

Group identities and their perceived representation in the party system: evidence from four European countries

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Abstract

The formation of a political cleavage requires a socio-structural, a normative, and an organizational element. Recent research on the emergence of a universalist-particularist cleavage in Western European party systems has emphasized the normative element by demonstrating the importance of social identities as a source of political preferences and electoral behavior: voters pick their parties not just based on programmatic concerns but also based on social identities. Yet, existing studies do not connect social identities to the supply side of the political system. In this paper, we focus on the organizational element of cleavage formation and emphasize the link between the demand and the supply side of the political system by studying how voters perceive the representation of different social identities by different parties. We argue that identity-vote-links are underpinned by systematic patterns in the perception of identity-party-links.

We present results from a survey conducted in France, Germany, Switzerland and the UK, in which we asked respondents about their perception of the link between social identities and political parties. These results support the notion of an organizational dimension of cleavage formation in several ways. Firstly, we find that voters have a pretty accurate mental map of their countries' party system. Secondly, their own social identities also affect their perception of the party system: voters generally associate their ingroups with parties that they like and their outgroups with parties that they don't like. Therefore, knowing how individuals perceive of identity-party-links helps predicting their own voting behavior. Thirdly, the perception of an ingroup-inparty link is more differentiated and less schematic than the perception of an outgroup-outparty link. Finally, voters in countries where there was an early political realignment along a universalism-particularism cleavage have more congealed perceptions of the link between certain identities and certain parties than voters in countries in which this cleavage was only politicized more recently.

Introduction

Are Social Democrats still the party of hard-working people or have they lost these voters to Radical Right parties? Do highly educated voters still predominantly support center-right parties, or have they become the main support group of the center-left? Have Social Democratic parties ceded their role as representatives of urban interests to the Greens?

Typically, questions such as these are approached as questions about individual behavior that can be analyzed objectively by using survey data or election results: with the right methods, we can figure out how highly educated citizens vote. In this paper, by contrast, we approach these questions through the eyes of voters and ask what they think about these questions: How do voters perceive of the link between certain social groups – rural or urban people, people with high or low education, cosmopolitans and down-to-earth people among others – and political parties? What is their “mental map” of the party system?

We approach this question from the perspective of cleavage politics. We argue that the development of a political cleavage does not just require the existence of a clear socio-structural demarcation that translates into systematic differences in voting behavior but that it also implies an organizational element. This leads to an important role for parties as representatives of socio-structurally defined groups: the class-cleavage presupposes not only working-class-voters but also a working-class-party. In a fully developed cleavage, voters should be easily able to explain which party “people like themselves” typically vote for.

Over the last years, many authors have described the development of a universalist-particularist cleavage in Western European countries (Kriesi, et al. 2006, Hooghe and Marks 2018, Bornschieer, et al. 2021b). We argue that the development of this cleavage should not just be visible in people’s attitudes and voting behavior, but also in their conception of the party system. Voters should perceive those parties that are the main representatives of this cleavage, in particular parties of the new left and the far right, as clearly linked to the specific social groups underpinning the cleavage. This perception should be clearer, the more strongly developed the universalist-particularist cleavage is.

To study whether people have a clear sense of the link between social identities and political parties, we conducted a survey in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. We asked people about their own identification with 17 social groups, as well as about which party they associated with each of these groups. Our results show that respondents generally have a quite good understanding of objective group-party links: in most cases, they correctly identify the party that most members of a social group vote for as the main political representative of this group. However, there is an asymmetry regarding

one's own ingroups and outgroups: Respondents have a more differentiated image of the voting behavior of their ingroups than of the voting behavior of their outgroups. Moreover, we also find important cross-country differences: In those countries where the universalist-particularist cleavage became important early on (Switzerland, France), social identities are more strongly associated with the new left and the far right as the main representatives of this cleavage. In those countries where the universalist-particularist cleavage only became important more recently (Germany, UK), the same identities are often associated more strongly with traditional mainstream parties.

Moreover, we find evidence that respondents' perceptions of identity-party links are also associated with their own voting behavior. Respondents who hold a specific identity are more likely to vote for a party if they perceive the party to be the main representative of this identity. To give a more specific example: Respondents who identify as "cosmopolitans" are more likely to vote for a green party if they think that "cosmopolitans" typically vote for the greens.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we explain our argument about the importance of perceived identity-party links for the development of a full-blown political cleavage. Afterwards, we introduce our survey data. Section four presents our findings about people's perceptions of identity-party links and about the relationship between these perceptions and individual vote choices. The conclusion discusses avenues for future research.

Argument

In recent years, political scientists have returned to the question of cleavage formation to make sense of transformations of European party systems (e.g. Kriesi, et al. 2006, Hooghe and Marks 2018, Ford and Jennings 2020, Bornschier, et al. 2021b, Hooghe and Marks 2022). In the cleavage perspective, these transformations cannot be entirely understood as a process of dealignment, in which atomistic voters become more and more fickle in their support of specific parties and increasingly vote based on short-term considerations, driven by programmatic fit, the profile of candidates, campaign effects and the like. Instead, the cleavage perspective emphasizes the stability in voting behavior that flows from three elements (for a classic statement, see Bartolini and Mair 1990).

Firstly, a cleavage presupposes the existence of a clear and stable socio-structural divide. Here, a great number of studies has provided evidence of a new divide between the winners and losers of globalization and the transformation towards a knowledge economy. While exact terminologies differ (e.g. GAL-TAN, universalism-particularism), these studies agree that this structural divide underpins differences in attitudes, in particular on issues such as immigration, minority rights, and European

integration, and in voting behavior. While universalists are the strongest voter base of new left parties, particularists increasingly support the radical right.

Secondly, a cleavage presupposes the formation of collective social identities. In this perspective, voters approach political questions not as atomized individuals, but as members of groups. Hence, they do not base their vote on purely programmatic considerations but take into account how “someone like them” would typically vote. Against this background, recent empirical work pays increasing attention to group-based social identities (Damhuis 2020, Bornschier, et al. 2021b, Westheuser 2022, Zollinger 2022).

Thirdly, however, the cleavage needs to be organized. Here, important work focuses on the decline of organizations such as trade unions, churches, and associations, which traditionally played a crucial role in linking group collectives to political parties (Gingrich and Lynch 2019). However, cleavages may also be organized by parties themselves. For example, there is increasing interest in how parties use group-based appeals to attract the votes of specific social groups (Thau 2019, Huber 2021, Robison, et al. 2021, Thau 2021, Mierke-Zatwarnicki 2022). Parties do not just appeal to voters programmatically by offering policies that are in line with voters’ preferences, but also by appealing to voters’ identities. These appeals most prominently target people’s class (Thau 2019, Robison, et al. 2021, Thau 2021), but also to their education or geographical residence (Jacobs and Munis 2019).

In this paper, we combine the second and the third element and argue that identity-party links are an important element of electoral re-alignment and the formation of new cleavages in European party systems. In contrast to the literature on group-based appeals, however, we do not study parties as actors but focus on the perceptions of parties by voters. Put simply, our question is: do voters perceive parties as representatives of identity-based defined social groups? What determines this perception? And does it correspond to group members’ objective voting behavior?

The question what people think/know about the alignment of social groups and political parties is at the center of an emerging literature on the US. The importance of voters’ perception of group-party links is demonstrated by Kane, et al. (2021), who find that the link between a voter’s own group membership and his or her party identification is moderated by the knowledge of other group member’ party identification: “Irrespective of one’s own group memberships, partisanship is shaped by knowledge about the social compositions of the parties, as well as positive or negative sentiments toward all of these politically aligned groups.” (ibid.: 1784). This relationship, however, presupposes that people know how the members of different social groups vote. Without knowing how other group members vote, one can hardly adapt his/her voting behavior. Perhaps more importantly, the lack of such knowledge would also be evidence against the presence of a cleavage: If people have no idea

about the voting behavior of their own group members, this would suggest that the group membership is perhaps not that politically important after all.

The literature has thus started to study people's knowledge of group-party-alignments. Here, existing evidence suggests that voters in two-party-systems have a remarkably good understanding of the link between groups and parties. Goggin, et al. (2020) find that people are quite good at inferring a candidate's party when given information about the candidate's policy positions. In a study on the UK, Titelman and Lauderdale (2021) find that people can infer voting behavior from demographic characteristics of voters.

At the same time, voters suffer from a substantive base-rate fallacy. That is, they heavily overestimate the role of small but highly visible elements of a party's voter coalition. In other words, they disregard that "almost all members of Group X vote for party Y" does not imply that "most voters of party Y come from group X". In particular, voters misperceive the share of outgroup members in the outparty's support base (e.g. Republicans heavily overestimate the share of LGBT in the Democratic voter base)(Ahler and Sood 2018).

Our paper extends the logic of these papers to multiparty systems. Here, there is little research on the perception of parties as representatives of specific social groups yet. Instead, most of the existing literature focuses on parties' left-right positioning. Do people correctly perceive the left-right position of parties (based on expert surveys) and do they perceive changes in these positions? (Busch 2016, Meyer and Wagner 2020, Nasr 2020). In work that has a stronger focus on the perception of group members' political behavior, Ronja Sczepanski shows that voters in Austria and Italy have relatively clear perceptions of which group would support leaving the European Union (Sczepanski 2022). However, to our knowledge, there is little existing research on the perception of group-party-links in multiparty systems.

To develop our expectations, we take the main conclusions from the literature on two-party-systems, and adapt them to the multiparty context:

Firstly, the two-party-system literature shows that voters have a remarkably accurate *mental map* of the party system: voters know relatively well how members of important social or demographic groups vote. Thus, learning about a person's group memberships allows them to make accurate predictions of that person's voting behavior. We expect that this should also hold in multiparty system, with one important adaptation: it is well possible that voters' mental map is much more accurate between ideological blocs (e.g. the left vs. the mainstream right) than within ideological blocs (e.g. Greens vs. Social Democrats, Liberals vs. Christian Democrats).

Secondly, the two-party-system literature shows that there is a considerable *outgroup bias*. Voters systematically overestimate the importance of their outgroups in the voter coalitions of their outparties (Ahler and Sood 2018). This is likely to also hold in a multiparty system. However, an additional dimension in multiparty systems is the perceived dispersion of a group's voting behavior. This is not relevant in a two-party-system, where every voter who does not vote for Party A automatically votes for Party B. In a multiparty system, by contrast, not voting for Party A can mean voting for Party B, C, D, or E. Hence, the voting behavior of ingroups and outgroups can be conceptualized in a more simple ("everybody votes the same") or more complex ("people vote differently") manner. In this context, we can extend the logic of *outgroup bias* to mean that respondents have a more schematic perception of the voting behavior of their outgroups than of their ingroups.

Thirdly, political behavior is not just group-centered but actually *group-party centered*. When making political choices, people do not just consider which social groups they themselves belong to. They also consider how group members behave politically (Kane, et al. 2021, Szczepanski 2022). In other words, their perception of group members' political behavior affects their own political behavior. This prediction directly translates to multiparty systems.

In the rest of the paper, we study these expectations empirically. Firstly, we compare voters' perceptions of identity-party-links to the actual party preferences of certain identity groups. This allows us to draw conclusions about the accuracy of voters' mental map of the party system.

Secondly, we analyze the link between voters' own social identities and their perceptions of identity-party-links. Here, we expect that voters associate parties they like with their ingroups and parties they dislike with their outgroups. Moreover, we study the variance in the perception of identity-party-links. Here, our assumption is that the mental map of outgroup political behavior is more schematic than the mental map of ingroup political behavior. Finally, we analyze the link between perceived identity-party-links and respondent's own vote choices. Here, we argue that that people who hold a specific identity are more likely to vote for a party when they perceive this party to be the representative of this identity.

Finally, we bring in a comparative dimension and study whether the perception of identity-party-links differs between countries. This is also where we study the variance within broader political camps, and, specifically, within the political left. We posit that the perception of Social Democrats is the crucial difference that distinguishes countries in which the party system experienced an "early" realignment from countries in which the party system experienced a "late" realignment. In cases of early realignment, Social Democrats lost the status as main representative of the working class to the Radical Right early on. At the same time, they established themselves as the representative of the new middle

class. In cases of late realignment, by contrast, Social Democrats kept their position as working-class party much longer and still challenge the Radical Right for the representation of working-class voters. At the same time, they never became the main representative of the new urban, educated, and cosmopolitan middle class. Instead, this role was taken by the Greens.

Data and Measurement

Our results are based on four online surveys fielded in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK between November 2020 and January 2021. We recruited about 2,000 participants in France and Germany and about 3,000 participants in Switzerland and the UK. In Switzerland, we only recruited participants from the German and French speaking parts. In the UK, we only recruited participants from England. The samples are representative for education, age, and gender. We selected these four countries because they are at different stages of electoral realignment: while France and Switzerland are representative of countries that experienced early and strong realignment, Germany and the UK are cases of late realignment. However, the structural transformations generating new identity potentials have occurred in all four countries. Moreover, the UK allows us to compare the findings for true multiparty systems to a system that is much closer to a two-party system.

At the heart of the survey is a list of 17 social groups. The list of groups is presented in Table 1. It provides a mixture of categories related to education, income, the type of work people do, residence, and lifestyle choices. While most of these identities tap into a new, universalist-particularist divide, we also included some categories associated with older political cleavages (“Wealthy people”, “People with humble financial means”, “People with Christian-Western values”).

List of identity categories	
People with a higher education degree	People in rural areas
People with medium level education	People in urban areas
People with lower level education	Feminists
Wealthy people	People with Christian-Western values
People with humble financial means	People with a migration background
People who do hard, tiring work	Cosmopolitans
People who do creative work	Culturally interested people
People who work in the social and education sector	People who are down-to-earth and rooted to home
Co-Nationals	

Table 1: List of identity categories

The two main questions that we use in the following analyses presented respondents with the whole battery of social groups and asked them about their own closeness to these groups as well as about

their perception of group members' voting behavior. Our question for gauging people's social identities read as follows (see Bornschier, et al. (2021a) for a validation of this question):

"Of the following groups, how close do you feel towards them? By 'close' we mean people who are most like you in terms of their ideas, interests, and feelings."

Respondents selected a choice on a scale from 1 ("not close at all") to 10 ("very close").

To learn about people's perception of group-party links, we asked the following question:

"Which party would you associate most closely with each of the following groups? In other words: which party do you think the members of each group would be most likely to vote for?"

Here, we presented respondents with a choice of the six major parties in each country as well as with a "Don't know" option.¹ This question deliberately combines two somewhat different logics: the second part of the question refers to an objective likelihood that should be dominated by the base rate: for most social groups, the relative majority of their members will vote for a country's biggest party. By contrast, the first part of the question asks for a more subjective evaluation of the association between groups and parties, that allows people to link smaller parties to certain groups. While these dimensions of the question may objectively point into different directions, we consider them a compromise that seeks to keep the question simple but also allows respondents to take the complexity of multiparty systems into account. While it would potentially be interesting to know about people's perceived distribution of votes by identity group, this would be an extremely demanding question.

In addition to these questions about identities and perceptions, we measure respondents' own political preferences in two ways: we asked them about their own vote choice in a hypothetical election as well as about their propensity to vote for each of the major parties in their country. We also ask for people's age, gender, place of residence, level of education, occupation, and migration background.

Results

Our analysis proceeds in four steps. We start with comparing perceived identity-party links to the actual voting behavior of group members. Afterwards, we study the association between individual

¹ The parties we presented:

Germany: CDU/CSU, SPD, AfD, FDP, Die Linke, Bündnis90/Grüne.

France: France Insoumise, Parti Socialiste, Les Verts, La République en Marche, Les Républicains, Rassemblement National.

Switzerland: SVP, SP, FDP, CVP, GPS, GLP.

UK: Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens, UKIP, Brexit Party.

identities and the perception of identity-party links. We then move on to differences between ingroup- and outgroup-perceptions. Finally, we look at differences between countries more closely.

First, we compare respondents' perceptions of identity-party links to the stated party preferences of identity holders. To do so, we define every respondent who reports a value of six or more on the closeness scale as identifying with a specific group. The share of respondents who identify with a specific identity then reaches from a low of 21% (wealthy people) and 27% (feminists) to a high of 69% (down-to-earth people) and 70% (co-nationals), with relatively minor differences between countries.²

For some identities, we can compare the voting behavior of self-identifiers with an objective indicator of group belonging. For example, we can compare the vote choices of rural-identifiers to those of people who report living in rural areas or those of high-education-identifiers with those of people with university degrees. If we allow for a coarser fit, we can also compare the vote choices of those who identify with "hard-working people" to those of production workers and the vote choices of those who identify with "people who do social and educational work" to those of socio-cultural professionals. Generally, the vote choices of objectively and subjectively defined social groups are highly similar. Hence, the following analyses focus on subjective identification which is available for all 17 groups.

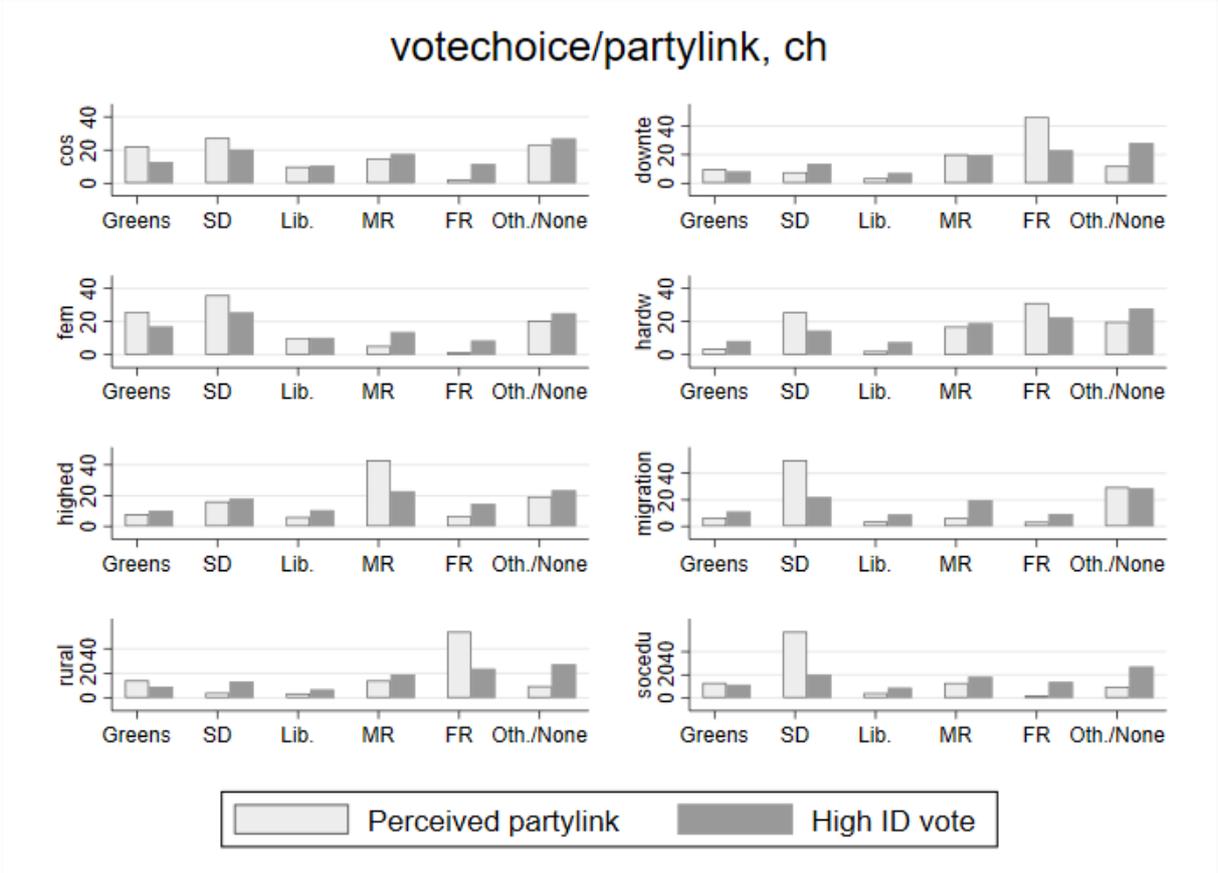
For ease of presentation, we define five party groups that exist in all countries: the Greens, the Social Democrats, the Liberals, the Mainstream Right and the Far Right.³ Moreover, to keep the graphs manageable, we only show results for eight identities that tap into different aspects that are typically associated with a universalist-particularist cleavage. These identities are: people with a higher education degree; people who do hard, tiring work; people who work in the social and education sector; people in rural areas; feminists; people with a migration background; cosmopolitans; people who are down-to-earth and rooted to home.

We start with Switzerland (Figure 1). Here, four of these identities (cosmopolitans, migration background, social and educational work, feminists) are clearly associated with the political left, one identity (highly educated) with the mainstream right and two identities (rural, down to earth) with the far right. Hardworking people, finally, is a contested identity that is associated with both the Social Democrats and the far right. Importantly, the party that has the strongest objective support from an identity group is correctly identified as the main representative of this group in all eight categories: the highest light bar and the highest dark bar are always assigned to the same party (disregarding the

² The exceptions are „people with medium-level education" and "people with low education". There is much higher identification with medium-educated people in Switzerland and Germany, most likely because we specified medium education as having vocational training in the two countries.

³ We assign one party to each category, with two exceptions: in Switzerland, the Mainstream Right consists of the FDP and the CVP, with the GLP being coded as the liberal party; in the UK, the Far Right consists of UKIP and the Brexit Party. This means that Die Linke in Germany and France Insoumise in France are allocated to the other/don't know category, since no equivalent parties exist in Switzerland and the UK.

“Other/none” category). Thus, it seems that Swiss respondents have a remarkably accurate mental map of the Swiss party system. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that Swiss respondents find it relatively easy to assign a group to a party, as indicated by the low share of “don’t knows” for this question battery.

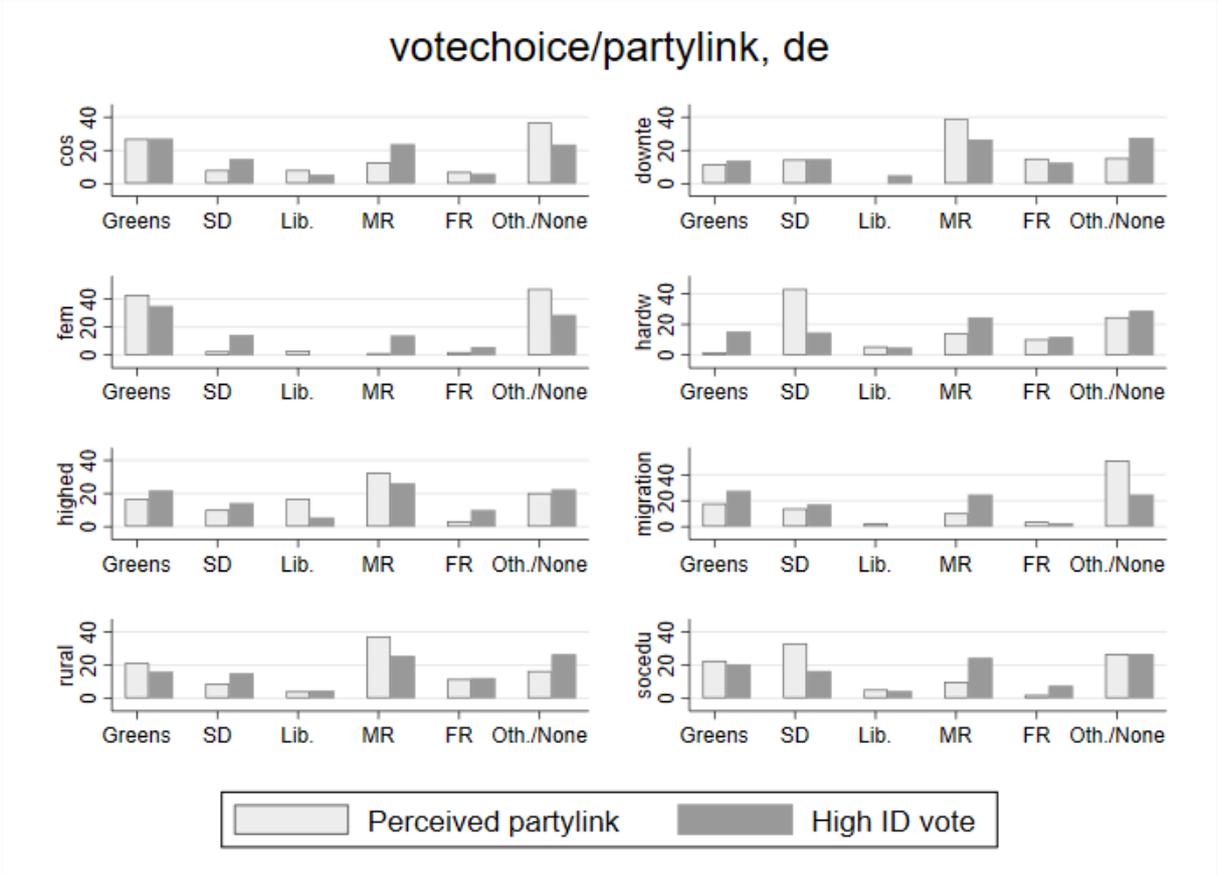


Light bars show the share of respondents who associate an identity with a specific party, dark bars show the voting distribution among respondents who hold that identity.

Figure 1: Perceived and real identity-party-links, Switzerland.

In Germany (Figure 2), the left is again associated with feminists and people who do social and educational work, as well as – though to a weaker extend – with cosmopolitans and people with a migration background. The main difference to Switzerland is that the far right is not really associated with any of the presented identities. Down to earth and rural – identities that are clearly associated with the far right in Switzerland – are associated with the mainstream right in Germany, while hard work is strongly associated with the Social Democrats. Again, the assignment is correct in most categories, although there is a discrepancy for hard work (assigned to Social Democrats, but strongest support for the CDU) and for social and educational work (assigned to Social Democrats, but strongest

support for the Greens). Because we assign Die Linke to the “don’t know option” here, the “don’t know” bar is inflated considerably for cosmopolitans, feminists and people with a migration background, which more than 10% of respondents associate with Die Linke.

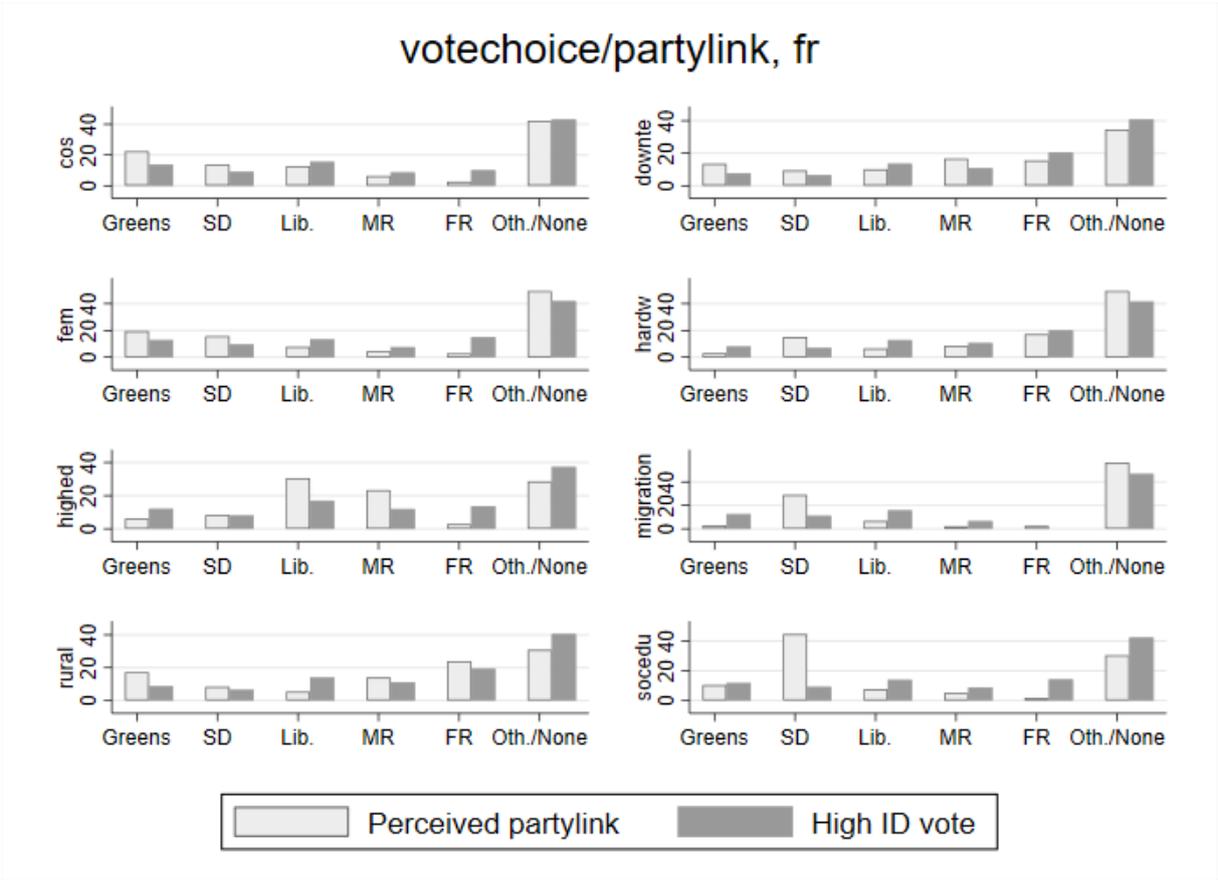


Light bars show the share of respondents who associate an identity with a specific party, dark bars show the voting distribution among respondents who hold that identity.

Figure 2: Perceived and real identity-party-links, Germany

In France, the image is much less clear than in Switzerland and Germany. For several categories, people do not really seem to know how to assign them, with none of the parties being assigned to a specific identity by at least 20% of respondents. The only clear exceptions are social and educational work, which is heavily associated with the Socialists, and high education, which is associated with La République En Marche. This dispersed pattern of associations has partly to do with the presence of LREM as the strongest liberal party of the four countries and partly with the strong three-way-split on the left. Similar to Germany, we have assigned la France Insoumise to the “other/none” category to increase comparability across countries. Still, if we add up the parties of the left, it is clear that the left block is associated with cosmopolitans, feminists and people with a migration background, as in Germany and Switzerland. As in the other countries, the far right is most strongly associated with rural

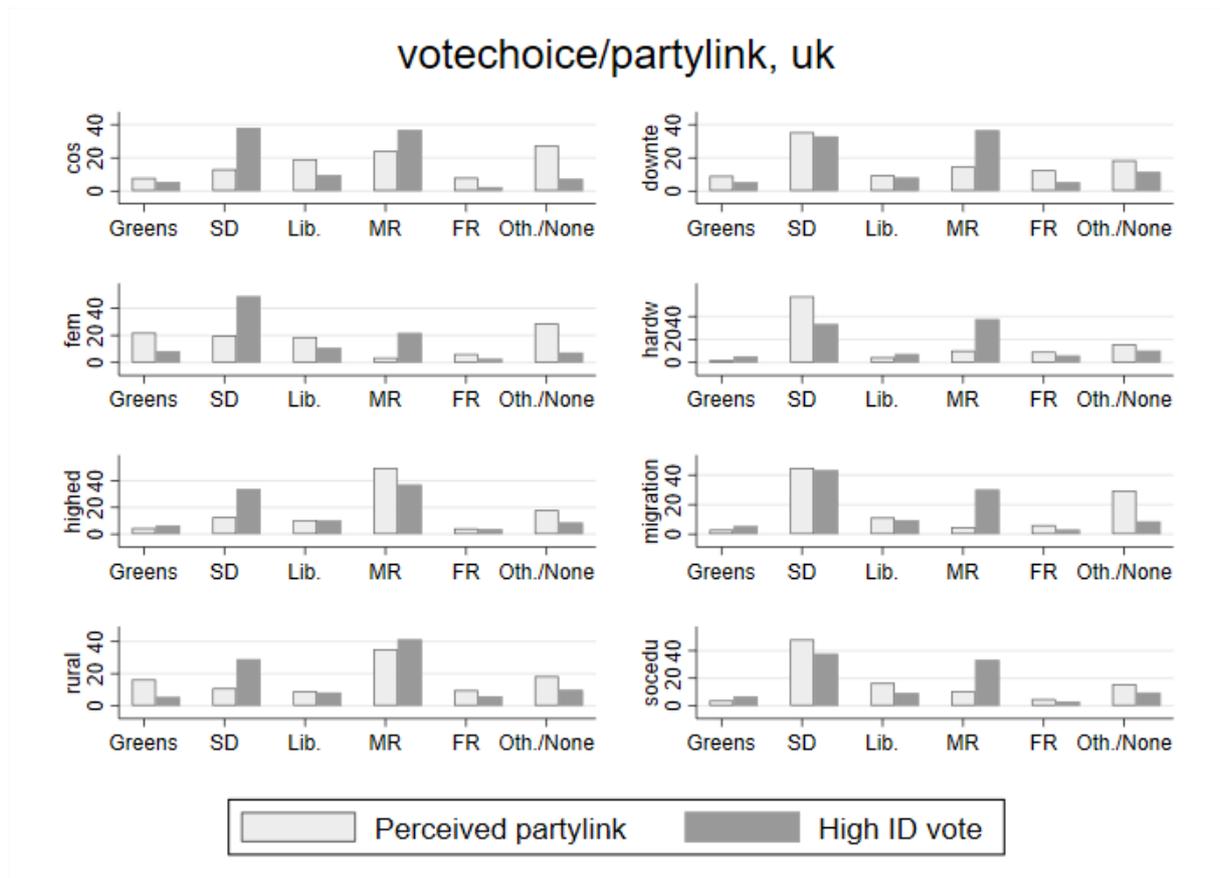
and down-to-earth-people. This association is stronger than in Germany but considerably weaker than in Switzerland.



Light bars show the share of respondents who associate an identity with a specific party, dark bars show the voting distribution among respondents who hold that identity.

Figure 3: Perceived and real identity-party-links, France

In England, finally, the picture is structured by the two-party dominance of Labour and the Tories. Of the eight identities, four (down to earth, hard work, migration, social and educational work) are clearly associated with labor, while three (higher education, rural, and, barely, cosmopolitans) are associated with the Tories. Feminists are narrowly associated with the Greens over Labour. Interestingly, these associations do not always fit the split between Tories and Labour among self-identifiers. Both, down-to-earth and hardworking people narrowly prefer the Tories over Labour in our sample.



Light bars show the share of respondents who associate an identity with a specific party, dark bars show the voting distribution among respondents who hold that identity.

Figure 4: Perceived and real identity-party-links, England

What emerges from these comparisons is a relatively clear image of the coalition supporting left parties (feminists, people who do social and educational work, people with a migration background, cosmopolitans), while the highly educated are still associated with the mainstream right across all four countries. For the other three identities, the far right holds the key: in the far right's strongest country, Switzerland, rural, down-to-earth and hardworking people are all associated with the far right. The same picture also emerges in France, though it is considerably weaker. In Germany and UK, countries where the far right plays a much smaller role, rural is associated with the mainstream right while hard work is associated with Social Democrats. Down-to-earth people, finally, are associated with Social Democrats in the UK and with the mainstream right in Germany.

This analysis shows a high accuracy of respondents' mental maps: the four identities that are linked to left parties are in fact the group whose members show the highest support for the left. Similarly, the association of rural, hardworking and down-to-earth with the radical right correctly identifies the three strongest identities of these parties, even if the actual party strength differs heavily between countries.

The one identity where respondents have not yet adapted their mental map is high education: it is still associated with the mainstream right, even if majorities of the highly educated now vote for the left.

After reviewing perceptions of identity-party links in the aggregate, we now study whether identities predict these perceptions on the individual level. To do so, we use the propensity to vote (ptv) for the party that a respondent assigns to a specific identity as a dependent variable. For example, if a British respondent assigns the Tories to wealthy people, we use this respondent's ptv for the Tories as the dependent variable and regress its value on the respondent's own identification with wealthy people. Table 2 reports the results of such a regression for five identities: highly educated, hardworking, people who do social and educational work, rural, and having a migration background. These are all identities for which we also have an "objective" measure for group belonging which we can control for.

	Propensity to vote for party that respondent assigns to an identity				
	(1) High Educ	(2) Hard Work	(3) Soced Work	(4) Rural	(5) Migration
Closeness to ID	0.335**	0.298**	0.386**	0.345**	0.486**
	-0.02	-0.02	-0.017	-0.02	-0.017
Born in country	-0.104	-0.029	0.037	-0.088	-0.072
	-0.166	-0.171	-0.158	-0.171	-0.171
Educ: medium	0.182	-0.155	0.016	-0.284*	0.124
	-0.13	-0.131	-0.123	-0.133	-0.133
Educ: high	0.757**	-0.287*	0.127	-0.605**	0.391**
	-0.139	-0.132	-0.125	-0.135	-0.134
Inh: 50k – 500k	-0.069	0.108	0.311**	-0.293**	0.250*
	-0.101	-0.102	-0.095	-0.103	-0.103
Inh: >500,000	0.002	0.081	0.485**	-0.356*	0.460**
	-0.137	-0.138	-0.13	-0.144	-0.141
Germany	0.058	0.063	0.372**	0.814**	0.073
	-0.129	-0.13	-0.121	-0.129	-0.134
France	-0.956**	-0.743**	-0.745**	0.025	-0.860**
	-0.136	-0.138	-0.128	-0.139	-0.136
UK	0.258*	0.115	0.385**	0.823**	0.279*
	-0.115	-0.116	-0.108	-0.116	-0.117
Constant	3.621**	4.036**	2.550**	3.034**	2.160**
	-0.243	-0.271	-0.24	-0.275	-0.235
N	5972	5989	6305	6170	5146
r2	0.088	0.044	0.096	0.068	0.171

Table 2: Regressions of propensity to vote for assigned party on closeness towards social group

The regressions consistently show that a positive identification with a group is systematically related to a more positive evaluation of the party that respondents assign to this identity. Since both closeness and the propensity to vote are measured on a 10-point-scale, this relationship is quite strong: A one-

point increase in closeness to a group correlates with an up to 0.5 points higher evaluation of the assigned party. Thus, people generally believe that their ingroups vote for their inparties and that their outgroups vote for their outparties.

Thirdly, and following up on this, we study whether there is an asymmetry between the perceptions of ingroup-party links and the perceptions of outgroup-party links. We hypothesized that people have a more differentiated understanding of the voting behavior of their ingroups than of the voting behavior of their outgroups. To test this hypothesis, we measure the concentration of the perceived identity-party links within identity brackets, using a standard Herfindahl index. In each country, we have ten identity brackets per category: some people describe their closeness to a social group as a 1, others as a 2, and so on, up to a closeness of 10. Within each bracket, we can see how concentrated the perceived identity-party links are. If 50% of respondents who report a closeness of 2 assign the relevant identity to Party A, and 30% assign it to party B, the perceptions are more concentrated than if the respective numbers are 40% and 25%.

We then regress the bracket-specific Herfindahl index on closeness, weighting observations by the number of respondents in each closeness bracket, since for most identities only very few respondents report a closeness of 1 or 2, while responses cluster in the 5-8 range. This gives us a total of 680 observations (4 countries x 17 identities x 10 closeness brackets).

Model 1 in Table3 reports the results of a regression in which we only add country dummies while model 2 also adds dummies for each identity. The latter set of controls reduces the size of the effect, which, however, remains statistically significant: indeed, it seems that the perception of the voting behavior of outgroups is somewhat more schematic (i.e. more concentrated) than the perception of the voting behavior of ingroups.

We can look at this phenomenon more closely by investigating people's attitudes towards the parties that they assign to their ingroups and outgroups. The more schematic view of outgroups' voting behavior may also imply a more uniform attitude towards these parties. In other words: the tendency to assign an outgroup to an outparty should be stronger and more uniform than the tendency to assign an ingroup to an inparty.

In models 3 and 4, we measure uniformity as the standard deviation of the respondents' probability to vote for the party that they to assign to an identity. If everyone assigns a party they like (dislike) to an identity, this standard deviation is small, even if respondents may assign different parties. By contrast, the standard deviation increases when some respondents assign a party they dislike to their ingroup or a party they like to their outgroup.

	<u>DV: Herfindahl index of perceived identity-party- links</u>		<u>DV: Standard Deviation of propensity to vote for assigned party</u>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Closeness	-0.006** (0.00)	-0.002* (0.00)	0.051** (0.00)	0.042** (0.00)
Germany	-0.007 (0.01)	-0.007 (0.01)	0.181** (0.03)	0.182** (0.02)
France	-0.039** (0.01)	-0.038** (0.01)	0.114** (0.03)	0.112** (0.02)
UK	0.009 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.330** (0.02)	0.325** (0.02)
Constant	0.306** (0.01)	0.420** (0.01)	2.681** (0.03)	2.842** (0.04)
Controls for Identity	NO	YES	NO	YES
N	680	680	680	680
r2	0.076	0.463	0.386	0.541

The level of analysis is the group of people who identify with a specific strength with an ID

Table 3: Regressions of variation of assigned party on closeness towards social group

As the models demonstrate, respondents indeed tend to more schematically assign outparties to their outgroups than they do assign inparties to their ingroups. The closer respondents feel towards a social group, the more diverse their assessment of the parties they assign to these groups. The less close they feel to a group, the more uniformly they dislike the party they assign.

As the final step of our exploration of individual-level results, we study whether perceptions of identity-party links also have an effect on the individual links between identities and vote choice. Can we better predict individuals' own vote choices if we know about how they perceive identity-party-links?

Clearly, any relationship here probably runs both ways: When people do not have a clear idea about how a group votes, they will assign their own preferred party when they like the group but not when they dislike the group. Hence, vote choice clearly affects perceived identity-party-links. Nevertheless, the question "how do people like me usually vote" may also affect individual vote choices.

For this analysis, we further aggregate the party system into just three blocs: the left, the mainstream right and the far right (Oesch and Rennwald 2018, Bornschieer, et al. 2021a). Based on this coding, Figure 5 shows predicted probabilities from a logit model that regresses the decision to vote for a left party on country dummies, a set of control variables, and the interaction between closeness towards a social group and the perception whether this group votes for the left or not. As the graphs show, among people who identify with highly educated people, people who do social and educational work,

or people with a migration background, associating these groups with the left has a strong positive relationship with voting for the left. Among people who do not identify with these groups, by contrast, perceptions of group-party-links do not affect the own support for the left. For hard-work, the slopes are slightly different, as closeness massively reduces the likelihood of voting left among those who do not assign hard work to the left. Despite this difference, the fundamental message of all four graphs is the same: For people who do not identify with a group (“people not like me”), perceptions of how this group votes are not really associated with one’s own voting behavior. For people who identify with the group (“people like me”), however, these perceptions strongly correlate with one’s own vote choice.

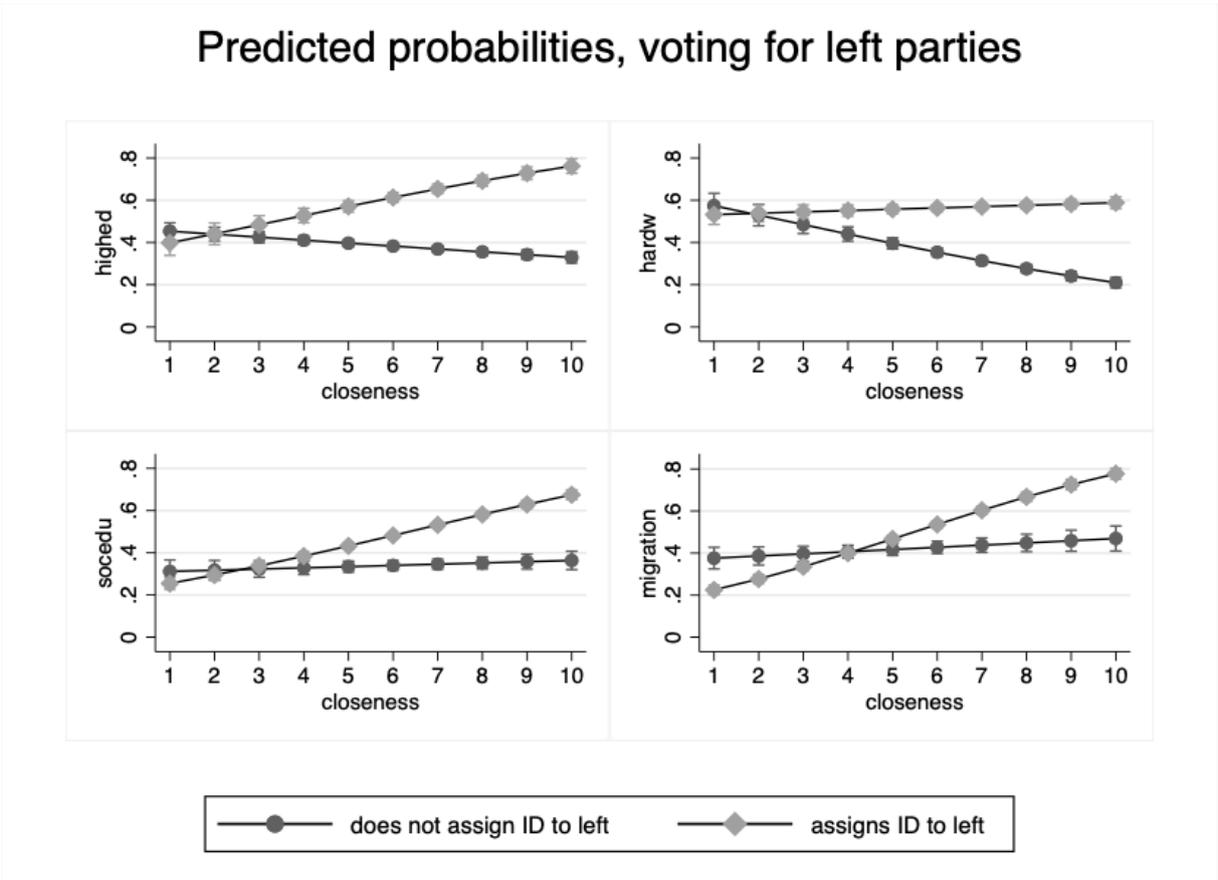


Figure 5: effect of closeness and perceived identity-party link on probability to vote for a left party.

Figure 6 shows a very similar pattern for radical right parties: closeness to highly educated and to hardworking people increases the probability to vote radical right among those who associate these identities with radical right parties. Closeness to people who do social and educational work or to people with a migration background reduces the probability to vote radical right among those who associate these identities with other parties. Thus, we can much better predict individuals’ vote choices if we know about their mental map of the party system.

Predicted probabilities, voting for farright parties

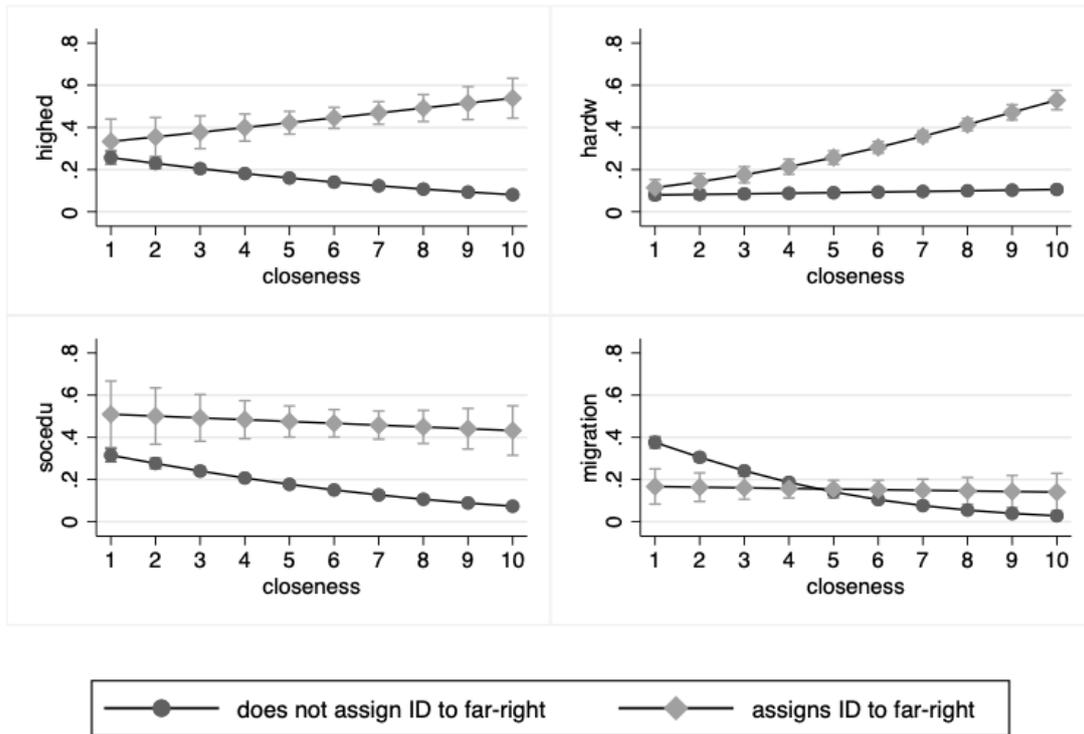


Figure 6: effect of closeness and perceived identity-party link on probability to vote for a radical right party.

Finally, we return to the aggregate level and take a deeper look at cross-country differences. Above, we have already seen that there are important cross-country differences with regard to the radical right: In countries with an early realignment, the far right tends to be associated with rural, down-to-earth and hardworking people, while these identities are still associated with mainstream parties in countries with a late realignment.

Here, we turn to differences within the Europhile left and focus on the comparison between Switzerland and Germany. We focus on these countries, since the UK party system is quite different from the other countries' party systems, due to the majoritarian electoral system. As a consequence, the distribution of perceived identity-party-links is much more concentrated on the two biggest parties than in the other countries. France, in turn, has a highly fragmented left, which does not really allow to focus on a single comparison between two parties.

Looking at Figure 7, we see a systematic difference between the two countries regarding the party-associations within the left camp. Here, we focus on four identities that are representative of the universalist pole of the universalist-particularist cleavage and that form strongholds of both parties in

both countries: cosmopolitans, cultured people, people who do creative work, and people who do social and educational work

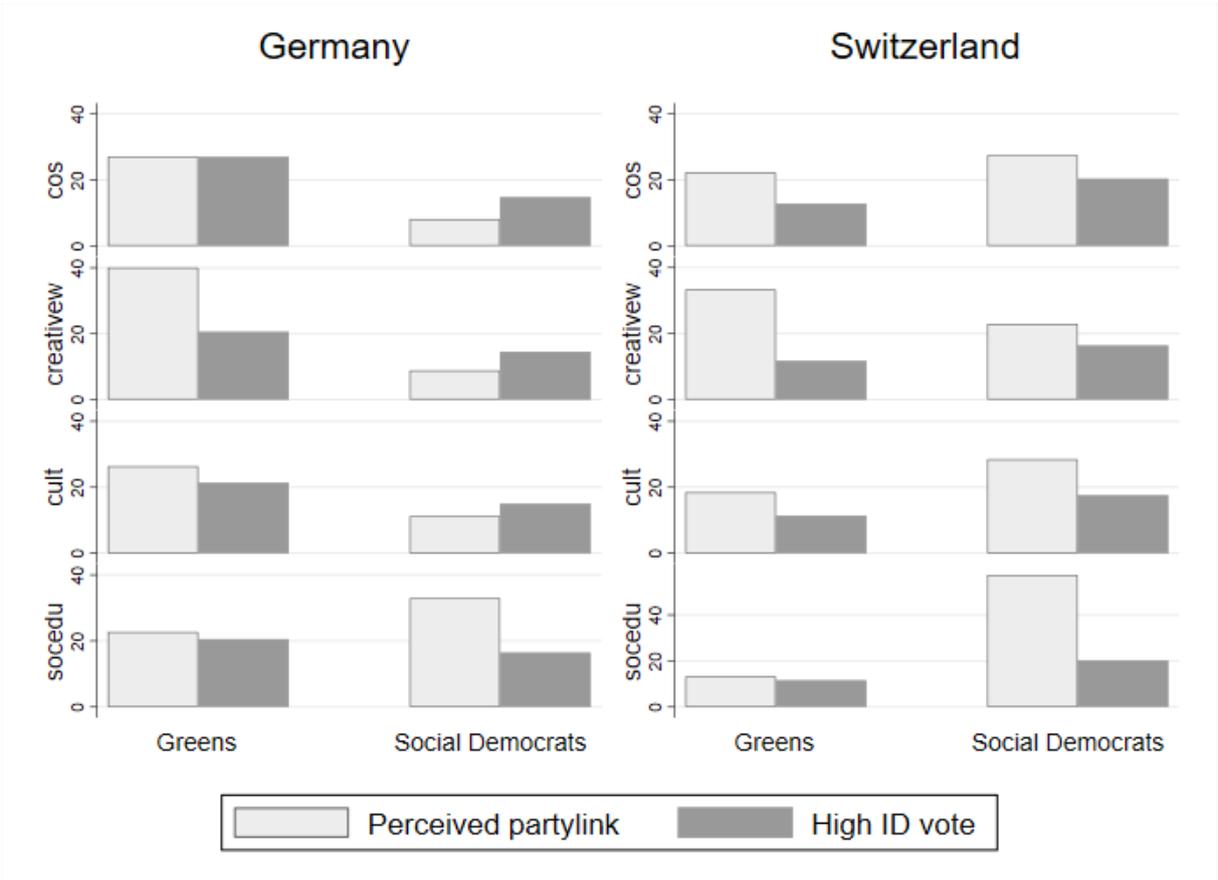


Figure 7: Perceived and real identity-party-links on the political left, Germany and Switzerland

All four identities are perceived to be strongholds of the Greens in both countries, as the perceived share of Green voters in these groups is even higher than the actual share. This is different for the Social Democrats: In Switzerland, they are also perceived to have strongholds among all four groups. In Germany, by contrast, respondents actually underestimate the strength of the Social Democrats among cosmopolitans, people who do creative work, and cultured people.

We interpret this pattern as evidence of the importance of the timing of the re-alignment of the party system. In Switzerland, re-alignment occurred rather early and Social Democrats transformed from a working-class party into a party of the educated middle class early on. In Germany, this transformation also occurred, but the connections to the working class, and the self-description as the party of the working class remained an important pillar of the party for much longer.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed voters' mental map of the party system in France, Germany, Switzerland and the UK from different angles. In this conclusion, we seek to bring the results of the individual analyses together and to evaluate them through the lens of cleavage politics.

In our reading, the results show that the emerging universalist-particularist-divide has a clear organizational element. The divide does not just structure the political attitudes of individual voters, but also structures their perception of the party system.

There are several individual pieces of evidence that support this conclusion: Respondents have a well-developed understanding of how the social groups that are the main exponents of this divide vote. For example, voters clearly associate cosmopolitans, culturally interested people or people who do creative work with the (new) left. At the same time, the radical right is mostly associated with down-to-earth and hardworking people.

Moreover, respondents' understanding of the party system is shaped by their own position in this divide: people systematically and schematically associate their outgroups with their outparties. Hence, they do not only have a clear conception of how "people like me" vote but an even clearer idea of how "people unlike me" vote. In fact, this idea is probably too clear: we found evidence that people hold rather schematic views of how their outgroups vote.

In addition, there is a clear correspondence between people's conception of how "people like me" vote and their own voting behavior: people think that they vote like other group members and that other group members vote like themselves.

Finally, we see that the details of respondents' mental maps depend on the country-specific histories of cleavage formation. The earlier the universalist-particularist divide started to structure the party system, the more structured is people's understanding of the party system.

In future iterations of this paper, we will seek to provide more systematic evidence for some of these claims. For example, we will seek to evaluate the overlap between perceived and actual identity-party-links quantitatively. While it is elucidating to see whether respondents correctly identify that most-preferred party of a social group, we will try to evaluate the accuracy of perceptions along the entire distribution.

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