and to one in an extreme-conservative way) count more than small deviations from the Guttman pattern (i.e. responding to all items in an extreme-progressive way and to one in a centrist way).

In this regard, MSA produces a value H (so-called Loevinger's H) that measures the consistency of the responses to a set of items.⁴ Hence, it is a measure of scale quality, which is independent of the number of items and answer options. As a simple rule of thumb, a scale is deemed weak if $H \geq 0.3$, to be of medium strength if $H \geq 0.4$ and strong if $H \geq 0.5$ (Mokken, 1971; for more details, see online Supplemental Appendix B). Cronbach's alpha from classical test theory is also calculated to show that the outputs of the MSA are not some artefact of a particular scaling method (the threshold value for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7 for strong scales).

This study applies MSA in a confirmatory mode to test the validity of the a priori defined dimensions. The goal, indeed, is to detect reliable unidimensional scales from the policy statements made by respondents about several issues. Relying on the confirmatory method, MSA is applied in each national-level dataset separately to the groups of items belonging to the a priori defined dimensions (economic, cultural and transnational issues).

In the second stage, I focus the analysis on party electorates' preferences, looking at the average positions of the main parties' constituencies on issues, comparing older and younger people in each country. The party constituencies' preferences are investigated on issues grouped into the three a priori defined policy domains.

In the third stage, a synthetic measure of individual responses' consistency is computed to provide an ultimate test of the hypotheses. In particular, the consistency index has been built up in three steps. First, in each country-specific dataset, all the Likert items related to cultural, economic and transnational issues have been dichotomised (with 0 meaning TAN/Right-wing/Demarcationist positions and 1 meaning GAL/Left-wing/Integrationist positions). For each subset of these dummies (linked with each of the three dimensions), each respondent has been assigned to either the GAL/Left-wing/Integrationist side or the TAN/Right-wing/Demarcationist side, according to the side they aligned with most of the times. Second, I counted the number of issues of each dimension on which the respondent showed consistency with the assigned side. Third, I

⁴ Respondents with missing values for any of the items are dropped from the analysis.

have divided the number of consistent issues by the total number of issues included in the dimension. In this way, we have a measure of the consistency of individual preferences about economic left-right issues, cultural GAL-TAN issues and transnational demarcation-integration issues. For the sake of comparability, these consistency indices have been rescaled (with 0 and 1 as the minimum and maximum values, respectively).⁵ Subsequently, the same procedure has been applied to all the items of each national dataset producing an index of consistency of individual responses according to the overarching progressive-conservative dimension. In other words, it is a measure of association indicating the degree to which one individual tends to take systematically progressive or systematically conservative positions. Finally, for each country, all these consistency indices have been averaged across voted parties and age groups (young vs. older) to test whether these measures of association are significantly different for supporters of mainstream vs. challenger parties (especially radical right ones) and for young vs. older voters.

RESULTS

Scaling Analysis

We can now move ahead looking at the results of MSA. I applied it in its confirmatory mode to the items of the a priori defined dimensions to investigate the extent to which these three dimensions actually constitute reliable and unidimensional scales. Table 1 shows the H coefficients and (in brackets) the number of items that satisfy the condition $H_j \geq 0.3$ (see Supplemental Appendix B for more details about values H_j). In general, it is rare for all the items in any dimension to fulfil this condition and typically the scale as a whole does not satisfy the overall $H \geq 0.3$ condition, with no significant differences when we compare young and older people. In particular, cultural GAL-TAN items and economic left-right items scale poorly, as is shown by the low values of H . Conversely, most items on the integration-demarcation dimension satisfy the condition $H_j \geq 0.3$, and in all countries this dimension forms a satisfactory,

⁵ Indeed, before rescaling, consistency ranges between 0.5 and 1 when the number of issues is even; conversely, it ranges between 0.66 and 1 when there are three issues, and so forth. After rescaling, the minimum value (0) means that 0% of responses on issues related to a specific dimension (economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and transnational integration-demarcation) are consistent, whereas the maximum value (1) means that 100% of those responses are consistent.

and in some cases even strong, scale according to the H values. In this regard, differences between older and young people are not huge, although the strength of the scale is greater among older people, as is the number of items that satisfy the condition $H_j \geq 0.3$. In other words, older peoples' responses to items related to the integration-demarcation dimension seem to be more consistent than young people's responses. This is especially true in France, Germany and Spain (where the H value for the young sample is around 0.3 and the number of items with $H_j \geq 0.3$ is lower compared to the older sample) and in Austria and the UK (where all the items form a strong scale in the older age group). In the Netherlands and especially in Italy, older and young people show very similar patterns. It is striking to notice that items (supposedly) belonging to the traditional economic left-right dimension do not form a reliable and unidimensional scale, with the partial exception of the Dutch young group and the British older group, where the H values are around 0.3 (but the number of items with $H_j \geq 0.3$ is extremely low).

In other words, unidimensionality seems to be a characteristic of the new dimension of conflict concerning globalisation, denationalisation and EU integration rather than of the traditional economic left-right division that structured political conflict in Western Europe for a long time. At least, the respondents do not show consistent responses to the items that were pre-selected as being on the economic left-right dimension.⁶ The same applies to the cultural GAL-TAN items, with the only partial exception of the Spanish older sample (where 6 items out of 12 satisfy $H_j \geq 0.3$ and the H is around 0.3).

To show that the (lack of) scalability is not the result of some methodological artefact, I also calculated Cronbach's alpha (see Table B1 in Supplemental Appendix B). Overall, it confirms that items related to the integration-demarcation dimension can form a single scale (only in the Spanish sample is the Cronbach's alpha slightly below the 0.7 threshold) and that items related to the GAL-TAN and economic left-right dimensions are rarely scalable.

As explained in the previous section, MSA allows us to investigate whether the policy statements made by respondents about several issues can form reliable unidimensional scales. The result that items related to both the traditional economic left-right issues and the cultural GAL-TAN issues are not characterised by unidi-

Table 1. Overview of MSA Outputs When Applied to the Predefined Scales (Young and Older People Compared).

Country	Age group	H coefficient (no. of items $H_j \geq 0.3$ /total no. items)		
		Eco. left/right	Integration/demarcation	GAL/TAN
Austria	Older	0.212(0/8)	0.494 (6/6)	0.110(0/7)
	Young	0.063(0/8)	0.315 (4/6)	0.082(0/7)
France	Older	0.138(0/3)	0.425 (6/7)	0.180(0/5)
	Young	0.167(0/3)	<u>0.269</u> (3/7)	0.188(0/5)
Germany	Older	0.156(0/5)	0.380 (5/6)	0.166(0/6)
	Young	0.121(0/5)	<u>0.297</u> (3/6)	0.135(0/6)
Italy	Older	0.139(0/9)	0.384 (5/6)	0.124(0/6)
	Young	0.190(0/9)	0.364 (5/6)	0.149(0/6)
Netherlands	Older	0.244(0/5)	0.451 (5/5)	0.044(0/5)
	Young	<u>0.272</u> (2/5)	0.400 (4/5)	-0.008(0/5)
Spain	Older	0.231(0/6)	0.322 (3/4)	<u>0.275</u> (6/12)
	Young	0.196(0/6)	<u>0.290</u> (1/4)	0.147(0/12)
UK	Older	<u>0.278</u> (3/8)	0.513 (6/6)	0.171(0/4)
	Young	0.204(0/8)	0.364 (5/6)	0.034(0/4)

Note. H coefficients > 0.3 are in bold, whereas those around 0.3 are underlined.

mensionality means that many citizens respond to some items in an extreme-progressive way and to others in an extreme-conservative way (in economic and cultural terms). This entails also that citizens' preferences on relevant policy-related issues are not consistent with the overall progressive-conservative distinction, in line with H1. This result is confirmed (unsurprisingly) when MSA is applied to all the items included in each country-specific dataset, for both age groups (see Table B2 in Supplemental Appendix B): citizens' preferences on transnational, economic and cultural issues do not align with a common latent dimension related to the overall progressive-conservative distinction.

Ideological Configurations of Party Constituencies

The lack of ideological consistency in citizens' preferences on policy issues needs further investigation to detect two (hypothesised) sources of variation: party family (H2) and birth cohort (H3). I begin this empirical inquiry by investigating how the main party constituencies in each country take average consistent positions within and across the three a priori defined dimensions (which rarely are meaningful dimensions in the whole sample, as we have just seen, with the significant exception represented by the new integration-demarcation dimension). Electorates' mean positions on each issue,

⁶ Here it should be recognised that opinions on policy issues are usually less stable than values, which show a higher level of abstraction. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that ideological consistency could be higher if the focus was on values rather than on issues.

along with standard deviation values, are reported in Tables A1–A41 in online Supplemental Appendix A. For the sake of brevity and comparability, mean positions on issues have been averaged for the three a priori defined dimensions of the political space. Figures 1–7 show, for each country, these average positions of the main party constituencies on the three issue domains. Young people’s positions and older peoples’ ones are compared.

In a nutshell, most party constituencies appear left-ist on the economy, progressive on cultural GAL-TAN issues and quite divided on integration-demarcation issues: mostly pro-EU but anti-immigration. In all the countries, there is more ideological homogeneity on the left (although conservative attitudes on immigration are quite widespread) than on the right – where progressive views on several economic and cultural issues related to personal lifestyle (but not on law and order issues) even prevail. Overall, this ideological heterogeneity is accentuated among young voters.

To go into detail of each country, in Austria (see Figure 1), as expected Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) voters are those who take more right-wing positions. However, on cultural issues only a tiny majority of FPÖ voters are oriented towards the TAN side and on economic issues FPÖ voters, especially the youngest, are even more oriented towards the left-wing goals. Voters for the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) also show a prevalence of GAL positions, especially among the youngest, who are even located on the left-wing side of economic issues. Voters for New Austria and Liberal Forum

(NEOS) show in general a prevalence of progressive preferences.

On the left, most Pilz List and Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) voters support progressive economic and cultural goals, but are more divided on integration-demarcation issues, especially older SPÖ voters and young Pilz List voters (among the latter even prevail “demarcationist” goals). Most of them, indeed, support cultural assimilation of immigrants and more restrictive asylum rules (see Tables A1 and A2), whereas the Greens emerge as the party of cultural integration, especially regarding EU issues. On immigration issues Green voters show preference heterogeneity (see the standard deviations in Table A3).

Similarly, in France (see Figure 2) most right-wing French voters – *Les Republicains* (The Republicans-LR), National Front (FN) – take on average a progressive position on GAL-TAN issues and this ideological configuration is accentuated among young voters. Most FN voters take left-wing positions on economic issues, too. Conversely, Republicans, especially older voters, are mostly located on the right-wing side on economic issues consistently with the party’s platform and campaign (Lachat & Michel, 2020).

The electorate of the new centrist party founded by President Macron, En Marche (EM), is the closest to the median voter, with a prevalence of progressive views, especially GAL positions.

On the left, most socialist and green voters take progressive ideologically consistent positions across

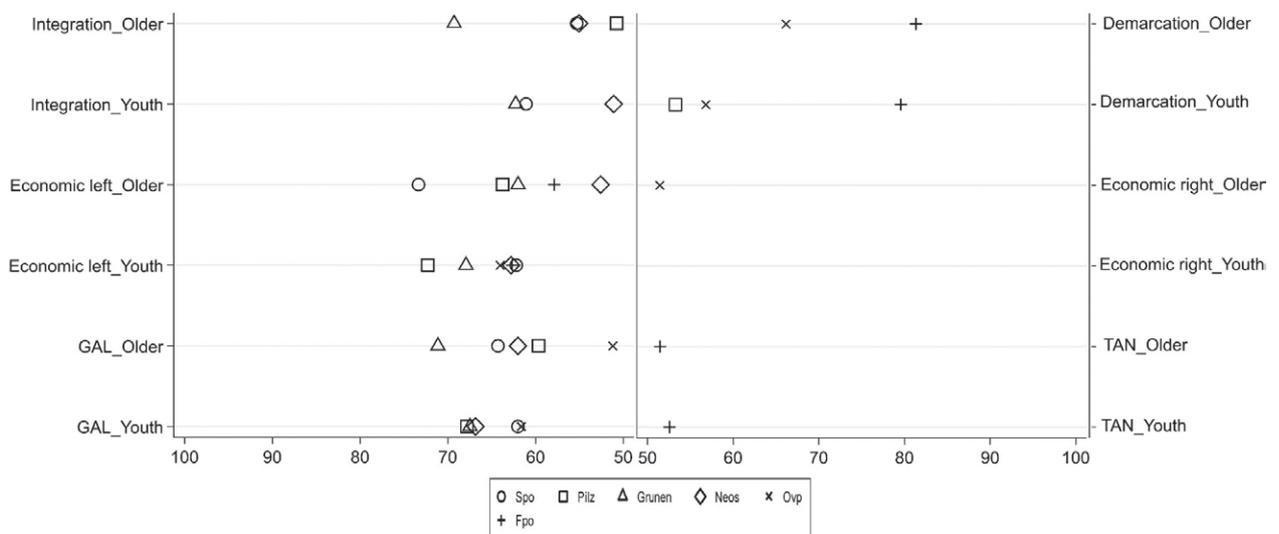


Figure 1. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Austria, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data). *Note.* For each policy dimension, markers represent the average percentage of party constituencies who support the favoured among the two rival sides. These considerations apply also to Figures 2–7.

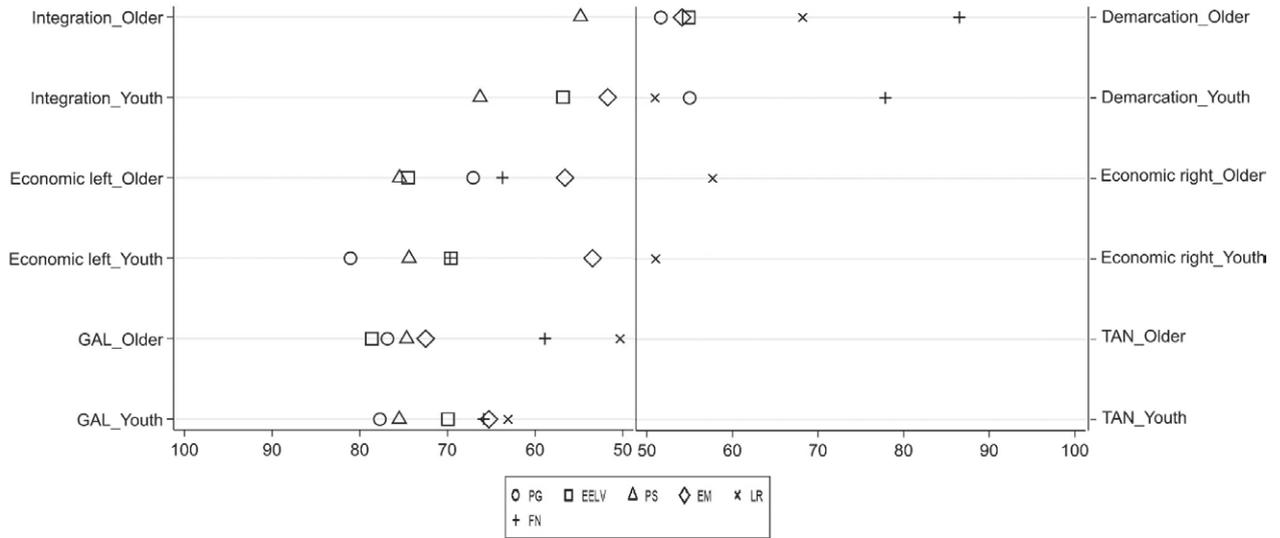


Figure 2. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in France, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).

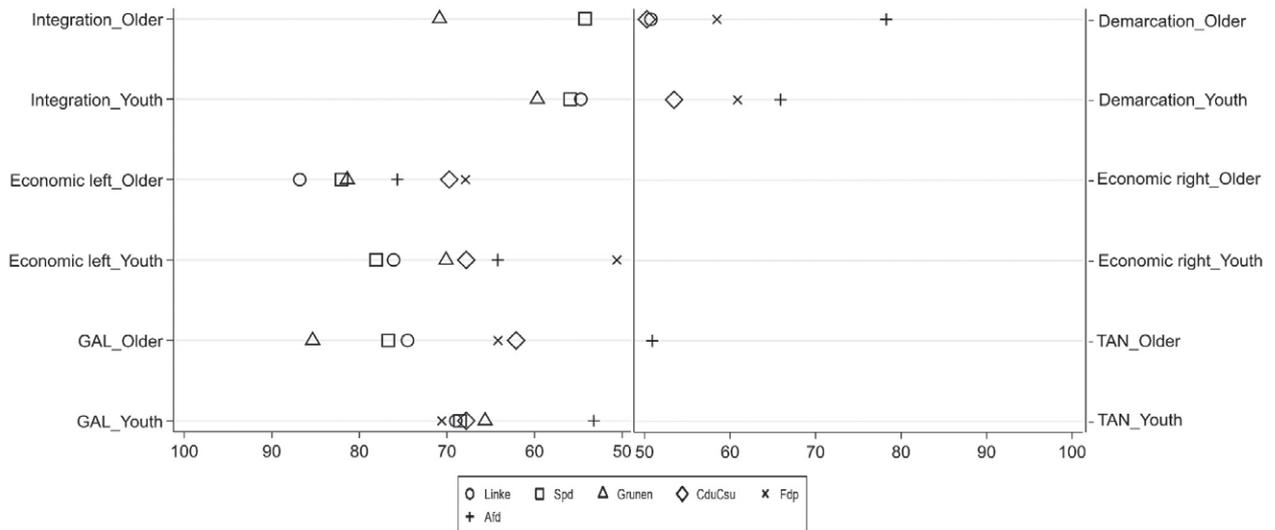


Figure 3. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Germany, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).

dimensions, although older voters are quite divided on integration-demarcation issues, especially those related to immigration (see Tables A8 and A9). Left Party (PG) voters are even more located on the pro national demarcation side, where older radical left voters predominantly combine pro-EU and anti-immigration attitudes, whereas a slight majority of young PG voters oppose the EU and support both immigration and migrants’ access to welfare benefits (see Table A7).

Similar patterns can be observed in the German sample (see Figure 3), where most voters for Christian

Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU), Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Alternative for Germany (AfD) are quite ideologically inconsistent, supporting both left-wing economic goals and cultural GAL objectives. Only a tiny majority of older AfD voters support TAN goals. Within the GAL-TAN dimension, the ideological heterogeneity is higher among young voters, whereas the latter are less progressive (hence, less inconsistent) as for the economic dimension, especially young FDP voters. Conservative voters are more ideologically consistent within the integration-demarcation dimen-

sion, especially AfD voters who are the most nationalist.

Compared to AfD electors, Green voters are on the opposite side of the integration-demarcation policy domain and the distance is larger among older voters. The majority of Social Democratic Party (SPD) and *Linke* (Left) voters are located on the pro-integration side, except older *Linke* voters who are slightly more on the pro-demarcation side.

Turning to the results for the Italian case (see Figure 4), the electorates of (centre-)right parties – Go Italy (*Forza Italia*-FI), the League (*Lega*) – mostly show left-wing economic preferences. Only among older people, a tiny majority of League voters are in favour of a flat tax and job market deregulation (see Table A22). This relatively low support for a flat tax is quite surprising, given that the issue was among the flagship proposals in both the League and FI electoral platforms and both parties campaigned on it (see Emanuele et al., 2020). Regarding the retirement age, voters’ preferences are instead in line with the League’s platform and electoral campaign, which innovatively emphasised a mix of left-wing and right-wing economic goals (a lower retirement age and a flat tax – see Emanuele et al., 2020). Moreover, most League and FI voters take progressive/libertarian positions on cultural issues like same-sex marriage and legislation on euthanasia.

Voters for the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) are leftist on economic and cultural issues, but quite close to right-wing voters on immigration and (to a lesser extent) the EU. In general, the average position of the M5S electorate is the closest to the median voter.

Only the Democratic Party (PD) electorate shows across-dimension consistency, with a prevalence of (economically and culturally) progressive and integrationist positions. Nevertheless, 57% of the PD electorate want to reduce the number of refugees (see Table A19).

In the Netherlands (Figure 5), party constituencies are more ideologically consistent within and across dimensions, although most voters for Party for Freedom (PVV) are located on the GAL side. Moreover, most voters for Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Reformed Political Party (SGP) and especially PVV voters take left-wing economic positions, except young voters for CDA. In both age groups, liberal-conservative voters for VVD are the ones who are less ideologically inconsistent, although they appear quite divided. The ideological heterogeneity of VVD voters regarding economic issues is confirmed by a higher dispersion of their preferences compared to those of centre-left voters, especially in the older sample (see the standard deviations in Tables A23–A29).

As for left-wing voters, it should be noticed that a tiny majority of older Socialist Party (SP) voters are located on the national demarcation side, especially as regards immigration issues (see Table A23).

In the Spanish case (see Figure 6), on the centre-right – Citizens (*Ciudadanos*-Cs), People’s Party (PP), Voice (*Vox*) – we observe ideological heterogeneity on economic issues, with a prevalence of centre-left positions. This within-dimension (and party-voter) inconsistency of PP and *Vox* voters is confirmed if we look at the standard deviations of their responses to economic

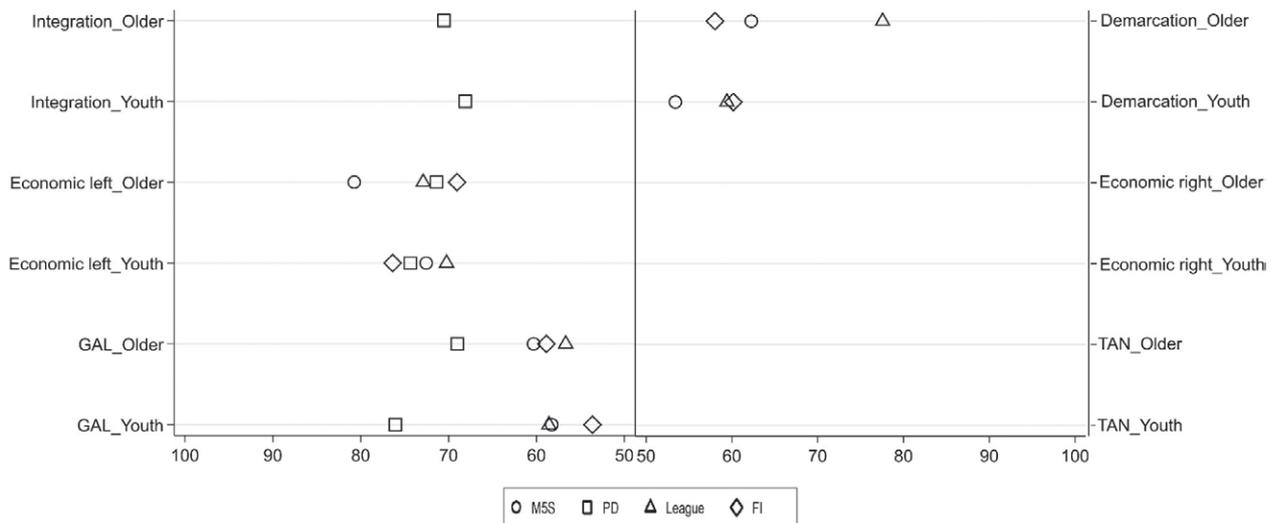


Figure 4. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Italy, older vs. young people (2018 general election, ICCP data).

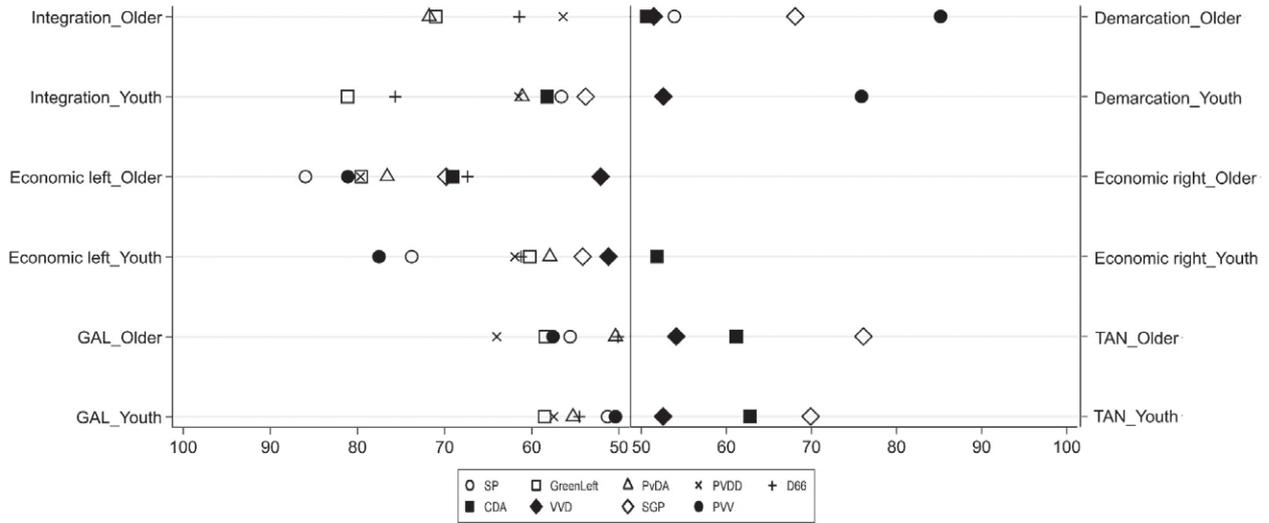


Figure 5. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in the Netherlands, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).

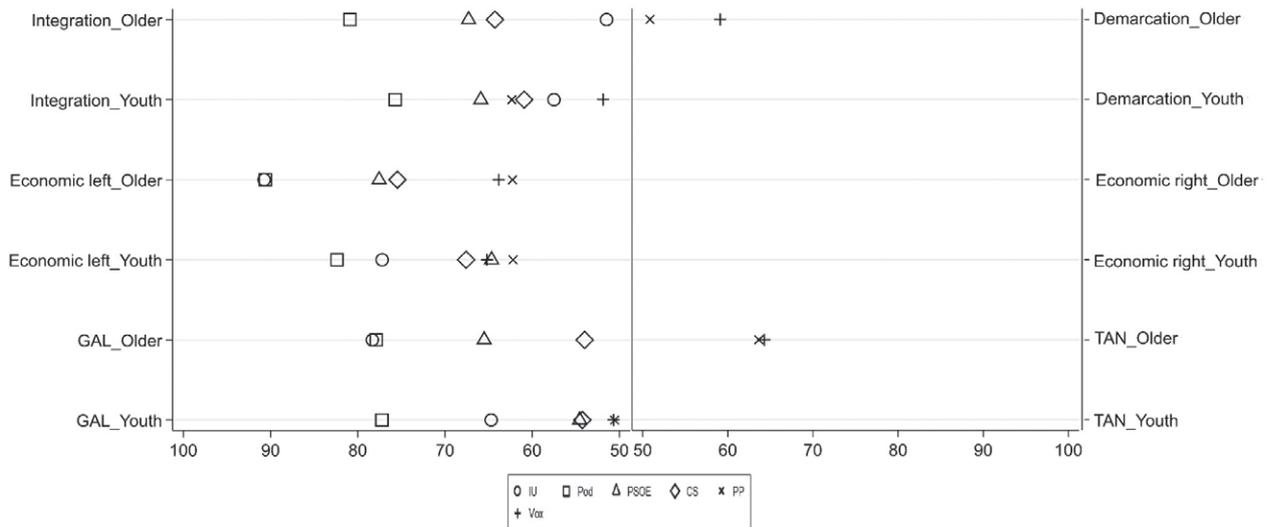


Figure 6. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Spain, older vs. young people (April 2019 general election, ICCP data).

items, which are definitely higher compared to those of United Left (IU)-We Can (*Podemos*) and Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) voters (see Tables A32–36). Left-wing voters appear as the most ideologically consistent across dimensions, especially older voters and those for *Podemos*.

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of centre-right voters are on the progressive/libertarian side on several cultural issues, and culturally progressive positions even prevail among young centre-right voters. The latter also lean towards the pro integration side. Indeed, only among older *Vox* and PP voters both pro national

demarcation and TAN positions on some cultural issues prevail. Furthermore, among PP and *Vox* voters anti-immigrant attitudes coexist with pro-EU stances (see Tables A35 and A36).

Conversely, when it comes to policy goals related to the debate about the Catalan “macro issue”, brought about by the failed independence process promoted by the Catalan pro-independence parties, voters for Cs and especially for PP and *Vox* strongly oppose a further decentralisation of the state, a referendum on Catalanian independence, Catalan autonomy, negotiations with Catalan independentists and the allocation of public money

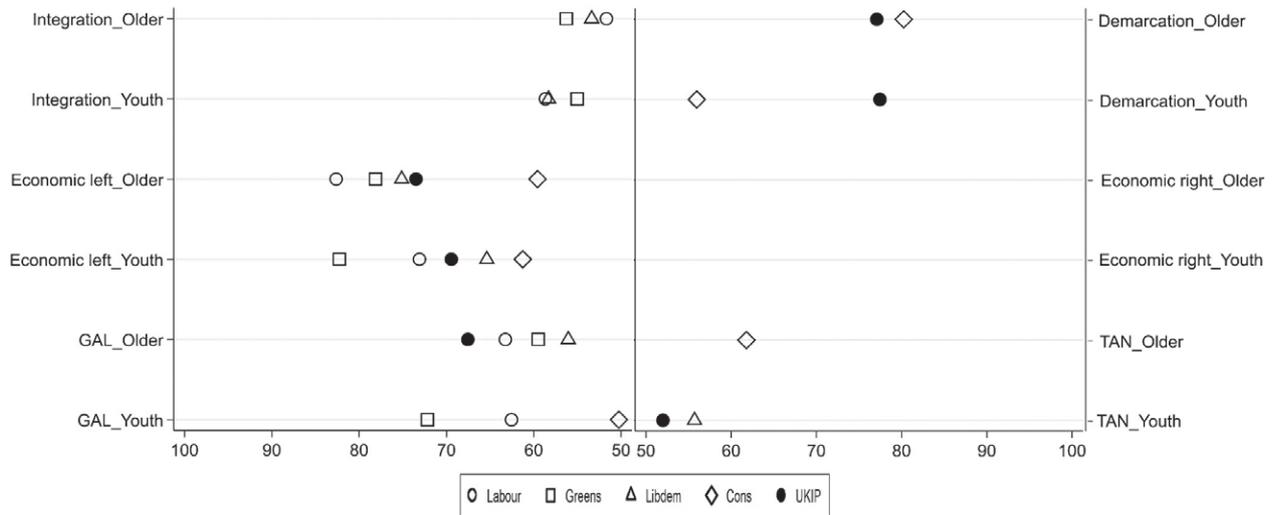


Figure 7. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in UK, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).

to recover the bodies of civil war casualties (see Tables A34, A35 and A36).

As far as the British case is concerned (see Figure 7), Conservative and UKIP voters combine nationalist stances on the EU and immigration with several left-wing stances on the economy and GAL stances. The latter prevail among older UKIP voters and (to a lesser extent) among young Conservatives. As regards GAL stances, it is noteworthy that UKIP voters, regardless of their age, are the most progressive on the same-sex marriage issue, and they are homogeneously progressive, as is shown by the lower standard deviation of their positions on gay rights compared to those of other party constituencies (see Tables A37–A41).

On the left, Labour voters (especially the older ones) combine progressive stances on economic and (some) cultural issues (same-sex marriage, prohibiting fracking) with rather conservative stances on immigration issues, and although they are mostly pro-EU there is a considerable proportion of them that are Eurosceptic (40%, see Table A37). Similarly, most Green voters combine a pro-EU membership stance with a conservative position on immigration issues, at least in the older group (see Table A38).

To conclude, the overall results show that most party constituencies are ideologically inconsistent across dimensions in line with the first hypothesis, although to a different degree across countries, with Dutch electorates turning out to be the most ideologically consistent, especially on the left. The higher ideological heterogeneity characterising radical right voters and the electorates of new centrist and/or anti-establishment parties

(such as EM in France and M5S in Italy) is in line with the second hypothesis, whereas mainstream centre-right parties are less ideologically consistent than expected. Furthermore, across-dimension ideological consistency is shown not only by mainstream centre-left party constituencies (e.g. PD in Italy, PS in France) but also by the new radical left (*Podemos* in Spain) and Green party constituencies.

The general ideological inconsistency is accentuated in the young sample, in line with our third hypothesis, although the differences between older and young people are not huge and in some cases young voters appear even more ideologically consistent than older ones.⁷

Consistency of Issue Preferences, by Voted Party and Age Groups

Moving beyond the average positions taken by (young and older) party constituencies on electoral campaign issues is necessary to submit H2 and H3 to a more stringent test. Indeed, average positions do not provide a

⁷ However, it is worth stressing that the saliency of issue goals could be relevant in differentiating electorates, apart from positions on issues. An analysis of the priorities attached by voters to different policy goals would require specific theoretical hypotheses and is beyond the scope of this research. That said, our questionnaire included questions about the saliency of each policy goal. Looking at the data (the saliency of each issue is reported in Tables A1–A41 in Supplemental Appendix A), it turns out that right-wing voters generally prioritise issues related to national demarcation, especially anti-immigration stances. Conversely, on the left, older voters generally prioritise traditional economic left-wing goals, whereas young voters tend to prioritise progressive cultural goals.

systematic assessment of the degree to which one voter tends to take systematically progressive (left-wing, GAL, integrationist) or systematically conservative (right-wing, TAN, demarcationist) positions on issues. Therefore, we overcome these limitations through a measure of the consistency of individual responses to economic, cultural and transnational items, which has been explained in more detail in the methodological section. Table 2 reports, for each country, the mean values of the consistency index computed for each dimension, by voted party and by age group (young vs. older). The values of the cells represent the share of consistent responses given by each party constituency and age group on the issues related to each dimension (including the overarching progressive-conservative dimension in the last column on the right).

According to the numbers presented in the table, it is possible to substantially confirm the main findings of previous sections.

First, data show that the ideological consistency of issue positions within each sub-dimension is generally greater than the ideological consistency across dimensions; i.e. the overarching progressive-conservative dimension. The latter is no longer a dimension significantly structuring issue preferences, in line with H1.

Second, these data confirm H2: in general, voters for challenger parties (especially populist radical right parties) are more ideologically inconsistent compared to mainstream parties' voters. Indeed, as regards the overall progressive-conservative dimension, the lowest values of the consistency index are shown, for each country, by responses of FPÖ voters in Austria (0.201), of AfD voters in Germany (0.196), of *Lega* voters in Italy (0.186), of PVV voters in the Netherlands (0.128), of *Vox* voters in Spain (0.211), of UKIP voters in the UK (0.179). And although in France the lowest share of consistent responses does not regard FN voters, it regards EM, i.e. a new centrist party going beyond the traditional left-right ideological distinction (again in line with H2). That said, data also show that the ideological consistency of positions on issues is not a characteristic of all mainstream parties' voters, but especially of voters for centre-left parties. For instance, in Italy 41.7% of PD voters' positions on all the relevant political issues is consistent with the overarching progressive-conservative distinction, whereas the percentage of consistency is much lower among voters for *Forza Italia* (21.4%). A similar pattern can be observed in the other countries: issue preferences of SPÖ voters in Austria, of PS voters in France, of SPD voters in Germany, of PvdA voters in the Netherlands, of PSOE voters in Spain and of Labour voters in the UK are more ideologically consistent than issue prefer-

ences of voters for mainstream centre-right parties (i.e. ÖVP in Austria, *Les Républicains* in France, CDU-CSU in Germany, CDA and VVD in the Netherlands, PP in Spain, Conservative Party in the UK). Furthermore, in some countries, the most ideologically consistent issue preferences are shown not by voters for mainstream centre-left parties, but by voters for Green parties or for new populist left-wing parties. This is the case of *GroenLink* in the Netherlands, of the *Grünen* in both Austria and Germany, and of *Podemos* in Spain. This point is in line with the result shown in the previous section, hence giving it more robustness.

Table 2 also shows the values of the consistency index for issue preferences of young and older people, confirming H3: in general, older people take positions on issues that are more consistent with the progressive-conservative distinction compared to young people's preferences. However, as discussed in the previous section, differences between these age groups are not huge and there are two exceptions: the share of consistency is slightly higher among young Dutch than among older Dutch (0.239 vs. 0.231), and among young Italians compared to older Italians (0.318 vs. 0.290).

This overall picture becomes more nuanced if we look at the ideological consistency within the three sub-dimensions (economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and transnational integration-demarcation).

First, as regards party constituencies' preferences, there is a clear distinction between positions on issues related to the integration-demarcation dimension on the one hand, and positions on issues related to the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions on the other. As regards the latter, indeed, it is confirmed that voters for mainstream centre-left parties, green parties and radical left parties tend to take more systematically consistent positions than voters for mainstream centre-right parties and, especially, for radical right parties. In general, socialist/social-democratic voters and radical left voters take the most consistent positions on economic issues (i.e. left-wing positions), whereas Green voters show consistent positions, especially on issues related to the GAL-TAN dimension. As an example, in Germany 63.4% of *Die Linke* voters' positions on economic left-right issues are consistent and 61.1% of Green voters' positions on cultural GAL-TAN issues are consistent. Conversely, among CDU-CSU voters the percentage of consistency on economic left-right issues is 38.9% and on cultural GAL-TAN issues is 45.4%, and among AfD voters these percentages are, respectively, 48% and 39.8%. The exception is Italy, where the most coherent issue preferences (55.9%) on economic left-right issues are taken by the M5S, more than those taken by PD voters (although the

Table 2. Overview of the Consistency of Responses on Issues Grouped into Different Dimensions, by Voted Party and Age Group.

Country	Party	Consistency Index			
		Integration- Demarcation	Left- Right	GAL- TAN	Overall Progressive- Conservative
Austria	SPÖ	0.429	0.479	0.285	0.309
	Pilz	0.356	0.395	0.304	0.218
	Grünen	0.599	0.361	0.360	0.364
	Neos	0.285	0.304	0.372	0.226
	ÖVP	0.386	0.400	0.299	0.213
	FPÖ	0.640	0.380	0.198	0.201
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
	Older	0.490	0.418	0.279	0.248
Young	0.384	0.373	0.279	0.224	
France	PG	0.330	0.379	0.503	0.284
	EELV	0.359	0.364	0.541	0.277
	PS	0.323	0.436	0.517	0.352
	EM	0.268	0.266	0.363	0.203
	LR	0.330	0.343	0.243	0.206
	FN	0.674	0.263	0.281	0.211
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
	Older	0.434	0.324	0.361	0.242
Young	0.323	0.311	0.391	0.202	
Germany	Die Linke	0.511	0.634	0.572	0.378
	SPD	0.370	0.584	0.565	0.384
	Die Grünen	0.403	0.515	0.611	0.464
	CDU-CSU	0.274	0.389	0.454	0.243
	FDP	0.279	0.405	0.508	0.244
	AFD	0.569	0.480	0.398	0.196
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
	Older	0.388	0.522	0.511	0.312
Young	0.365	0.407	0.489	0.278	
Italy	PD	0.509	0.435	0.462	0.417
	M5S	0.428	0.559	0.351	0.267
	Forza Italia	0.371	0.431	0.390	0.214
	Lega	0.559	0.466	0.328	0.186
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
	Older	0.417	0.483	0.401	0.290
Young	0.452	0.516	0.401	0.318	
Netherlands	SP	0.385	0.696	0.159	0.258
	GroenLink	0.512	0.527	0.235	0.364
	PvDA	0.414	0.433	0.096	0.291
	PVDD	0.372	0.574	0.311	0.342
	D66	0.448	0.424	0.134	0.257
	CDA	0.292	0.456	0.236	0.173
	VVD	0.293	0.407	0.190	0.230
	SGP	0.356	0.428	0.443	0.227
	PVV	0.634	0.584	0.153	0.128
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
	Older	0.431	0.542	0.190	0.231
	Young	0.430	0.455	0.170	0.239
Spain	IU	0.451	0.768	0.515	0.518
	Podemos	0.664	0.752	0.575	0.615
	PSOE	0.494	0.646	0.372	0.410
	Ciudadanos	0.404	0.543	0.249	0.293
	PP	0.271	0.397	0.317	0.229
	Vox	0.290	0.431	0.299	0.211
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
	Older	0.436	0.594	0.387	0.379
Young	0.464	0.517	0.356	0.356	
UK	Labour	0.526	0.623	0.423	0.396
	Greens	0.492	0.597	0.386	0.356
	LibDem	0.390	0.492	0.395	0.328
	Conservatives	0.638	0.403	0.421	0.262
	UKIP	0.653	0.499	0.353	0.179
	<i>All Voters By Age:</i>				
Older	0.597	0.520	0.442	0.327	
Young	0.482	0.484	0.359	0.298	

overall consistency across dimensions is much higher for PD voters' positions).

This pattern changes radically when we look at the preferences related to the integration-demarcation issues. On these issues, indeed, the most consistent positions are taken by voters for radical right parties (with consistency percentages always over 55%). The only exception is represented by the Spanish case: here, the positions of *Vox*

voters on transnational issues are poorly consistent (29%), whereas the most consistent preferences (66.4%) about integration-demarcation issues are shown by *Podemos* voters. The latter are the most ideologically consistent in all the dimensions, also in comparison with other electorates in other countries. Indeed, 61.5% of positions taken by *Podemos* voters are consistent with the overarching progressive-conservative distinction.

Finally, as regards age differences, the overall picture is confirmed: in each sub-dimension, older people tend to take more consistent positions than young people (except in Austria and especially in France as for the GAL-TAN dimension, in Spain as for the integration-demarcation dimension and in Italy overall). These exceptions entail that young people's higher ideological inconsistency especially characterises their positions on economic issues.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The broad objective of this study was to investigate whether models of political space based on dimensionality can still describe issue stances among voters in western Europe or whether a deeper de-structuration of issue preferences is spreading among citizens. The article has also compared issue preferences between young and older people to investigate whether distinct generations differ in terms of ideological structuring of their issue preferences. In this regard, I hypothesised that voters' issue preferences would no longer be able to be interpreted according to a classical twentieth-century progressive-conservative ideological alignment (Middendorp, 1978), which was used to summarise both the economic and cultural stances of parties and their constituencies. The findings have confirmed this hypothesis, showing that most citizens take ideologically inconsistent positions on issues across (and in some cases even within) policy dimensions.

Going into detail, this ideological inconsistency of issue preferences in terms of the traditional overarching left-right distinction cannot be explained with a multi-dimensional model of issue space characterised by three separate dimensions: economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and integration-demarcation. Indeed, the results of the Mokken scaling analysis show that the three-dimensional model cannot be applied to these cases. Most cases exhibit a one-dimensional structure, although it is not the broad left-right dimension that separates progressive from conservative stances on economic and cultural issues *à la* Middendorp. Conversely, this dimension mostly corresponds to the new transnational cleavage⁸

⁸ In this study, the focus is on political dimensions of the issue space rather than on cleavages. The latter indeed regard salient issues in which different social groups identify themselves and are mobilised by parties. However, as regards issues related to the transnational or integration-demarcation dimension, these are also very salient issues, especially immigration issues for right-wing voters and EU issues for voters for mainstream or green parties (the saliency of each issue is reported in Tables A1–A41 in Supplemental Appendix A). And several political parties, especially populist radical right parties, have mobilised voters

(Hooghe & Marks, 2018) or the integration-demarcation dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008) comprising immigration and EU integration issues.

Furthermore, the analysis of party constituencies' positions showed that in the selected group of western European countries most party constituencies are quite ideologically inconsistent across dimensions, especially on the right. On the left, there is more ideological homogeneity, although significant proportions of centre-left and radical-left voters show conservative attitudes on immigration. Conversely, the electorates of centre-right and radical right parties show, on average, ideologically heterogeneous positions on both economic and cultural issues. Voters for populist radical right parties show strong preferences for both anti-immigration and anti-EU positions (except in Spain, where pro-EU stances prevail), but at the same time they combine this nationalist and exclusionist attitude with left-wing stances on most economic issues, usually more than mainstream centre-right parties. This confirms the relevance of "left-authoritarians" (Lefkofridi et al., 2014) among radical right voters who also share GAL views on several cultural issues related to personal lifestyle (e.g. euthanasia, abortion, same-sex marriage) but not on law and order issues, especially in some national contexts (e.g. the Dutch PVV) and among the young.

The ideological consistency of issue preferences of different party constituencies and age groups (youth vs. older people) has been investigated more systematically through an index of consistency of individual responses to economic, cultural and transnational items. The analysis confirms the lower ideological consistency of radical right voters, of voters for both new centrist parties and new anti-establishment parties explicitly rejecting the labels of left and right (EM in France and the M5S in Italy, although the latter shows among its voters quite consistent positions on economic issues). This result is in line with my second hypothesis. Nevertheless, I also hypothesised that mainstream parties would be more ideologically consistent. This is not always the case, especially regarding centre-right party constituencies. Moreover, electorates with more ideologically consistent positions across dimensions in terms of the classical progressive-conservative (or broad left-right) antithesis are not only mainstream centre-left party constituencies (e.g. PD in Italy, PS in France, Labour Party in the UK) but also new radical left (e.g. *Podemos* in Spain) and Green party constituencies (especially in Austria, in Germany and in the Netherlands). The latter are also the most coherently progressive on cultural issues, whereas

on such issues. Hence, this dimension shows the potentialities to be or become a political cleavage.

radical right voters are the most coherently nationalist on transnational issues. Finally, radical left and centre-left voters take the most (left-wing) consistent positions on economic issues.

In general, however, the across-dimension ideological consistency of positions on issues is low, confirming again my first hypothesis: voters' positions on cultural, economic and transnational issues are quite inconsistent, no longer aligning with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological distinction. This general inconsistency is accentuated in the young sample, in line with my third hypothesis, although differences between older and young people are not huge and there are exceptions. Furthermore, young people's positions are ideologically inconsistent mostly as regards economic issues.

To conclude, the economic left-right dimension, which for decades shaped political oppositions and alignments in western Europe, seems to have lost its ability to structure voters' issue preferences. This is not something totally new. Previous studies suggest that voters have a multidimensional understanding of economic issues (Otjes, 2016), showing that citizens who support principles such as egalitarianism do not necessarily endorse the tool that is meant to achieve it – the welfare state (Achterberg et al., 2011) – or they are not necessarily economic interventionists (Otjes, 2014) or that voters who support policies meant to achieve equal outcomes do not necessarily support policies that are meant to achieve equal opportunities (Fossati & Häusermann, 2014). This study confirms these findings, even when the focus is on specific economic policy goals on which parties in different countries and with different ideologies have campaigned. This does not mean that citizens' views on economic issues are completely inconsistent, as we have seen.

Furthermore, the loss of the structuring ability of the two dimensions (cultural and economic) along which traditional party positions could be synthesised does not mean that citizens' preferences are totally deconstructed from an ideological standpoint. Indeed, the new transnational dimension related to immigration and EU issues seems to have replaced the previous ones in terms of its capacity to order citizens' views on relevant political issues, both among young and older people. In other words, rather than deconstruction it seems more appropriate to speak of re-structuration. This is quite reassuring. Indeed, as Downs (1957) clarified a long time ago, unidimensionality is a desirable property of democracy because it limits the risk of intransitive unstable collective preference rankings (Arrow, 1951).

As regards the differences between young and older people, given that this analysis is cross-sectional, it is not possible to draw too strong conclusions about

long-term changes driven by generational differences. In other words, we do not know if the observed higher ideological inconsistency of young people is a consequence of the fact that young people are always less involved in politics compared to older ones (life-cycle effect) or rather because they have been socialized in a particular historical period which entailed a radical and long-lasting value change (generation effect). In this regard, this research has provided only preliminary mixed evidence. On the one hand, the observed lower ideological consistency among young people could signal a generational divide similar to that driven by the rise of post-materialism, which was mainly about a change in value priorities (Inglehart, 1990). On the other hand, we have seen that the differences between young and older people in terms of issue positions are not huge, being relevant mainly among voters of the populist radical right. This would not be evidence of a clear generational pattern. Hence, further research is needed. In particular, three paths appear promising: first, beyond positions on issues, the salience of issues should be also analysed to explore whether young and older people differ especially in terms of priorities, rather than in terms of positions on policy issues; second, longitudinal dynamics should be considered through a panel research design to fully disentangle life-cycle effects from generation effects; third, the interaction between age and other individual characteristics (e.g. partisanship, political interest, education) should be investigated to formulate and test conditional hypotheses about the determinants of ideological (in)consistency.

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