Party positions and the changing gender gap(s) in voting

Abstract

Why, despite increased female support, do social democratic parties (SDPs) in most Western European countries face electoral decline? To study this puzzle, we harness a well-documented regularity – diminishing support for SDPs by manual workers and their increased support for the far right. We contend that this trend is intensified in contexts where the economic positions of SDPs align with market-oriented policies or converge with those of the far right. Additionally, as men are disproportionately represented among manual workers, this shift contributes to the reversal of the gender gap in support for SDPs. Drawing on public opinion data from 18 countries spanning 46 years, along with labor and party position data, our findings substantiate this argument.

Keywords: party positions, gender gap, voter behavior, social democratic parties, far right.

Word count: 9,181

1. Introduction

Ample evidence suggests that, across Europe, social democratic parties (hereafter SDPs) have not been gaining support overtime, and in fact, alternation of power between left-leaning and right-leaning parties and even decline in support for SDPs overtime have been a commonplace (e.g., Bandau 2023; Benedetto et al. 2020; Rennwald and Pontusson 2021). Yet scholars are also in agreement that women drifted toward SDPs (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2004, Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006, Manza and Brooks 1998, Inglehard and Norris 2000).

While at present women in Western democracies support progressive policies and vote for SDPs at higher rates than men ('the modern gender gap'), five decades ago, the gender gap in voting was in the opposite direction (e.g., Dassonneville 2021; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; Shorrocks 2018). Men were the ones to support SDPs at higher rates, while women disproportionately supported conservative parties ('the traditional gender gap'). A secular trend led to the narrowing of the traditional gap and in most countries to its reversal in the 90s or the aughts of the 21st century. This trend has been documented in both cross-national analyses (e.g., Giger 2009) and single case-studies (e.g., Hudde 2023).

Why, despite increased female support, do SDPs in most Western European countries face electoral decline? And how are these trends contingent on the positions taken by parties themselves? We investigate the tension between the drift of women toward SDPs and the decline in support for them in the context of European multi-party systems. In particular, we harness the well-established finding that manual workers withdrew their support for SDPs, utilize it to formulate a gendered analysis of occupational realignment of the vote, and analyze how party positions condition such realignment.

First, consistent with past findings, we hold that being occupationally vulnerable to immigration and trade, manual workers, a category in which men are overrepresented, have withdrawn their support for SDPs. At the same period of time, we observe that they have increased their support for the far right which presents itself as a guardian of dislocated interests of workers. The withdrawal is reflected in a reversal of the gender gap in support for SDPs. Second, we argue that these trends are contingent on economic positions taken by SDPs and far right parties (hereafter FRPs), as well as the degree to which manual sectors are dominated by men: we hypothesize that the change is increased when SDPs adapt market-oriented policies or converge along with the far right to centrist economic positions.

We utilize public opinion data in 18 democracies over a 46-year period (the Eurobarometer and European Social Survey between 1970-2002 and 2002-2016, respectively), along with labor data about skills relevant for different jobs and party placement data (the Chapel Hill Expert Survey) and find support for our argument: Manual workers, most of whom are men, withdraw their support from SDPs and show up in large numbers to support FRPs, a change that is then reflected in the reversal of the gender gap on the left. Importantly, we do not find realignment of support of manual workers toward other party families. The magnitude of these trends, we find, is contingent on economic positions taken by SDPs and FRPs: In contexts with high male domination of manual sectors, a moderately large shift in the economic position of SDPs toward the center is associated with a decline of 13.9 percentage points in the gender gap is support for it. Overall, our findings demonstrate a strong link between support for social democratic and far right party families, revealing an intricate party ecosystem where both party families vie for the support of manual workers. The link, we demonstrate, is contingent on economic positions of the

two party families.

The contribution of our study is twofold. First, we take a repeatedly demonstrated observation regarding increased support for the far right by workers and bring it to bear on a puzzle related to the support level and the gender gap in support for SDPs. The realignment of the vote along occupational and gender lines sheds light on the changing composition of the economic center-left and speaks to recent debates in the literature about groups that have shifted their support from it. The analysis of the contingency of these processes on party positions enables us to provide notable evidence of the capacity of political parties to shape these processes of realignment and to contribute to our understanding of the interrelationship between labor market structure and the party system. Second, cross national studies notwithstanding (Studlar et al 1998), spanning a period of 46 years and 18 countries, to the best of our knowledge, our analysis of this topic is the most extensive in scope undertaken to date.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews accounts of changes in support for SDPs as well as for FRPs. The following section develops our hypotheses. The empirical analysis is conducted in two steps. After presenting the data (Section 4), Section 5 sets the stage in establishing trends in party support among manual workers. Section 6 examines our hypotheses and demonstrates how these trends are contingent on economic positions of SDPs and FRPs. The final section concludes.

2. Shifts in voter support in multi-party systems

Departure from SDPs. Our paper speaks to a growing debate about the relationship between the decline in support for SDPs and the increased support for the far right. The longstanding

side of the debate maintains that male manual workers, the core constituency of SDPs in the past, shifted their support to the far right, mainly because of economic concerns (Betz 1994; Coffé 2018; Morgan and Lee 2018; Oesch 2008; Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Rydgren 2012). A recent challenge to this narrative takes issue with the argument about the transition of working-class voters from the SDPs to FRPs (Abou-Chadi et al 2021; Häusermann et al 2021). Instead, it contends that (i) SDPs have lost voters mainly to Green and mainstream right parties, and (ii) FRPs, on their part, enjoy growing support of both newly mobilized voters and former supporters of a variety of parties.

We reconcile the two narratives. We hold that overrepresented in manual jobs – the type of jobs most threatened by globalization and competition with immigrants – men as a group withdrew their support for SDPs (this is consistent with Benedetto et al.'s (2020) findings of a reduced propensity of manual workers to vote for SDPs). Simultaneously, they significantly increased their support for FRPs, with no comparable shift toward other party families during the same period. We contend that when SDPs adopt more market-oriented stances or converge economically with FRPs, male domination of manual sections will not be associated with greater support of men for SDPs compared to women.

While our argument is consistent with that of the first camp of scholars, it is not specifically in tension with the latter. First, we do not argue that the withdrawal of support for SDPs by manual male workers and their increased support for FRPs is the only movement in the field. Rather, we show that it is a significant and systematic one, and one that particularly pertains to long-term trends in support for SDPs, as well as the realignment of the gender gap in support of it. Second, our goal is not to map out all sources of growth in support for FRPs (we touch on this point immediately below), hence our argument is not in

tension with the finding regarding the diverse sources of support for FRPs.

Increased support for FRPs. Perhaps the most dramatic phenomenon in mass behavior in Europe in the past several decades has been the rise of FRPs. Taking different ideological forms (e.g., neo-fascist, populist) and focusing on both domestic policy of immigration and foreign policy vis- a-vis the European Union, FRPs have acquired high levels of support and have gradually infiltrated mainstream politics.

Political scientists have extensively studied the rise of the far right and its growing acceptance. One set of explanations relies on cultural factors such as symbols, values, and identity as predictors of support for FRPs in general and anti-immigrant sentiments in particular (for review, see Noury and Roland 2020). These explanations invoke concepts such as national identity (Sides and Citrin 2007), cultural sentiments (Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014), and traditional values (Inglehart and Norris 2017) that propel segments of the population to support the far right. Another family of explanations emphasizes interest-based considerations of native workers. These explanations invoke worker skill level (Scheve and Slaughter 2001, though see Hainmueller et al. 2015 for different results), the place of one's sector in a changing economy (Dancygier and Donnelly 2013), one's exit options and skill transferability (Pardos-Prado and Xena 2019) as proxies for economic hardship and labor market insecurity. Ortega and Polavieja (2012) find that the degree of manual skill dexterity required in a native worker's occupation is positively correlated with anti-immigrant sentiments, and holding a job that requires high human capital is positively correlated with pro-immigrant attitudes (see also Polavieja 2016). According to some within this strand of research, anti-immigrant sentiments promoted by FRPs are framed to appeal to those who have lost out due to globalization, usually blue-collar male workers whose jobs have been

put at risk by the influx of manual immigrant workers (Givens 2005; Jackman and Volpert 1996).

Cultural and structural explanations notwithstanding, support rate for FRPs varies by gender. Analyses of support for the far right have found that it enjoys support of men more than that of women (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; Coffé 2018; Givens 2005; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten 2018; Van der Brug and Fennema 2007). Studies offer different accounts for this regularity, spanning from the hierarchical and usually male-dominated structure of FRPs (Kitschelt and McGann 1997), through the antifeminist agenda promoted by them (Campbell and Erzeel 2018), to the claim that women possess a stronger need to control prejudice which in turn hinders their tendency to support FRPs (Harteveld and Ivarsflaten 2018). Relatedly, Harteveld et al. (2019) show that women are less likely than men to vote for small, extreme or socially stigmatized parties. Lastly, the ethics of caring, including sympathy for the disadvantaged catalyzed by feminist consciousness (Conover 1988) may pull women away from FRPs.

While we do not prescribe to one particular explanation for the greater support of men for FRPs compared to women, this established regularity in itself is fully consistent with our argument about the process underlying electoral decline of SDPs. In the next section, we develop our argument about changes in support for SDPs and elaborate on how we see the interlinks between the two.

3. Skill and occupational vulnerability

Students of political economy have highlighted the importance of identifying the advantaged and disadvantaged in the labor market. Depending on the focus, studies differ in both the

aspects of one's disadvantage they identify and their operationalization. One such example is Rueda's (2005) conceptualization, which focuses on materialized hardship in individuals' current labor market status and defines outsiders as those who are either unemployed or hold low-salary jobs. Another is Häusermann and Schwander's (2011), which conceptualizes outsiderness as belonging to an occupational group that has above-average rates of unemployment.

Inspired by this framework and adapting it to the question at hand, we focus on occupational vulnerability of workers to immigration and trade in particular. Individuals working in sectors that require manual rather than communication skills are vulnerable to both competition with immigrant workers who possess manual skills and offshoring of their jobs due to trade. Language and communication skills, on the other hand, often serve as a security fence for native workers and present a labor-market barrier for immigrants.[1] We can thus think of manual skills as indicators of occupational uncertainty at times of rapid globalization, trade and immigration, whereby the more (less) manual (communication) skill dexterity one's job requires, the more occupationally vulnerable one is.[2]

We classify workers by the skill dexterity required in the sector they work in and hence, we contend, the potential threat to their livelihood posed by immigration or trade. Manual workers might look for ways to offset that risk by supporting a party that explicitly promotes anti-immigrant rhetoric, opposes trade and presents itself as a fighter against

[1] This is consistent with Peri and Sparber's (2011) finding of limited substitutability between highly educated immigrants and native workers.

[2] Note that while the two strongly correlate ($r=0.79$, $p<.0001$), manual skills are different from routine skills, a predictor of job vulnerability vis-a-vis automation (e.g., Kurer 2020, Thewissen and Rueda 2019).

these “external” threats. This approach allows us to capture a worker’s vulnerability in the face of current *and* potential future shocks to the labor market. This logic resonates with recent work on the importance of economic risk in shaping policy preferences and political behavior (Rehm 2016). In particular, we expect that individuals working in sectors that require high manual skill dexterity would be more likely to support FRPs compared to the general population. Our next step contextualizes this expectation, specifying how positions of parties interact with labor market characteristics to affect the gender gap.

3.1 Political parties and labor markets

We contend that the support for SDPs by manual workers depends on the political context, and given that more men than women work in manual jobs, this is of particular relevance for men and in turn affects the gender gap for SDPs. We focus on two mediating factors: economic positions taken by SDPs as well as FRPs, and the gender segregation of the labor market.

Economic positions. In recent decades, SDPs have confronted structural and electoral challenges which shaped their ideological choices and economic policies. Processes of de-industrialization, technological shifts, and educational expansion prompted many SDPs in the 1990s to adopt third way economic solutions which were less popular among manual workers (e.g. Gingrich and Häusermann 2015). Additionally, fragmentation processes in European party systems led SDPs to compete with green and liberal parties for the growing educated urban middle class (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015). To appeal to this demographic, SDPs adopted progressive policies on cultural issues, risking potential loss of support among manual workers. After the global financial crisis and the Great Recession, SDPs faced challenging trade-offs between policies appealing to different constituencies:

adopting austerity measures to appeal to the median voter but contributing to their long-term decline, or opposing austerity policies that would keep them out of power (Bremer 2023). Amid these dynamics, spatial and temporal differences exist among SDPs, with some persistently promoting traditional social democratic macro-economic policies, others pursuing centrist or third-way solutions, and some shifting focus to other domains such as identity. We propose that the policies supported by SDPs are relevant for understanding vote shifts among manual workers.

We contend that, when SDPs take decidedly leftist positions, more manual workers tend to support it. Conversely, where SDPs take centrist policy positions, manual workers may be less inclined to stay loyal, perceiving the party as not being the ultimate guardian of their interests (see Karreth et al. (2013) for discussion of the electoral long-term effects of SDPs taking centrist positions). This will be observed where the far right, employing rhetoric of "own people first", is a viable alternative for voters, but not otherwise.

In conjunction with changes in policies pursued by SDPs that may serve as push factors for some of its constituencies, FRPs might play a role in pulling voters in their direction. While many FRPs pursue anti-immigrant rhetoric, they vary in their economic policies, with some endorsing laissez-faire policies and others advocating state intervention (Mudde 2007). Those endorsing redistribution tend to win the support of pro-welfare nativists, a group of voters often embedded in working class roots. Correspondingly, upper middle-class voters (measured in subjective terms) tend to support FRPs that hold pro-market economic positions (Harteveld 2016). Overtime, and in response to evolving political preferences in post-industrial societies, FRPs' programmatic appeal shifted toward the center on economic issues (de Lange 2007; Kitschelt 2004). We therefore expect *the*

combination of positions of the two parties to play a role in encouraging or discouraging voters to shift their support. When both SDPs and the far right take distinctly different positions, voters are less likely to shift their support. When their respective positions are closer together, however, the combination of push and pull factors might make it more likely for manual workers to shift their support.

Gender segregation of the labor market. As we show below, men generally work in manual sectors more than women do. Thus, withdrawal of support for SDPs by manual workers is in fact withdrawal by men more than by women. Given that male domination of manual sectors varies across contexts, we expect the degree to which party positions affect the gender gap to be contingent on male domination of manual sectors.

Overall, then, we hold that there is an interactive effect of party positions and the gender segregation of the labor market.

H1. Where SDPs pursue leftist (centrist) economic positions, greater male domination of manual sectors will be associated with a larger (smaller) gender gap for SDPs.

And while this relationship will be pronounced in the presence of the far right as a viable alternative, it will not be observed in the absence of it. Furthermore,

H2. Where SDPs and the far right pursue relatively similar (different) economic positions, greater male domination of manual sectors will be associated with a smaller (greater) gender gap.

In the next section we empirically examine these hypotheses.

4. Empirical strategy: Gender and occupation

The study of large overtime drifts in voter behavior in a multiparty system poses obvious

challenges: many potential drifts may take place simultaneously, making it difficult to empirically isolate the realignment of a particular group. Several single-country multi-wave panel surveys (e.g BES, GLES, LISS, SHP) allow for targeted analysis of individual voters overtime. The advantage of panel data notwithstanding, given that our argument draws on cross-country variation in social democratic and far right party positions and the structure of the labor market, we opt for more comprehensive cross-country data.

Our empirical analysis is two-pronged. We begin with a broad-brush analysis In section 5, where we examine trends in the gender gaps in general and voting trends among manual workers in particular. We focus on SDPs and FRPs (5.1), but also analyze other party families (5.2). This section also highlights the gender segregation of the manual labor market, enabling a nuanced analysis of voting trends through both gender and occupation lenses. Having set the stage in Section 5, Section 6 tests our hypotheses, analyzing how economic positions of SDPs and FRPs condition the trends established in Section 5.

4.1. Data and measurement

Voter support and the gender gap. We utilize Eurobarometer (hereafter EB) data between 1970-2002 as well as European Social Survey (hereafter ESS) between 2002-2016, forty-six years altogether (N=420,508 and 140,660, respectively). The former includes five countries from 1970 and quickly turns into nine in 1973, and then gradually grows in scope with each enlargement of the EU, reaching respondents from sixteen countries in the 2002 wave and a total of 339 country/year samples, while the latter includes eighteen countries in all waves with a total of 119 country/year samples (see sampling details in Appendix A).[3]

[3] Vote choice is not included in the Eurobarometer as of 2002.

We follow others by excluding East European countries from our analysis due to distinctive party competition patterns: Left-wing parties are frequently linked to a communist legacy, and the far right exhibits unique characteristics that differentiate it from its older West European counterparts (Kim and Hall 2023).

Consistent with previous studies, we defined the gender gap as the proportion of men supporting a particular party family minus the proportion of women who do so.[4] The following questions about electoral choice are taken for the analysis of the Eurobarometer and ESS data, respectively: "if there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you support?", and "which party did you vote for in the last election?". We categorized parties to party families drawing on ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2016) up to 1999 and the Chappell Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2014) from 2000 onward.[5] While we focus on two party families–SDPs and FRPs–our analyses also address the radical Left, Liberal, Conservative, and Christian Democrats party families.

Skills. We classify each sector respondents work in (first digit of ISCO code in our ESS data) by the degree to which it relies on manual or communication skills. This is done by utilizing and adapting D'Amuri and Peri (2014) categorization of O*NET characterization of occupations. We also adapt EB occupational categorization and match it with the appropriate ESS category (see Appendix C for detailed description). Thus, sectors requiring tasks such as oral comprehension, oral expression, speech clarity, written comprehension and written expression score high on communication skills while those requiring wrist-

[4] Given that only respondents who reported to have turned out in the recent elections were asked about their vote-choice, each of the 119 years samples separately screens for turnout in the last elections.

[5]We included only the parties that obtained at least a single parliamentary seat in the elections closest to the survey into party families.

finger speed and trunk strength score high on manual skills.

Party positions. We utilize the CHES data (2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014) to measure parties' positions on the economic and cultural dimensions. Both scales run from 0 to 10 where parties on the lower end of the former 'want government to play an active role in the economy' and those on the lower end of the latter are 'libertarian/post-materialist'. On the upper ends are parties that 'emphasize reduced economic role for government: privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, and a leaner welfare state' and parties that support 'traditional/authoritarian' positions (Bakker et al. 2014, see p. 1100 for cross validation).

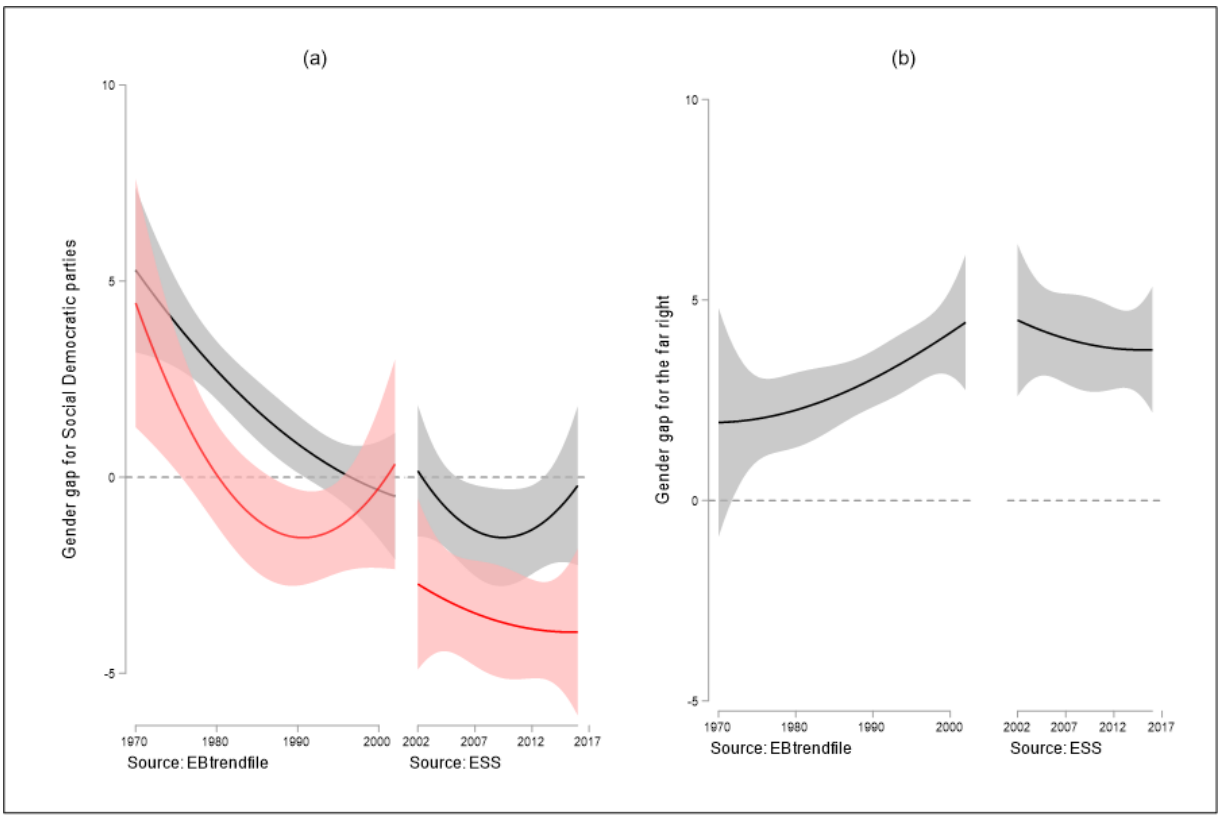
Gender segregation of the manual labor market. To measure gender segregation of manual sectors we calculated the difference between the number of men and women in the three most manual sectors, and divided this difference by the total number of manual workers (ESS 2002-2016) for each country/year. A score of 1 signifies complete male domination, 0 indicates perfect occupational gender balance, and -1 indicates complete female domination in these sectors. In all country/years, the three most manual sectors combined were found to be male dominated (two exceptions are Portugal 2012 (-0.14) and 2016 (-0.08)), with a maximum of 0.62 (Sweden 2008), indicating that four in five employees in manual sectors are men.

5 Gender gaps

A preliminary first step toward analyzing the link between the changing gender gap and occupational realignment is a descriptive examination of the gender gap in support for SDPs (at the presence and absence of the FRPs) and for FRPs. Figure 1 displays the two gender

gaps (panels a and b, respectively), drawing on the Eurobarometer and the ESS. On the vertical axis is the gap for the relevant party family (men minus women) and on the horizontal axis our 46-year period, based on the two surveys. In panel (a), cases (country/years) are split to those in which FRPs did not acquire a seat in parliament (in black) and those in which it acquired at least a single seat (in red). This admittedly crude dichotomization presents a clear descriptive difference in support for SDPs between the two sets of cases. In contexts where FRPs are strong enough to gain seats in parliament, the gender gap in support for SDPs is smaller ("more modern") and it flips signs earlier (though notice the temporary greater uncertainty around 2000). In other words, in contexts where the far right gained seats in parliament, fewer men (or more women) supported SDPs compared to cases where it did not. Figure 1b presents the gender gap for FRPs for the same scope of data. Here, too, consistent with past findings (e.g., Allen and Goodman 2021), the aggregate trend reflected in the data indicates a clear pattern whereby men are consistently more likely to support FRPs than women.

Figure 1. The gender gap in support for SDPs (a) and FRPs(b): 1970-2016



Note. Trendline is a polynomial regression of the gender gap on year, weighted by country. See Appendix F for a detailed Figure, presenting the gender gap for every country/year, and Appendix B for more information about party classifications. Data sources: Eurobarometer survey (1970-2002) and European Social Survey (2002-2016). Figure 1a: In red are country/years where far right parties attained at least a single parliamentary seat.

These merely descriptive empirical pieces suggest that there is possibly a link between the gender gap in support for SDPs and FRPs. We next turn to identify manual workers and scrutinize these gaps, honing in on this occupational group.

5.1 Manual workers: Support for SDPs and FRPs

To identify manual workers we append the data for each respondent with the degree to which their job requires manual and communication skill dexterity. The two are measured in terms of percentiles: the score indicates the percentile of the sector in the economy in terms

of use of the relevant skill such that high number indicates that workers in the sector use the skill with greater intensity compared to others (see Appendix C for sources and construction of these variables). Not surprisingly, the two are strongly and negatively correlated: the more a sector requires communication skills the less it requires manual skills (r = -0.98).

Table 1 presents the nine sectors as defined by the International Labor Organization according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) along with examples of occupations and their percentiles on manual and communication skills. At the bottom end of the list are the three most manual sectors: elementary occupations, immediately followed by craft workers and plant and machine operators and assemblers. In the analysis below we refer to workers in these three sectors as manual workers (the next sector in terms of use of manual skills is services which substantially differs from these three).[6] The average fraction of manual workers per country/year is 26% on average and varies from 13.3% (Switzerland 2012) to 52% (Portugal 2006).

The last column of the table presents the share of male workers in each sector, and hence provides information about the gender segregation of the labor market within each sector. The table shows three general areas that exhibit major segregation by gender. First is senior officials and managers (Sector 1) -- this communication intensive sector is heavily dominated by men. Second is Sectors 4 and 5: clerks and service workers. These sectors, too, rely on communication skills but are heavily dominated by women. Lastly, the three most manual sectors: crafts, machine and plant operators, and elementary (7, 8, and 9). The former two are distinctly male dominated while in the latter (mostly due to domestic

[6] Skill intensity scores are not available for skilled agricultural and fishery workers (3.82% of respondents) and armed forces (0.35%).

helpers) women are the majority. Overall, though, the three manual sectors combined are male dominated: drawing on ESS data (2002-2016), 69% of those working in manual sectors are men.

Table 1. Sectors by skill dexterity and gender

	Example Occupations	Manual skill percentile	Com. skill percentile	% men in sector
1. Legislators, senior officials and managers	Corp. managers, managers in restaurants and hotels	21.75	85.45	69
4. Clerks	Accounting and bookkeeping, secretaries	29.2	70.18	29
3. Technicians and associate professionals	Estate agents, medical assistants	37.83	67.42	47
2. Professionals	Computing professionals, lawyers, Advertising and marketing professionals, Teaching professionals	38.14	69.46	47
5. Service, shop and market sales workers	Cooks, police officers, travel guides, hairdressers, beauticians, sales workers	38.61	64.46	29
9. Elementary occupations	Street vendors, domestic helpers, garbage collectors, shelf fillers, kitchen helpers	71.19	29.86	37
7. Craft and related trades workers	Roofers, plumbers, sheet metal workers	75.32	18.1	86
8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers	Plant operators, textile, fur and leather plant operators	78.23	21.11	80
6. Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	Dairy and livestock producers, crop growers			

Note. Percentiles describe manual and communication skill intensity (Source: D'Amuri and Peri, 2014)

This gender-based segregation of the manual sectors has implications for our argument regarding the link between occupational vulnerability and the vote. Our argument pertains to all manual workers, irrespective of gender. However, since more women than men are occupied in communication-based sectors and more men than women are occupied in manual sectors, on average, their occupational interests push them in different directions. Fewer women than men have an interest to shift their support from SDPs or to support the FRP's on occupational grounds.

Figure 2 (panels a and b) presents the overtime rates of support for the SDPs and FRPs among women (black) and men (red) working in manual jobs.[7] As a reference point, the figure also presents the respective vote-share among the general population (in gray). Panel (a) shows that support for SDPs among manual workers declines at a steeper rate than that of the general population. Panel (b) displays analogous analysis for the far right, and demonstrates an increase in support overtime among women and men holding manual jobs at rates slightly higher than those of the general population.

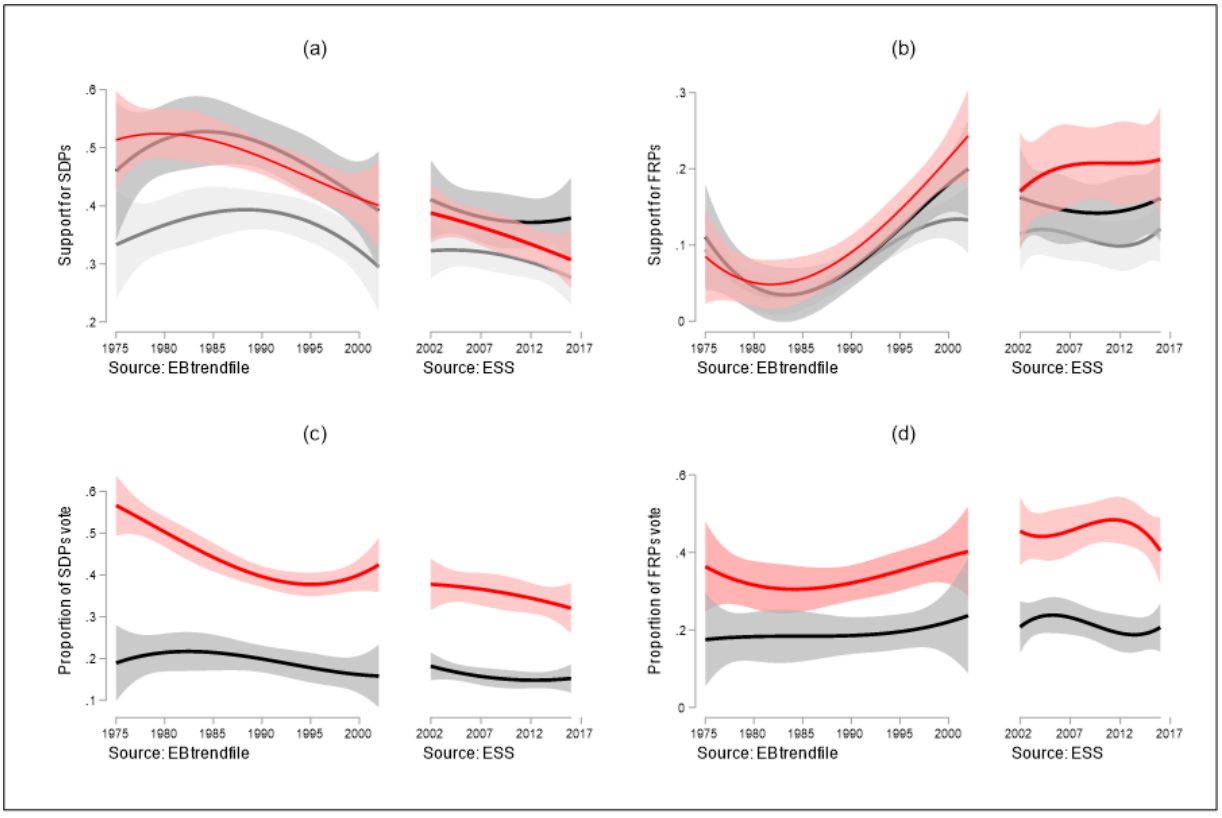
To complement the picture, Panels (c) and (d) of the figure present the proportion of men holding a manual job (in red) and that of women holding similar jobs (in black) among SDP and far right supporters, respectively. Consistent with the fact that more men are occupied in manual jobs compared to women (37% compared to 25% in the EB, and 35% compared to 16% in the ESS data), panel c demonstrates that the former are a larger sub-constituency among supporters of SDPs compared to the latter. Consistent with our

[7] For comparability of the two panels, data in the left panel are limited to country-years in which the far right attained presence (at least a single seat) in parliament.

expectation about the link between manual skill and a drift to the far right, it shows that the share of men holding manual jobs among SDP supporters declines overtime.

One might argue that this is simply an artifact of the declining share of manual workers in the general population in advanced industrialized democracies due to technological changes and global economic forces (See Kitschelt and Rehm 2022). Panel (d) refutes this argument. It shows that there is no decline in the share of men working in manual jobs among supporters of the far right, suggesting that the trend observed in support for SDPs is not merely a product of the decline of this segment of the population but rather an occupational and gender-based realignment of vote choice.

Figure 2. Support for SDPs and the far right: manual workers and others



Note. Rate of support for SDPs (a) and the far right (b) among men holding manual jobs (red), women holding manual jobs (black), as well as the general population (gray). Panels (c) and (d) display male (red)

and female (black) manual workers' share among supporters of the SDPs and FRPs, respectively. Italy is excluded from panels (a) and (c) as the largest leftwing party is classified as radical left. For a detailed figure including scattered data points for country years see Appendix F.

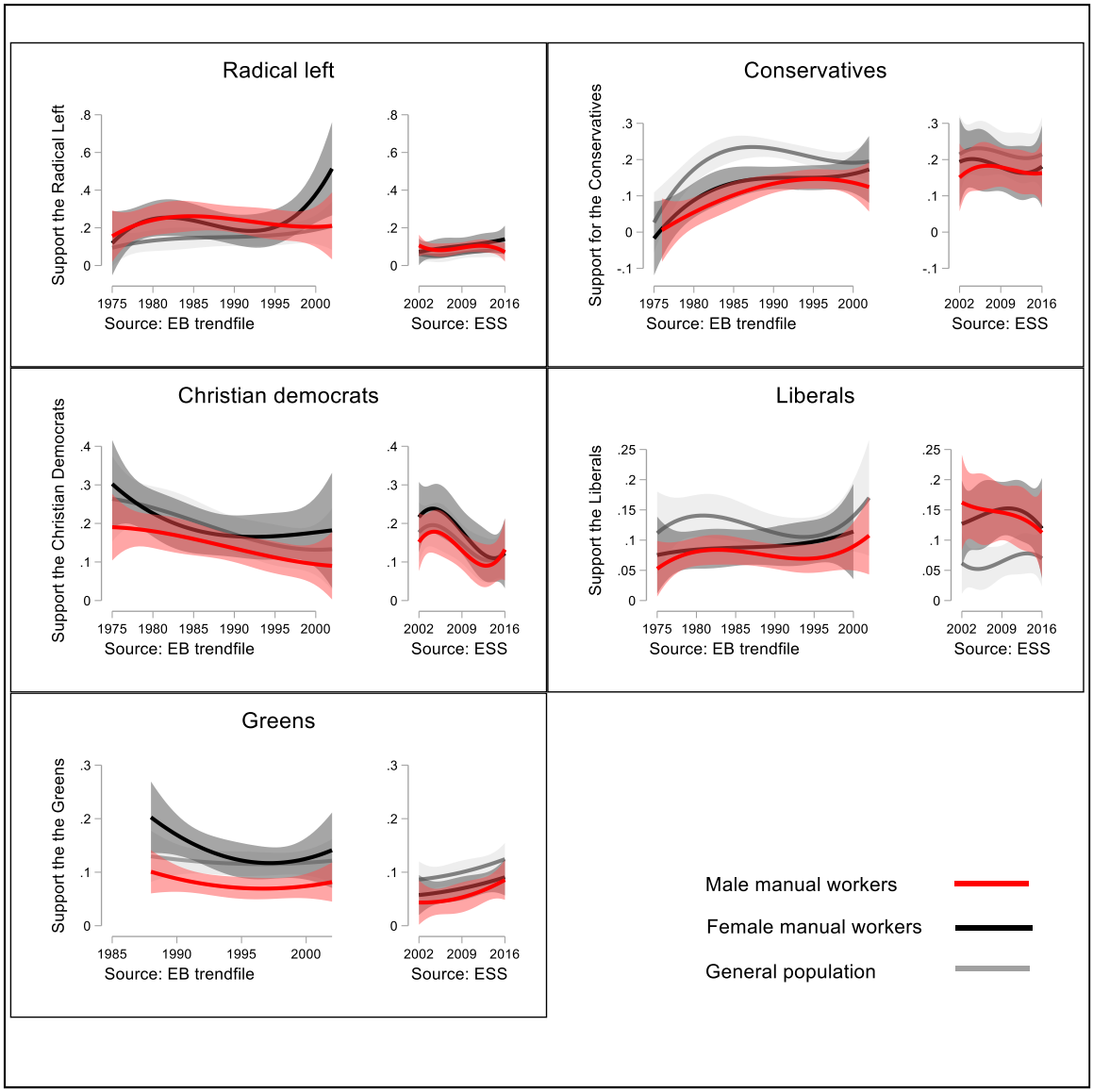
Overall, the analysis above suggests a possible link between the change of the gender gap in support for SDPs and that for the far right and highlights the potential role of manual skill in that process. The greater tendency to support FRPs among manual workers, combined with the fact that more men than women occupy manual jobs come together to a higher rate of support for FRPs among men compared to women.

5.2. Movement to other party families?

Although our focus is on the electoral links between SDPs and the far right, given the plethora of parties in the systems we study, one might wonder whether manual workers have found a political home in other party families. Figure 3 presents changes in rates of support of men and women holding manual jobs for five party families: The radical left, the Conservatives, Christian Democrats, Liberals and Greens. We juxtapose these trends with those of the general population. We begin our analysis with the party family that offers a different solution to dislocated interests: The radical left. Figure 3 shows no systematic change overtime in the support of male manual workers (in red) compared to those of the general population (in gray). We next examine trends for both the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats, the two key mainstream right party families. Our analysis of the Conservatives suggests that manual workers supported them at lower rates compared to the general population during the earlier part of the period. We find no difference from the general population in support for Christian Democrats. Support rates for the Liberal party among manual workers exhibit a somewhat unclear picture, being lower and higher than

those of the general population at different times, albeit the thick confidence intervals make it harder to draw an inference in this case. Lastly, although more female than male manual workers have rallied around green parties, the trends show no different direction to the ebbs and flows of their support compared to the general population.

Figure 3. Support for other party families



Note. Rate of support for the radical left, Conservatives, Christian democrats, the Liberals, and green party families among men holding manual jobs (red), women holding manual jobs (black), as well as the general population (gray).

Our interpretation of manual skills as a proxy for occupational vulnerability vis-à-vis immigration and trade is bolstered by two additional analyses. First, we utilize a two-round ESS module on labor-market competition (2004, 2010) that measures subjective job insecurity. In it, respondents were asked how difficult it would be for their employer to replace them and whether they perceived their job to be secure. We find that by both measures, perceived occupational vulnerability is higher among manual workers compared to non-manual workers (see Appendix F). Second, we examine economically motivated anti-immigrant attitudes of manual workers compared to non-manual workers. Our analysis finds that manual workers hold anti-immigrant sentiments more so than non-manual workers. They agree with the statement that immigrants are bad for the economy and disapprove of the acceptance of immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe at higher rates compared to their non-manual counterparts (on both, two-tailed t-test: $p < 0.001$).

Taken together, our findings provide support for our argument of occupational realignment: workers whose livelihood depends on manual skills and are thus particularly vulnerable to competition with immigrants or trade, most of whom are men, realigned their support away from SDPs. Such voters turned out in high numbers for FRPs but not for other party families. The next section complements this analysis from a different angle: it analyzes how such realignment corresponds to SDPs and FRPs economic and other policy positions.

6. Party Positions and the gender gap

Are the trends established above contingent on the economic positions of SDPs and FRPs? And if so, how? Recall that our first hypothesis linked the gender gap for SDPs to their

economic positions. In particular, it predicted that where SDPs take centrist policy positions, the more jobs in immigration-vulnerable sectors are occupied by men, *fewer men compared to women* will support SDPs.

To test this hypothesis, we estimate the gender gap in support for SDPs as a function of the economic positions of SDPs in the elections preceding the survey, gender segregation of manual sectors, as well as their interaction, both measured as described in Section 4.1. Importantly, our analysis also includes the positions of both SDPs and FRPs on the second dimension (Hall and Evans 2022; Kitschelt 1994). This allows us, among other things, to capture cross-pressures of low-education/low-income voters in post-industrial contexts (Kitschelt and Rehm 2022). Additionally, it includes the economic position of the latter and country and year fixed effects. Results of this estimation are reported in Model 2 in Table 2 (Model 1 is similar, albeit without the controls).

Based on the reported coefficients, Figure 4a presents substantive effects: the marginal effect of gender segregation of manual sectors on the gender gap in support for SDPs (on the vertical axis), modified by the economic position of the largest SDP in the election preceding the survey (on the horizontal axis). All other variables are held constant at their respective mean. Where SDPs take a traditional social democratic position (on the left side of the figure), greater male domination of the manual labor market translates to a larger gender gap in support for SDPs. This positive correlation implies that where more men compared to women work in manual jobs, more men compared to women support SDPs. As we move to the right on the horizontal axis and social democratic parties adopt more market oriented positions, this relationship fades away -- greater occupational vulnerability among men does not translate to greater support for SDPs among men compared to women. The

magnitude of the effect is substantial. Given high male domination of manual sectors (one standard deviation above the mean), a shift in the economic position of SDPs toward the center from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above it, is associated with a decline of 13.9 percentage points in the gender gap.

Table 2. Gender gap in support for SDPs

Gender gap for SDPs					
	H2			H3	
	FRP present		FRP not present	FRP present	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male domination of manual sectors	0.64*	1.13***	-0.02	-0.21	-0.12
	(0.26)	(0.30)	(0.34)	(0.14)	(0.32)
Economic position of SDP	0.04	0.07**	0.01		-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)		(0.01)
Ec. position of SDP * male dom. of manual sectors	-0.20**	-0.34***	-0.04		
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)		
Cultural position of SDP		-0.03*	0.02	-0.02+	-0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic position of FRPs		-0.01			-0.01
		(0.01)			(0.02)
Cultural position of FRPs		-0.01+		-0.01	-0.01
		(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)
Distance in ec. position b/w FRPs and SDP				-0.02	
				(0.01)	
Distance in ec. position * male dom. of manual sectors				0.10*	
				(0.05)	
Ec. position of FRPs * male dom. of manual sectors					0.02
					(0.05)
Country and year FEs	√	√	√	√	√
Constant	-0.12	0.01	-0.05	0.21+	0.24
	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.17)
Observations	55	50	44	51	52
R-squared	0.72	0.79	0.47	0.69	0.67

Note. All models include country and year fixed effects. Gender gap figures are extracted from the ESS.

Note that consistent with our expectation, where the far right is not a viable alternative for

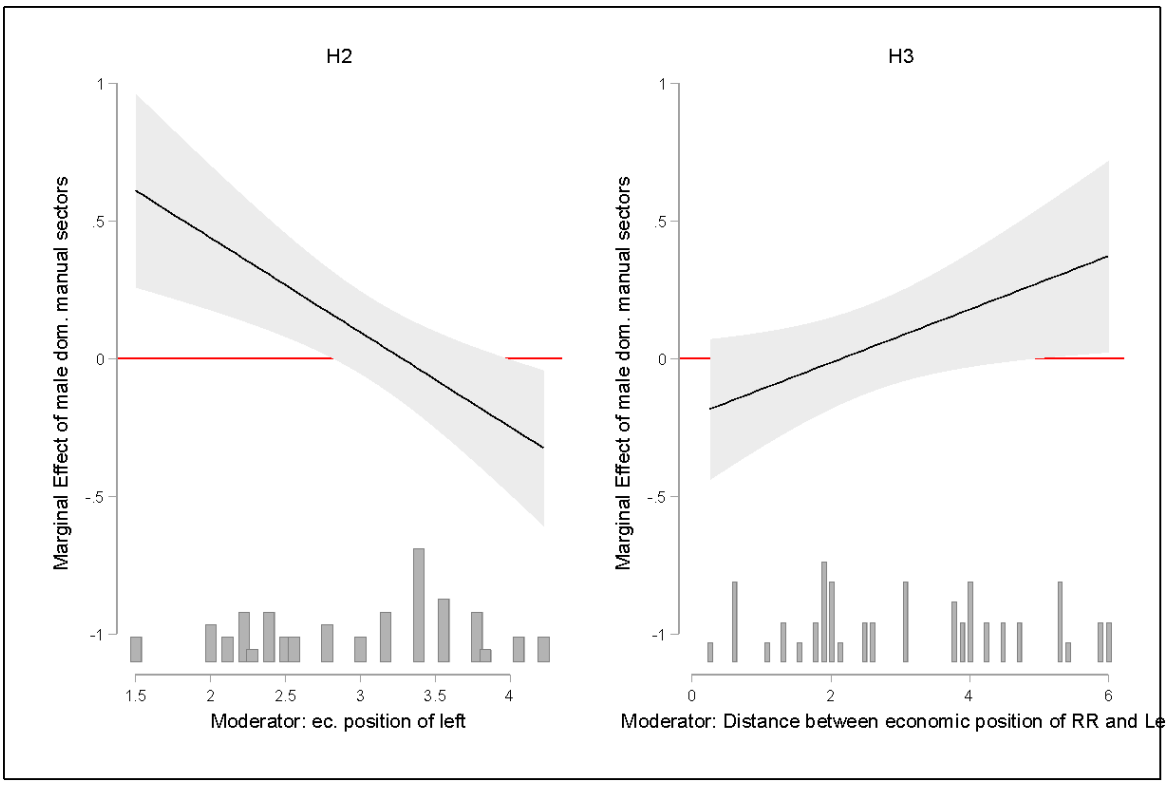
voters (Model 3), neither ideological placement of SDPs nor gender segregation of the manual labor market are correlated with the gender gap of the vote. Overall, then, our first hypothesis finds support in the data.

We turn to our second hypothesis, this time combining push and pull factors. As a reminder, our expectation was that where the economic positions of SDPs and the far right are clearly distinct, the more jobs in immigration-vulnerable sectors are occupied by men, *more men compared to women* will support the left. However, as the economic positions of the two parties converge, workers are likely to shift their support and thus cases where more men working in immigration-vulnerable sectors will be associated with *fewer men compared to women* supporting SDPs.

To test this hypothesis, we repeat the exercise above with the gender gap for SDPs as a dependent variable, this time labor market segregation is moderated by the economic distance between the SDPs and the FRPs. Here, too, we include the party positions on the cultural dimension as a control variable, as well as country and year fixed effects. Model 4 in Table 2 reports the raw result of this estimation, based on which, Figure 4b presents substantive effects, this time with economic distance between the two parties on the horizontal axis. The effect is as predicted, though statistical significance is weaker than above. Let us begin with the right-hand side of the figure. When the economic positions of SDPs and FRPs are significantly apart, a large number of men compared to women working in manual sectors is associated with a large number of men compared to women supporting the left. As we move leftward and SDPs and FRPs converge toward one another in their economic policies, greater occupational vulnerability of men does not translate to greater support for the left by men compared to women.

To complete the picture, we examined the pull factor alone. Analogous to Model 3, Model 5 examines the effect of male domination in the manual labor market as modified by the economic position of FRPs. Neither the constitutive terms nor the interaction are statistically significant.

Figure 4. Estimated effect of labor market segregation on the gender gap



Note. 95% confidence intervals are marked. Results are based on estimation reported in Table 3, Models 2 (H2) and 5 (H3).

In sum, these results about the relationship between the economic positions of SDPs and the FRPs and the gender gap for the SDPs support our argument about the capacity of political parties to shape processes of occupational realignment. Where the SDPs or both the SDPs and the far right moderate their economic positions such that they shift toward the center, the far right successfully presents itself as a substitute for the SDPs in guarding

dislocated interests of occupationally vulnerable manual workers. Yet, when SDPs maintain their traditional leftist economic positions or distinctly differ from FRPs, they can retain their traditional constituency of manual workers and halt, to an extent, processes of occupational realignment.

7. Conclusion

What explains the decline in electoral success of SDPs in spite of the increased support for them among women over the past five decades? This study shows that voting behavior of manual workers–most of whom are men– reconciles the tension between the two trends and explains the change in the gender gap for SDPs. Importantly, the reversal of the gender gap for SDPs is most evident in cases where SDPs moderate their economic positions and in those where SDPs and FRP converge toward one another in their economic positions.

Certainly, the gender gap is influenced by factors extending beyond party positions and manual labor market segregation. Demographic shifts such as female educational expansion and with it the increased participation of women in the labor market and the influx of migrants to Europe intensifying competition between natives and immigrants in the manual labor market, as well as other large-scale shifts such as the decline of labor unions, traditionally used by parties to mobilize core constituencies, all play a role in shaping its scale and pace (for more discussion on these processes see Ford and Jennings 2020). Our study opens the door to exciting new research avenues. We highlight three extensions here. The first extension has to do with party positions. In our analysis, we contextualized manual workers' realignment of the vote using a well-established, albeit quite general indicator of party economic position. While the left-right economic scale offers a helpful heuristic for

party positions, one might seek to refine the measurement of economic policy position, as recent research goes beyond the unidimensional scale of more or less public spending. Parties differ in their emphasis: some focus on income while others on human capital (Beramendi et al. 2015), some on benefits directed at insiders while others at outsiders, some on redistribution while others on social insurance (Häusermann 2018). A more nuanced analysis would take into consideration the different aspects of socio-economic policies pursued by different parties, and examine how they affect occupationally vulnerable workers.

The second has to do with occupational vulnerability. In our analysis, we point at communication as a key barrier to integration of immigrants and assume that occupations that require communication skill dexterity are harder for immigrants to penetrate. Although a good proxy for the challenge of integration, the degree to which language serves as a barrier for immigrants may vary. Due to historical or cultural ties and colonial history, some relevant host languages are widely spoken in some countries of origin, while others are not. Additionally, linguistic similarity varies across languages making some easier to get command of than others, depending on one's language of origin. Thus, a possible extension of our analysis might entail a more nuanced classification of languages required and those spoken by groups of immigrants in different countries.

Lastly, future research could break down our pooled analysis into groups of countries based on divergent labor market structures, regional differences, and aspects of institutional context. Such analysis would examine the relationships unpacked in this study under different contexts such as Southern vs. Northern European, or different welfare regimes.

Given the considerable variations among countries, such unpacking will further shed light on the mechanisms behind the relationships analyzed in this study.

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