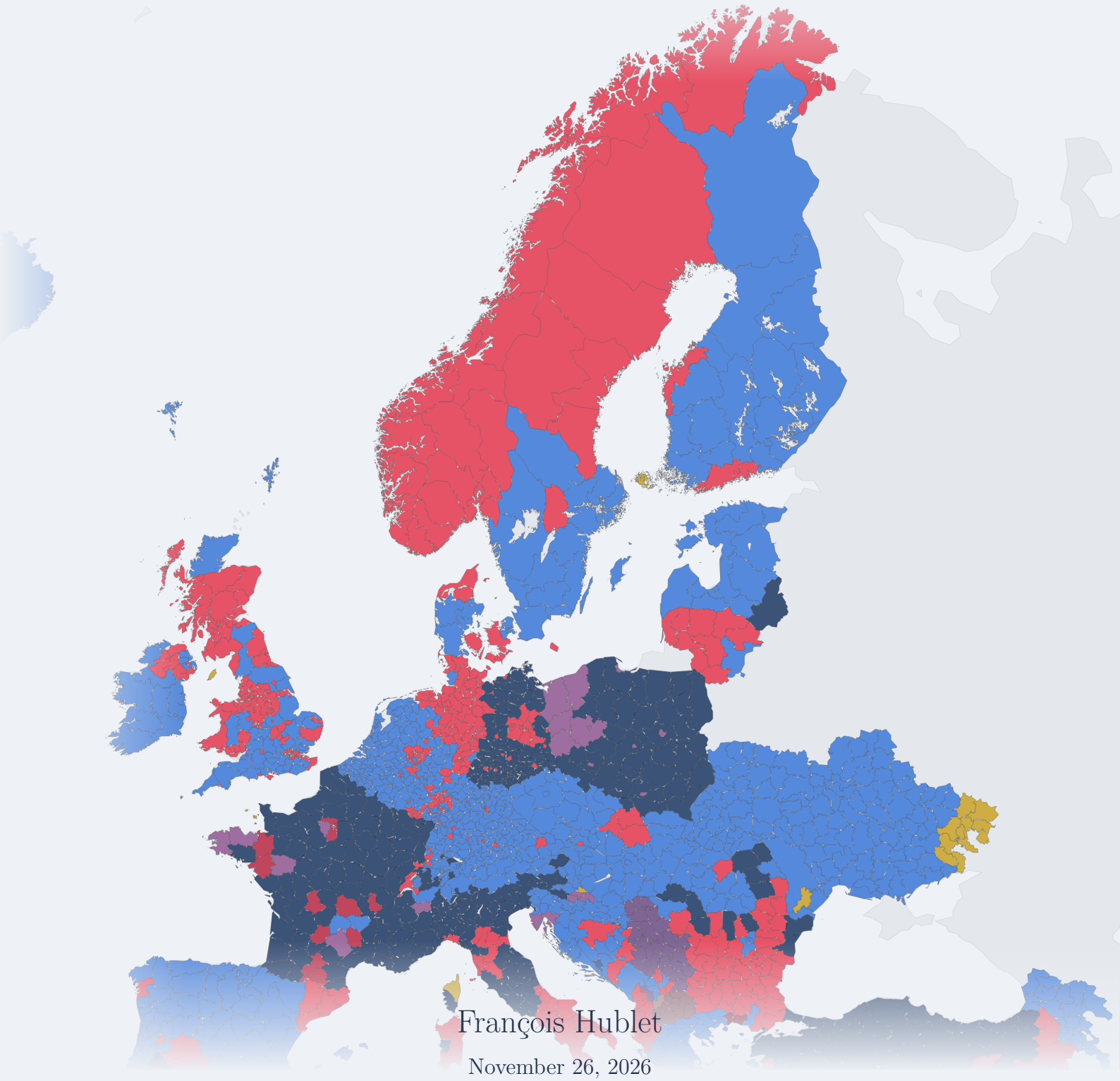
Introduction to European Electoral Analysis



François Hublet

November 26, 2026

Cover map: leading ideological family by NUTS 3 region in the most recent national parliamentary election of each country, as of November 2026. Data and map: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026), `https://electionatlas.eu`.

Contents

Introduction **v**

1 Foundations of Electoral Sociology **1**
1.1 What is Electoral Sociology? . . . 1
1.2 Precursors: Marx, Weber, and Beyond . . . 3
1.3 From André Siegfried to the Ecological Fallacy . . . 5
1.4 Three Classical Models . . . 7
1.4.1 The Columbia School . . . 7
1.4.2 The Michigan School . . . 8
1.4.3 Rational Choice Theory . . . 11
1.5 Lipset and Rokkan's Cleavage Theory . . . 13

2 The European Party System(s) **15**
2.1 Party systems in multilevel polities . . . 15
2.2 A few European party systems, compared . . . 17
2.3 The European party system: Europarties and EP groups . . . 19
2.3.1 Europarties . . . 19
2.3.2 European Parliament groups . . . 24
2.3.3 Evolution of the European party system . . . 25
2.3.4 Ideological classifications . . . 27
2.4 Party Systems in Europe: One, 52, or more? . . . 28

3 Trends in Electoral Sociology and Geography (2001–2026) **29**
3.1 Dealignment, realignment, abstention . . . 29
3.2 New electoral cleavages: education, culture, globalization . . . 31
3.3 Populism, trust, and the "anti-system" vote . . . 35
3.4 Gender, generations, and the changing social bases of electoral competition . . . 36
3.5 The geography of discontent . . . 41
3.6 The irresistible rise of the far right? . . . 51

4 Election Data Sources **59**
4.1 Aggregate demand-side data . . . 60
4.1.1 Official election results . . . 60
4.1.2 Polls and exit polls . . . 61
4.1.3 Regional and local statistics . . . 63
4.1.4 Harmonized datasets of election results . . . 64
4.2 Individual demand-side data . . . 65
4.2.1 National election studies . . . 66
4.2.2 Comparative (international) surveys . . . 66
4.3 Primary supply-side data . . . 68

4.4 Secondary supply-side data 69

5 Questions and Methods of European Election Analysis 71
5.1 Questions and problematization 71
5.2 Typical structure of case studies 72
5.3 Mapping election results 73
5.4 Quantitative indicators and methods 75
5.4.1 Descriptive indicators for election results 77
5.4.2 Analysis of ecological data 77
5.4.3 Analysis of survey data 78
5.5 Qualitative methods 79
5.5.1 Documents 79
5.5.2 Academic publications 80

Bibliography 81

Introduction

This short document offers an overview of the main concepts and methods of contemporary European electoral analysis. It is not meant as a substitute for the great academic treatises and handbooks that give an extensive overview of current research issues. Instead, it strives to give some keys to a practical understanding of current political developments from the point of view of a "working election analyst," with particular attention to available quantitative data. Its primary audience are the students of the course on "European Electorates"—the second part of "European Elected Officials and Electorates"—taught in the Master's programme in European and International Studies at Sciences Po Strasbourg. Interested students and professionals beyond that institution may find in it a first guide to dissecting contemporary electoral events. No prior background in political science, statistics, or data analysis is expected. Its goal is to convey the fundamentals students need to carry out electoral analyses themselves: select one or more recent electoral events, gather the relevant data from open sources, and identify and explain their most salient features. Accordingly—and being an interdisciplinary scholar myself—I have kept the bibliographic apparatus compact and focused.

The document follows the structure of the course. After a short introduction to the fundamentals of electoral sociology (Chapter 1), I review the structure of Europe's party systems (Chapter 2) and the main trends in electoral sociology and geography since the turn of the millennium (Chapter 3). The next two chapters discuss relevant data sources (Chapter 4) and address the main questions posed by recent developments, as well as the empirical methods that can help answer them (Chapter 5).

Throughout this document, I adopt a Europe-wide approach that does not put any specific country in the foreground. By "Europe," I mean not only the member states of the European Union, but the European continent at large, including countries such as the United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland, or the states of the Western Balkans. Our main focus will be on national parliamentary elections and European Parliament elections, although regional and local elections will sometimes be most informative. While I have deliberately refrained from following any "national" tradition in the presentation of the facts, readers will note that I drew mainly from Anglophone, German, and French handbooks as a reference (Arzheimer et al. 2017; Dalton and Klingemann 2007; Falter and Schoen 2014; Mayer 2010). All maps and graphs I present use data and visuals from the Basic Local Units Election Database (BLUE_DB; Hublet and Chiecchio 2026), a dataset of local-level election results that covers 52 countries and territories from 2001 to the present and that I maintain together with Nicola Chiecchio. All figures reflect the state of the database as of November 2026. The (open) data can be explored online at `https://electionatlas.eu`.

Chapter 1

Foundations of Electoral Sociology

1.1 What is Electoral Sociology?

Electoral sociology studies *how different people vote*, and *why they vote the way they do*. The 'how' is most frequently analyzed in terms of party or candidate choice, while 'different people' can be grouped by region, social class, age, etc., depending on the type of analysis performed. The 'why' can involve a variety of claims, which often share a *causal* or quasi-causal language (some people vote one way *because* they have some characteristics), although strong evidence of causality in voting behavior is actually quite rare. In practice, available data more often provides either descriptive statistics (the 'how') or explanatory hypotheses and correlations (a form of 'why' without a proven causal mechanism). The 'why' may explain voting behavior by referring to differences in social status, geography, or other individual or group characteristics that structure the vote (e.g., 'young urban voters voted for X'). It may focus on *values* instead, which often happen to correlate with socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., 'liberal, ecologically conscious voters voted for X'), or on cultural substrates and historical traditions (e.g., 'most voters in the old communist bulwark of T still overwhelmingly vote for X'). It may further rationalize voting behavior by considering personal or collective incentives, which voters may sometimes themselves propose to justify their vote (e.g., 'well-off educated voters chose X to save taxes and because they considered X to be more competent on foreign policy issues'). The literature commonly organizes these explanations into three levels (Figure 1.1): *socio-demographic characteristics*, which are relatively stable and causally 'distant' from the vote; *political values and attitudes*, which are partly shaped by them; and *political behavior* proper, such as turnout and vote choice. Socio-demographic characteristics act on behavior both through the mediation of values and attitudes and directly, e.g., via the perception of individual or group interests.

These different levels of explanation make electoral sociology a very versatile and diverse discipline, but also incur many methodological pitfalls. Next, we discuss four of them that are of particular importance for practical election analysis.

First, the reader should always bear in mind that while statistics from, say, opinion polls can draw a very rich descriptive picture of how people vote or intend to vote, that description can always be analyzed at multiple levels at once. Simple narratives that claim that 'certain demographics vote a certain way' and handpick one or two strong variables as causal explanations of an election's outcome are almost always *too* simple. To begin with, as we have already underlined, evidence of causality is very rare in political sociology. Moreover, such explanations neglect the ways in which most individuals would themselves explain their vote, and legitimately so: the values they uphold, the way their family and friends have always voted, the political programs they found most attractive. Finally, they also ignore the way the political and electoral system influenced their decisions: who were the candidates?

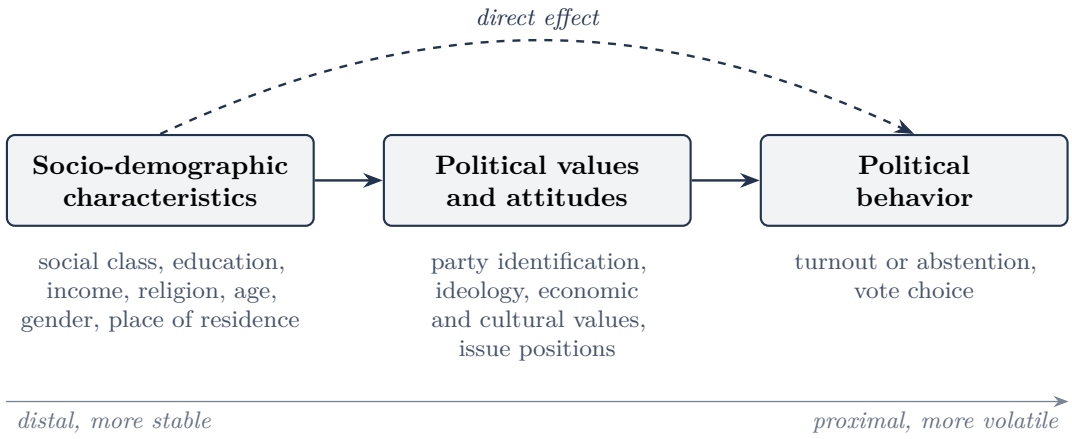


Figure 1.1: The three levels of political behavior. Arrows indicate the main direction of influence, from distal to proximal factors.

what did they have to offer? what was at stake in the election? Without taking into account the so-called *supply side* of the political system (the candidates, parties, and programs), all explanations are partial. In elections, voters do not pick an ideal candidate in a vacuum; they make their choice among a small preselection of candidates or parties running for office, whose programs they cannot directly influence. In practice, an honest explanation of voting behavior must relate demographics, values, and candidate or party profiles, and, whenever possible, should never merely rest on simple aggregate statistics.

Second, electoral sociology is most often highly multidimensional. The various socio-demographic features of individuals are generally correlated: younger citizens are, on average, less wealthy and more educated than senior citizens; European suburban areas concentrate both extreme wealth and extreme poverty; women work part-time significantly more often than men and are much more likely to hold care or teaching jobs; immigrants and their descendants are more likely to live in cities, etc. Whenever one of these criteria *would be* decisive in explaining voting behavior, many other criteria that correlate with it would also show an apparent effect in polls and surveys. This warrants caution when analyzing statistics: if cities favor party X over Y consistently, it may be because of a specific urban culture, higher education, higher wages, younger age, higher migration background, or all of these at once. Raw numbers alone cannot tell, and voters themselves may not be able to single out a decisive factor. To make matters worse, all the above characteristics correlate with a multi-dimensional set of values: climate-conscious citizens are more likely to be young, female, and highly educated; younger men are more often nationalistic and economically right-wing than younger women; middle-aged Breton or Bavarian voters are more likely to be Christian Democrats and older East Berliners more often favor the radical left or far right than their Western counterparts. As a result, it is often more convenient to identify clusters of values and socio-demographic features that function together, potentially over distinct axes (e.g., left–right versus pro-EU–euroskeptic), rather than to opt for unidimensional explanations.

Third, the trends and mechanisms underlying voting behavior are always somewhat contingent and can vary widely from one region to its neighbor and from one time period to another. In multiple Western European countries, demographics that used to form the backbone of the Communist electorate now overwhelmingly support radical-right parties; educated voters from Eastern Europe are much less likely to vote for left-wing parties than their Western European peers; many universities now considered rather progressive have also been the birthplace of modern nationalism; voters who regularly attend religious services vote overwhelmingly for right-wing parties in some areas, for left-wing parties in others, and for

centrist parties in yet another group; tech companies have been supportive of progressive policies in certain contexts and of hard-right leaders in others... Political and electoral sociology varies in time and space, with associations between individual characteristics, group identities and values, party identification, and voting behavior evolving permanently. Looking at contemporary Europe, some variations are evident, while general trends can still be identified, but the same phenomenon also exists at national and subnational level.

Fourth, analysts should not neglect the importance of non-voting and other non-candidate voting options when investigating the sociological mechanisms behind an election. Non-voting *lato sensu* can take a number of forms: invalid votes, blank votes or 'none of the above,' non-voting proper (abstention), and non-registration (i.e., voting-age citizens not on the voter roll). In some contexts, information about the share of non-citizens within the population and their sociology can also be helpful when analyzing the representativeness of a result. Not voting is, in general, a voting option among others. It may have a variety of causes—lack of interest in politics, disappointment, protest, or simply the absence of a candidate meeting the voters' expectations. In any case, and as *mobilization* and *demobilization* dynamics appear particularly crucial in contemporary politics, forms of non-voting deserve similar attention as individual voting options for parties or candidates.

1.2 Precursors: Marx, Weber, and Beyond

An early example of electoral sociology can be found in the works of Karl Marx, especially *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (*Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850*) (K. Marx 1850) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (*Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*) (K. Marx 1852). While Marx's analyses of the Constituent Assembly (April 1848), presidential (December 1848), and legislative (May 1849) elections held in France do not rely on any systematic analysis of data, his work still stands out for its modernity. The first elections held in France by direct universal male suffrage, the three ballots were a turning point in European political history. Marx discusses their results in terms of what modern scholarship would describe as *class cleavages*: oppositions between different socio-economic groups—in Marx's words: the proletariat, the (petty and high) bourgeoisie, the peasants, and several intermediate groups—that structure the vote for political factions or parties. In the 1848 presidential election won by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (the soon-to-be Napoleon III), Marx identifies 'moderate republican' candidate Cavaignac as the representative of the repressive bourgeois establishment, democratic socialist Ledru-Rollin as the man of the petty bourgeoisie, and socialist Raspail as the prototypical proletarian candidate. But his class analysis (one could say: his socio-economic analysis) also revealed a fact at odds with his own normative views on class struggle. In *The Class Struggles...*, Marx notes that the election's winner, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, collected 74% of the popular vote (Table 1.1) by assembling a heterogeneous coalition whose motivations and interests differed. Its core were the peasants—Marx calls 10 December 1848 "the day of the peasant insurrection" and "the reaction of the countryside against the city," a formula that anticipates many modern slogans—but it also included 'proletarians,' who voted out of protest against the incumbent Cavaignac, responsible for the bloody repression of the June 1848 uprising, and 'grand bourgeois,' who saw Bonaparte as a bridge towards a restoration of the traditional political order. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire...*, written after Bonaparte's coup of December 1851, Marx turns this observation into a theory of the peasant vote. The small-holding peasants (*Parzellenbauern*), by far the most numerous group in French society at the time, form a 'vast mass' (*ungeheure Masse*) of producers living in similar conditions but isolated from one another, "much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes." Lacking the organization and common consciousness that would make them a class 'for itself,' they "cannot represent

Table 1.1: Results of the French presidential election of 10–11 December 1848 and Marx's class reading of the candidates.

Candidate	Orientation	Votes	%	Social basis according to Marx
Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte	Bonapartist, catch-all	5,434,226	74.33	peasants, military, parts of the proletariat and high bourgeoisie
Louis-Eugène Cavaignac	Moderate republican	1,448,107	19.81	bourgeoisie
Alexandre Ledru-Rollin	The Mountain	370,119	5.06	petty bourgeoisie
François-Vincent Raspail	Socialist	36,920	0.50	revolutionary proletariat
Alphonse de Lamartine	Liberal	17,210	0.24	—
Nicolas Changarnier	Monarchist	4,790	0.07	—
Total		7,311,372	100.00	

themselves, they must be represented"—by a strong man such as Bonaparte.

By modern empirical standards, these claims are only partially backed by rigorous statistical analysis. However, they illustrate a few typical (claimed) behavioral patterns in electoral sociology that remain relevant more than a century and a half later. Just as he was laying the foundations of 150 years of class-centric analysis, Marx was quick to recognize that socio-economic status, political behavior, group identities, and (real or hypothetical) socio-economic interests were not necessarily aligned: a shared class position does not automatically produce a shared class vote. He also identified other potential cleavages, such as the one between rural and urban areas, linked them to different modes of production and social organization, and hinted at a catch-all character in Bonaparte's campaign that is evocative of modern populism. To this day, *class voting* remains one of the main patterns studied by electoral sociologists, in conjunction with other factors such as education, gender, or age. While its strength and form have changed considerably (see Chapter 3), empirical data establish its continued relevance in many contemporary polities.

In *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Weber 1922), published posthumously in 1921–1922, Max Weber distinguishes social classes from two other phenomena of the distribution of power within a community: *status groups* (*Stände*) and parties. While a class is defined by a shared economic position under market conditions (in terms of property or marketable skills, and hence of 'life chances'), a status group is defined, according to Weber, by a shared social estimation of "honor" or prestige, expressed in a common style of life. Weber cites American "gentlemen"'s clubs and the society formed by the oldest families of a given settlement, but also ethnic and religious groups, as examples of *Stände*. Unlike Marx, Weber does not see classes as communities: they are merely categories of people sharing the same economic situation, which may or may not give rise to common action. Status groups, in contrast, are normally communities, albeit often of an "amorphous" kind. Parties, finally, are for Weber associations deliberately built to acquire and exercise power, and therefore require more internal unity and organization. Hence, while he recognizes the importance of social classes as a dimension of social order, Weber does not see them as the main organizing principle of political power. Class is one dimension of social organization among others, able to influence parties and holders of political power. With his (at least) two-dimensional model of social stratification combining classes and status groups, Weber also anticipates various multidimensional models of political competition that would emerge in the late 20th century: the economic left–right axis is complemented by other axes anchored in non-material hierarchies, driven, e.g., by educational, cultural, or national and ethnic claims. An interesting example of a two-dimensional model of social status that occupies a middle ground between Marxian and Weberian ideas is Pierre

Bourdieu's duality of 'economic capital' and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1979), which extends a class-based view of social hierarchies to the cultural realm.

Empirical electoral analyses had begun to appear well before Weber's treatise was published. In 1905, Weber's own journal, the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, published one of the first documented statistical analyses of electoral behavior: R. Blank's "The Social Composition of Germany's Social Democratic Electorate" (Blank 1905). The article investigates the sociological foundations of the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) electoral success in the Reichstag (imperial parliament) election of 1903, in which the party won the largest share of the vote, comparing it with the elections of 1893 and 1898. Blank first describes the unequal geographic distribution of the SPD vote at the level of states and provinces (highest in Berlin, with 66.8%, and lowest in the Province of Posen, with only 2.7%). He connects this heterogeneity to differences in industrial development (more industrial regions favor the SPD) and religion (Catholic regions resist the SPD more strongly, many Catholic workers still voting for the Catholic Centre Party). Blank then investigates how much of the bourgeois vote the SPD was able to capture by computing the difference between the electoral potential of workers (the SPD's traditional electorate) and the party's actual result. He estimates that at least 540,000 SPD votes in 1903 cannot be explained by the vote of workers alone, and that bourgeois voters made up at least a quarter of the SPD's electorate as early as 1893 and 1898. Focusing on the urban electorate, he observes that the SPD's share of the vote exceeded the working-class share of the population by an even larger proportion in most large cities, especially those with a Protestant majority, such as Berlin and Hamburg, but also in two Catholic cities, Munich and Strasbourg. Yet the SPD was not merely an urban party: in rural areas, only the Centre Party received more votes. The rest of the article discusses various regional peculiarities, such as the SPD's strong showing among Catholic voters in Alsace-Lorraine, where the Centre Party was unusually weak. Blank concludes that the SPD is no longer a pure class party and is gradually becoming a "people's party" (*Volkspartei*) able to play a major political role in most regions and social strata. Although over a century old, Blank's analysis already displays many features of rigorous contemporary electoral analysis, including a fairly systematic treatment of regional electoral data and population statistics.

1.3 From André Siegfried to the Ecological Fallacy

Some degree of geographical analysis was already present in the early electoral analyses we have cited. However, the birth of modern *electoral geography* is conventionally identified with the publication of André Siegfried's *Political Portrait of Western France under the Third Republic* (*Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République*) in 1913 (Siegfried 1913). In this book, Siegfried seeks to identify the cultural and sociological factors that underlie different geographic patterns of voting in Western France between 1876 and 1910. The first half of the *Tableau* is a series of smaller regional monographs, while the second half draws general conclusions for the whole of Western France. The use of fine-grained socio-demographic and electoral data at cantonal (local) level was a major innovation in Siegfried's time. Siegfried explains local and regional heterogeneity as the consequence of a complex interplay of economic structures (large vs. scattered landholding), geology (less vs. more productive soil), urbanization, religion, language, etc. These factors influence attitudes towards republicanism, Bonapartism, and monarchism—the major left–right cleavage of the time—and, more directly, the parties' results. Often, several dimensions intersect: for instance, Siegfried contrasts the large landholdings of Western Sarthe, which cemented the power of a small number of (often aristocratic) families and the political influence of right-wing parties over the rural population, with the fragmentation of farmland property in the Loire valley, which provided a more favorable breeding ground for rural republicanism. Throughout his

book, Siegfried identifies both stable trends in many regions and significant differences between them, at times even concluding that some regions were patches of Ancien Régime in the middle of modern France or had never been reached by republicanism. While this approach has often been criticized by modern scholarship as overly deterministic, it should be borne in mind that Siegfried's methodology was already quite rigorous for his time, and that the regions he analyzed did show a degree of cultural, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity quite unlike that of contemporary France.

With voting results available only at the local (precinct, municipality, or cantonal) level, electoral analyses relying on correlations between voting and socio-demographic patterns at the local level were the first form of large-scale modern electoral analysis. Such analyses, called *ecological analyses* in the academic literature, remain a key genre of electoral sociology to this day. An often-cited precursor is Herbert Tingsten (1937), whose 1937 book provides one of the first instances of a comparative study of European voting behavior based on local and regional statistics, including one of the first studies of gender-specific electoral behavior. Another founding figure of ecological electoral analysis is the German-American sociologist Rudolf Heberle, who investigated the rise of the National Socialist party (NSDAP) in Schleswig-Holstein between 1918 and 1932, combining qualitative historical and geographical analysis with quantitative sociological methods (Heberle 1945; Heberle 1963). Heberle showed significant differences in the NSDAP's growth between the region's natural and agrarian zones, and used statistical correlations to relate the NSDAP vote to local social structure, in particular the size of farms and the relative weight of independent farmers and agricultural laborers. At the time, opinion polls and electoral surveys were still very rare in Europe, leaving few alternatives to local- or regional-level voting data for statistical analysis. Moreover, ecological analyses can, in many cases, reveal genuine individual-level patterns; this was likely the case for many early analyses that showed correlations, e.g., between the share of workers in an area and the electoral success of socialist and communist parties.

However, ecological methods can also be criticized—on solid ground—for sometimes suggesting incorrect individual-level correlations. Had an early electoral sociologist observed that, say, "areas that are home to more factory owners are more left-wing," they would have been wrong to conclude that "factory owners are more left-wing." In this case, it would have been much more plausible that factory owners live in areas that are also home to many factory *workers*, who are known to be more left-wing. Deducing incorrect individual-level correlations from valid aggregate-level correlations is called the *ecological fallacy* and was pointed out in a classic essay by Robinson (1950). In practice, it is always preferable to avoid claiming individual-level effects from aggregate data, even when the underlying individual-level mechanisms may be hypothesized and discussed qualitatively. In many cases, several explanations may all be simultaneously plausible. For instance, in Germany or France, areas with a larger immigrant population tend to vote less for far-right parties. This can be caused by several phenomena at once: immigrants themselves voting for the far right less often; the urban population as a whole voting for the far right less often *because they are more often in contact with immigrants* (the so-called *contact hypothesis* (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006)); or immigrants settling in urban environments that are structurally more liberal (e.g., more educated, younger) and therefore less right-wing. Here, aggregate data allow us to identify neither *who* votes less for the far right (immigrants vs. non-immigrants) nor *why* (contact with immigrants vs. more liberal attitudes). When individual-level survey data can answer the first question, the answer is not always predictable and varies by country and over time: while only a small minority of French Muslim voters—a group largely made up of immigrants and their descendants—voted for Marine Le Pen in the first round of the 2022 presidential election (Ifop 2022), Russian-German resettlers (*Spätaussiedler*) gave the AfD a slightly above-average share of their votes in the 2017 Bundestag election (15% vs.

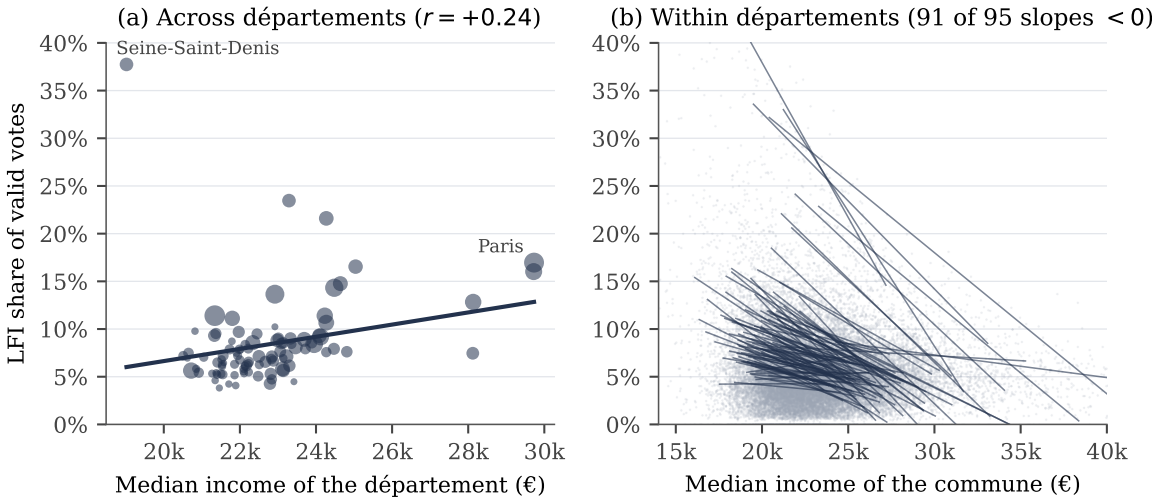


Figure 1.2: Simpson's paradox: income and the vote for La France insoumise (LFI) in the 2024 European Parliament election, metropolitan France. (a) Richer départements gave LFI a slightly higher share of the vote. (b) Within almost every département, richer communes gave LFI a *lower* share (one fitted line per département, drawn over the central 90% of its communes). Income: median disposable income per consumption unit, 2021. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026); INSEE, Filosofi (INSEE 2024).

12.6%) (Goerres et al. 2019).

Beyond the identification problem we just saw, ecological analyses are plagued by problems of aggregation. One classical example is Simpson's paradox (Simpson 1951), which can be illustrated by looking at the radical-left vote in France (Figure 1.2). On average, the vote for the radical-left La France insoumise (LFI) is more common in départements with a higher median income (panel (a)). Should one conclude that richer citizens are those supporting the radical left? The surveys say otherwise, and municipality-level data in fact already show a negative correlation: within most départements, poorer municipalities have a higher share of LFI voters. At the aggregate level, the pattern is consistent with LFI being strongest in *poorer municipalities of richer départements*; survey data show that it is strongest in poorer demographics overall, with a significant, but lower share of the vote in richer demographics (19% among voters with a monthly household income below €1,250 vs. 8% above €3,000) (Ipsos 2024). Note that the conclusion that "LFI is strongest among poorer voters" still cannot be drawn from Figure 1.2(b) alone, since it could still be the case that, e.g., richer voters in poor municipalities are more likely to vote for LFI than poorer voters there.

1.4 Three Classical Models

Next, we present three classical models of individual electoral behavior. These three models were developed in the post-war period in the United States, but have since then enjoyed worldwide academic influence, including for the analysis of European electoral dynamics. Our description is based mainly on Falter and Schoen (2014) and Mayer (2010).

1.4.1 The Columbia School

The first 'micro-sociological' approach (Falter and Schoen 2014) that we discuss is due to Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) and Berelson et al. (1954). Published in 1944, *The People's Choice:*

How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign is likely the most influential book in the history of electoral sociology. The authors analyze the 1940 presidential election in Erie County (Ohio) using large-scale individual survey data and develop an explanatory model of voting behavior. Two aspects of this work have been particularly influential: (1) its demonstration of the explanatory power of socio-demographic variables in explaining voting behavior and (2) its underlying model of voting behavior as based on socialization and group conformity.

(1) To this day, the work of the Columbia School remains associated with the idea that specific socio-economic characteristics can (statistically) predict the voting behavior of individuals. In *The People's Choice*, the main predictive variables are socio-economic status, religion, and settlement size. The authors underline the strong statistical regularities behind voting behavior: "a person thinks, politically, as he [*sic!*] is, socially" (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944, p. 27). However, their model is not one of political determinism; rather, they underline the social contingencies and interests underlying these regularities.

(2) An equally important—and more debatable—contribution of the Columbia School's model is its model of the emergence of political preferences. Unlike the Marxian and, later, the rational-choice school, Columbia sociologists do not assume that individual or group interests determine party preference. Instead, they view political preferences as the result of socialization and group pressure, which can be independent of—and in fact, go against—voters' objective interests and rational calculation. The implicit or explicit political education that occurs within families and other social groups determines the individual's political identity, and group dynamics and the influence of powerful "opinion leaders" within them influence its evolution. This typically results in socially homogeneous groups displaying homogeneous political positions. In contrast, individuals located at the margins or at the intersection of various groups are subject to "cross-pressures" that make them more liable to change their vote or abstain from voting. We represent this model in Figure 1.3. Read literally, this model is now outdated (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). A broad field of research has studied the evolution of individual political preferences across a voter's lifetime; the degree of partisan affiliation of Western electorates has been steadily decreasing across the years; and the role of opinion leaders and close-knit communities is arguably smaller today than it was in the 1940s. Nonetheless, empirical research has also confirmed the importance of the transmission of political values in family and peer groups, especially during childhood and adolescence, in the formation of political identities (M. K. Jennings et al. 2009; Ditmars 2023). Phenomena of political homophily have also been largely backed by evidence (McPherson et al. 2001). Hence, the Columbia School's model remains useful as an abstract model of the dynamics that lead socially differentiated groups to adopt relatively stable political attitudes across time.

1.4.2 The Michigan School

Ten years after Lazarsfeld et al., Campbell et al. (Campbell et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960) introduced alternative, socio-psychological models of voting behavior in two landmark studies: *The Voter Decides* and *The American Voter*. The work of the so-called Michigan School is characterized by a stronger focus on the factors *mediating* between socio-demographic characteristics and the voting decision: voters' positions regarding issues, parties, and candidates in *The Voter Decides*, and political positions (broadly construed) in *The American Voter*.

In *The Voter Decides*, which investigates voting behavior during the 1952 presidential election using a representative nationwide survey, the authors explain voting in terms of a series of three political attitudes. *Party identification* is the degree of (self-assessed) closeness of a voter to the main political parties. Concretely, voters are asked to indicate their position on a partisan scale that ranges from 'strong Democrat' through 'Independent' to 'strong Republican.' *Issue orientation* is composed of three sub-indicators: *sensitivity to partisan*

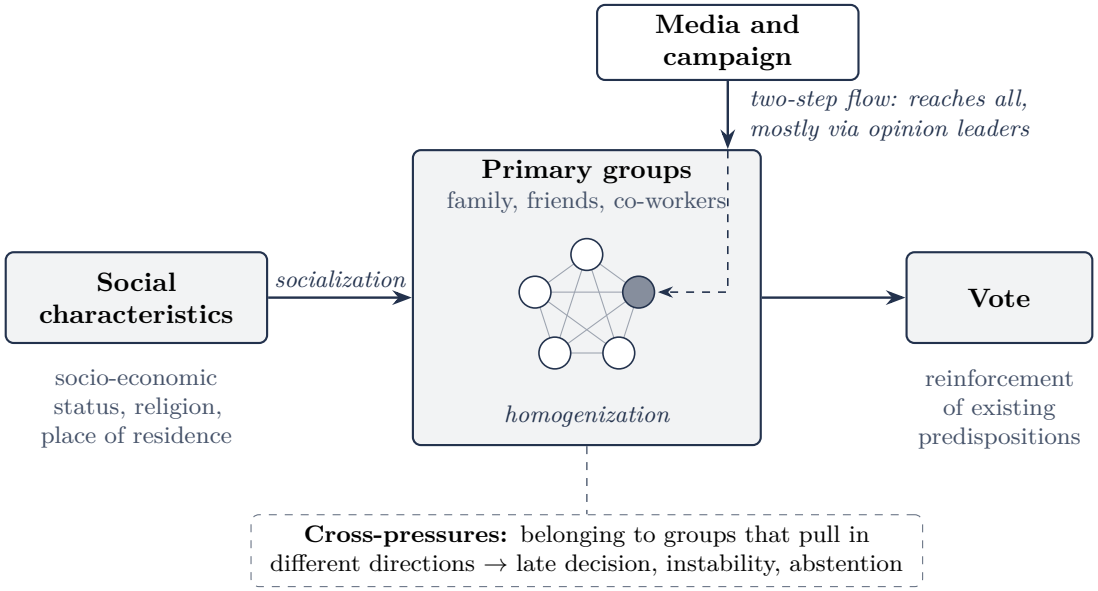


Figure 1.3: The Columbia model: social characteristics shape the vote through primary groups, which socialize and homogenize their members' political preferences. After Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) and Berelson et al. (1954).

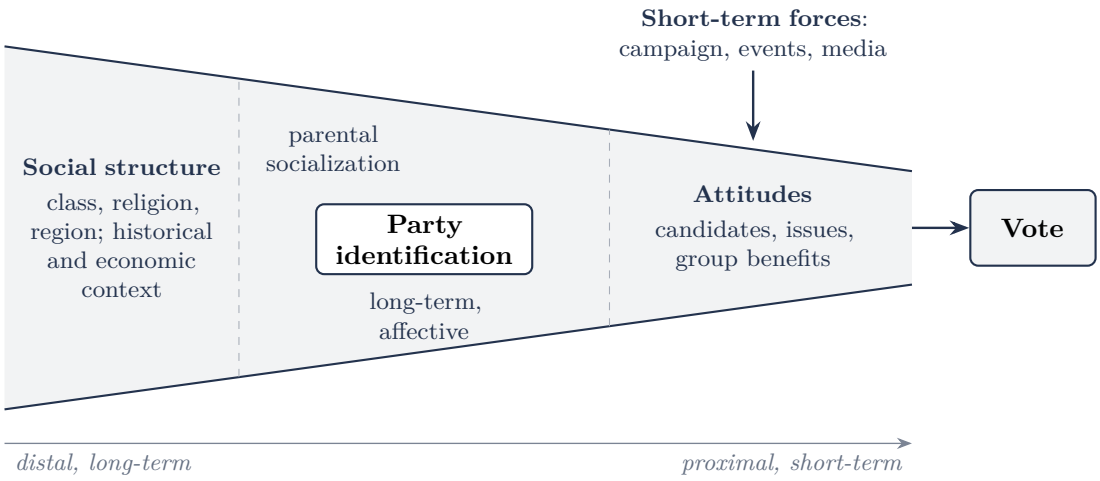


Figure 1.4: The Michigan model: the funnel of causality, with party identification as the central long-term factor. After Campbell et al. (1960).

differences (do voters identify differences between the two parties' positions?); *extent of issue involvement* (do voters express a clear preference between the positions of parties on specific issues?); and *issue partisanship* (with which party do voters' issue preferences align?). Finally, *candidate orientation* measures voters' attitude towards the personal characteristics of the two main presidential candidates, Eisenhower and Stevenson. Similarly to issue orientation, the authors differentiate between the extent and the direction of candidate orientation. The three investigated characteristics influence each other *and* influence the voting decision. Similar items have since been adopted in many opinion and value surveys and are routinely included in political science studies. Much less clear is the causal relation between the various factors: while Campbell et al. present party identification, issue orientation, and candidate orientation as influencing the voting decision, it is unclear why, e.g., a favorable attitude towards the personality of a given candidate should causally explain the voting decision, rather than justify it *a posteriori*.

The American Voter refines this approach. Political attitudes as measured in *The Voter Decides* are now only one link in a causal chain that connects socio-demographic and cultural factors to voting behavior. As in the Columbia School's model, such factors influence party identification, which in turn influences political attitudes, and, through them, voting behavior. Party identification is conceived of as an affective, long-term attachment, typically acquired early in life through the family and stable across a voter's lifetime; it acts as a 'perceptual screen' through which voters evaluate candidates and issues. The resulting model involves a 'funnel of causality' (Figure 1.4) that can be viewed as reconciling Lazarsfeld's microsociological approach with Campbell's psychological focus. Attitudes affect the vote directly and can be influenced by external factors (e.g., the political campaign) but remain dependent on predispositions acquired through socialization, including party identification. Structural factors only affect the voting behavior indirectly, through the mediation of identification and attitudes, but can nevertheless show a significant correlation with them. This second study also extends the set of attitudes considered by the authors, who now explicitly include questions about parties' ability to govern—a standard question in contemporary political surveys. Overall, the full model developed by the Michigan School provides a good basis for analyzing electoral behavior without neglecting socio-demographic, attitudinal, or group-specific factors.

In specific contexts, the three elements identified by the Michigan School as the main objects of voters' attitudes—parties, issues, and candidates—can also be considered in isolation, often because one of them is hypothesized to carry most weight. A focus on the personal qualities of individual candidates leads to the study of *candidate voting* (or the *personalization* of voting behavior) (Karvonen 2010; Garzia 2014). Similarly, one speaks of *issue voting* when voting behavior is thought to be mostly driven by important political issues and the parties' positions towards them, rather than by preexisting party identification. Issues can be divided into two main groups. *Position issues* are those on which voters and parties take different sides, and are the natural target of the spatial model of Figure 1.5. *Valence issues*, by contrast, are issues on which most voters share a similar position, such as economic prosperity, security, or the fight against corruption: on these, parties compete less by choosing a position than by appearing more competent than their rivals (D. E. Stokes 1963). Finally, not all issues carry the same weight at all points in time. The *salience* of an issue is the importance that voters attach to it and can be influenced by political parties' own actions. Hence, parties often compete less by moving their positions than by trying to publicly push (make salient) the issues on which they are deemed competent by voters, a phenomenon commonly known as 'issue ownership' (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996).

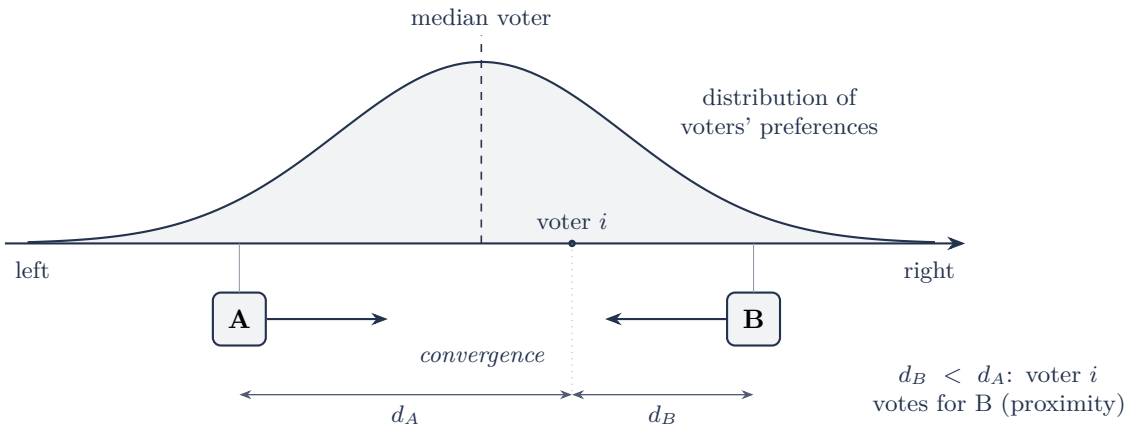


Figure 1.5: The rational-choice (spatial) model: voters choose the party closest to their own position, and parties competing for votes converge towards the median voter. After Downs (1957).

1.4.3 Rational Choice Theory

Downs's *An Economic Theory of Democracy* is at least as influential as the two previous models, yet it relies on a very different kind of abstraction. It originates in economic theory, more specifically in models of competitive markets. In this reading, voters are consumers and parties are producers. Knowing their own preferences and the programs supplied by the parties, voters act rationally by selecting the party nearest to them in the space of political positions. Knowing the distribution of voters, parties in turn select positions that maximize their own standing in elections under some additional constraints. In the simplest case, the resulting model resembles the one in Figure 1.5: voters are distributed in a line from far left to far right, each picking the party closest to their own position. If there are only two parties, a single dimension of political competition (e.g., left–right), and voters' preferences concentrate around a single peak, the theory predicts that the two parties should tend to converge towards the median position of the electorate to maximize their own performance: elections are lost or won in the center, and the median voter decides. Downs himself noted that with a polarized electorate or more than two parties, parties may instead have an interest in differentiating their positions. Such clean mathematical modeling allows analysts to resort to the resources of game theory to formalize and solve problems of political competition, which partly explains its lasting influence despite many simplifying hypotheses.

In practice, models of political competition can be significantly more complex than the one-dimensional, perfect-information model of Figure 1.5. As Downs himself emphasized, both voters and parties generally operate under partial information: they can only estimate the position of the other side (through opinion polls for parties, and by informally evaluating the potential position of parties in office for voters). In particular, when acquiring political information is costly and a single vote is very unlikely to be decisive, voters can rationally rely on shortcuts such as party ideologies and labels to make their voting decisions. Furthermore, the space of political competition can be highly multidimensional, with multiple parties competing on different dimensions and forming coalitions to govern. If the electoral system involves several rounds, preferential votes, or rankings of candidates, and even in many cases where a single-round election involves more than two candidates, the optimal strategy of individual voters can be much more elaborate than choosing the nearest party. This gives rise to many forms of tactical voting that have become a mainstream topic of discussion in Western media in recent decades. In the public sphere, the emergence of many political self-assessment tests, voting advice applications (VAAs; Garzia and Marschall 2012), and other candidate

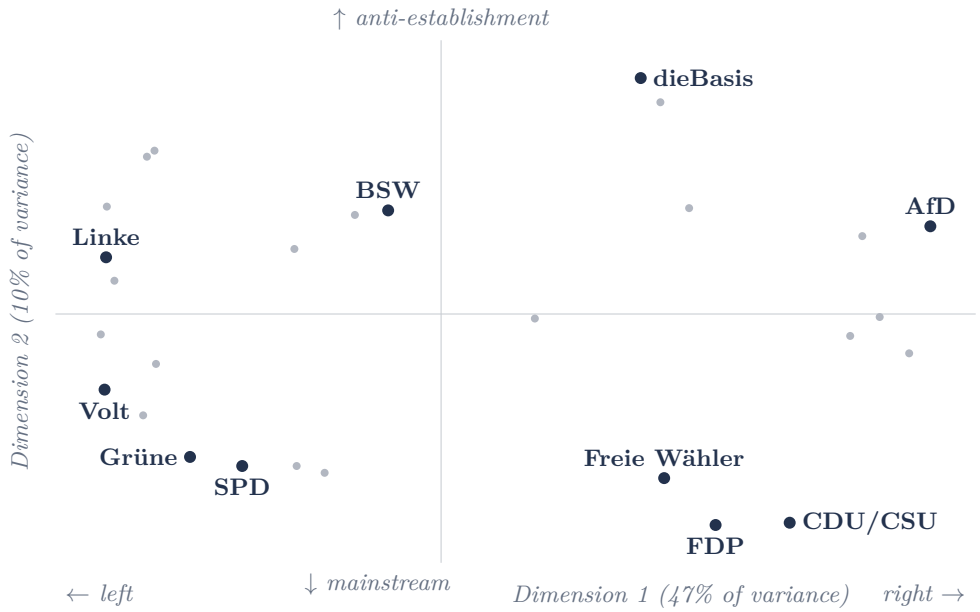


Figure 1.6: A two-dimensional space of party competition: positions of the 28 parties in the *Wahl-O-Mat* for the 2025 German federal election. Dimension 1 opposes, e.g., higher top tax rates and dual citizenship (left) to turning away asylum seekers and nuclear energy (right); Dimension 2 opposes, e.g., military support for Ukraine and the recruitment of skilled workers (mainstream) to a national currency, referendums, and abandoning climate targets (anti-establishment). Data: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2025a); own computation.

comparators ahead of elections can be seen as the practical voter-side counterpart of the ideal of rational choice: voters are helped to identify which parties or ideologies align with their preferences most closely based on a series of questions assumed to cover the main issues at stake. As a side effect, the positions that parties declare in such tools can be used to map the space of party competition. Figure 1.6 shows the result for the German *Wahl-O-Mat* ahead of the 2025 federal election (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2025a): projected onto their two main dimensions, the answers of 28 parties to 38 statements reveal a dominant left–right axis and a second axis opposing mainstream and anti-establishment parties.

Another, rather unsettling consequence of Downs's model is the so-called *paradox of voting* (Downs 1957): if the expected benefit of casting a vote is lower than its cost, a rational voter should abstain; but the benefit of a single vote is only obtained if this vote is decisive, and the probability of this happening is tiny. Should most voters therefore be expected to abstain? This question has attracted significant academic interest. Various approaches have been proposed to reconcile real-world turnout numbers with rational choice, either by internalizing other factors influencing voters' decision to turn out (e.g., the satisfaction of fulfilling one's civic duty; Riker and Ordeshook 1968) or by relaxing the hypotheses of the game, for instance through a different handling of uncertainty (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974). Alternatively, some have challenged the very assumptions that underlie the rational-choice model (Green and Shapiro 1994). But this implies giving up a model that has proved very powerful in both normative and empirical terms, especially in the modeling of an increasingly multidimensional and volatile political competition.

1.5 Lipset and Rokkan's Cleavage Theory

The cleavage theory of Lipset and Rokkan (1967)[1] seeks to capture the political fault lines that materialized during the formation of Western European party systems. Unlike the individual-level models above, which are rooted in micro-sociological interactions, Lipset and Rokkan's approach is 'macro-sociological': it relies on a comparative analysis of political history rather than on individual-level surveys. The authors' main contention is that modern party systems were shaped by long-term social conflicts, which structured partisan competition after the introduction of universal (male) suffrage. These conflicts were born of nation-building and industrialization. Lipset and Rokkan identify four resulting cleavages: center–periphery, religious–secular, rural–urban, and capital–labor. Cleavages arise from the opposing interests of social groups, respectively pitting peripheral regions against the nation-building center, the churches against the secular state, agrarian against urban-industrial interests, and the emerging working class against the bourgeoisie. The authors do not assume determinism: social divisions only translate into political cleavages when they are mobilized by political entrepreneurs. However, once mobilized, these alignments can prove remarkably durable: according to Lipset and Rokkan's 'freezing hypothesis,' the party systems of the 1960s still largely reflected the cleavage structures of the 1920s.

In a widely adopted definition, Kriesi (1994, pp. 224–225) describes a cleavage as a social division that separates the population into groups on the basis of a social criterion, such as class, religion, or ethnicity. Like Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Knutsen and Scarbrough (1995), Kriesi distinguishes three cumulative levels: a *socio-structural* level (the existence of the social division itself), an *identity-normative* level (the groups are aware of their collective identities and values), and an *organizational* level (the division is articulated by a party, a trade union, a church, or another organization). This definition is very flexible since the social criteria ("class, religion, or ethnicity") are only examples and can change over time. However, it may prove difficult to operationalize empirically; the identity-normative level, in particular, is very challenging to measure (Bornschier 2009). In practice, this three-level definition is rarely operationalized as such in empirical work, which frequently only analyzes cleavages from the demand side, i.e., from the viewpoint of voters. To make this explicit, Hublet and Lanoë (2025) distinguish a *cleaved demand*—a political demand that varies across the social groups separated by the cleavage—from a *cleaved supply*—a political offer that actively mobilizes the electorate around the interests, demands, or identity of certain social groups. Only the combination of a cleaved demand, a cleaved supply, and a link between the demand and individuals' identities and values produces a cleavage in the full sense. Several authors distinguish such *full* cleavages, in which all three levels are present, from *partial* cleavages or 'divides' in which not all dimensions occur (Deegan-Krause 2007; Deegan-Krause 2013). In the same spirit, when the demand is cleaved but not necessarily the supply, and the link between this demand and individuals' identities and values is not established, Hublet and Lanoë speak of a *pre-cleavage*. Analyses based on election results and socio-demographic data can only establish a cleaved demand, that is, a pre-cleavage; qualifying it as a full cleavage requires studying how parties and other organizations mobilize the corresponding division.

Standing on the shoulders of Lipset and Rokkan, the more recent *neo-cleavage theory* seeks to explain the emergence of new competing groups and fault lines in an era of successive crises, transnationalization, and shifting partisan balances (L. Hooghe and Marks 2018). The rise of neo-cleavage theory follows the recognition that the four cleavages inherited from the Rokkanian model no longer suffice to explain the structure of Western political competition, especially since the entry into the 'age of globalization' (Kriesi et al. 2008). The declining importance of economic and religious variables justifies the use of new models, but does not

[1] This section is adapted from Hublet and Lanoë (2025, pp. 220–224).

mean that the 'old' cleavages have become irrelevant. We return to these in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

The European Party System(s)

2.1 Party systems in multilevel polities

A *party system* is defined by a set of major parties and/or coalitions, typically stable over several legislative terms, around which electoral competition is structured. While elections can see many parties large and small compete for seats, party systems are primarily characterized by the relation between their largest political forces—typically, those able to obtain seats in the local legislature or to participate in government. Besides the number and relative sizes of the parties it contains, a party system is defined by a system of *alignments* between different groups of the population and political parties, which result in socially differentiated partisan affiliations. A change in the relation between social fault lines and partisan affiliations, i.e., a change in the structure of political cleavages (see Section 1.5) is referred to as a *realignment*.

Party system change can be conveniently illustrated by a few examples from the political history of the United States, Germany, and Italy. The United States are conventionally considered to have had at least six party systems (Chambers and Burnham 1967; Sundquist 1983), of which the latest to date is a two-party system opposing the centrist Democratic Party and the right-wing Republican Party. Independent candidates and other nationwide political parties (e.g., the Green, Libertarian, and Constitution parties) run in major elections, but their political weight is too limited to significantly impact power and opinion dynamics. The emergence of a seventh party system following Donald Trump's reshaping of the Republican party has been suggested, but remains contested among political scientists. The sixth party system succeeded the fourth (ca. 1896–1932) and fifth (ca. 1932–1980) party systems, characterized by the strong dominance of the Republican and Democratic party, respectively.

In Germany, post-1945 federal party systems are often identified by the number of parties represented in parliament (Blondel 1968; Sartori 1976). Between 1961 and 1983, only three parties or coalitions gained seats in the Bundestag: the coalition of the Christian Democratic Union and the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU, center-right), the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD, center-left), and the much smaller Free Democratic Party (FDP, center-right). Accordingly, the party system of the 1960s and 1970s is conventionally referred to as 'two-and-a-half-party system' (*Zweieinhalbparteiensystem*), owing to its configuration with two major and one minor ('half') party. Following the rise of the Greens in the 1980s, Germany developed a four-party system (1983–1990), and, after the emergence of the left-wing Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, a predecessor of today's Die Linke), a five-party system (1990–2017). The Alternative for Germany (AfD, far right) entered the Bundestag for the first time in 2017, giving rise to a six-party system in which the traditional dominance of the CDU/CSU and SPD has significantly eroded. Each party system change coincided with a series of changes in the structure of political cleavages, with, e.g., the Greens increasingly capturing highly educated, politically liberal urban voters while the AfD took root in more

disenfranchised, rural or suburban demographics.

In Italy, the best-known historical rupture is that of 1991–1994, when the investigations in the *Tangentopoli* and other related corruption cases shattered the two major parties of the time, the Christian Democracy (DC, center-right) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI, center-left). The simultaneous collapse of both parties gave rise to a new political order, known as the 'Second Republic' (*Seconda Repubblica*) despite the absence of a constitutional change. Between 1994 and 2013, the Second Republic was dominated by a two-bloc system composed of a center-left bloc dominated by a social democratic party (first the Democratic Party of the Left, later the Democratic Party) and a center-right to right-wing populist alliance led by Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia. On the fringes of the political spectrum, the Party of Communist Refoundation and the National Alliance (post-fascist) exerted significant influence. Since 2013, a new and more fluid party system has emerged with the rise of the Five-Star Movement (M5S)—a populist and mostly Southern party that progressively became a part of the center-left coalition—and two sizeable far right parties—Matteo Salvini's formerly Northern autonomist Lega Nord and Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy. The current party system retains a two-bloc logic opposing two nominally 'center-left' and 'center-right' coalitions, with the latter effectively dominated by nationalist parties.

In Section 1.5, we have seen that Lipset and Rokkan had hypothesized a 'freezing' of the party systems from the 1920s to the 1960s. In 1990, Bartolini and Mair (1990) indeed found evidence of a decrease in electoral volatility in the post-war period, and showed that volatility between the two sides of the left–right class cleavage remained far lower than volatility between individual parties: voters mostly moved within, not across, the two blocs. By contrast, the German and Italian examples above show that since then, significant *realignment* has taken place, with party system change occurring in many Western polities. We will come back to this, and the closely related phenomenon of *dealignment*, in Section 3.1.

In multilevel polities (L. Hooghe and Marks 2001; Deschouwer 2003) with a strong regional tier, party systems can vary by region and type of election. This is common in regions with a strong nationalist or autonomist movement: In Catalonia, Québec, or Corsica, a local party system consisting mostly of autonomist or independentist parties challenges the 'national' parties of Spain, Canada, and France. Such parties have their own internal fault lines (e.g., left–right or autonomist–independentist) besides the cleavage(s) that separate them from the parties of the larger state they are contained in. In some regions, differential mobilization of different groups of voters can lead to seemingly contradictory situations in different elections: the (French) nationalist Rassemblement National performs well in (French) presidential elections in Corsica, while its members are barely present on the regional scene, dominated by (Corsican) nationalists of both left-wing and centrist leanings. The most radical instance of a divided party system is Belgium, where almost all parties split along linguistic lines in the 1960s and 1970s, leaving Wallonia, Flanders, and the much smaller German Community with distinct party systems. At the federal level and in Brussels, where the two main linguistic groups meet, large coalitions involve parties of both linguistic groups.

Multilevel party systems are not exclusively triggered by substate nationalism or separatist movements. The Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), the sister party of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), only runs in one of the 16 German states, where the CDU is mostly absent. This is the result of a historical development marked by Bavarian autonomism, but does not result in the CSU explicitly defending Bavarian nationalism or other parties attempting a similar split. In fact, moderately differentiated party systems are rather common in federal or decentralized polities. In France—considered a model of a centralized state—, many regions have maintained a local duopoly of center-left (Socialist Party) and center-right parties (Republicans) despite the national political scene being dominated by other left-wing, center-right, and far-right forces. Similarly, Eastern German states have displayed a very

different relative distribution of the vote than their Western counterparts in the last decade, with the left-wing (Linke) and far-right (AfD) obtaining better results than elsewhere. In Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, etc., significant regional variations also exist.

The European Union as a whole (and, to a lesser extent, geographical Europe) can also be described as a loose supranational political space. Therefore, it is tempting to try and describe the European party landscape as a multilevel system. In the next sections, we will see how such a "European party system" is structured. However, while attempting this exercise, it is important to keep in mind that the level of integration of political parties varies widely between, say, Bavaria within Germany, Wallonia within Belgium, and Slovakia within the European Union. As we will see in the next sections, while certain member states have a party system that closely matches the party system that materializes in, e.g., the European Parliament, others are structured very differently.

2.2 A few European party systems, compared

To understand the similarities and differences between various party systems within Europe, next we consider the main political parties in the last national parliamentary election in the ten most populous EU member states: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Romania, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, and the Czech Republic. In Table 2.1, we group these parties into broad ideological families, distinguishing between radical-left, left and center-left, center and center-right, and radical-right parties.[1] The table also reports each member state's Effective Number of Parties (ENP) (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), a fractional measure of how many parties exist in the local party system relative to their size: a system with two large and one small party a third the size of the others would have an ENP close to 2.5.

The comparison shows that different member states have very different numbers of parties: while in Spain four parties and coalitions (PP, PSOE, Vox, and Sumar) concentrate most votes, in Romania and the Netherlands a large number of smaller parties obtain roughly equal vote shares. In Belgium, where two separate party systems exist in Wallonia and Flanders, the ENP is as high as 10.3. These differences are also reflected in the number of groups present in the lower chamber of national parliaments: 4 large groups and 5 much smaller ones (mostly regionalist/nationalist parties) in the Spanish Congreso de los Diputados, against 11 groups of more homogeneous size in the Belgian Chambre des représentants and 16 groups in the Dutch Tweede Kamer. Part of this variation is commonly attributed to differences in electoral systems (Lijphart 1999). In a country such as the Netherlands, where lower-house elections are contested using pure party-list proportional representation in a single national constituency, smaller and newer parties can easily obtain a few seats in parliament and emerge as challengers to existing forces. In contrast, in the German system, where parties need to obtain 5% of the vote nationally to gain seats in the Bundestag[2], entry is much harder for newcomers, and voters are incentivized by the electoral system to favor parties likely to pass the bar. In general, less proportional electoral systems—especially those using first-past-the-post as in the United Kingdom and the United States—are assumed to produce a more compact party system. However, other factors such as the degree of polarization of society, regional differences, and the existence of powerful, politically organized communities (e.g., religious parties) contribute to shape the party system.

[1] We do not use an independent 'right-wing' category as this label can be interpreted as meaning either all of the moderate and radical right (French *droite*, Spanish *derechas*) or only the far right (German *rechts*). We use 'center-right' for all non-radical right-of-center parties (= the French *droite* and German *mitte-rechts/bürgerlich*) and 'radical right' for the far right. Note that the Italian *centrodestra*, unlike our *center-right*, can designate a coalition of the center-right and far right.

[2] Exceptions exist for parties who obtain enough direct mandates and for parties representing national minorities.

Turning to the ideological profiles of the parties, a few facts stand out. First, all party systems except Wallonia's have at least one major center-left party, one major center-right party, and one major radical-right party. Wallonia is the only instance without a large radical-right party. Six systems additionally feature radical-left parties (independently or within a left-wing coalition), six have Green parties in addition to traditional center-left parties, and all but Spain's and Germany's involve at least two flavors of center-right parties: a free-market liberal and a conservative party. In fact, Spain and Germany also have liberal parties (Ciudadanos and the FDP), but these either did not run (Ciudadanos) or obtained a result too weak to be shown in the table (FDP). Four of these conservative parties (CDU/CSU, CDA, CD&V, KD) belong to the Christian Democratic family. On the right, five systems see competition between different strands of nationalism (FdI vs. Lega in Italy, PiS vs. Konfederacja in Poland...). We will come back to the differences between these in the next sections when we address the distribution of parties into political groups.

Overall, a 'typical' European party system is thus composed of a large center-left party or coalition (often social democratic), one or more large center-right parties (conservative or Christian Democratic vs. liberal), and one or more large radical-right parties. Radical-left and Green parties and a second or third radical-right party are common but not universal. Almost everywhere, the total of the right-of-center bloc (center-right and radical right) is above 55% and sometimes as high as 90%, the only exception among the largest EU member states being Spain. How the three main families (left, center-right, radical right) interact depends on national political customs. While in Germany, France, Romania, or Belgium, a relatively strict 'cordon sanitaire' (*Brandmauer*, *barrage républicain* etc.) policy has so far been applied in government formation, in other systems coalitions spanning all of the right bloc are accepted (Italy, Netherlands, Sweden). Other systems apply a relatively strict two-bloc system that practically forbids coalition across the political center: France, Italy, Spain, and Sweden; in Poland and Czechia, the two blocs are instead divided between the center-right and the radical right. Only the Netherlands has neither a two-bloc system nor a cordon sanitaire, while only France has both, giving rise to an effective tripartition of the party system.

European party systems have common features—but are the electorates of comparable national parties similar? To answer this question, we first consider the gap in voting behavior by gender, age, and education as reported by the latest exit polls and post-election surveys (Figure 2.1). A few structural findings emerge: almost all radical-right parties perform better among voters with the lowest level of educational attainment, while most Green and center-right parties perform better among highly educated voters. Female voters are more likely to be left-wing, whereas male voters are more likely to vote for the radical right. The effect of age, on the other hand, varies by country: the left-wing NFP coalition and the Czech Pirates are more popular among the young, while the German SPD and Swedish Social Democrats are most successful in older demographics.

A more precise picture of the relationship between social characteristics, value systems, and partisan affiliations can be obtained by analyzing European Social Survey (ESS) data. Table 2.2 and Figure 2.2 show the distribution of voters of each of the four families (Greens shown separately) in 2023–24 in terms of their position on five dimensions (redistribution, immigration, secularism, trust, EU integration) and socio-demographics. A total of 22 EU member states are covered. Radical-left voters are more pro-redistribution, open to immigration, and liberal, and slightly distrustful; center-left voters share the same characteristics, minus distrust, and add pro-EU sentiment; Greens are similar to other center-left voters with more strongly positive attitudes on all axes; center-right voters are opposed to redistribution, display more political trust, and are indifferent or divided on immigration, liberalism, and EU integration; radical-right voters are critical on all five axes—their profile appears as the opposite of the

Greens'.

In terms of demographics, the ESS confirms that women tend to be more left-wing and men vote more frequently for the far right; that center-left and, even more strongly, Green electorates are skewed towards higher educational attainment and radical-right electorates towards lower educational levels. Age correlates with stronger center-left and center-right vote and weaker Green vote, urbanity with more Green and radical-left vote and less radical-right vote. Income only matters for the Greens and center-right, where its effect is moderately positive. At the individual level, tertiary education, gender, and urbanity thus display the strongest regularities, while senior citizens appear to favor moderates and income moderately advantage center-right and Green forces.

Positioning the parties and ideologies on a tri-dimensional space that distinguishes between attitudes towards redistribution, immigration, and political trust, the three left-wing and center-left groups appear relatively similar to each other, while the center-right group is closer to the left on immigration and trust and closer to the radical right on the economy. However, the national parties of the center-right and radical-right families are more scattered than their left-wing counterparts: attitudes on trust vary enormously between, e.g., the German AfD and the Italian FdI (both radical-right), while a party such as the social-liberal D66 (nominally center-right) is significantly more open to immigration and redistribution than the French LR (also nominally center-right) or the Flemish N-VA.

In conclusion, national European electorates appear to indeed present a number of common features. Similar party profiles exist in a majority of member states, while factors such as education, gender, and urbanity correlate similarly with the vote for broad party families. On average, older citizens tend to favor non-radical parties, with some exceptions. The presence of large center-left, center-right, and radical-right parties is a general feature of most European party systems, while the presence of Green and radical-left parties is less systematic. The electorates of Green and radical-right parties are generally the most dissimilar, both in terms of positions on key issues and demographics. The similarities between the different groups and their homogeneity in European comparison are more obvious on the left, while center-right and radical-right parties tend to show more variance in their attitudes towards political trust and economic redistribution. While often significant at the national level, age and income have more complex and heterogeneous effects, especially vis-à-vis the center-left.

2.3 The European party system: Europarties and EP groups

Two types of pan-European party groupings are commonly used in European electoral analysis: European political parties (Europarties) and European Parliament political groups (EP groups). Next, we review their characteristics.

2.3.1 Europarties

Since 2001, 14 European political parties ('Europarties') have been officially recognized by the European Union. Europarties provide a layer of political coordination to their member parties, publishing manifestos and reports and holding regular congresses, but enjoy very little visibility in (mostly national) political campaigns. Of these, 12 are still active as of 2026 (Table 2.3); two smaller far-right parties have been dissolved: the Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF, 2015–2018) and the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM, 2009–2018). Europarties are "transnational partisan actors," "parties of parties" (Johansson and Raunio 2024) federating national political actors that have emerged as influential actors on the European political scene since the 1990s. While the national or regional parties composing a European party can present diverging programmatic positions, membership in

	Radical left	Left and center-left	Center and center-right	Radical right	Left total	Center & right	ENP
Germany (2025)	Linke 8.8	SPD 16.4 Grüne 11.6	CDU/CSU 28.5	AfD 20.8	44.2	55.6	5.6
France (2024)		NFP† 28.0	ENS 20.0 LR 6.6	RN 29.3	30.8	67.1	4.7
Italy (2022)		PD 19.3 M5S◁ 15.1	FI 7.9 Az-IV 7.5	FdI 25.2 Lega 8.5	40.2	57.5	6.9
Spain (2023)		PSOE 31.9 Sumar† 12.4	PP 33.3	Vox 12.5	50.0	49.8	4.1
Poland (2023)		NL 8.6	KO 30.7 TD 14.4	PiS 35.4 Konf 7.2	8.7	91.3	4.0
Romania (2024)		PSD 23.9	PNL 13.2 USR 12.4 UDMR 6.3	AUR 18.0 S.O.S. 7.4 POT 6.5	27.6	70.7	7.3
Netherlands (2025)		GL-PvdA 12.8‡	D66 16.9 VVD 14.2 CDA 11.8	PVV 16.7 JA21 5.9	21.0	79.0	8.6
Belgium (2024)					33.9	64.0	10.3
Flanders	PVDA 8.2	Vooruit 13.0 Groen 7.4	N-VA▷ 25.4 CD&V 12.8 Open VLD 8.7	VB 21.7	29.0	70.1	6.1
Wallonia	PTB 11.6	PS 22.0 Ecolo 6.9	MR 28.2 LE 20.0		40.5	56.0	5.3
Sweden (2026)	V 8.3	S 28.1 MP 6.1	M 19.9 C 7.1 KD 6.2 L 5.4	SD 17.5	42.4	56.0	5.8
Czechia (2025)		Piráti 9.1	SPOLU▷ 23.4 STAN 11.3	ANO 34.4 SPD 7.8 AUTO 6.7	13.7	85.8	4.8

Table 2.1: Parties and coalitions obtaining at least 5% of the valid votes in the most recent national parliamentary election (as of November 2026) in the ten most populous EU member states, by ideological family. France: first round; Germany: second vote (*Zweitstimme*); CDU and CSU, and PSOE and PSC, are counted together. Coalitions are assigned to the family of their dominant member. †The French New Popular Front (NFP) and the Spanish Sumar alliance also include radical-left parties. Green parties are shown in green, explicitly Christian Democratic parties in orange. ‡Joint list of GroenLinks (Green) and the Labour Party (PvdA). ▷ Center-right parties (or coalitions including such parties) whose MEPs sit in the radical-right ECR group: N-VA; ODS within SPOLU. ◁ M5S sits in the radical-left group The Left since 2024. Belgium: shares computed separately for the Flemish and Walloon regions (Brussels omitted), since the two communities have distinct party systems; PTB and PVDA are the two regional names of the same unitary party. ENP: effective number of parties in votes, computed over all lists (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Left total: combined share of the radical-left and left/center-left families; center & right: combined share of the center/center-right and radical-right families; both computed over all lists, the remainder being unclassified lists. Note that the center (e.g., Ensemble, KO, D66) is counted with the right. Vertical rules: thick red rule, *cordon sanitaire* (mainstream parties refuse to govern with the parties to the right of the rule); double rule, strict division between two blocs competing for government. Data and classification: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026), except ANO, classified as radical right (Patriots for Europe).

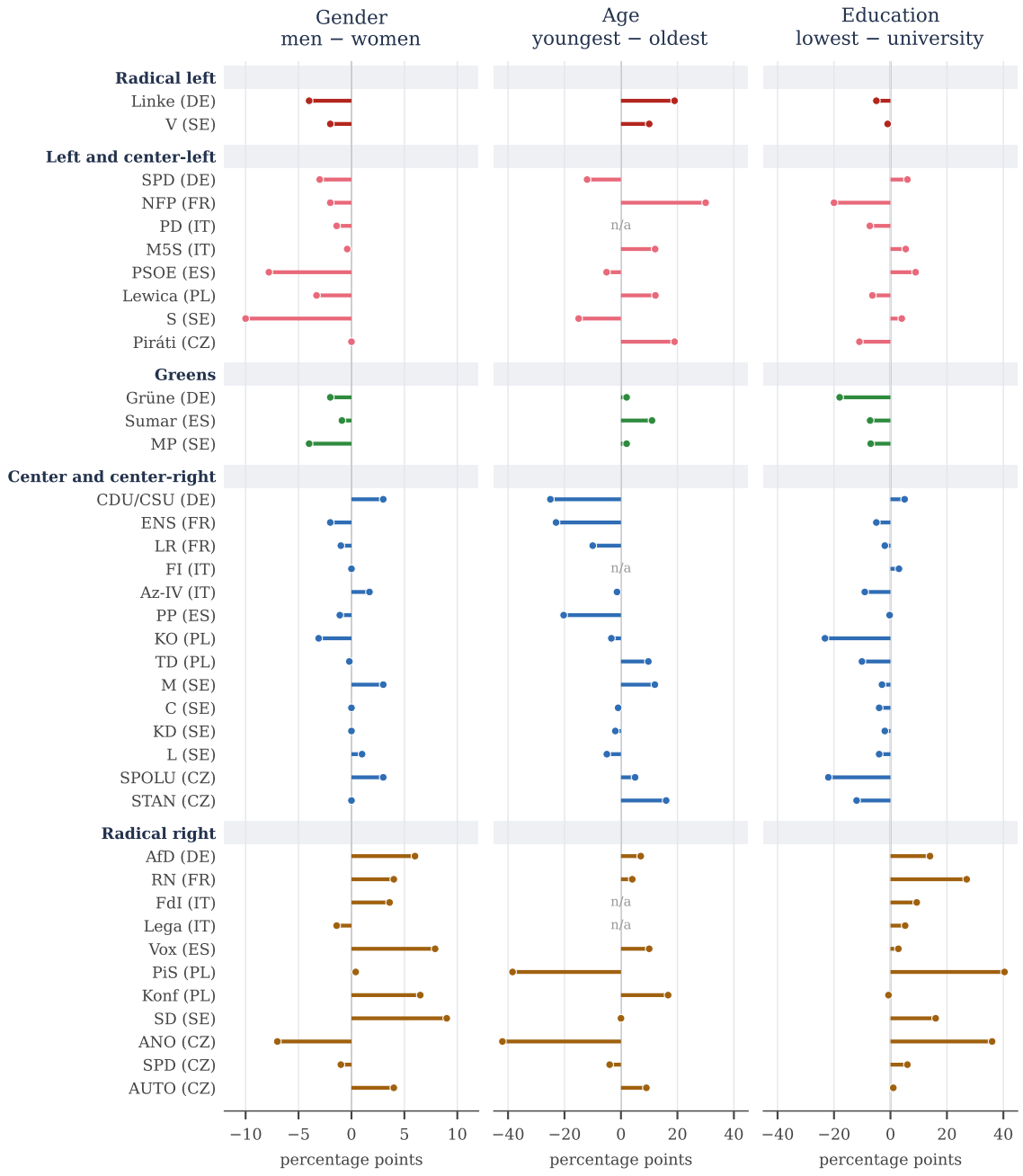


Figure 2.1: Gaps in the vote of the main parties between extremal social groups, in percentage points: share among men minus share among women; among the youngest minus the oldest age group; among the least educated minus university graduates. Parties as in Table 2.1, grouped by family (note the different scale of the gender panel). Groups compared: DE 18–29 vs. 60+, *Hauptschule* vs. university; FR 18–24 vs. 70+, below *baccalauréat* vs. bac+3; IT 18–34 vs. 65+ (M5S and Az-IV only), up to *licenza media* vs. *laurea*; ES 18–24 vs. 75+, below upper secondary vs. tertiary; PL 18–29 vs. 60+, primary/lower secondary vs. bachelor's or higher; SE 18–21 vs. 65+, compulsory school vs. university; CZ 18–24 vs. 75+, no *maturita* vs. university. Spain: recalled vote, electorate compositions converted into vote shares using the official result. No comparable survey with published cross-tabulations for the Netherlands, Belgium and Romania. Sources: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (2025), gender: infratest dimap (2025); Ipsos-Talan (2024); Ipsos (2022); Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (2023); Ipsos exit poll as tabulated by Cześnik et al. (2026); SVT/Valu (2026); STEM et al. (2026).

	Radical left (13)	Left & c.-left (34)	Greens (9)	Center & c.-right (54)	Radical right (28)
Pro-redistribution	$+0.39^{***}$ (0.20)	$+0.16^{***}$ (0.20)	$+0.33^{***}$ (0.16)	-0.14^{***} (0.26)	-0.15^{**} (0.21)
Open to immigration	$+0.30^{*}$ (0.35)	$+0.24^{***}$ (0.29)	$+0.58^{***}$ (0.15)	$+0.02$ (0.25)	-0.58^{***} (0.39)
Liberal/secular	$+0.43^{***}$ (0.28)	$+0.23^{***}$ (0.36)	$+0.67^{***}$ (0.14)	$+0.03$ (0.41)	-0.36^{***} (0.41)
Political trust	-0.15^{*} (0.22)	$+0.12^{*}$ (0.27)	$+0.32^{**}$ (0.21)	$+0.20^{***}$ (0.26)	-0.36^{***} (0.50)
Pro-EU integration	-0.05 (0.23)	$+0.18^{***}$ (0.26)	$+0.39^{***}$ (0.17)	$+0.07$ (0.25)	-0.47^{***} (0.35)
Left–right self-placement	-2.3^{***} (0.8)	-1.3^{***} (1.0)	-1.3^{***} (0.6)	$+0.8^{***}$ (0.9)	$+1.5^{***}$ (0.9)
Women (pp)	$+4^{*}$ (6)	$+3^{*}$ (8)	$+6^{*}$ (7)	-2 (7)	-10^{***} (10)
Age (years)	$+0.6$ (6.4)	$+4.3^{***}$ (6.4)	-3.2^{**} (2.2)	$+3.8^{***}$ (5.2)	$+0.5$ (4.7)
Tertiary education (pp)	$+4$ (12)	$+6^{*}$ (13)	$+27^{***}$ (8)	$+8^{***}$ (11)	-7^{***} (9)
Income (deciles)	-0.2 (0.7)	$+0.0$ (0.7)	$+0.8^{*}$ (0.8)	$+0.6^{***}$ (0.6)	$+0.0$ (0.5)
Rural (pp)	-6^{*} (9)	-4 (11)	-14^{***} (8)	$+2$ (10)	$+5^{*}$ (10)

Table 2.2: Profile of party electorates by family in 22 EU member states (European Social Survey, round 11, 2023–24; not covered: CZ, DK, LU, MT, RO). Each cell is the mean across parties (standard deviation in parentheses) of the difference between the party's voters and the national average; number of parties in the header. Attitudes in within-country standard deviations: redistribution (one item), openness to immigration (economy, culture, "better place"), liberalism/secularism (gay rights, religiosity, worry about climate change), political trust (parliament, politicians, satisfaction with democracy), EU integration (one item). Left–right self-placement on a 0–10 scale; women, tertiary education and rural residence in percentage points. Vote at the last national election; parties with at least 25 respondents. Families from BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026), with Green parties shown separately and multi-family coalitions and Greek parties assigned by hand. Significance, with parties as units: two-sided t-test of a zero difference with the national average; $^{*}\,p < 0.05$, $^{**}\,p < 0.01$, $^{***}\,p < 0.001$. Data: European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC) (2026).



Figure 2.2: Party electorates in attitude space, European Social Survey round 11 (2023–24), 22 EU member states. Positions relative to the national average, in within-country standard deviations (scales as in Table 2.2). Labelled: main parties of the countries of Table 2.1 covered by the survey; pale markers: other parties; large hollow markers: family averages. Arrows in (a): average position of social groups, multiplied by three for readability. A principal component analysis of the eleven items yields three dimensions (immigration, political trust, liberalism/secularism; 30%, 15% and 10% of the variance); redistribution forms no dimension of its own. Data: European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC) (2026); families from BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

Abbr.	Name	Founded	EP group	Family	Parties
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	1976	Renew	Center	132
EPP	European People's Party	1976	EPP	Center-right	110
PES	Party of European Socialists	1992	S&D	Left	66
EGP	European Green Party	2004	Greens/EFA	Left	51
PEL	Party of the European Left	2004	The Left	Radical left	45
EFA	European Free Alliance	1981	Greens/EFA	Other	43
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Party	2009	ECR	Radical right	40
EDP	European Democratic Party	2004	Renew	Center	33
Patriots.eu	Patriots.eu (formerly ID Party, MENF)	2014	PfE	Radical right	23
ECPP	European Christian Political Party	2002	—	Center-right	19
ELA	European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet	2024	The Left	Radical left	10
ESN	Europe of Sovereign Nations	2024	ESN	Radical right	8
APF	Alliance for Peace and Freedom (dissolved 2018)	2015	NI	Radical right	15
AENM	Alliance of European National Movements (dissolved 2018)	2009	NI	Radical right	12

Table 2.3: Europarties recognized since 2001. 'EP group': group in which most of the party's MEPs sit; 'Family': ideological family in the BLUE_DB classification (see Section 2.3.4); 'Parties': number of national or regional parties recorded as full, associate, or observer members at any point since 2001. ECPP members sit in the EPP and ECR groups. Source: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

a European party generally reflects a party's alignment with key ideological traditions. In fact, European party membership generally provides a more fine-grained positioning than EP group membership; e.g., regionalists from the European Free Alliance (EFA) and Greens from the European Green Party (EGP) together form the Greens/EFA group in the EP. The main limitation of Europarty membership as a classification tool is that it covers only a fraction of the parties competing in elections and ignores most smaller entities: of the 5,194 parties, coalitions, lists, and candidates recorded in BLUE_DB, only 570 have a European-party affiliation.

2.3.2 European Parliament groups

Prior to the constitutive session of each legislature, the elected members of the European Parliament (MEPs) regroup into transnational political groups (Hix and Høyland 2022; Bressanelli 2022). To avoid excessive fragmentation or geographic concentration, such groups must consist of at least 23 MEPs from at least 7 member states. Political groups in the EP function similarly to political groups in national or regional parliaments, coordinating the distribution of elected positions and speaking time. Additionally, they serve as European party coalitions, uniting a large number of heterogeneous national parties into a small set (5 to 8) of European political groups that play a key role in parliamentary procedure (Hix and Høyland 2022), maintain an identifiable ideological profile and, at least in the case of centrist groups, display a high degree of cohesion in their voting behavior (Hix et al. 2005; Hix et al. 2009; McElroy and Benoit 2010; Hublet et al. 2023). The two largest groups—the EPP and S&D—have formed the core of a loose 'Grand Coalition' since the Parliament's first legislature, joined by the liberals (now Renew) as a regular partner since 2019, even though their influence and the strength of the 'cordon sanitaire' vis-à-vis the radical right has been steadily eroding. As of 2026, all European groups are structured around one or more

Group	Core Europarties	Family	Seats
EPP	EPP	Center-right	188
S&D	PES	Left	136
PfE	Patriots.eu	Radical right	84
ECR	ECR Party	Radical right	78
Renew	ALDE, EDP	Center	77
Greens/EFA	EGP, EFA, European Pirate Party, Volt Europa	Left	53
The Left	PEL, ELA, Animal Politics EU	Radical left	46
ESN	ESN	Radical right	25
NI	—	—	33
Total			720

Table 2.4: Political groups of the tenth European Parliament (2024–2029), with their seats at the constitutive session (16 July 2024). Core Europarties after Hublet (2024); family as in BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026). ECR members are classified individually as center-right or radical right in BLUE_DB.

European parties that federate most of their MEPs' national parties (Table 2.4). However, European groups still welcome in their ranks MEPs whose national parties are not members of their core European parties, as well as some non-affiliated MEPs. As in most national parliaments, MEPs who fail to become members of any European group (mostly members of far-left, left-wing nationalist, far-right, or satirical parties) are given a non-attached status known in the EP by its French name of 'non-inscrits' (NI).

As shown in Figure 2.3, the electorates of the different EP groups display more distinct profiles than those of broader ideological families. The liberal center-right Renew group shows most dispersion on the economic axis and is more open to immigration than the conservative and Christian Democratic EPP group. The national-conservative ECR group is both more dispersed and closer to traditional conservatism than the PfE group, which shows a more homogeneously hard-right profile. Additionally, the three radical-right groups are separated by relatively clear divides on foreign policy and EU integration: the ECR are the closest to the centrist coalition and tend to emphasize collaboration with center-right conservatives and atlanticism; the PfE adopt a more clearly euroskeptic and sovereigntist position and have traditionally advocated for a downsizing and overhaul of the European Union, with historical pro-Russian positions; the ESN, led by the German AfD, embrace identitarian and ethnic strands of nationalism and present the hardest line on EU integration. This justifies the use of EP groups as a more fine-grained approach to party classification in the EU context, allowing for a relatively clear separation between Green and social-democratic, center-right liberal, conservative, and several strands of radical-right forces.

2.3.3 Evolution of the European party system

Groups have existed in the European Parliament since its inception in 1979 and have since then played a structuring role in European politics. Since 1984, all EP legislatures have had at least one radical-left group; one Social Democratic group; one Green group; one center-right liberal group; one Christian Democratic group; one right-wing conservative group; and one euroskeptic or populist radical right group (Kaiser and Mittag 2023). Five groups have existed for the entire period covered by BLUE_DB (Table 2.5): the European People's Party Group (EPP), the Socialists and Democrats (S&D, formerly the Socialist Group), the centrist Renew Group (formerly the ALDE Group), the Greens/EFA group, and the Left group (GUE/NGL). The euroskeptic group of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) was founded in 2009 and the far-right Europe of Sovereign Nations Group (ESN), in 2024. A number of other

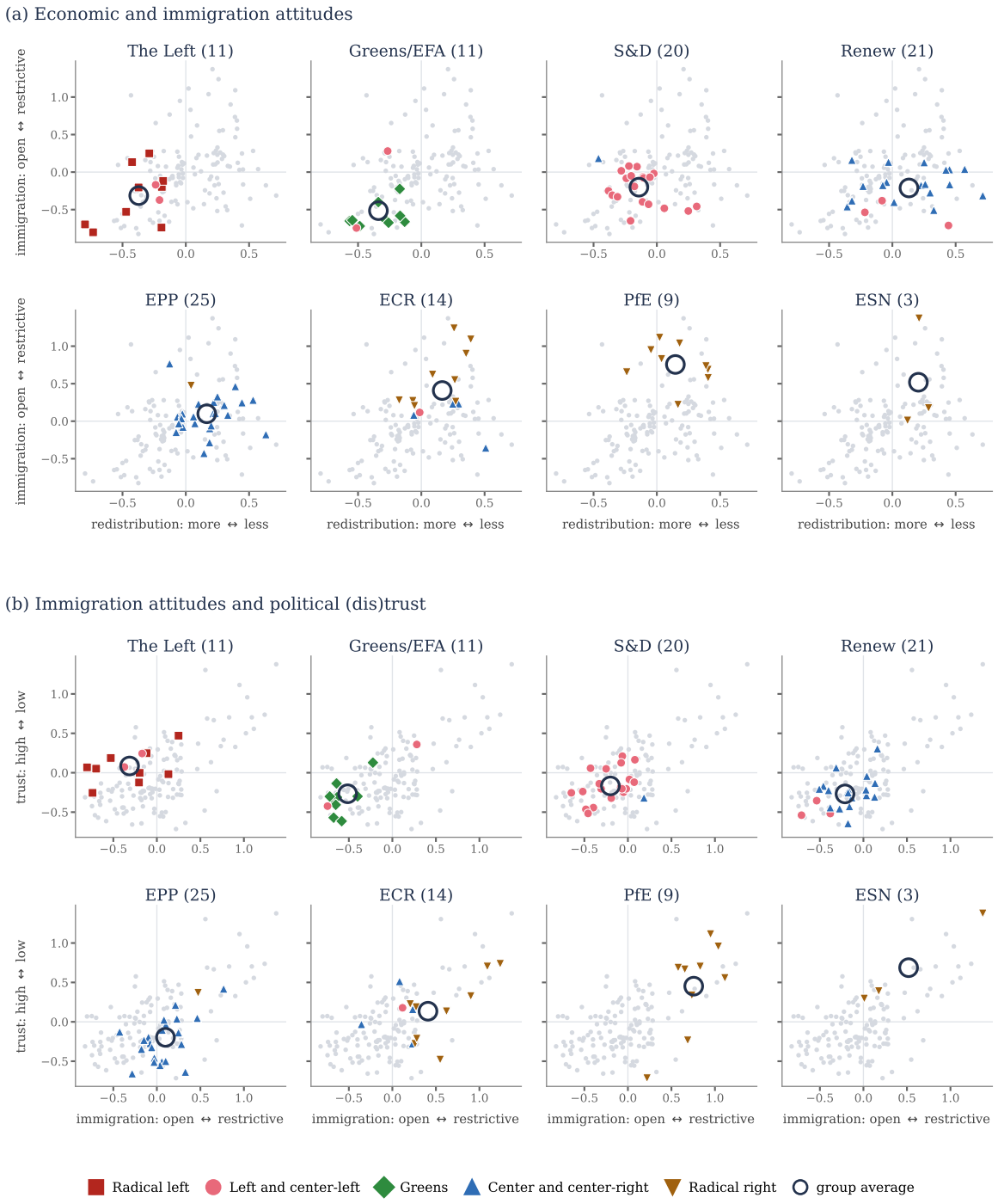


Figure 2.3: Party electorates in attitude space by political group of the tenth European Parliament, European Social Survey round 11 (2023–24), 22 EU member states. Same axes and scales as Figure 2.2; grey dots: all other parties; colours and markers: family of each party; circle: group average (unweighted); number of parties in parentheses. Parties are assigned to the group in which their MEPs sit (as of 2024–29) or, if they have no MEPs, to the group of their Europarty; coalitions split across several groups (e.g., NUPES, Sumar, AVS, Trzecia Droga, Konfederacja) and parties with neither MEPs nor a Europarty are left out. Two parties sit with the non-attached members (KKE, Smer) and are not shown. Data: European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC) (2026).

Thread	1999–04	2004–09	2009–14	2014–19	2019–24	2024–29
Radical left	GUE/NGL	GUE/NGL	GUE/NGL	GUE/NGL	The Left[a]	The Left
Greens and regionalists	Greens/EFA	Greens/EFA	Greens/EFA	Greens/EFA	Greens/EFA	Greens/EFA
Social democrats	PES	PES	S&D	S&D	S&D	S&D
Liberals and centrists	ELDR	ALDE	ALDE	ALDE	Renew	Renew
Christian democrats	EPP-ED	EPP-ED	EPP	EPP	EPP	EPP
National conservatives	UEN	UEN	ECR	ECR	ECR	ECR
Sovereigntists	EDD	IND/DEM	EFD	EFDD	—	—
Far right	—	ITS[b]	—	ENF[c]	ID	PfE
New radical right	—	—	—	—	—	ESN

Table 2.5: Main threads of EP political groups, 1999–2029. Groups in the same row share most of their membership or their core Europarty; there is no legal continuity between groups across terms. [a]GUE/NGL, renamed in 2021. [b]Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty, January–November 2007. [c]Founded in 2015. After Kaiser and Mittag (2023) and BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

radical-right euroskeptic groups have existed over the same period. While there exists no formal legal continuity between groups across legislative terms, these groups can be regrouped into three historical threads based on their membership. The Patriots for Europe (PfE, 2024–) were founded by a majority of former members of the Identity and Democracy Group (ID, 2019–2024), which itself inherited much of the membership of the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF, 2015–2019). The sovereigntist groups of the Europe of Freedom and (Direct) Democracy (EFD, 2009–2019), Independence/Democracy (IND/DEM, 2004–2009), and the Europe of Democracies and Diversities (1999–2004) were increasingly structured around Nigel Farage's UKIP. The Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN, 1999–2009), whose members would for the most part join the ENF or ECR, prefigured both major right-wing groups. The two largest groups, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, have provided the core of centrist coalitions in the EP since its early years (Crum 2020).

2.3.4 Ideological classifications

To ease transnational comparison, BLUE_DB provides a coarse classification of parties into one of five ideological labels, which we have used in this chapter: 'radical left'; 'left or center-left, including non-radical greens'; 'center, center-right or moderate right'; 'radical right'; and 'other.' These labels were selected to reduce subjective assessment and naturally extend the EP group classification (Hublet 2024). Hence, the classification does not distinguish between center and center-right parties (covering roughly the Renew and EPP groups), nor between center-left, left, and Green parties (corresponding to the S&D and Greens groups). In general, the divide between 'radical right' and 'center-right' is easier to establish than the divide between 'radical left' and 'center-left:' historically, the voting patterns of the GUE/NGL, Green, and S&D groups in the EP have been far more similar to each other than the voting behavior of the ECR has been to the EPP's (McElroy and Benoit 2007). This reflects a structural divide within the European right, materialized by formal or semi-formal 'cordon sanitaire' policies (Ripoll Servent 2019; Kantola and Miller 2021), with no similarly sharp divide existing on the left. Such a classification can, of course, be refined by mobilizing expert surveys such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, which explicitly distinguish between left–right,

GAL–TAN, and mainstream–populist dimensions (see Chapter 4).

This four-way classification deliberately aggregates the much finer party families used in historical and comparative research. As an example, Caramani (2015) derives some twenty-five families from the cleavage model, ranging from socialists, communists, conservatives, liberals, agrarians, and Christian democrats ('people's parties') to greens, regionalists, ethnic parties, and the extreme right, as well as smaller families such as animalists, pensioners' lists, or personal parties. Roughly, BLUE_DB's 'radical left' covers communists and the new left; the 'left or center-left' covers socialists and greens; the 'center, center-right or moderate right' merges conservatives, liberals, agrarians, and Christian democrats; and the 'radical right' corresponds to the extreme right and parts of the nationalist and anti-European families. Regionalist, ethnic, and single-issue parties are either positioned on the left–right axis or classified as 'other.' This simplification is visible in Table 2.1: the center-right column brings together, among others, Christian democrats (CDU/CSU, CDA, CD&V), liberals (VVD, D66, MR), and an agrarian party (the Swedish Centre Party), while the Flemish regionalists of the N-VA and the Hungarian minority party UDMR appear alongside them.

2.4 Party Systems in Europe: One, 52, or more?

In this chapter, we have seen that national European party systems display significant convergence in terms of their structure, the party families they typically feature, and the demographic and ideological profile of their electorates. Additionally, Europarties and EP groups function as party coalitions or confederations that coordinate the political work of national parties at the European level. In some European states, the national party system is itself decomposed in several regional subsystems, while in others, the party system of some but not all regions diverges from the national one. This aligns with the diagnosis of a *Europeanization* of national politics (Caramani 2015): the convergence of national party systems with common sociological patterns and trends. Accordingly, the European party system can be described as a single, multilevel party system, and comparisons between different political systems are rendered easier by the common features that we have identified. However, this multilevel party system must be qualified as one in which the national level remains dominant: Europarties are still mostly unknown to voters, and most citizens are unaware of the transnational convergence that we have just described. Depending on the level of electoral competition considered, local, regional, national, and European party systems may all be relevant to describe and analyze the structure of political competition. In this sense, Europe counts as many national party systems as it has states—52 in the coverage of BLUE_DB—and more if regional subsystems are included, while these systems increasingly share a common structure. Note that in this chapter, our comparison has been limited to EU member states: in other European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland, or the Western Balkans, party systems can depart further from the EU-level pattern, and integration into Europarties be much looser than in the average EU member state.

Chapter 3

Trends in Electoral Sociology and Geography (2001–2026)

The previous chapters have set the scene for an analysis of the contemporary electoral landscape by reviewing the fundamentals of electoral sociology (Chapter 1) and presenting its protagonists: the parties and their electorates (Chapter 2). In this chapter, we review the key trends of electoral competition in Europe since the turn of the millennium. The question we are set to answer is thus both broad and simple: *What has changed in electoral Europe since 2001, and what is currently changing?*

3.1 Dealignment, realignment, abstention

Dealignment—the weakening of long-term ties linking specific social groups to parties—has been in the focus of elections research since at least the 1980s (Dalton et al. 1984). The phenomenon is now well-established: from the 1980s on, the regularity and stability of partisan affiliations in Western polities showed signs of weakening (Dalton and Klingemann 2007, p. 10). Social groups that had long been faithful to 'their' political parties—communist workers and employees, christian democratic catholics—started showing more diverse political behavior. This included voters switching sides or electing newcomers, but also, and perhaps most importantly, periodically or systematically abstaining. The rate of non-voting grew particularly in lower-income, less-educated, younger, and disenfranchised groups, widening the social gap in turnout. This evolution is often linked to the declining role of class and religious identification in social organization, but also, more controversially, to a shift in focus from material/survival to post-materialist values in the wake of economic development and the material and physical security of the post-war decades (R. Inglehart 1977; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Electoral turnout declined, political volatility (the changes in the relative strength of parties in consecutive elections) increased, and a variety of new political forces emerged (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair 1997). The period from the 1980s to the early 2000s corresponds, in most Western Europe countries, to a phase in which Green, New Left, social-liberal, and a few hard-right parties emerged as significant political forces, increasingly challenging the hegemony of traditional social democratic (or socialist) and christian democratic (or conservative) forces, eventually unlocking the 'frozen' party system theorized by Lipset and Rokkan. Yet the traditional parties, however weakened, were not yet defeated. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, post-1990 democratization had led to a complete overhaul of the local party system, with pro-Western capitalists and post-socialist left-wingers struggling for dominance in a chaotic social-economic environment. In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, in Northern Ireland, and in some other territories such as the Basque Country, political violence and war left a hard mark on the local populations,

in some cases (Bosnia, Kosovo) causing large-scale emigration.

The period between 2001 and 2008 can be read as a continuation of this dealignment logic. In 2001, Tony Blair's centrist 'New Labour' won a second term as Prime minister, which was renewed for a second time in 2005. In 2002, a young Viktor Orbán narrowly lost control of the Hungarian government to an alliance of social democratic and liberal forces. That same year, the Austrian conservative ÖVP, who had garnered stark Europe-wide criticism for forming a coalition with the radical-right FPÖ two years earlier, obtained a staggering 42% of the vote at the polls and renewed its coalition with the far right, which lost heavily. In 2002 still, the right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn List came second in the Dutch general election a few days after the assassination of its leader, and went on to form a government with the historical party of the center-right, the christian democratic CDA, winner of the election, and the liberal VVD. In 2005, the CDU's Angela Merkel won the German federal election and formed her first Grand Coalition with the SPD, holding together two thirds of the Bundestag seats. Meanwhile, in Italy Silvio Berlusconi's populist center-right alliance had won the 2001 and 2008 elections and narrowly lost the 2006 ballot to a rather scattered center-left. France saw radical-right Jean-Marie Le Pen advance to the second round of the presidential election in 2002 and a new generation of the (center-)right take over with Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 victory. In Serbia, indicted war criminal Slobodan Milošević's SPS had lost power in 2000; in the 2003 elections, the hard-right Serb Radical Party (SRS) emerged as the largest party, after which moderate parties negotiated a rather precarious minority government. In 2005, the failed French and Dutch referenda on the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* bore witness to an increasingly visible anti-European backlash, one year after the accession of 10 new states to EU membership. Though disputed and torn between multiple options, the electoral scene of the early 2000s did not seem to take a clear direction. Old parties cohabited with newer ones, with few systems (mostly Italy, after the 1992–1994 collapse of its party system, and the recently democratized Eastern member states) experiencing a full 'reset' of old partisanships. The far right grew without becoming dominant, while the radical left mostly remained below the critical size needed to influence government formation.

Some of this changed gradually with the 2008–2012 financial crisis and, again later, in the aftermath of the 2015 migration crisis, the 2020–2023 COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2022– full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Because it can be suspected to have led to a more durable reconfiguration of electorates rather than a mere decoupling, this second phase, which continues to this day, is increasingly described as a *realignment* phase (Kriesi et al. 2008; L. Hooghe and Marks 2018; Ford and W. Jennings 2020). In broad strokes, the new electoral order that has emerged with the polycrisis of the last two decades has the following features: growing radical-right nationalism powered by strong anti-immigrant sentiment and various degrees of anti-Europeanism; strong radical-left forces in a few member states; widespread distrust towards political establishments combined with a recent increase in participation in several countries, which has benefited populist parties in some cases (e.g., Germany in 2025) and their opponents in others (e.g., Poland in 2023); divergence between educational, age, and gender groups and between rural and urban electorates; heightened permissiveness between center-right and radical-right parties and electorates; simultaneous trends towards greater territorial differentiation of the vote within countries (de-nationalization), polarization, and convergence of electoral trends across countries (Europeanization); and the marginalization of many traditional center-left and center-right parties in fragmented multi-party systems. In this landscape, the financial crisis is commonly hypothesized to have revived polarization around the role of the welfare state (Hernández and Kriesi 2016); the migration crisis, to have fueled xenophobia and increased the salience of migration and asylum issues (Dennison and Geddes 2019); the COVID-19 crisis, to have both fueled conspiracy narratives (Douglas 2021) and temporarily boosted trust in incumbent governments (Bol et al. 2021); and the Russia-Ukraine

war, to have revived controversies around inflation, military spending and war preparedness, and Atlanticism (Kaeding et al. 2025). Besides, the role of social media in political campaigns is frequently credited with having transformed political campaigning, although evidence on its electoral effects remains mixed (Tucker et al. 2017). With participation recently rising in several European countries amidst a spectacular radical-right rise, a new political order may have emerged. Whether it is only a transitory state in a period of high electoral volatility or can be the source of a new, more durable order remains to be seen.

Alongside long-term shifts, short-term economic conditions may also shape election results. The theory of *economic voting* hypothesizes that voters reward incumbents for positive economic outcomes and punish them for negative ones, looking back at the recent past rather than at political programs (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). The inflationary shock that followed the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine may have triggered such a trend: between 2022 and 2025, once dominant governing parties lost ground in many European polities, from the British Conservatives in 2024 to the parties of Germany's 'traffic light' coalition in 2025.

3.2 New electoral cleavages: education, culture, globalization

If realignment is occurring, what new cleavages are driving it? A number of answers to this question have been given in the last two decades, of which Ford and W. Jennings give a good overview (Ford and W. Jennings 2020).

Before we dive into these, let us first clarify what a realignment means for the "traditional" cleavages posited by Lipset and Rokkan: center–periphery, religious–secular, rural–urban, and capital–labor. In popular discourse and academic discussions alike, the main traditional cleavage that new cleavages are expected to overcome is the class (i.e., capital–labor) cleavage, which is identified to the left–right axis of post-war Western party systems. The main reason for this apparent reduction from four old cleavages to one has something to do with the relative weakening of the other three cleavages prior to the year 2000: religious, agrarian, and anti-centralist vote already seemed to have a lesser grip on the political systems of pre-2000 Europe than a left–right axis structured by issues of economic redistribution. However, this view is somewhat simplistic: religious, agrarian, and peripheral-autonomist vote still exist in many parts of Europe. Hence, one must be cautious not to forget about these pre-existing cleavages when analyzing, e.g., the vote of regions home to linguistic minorities, the electorates of parties with a strongly religious base, or voting patterns in areas with a strong rural identity. Some of these cleavages may actually be stable or reemerging, even as the left–right cleavage would weaken. Second, and most importantly, the emergence of new cleavages challenging older ones need not signify the disappearance of old divisions. There is in fact solid evidence (which we will review in this section) for a *superposition* of both types of cleavages. This is particularly visible for the left–right economic cleavage, but is also the case for the other three in regions or polities where they remain significant.

What are, then, the new cleavages that may be emerging? Building on Ford and W. Jennings, we distinguish eight, the first three of which are anchored in a broad conceptual literature while the last five are more hypothetical and reflect ongoing demographic changes:

1. *Materialist–postmaterialist.* This is a variant of Ronald Inglehart's thesis (R. Inglehart 1977) that value orientations in post-war societies range from materialist to postmaterialist, later generalized into a dimension running from 'survival' to 'self-expression' values (R. Inglehart and Welzel 2005) Voters for whom the first pole dominates—typically those exposed to poverty, low educational standards, war, or a more violent social environment—would clash with those—from richer, more educated, peaceful, and more protective backgrounds—for whom the second pole is more prevalent. Having been

suggested already in the 1970s to describe the generational change between pre-war and post-war generations, this cleavage is hardly new, but the influence of Inglehart's theories to this day remains considerable. As a result, such categories are often mobilized in multiple (and sometimes questionable) ways, be it to explain the behavior of disenfranchised voters (Norris and R. Inglehart 2019) or to analyze the specific political traits of diaspora communities with a history of armed conflict or patriarchal traditionalism in their countries of origin (Norris and R. F. Inglehart 2012).

2. *Winners–losers of globalization*. Popularized by Kriesi et al. (Kriesi et al. 2006), building on earlier accounts of 'modernization losers' (Betz 1994), the theory of the 'winners and losers of globalization' posits that a new cleavage has emerged between a group of citizens—often highly skilled, cosmopolitan, and potentially mobile—who benefit from economic, cultural, and political opening and a group of citizens exposed to increased economic and cultural competition, whose economic interests (e.g., as ex-employees of relocated industries) or sense of identity have been harmed by globalization. The former group is generally identified with pro-integrationist positions, the latter with euroskepticism and nationalism. While a few spectacular votes—especially the two 2005 referenda—have put forward a real divide between different social groups, what is less clear is whether concrete losses from globalization are really the phenomena at play, rather than cultural attitudes. Note that the theory does not require most 'winners' to move: only around 3% of EU citizens live in another member state (Eurostat 2025).

3. *GAL–TAN*: L. Hooghe and Marks's dichotomy of Green–Alternative–Liberal (GAL) vs. Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist (TAN) (L. Hooghe et al. 2002; L. Hooghe and Marks 2018) bears some resemblance with Kriesi et al.'s, but with a broader focus. Rather than focusing on 'gains' and 'losses' from globalization, the authors propose a set of features that coincide in the political offer (and, to some extent, in the electorates) of newer European parties. The GAL pole represents a Green, cosmopolitan, pro-European and culturally liberal group; the TAN pole represents its opposite: a nativist, culturally conservative, euroskeptic and authoritarian agenda. It fits well with the second dimension that expert surveys such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey identify in party positions (also see Section 2.3.4), where Green and far-right parties sit at the two extremes of an axis that combines cultural liberalism, environmentalism, and pro-Europeanism at one end with their opposites at the other.

4. *University-educated–non-university-educated*: The massification of higher education in the post-war period has created a sizeable group of university-educated individuals reaching far beyond traditional cultural and economic elites. As of 2026, educational attainment levels are one of the variables most predictive of voting behavior in many European polities (see Figure 2.1) as well as in the United States (Gethin et al. 2022). Overall, university-educated voters tend to be more culturally liberal, more tolerant of minorities, including immigrants, less authoritarian, and less nationalistic. This pattern is quite consistent across countries. More controversially, the spread of socially liberal values among younger and more educated cohorts has been hypothesized to have triggered a 'cultural backlash' (Norris and R. Inglehart 2019) among older cohorts and groups of non-graduates, potentially fueling resentment against cultural elites and reinflaming nativist and extremist sentiment.

5. *Ethnic minority–majority*: Another significant demographic phenomenon in post-war Europe is the emergence of new groups of both intra-European and extra-European diasporas. This includes immigrants and descendants of immigrants with origins in former colonies of European imperial powers (e.g., in North and Sub-Saharan Africa,

South Asia, the Caribbean, Indonesia, or Suriname), Turkish, Southern European, and Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter* and their descendants, (former) asylum seekers and their descendants from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Ukraine, etc., and intra-European immigrants and their descendants, mostly from Eastern Europe, Russia, and the former Yugoslavia. The corresponding (real or supposed) shifts in the cultural, linguistic, and religious makeup of Europe have been long in the focus of right-wing and nationalistic political parties and their electorates. Meanwhile, there is also broad evidence that voters assigned to 'ethnic' minorities, especially those experiencing racism, may display different voting patterns than their non-minority peers. This may include rejecting far-right vote and turning to left-wing or liberal parties, as is the case for a majority of descendants of non-European immigrants in countries such as France or Belgium; other minorities may also favor nativist parties more than the average citizen, as is the case in part of the Russian-German community in Germany (Goerres et al. 2019).

6. *White nationalism–diverse pluralism*: The archetype of the 'white school leavers' is used by Ford and W. Jennings to identify a more radical pattern that combines educational, ethnic, cultural, and social aspects. In France, the recent ethnographic work of Félicien Faury (Faury 2024) on far-right voters in south-eastern France has pointed to a similar pattern, among voters from stable working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds, mostly without university education, who identify as 'native.' Racism, defiance towards university-educated and 'culturally dominant' metropoles, and economic grievances tend to converge in part of the electorate. At the other end of the spectrum, urban voters with a more diverse socialization, graduate degrees, high levels of 'cultural capital,' and potential family ties to other countries or world regions are much more likely to vote for centrist, left-wing, or Green parties. The analysis, however, tends to concentrate on the figure of the 'white school leaver,' at the cost (and risk) of sociological oversimplification.

7. *Young–old*: In aging societies (Ford and W. Jennings 2020), the decrease in the stock of working-age individuals creates new redistributive pressures. Simultaneously, generational changes in political values—on average, younger voters tend to be more culturally tolerant than their parents' generation (Norris and R. Inglehart 2019), although young men have recently shifted towards the radical right in several countries, e.g., Germany and Portugal—can create tension between age groups. Among younger cohorts, left–right self-placement is also more strongly tied to cultural issues such as immigration and less to economic questions (Steiner 2024). Significant differences in the voting behavior of different age groups is no new phenomenon, yet it has been the subject of much public controversy (Norris and R. Inglehart 2019). More novel is the electoral dominance of the 65+ and 70+ age groups—two groups traditionally more likely to turn out—who make up roughly a quarter to a third of the electorate in many countries, and an even larger share of actual voters (in the 2025 German federal election, over 40% of eligible voters were aged 60 or over (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2025b)). Senior citizens have long been a demographic less favorable to radical parties in Western Europe, while forming the bulk of the electorate of hard-right conservative parties elsewhere, especially in Poland and Hungary. Given their growing demographic preeminence, analyzing the cleavage between the older, retired generation and working-age citizens may often prove more impactful than analyzing the cleavage between middle-aged and younger voters—with the latter often making up a very small proportion of the electorate.

8. *Declining–growing regions*: When observed through a geographical lens, the cleavages between 'winners and losers' of globalization or GAL and TAN can be seen as pitting declining against growing regions. The declining regions may be either large stretches of industrial *hinterland*, including urban areas (e.g., the French or Walloon Mining

Basins), or rural areas whose economic performance cannot compete with that of neighboring urban centers (Rodríguez-Pose et al. 2024). In the first case, one can expect a denationalization of the vote, with some regions developing differentiated political profiles; in the second case, urban and rural areas should diverge. In both cases, the geographic patterns of the resulting cleavage are remarkably similar to those of the 'old' center–periphery and urban–rural cleavages, reframed around the consequences of globalization and economic modernization rather than by state-formation and early industrialization.

A few important, alternative cleavage candidates are not covered above. Non exhaustively, we note four:

9. *The Gender Gap*: We will come back to this question in Section 3.4.

10. *Post-socialist nostalgia*: In countries of the former Eastern bloc and Yugoslavia, attitudes towards the former socialist regimes continue to shape political divisions (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017).

11. *Climate-conscious–climate deniers*: Attitudes towards environmental regulation could become a more autonomous criterion as both the costs of the Green transition and the consequences of climate change take a higher toll on European societies. The emergence of explicitly anti-Green measures in the programs of multiple radical-right and right-wing parties, and the more extreme pattern of Republican climate denialism in the United States, suggest that a cleavage might be forming.

12. *Winners–losers of AI*: While still hypothetical, a cleavage structured around the consequences of the generalization of Generative Artificial Intelligence may be emerging, especially if its impact on the white-collar job market proves significant in the long run.

Multiple empirical studies show several of these cleavages coexisting rather than replacing one another. Using post-electoral surveys from 21 Western democracies, Gethin et al. (2022) show that in the 1950s and 1960s, the vote for left-wing parties came disproportionately from both lower-income and less-educated voters, after which the education gradient reversed: university graduates started becoming more left-leaning, while high-income voters remained right-leaning. This gave rise to a 'multi-elite' party system with distinct educational and income cleavages, which they describe as opposing a 'Brahmin left' and a 'merchant right.' Drawing on ecological election data at the polling-station level, Hublet and Lanoë (2025) analyze the 2022 French presidential election in the light of a large set of socio-demographic indicators. They find that three variables—socio-economic status, education, and immigration status—account for a large part of the variation in local voting behavior. However, each of these variables opposes a different pair of candidates in the first round. Affluent areas favor Emmanuel Macron and poorer ones Jean-Luc Mélenchon; areas with fewer graduates favor Marine Le Pen and those with more graduates Macron; areas with more immigrants favor Mélenchon and those with fewer Le Pen. In each case, the third candidate occupies an intermediate position, and abstention moves closer to a different candidate on each cleavage. The authors conclude that the structure of political competition cannot be reduced to one or even two axes: class still matters, but it is only one cleavage among several.

Each of the proposed divisions of the political landscape can warrant multiple research programs. Some overlap (e.g., the winners–losers of globalization, GAL–TAN, declining–growing regions, and climate axes) and others may in fact reenact older patterns, such as the urban–rural cleavage or center–periphery cleavages. Their interaction with the left–right cleavage and religiosity should also not be underestimated.

3.3 Populism, trust, and the "anti-system" vote

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser define populism as

> a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, p. 6)

By describing populism as *thin-centered*, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser wish to convey that populism is not a fully-fledged ideology like liberalism or communism, but rather a 'lightweight' ideology that can be combined with and modify other ideological frameworks.

Populism as such is neither left nor right, neither parochial nor cosmopolitan. While the attribute 'populist' is almost universally rejected by the parties and individuals it designates (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, p. 2), it can, by the above definition, be assigned to political entrepreneurs of any political leanings. The PopuList database of political parties (Rooduijn et al. 2024) thus classifies as populist representatives of the radical left (Spain's Unidas Podemos, France's LFI), the nationalistic left (Slovakia's Smer, Germany's BSW), the Greens (Croatia's Možemo), the left (Greece's SYRIZA, Progressive Bulgaria), the center-right (Italy's Forza Italia under Berlusconi, Bulgaria's GERB), ideologically eclectic anti-system parties (Italy's M5S), and the radical right (Austria's FPÖ, Portugal's Chega, Reform UK). The radical right stands out for being home to a very large share of populist parties. As a consequence, the label 'PRR' (populist radical right) is very commonly used to designate far-right parties in general, despite a few far-right parties hardly fitting the 'populist' label due to their elitist profile.

Since populism is a thin ideology, populist parties do not share a unified social base. Comparing the electorates of fifteen West European populist parties, Rooduijn (2018) finds no common socio-demographic profile: radical-right populist voters tend to be male, less educated, hold working-class or self-employed jobs, and hold restrictive views on immigration (Section 3.2), whereas the voters of radical-left populist parties such as Podemos are younger, more highly educated, and favor economic redistribution (Ramiro and Gomez 2017). Centrist anti-corruption challengers recruit across social groups, often among volatile, younger and urban voters (Hanley and Sikk 2016). The main trait that these heterogeneous electorates share is political discontent and low levels of trust in the political system (Rooduijn 2018). Panel studies show that individual distrust predicts later votes for populist and protest parties, and that voting for populists in turn tends to increase discontent, a phenomenon sometimes dubbed the 'spiral of distrust' (Rooduijn et al. 2016; M. Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018).

Research on populism has been booming in the last two decades (Rooduijn 2019), in part due to the rise of a new generation of political leaders that have embraced a populist style. Political figures such as Silvio Berlusconi, Viktor Orbán, Alexis Tsipras, or Matteo Salvini have embodied different strands of populism during their respective tenures, and parties such as the Italian Five Star Movement (M5S), the Austrian FPÖ, and the Hungarian Fidesz have shown that populism can constitute an effective mobilization strategy. More controversially, many centrist leaders running on an anti-establishment or anti-corruption platform, such as Emmanuel Macron, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Péter Magyar, or the leaders of the Romanian USR alliance, have sometimes been described as populists (Perottino and Guasti 2020; Engler et al. 2019). But while some 'populist' challengers have been able to channel political distrust into demands for democratic renewal, more often worries have emerged about the risk of democratic backsliding (Waldner and Lust 2018; Juon and Bochsler 2020) arising from populism, as populist parties tend to prioritize their interpretation of an essentialized 'general will' over the principles of the rule of law (Müller 2016). Anti-elitist populism is particularly hard to tell apart from anti-corruption platforms. In Eastern Europe,

a significant number of centrist parties have won elections in the last ten years after running on successful anti-corruption platforms (Engler et al. 2019), including Zelenskyy's Servant of the People Party (SN) in Ukraine, the Bulgarian Continue the Change! (PP), and Magyar's TISZA party, with the Serbian Student List being one of the most recent and spectacular examples of this phenomenon. Such parties have generally professed a commitment to the rule of law and have not triggered the same concerns as their radical counterparts.

Like nationalism, populism tends to be associated with right-wing parties while being effectively combinable with very different political ideologies. Therefore, it is generally analytically cleaner to decouple populism (viewed as a feature of ideologies or a style of discourse that mobilize anti-elitist sentiments) from other forms of political radicality, be it left-wing (e.g., revolutionary anticapitalism or democratic socialism) or right-wing (e.g., national-conservatism or fascism).

3.4 Gender, generations, and the changing social bases of electoral competition

While gender and age have long been known to structure electoral behavior, the direction and magnitude of their effects have changed over time. In the post-war period, women were generally assumed to be more conservative and religious than men, and were found by early studies to more frequently favor Christian-democratic and other center-right parties (R. Inglehart and Norris 2000). In the wake of the 1968 movement, younger generations came to be strongly associated with left-wing politics and (cultural) liberalism, while older age groups voted more conservatively (Butler and D. Stokes 1969).

Since the 1970s, this situation has changed—quite radically for the gender gap, and more subtly for the age gap. Election surveys[1] now show that female voters favor the (center-)left more often, while men disproportionately support radical-right parties. This gap is much stronger in younger generations than in older ones, where the difference in gendered voting behavior is often not statistically significant. Figure 3.2 breaks down the gender gap in left–right self-placement for the five largest EU member states. The gap is largest in Poland (1.2 points on the 0–10 scale among the 18–29), Spain (1.0), and France (0.9), and shrinks to 0.2 points or less among the over-65s. Germany shows a stable gap of about half a point at every age, while in Italy the gap is small among the young and reversed among the over-65s, where women place themselves to the right of men. Turnout gaps are less consistent: in Poland, young women report voting more often than young men (82% against 76%), whereas in Italy women aged 65 and over report voting 18 points less often than men. Looking beyond self-placement, Figure 3.1 shows how the gaps in declared voting behavior vary with age in the latest round of the European Social Survey (2023/24, 22 EU member states). Among voters aged 18–29, women were 13 points more likely than men to vote for the left (46% against 33%) and 8 points less likely to vote for the radical right (13% against 21%). In European aggregate, the left-wing gap shrinks steadily with age and nearly disappears among the oldest age groups; for the radical right, it is even slightly reversed among the 60–74. The gap is again largest among the young, both for left-wing and radical-right parties, consistent with cohort studies of the modern gender gap (Shorrocks 2018).

National election surveys conducted following recent elections confirm these patterns (Figure 3.3). In all five countries we consider (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland), the main radical-right party draws more votes from men than from women, with the gap reaching 8.5 points for the German AfD. The Polish PiS, whose electorate is older, is the exception,

[1] Due to the balanced number of female and male voters in the vast majority of electoral precincts and municipalities, ecological data are not informative about gender-specific patterns.

with almost no gap (0.4 points). Left-wing parties draw more votes from women, the most extreme case being the Spanish PSOE (7.8 points). A particularly useful resource is Germany's representative electoral statistics, which cross-tabulate votes by sex *and* age, sourced from ballots counted in a sample of polling stations. These data show how strongly the gaps are concentrated among the young: among voters aged 18–24, the AfD won 25% of men's votes against 13% of women's, while Die Linke won 37% of young women's votes against 18% of men's. The latter gap falls to 7 points among the 25–34 and to about 2 points beyond age 35. These rather dramatic gaps have attracted a lot of media and academic attention. However, note that the limited demographic weight of the 18–24 age group in German elections (6.8% of valid votes in 2025) means that a strong gender gap among the youngest cohorts has very little influence on the outcome of the vote.

Looking forward, whether this gender gap is the result of an *age* or *cohort* effect, and whether it will persist in future generations, matters enormously. The age gaps in surveys can reflect three different phenomena: *age* or *life-cycle* effects (people change as they age, e.g., voters are left-leaning when young but become more conservative as they grow older), *cohort* effects (each generation has a different political profile marked by the political climate of the time it was politically socialized—e.g., post-war generations develop post-materialist values R. Inglehart 1977), and *period* effects (events shift the behavior of all age groups at once). Since age is the difference of the current period and birth year, these three effects cannot be separated empirically without additional assumptions. Available evidence suggests that cohort effects often dominate age effects. Combining repeated cross-sections with panel data, Tilley and Evans (2014) find a small genuine ageing effect towards the Conservatives in Britain alongside larger cohort differences; Blais et al. (2004) find similar generational effects on turnout.

Turning to the question of age differences, recent developments show that the age gap is often non-linear. In many countries, the radical-right vote follows an inverted U-shape (Figure 3.4), with middle-aged voters most likely to vote for radical-right parties. In Germany's 2025 Bundestag election, the AfD won 19% among voters aged 18–24, 27% among the 35–44, and only 11.5% among those aged 70 and over. ESS data show a flatter version of the same trend: 16% of the vote among under-35s, 20–21% between 45 and 75, and 15% among the over-80s. That pattern, however, is not universal: in Poland, the radical-right vote (PiS and Konfederacja) rises steadily with age, from 28% to 53%, while in Spain Vox does best among the young. A plausible interpretation of this situation is that the oldest cohorts remain attached to established, centrist parties they have grown up with; the youngest are more educated, more culturally liberal, more frequently have a family history of migration, and are less exposed to long-term economic insecurity than their older peers; and middle-aged voters, who are both more exposed to economic insecurity and less attached to the old establishment, form the radical right's core. Where the radical right functions as an established conservative party with a traditional and religious electorate (Poland's PiS, Hungary's Fidesz), the curve rises with age instead of peaking among working-age individuals.

Why does the gender gap exist, and why is it widest among the young? Research points to a combination of three types of factors. Literature from the early 2000s generally sees the reversal of the 'old' gender gap as following the secularization of women, their entry into paid employment, and a reversal of educational gaps (R. Inglehart and Norris 2000; R. Inglehart and Norris 2003). This is consistent with the modern gender gap being largest in younger cohorts and smallest among the oldest (Shorrocks 2018). However, the radical-right gap is generally hypothesized to have a different origin: while men and women with similar socio-demographic profiles differ little in their views on immigration, women are less receptive to radical-right parties' anti-establishment style and more supportive of redistribution and gender equality, the latter often opposed by radical-right parties (Harteveld et al. 2015; Spierings

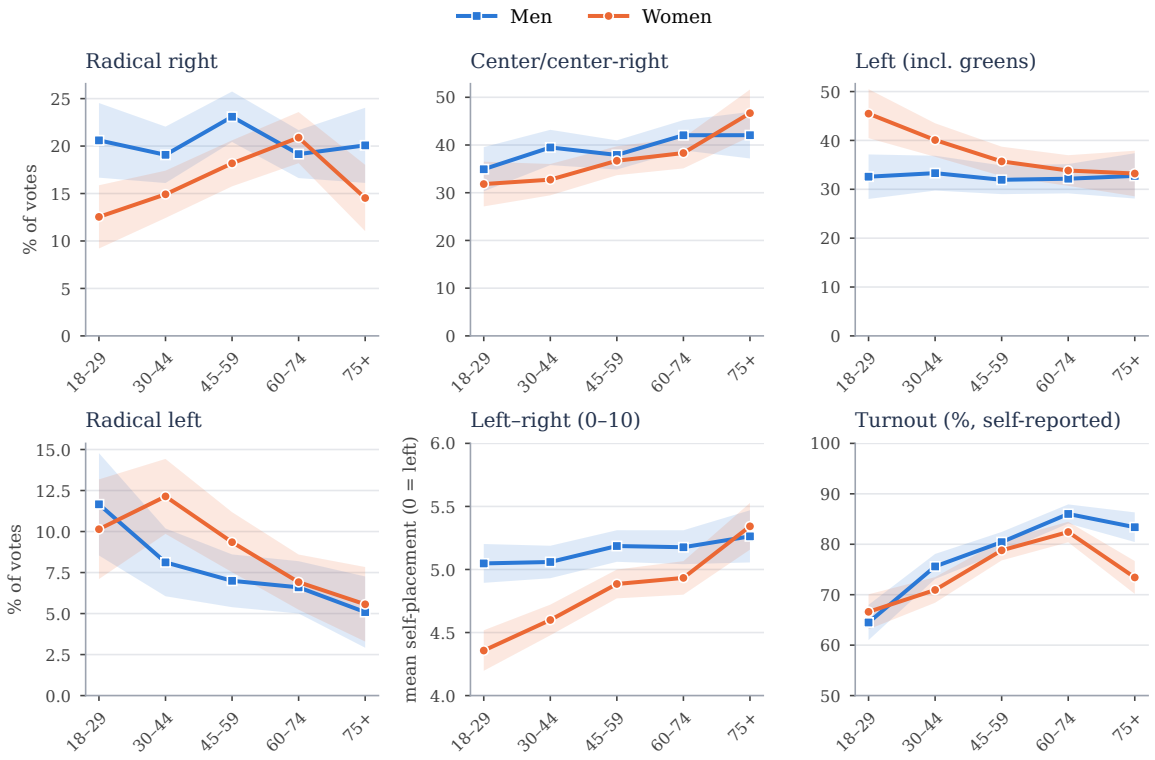


Figure 3.1: Vote by gender and age group, last national election (% of votes for each party family), mean left–right self-placement, and self-reported turnout (% of eligible respondents who say they voted). European Social Survey round 11 (2023/24), 22 EU member states pooled, weighted by the ESS analysis weight; shaded: 95% confidence intervals. Party families as in BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

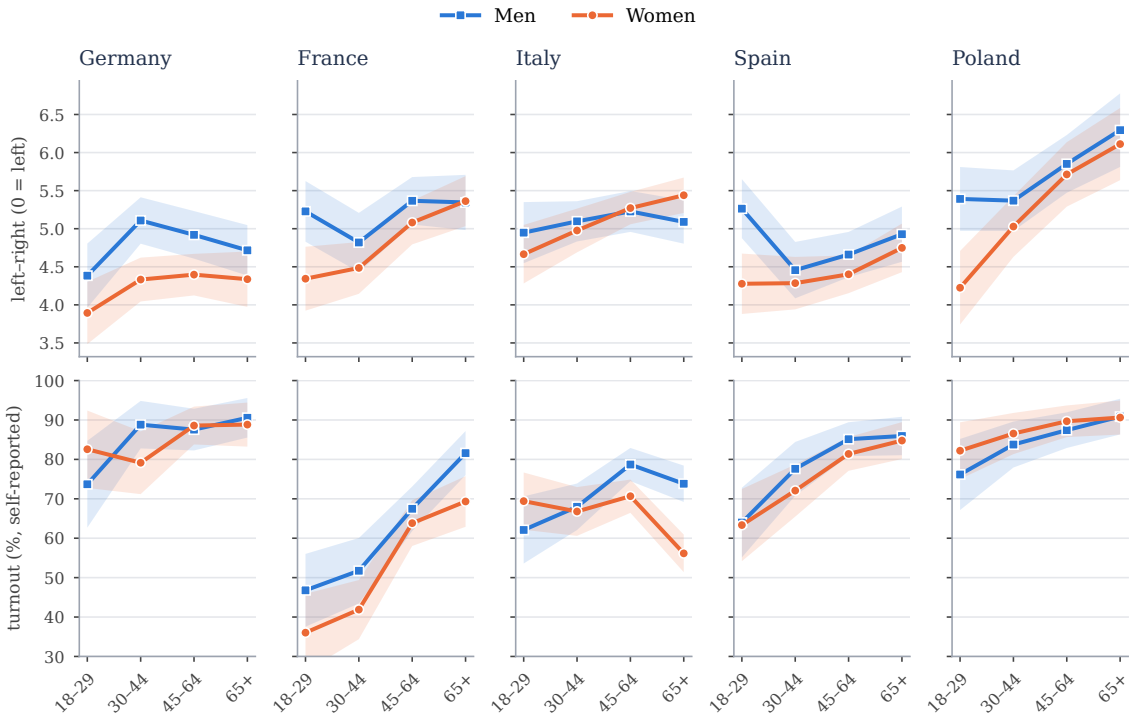


Figure 3.2: Mean left–right self-placement (0 = left, 10 = right; top) and self-reported turnout (bottom) by gender and age group in the five largest EU member states. European Social Survey round 11 (2023/24), weighted by the ESS analysis weight; shaded: 95% confidence intervals.

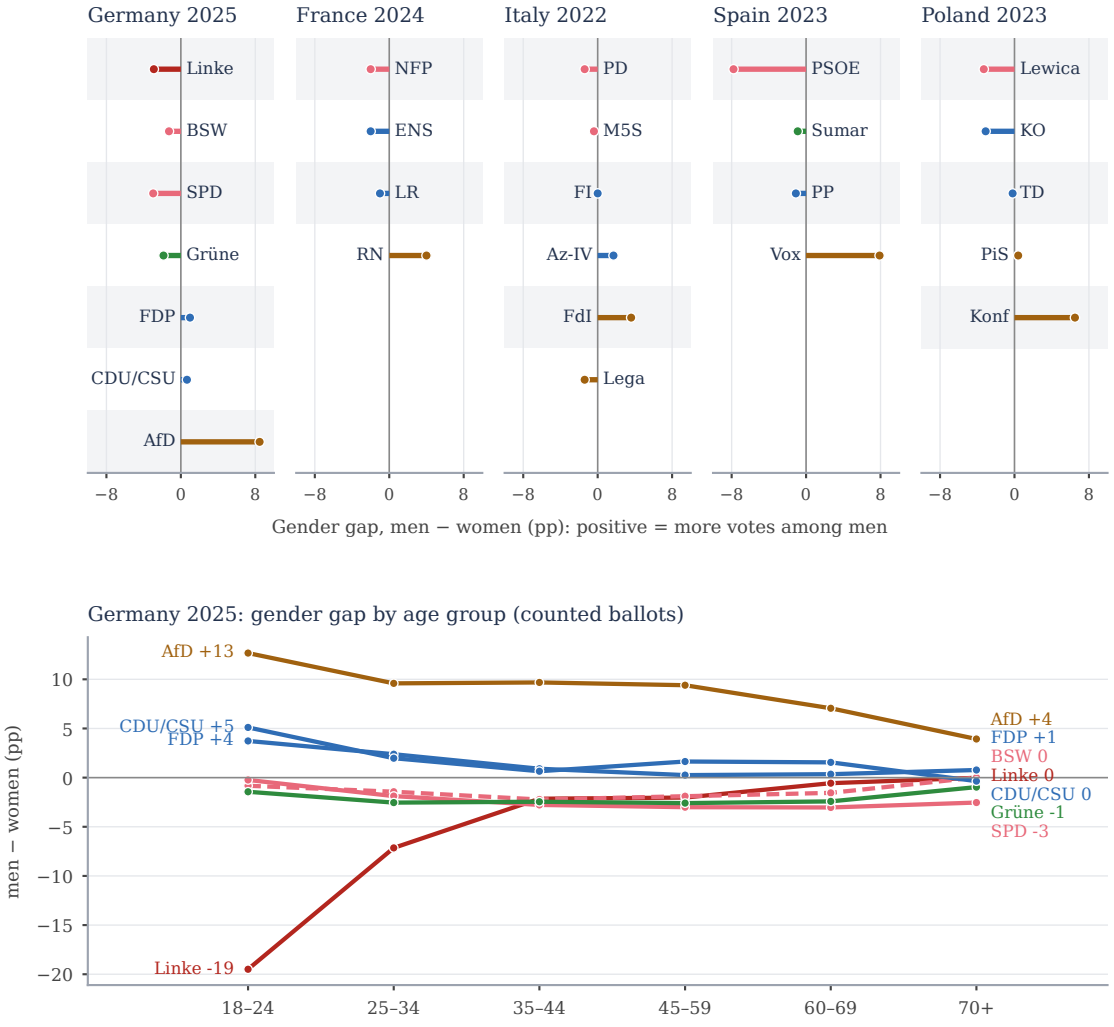


Figure 3.3: Gender gap in party vote (men minus women, percentage points), latest national election in the five largest EU member states. Germany: representative electoral statistics (Zweitstimme, counted ballots), Bundeswahlleiterin/Destatis. France, Italy, Spain, Poland: post-election surveys (France: Ipsos, first round; Italy: Ipsos; Spain: CIS study 3420; Poland: Ipsos exit poll), which report vote by sex and by age separately. Bottom: Germany, by age group (birth cohorts 2001–2007 to 1955 and earlier); BSW dashed.

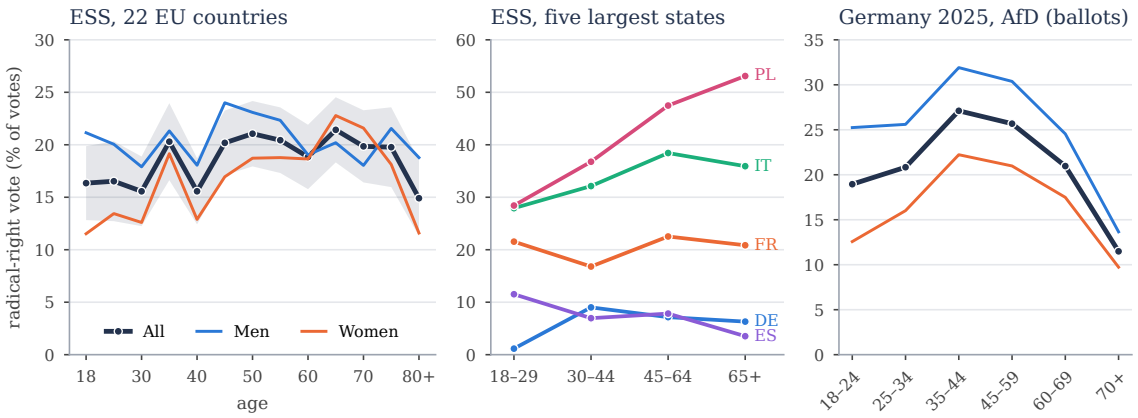


Figure 3.4: Radical-right vote by age. Left: European Social Survey round 11 (2023/24), 22 EU member states pooled, last national election, shaded: 95% confidence interval. Center: the same for the five largest member states (Germany: 2021 federal election, in which the AfD is under-reported). Right: AfD, Bundestag election 2025, representative electoral statistics (counted ballots), Bundeswahlleiterin/Destatis.

and Zaslove 2017). Thirdly, among the young, the rising salience of gender equality since the late 2010s (#MeToo) may have decreased young women's willingness to support parties that often adopt an openly anti-feminist stance, while part of the young male electorate embraces that anti-feminist stance (Off 2023).

3.5 The geography of discontent

The vote for radical-left, radical-right, and populist parties in Europe is not homogeneously distributed: urban, richer, and more educated areas often lean towards more centrist (and, in cities, left-wing) politics. The new divides between urban and rural areas and between centers and peripheries (today generally viewed in terms of 'globalization winners vs. losers' rather than 'capital cities vs. peripheral regions') feature prominently in contemporary academic and media commentary. Geographic heterogeneity can result from both *compositional* and *contextual* effects: areas that vote differently may have different demographic makeups, e.g., urban areas are younger, more educated, and home to more minority voters (the compositional effects), but they may also vote differently because they have developed different local cultures or foster different kinds of interpersonal relations (the contextual effects). These effects are often very difficult to disentangle empirically, even though approaches that control for sociodemographic factors across regions can help bound the likelihood of strong contextual effects. As a rule of thumb, empirical studies tend to find that a large share of the differences between areas of the same polity is compositional (Maxwell 2019; Huijsmans et al. 2021), even though contextual effects may be dominant in specific contexts (e.g., regions with strong linguistic minorities or a history of substate nationalism). While some prominent geographers have made 'urbanity gradients' a key aspect of their analysis of contemporary political developments (Lévy 2013; Guilluy 2014), this view has been criticized for underplaying class and other compositional differences (Rivière 2022; Maxwell 2019).

A second, older territorial cleavage opposes national centers to peripheries with distinct linguistic, religious, or historical identities: Lipset and Rokkan's center–periphery cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In regions such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, Scotland, Flanders, or South Tyrol, regionalist and nationalist parties are more likely to channel a

significant part of the discontent towards national elites or compete with it for the same voters. Some of the regions see much lower far-right vote than the national average (the Basque Country, South Tyrol, Galicia, Scotland) due to the unpopularity of (Spanish, Italian) nationalism there and the left-wing or center-right leanings of the local party system. Others have large substate nationalist *and* radical-right parties, such as Flanders with the Vlaams Belang (VB). A third category, to which Catalonia belongs, has recently seen the emergence of new radical-right autonomist or independentist forces.

To visualize these geographic cleavages, Figure 3.5 maps the radical-right and radical-left vote in the 2024 European Parliament election at the municipal level, and Figure 3.7 shows the sum of all radical-left and radical-right vote, which we take as a rough proxy for discontent with centrist pro-integration politics. The radical right is strongest in France, Italy, Poland, Hungary, and Eastern Germany; the radical left in Greece, Finland, and Ireland. Figure 3.8 plots similar indicators for the latest national election in all 52 countries covered by BLUE_DB. The share of nominally radical vote is generally lower in most countries of the EU's neighborhood, except in Norway and Switzerland (where radical-right vote is common), in Serbia (where BLUE_DB splits the ruling SNS coalition between its member parties, some of them radical right), and in Türkiye (where BLUE_DB codes the ruling national-conservative AKP as radical-right).

Maps that show municipalities with their real (geographic) area tend to overstate the importance of sparsely populated rural regions (inland Spain, northern Scandinavia) and understate that of cities. Figures 3.6–3.10 show the same data as cartograms in which the area of each region is adjusted to be proportional to its number of registered voters (Gastner and Newman 2004). Metropolitan areas appear as large bubbles in these cartograms, often with a markedly lower share of radical-right vote than the rest of their country: in the 2024 EP election, radical parties won 35% in Paris against 53% in France as a whole, 38% in Warsaw against 52% in Poland, and 33% in Milan against 42% in Italy (Berlin, where the radical left is strong, is an exception). On a traditional area map, the radical vote looks dominant almost everywhere in these countries; the cartograms show many voters live in places that do not, in fact, lean towards the far right.

While borders matter for the distribution of political radicality, contrasts are often as strong, or even stronger, within individual countries. Figure 3.11 shows six stark examples of such contrasts. In Germany, the AfD came out on top in 92% of the municipalities of the former GDR, against just 6% in the West: thirty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the former inner-German border remains the sharpest line on the electoral map. In Poland, the national-conservative PiS led in the south and east—the territories of the former Russian and Austrian partitions, often dubbed 'Poland B'—while the liberal-conservative Civic Coalition dominated in the cities and in the west and north, the former Prussian partition and the formerly German territories resettled after 1945, dubbed 'Poland A' due to their greater economic dynamism. In another stark contrast, around Paris the radical left (LFI) led in the working-class inner suburbs of Seine-Saint-Denis, the left in Paris and parts of the inner suburbs, the center-right in the wealthy Western suburbs, and the radical right (RN) in most of the outer, periurban ring, and neighboring regions. In Northern and Central Italy, the Democratic Party won the vote in its historical strongholds of Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany (the former communist 'red belt'), while Giorgia Meloni's FdI and their Lega allies won a plurality almost everywhere else. The former mining basin shared by Northern France and Belgian Hainaut shows how much regional party systems still matter: the RN led in 1,500 of the 1,538 communes of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, whereas just across the border in Wallonia, where the radical right has remained marginal, the populist-liberal MR or the Socialist Party led in every municipality of Hainaut. On the last panel, Switzerland provides an exemplary case of both regional (cantonal) and urban–rural heterogeneity: the national-conservative

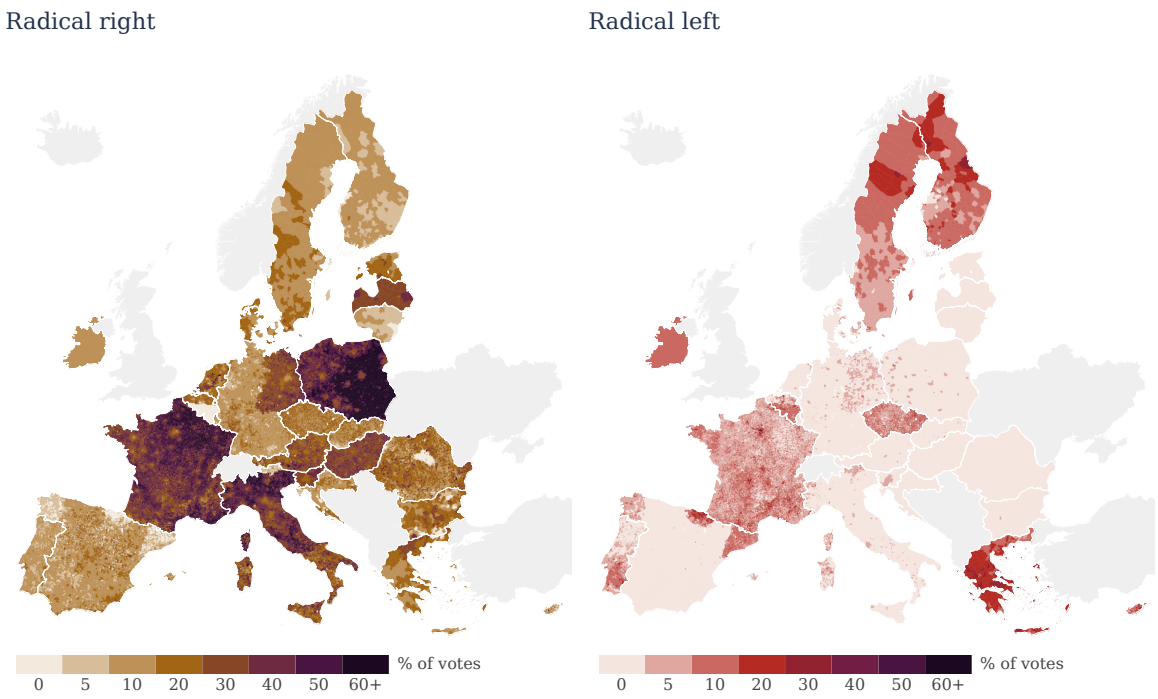


Figure 3.5: Radical-right and radical-left vote by municipality, 2024 European Parliament election (% of valid votes; same scale for both maps). Ireland and Malta: national values; Slovenia: NUTS-3 regions. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

SVP led in two-thirds of the municipalities in 2023, especially in the German-speaking part of the country, while the Centre and Liberals held Catholic and Italian-speaking areas and the Socialists won a plurality in all major cities except Lugano.

Most of the above contrasts are the result of historical legacies. Italy's 'red' and 'white' (Catholic) subcultures long organized parties, unions, and associations at the local level (Diamanti 2009); the borders of the Polish partitions still separate areas with diverging religious and social structures (Grosfeld and Zhuravskaya 2015); the AfD's strength in the East reflects both the consequences of reunification—deindustrialization, emigration, ageing—and effects of political socialization under communism (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017; Weisskircher 2020); Wallonia's strict *cordon sanitaire* vis-à-vis the far right vs. the decline of Northern France's socialist culture have led the two halves of the formerly red binational mining basin to diverge politically. But these legacies should not be confused with historical determinism: the parties that thrive in different subnational spaces may change over time, as the RN's conquest of Northern France and its rather unremarkable results in the former royalist (i.e., historically *far-right*) lands of Northern Vendée demonstrate.

There is evidence that the urban–rural divide has been growing in Europe over the last two decades. Using Eurostat's degree of urbanization, Hublet (2024) finds that, between the 2019 and 2024 EP elections, the left's advantage in cities and the radical right's advantage in rural areas both widened. Figure 3.12 performs a similar analysis for all national and EP elections since 2001, using municipal size as a proxy for urbanization: in each election, municipalities are ranked by their number of registered voters and split into three groups each holding a third of the national electorate. The gradient in radical-left, left, and radical-right vote between the largest and smallest municipalities is growing over time, while the center-right gradient is mostly stable. In the national elections of 21 EU member states, the left polled 4.7 percentage points (pp) higher in large than in small municipalities in 2006 and 8.6 pp more in 2026; the

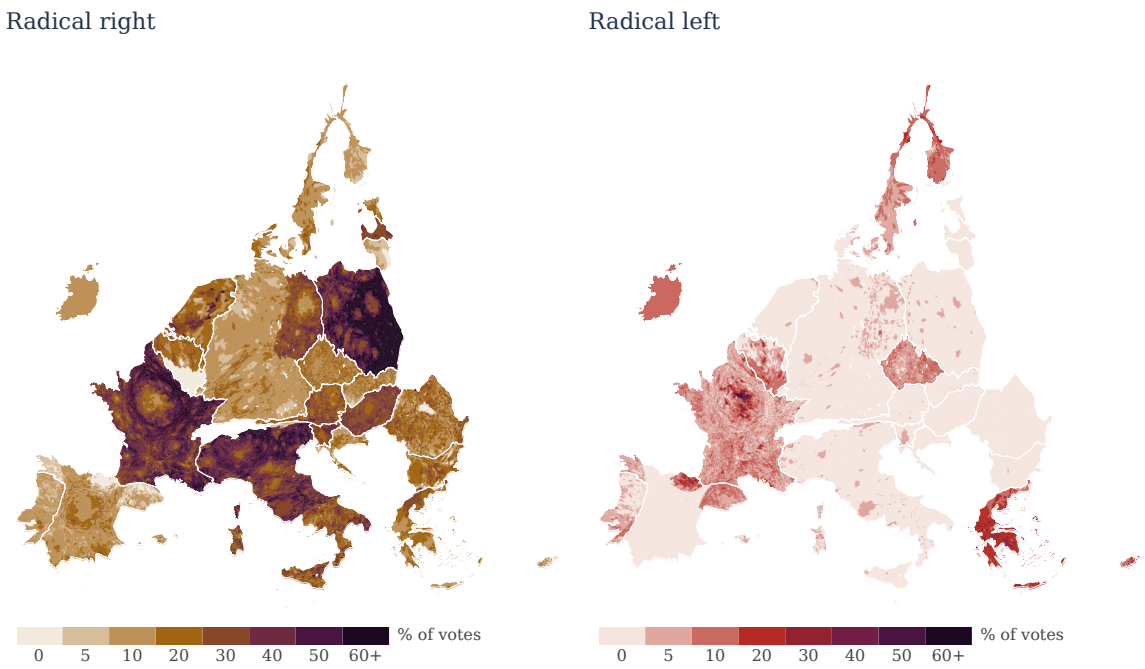


Figure 3.6: Figure 3.5 as a population cartogram: the area of each region is proportional to its registered voters in the 2024 European Parliament election (diffusion method, density smoothed over 24 km). Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

radical right's advantage in small municipalities grew from just 1.6 pp in 2006 to 9.8 pp in 2026. EP elections show the same pattern, with a radical-right gap rising from 3.1 pp in 2004 to 10.2 pp in 2024. The widening gap is consistent with the rise of the education and cultural cleavages discussed in Section 3.2: as education has become a stronger predictor of the vote, the concentration of graduates in large cities has translated it into geography (Maxwell 2019; Huijsmans et al. 2021).

Discontent and political distrust are not only expressed by voting for radical or populist parties. They can also lead to non-voting (abstention), a rising phenomenon in most of Europe since the 1980s (Section 3.1). Figures 3.13 and 3.14 map abstention in the 2024 EP election and in the latest national elections, and Figures 3.15 and 3.16 show the same data as population cartograms. The geography of non-voting differs markedly from that of the radical vote for two reasons. First, it largely depends on national idiosyncrasies: in the EP election, abstention ranged from about 11% in Belgium and 18% in Luxembourg, where voting is compulsory, to 72% in Lithuania and 79% in Croatia, with differences between countries accounting for about half of the variance across municipalities in both cases. Abstention is highest in Central and Eastern Europe and up to 20 points lower in national elections than in EP elections, often described as 'second-order' contests (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Second, within countries, abstention tends to be concentrated in specific places: poor urban neighborhoods with many young and less educated voters and peripheral regions. It is worth keeping in mind that since abstention is strongly correlated with income and education, the maps of the radical vote describe an electorate in which these demographics and the places where they are strong are underrepresented.

Beyond composition and historical legacies, a growing academic literature has pointed to the economic trajectory of places to explain radical and populist vote. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) describes the anti-system vote as the 'revenge of the places that don't matter': regions in long-

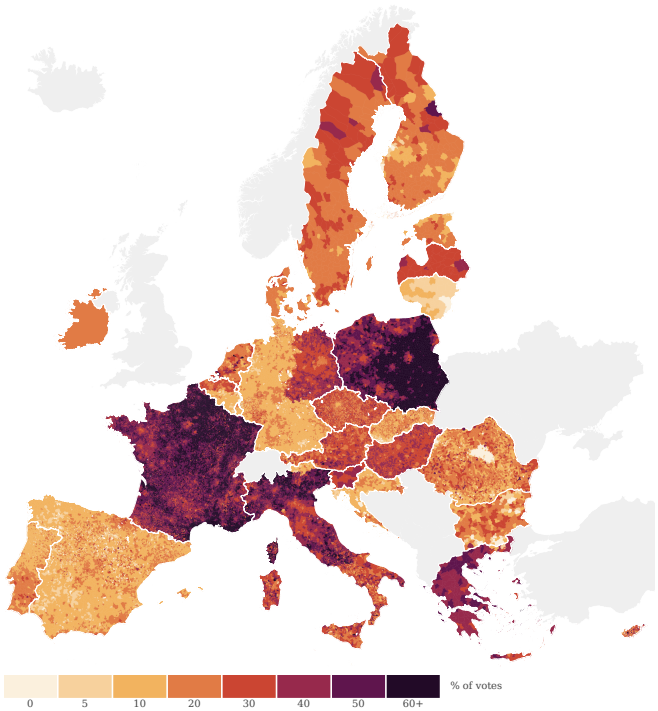


Figure 3.7: Radical right and radical left combined, by municipality, 2024 European Parliament election (% of valid votes). Ireland and Malta: national values; Slovenia: NUTS-3 regions. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

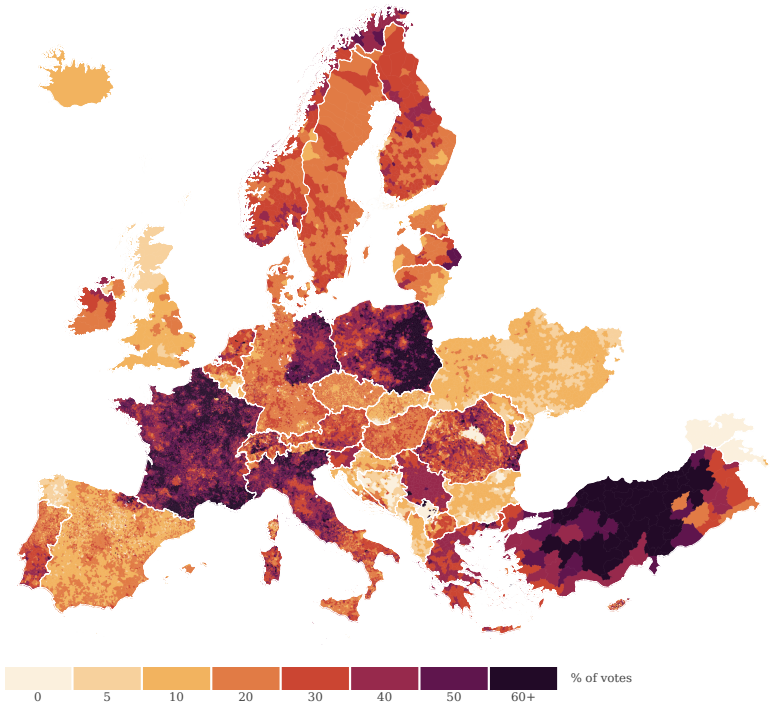


Figure 3.8: Radical right and radical left combined, latest national election (2019–2026), all 52 countries of BLUE_DB (% of valid votes; Greenland not shown). Party lists; first round in France. Iceland, Ireland, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom: NUTS-3 regions; Malta: national value. Families as classified in BLUE_DB, which places Turkey's AKP on the radical right. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

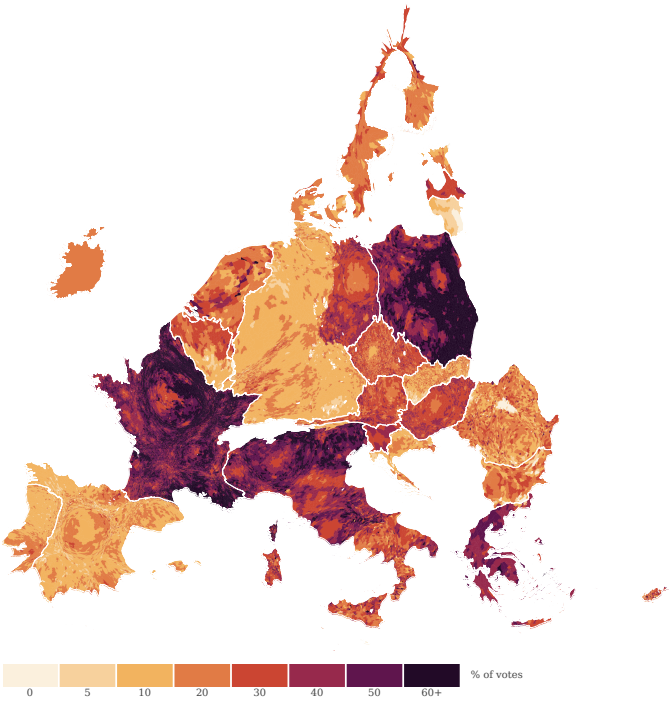


Figure 3.9: Figure 3.7 as a population cartogram (area proportional to registered voters, 2024 European Parliament election).

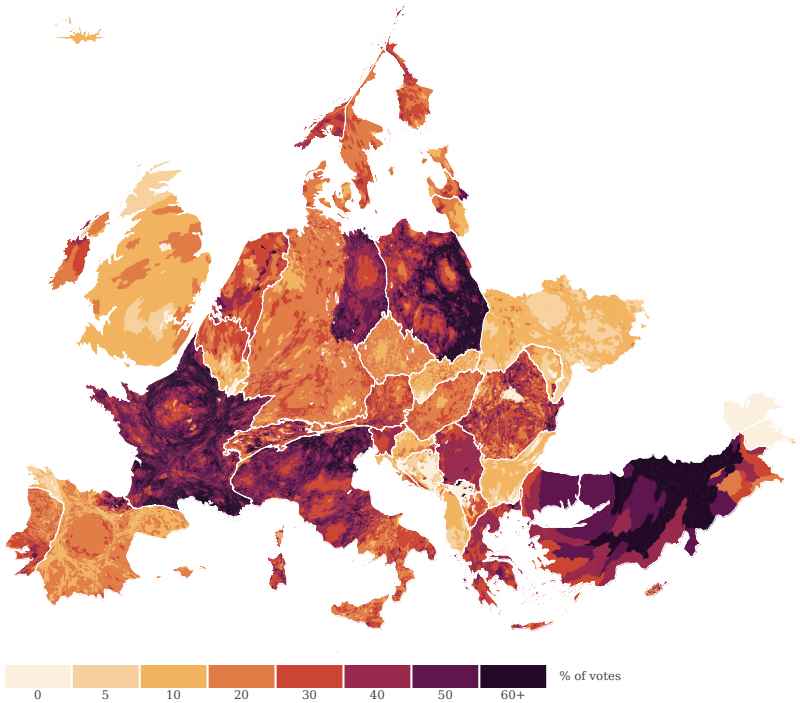


Figure 3.10: Figure 3.8 as a population cartogram (area proportional to registered voters in the latest national election).

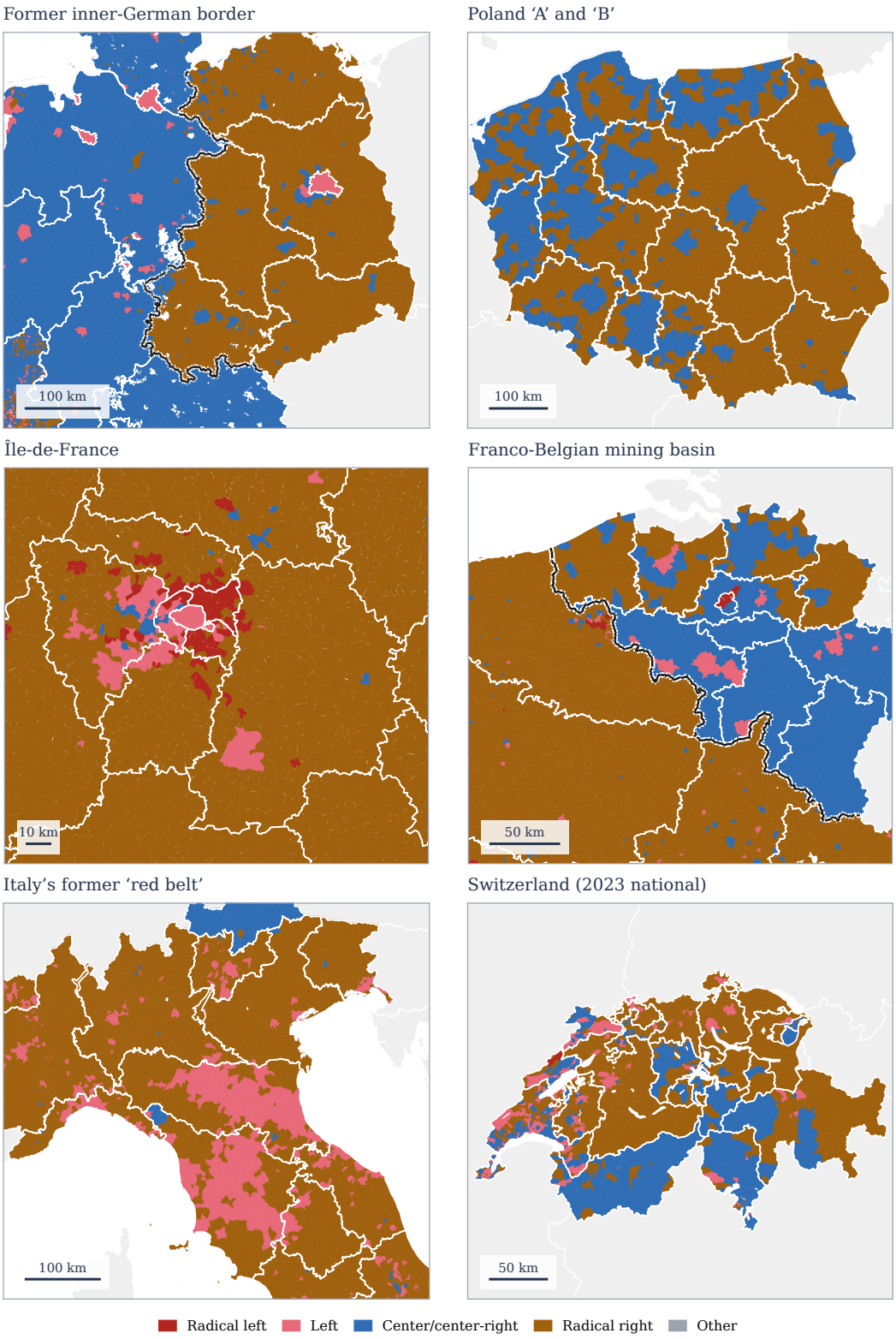


Figure 3.11: Family of the leading list by municipality, 2024 European Parliament election (Switzerland: 2023 national election). Dashed lines: the former inner-German border and the Franco-Belgian border. White lines: German *Länder*, Polish voivodeships, French *départements* (regions in the mining basin), Belgian provinces, Italian regions, Swiss cantons. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

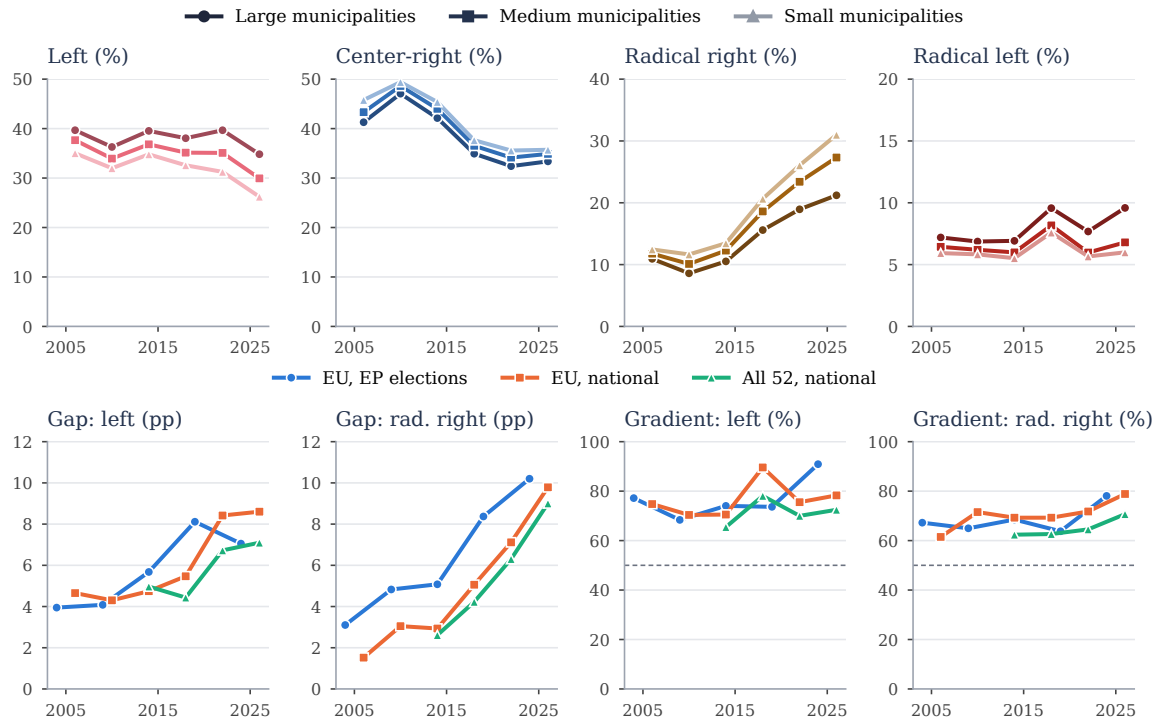


Figure 3.12: Vote by municipal size, 2004–2026. Large, medium, and small municipalities each hold a third of registered voters. Top: family shares, EU national elections (21 countries). *Gap*: large minus small (left), small minus large (radical right). *Gradient*: share of voters in countries where the vote rises (left) or falls (radical right) monotonically with size. Weighted by registered voters; countries whose units are constituencies or provinces excluded. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

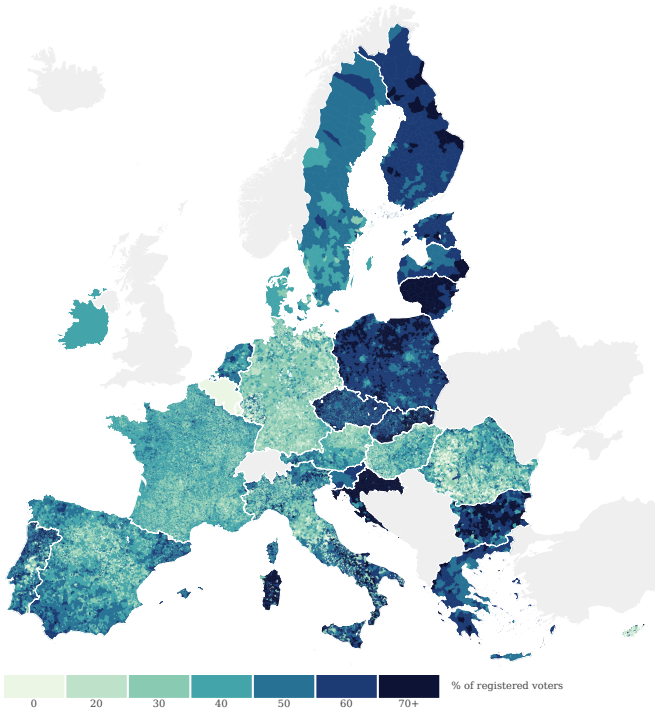


Figure 3.13: Abstention by municipality, 2024 European Parliament election (% of registered voters). Postal votes counted outside municipalities (Austria, Germany) are allocated proportionally within NUTS-3 regions. Belgium: provinces; Slovenia: NUTS-3 regions; Ireland and Malta: national values. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

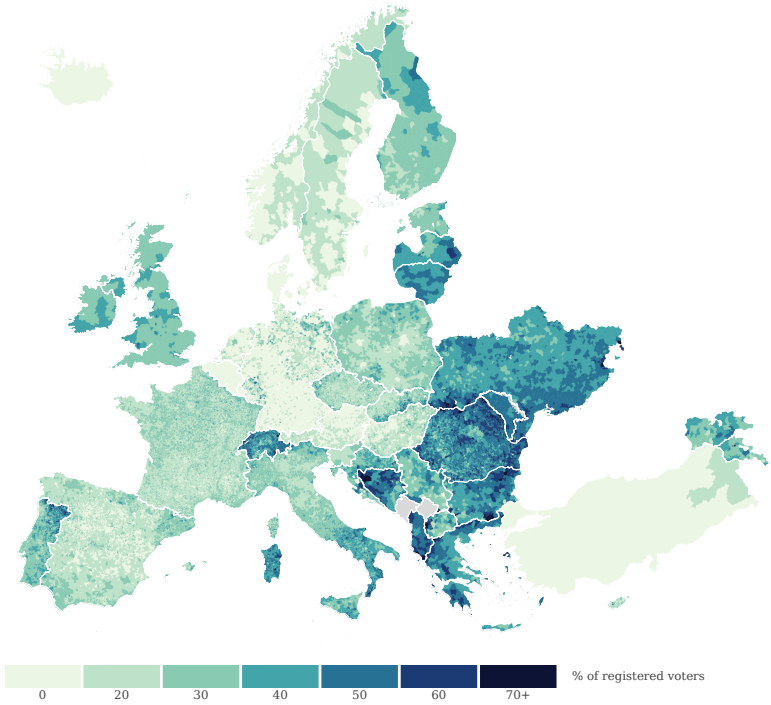


Figure 3.14: Abstention, latest national election (2019–2026), all 52 countries of BLUE_DB (% of registered voters; Greenland not shown). No data: Kosovo, Montenegro, Isle of Man. Belgium: provinces; Iceland, Ireland, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom: NUTS-3 regions; Malta: national value. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

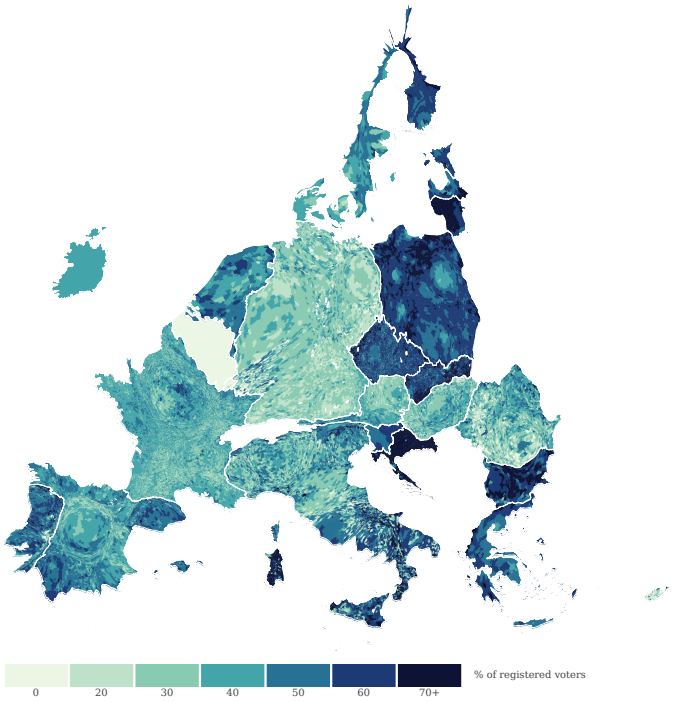


Figure 3.15: Figure 3.13 as a population cartogram (area proportional to registered voters, 2024 European Parliament election).

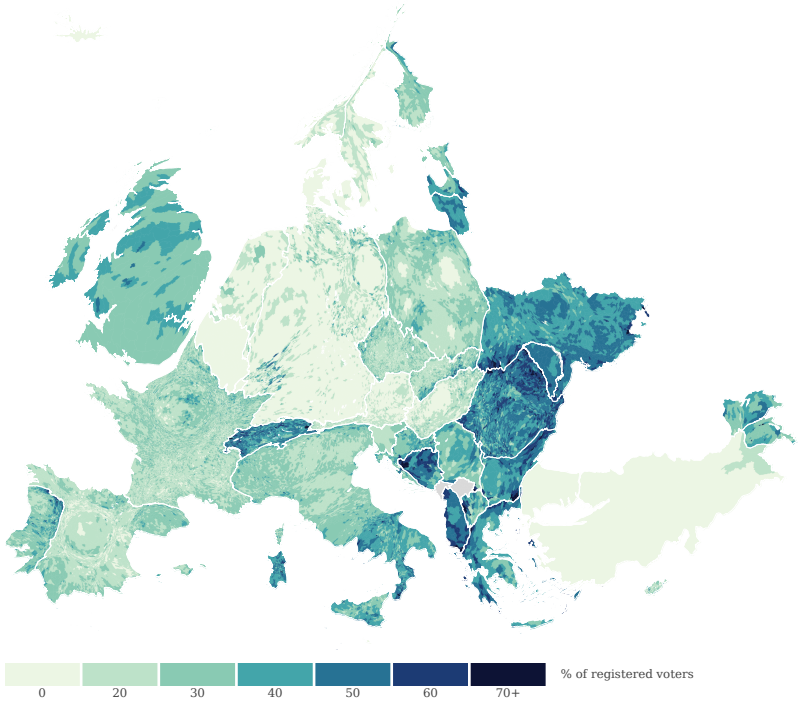


Figure 3.16: Figure 3.14 as a population cartogram (area proportional to registered voters in the latest national election).

term decline, rather than the poorest ones, turn against the political mainstream. At regional level, euroskeptic vote is indeed associated with industrial decline, lower employment, and lower educational attainment levels (Dijkstra et al. 2020), and particularly with regions caught in a 'development trap' of stagnating income (Rodríguez-Pose et al. 2024). These contextual explanations are consistent with the faster growth of the radical right in deindustrialized regions such as Northern France or Eastern Germany, yet they remain hard to disentangle from compositional factors.

Whatever its causes, the existence of stark geographic cleavages can significantly impact national and European politics. When some regions lean strongly towards one large camp while others lean towards another, each election means a loss of political influence for part of the country, with potentially severe consequences for regional and local budgets and the ability of local representatives to argue their case nationally. In countries where local patronage networks connected to national party elites hold significant influence, political alignment with the national government has been shown to shape the allocation of transfers to municipalities, for instance in Hungary, Italy, and Spain (Muraközy and Telegdy 2016; Carozzi and Repetto 2016; Solé-Ollé and Sorribas-Navarro 2008). The internal geopolitics (Lacoste 1993) of geographically cleaved states, especially those where the central government holds significant political and fiscal capacity, affects both policy making and political trust. As an extreme instance of this phenomenon, the centrist French government of Gabriel Attal had half of its ministers born within 17 kilometers of Paris, causing concerns about the representativity of the executive (Le Grand Continent 2024). In federal countries such as Germany or, even more characteristically, Switzerland and Belgium, formal or informal arrangements require politicians from all major regions (or language groups) to be included in the executive. For all these reasons, understanding geographic cleavages is important beyond the question of their causes, as they affect the relation between the central government and local electorates, the relations between regions, and the quality and legitimacy of governance at all levels.

At European level, where citizens are represented by MEPs from major national parties and by their national governments (in the Council), the geographic cleavages impact coalition formation. Member states or regions that disproportionately favor radical parties (recently: Hungary, France, or Eastern German states) may have fewer influential representatives in the European Parliament, as the parties of their MEPs are structurally marginalized (Ripoll Servent 2019; Kantola and Miller 2021). On the other hand, member states or regions with a similar political profile may form effective transnational alliances: through the ECR Group, parties such as the Italian FdI, the Spanish Vox, and the Polish PiS have been frequently interacting, even participating in each other's campaign rallies; at the same time, the proximity between centrist leaders in Germany, Poland, or France is often used as a way to advance common agendas on the European scene. In this case, political equilibria favor large majoritarian (and so far, centrist) alliances over radical ones, giving rise to a form of pan-European internal geopolitics that has isolated some heads of government (e.g., Orbán's Hungary) and may, less visibly, weaken the political leverage of citizens in member states with a large share of radical vote (France) and of regions that diverge strongly from the European median (Eastern Poland, Southern Italy).

3.6 The irresistible rise of the far right?

We conclude this chapter by answering a question that has become central in media commentary in the last decade: Is the European radical right becoming dominant?

Figure 3.17 plots the radical-right vote in national elections since 2001, distinguishing, for each country, the largest (∼urban) from the smallest (∼rural) municipalities, each group holding a fifth of registered voters. In most of Western and Northern Europe, the radical

right performs markedly better in smaller municipalities, by 20 points or more in France, Poland, and Switzerland. In contrast, the gap is small or reversed in some of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Latvia). Across the EU, the radical right's national vote share rose from 12% in 2006 to 26% in 2026, with a widening gap between small and large municipalities (from 2 to 12 pp). As of autumn 2026, nearly one in three voters in the EU's smallest municipalities voted for the radical right in the latest national lower-house election, against slightly over one in ten in 2006. In the largest municipalities, the share of radical-right vote is roughly 20%, about double the 2006 figure.

Figures 3.18 and 3.19 show the radical-right vote and the party families that won a plurality locally across the 52 countries of BLUE_DB. In 2006, the radical right came first mainly in Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, and Switzerland. By 2026, it exceeds 20% in most municipalities of France, Italy, Poland, Austria, the Netherlands, Romania, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Eastern Germany. Within the EU, the share of voters living in a municipality won by the radical right grew from just 4% in 2006 to 27% in 2026 (5% and 31% across all 52 countries). Figure 3.20 redraws the leading families on a population cartogram.

When comparing the 52 countries in our dataset, three facts about the evolution of the radical-right vote since 2005 stand out. First, radical-right parties mostly 'took off' after 2013, with the EU-wide average even trending slightly downward in the first few years of our dataset (from 12% in 2006 to 9% in 2009). Their initial rise coincides with the late stage of the euro-area debt crisis and with the 2015 refugee crisis, which made immigration a salient issue across Western Europe (Dennison and Geddes 2019). Second, the strong upward trend at European level is driven by even stronger trends in large states such as France, Italy, Poland, and the Netherlands, and more recently Germany, Spain, and Romania. In other, smaller countries such as Switzerland, Belgium, or Denmark, the trend is less obvious, the radical-right vote having fluctuated around a stable level for two decades. While national heterogeneity is thus real, the rise of the radical right can still be qualified as a continental trend due to the largely simultaneous shifts in a majority of countries. Third, the two countries where the radical right governed longest, Poland and Hungary, were also those experiencing a radical-right *decline* after 2022 (from 52% to 44% in Poland in 2023, from 44% to 25% in Hungary in 2026), in Hungary after sixteen years of radical-right government. In both instances, this decline appears to have been driven mainly by backlash against the radical-right executive's alleged corruption and a demobilization of the right-wing electorate, rather than by a decline in nativist or euroskeptic sentiment within the country. The few examples of an early radical-right rise thus show that their growth is not irreversible, even in cases where the rule of law had been weakened (Poland, Hungary), but that this reversal may occur quite late and be rather partial, potentially taking place only after multiple government tenures and leaving the former governing party in the position to lead the opposition. The cases of Türkiye, where the national-conservative AKP has been increasingly eroding the rule of law and repressing opponents, and that of Russia (not in our dataset), which has evolved from a flawed but competitive electoral democracy in the early 2000s into one of the world's most authoritarian polities as of 2026, provide cautionary tales of the effects of prolonged nationalistic leadership.

All of these suggest that the European far right is there to stay. With the erosion of the 'frozen' party systems inherited from the 1920s (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) and the emergence of a new political order including strong cultural and educational cleavages, radical-right parties occupy a distinctive political niche in many European party systems. Their signature issues (immigration and nationalism, but also inflation, the cost of energy, or public safety) enjoy a high salience. The ongoing economic and geopolitical crises fuel discontent that may play into their hands. The latent nativist attitudes they have reactivated have a long history, while traditional class conflicts have lost some of their political momentum in the

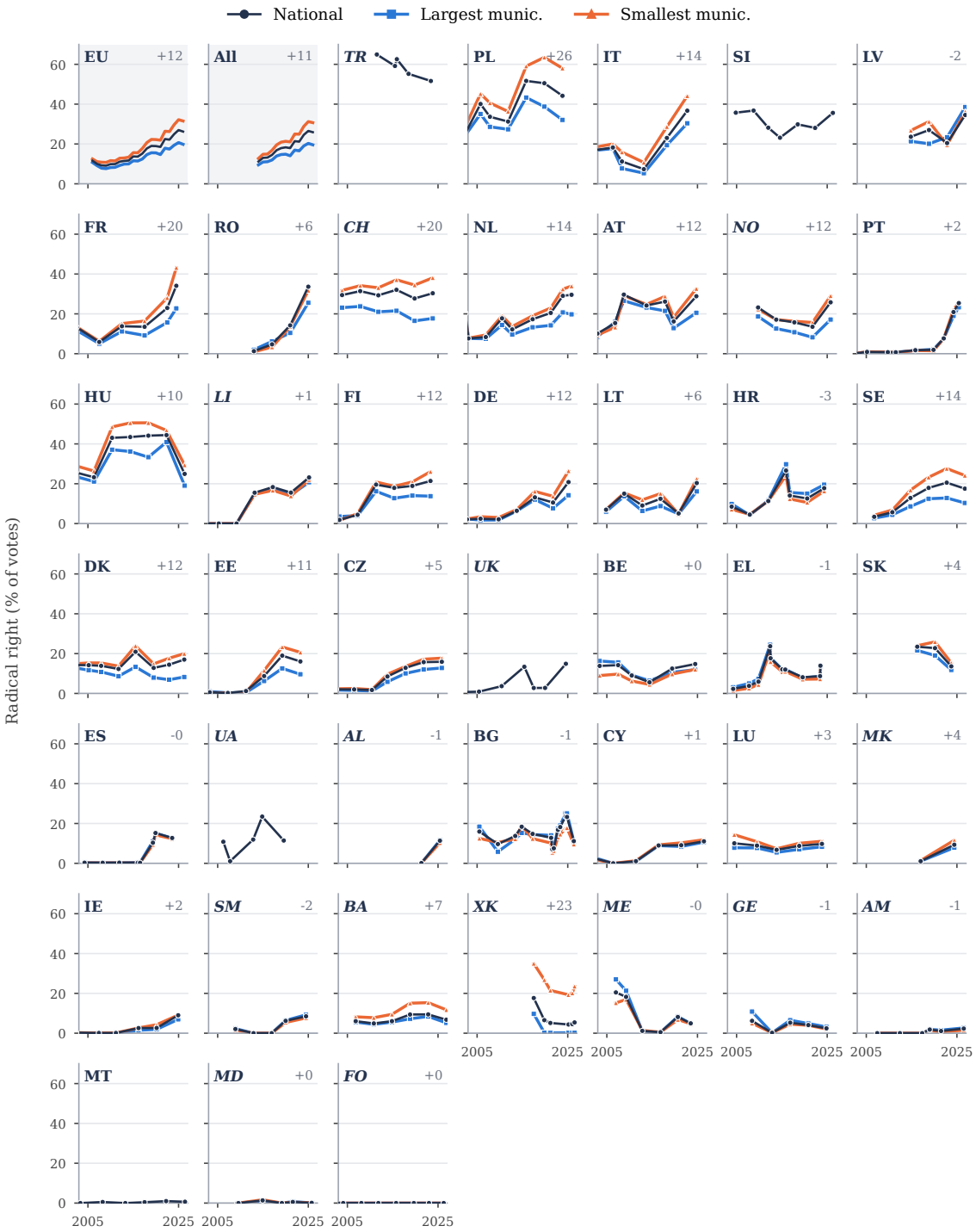


Figure 3.17: Radical-right vote in national elections: national share, and share in the largest and smallest municipalities (each group holding 20% of registered voters). Top right: latest gap, smallest minus largest (pp). Non-EU countries in italics. *EU* and *All* (shaded): totals over the countries with municipal data and an election by 2006 (EU, 22 countries) or 2014 (all of BLUE_DB, 34 countries), latest election held by the end of each year, weighted by registered voters. Malta, Slovenia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom: national share only, as their units are constituencies or districts. Serbia is left out: BLUE_DB splits the coalition lists led by the SNS equally between their member parties' families, which counts a third of the governing list as radical right. Party families as classified in BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

last 30 years—and would anyway not primarily suit the whole of their electorate, which also includes many lower-middle-class and self-employed voters (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). On the other hand, some older coalitions—such as the broad center-to-right-wing party bases of the former conservative parties of the post-war period, or the broad far-left-to-center-left socialist coalitions of the same era—may be too divided to survive as major players. 'There to stay,' however, does not mean necessarily dominant. We may, in some countries, be expecting a prolonged period of structural far-right dominance; but a "post-populist moment" as it has occurred recently in Hungary is also possible, just as is the alternation of radical-right and more moderate government phases, as illustrated by the examples of Poland or the United States.

Two questions will largely decide the electoral fate of radical-right parties. The first is whether they can narrow the gender gap. Radical-right parties still draw disproportionately from men (Section 3.4). In France, the Front National's gender gap closed under Marine Le Pen's leadership (Mayer 2015). Even in Germany, where the gap remains large, the AfD's score among women rose from 56% of its score among men in 2017 to 67% in 2025. Since the gap stems from stigma rather than from different views on core radical-right issues (Harteveld et al. 2015), the normalization of these parties and the rise of radical-right female leaders may close it. The second, and currently less settled question, is whether the radical right can win over older voters, or at least keep today's middle-aged voters as they age, and avoid regression among the generations to come. Currently, the oldest cohorts are both those whose share of the electorate is growing fastest and those least favorable to the far-right. In Germany in 2025, the CDU/CSU won 41% among voters aged 70 and over, against 11.5% for the AfD. Life-cycle effects may draw ageing voters back to established parties (Tilley and Evans 2014). However, on this dimension too, there are signs of a normalization. Among German voters aged 60–69, the AfD rose from 4.6% in 2013 and 13.2% in 2017 to 21.0% in 2025, and from 2.8% to 11.5% among those aged 70 and over. PiS shows that a radical-right party can rely on older voters by combining generous pension reforms with (religious) conservatism. If radical-right voting partly reflects cohort rather than age, generational replacement will work in these parties' favor in the next three to four decades.

What happens when today's younger voters make up a larger part of the electorate is still hypothetical, yet trends point in a different direction than the current far-right rise. In several countries, the youngest voters—especially women—are less drawn to the radical right than the middle-aged. In Italy in 2022, the Brothers of Italy won about 16% among voters aged 18–34, against 26% nationwide (Ipsos 2022). In Poland in 2023, PiS won 15% among the 18–29, against 37% nationally (TVN24 2023); despite the performance of Konfederacja among young men, the radical right polled about 31% among the youngest against 43% nationally. In Germany in 2025, the AfD won 19% among the 18–24-year-olds, against 27% among the 35–44. Across Europe, the youngest cohorts are also the most educated and most likely to have a migration background, with young women being the most liberal demographic overall (Section 3.4). If these differences persist as today's young voters age, the radical right's current strength may prove demographically limited beyond 2040–2050. However, the evidence is far from conclusive: young voters' preferences are volatile, potentially affected by age effects, and some parties such as Spain's Vox overperform among the youngest generations. Whether the radical right's rise generates a lasting realignment for most of the century or remains the political signature of particular generations is likely to be one of the central questions of European electoral sociology in the coming decades.

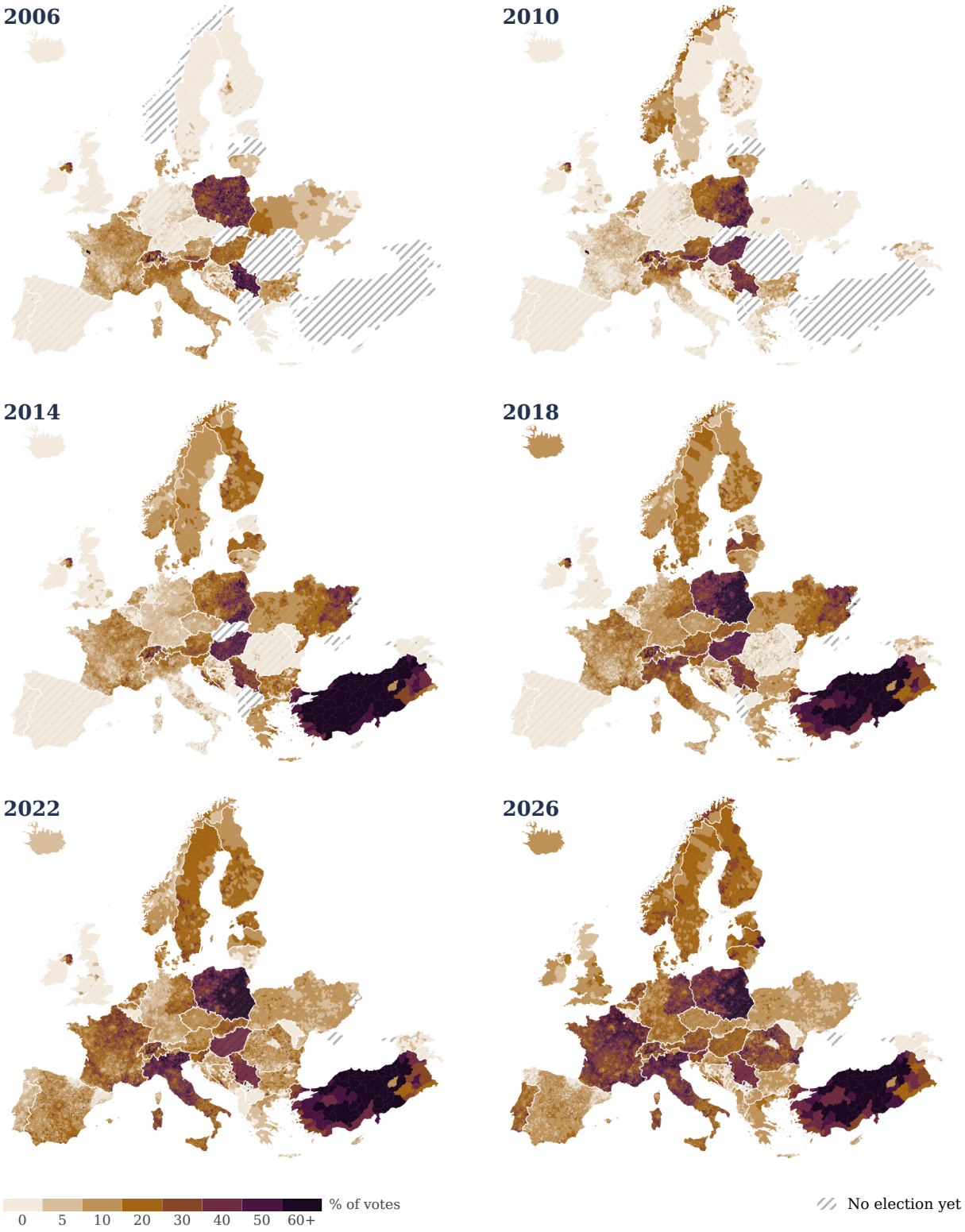


Figure 3.18: Radical-right vote by municipality, latest national election held by the end of each year (% of valid votes). Hatched: no election in BLUE_DB yet (e.g. Norway before 2009, Turkey before 2011, Romania before 2012, Latvia before 2014, Slovakia before 2016). Iceland, Ireland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom (and Belgium before 2014): NUTS-3 regions; Malta: national value. Data: BLUE_DB (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

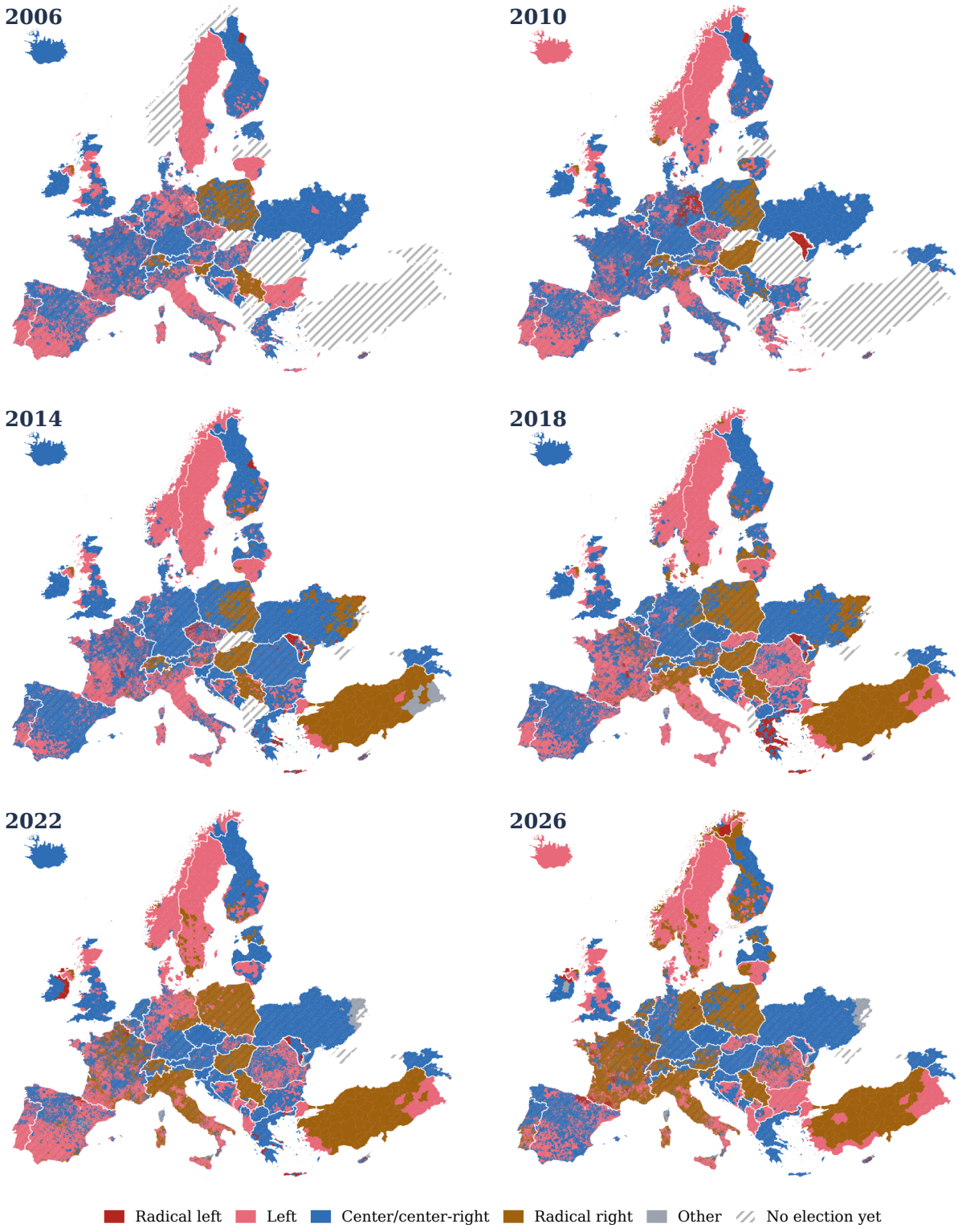


Figure 3.19: Family of the leading list by municipality, latest national election held by the end of each year. Same data and conventions as Figure 3.18.

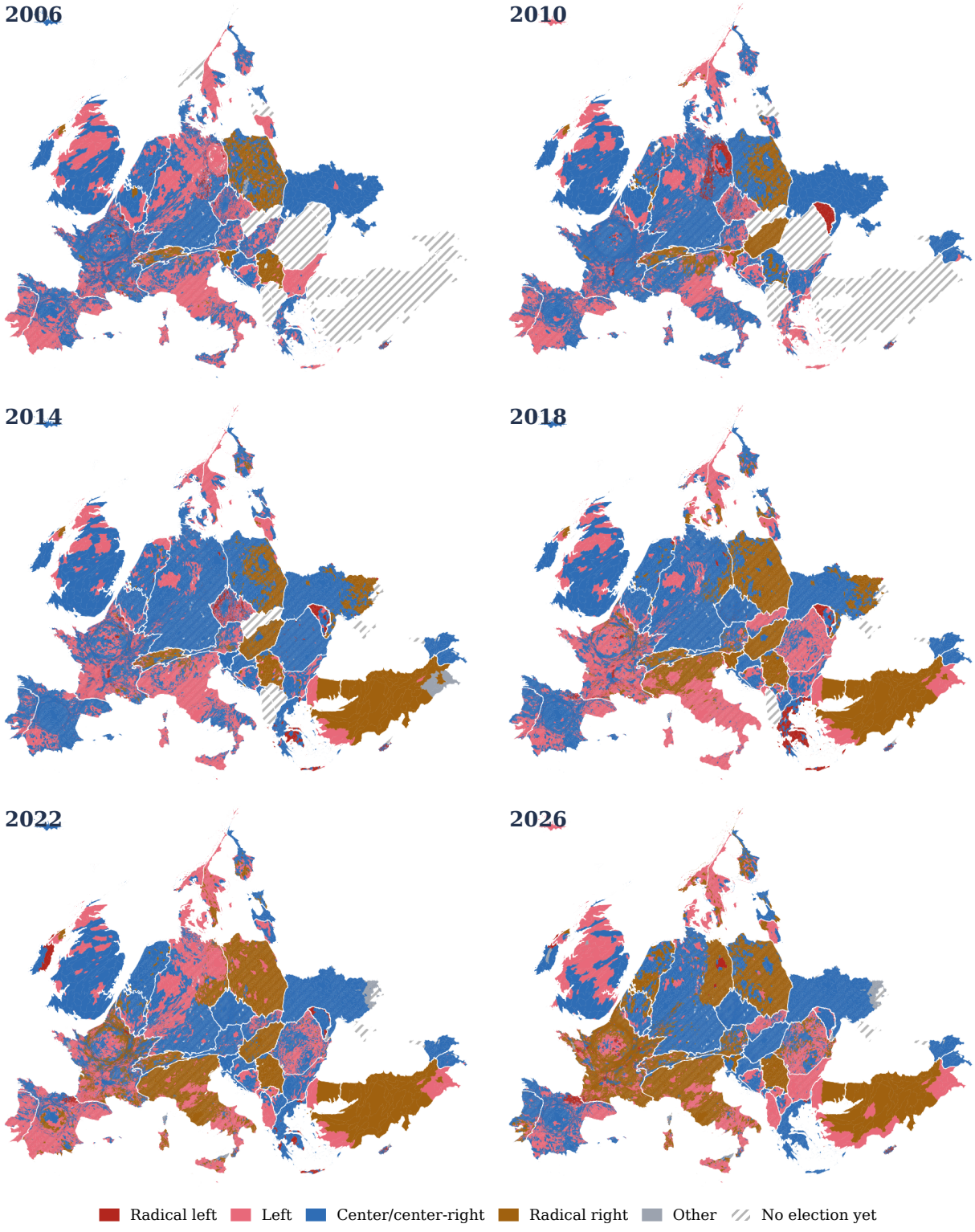


Figure 3.20: Figure 3.19 as a population cartogram. Every panel uses the same cartogram, in which the area of each region is proportional to its registered voters in the latest national election (as in Figure 3.10).

Chapter 4

Election Data Sources

In this chapter, I review sources of election data and discuss their strengths and limitations. This list is not exhaustive—in particular, the list of academic datasets is much broader than the small selection we present.

Following standard terminology, we refer to data on voters' preferences or behavior as addressing the *demand side* of electoral competition, while data on parties' positions addresses the *supply side*. The data sources we describe in this chapter fall into four broad categories:

- Aggregate demand-side data (official election results, published poll results...);
- Individual demand-side data (mostly academic surveys);
- Primary supply-side data (raw documents from political parties and the media);
- Secondary supply-side data (mostly academic party databases).

For each type of source, I indicate where to find it, how many countries it covers, and which questions it can and cannot answer. Whenever possible, I give examples for the latest national election in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the sources reviewed in this chapter.

Type	Unit of analysis	Main uses	Main limitations
Official results	territorial unit	who won, where; turnout; maps; ecological analysis	no individual information; changing boundaries
Polls and exit polls	group of voters	fast vote-by-group estimates	methodology often opaque; tables only
Regional statistics	territorial unit	socio-demographic covariates for aggregate analysis	ecological fallacy; years rarely match elections
Harmonized results	territorial unit, party	cross-national and over-time comparison	coverage gaps; classification choices
Election studies and surveys	individual	who votes for whom and why	cost, small subsamples, recall bias
Party documents and press	party, event	programmes, campaign, candidates, context	unsystematic; selection bias
Party datasets	party	positions, families, populism	expert judgement; coverage

Table 4.1: Main types of election data.

4.1 Aggregate demand-side data

4.1.1 Official election results

Official results are the most basic form of election data. Most official result files provide the number of registered voters, the number of voters that turned out, the number of invalid ballots, and the votes for each party or candidate, at various aggregation levels.

Where to find them. Results are published by an electoral authority (electoral commission or election office), a ministry (most frequently the Ministry of the Interior), or a statistical office. Since the 2010s, most countries publish both browsable graphs and maps and machine-readable files (CSV, XLSX) on their websites. Provisional results are generally available on election night or the next day. Publication of the final result files can be delayed by a few days, rarely by up to a few months (Germany).

- Germany: the Federal Returning Officer (*Bundeswahlleiterin*) at the municipality level; demographic breakdowns from the representative electoral statistics.
- France: the Ministry of the Interior at the municipality level, detailed results on data.gouv.fr at the polling-station (*bureau de vote*) level.
- Italy: the Ministry of the Interior's *Eligendo* at municipality level.
- Spain: the Ministry of the Interior's *Infoelectoral* at municipality and polling-station (*mesa*) level.
- Poland: the National Electoral Commission (PKW) at the municipality and polling-station level.

Language. Search in the national language: *Wahlergebnisse*, *résultats des élections*, *risultati elezioni*, etc. English versions of official websites are often incomplete.

Trustworthiness. In established democracies, official results are authoritative. Whenever possible, the final (certified) results should be used, but the provisional results published on election night are generally trustworthy. Minimal discrepancies between aggregates and the sum of local totals are relatively common. In electoral autocracies and hybrid regimes, official results may be manipulated; check the reports of election observers (e.g., OSCE/ODIHR).

Country coverage. A majority of European countries publishes official election results at the municipality or polling-station level. Across the EU and EFTA, local results are public for all but 14 national and EP elections held between 2001 and 2025 (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026); the coverage is less homogeneous outside the EU, but still excellent from at least 2010. Five European democracies publish results only for constituencies that group several municipalities: Ireland, Iceland, Malta, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, as did Ukraine in 2006 and 2007. In Belgium and in early Estonian elections, the number of registered voters is reported at a slightly more aggregated level (canton, county). Blank or 'none of the above' votes are not always distinguished from invalid votes. Formats, party names, and territorial codes differ from country to country, and older elections are often available only as PDFs or web pages. Box 4.1 explains how to read results from ballots that are not a single party-list vote.

Strengths. Results are exhaustive (all voters) and exact. They are useful to analyze electoral equilibria and their evolution over time, down to small places. They are also the basis of maps and ecological analyses (see Section 1.3).

Limitations. Official results do not provide direct information about individual voting behavior. Ecological analysis is particularly ineffective for demographic characteristics that are distributed rather uniformly across space (e.g., gender). In some cases, some votes (e.g., postal vote) are reported only for groups of municipalities (Austria, Germany) or even only nationally (Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands). Both the party landscape and local administrative boundaries change over time, making transnational and longitudinal comparisons more difficult. This is mitigated by academic datasets (see Section 4.1.4).

Box 4.1. Electoral systems: preference votes, multiple votes, panachage, and STV

In most European countries, each voter casts at most one vote for a single party list or candidate, with results counting the votes received by each list. A few electoral systems use other models. Their vote counts must be handled with care in international comparison.

Preference votes within lists. In many list systems, voters can also mark one or several candidates of the list they choose (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland). Preference votes decide which candidates of a list are elected but not how many seats the list wins. Party results are the votes cast for each list.

Two-round and multiple-vote systems. In two-round systems (France) and systems in which each voter casts several votes (Germany's first and second vote, Hungary's list and constituency votes, Andorra's national and parish votes, etc.), each round or vote has its own results. For comparisons, it is advisable to use first round and the vote for multi-member lists (the German *Zweitstimme*).

Panachage. In Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Gibraltar, and the Crown Dependencies (Guernsey, Jersey, Isle of Man), voters have as many votes as there are seats and can spread them across candidates of different lists. The sum of raw counts therefore does not equal the number of valid votes. To approximate party support, the votes of each party's candidates can be divided by the number of seats, as in the 'fictional voters' of Luxembourg's official tallies.

Single transferable vote (STV). In Ireland and Malta, voters rank candidates (1, 2, 3...) in multi-member constituencies. A candidate who reaches the quota is elected and their surplus votes are transferred to the next preferences; the weakest candidates are then eliminated one by one and their ballots transferred until all seats are filled. Results are therefore published as a series of 'counts,' at constituency level only constituency. To compare with list systems, the first preferences of each party's candidates can be added up. First preferences are only an approximation of party support as they parties' initial support while ignoring transfers.

4.1.2 Polls and exit polls

Most polls are published as aggregate tables reporting the voting intentions of each party, either only for the whole electorate or by group (age, gender, education, occupation, etc.).

Where to find them. Most polls are published on the websites of the media houses commissioning them, sometimes on the website of the pollsters themselves.[1] As a general pattern, national broadcasting companies tend to publish the most precise exit polls. However, in most countries, there is no official poll repository; as an exception, France's *Commission des sondages* publishes documentation for all public French polls. Wikipedia pages (search "Opinion polling for XXX election" in the local language or in English) often provide valuable entry points. Conventional search engines and AI chatbots can help identify relevant polls, which may also be found under 'sociology of the electorates' or 'vote analysis.'

- Germany: infratest dimap (for ARD) and Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (for ZDF).

[1] Private polling is common and relatively unregulated, but the results of private polls are almost never made public later on, except when the commissioning entity is a research institution.

- France: Ipsos, Ifop, Elabe, Cluster17, OpinionWay (*sociologie des électorats*, e.g., Ipsos 2024).
- Italy: Ipsos, SWG, YouTrend/Quorum.
- Spain: the public *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS), which publishes pre- and post-electoral surveys with their data; private pollsters (40dB, GAD3, Sigma Dos).
- Poland: the Ipsos exit poll commissioned jointly by the main TV channels.

Aggregators such as Europe Elects or Politico's Poll of Polls collect poll data from all European countries.

Language. Search in the national language (*Wahlanalyse*, *sondage sortie des urnes*, *analisi del voto*, *encuesta postelectoral*, *sondaż exit poll*, etc.). Reports are rarely translated.

Trustworthiness. Prefer known pollsters working for reputable media houses that publish their methodology: sample size, mode (face-to-face, phone, online), and sampling method (random or quota). Face-to-face or phone interviews are generally considered more trustworthy than internet-based polls. Larger sample sizes are better: for most European countries, ca. 1,000 respondents is a practical minimum (less for smaller countries with few political parties), 2,000 a large sample, and over 3,000 exceptionally large.

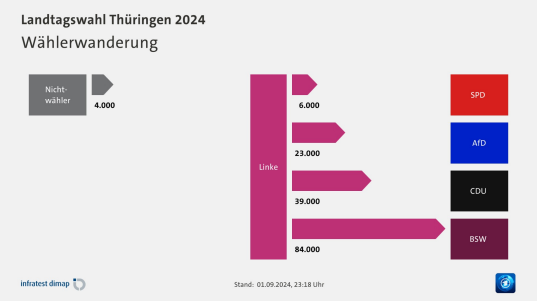
Country coverage. While all European countries have commercial pollsters, election-day surveys with detailed group results are mainly available in larger and more affluent countries. There are significant differences in the detailedness and content of opinion polls, including between large countries: Germany's ARD provides detailed demographic election-day breakdowns even for regional elections, while, e.g., French public broadcasters provide much less fine-grained data. Group definitions (age brackets, education levels) differ between pollsters.

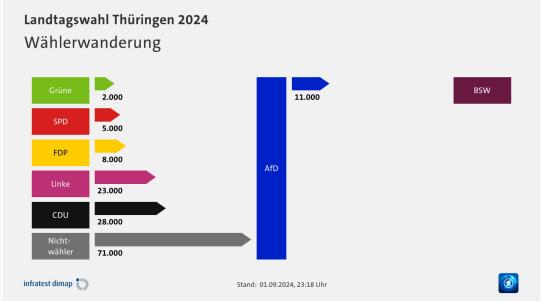
Strengths. Polls are fast: group results are available on election night or within days. They answer simple questions about socio-demographic factors on the basis of representative population samples. Some polls report self-declared vote transfers from the previous election.

Limitations. Commercial pollsters only publish aggregate tables and do not release the raw data. As a result, variables cannot be further crossed (e.g., to study gender and age simultaneously). In both pre-electoral and electoral polls, quota samples may miss some groups (especially those living abroad, people not using the internet, or postal voters), and voters may answer dishonestly, refuse to answer, or express uncertainty; online polls are generally assumed to be less reliable. Any analyses of polls must take into account the declared margin of error, which can be quite large for smaller parties.

Box 4.2. Voter flows (*Wählerwanderung*)

Some pollsters and academic sources report how many voters each party won from, or lost to, the other parties and the non-voters since the previous election. Reporting such *voter flows* (German: *Wählerwanderungen*) is particularly common in German-speaking commentary. In Germany, these flows are estimated by infratest dimap with a model that combines official statistics, pre-election, and election-day surveys (including the question "which party did you vote for last time?"). Such models must also account for first-time voters and voters who have died since the previous election (infratest dimap 2024).





Thuringian state election, 1 September 2024: net transfers of the Linke (left) and the AfD (right). Graphics: infratest dimap for ARD (tagesschau.de), reproduced for teaching purposes.

In voter flow diagrams, the arrows represent *net* balances: in the above, the Linke lost about 84,000 voters to the newly founded BSW, 39,000 to the CDU, and 23,000 to the AfD; the AfD's largest net gain came from former non-voters (71,000), ahead of the CDU (28,000) and the Linke (23,000), while it lost 11,000 to the BSW. A net figure hides flows in both directions: some BSW voters of 2024 may well have voted AfD in 2019 and vice versa.

4.1.3 Regional and local statistics

To explain local results, election data can be combined with the socio-demographic characteristics of the same places: age structure, income, education, unemployment, migration.

Where to find them. Eurostat publishes harmonized statistics for the NUTS regions and municipal boundaries (GISCO), the degree of urbanization of each municipality (DEGURBA), and census data on a 1 km grid. National statistical offices publish finer data:

- Germany: Destatis and the *Regionaldatenbank Deutschland*.
- France: INSEE (census; *Filosofi* for incomes by municipality).
- Italy: ISTAT.
- Spain: INE (census; household income by municipality).
- Poland: GUS and its Local Data Bank (*Bank Danych Lokalnych*).

Language. Eurostat in English; national offices in the national language, with partial English versions.

Country coverage. Regional (NUTS) data are harmonized for the whole EU and candidate countries. Municipal data exist everywhere but differ in variables, definitions, and years. Censuses take place every ten years (2011, 2021).

Strengths. Regional statistics cover all places and can be matched with results through territorial codes (NUTS, LAU). They allow testing whether, e.g., the radical right does better in declining or ageing areas.

Limitations. Correlations between places do not show how individuals vote (the ecological fallacy, Section 1.3). Statistics rarely date from the election year, and municipal boundaries may have changed in between.

4.1.4 Harmonized datasets of election results

Academic datasets collect official results from many countries in one format, with consistent party identifiers. All datasets listed below are freely downloadable online, with full English-language documentation.

BLUE_DB

What it is. The Basic Local Units Election Database (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026) collects the results of national and European Parliament elections by municipality (or the smallest available unit) in 52 European countries and territories since 2001, with a classification of parties into Europarties, EP groups, and broad ideological families (see Chapter 2).

Where to find it. Open data and maps on electionatlas.eu.

Country coverage. All EU member states and most other European countries; some countries only at the constituency level (Ireland, Iceland, Malta, Slovenia, the United Kingdom).

Strengths. Local results for all of Europe in a single format; links to NUTS codes and maps; consistent party families.

Limitations. Party families are coarse and fixed over time; coalitions with members of different families are split between them.

SAGE

What it is. The Small-Area Global Elections dataset (Dasanaike 2026) records the results of lower-house, presidential, and some local elections at the polling-station or municipality level in 110 countries worldwide.

Country coverage. Coverage over time depends on the country. In the EU and EFTA, SAGE covers about 70% of the lower-house elections held between 2001 and 2025 (from all elections since 1948 in Italy to one or two recent elections in some countries), and no European Parliament elections (Hublet and Chiecchio 2026).

Strengths. The only global dataset of local-level results, including very fine geographical units (polling stations) for some elections.

Limitations. Coverage is heterogeneous; units are not aligned with the LAU/NUTS codes of Eurostat; parties are not classified.

EU-NED

What it is. The European NUTS-level election dataset (Schraff et al. 2023) collects the results of national and EP elections in EU member states by NUTS-2 and NUTS-3 region over several decades.

Country coverage. Mostly EU member states, back to the 1990s for national elections and to 1979 for EP elections.

Strengths. Long time series; regions match Eurostat statistics.

Limitations. Some national heterogeneity; regional rather than local level: NUTS-3 regions are large and hide local contrasts.

CLEA

What it is. The Constituency-Level Elections Archive (Kollman et al. 2025) collects the results of lower-house elections by electoral constituency globally.

Country coverage. Most democracies, sometimes back to the nineteenth century.

Strengths. Very long time series; particularly natural for majoritarian systems with small constituencies.

Limitations. In proportional systems, constituencies are usually very large (often whole regions).

ParlGov

What it is. ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2024) compiles national election results, lists of major parties (with families and left–right positions), and cabinets for EU and OECD democracies since 1945.

Strengths. The easiest source for national results, coalitions, and governments over time.

Limitations. National level only; small parties are grouped together.

National Elections Database

What it is. The National Elections Database compiles the results of national parliamentary and presidential elections worldwide since 1789 (B. Marx et al. 2025), including the number of seats of each party in parliamentary elections, votes for each candidate in presidential elections, and a special flag for elections marked by significant events.

Country coverage. About 6,300 elections in 212 countries and territories, 1789–2023.

Strengths. The broadest coverage in space and time; well suited to questions on government turnover and incumbency across many countries.

Limitations. National totals only; no grouping of parties into families.

4.2 Individual demand-side data

Electoral and sociological surveys ask individual voters for whom and how they cast their vote. They are often the only quantitative data source that lets analysts investigate the link between socio-demographics, political attitudes, and individual voting decisions (Figure 1.1).

4.2.1 National election studies

Where to find them. Academic teams survey voters before and/or after each major national election. The data is often available through social-science data archives.

- Germany: German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES).
- France: French National Election Study and *Enquête électorale française* (CEVIPOF), data at the Centre de données socio-politiques (CDSP).
- Italy: Italian National Election Studies (ITANES), who also provide regular post-electoral analytical volumes.
- Spain: CIS post-electoral surveys.
- Poland: Polish National Election Study (PGSW).

Language. While some documentation may be provided in English, questionnaires and variable labels often remain in the local language.

Trustworthiness. Academic studies use documented, mostly random samples and are the most reliable source of electoral survey data.

Country coverage. Most Western European countries have a national election study after every national election; coverage is less homogeneous in Central and Eastern Europe countries. The smallest polities may not run any study.

Strengths. When individual data ('microdata') is released, any variables can be crossed. Questions on attitudes, issues, party identification, and leaders support a wide variety of analyses. However, such data may not be publicly released in some studies.

Limitations. Samples vary in size (typically 1,500 to 5,000 respondents), which may make analysis for some subgroups (young women, minorities, small parties) rather imprecise. Voting behavior and attitudes are self-declared and are thus subject to desirability biases; in particular, respondents may over-report turnout and under-report votes for some parties. Data are released months after the election, with access to fine-grained data often requiring registration.

4.2.2 Comparative (international) surveys

Comparative surveys collect the answers of respondents in multiple countries, with identical or similar question catalogues in each country. All surveys listed below are published in English and free for academic use (potentially after some registration).

European Social Survey (ESS)

What it is. A face-to-face survey run every two years since 2002 (European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC) 2026), including (but not limited to) questions on voting behavior at the last national election, trust, and political values.

Country coverage. About 30 European countries per round, with most EU member states covered by most rounds.

Strengths. Highest methodological quality; comparable questions over two decades; detailed socio-demographics (education, occupation, income).

Limitations. For questions related to voting behavior, the ESS inherits the limitations of national election studies. Additionally, answers are given retrospectively, sometimes years after the actual vote, which may introduce errors and biases. With about 1,500 to 2,500 respondents per country, statistics on minority groups may not be significant.

European Election Studies (EES)

What it is. Voter surveys after each European Parliament election since 1979 (European Election Studies n.d.), with questions on voting behavior and political attitudes, including attitudes towards the EU.

Country coverage. All EU member states at each EP election.

Strengths. The only survey specifically designed for EP elections; 'propensity to vote' questions for every party allow studying party competition.

Limitations. For questions related to voting behavior, the EES inherits the limitations of national election studies. Additionally, the samples are relatively small (about 1,000), and recent waves use online surveys that may be of lower quality.

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)

What it is. A common module integrated in national election studies since 1996 (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems n.d.), with supplementary electoral system data.

Country coverage. About 50 countries worldwide with some temporal heterogeneity.

Strengths. Directly comparable national election surveys accessible in a single data package.

Limitations. Limited set of questions and uneven coverage in space and time.

European and World Values Surveys (EVS/WVS)

What it is. Surveys of political values since 1981 (EVS/WVS n.d.), conducted every five to nine years.

Country coverage. Almost all European countries and a large collection of countries globally for the WVS.

Strengths. Long time series, useful for the analysis of cultural change and cohort analysis.

Limitations. Conducted only every five to nine years, with little detail on voting behavior.

Eurobarometer

What it is. Surveys commissioned by EU institutions (mainly the Commission, sometimes the European Parliament) at least twice yearly (standard Eurobarometer) and on special occasions or issues (flash Eurobarometer) since the 1970s (European Commission n.d.). Questions cover political trust, attitudes towards the EU, and many current policy issues.

Country coverage. All EU member states and candidate countries.

Strengths. Frequent and long series on trust and attitudes towards the EU.

Limitations. Few questions address voting behavior or party choice; questions change.

World Political Cleavages and Inequality Database (WPID)

What it is. Harmonized post-electoral surveys 1948–2020 (Gethin et al. 2021), with crosstabs for educational income, age, gender, and religious groups.

Country coverage. About fifty democracies, including most of Western Europe.

Strengths. The only readily available source for long-run trends (e.g., the education and income cleavages since the 1950s, see Section 3.2).

Limitations. Coarse party classification (mostly left–right).

4.3 Primary supply-side data

Where to find them. Party programmes, posters, and other electoral propaganda can be accessed on party websites (search for, e.g., *Wahlprogramm*, *programme*, *programma elettorale*, *programa electoral*, *program wyborczy*). When older pages have been taken down, the Wayback Machine can often be used to access older documents. Recent parliamentary voting data is available on each parliament's website, and for the European Parliament on HowTheyVote.eu. Voting advice applications often release open datasets summarizing parties'—and, sometimes, users'—positions in recent elections (e.g., the *Wahl-O-Mat* in Germany). YouTube and other video platforms are generally a good source for public declarations; always control the quality of the source posting them. Local newspapers of record and public broadcasters extensively cover campaigns, candidates, and coalitions:

- Germany: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, *ARD/ZDF* (TV), *Deutschlandfunk* (radio)
- France: *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Les Échos*, *France Info* (TV/radio)
- Italy: *Corriere della Sera*, *Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *RAI* (TV/radio).
- Spain: *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, *RTVE* (TV/radio).
- Poland: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Rzeczpospolita*, *Polityka*, *TVP* (TV).

Politico Europe and *Le Grand Continent* cover elections across Europe in English and French/Spanish/Italian, respectively. Wikipedia in the local language or English is often a good starting point for identifying relevant campaign trends, but should be checked against primary sources.

In some (especially Eastern European) countries, public media and some newspapers of record may be strongly biased towards or against the governing party. Check for potential biases when the sources cover controversial events.

Language. Primarily in the local language. Machine translation (using DeepL, Google Translate, or AI assistants) is usually good enough to read programmes and articles. Controversial statements should be double-checked with a fluent speaker of the local language.

Trustworthiness. Read newspapers of different political orientations and prefer quality newspapers and public broadcasters. Distinguish between party declarations and actual policy.

Country coverage. Programmes and their press coverage are available in all countries, although the quantity and quality of coverage may vary. Do not expect English-language sources for all but the largest countries.

Strengths. Published in real time, party-released documents and their media coverage provide indispensable first-hand information about issues, candidates, campaign events, alliances, public opinion, and media discourse. Audiovisual documents (images and videos) help inform an analyst's qualitative understanding of the ongoing political campaign.

Limitations. The material is unsystematic and can be time-consuming to review. Political and media accounts of 'who voted for whom' must be checked against data.

4.4 Secondary supply-side data

Several academic party datasets provide internationally harmonized data about parties' positions and families. All datasets listed below are published in English and free.

Manifesto Project

What it is. The main source of international party-program data. Party programs are coded by expert, sentence by sentence, into a large number of policy categories (Lehmann et al. 2024). From this, a number of quantitative indicators (e.g., left–right position) are computed.

Country coverage. Most democracies since 1945, at each national election, for a selection of major parties.

Strengths. Long series collecting official party documents.

Limitations. Programmes measure campaign emphasis more than actual positions, and should be complemented by voting behavior data whenever needed. Some parties publish no programme; smaller and newer parties are often not covered.

Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES)

What it is. Expert classification of parties' positions on an economic left–right, cultural (GAL–TAN), and European integration dimensions (Jolly et al. 2022).

Country coverage. All EU member states and a few other countries, about every four years since 1999.

Strengths. The standard source for comparing party positions across Europe, with multiple dimensions covered.

Limitations. Smaller and newer parties are often not covered. The set of annotations available is limited; expert annotations are somewhat subjective and may not be fully comparable across countries.

POPPA and the PopuList

What they are. POPPA is an expert survey of populism and related attitudes at the party level (Meijers and Zaslove 2021); the PopuList classifies parties as populist, far-left, or far-right, among others (Rooduijn et al. 2024).

Country coverage. European democracies; the PopuList covers 31 countries since 1989.

Strengths. The reference classifications for populism and the radical parties (Section 3.3).

Limitations. Yes/no categories (PopuList) and few waves; smaller and newer parties are often not covered.

V-Party

What it is. Expert classification of parties' identity and organization at global scale (Lührmann et al. 2020), including labels for illiberalism and populism.

Country coverage. Most countries of the world since 1970.

Strengths. Useful for studying democratic backsliding and illiberal parties, broad temporal and spatial coverage.

Limitations. Few observations per party; smaller and newer parties are often not covered.

Party Facts

What it is. A database linking the identifiers of parties across datasets (ParlGov, Manifesto Project, CHES, and many others) (Döring and Regel 2019).

Strengths. Eases combining results with party positions.

Limitations. Only links existing datasets, with little additional content beyond identifiers.

Chapter 5

Questions and Methods of European Election Analysis

In this chapter, I review the basic methodology of hands-on election analysis: which questions election analysts should ask, how to structure case studies, which graphs and maps can support analytical work, and what indicators and methods can be used. As a worked-out example, the reader can consult my analysis of the Thuringian state election of 1 September 2024 (Hublet 2025), which follows the structure proposed in Section 5.2.

5.1 Questions and problematization

Election analysis can answer a broad variety of questions. I suggest focusing primarily on the following six aspects:

1. Who was running for office, with which ideological and programmatic profiles, and what were the key themes and elements of the campaign? What was the context of the election (typically, what happened in the previous election and since then)?

2. Which parties (or candidates) won or lost the election? This should be answered in terms of both *votes* and, for parliamentary elections, *seats*. Was the result unexpected?

3. How did different groups of voters vote? Voting options include invalid votes and non-voting. What data and theories (cf. Chapter 1) are available to explain their vote?

4. Where did each party or candidate win or lose most strongly? How can this be explained (in terms of composition or context, see Section 3.5)?

5. What are the consequences of the vote for coalition/government formation? For the long-term evolution of the regional/national/European party system? Are there any consequences for European governance or foreign policy?

6. How do the trends observed support, or differ from, pan-European or global patterns (see Chapter 3)?

Election analyses need not answer a single question, but it is often possible to organize an analysis around a few key questions or facts, e.g., why a party unexpectedly won the ballot or how a certain realignment materialized and what it means for the country's future. The trends described in Chapter 3 provide a first catalogue of potential questions that European readers may ask. Checking how a given election relates to these trends is a good starting point when no clear question emerges at first sight. Sometimes, especially in this course, specific

analytical angles may be explored. In this case, it makes sense to focus most of the analysis on them. However, for context, the other points above (especially 1–3 and 5) should still be discussed briefly, especially for lesser known elections.

Whenever a certain trend calls for both a description (stating *the facts*) and a tentative explanation (stating *why* the facts occur), make sure to state the facts first and be cautious about the nature of the evidence. Sociological trends are rarely causal; in most cases, only correlations can be demonstrated. Aggregate results for spatial units can be suggestive, but are not evidence of individual-level patterns (cf. Section 1.3). Phenomena often admit of multiple concurrent explanatory theories. If the authors of a scientific article or other experts have proposed an explanation, always cite them—preferably verbatim—and indicate the source after checking for potential biases. In general, the analysis of a single election (or a handful of those) cannot establish general trends ("populism is rising due to x") and should not be presented as the result of inevitable trends ("the incumbent had to win because of y", "the far-right continues its inexorable sweep").

When writing for a non-national audience—which is the case in this course—always indicate the EP group or Europarty of each party you cite; if the party is unaffiliated, indicate its general ideological orientation. It is crucial to avoid uncritically projecting logics that apply to one political arena to another (so-called 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002)): as we have seen in the previous chapters, European electorates can differ from each other in many, often unexpected ways.

5.2 Typical structure of case studies

The following outline is applicable to general case studies:

1. **Introduction:** Start by introducing the broader context of the election and why its result mattered. Announce the plan of the study. If a specific question is asked, state it.

2. **Context and campaign**: Give an overview of the electoral system (formula, threshold, district magnitude, etc.), more details on the election's context if needed, and discuss the campaign. Make sure you address main issues, programs and slogans, leaders, key events, established vs. new parties, and broad poll trends.

3. **Results**: Review the results, including turnout and the vote for all major parties, comparing their results to the previous election(s). If relevant, use the indicators of Table 5.1 (volatility, fragmentation, disproportionality).

4. **Sociology and geography**: Discuss the voting behavior of different demographics (gender, age, education, occupation, religion...) and relevant geographical patterns, including urban–rural gaps and the distribution of party strongholds. Review quantitative and qualitative evidence (Sections 5.4–5.5) and link it to the theories of Chapters 1–3. Make sure to answer any specific question asked in the introduction.

5. **Aftermath**: Review the government formation process, first policy decisions, and possible consequences for European and global governance.

6. **Outlook**: Say how the election mattered in a broader European context, where it was part of wider trends or showed some exceptionality. What should the reader remember this election for? If a specific question was asked, summarize your answer to it.

When following the above structure, aim for at least one key table, graph, or map per part, preferably multiple for the *Sociology and geography* section. Always cite your sources.

Indicator	Formula	Reading
Turnout	$T = \frac{\text{votes cast}}{\text{registered voters}}$	share of the electorate that voted
Swing (two parties)	$\frac{1}{2}(\Delta v_A - \Delta v_B)$	net shift from B to A (percentage points)
Pedersen volatility	$V = \frac{1}{2}\sum_i \lvert v_{i,t} - v_{i,t-1}\rvert$	net share of votes changing party between two elections (Pedersen 1979)
Effective number of parties	$N = 1 \big/ \sum_i v_i^2$	fragmentation; with v_i as shares (Laakso and Taagepera 1979)
Disproportionality (Gallagher)	$G = \sqrt{\frac{1}{2}\sum_i (v_i - s_i)^2}$	gap between vote shares v_i and seat shares s_i (Gallagher 1991)
Group gap	$v_{i\lvert\text{women}} - v_{i\lvert\text{men}}$	e.g. gender gap of party i (survey data only)

Table 5.1: Common descriptive indicators. v_i: vote share of party i; s_i: seat share.

5.3 Mapping election results

For case studies of national and EP elections, you can produce most required maps and graphs using the analysis mode of electionatlas.eu, the web interface of BLUE_DB (Section 4.1.4). The interface runs in the browser, requires no programming or spreadsheet manipulation, and exports every figure as an image. Since BLUE_DB only supports national parliamentary and European Parliament elections, regional or local elections (e.g., the 2024 election in Thuringia cited as an example above) must be analyzed using another tool after collecting data from the respective official sources. The same holds for data from surveys and polls. We recommend the free tier of Datawrapper to generate maps and graphs in a code-less way.

The rest of this section describes the use of the Analysis mode of the election atlas and lists available types of graphs and maps. Similar functionality is available in Datawrapper as well as in conventional Python and R libraries[1].

Opening the analysis mode. On the map page, click the *Analysis* button in the top-left corner. The analysis mode opens, starting from the country and election currently selected. The left panel has four blocks, *Data*, *Chart*, *Text*, and *Export*, which parameterize the graph or map. The right panel shows the figure exactly as it will be exported. *Back to the map* closes and resets the analysis mode (Figure 5.1).

Step 1: select the data.

- *Area*: *One country* or *Europe · national elections* or *Europe · European Parliament*. In the two 'Europe' modes, you can select a date (*Latest elections as of*) to load the most recent election in each country at that date.
- *Election* and *Compare with*: the election to analyze and, optionally, a second election (in the European modes, a second date). A comparison is needed for change analysis.
- *Level*: municipalities, NUTS 3, NUTS 2, NUTS 1, or whole countries. The European modes start at NUTS 3 by default.
- *Parties*: individual lists (*Party*), *European party*, *EP group*, or *Ideology* (party family). Grouping aggregates the votes of a group's lists. Required in the 'Europe' modes.
- *Vote shares as a percentage of*: *Valid votes* (the default, as in official results) or *Registered voters*, which includes non-voters (Section 5.4).

[1] See footnote 2.

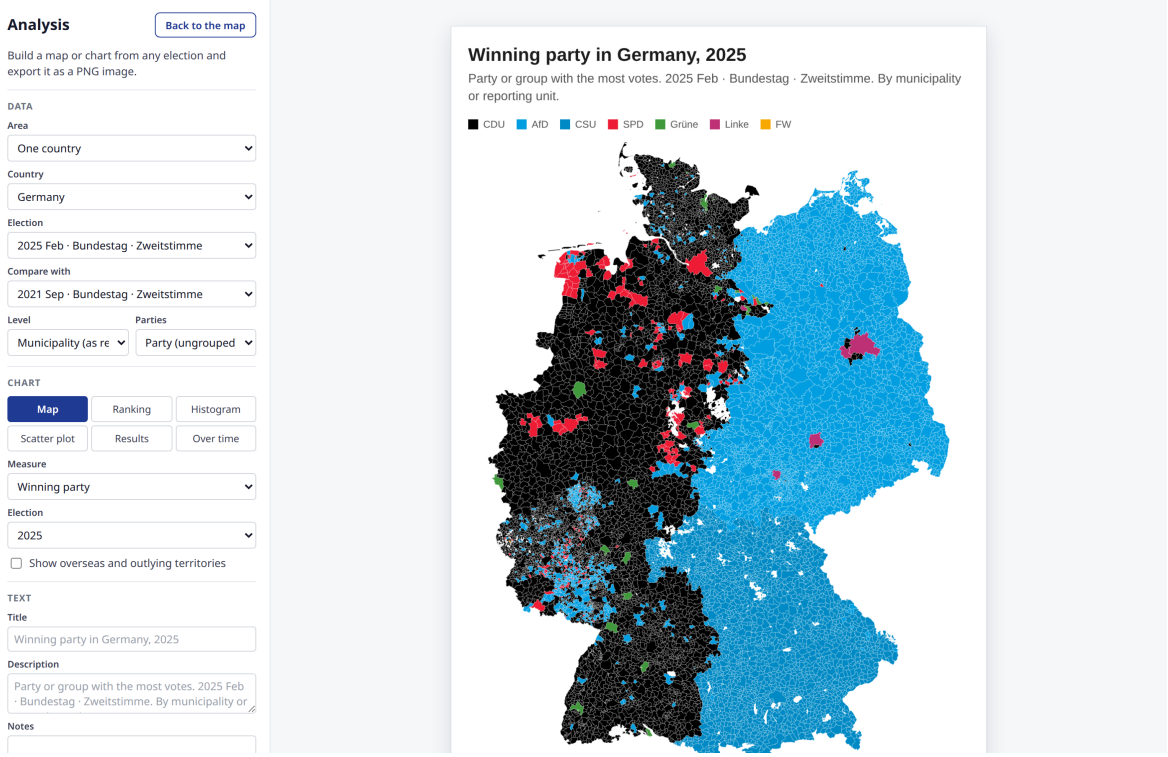


Figure 5.1: The analysis mode of electionatlas.eu: settings on the left (here: Germany, 2025 Bundestag election, compared with 2021, by municipality, *Map* of the *Winning party*), preview of the exported figure on the right.

Step 2: choose and customize the chart. Six chart types are offered:

- *Map*: one value per unit, or the winning party.
- *Ranking*: the units with the highest (or lowest) values, as bars.
- *Histogram*: the distribution of a value across spatial units. With *Weight by registered voters*, the bars represent numbers of voters instead of numbers of units.
- *Scatter plot*: two variables in x and y, with optional dot sizes proportional to registered voters, colors by winning party, and a regression line.
- *Results*: the total election result as bars, with the change from the previous election.
- *Over time*: the result in all comparable elections of one country (same parliament and type of vote), for the whole country or one spatial unit.

For the first four types, you then pick the *Measure* to be plot: the vote share or number of votes of a party or group; the turnout; the number of registered voters; the number of votes cast; the number of invalid and blank votes; winning party; the winner's share of the vote; the winning margin (i.e., the lead of the winner over the second-ranked candidate, in percentage points); and the effective number of parties (Table 5.1, computed over all lists on the ballot). When a comparator election has been selected, *Election* can be either one of the two elections or the *change* between them: in percentage points for shares, in percent for counts, and, for the winning party, a map of the units where the winner changed. Further options set the colours, the *Classes* of values, and the number of units, bins, or parties displayed.

Step 3 (optional): edit the text. The Analysis mode sets a default title, description, and notes. You can overwrite them; the source line is added automatically.

Step 4: export. Choose a width and click *Download PNG*. Optionally, *Download data (CSV)* downloads the values of every unit, with its name and Eurostat (GISCO) code.

Example. Figure 5.2 shows typical graphs and maps for the 2025 federal election in Germany. Panels (a)–(d) use *Area* = One country, Germany, *Election* = 2025 Bundestag (Zweitstimme), and *Compare with* = 2021 Bundestag (Zweitstimme), with *Parties* = Party (ungrouped). All other options keep their default values. The configurations are as follows:

(a) *Chart* = Results. The bars give the 2025 result of the eight largest lists, the pale bars the 2021 result, and the brackets the change in percentage points (Figure 5.2a): the CDU came first with 22.6% (+3.6), ahead of the AfD with 20.8% (+10.4).

(b) *Level* = NUTS 3 (*Landkreise*), *Chart* = Scatter plot. Horizontal axis: *Measure* = Vote share, *Party or group* = AfD, *Election* = 2021. Vertical axis: the same for 2025. Each dot is one of 428 districts, sized by its registered voters. The dashed diagonal marks no change (Figure 5.2b). With $r = 0.97$ and a slope of 1.41, the AfD registered its largest gains in districts where it was already strong.

(c) *Level* = NUTS 1, *Chart* = Over time, area Thüringen (found with the search box). The lines give each party's result in Thuringia in all Bundestag elections since 2002 (Figure 5.2c), up to 38.6% for the AfD in 2025.

(d) *Level* = Municipality (as reported), *Chart* = Map, *Measure* = Vote share, *Party or group* = AfD, *Election* = Change 2021 → 2025. The diverging scale shows where the AfD gained most: everywhere, but most in the East (Figure 5.2d). The notes report the 127 of 11,247 municipalities that could not be matched between the two elections.

(e) *Area* = Europe · European Parliament, *Latest elections as of* = 2024-06-09, *Level* = NUTS 2, *Parties* = EP group, *Chart* = Map, *Measure* = Winning party (Figure 5.2e).

Figure 5.1 uses *Level* = Municipality (as reported), *Chart* = Map, *Measure* = Winning party, *Election* = 2025, showing the former inner-German border (cf. Figure 3.11).

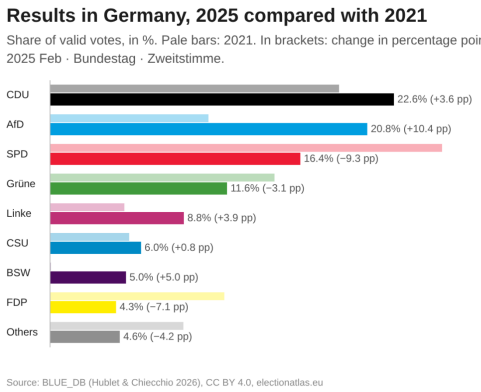
Limitations. The analysis mode of the election atlas only supports aggregate election results and cannot relate votes to income, age, or religion. For all other tasks, you need to download the data and potentially merge it, using the GISCO or NUTS codes, with census or regional statistics (Section 4.1.3),[2] then use the methods of Section 5.4.[3]

5.4 Quantitative indicators and methods

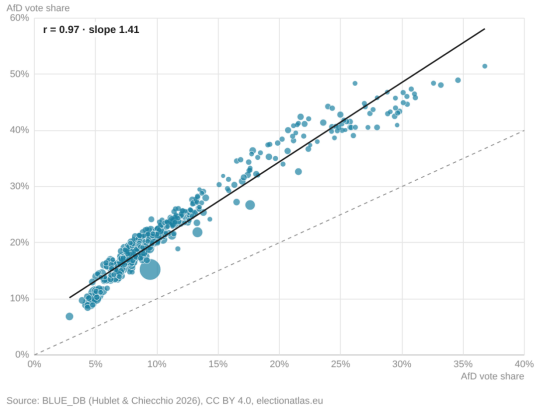
No specific quantitative skills are needed to write a good election analysis, as many sources already provide ready-to-use data. However, statistical models will appear in many of the studies that you will find in the (academic) literature and that you may want to rely on, and a few pitfalls are worth knowing. This section introduces the most common tools.

[2]To merge and map the data yourself: in Python, `pandas` for tables, `geopandas` for boundaries and maps, and `eurostat` to download Eurostat tables; in R, `dplyr`, `sf`, `tmap` or `ggplot2` for maps and charts, and `eurostat` and `giscoR` for Eurostat tables and NUTS and municipal boundaries. The R package `cartogram` draws cartograms.

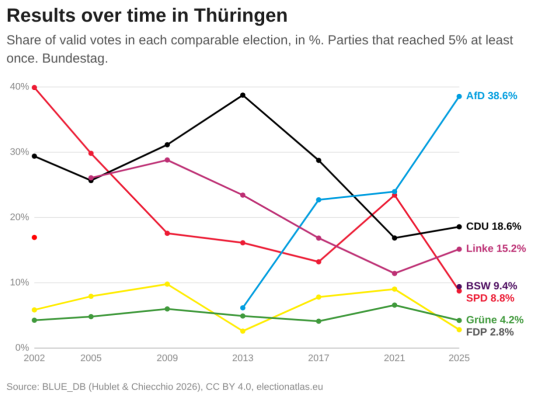
[3]For regressions: in Python, `statsmodels` (OLS, weighted least squares, logistic regression, variance inflation factors); in R, the built-in `lm` and `glm` functions. For spatial autocorrelation: `PySAL` (Python) or `spdep` (R). For ecological inference: `PyEI` (Python) or `ei` (R).



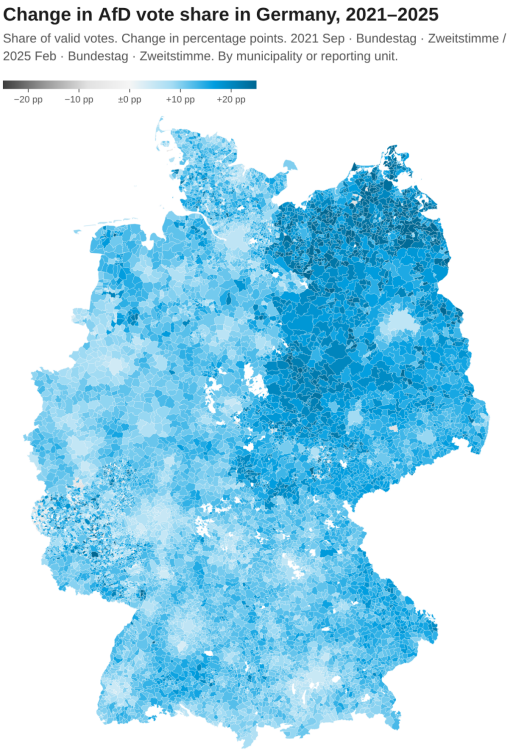
(a) Results.



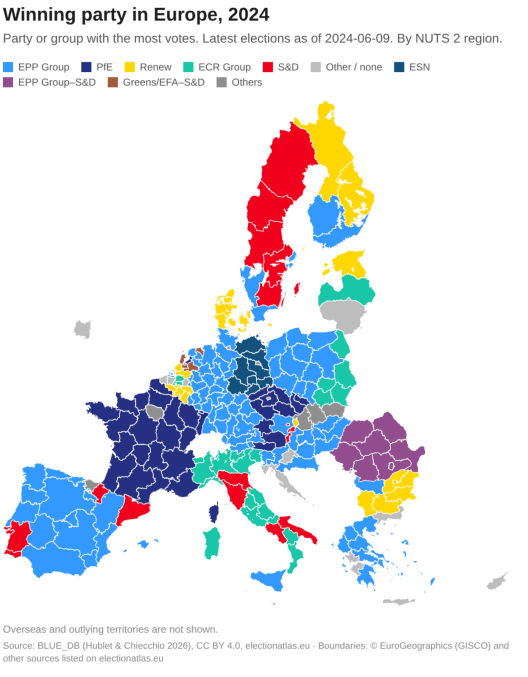
(b) Scatter plot.



(c) Over time.



(d) Map of a change.



(e) Map, Europe.

Figure 5.2: Five figures exported from the analysis mode of electionatlas.eu, with the configurations listed in the text.

5.4.1 Descriptive indicators for election results

The right denominator. A vote share is always a share *of* something. Official results usually report shares of *valid votes* (generally excluding invalid and blank votes, more rarely only excluding invalid votes), while turnout is computed as a share of *registered voters*. These two indicators can tell very different stories, especially when turnout is low. Shares of registered voters are useful when turnout changes a lot between elections or between places. For instance, in the 2024 general election in the United Kingdom, Labour appeared to win a landslide with 33.7% of valid votes, up from 32.1% in 2019. Yet turnout simultaneously fell from about 67% to 60%, with Labour actually receiving significantly *fewer* votes than in 2019 (9.7 against 10.3 million): its share of registered voters fell from 21.6% to 20.1%. Conversely, a party may lose in relative terms while gaining voters if turnout increases. The Analysis mode of electionatlas.eu supports both denominators (*Vote shares as a percentage of*).

Percentage points are not percentages. If a party grows from 10% to 15%, it gains 5 *percentage points* (pp), not 5%; its gain is in fact a *50% increase*. By default, one should use percentage points to express changes in party shares, as percentages of change exaggerate the gains of small parties (from 2% to 4%, a party experiences a 100% growth).

Summary indicators. Table 5.1 lists the most common indicators. Turnout and the change of each party since the previous election should always be reported, in terms of both vote shares and seat shares (for parliamentary elections). The other indicators are computed as in the respective formula: Volatility measures how much the party system moved as a whole; the effective number of parties measures its degree of fragmentation; disproportionality measures how much the electoral system distorted the vote. Compute these indicators only if they help answer one of your questions of interest, always comparing them with earlier elections or other countries. A single indicator value is often difficult to analyze on its own.

5.4.2 Analysis of ecological data

Aggregate results (Section 4.1.1) can be combined with regional statistics (Section 4.1.3) to analyze the profile of its vote.

Scatter plots. Put the potential explanatory variable (e.g. income, turnout...) on the horizontal axis and the vote share on the vertical axis, one dot per municipality or region. The shape of the cloud may already suggest a pattern: do you see a clear trend, a curve, two separate groups (e.g. East and West Germany), a few outliers? Plotting turnout against the vote for individual parties can help identify patterns of *differential mobilization* in which some party's voters are turning out in larger-than-average numbers.

Correlation. In single-variable models, the correlation coefficient r indicates how closely the scatter dots follow a straight line (= a linear trend). It ranges from -1 (perfect negative relation) to $+1$ (perfect positive relation); 0 means no linear relation. In Figure 5.2b, the AfD's *Landkreis* (NUTS 3) results from 2021 and 2025 have $r = 0.97$: the party grew almost everywhere in proportion to its earlier strength. Values of r above ± 0.7 are considered strong.

Regression. A *linear regression*[4] draws the line of the form $y \sim \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot x_1 + \ldots + \beta_n \cdot x_n$ that best fits the distribution of the dependent (outcome) variable y and independent (explanatory) variables $x_1, \ldots, x_n$. The *slope* β_i says by how many points the vote share y changes, on

[4]We refer the reader to any introductory statistics textbook for details.

average, when the explanatory variable x_i increases by one unit. A *multiple* regression includes several explanatory variables. The R^2 indicator measures the share of the differences between places (the *share of the variance*) that the provided explanatory variables can predict. In the Thuringian election of 2024 (Hublet 2025), a regression over 467 municipalities found that the AfD did worse in richer and denser municipalities, and the CDU better in Catholic ones; the model accounted for about two thirds of the variation in the AfD vote ($R^2 = 0.65$), but only a sixth of that in the newly founded BSW ($R^2 = 0.16$). When places differ a lot in size, results should ideally be *weighted* by the number of registered voters, so that a village of 200 voters does not count as much as a city of 200,000. A common form of weighted regression is *Weighted Least-Squares* (WLS). While you are not expected to run such models in this course, you should be able to identify them correctly from the literature.

Outliers. The most interesting places are often those far from the line. In the Thuringian election cited above, Jena voted much more for the Linke and the Greens, and Gera much more for the AfD, than the model predicted. Such places are good candidates for a closer, qualitative analysis (Section 5.5): Jena is Thuringia's main university town, while Gera is a city with a history of radical-right activism and a social makeup quite unlike Jena.

5.4.3 Analysis of survey data

A caveat about demographic shares. "What share of women voted for party X?" and "How many women are among party X's voters?" are different questions. In Thuringia in 2024, 38% of men but only 27% of women voted AfD, a difference of 11 percentage points (Hublet 2025); yet women still made up roughly two fifths of AfD voters.

The answers to these two questions can give seemingly paradoxical results when the groups considered are of very different size: a party can be much stronger in a small group, yet draw most of its support base from a large one where its performance is weaker. At the 2024 European Parliament election in France, the radical-right Rassemblement national (RN) won 39.8% of the vote in communes with fewer than 1,500 registered voters, against only 29.2% in communes with over 1,500 registered voters. However, since larger communes are home to three quarters of the electorate, *two thirds of RN voters* lived in larger communes. "The RN is a rural party" and "most RN voters live in communes of over 1,500 voters" are *both* true.

Margins of error. A survey of 1,000 respondents estimates a party's share within about ±3 points with 95% confidence. Table 5.2 shows margin of errors for different party sizes and sample sizes.[5] For subgroups, the margin can be much larger than the 2–4% reported by large polls. Among 200 people (e.g., 200 young women from a typical 1,000-respondent survey), the margin of error for large parties grows to about ±7 points. In general, a gap of three points between two small groups is not statistically significant.

Known biases. Respondents overreport turnout, and they misremember (or adjust) their past vote, often towards the winner or their current preference. Vote transfers estimated from such questions (Box 4.2) are therefore rough orders of magnitude. Transfers can also be estimated from aggregate results only (*ecological inference*), under strong assumptions (Goodman 1953; King 1997). Where available, official statistics based on counted ballots, such as Germany's representative electoral statistics (Figure 3.3), are more reliable than polls for vote by gender and age.

[5] For a share p and n respondents, the margin of error is about $1.96\sqrt{p(1-p)/n}$: ±3.1 points for $p = 50\%$ and $n = 1{,}000$; ±2.5 points for $p = 20\%$; ±6.9 points for $p = 50\%$ and $n = 200$. Weighting increases these margins somewhat.

	Party's share of the vote				
Respondents	5%	10%	20%	30%	50%
100	4.3	5.9	7.8	9.0	9.8
200	3.0	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.9
500	1.9	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.4
1,000	1.4	1.9	2.5	2.8	3.1
2,000	1.0	1.3	1.8	2.0	2.2
5,000	0.6	0.8	1.1	1.3	1.4

Table 5.2: Margin of error of a survey estimate, in percentage points (±), at the 95% confidence level: $1.96\sqrt{p(1-p)/n}$ for a share p and n respondents, assuming a simple random sample. Example: a party at 20% in a survey of 1,000 respondents lies between 17.5% and 22.5%. Quota samples and weighting make the true margins somewhat larger.

What to report. For each number, always report its source, fieldwork date, and base (valid votes, registered voters, respondents, respondents certain to turn out). For surveys: the sample size, pollster, and polling method (online, face-to-face, phone, or mixed). Round sensibly to at most one decimal (32% or 32.8%, not 32.847%).

5.5 Qualitative methods

Quantitative data facilitate modeling, but they also strongly reduce the complexity of real-world events. To understand what parties promised, how voters understood the campaign, or how the media covered it, *qualitative* data are needed. The corresponding documents should be treated with the same care as their quantitative counterparts, with a clear mention of sources and caution in generalizing.

5.5.1 Documents

Manifestos and other campaign material. Manifestos, slogans, posters, speeches, TV debates, and social-media posts are excellent resources to describe political campaigns. In Thuringia in 2024, the AfD used a slogan that echoed a banned Nazi-era phrase, while the BSW campaigned on five priorities including peace in Ukraine, echoing some Kremlin talking points—all of these elements were readily identifiable and citeable from official campaign documents (Hublet 2025). Whenever academic datasets have been updated, positions can also be checked against the expert and manifesto data of Section 4.4.[6]

Media reports. Press coverage shows which issues dominated the campaign and how parties and leaders were presented. They are the primary source of information about political scandals, rallies, candidates' reactions to each other's campaigns, etc. Compare several outlets with different political leanings, and prefer newspapers of record. With the exception of a few 'global' outlets (*The Economist*, *The New York Times*...) and major international networks (*BBC*, *RFI*, *Deutsche Welle*...), coverage by foreign reports is useful to discuss how the election was perceived abroad, but may often be biased or more superficial. Whenever possible, original-language sources should be preferred. If you speak the local language, watching original TV debates, recording from rallies, and video of election-night programs may prove very informative. Utterances by leading politicians in such programs can be cited *verbatim* as primary sources.

[6]Manifesto texts and codes can be downloaded with `manifestoR` (R). For larger amounts of text, `quanteda` (R) and `spaCy` (Python) count words and themes.

In some cases, (investigative) journalists author pieces that may qualify as both sources and campaign events. The famous 'Ibiza video' published by *Der Spiegel* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in May 2019 brought down Austria's ÖVP–FPÖ government and led to early elections; in early 2024, CORRECTIV's report on the 'remigration plan' discussed by AfD politicians and far-right activists in a villa near Potsdam triggered record demonstrations across Germany. Videos shot by political actors can sometimes play a similar role: in July 2020, Hristo Ivanov, then the leader of the opposition party Yes, Bulgaria!, livestreamed his attempt to land on a public beach in front of the seaside residence of DPS chairman and oligarch Ahmed Dogan, where he was met by state security guards; the video helped trigger the 2020–2021 anti-corruption protests (RFE/RL 2020).

5.5.2 Academic publications

Ethnographic studies written by researchers who devoted months or years to fieldwork offer some of the richest accounts of political—and, more broadly, social—behavior. Examples include studies of Rassemblement national voters in south-eastern France (Faury 2024), of young people in the declining rural towns of eastern France (Coquard 2019), of Law and Justice (PiS) voters in a small Polish town (Gdula et al. 2017), and of life in an Eastern German housing estate after reunification (Mau 2019).

Bibliography

Allport, Gordon W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Arzheimer, Kai, Jocelyn Evans, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck, eds. (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Electoral Behaviour*. London: SAGE.

Bartolini, Stefano and Peter Mair (1990). *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability: The Stabilisation of European Electorates 1885–1985*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee (1954). *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Betz, Hans-Georg (1994). *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Blais, André et al. (2004). "Where Does Turnout Decline Come From?" In: *European Journal of Political Research* 43.2, pp. 221–236. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00152.x.

Blank, R. (1905). "Die soziale Zusammensetzung der sozialdemokratischen Wählerschaft Deutschlands". In: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 20.3, pp. 507–550.

Blondel, Jean (1968). "Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies". In: *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1.2, pp. 180–203. DOI: 10.1017/s0008423900036507.

Bol, Damien et al. (2021). "The Effect of COVID-19 Lockdowns on Political Support: Some Good News for Democracy?" In: *European Journal of Political Research* 60.2, pp. 497–505. DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12401.

Bornschier, Simon (2009). "Cleavage Politics in Old and New Democracies". In: *Living Reviews in Democracy* 1, pp. 1–13.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1979). *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

Bressanelli, Edoardo (2022). "The Political Groups as Organisations: The Institutionalisation of Transnational Party Politics". In: *European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times*. Ed. by Petra Ahrens, Anna Elomäki, and Johanna Kantola. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 49–72. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-94012-6_3.

Budge, Ian and Dennis J. Farlie (1983). *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2025a). *Wahl-O-Mat zur Bundestagswahl 2025*. Machine-readable version: https://github.com/gockelhahn/qual-o-mat-data. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. URL: https://www.wahl-o-mat.de/bundestagswahl2025/.

— (2025b). *Wahlberechtigte*. URL: https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/zahlen-und-fakten/bundestagswahlen/564029/wahlberechtigte/ (visited on 11/11/2026).

Butler, David and Donald Stokes (1969). *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice*. London: Macmillan.

Campbell, Angus, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller (1954). *The Voter Decides*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.

Campbell, Angus et al. (1960). *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.

Caramani, Daniele (2015). *The Europeanization of Politics: The Formation of a European Electorate and Party System in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carozzi, Felipe and Luca Repetto (2016). "Sending the Pork Home: Birth Town Bias in Transfers to Italian Municipalities". In: *Journal of Public Economics* 134, pp. 42–52.

Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Sept. 2023). *Barómetro de septiembre 2023: Postelectoral elecciones generales 2023. Tabulación por recuerdo de voto*. Estudio 3420. Madrid: CIS. URL: https://www.cis.es/documents/d/guest/es3420vpMT_a.

Chambers, William Nisbet and Walter Dean Burnham, eds. (1967). *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (n.d.). *CSES Integrated Module Dataset (IMD)*. URL: https://cses.org.

Coquard, Benoît (2019). *Ceux qui restent: Faire sa vie dans les campagnes en déclin*. Paris: La Découverte.

Crum, Ben (2020). "Party Groups and Ideological Cleavages in the European Parliament after the 2019 Elections". In: *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*. Routledge, pp. 54–65. DOI: 10.4324/9780367816926-6.

Cześnik, Mikołaj, Oliwia Szczupska, and Maciej Sychowiec (2026). "The Polish Voter: A Sociodemographic Portrait from the 2023 IPSOS Exit Poll". In: *Polish Sociological Review* 233. DOI: 10.26412/psr233.01.

Dalton, Russell J., Scott C. Flanagan, and Paul Allen Beck, eds. (1984). *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Realignment or Dealignment?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dalton, Russell J. and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds. (2007). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dalton, Russell J. and Martin P. Wattenberg, eds. (2000). *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dasanaike, Noah (2026). "The Small-Area Global Elections (SAGE) Dataset". In: *Scientific Data* 13, 1529. DOI: 10.1038/s41597-026-07869-x.

Deegan-Krause, Kevin (2007). "New Dimensions of Political Cleavage". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Ed. by Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 538–556. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.003.0028.

— (2013). "Full and Partial Cleavages". In: *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*. Ed. by Sten Berglund et al. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 35–50. DOI: 10.4337/9781782545880.00009.

Dennison, James and Andrew Geddes (2019). "A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe". In: *The Political Quarterly* 90.1, pp. 107–116. DOI: 10.1111/1467-923X.12620.

Deschouwer, Kris (2003). "Political Parties in Multi-Layered Systems". In: *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10.3, pp. 213–226. DOI: 10.1177/09697764030103003.

Diamanti, Ilvo (2009). *Mappe dell'Italia politica: bianco, rosso, verde, azzurro... e tricolore*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Dijkstra, Lewis, Hugo Poelman, and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2020). "The Geography of EU Discontent". In: *Regional Studies* 54.6, pp. 737–753. DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2019.1654603.

Ditmars, Mathilde M. van (2023). "Political Socialization, Political Gender Gaps and the Intergenerational Transmission of Left-Right Ideology". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 62.1, pp. 3–24. DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12517.

Döring, Holger and Philip Manow (2024). *Parliaments and Governments Database (ParlGov): Information on Parties, Elections and Cabinets in Established Democracies*. URL: https://www.parlgov.org.

Döring, Holger and Sven Regel (2019). "Party Facts: A Database of Political Parties Worldwide". In: *Party Politics* 25.2, pp. 97–109. DOI: 10.1177/1354068818820671.

Douglas, Karen M. (2021). "COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories". In: *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24.2, pp. 270–275. DOI: 10.1177/1368430220982068.

Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.

Engler, Sarah, Bartek Pytlas, and Kevin Deegan-Krause (2019). "Assessing the Diversity of Anti-Establishment and Populist Politics in Central and Eastern Europe". In: *West European Politics* 42.6, pp. 1310–1336. DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2019.1596696.

European Commission (n.d.). *Standard Eurobarometer*. Cologne: GESIS. URL: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer.

European Election Studies (n.d.). *European Election Studies: Voter Studies, 1979–2024*. URL: https://europeanelectionstudies.net.

European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC) (2026). *ESS11 — Integrated File, Edition 4.1*. Bergen: Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. DOI: 10.21338/ess11e04_1.

Eurostat (2025). *EU Population Diversity by Citizenship and Country of Birth*. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/EU_population_diversity_by_citizenship_and_country_of_birth (visited on 11/22/2026).

EVS/WVS (n.d.). *European Values Study and World Values Survey: Joint EVS/WVS Dataset*. URL: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

Falter, Jürgen W. and Harald Schoen, eds. (2014). *Handbuch Wahlforschung*. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Faury, Félicien (2024). *Des électeurs ordinaires: Enquête sur la normalisation de l'extrême droite*. Paris: Seuil.

Ferejohn, John A. and Morris P. Fiorina (1974). "The Paradox of Not Voting: A Decision Theoretic Analysis". In: *American Political Science Review* 68.2, pp. 525–536. DOI: 10.2307/1959502.

Ford, Robert and Will Jennings (2020). "The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe". In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 23.1, pp. 295–314. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-052217-104957.

Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (Feb. 24, 2025). *Bundestagswahl 23. Februar 2025: Ampel-Desaster, Unionssieg und starke AfD*. Wahlanalyse. Mannheim: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V. URL: https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Wahlen/Wahlanalysen/NL_Bund_250224.pdf.

Gallagher, Michael (1991). "Proportionality, Disproportionality and Electoral Systems". In: *Electoral Studies* 10.1, pp. 33–51. DOI: 10.1016/0261-3794(91)90004-c.

Garzia, Diego (2014). *Personalization of Politics and Electoral Change*. Palgrave Studies in Political Psychology. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Garzia, Diego and Stefan Marschall (2012). "Voting Advice Applications under Review: The State of Research". In: *International Journal of Electronic Governance* 5.3/4, pp. 203–222. DOI: 10.1504/ijeg.2012.051309.

Gastner, Michael T. and M. E. J. Newman (2004). "Diffusion-Based Method for Producing Density-Equalizing Maps". In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101.20, pp. 7499–7504. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0400280101.

Gdula, Maciej, Katarzyna Dębska, and Kamil Trepka (2017). *Dobra zmiana w Miastku: Neoautorytaryzm w polskiej polityce z perspektywy małego miasta*. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Zaawansowanych / Krytyka Polityczna. URL: https://krytykapolityczna.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Dobra-zmiana-w-Miastku.pdf.

Gethin, Amory, Clara Martínez-Toledano, and Thomas Piketty, eds. (2021). *Political Cleavages and Social Inequalities: A Study of Fifty Democracies, 1948–2020*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

— (2022). "Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies, 1948–2020". In: *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 137.1, pp. 1–48. DOI: 10.1093/qje/qjab036.

Goerres, Achim, Sabrina J. Mayer, and Dennis C. Spies (Apr. 5, 2019). *Draußen vor der Tür? Russlanddeutsche Wähler und ihre unvollständige politische Integration in die deutsche Parteiendemokratie*. Based on the Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES). Regierungsforschung.de. URL: https://regierungsforschung.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/05042019_regierungsforschung.de_Goerres-et-al._Russlanddeutsche-W%C3%A4hler.pdf.

Goodman, Leo A. (1953). "Ecological Regressions and Behavior of Individuals". In: *American Sociological Review* 18.6, pp. 663–664. DOI: 10.2307/2088121.

Green, Donald P. and Ian Shapiro (1994). *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Grosfeld, Irena and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya (2015). "Cultural vs. Economic Legacies of Empires: Evidence from the Partition of Poland". In: *Journal of Comparative Economics* 43.1, pp. 55–75. DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2014.11.004.

Guilluy, Christophe (2014). *La France périphérique: comment on a sacrifié les classes populaires*. Paris: Flammarion.

Hanley, Seán and Allan Sikk (2016). "Economy, Corruption or Floating Voters? Explaining the Breakthroughs of Anti-Establishment Reform Parties in Eastern Europe". In: *Party Politics* 22.4, pp. 522–533. DOI: 10.1177/1354068814550438.

Harteveld, Eelco et al. (2015). "The Gender Gap in Populist Radical-Right Voting: Examining the Demand Side in Western and Eastern Europe". In: *Patterns of Prejudice* 49.1–2, pp. 103–134. DOI: 10.1080/0031322x.2015.1024399.

Heberle, Rudolf (1945). *From Democracy to Nazism: A Regional Case Study on Political Parties in Germany*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

— (1963). *Landbevölkerung und Nationalsozialismus: Eine soziologische Untersuchung der politischen Willensbildung in Schleswig-Holstein 1918 bis 1932*. Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 6. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.

Hernández, Enrique and Hanspeter Kriesi (2016). "The Electoral Consequences of the Financial and Economic Crisis in Europe". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 55.2, pp. 203–224. DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12122.

Hix, Simon and Bjørn Høyland (2022). *The Political System of the European Union*. 4th ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hix, Simon, Abdul Noury, and Gérard Roland (2005). "Power to the Parties: Cohesion and Competition in the European Parliament, 1979–2001". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 35.2, pp. 209–234. DOI: 10.1017/s0007123405000128.

— (2009). "Voting Patterns and Alliance Formation in the European Parliament". In: *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 364.1518, pp. 821–831. DOI: 10.1098/rstb.2008.0263.

Hooghe, Liesbet and Gary Marks (2001). *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

— (2018). "Cleavage Theory Meets Europe's Crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the Transnational Cleavage". In: *Journal of European Public Policy* 25.1, pp. 109–135. DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2017.1310279.

Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole J. Wilson (2002). "Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?" In: *Comparative Political Studies* 35.8, pp. 965–989. DOI: 10.1177/001041402236310.

Hooghe, Marc and Ruth Dassonneville (2018). "A Spiral of Distrust: A Panel Study on the Relation between Political Distrust and Protest Voting in Belgium". In: *Government and Opposition* 53.1, pp. 104–130. DOI: 10.1017/gov.2016.18.

Hublet, François (2024). *BLUE_EP: A Dataset of Municipality-Level Results of European Parliament Elections. Codebook v1*. Paris: Groupe d'études géopolitiques. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14569325.

— (Jan. 2025). "Regional Election in Thuringia, 1 September 2024". In: *BLUE – Electoral Bulletins of the European Union* 5: *Elections in Europe: 2024*. URL: https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/regional-election-in-thuringia-1-september-2024/.

Hublet, François and Nicola Chiecchio (2026). *BLUE_DB — Basic Local Units Election Database*. Paris: Groupe d'études géopolitiques. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21434111.

Hublet, François and Mattéo Lanoë (2025). "A Tale of Three Cleavages: Quantifier le rôle des démarcations sociales dans l'élection présidentielle française de 2022". In: *Revue française de science politique* 75.2, pp. 215–260. DOI: 10.3917/rfsp.752.0215.

Hublet, François, Mattéo Lanoë, and Johanna Schleyer (2023). *Spelling out the European Center-Right's Dilemma: Renewal of the Grand Coalition or National-Conservative Alliance?* Report. Paris: Groupe d'études géopolitiques. URL: https://geopolitique.eu/en/2023/06/19/spelling-out-the-european-center-rights-dilemma-renewal-of-the-grand-coalition-or-national-conservative-alliance/.

Huijsmans, Twan et al. (2021). "Are Cities Ever More Cosmopolitan? Studying Trends in Urban–Rural Divergence of Cultural Attitudes". In: *Political Geography* 86, p. 102353. DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102353.

Ifop (Apr. 10, 2022). *Le vote des électorats confessionnels au 1er tour de l'élection présidentielle*. Survey report for *La Croix*. Paris: Ifop. URL: https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/119082-Rapport.pdf.

infratest dimap (Sept. 1, 2024). *Landtagswahl Thüringen 2024: Wählerwanderung*. ARD / tagesschau.de. URL: https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2024-09-01-LT-DE-TH/analyse-wanderung.shtml (visited on 11/22/2026).

— (Feb. 23, 2025). *Bundestagswahl 2025: Wahltagsbefragung*. Election-day survey for ARD. Berlin: infratest dimap.

Inglehart, Ronald (1977). *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris (2000). "The Developmental Theory of the Gender Gap: Women's and Men's Voting Behavior in Global Perspective". In: *International Political Science Review* 21.4, pp. 441–463. DOI: 10.1177/0192512100214007.

— (2003). *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Inglehart, Ronald and Christian Welzel (2005). *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

INSEE (2024). *Revenus, pauvreté et niveau de vie en 2021: Dispositif Fichier localisé social et fiscal (Filosofi)*. Paris: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. URL: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/7756729.

Ipsos (Sept. 2022). *Elezioni politiche 2022: Le analisi Ipsos post voto*. Approx. 16,700 interviews, 22 August–22 September 2022. Milano: Ipsos. URL: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2022-10/Elezioni%20politiche%202022_le%20analisi%20Ipsos%20post%20voto.pdf.

Ipsos (June 9, 2024). *Sociologie des électorats et profil des abstentionnistes: Élection européennes, 9 juin 2024*. Survey report for France Télévisions, Radio France, France24/RFI, Public Sénat/LCP. Online survey of 8,923 registered voters, 6–7 June 2024. Paris: Ipsos. URL: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/Ipsos-Sociologie-des-e%CC%81lectorats-10-juin-15h.pdf.

Ipsos-Talan (June 30, 2024). *Sociologie des électorats et profil des abstentionnistes: Élections législatives, 1er tour, 30 juin 2024*. Online survey of 10,286 registered voters, 27–28 June 2024. Paris: Ipsos. URL: https://ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/ipsos-talan-sociologie-electorats-legislatives-30-juin-rapport-complet.pdf.

Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers (2009). "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined". In: *The Journal of Politics* 71.3, pp. 782–799. DOI: 10.1017/s0022381609090719.

Johansson, Karl Magnus and Tapio Raunio (2024). "Introduction: Europarties—Ubiquitous Yet Rarely Noticed". In: *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1–26. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-62285-4_1.

Jolly, Seth et al. (2022). "Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999–2019". In: *Electoral Studies* 75, p. 102420. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102420.

Juon, Andreas and Daniel Bochsler (2020). "Hurricane or Fresh Breeze? Disentangling the Populist Effect on the Quality of Democracy". In: *European Political Science Review* 12.3, pp. 391–408. DOI: 10.1017/s1755773920000259.

Kaeding, Michael, Manuel Müller, and Alexander Hoppe, eds. (2025). *The 2024 European Parliament Elections: A Turn to the Right in the Shadow of War*. The Future of Europe. Cham: Springer Nature.

Kaiser, Wolfram and Jürgen Mittag (2023). *Seventy Years of Transnational Political Groups in the European Parliament: Origins and Trajectories*. Briefing. Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service. URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/757568/EPRS_BRI(2023)757568_EN.pdf.

Kantola, Johanna and Cherry Miller (2021). "Party Politics and Radical Right Populism in the European Parliament: Analysing Political Groups as Democratic Actors". In: *Journal of Common Market Studies* 59.4, pp. 782–801. DOI: 10.1111/jcms.13181.

Karvonen, Lauri (2010). *The Personalisation of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*. ECPR Monographs. Colchester: ECPR Press. ISBN: 9781907301032.

King, Gary (1997). *A Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem: Reconstructing Individual Behavior from Aggregate Data*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Knutsen, Oddbjørn and Elinor Scarbrough (1995). "Cleavage Politics". In: *The Impact of Values*. Ed. by Jan W. van Deth and Elinor Scarbrough. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 492–524. DOI: 10.1093/0198294751.003.0018.

Kollman, Ken et al. (2025). *The Elections Archive: Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA), Lower Chamber*. Version 20251015. Ann Arbor: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan. URL: https://electiondataarchive.org.

Kriesi, Hanspeter (1994). *Les démocraties occidentales: Une approche comparée*. Paris: Economica.

Kriesi, Hanspeter et al. (2006). "Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 45.6, pp. 921–956. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00644.x.

— (2008). *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laakso, Markku and Rein Taagepera (1979). ""Effective" Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe". In: *Comparative Political Studies* 12.1, pp. 3–27. DOI: 10.1177/001041407901200101.

Lacoste, Yves, ed. (1993). *Dictionnaire de géopolitique*. Paris: Flammarion.

Lazarsfeld, Paul F., Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet (1944). *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

Le Grand Continent (Jan. 12, 2024). *Prosopographie du gouvernement Attal*. URL: https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2024/01/12/prosopographie-du-gouvernement-attal/ (visited on 11/13/2026).

Lehmann, Pola et al. (2024). *The Manifesto Data Collection: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/-MARPOR)*. Version 2024a. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). DOI: 10.25522/manifesto.mpds.2024a. URL: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu.

Lévy, Jacques (2013). *Réinventer la France: trente cartes pour une nouvelle géographie*. Paris: Fayard.

Lewis-Beck, Michael S. and Mary Stegmaier (2000). "Economic Determinants of Electoral Outcomes". In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, pp. 183–219. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.183.

Lijphart, Arend (1999). *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lipset, Seymour Martin and Stein Rokkan (1967). "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction". In: *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. Ed. by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan. New York: Free Press, pp. 1–64.

Lührmann, Anna et al. (2020). *Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Dataset*. Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. URL: https://www.v-dem.net/data/v-party-dataset/.

Mair, Peter (1997). *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Marx, Benjamin, Vincent Pons, and Vincent Rollet (2025). *National Elections Database (Version 2.0)*. URL: https://www.nationalelectionsdatabase.com.

Marx, Karl (1850). *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850*. Serialized in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Politisch-ökonomische Revue*; first published in book form with an introduction by Friedrich Engels, Berlin: Vorwärts, 1895.

— (1852). *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*. First published in *Die Revolution*, New York.

Mau, Steffen (2019). *Lütten Klein: Leben in der ostdeutschen Transformationsgesellschaft*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Maxwell, Rahsaan (2019). "Cosmopolitan Immigration Attitudes in Large European Cities: Contextual or Compositional Effects?" In: *American Political Science Review* 113.2, pp. 456–474. DOI: 10.1017/s0003055418000898.

Mayer, Nonna (2010). *Sociologie des comportements politiques*. Paris: Armand Colin.

— (2015). "The Closing of the Radical Right Gender Gap in France?" In: *French Politics* 13.4, pp. 391–414. DOI: 10.1057/fp.2015.18.

McElroy, Gail and Kenneth Benoit (2007). "Party Groups and Policy Positions in the European Parliament". In: *Party Politics* 13.1, pp. 5–28.

— (2010). "Party Policy and Group Affiliation in the European Parliament". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 40.2, pp. 377–398. DOI: 10.1017/s0007123409990469.

McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook (2001). "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks". In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, pp. 415–444. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415.

Meijers, Maurits J. and Andrej Zaslove (2021). "Measuring Populism in Political Parties: Appraisal of a New Approach". In: *Comparative Political Studies* 54.2, pp. 372–407. DOI: 10.1177/0010414020938081.

Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Müller, Jan-Werner (2016). *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Muraközy, Balázs and Álmos Telegdy (2016). "Political Incentives and State Subsidy Allocation: Evidence from Hungarian Municipalities". In: *European Economic Review* 89, pp. 324–344. DOI: 10.1016/j.euroecorev.2016.07.003.

Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, Pippa and Ronald F. Inglehart (2012). "Muslim Integration into Western Cultures: Between Origins and Destinations". In: *Political Studies* 60.2, pp. 228–251. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00951.x.

Oesch, Daniel and Line Rennwald (2018). "Electoral Competition in Europe's New Tripolar Political Space: Class Voting for the Left, Centre-Right and Radical Right". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 57.4, pp. 783–807. DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12259.

Off, Gefjon (2023). "Gender Equality Salience, Backlash and Radical Right Voting in the Gender-Equal Context of Sweden". In: *West European Politics* 46.3, pp. 451–476. DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2022.2084986.

Pedersen, Mogens N. (1979). "The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 7.1, pp. 1–26. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.1979.tb01267.x.

Perottino, Michel and Petra Guasti (2020). "Technocratic Populism à la Française? The Roots and Mechanisms of Emmanuel Macron's Success". In: *Politics and Governance* 8.4, pp. 545–555. DOI: 10.17645/pag.v8i4.3412.

Petrocik, John R. (1996). "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 40.3, pp. 825–850. DOI: 10.2307/2111797.

Pettigrew, Thomas F. and Linda R. Tropp (2006). "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory". In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90.5, pp. 751–783. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751.

Pop-Eleches, Grigore and Joshua A. Tucker (2017). *Communism's Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ramiro, Luis and Raul Gomez (2017). "Radical-Left Populism during the Great Recession: Podemos and Its Competition with the Established Radical Left". In: *Political Studies* 65.1_suppl, pp. 108–126. DOI: 10.1177/0032321716647400.

Reif, Karlheinz and Hermann Schmitt (1980). "Nine Second-Order National Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 8.1, pp. 3–44. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00737.x.

RFE/RL (July 9, 2020). *Beef Over Bulgarian Beach Sparks Protest Over 'Protected' Elites*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. URL: https://www.rferl.org/a/beef-over-bulgarian-beach-sparks-protest-over-protected-elites/30716443.html (visited on 11/22/2026).

Riker, William H. and Peter C. Ordeshook (1968). "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting". In: *American Political Science Review* 62.1, pp. 25–42. DOI: 10.2307/1953324.

Ripoll Servent, Ariadna (2019). "The European Parliament after the 2019 Elections: Testing the Boundaries of the 'Cordon Sanitaire'". In: *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15.4, pp. 331–342. DOI: 10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1121.

Rivière, Jean (2022). *L'illusion du vote bobo: configurations électorales et structures sociales dans les grandes villes françaises*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.

Robinson, W. S. (1950). "Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals". In: *American Sociological Review* 15.3, pp. 351–357. DOI: 10.2307/2087176.

Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés (2018). "The Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter (and What to Do about It)". In: *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11.1, pp. 189–209. DOI: 10.1093/cjres/rsx024.

Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés, Lewis Dijkstra, and Hugo Poelman (2024). "The Geography of EU Discontent and the Regional Development Trap". In: *Economic Geography* 100.3, pp. 213–245. DOI: 10.1080/00130095.2024.2337657.

Rooduijn, Matthijs (2018). "What Unites the Voter Bases of Populist Parties? Comparing the Electorates of 15 Populist Parties". In: *European Political Science Review* 10.3, pp. 351–368. DOI: 10.1017/s1755773917000145.

— (2019). "State of the Field: How to Study Populism and Adjacent Topics? A Plea for Both More and Less Focus". In: *European Journal of Political Research* 58.1, pp. 362–372. DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12314.

Rooduijn, Matthijs, Wouter van der Brug, and Sarah L. de Lange (2016). "Expressing or Fuelling Discontent? The Relationship between Populist Voting and Political Discontent". In: *Electoral Studies* 43, pp. 32–40. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2016.04.006.

Rooduijn, Matthijs et al. (2024). "The PopuList: A Database of Populist, Far-Left, and Far-Right Parties Using Expert-Informed Qualitative Comparative Classification (EiQCC)". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 54.3, pp. 969–978. DOI: 10.1017/s0007123423000431.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976). *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schraff, Dominik, Ioannis Vergioglou, and Buket Buse Demirci (2023). "The European NUTS-Level Election Dataset: A Tool to Map European Electoral Geography". In: *Party Politics* 29.3, pp. 570–579. DOI: 10.1177/13540688221083553.

Shorrocks, Rosalind (2018). "Cohort Change in Political Gender Gaps in Europe and Canada: The Role of Modernization". In: *Politics & Society* 46.2, pp. 135–175. DOI: 10.1177/0032329217751688.

Siegfried, André (1913). *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Simpson, E. H. (1951). "The Interpretation of Interaction in Contingency Tables". In: *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series B (Methodological)* 13.2, pp. 238–241. DOI: 10.1111/j.2517-6161.1951.tb00088.x.

Solé-Ollé, Albert and Pilar Sorribas-Navarro (2008). "The Effects of Partisan Alignment on the Allocation of Intergovernmental Transfers: Differences-in-Differences Estimates for Spain". In: *Journal of Public Economics* 92.12, pp. 2302–2319. DOI: 10.1016/j.jpubeco.2007.06.014.

Spierings, Niels and Andrej Zaslove (2017). "Gender, Populist Attitudes, and Voting: Explaining the Gender Gap in Voting for Populist Radical Right and Populist Radical Left Parties". In: *West European Politics* 40.4, pp. 821–847. DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2017.1287448.

Steiner, Nils D. (2024). "The Shifting Issue Content of Left–Right Identification: Cohort Differences in Western Europe". In: *West European Politics* 47.6, pp. 1276–1303. DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2023.2214875.

STEM et al. (Jan. 21, 2026). *Ozvěny voleb 2025: Společná povolební studie*. Post-election survey, N = 7,738. Praha: STEM. URL: https://www.stem.cz/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/SIMAR_spolecna_povolebni_studie.pdf.

Stokes, Donald E. (1963). "Spatial Models of Party Competition". In: *American Political Science Review* 57.2, pp. 368–377. DOI: 10.2307/1952828.

Sundquist, James L. (1983). *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

SVT/Valu (2026). *SVT:s vallokalsundersökning: Riksdagsvalet 2026*. Exit poll of 13,937 voters. Stockholm: Sveriges Television. URL: https://www.gu.se/valforskningsprogrammet/undersokningar/vallokalsundersokningar-svtvalu (visited on 11/26/2026).

Tilley, James and Geoffrey Evans (2014). "Ageing and Generational Effects on Vote Choice: Combining Cross-Sectional and Panel Data to Estimate APC Effects". In: *Electoral Studies* 33, pp. 19–27. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2013.06.007.

Tingsten, Herbert (1937). *Political Behavior: Studies in Election Statistics*. Stockholm Economic Studies 7. London: P. S. King & Son.

Tucker, Joshua A. et al. (2017). "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy". In: *Journal of Democracy* 28.4, pp. 46–59. DOI: 10.1353/jod.2017.0064.

TVN24 (Oct. 16, 2023). *Wśród młodych najwięcej stracił PiS*. Ipsos exit poll, Sejm election of 15 October 2023. URL: https://tvn24.pl/polska/wsrod-mlodych-najwiecej-stracil-pis-7392628 (visited on 11/14/2026).

Waldner, David and Ellen Lust (2018). "Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding". In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 21.1, pp. 93–113. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-050517-114628.

Weber, Max (1922). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Weisskircher, Manès (2020). "The Strength of Far-Right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East–West Divide and the Multiple Causes behind 'Populism'". In: *The Political Quarterly* 91.3, pp. 614–622. DOI: 10.1111/1467-923X.12859.

Wimmer, Andreas and Nina Glick Schiller (2002). "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences". In: *Global Networks* 2.4, pp. 301–334. DOI: 10.1111/1471-0374.00043.