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Electoral Fortunes of Social Democratic Parties: Do Second Dimension Positions matter?

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The dramatic decline in vote shares on the mainstream left in many recent elections has led to a renewed discussion about a crisis of Social Democracy. One popular argument is that Social Democratic decline is the result of these parties' liberal cultural positions and pro-EU stance, with both topics increasingly salient for their traditional voters, particularly among the working class. However, we lack comparative evidence testing this argument. In this paper, we combine CHES data on party positions with ESS survey data to analyse the electoral effects of Social Democratic parties' second-dimension and EU positions. In addition, we focus on whether support from different socio-economic groups is sensitive to these positions. In contrast to much public debate, we find that more authoritarian/nationalist and more anti-EU positions are if anything associated with lower rather than greater electoral support for Social Democratic parties.¹

Keywords: European integration, immigration, Social Democratic parties, party competition, elections

Word count: 5742

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Introduction

Social Democratic parties have witnessed steep electoral decline in the past 15 years. For example, the parliamentary elections in France and the Netherlands in 2017 saw the PS and PvdA scoring below 10 percent, some of the worst results for Western European mainstream left parties in the post-war era. Hence, Social Democratic parties are facing a fundamental crisis in their electoral and political relevance.

The electoral decline of Social Democratic parties is often linked to their failure to attract ‘losers of globalization’ [Kriesi et al. \(2008\)](#). In the transforming socio-economic structures of post-industrial societies, a new cleavage pitches well-educated, high-skilled workers against those with lower or more specific skills. Some argue that Social Democratic party positions on economic issues explain the extent to which they attract or repel these two groups (e.g. [Karreth et al., 2013](#); [Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019](#)).

However, this cleavage also divides voters on increasingly politicized cultural issues such as gender equality, immigration and European integration ([Hutter et al., 2016](#); [Green-Pedersen & Otjes, 2019](#)). While working-class and less-educated voters on average prefer more culturally conservative, authoritarian and nationalist positions, the urban middle class and socio-cultural professionals prefer more cosmopolitan and universalist policies ([Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014](#)). These issues therefore present Social Democratic parties with a strategic challenge ([Kitschelt, 1994](#)).

Hence, in public debates and academic work, the electoral decline of Social Democratic parties is often linked to their progressive positions on issues such as

immigration, gender equality and European integration. These positions, the argument goes, have alienated the core constituency of social democracy, the working class. These voters have found a new home with populist radical right parties. Crucially, the potential gains among other electoral groups cannot outweigh those losses. Thus, it is argued that if Social Democracy does not reverse its progressive positioning, then electoral decline is inevitable. In the words of the former leader of the German Social Democratic Party Sigmar Gabriel: ‘Winning over the hipsters in California cannot make up for losing the workers of the Rust Belt’ (Der Spiegel, 18/12/2017). The Danish parliamentary election 2019 that saw the Danish Socialists return to government after pursuing an anti-immigrant strategy, has fueled this debate.

In this article we evaluate this explanation for Social Democratic party decline. We see two gaps in existing research. First, while many studies indeed describe the preferences of working-class and less-educated voters on the second dimension (see e.g. [Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014](#); [Oesch & Rennwald, 2018](#)), there is no comparative work that links actual electoral behavior to Social Democratic party positions on this dimension. Second, existing work has not examined countervailing effects of second-dimension strategies on educated, middle-class voters, arguably now the core support group of Social Democratic parties ([Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015](#); [Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019](#); [Gingrich, 2017](#)). If such voters respond positively to progressive strategies, this may offset declines in working-class support. Progressive positions may therefore not lead to lower Social Democratic vote shares even if working-class voters react negatively to them.

We test these arguments combining data on party positions from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey ([Bakker et al., 2014](#); [Polk et al., 2017](#)) with individual-level data

from the European Social Survey. Focusing on ‘old EU’ countries, we investigate how Social Democratic positions on the cultural dimension and on European integration affect their electoral support. We also analyze how different socio-economic groups respond to these positions, allowing us to evaluate the micro-level mechanisms behind these parties’ electoral fortunes.

In contrast to the narrative described above, we find that more progressive and more pro-EU positions are if anything electorally beneficial for Social Democratic parties. For the cultural dimension, this is largely driven by positive reactions to liberal stances among young and highly-educated voters and among socio-cultural professionals. At the same time, more conservative positions do not seem to increase support among less educated and working class voters.

Beyond exploring the reasons for social democratic party decline, this article also contributes more broadly to research on party competition. It illustrates how complex the electoral consequences of the politicization of second dimension issues and European integration can be. We need more research on the strategies mainstream parties pursue a variety in response to the changing content of political debates. Often perceived as passive witnesses to their own decline, mainstream parties may instead affect their own electoral fortunes through the positions they pursue.

The emergence of second dimension politics

Accounts of the crisis of Social Democracy are certainly not new to political science and public debates. Famously, [Przeworski & Sprague \(1986\)](#) argued that as social democratic parties lose their capacity to shape class as a vote-defining identity,

they lose their appeal to the working class, their core constituency. This dilemma means that a shrinking working class inevitably lead to Social Democratic electoral decline. Similarly, [Evans & Tilley \(2017\)](#) examine how social democratic parties moved to the centre in the late 1990s. In the medium term, this weakened these parties' claim to represent the working class and led voters to abandon Social Democratic parties (see also [Karreth et al., 2013](#)). This story of social democratic decline therefore places economics at the centre.

A second explanation of social democratic decline focuses on the emergence of new issues, specifically cultural issues such as immigration and European integration. The solidification of this two-dimensional space has been a central development in political competition over the past decades. From the late 1960s the content of politics shifted towards more complex constellations of preferences ([Inglehart, 1977](#)). The simplest accounts of this rising complexity posit that a second dimension has been added to the first, economic dimension (though some argue that the second dimension has merely been transformed; see [Kriesi et al. \(2008\)](#)). This second dimension contains topics related to the organization of society and to cultural and moral issues, encompassing topics such as immigration, law and order or gender equality. The dimension has been variously termed cultural, 'new politics', libertarian-authoritarian and Green/alternative/libertarian vs. traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (GAL-TAN). The backlash against the progressive achievements of the 1968 generation has made societal organization and especially immigration a vote-defining issue ([Green-Pedersen & Otjes, 2019](#)).

A distinct development has been the politicization of the question of European integration ([de Vries, 2007](#)). Initially, this topic was famously a 'sleeping giant' characterised by a 'permissive consensus' ([Hooghe & Marks, 2009](#)). How-

ever, politicization increased as integration began to touch upon broader areas of politics. It finally emerged as a ‘constraining dissensus’ after the European economic and refugee crisis and the success of Eurosceptic parties ([Hooghe & Marks, 2009](#)).

Pooling sovereignty has implications for both the economic and the cultural dimension ([Kriesi et al., 2008](#)), but for Western Europe, EU integration has become a issue strongly associated with the second dimension ([Prosser, 2016](#)). Social Democrats in countries all took on clear pro-European stances in the mid-80s as the integration process started to encompass issues relating to regulation subsequent to the Single European Act ([Evans & Mellon, 2019](#)). At the same time, debates about European integration came to be framed more in terms of national sovereignty. In addition, the free movement of people and asylum policy led anti-immigration parties to criticise EU policies, particularly after EU enlargement in 2004 ([Kriesi et al., 2008](#)). Hence, debates on EU integration are today related to both the first and second dimensions, but with the second dimension now a stronger predictor of support for the EU ([Prosser, 2016](#)).

The challenge of EU and second-dimension politicization

The politicization of the second dimension and of EU issues forced Social Democratic parties to compete on a dimension where their traditional electorate has more heterogeneous preferences and where they compete with new challenger parties. The winner-loser divide cuts right through the traditional electoral coalition

of social democratic parties: working-class voters and highly-educated middle-class voters. Higher-educated voters, often in professions termed ‘socio-cultural’, e.g. in education, the media or health care, tend to hold left-libertarian positions; in contrast, working-class voters tend to hold more left-authoritarian views ([Oesch & Rennwald, 2018](#)). A similar divide exists on the EU issue: educated, middle-class voters tend to support EU integration, both because they may benefit economically and because they are generally supportive of cultural openness. Working-class voters are more sceptical of integration, particularly when framed in cultural terms ([Evans & Mellon, 2019](#)).

Hence, Social Democratic parties face a fundamental dilemma when it comes to choosing policy positions on the second dimension and the EU. Social Democratic parties did not tend to have clear positions on second-dimension topics before the emergence of this dimension ([Kitschelt, 1994](#)), and the question of European integration only fully emerged in the 1980s. However, Social Democratic parties could not freely choose potentially vote-maximizing positions on these topics, as they were constrained by ideological predispositions, activist preferences and interest group influence ([Kitschelt, 1994](#); [Marks & Wilson, 2000](#)). As parties committed to principles such as egalitarianism and internationalism, Social Democratic parties on average ended up choosing broadly pro-EU stances and liberal positions on second-dimension issues ([Kitschelt, 1994](#); [Abou-Chadi, 2016b](#)).

Some authors see this general tendency toward more progressive and pro-European positions as the main reason for the electoral decline of Social Democratic parties. For example, Goodhart highlights the lack of working-class Labour voters, which he attributes to the fact that the party now courts middle-class ‘Anywheres’ rather than working-class ‘Somewheres’ ([Goodhart, 2017](#)). Similarly,

[Eatwell & Goodwin \(2018\)](#) argue that 'it seems incredibly unlikely that social democrats will be able to win back workers unless they are willing to modify their culturally liberal stance on immigration. Calls for the left to abandon 'identity politics' are in the same vein (e.g. [Lilla, 2018](#)). These claims have had significant public impact, with many Social Democratic politicians and leaders formulating similar points.

Academic research also shows that left-authoritarian voters are a sizeable portion of the electorate yet badly represented in most party systems ([van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009](#)). In addition, voters in many systems are more Eurosceptic than mainstream parties ([Hobolt et al., 2009](#)). Similarly, [Evans & Mellon \(2019\)](#) argue that Labour moved towards pro-European positions and allowed large-scale immigration from new member states from 2004 onwards, causing the party to lose support from generally Eurosceptic and anti-immigration working class voters. Hence, it might make electoral sense for Social Democratic parties to appeal to such voters, who otherwise might be tempted to vote for the radical right ([Lefkofridi et al., 2014](#); [Oesch & Rennwald, 2018](#)). One way to do so would be to shift towards left-authoritarian voters on cultural issues.

However, there are two reasons why this explanation may not be accurate. First, while Social Democrats are clearly pro-European parties, their stance on libertarian-authoritarian issues is not quite as clear. [Wagner & Meyer \(2017\)](#) and [Bale et al. \(2010\)](#) argue that mainstream parties have on average become more conservative on second dimension issues, especially immigration ([Abou-Chadi, 2016a](#); [Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018](#)) as well as European integration ([Meijers, 2017](#)). Hence, Social Democratic parties' strongest losses coincide with a movement toward more conservative second-dimension positions.

Second, a more fundamental objection is that Social Democratic parties may gain from holding progressive positions on the second dimension. Social Democratic parties increasingly rely on middle class support ([Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015](#)). These voters generally support European integration and have more progressive attitudes, including on immigration ([Pardos-Prado & Xena, 2019](#)). Hence, looking towards educated middle-class voters as the core group of supporters may have been a sensible long-term strategy for Social Democrats ([Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019](#)).

Of course, some aspects of party competition are difficult for Social Democratic parties to affect through their autonomous decisions. For one, positional competition does not happen in isolation: other parties' positions should determine the electoral appeal of mainstream left positions. For example, it may be relevant how left-libertarian and centre-right parties react to the politicization of second dimension issues. While we include these aspects as much as possible in our empirical models, it is difficult to fully capture the dynamics of position-taking across party systems. A further important aspect is issue salience. It may be that positional decisions are less relevant for explaining Social Democratic decline than the increasing importance of issues where other parties have ownership or more attractive position([Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010](#); [Lefkofridi et al., 2014](#)). Long-term issue ownership reputations may make the task of appealing to voters by taking up more anti-immigration positions quite challenging.

However, Social Democratic parties only have a limited impact on issue salience or on other parties' positions. Yet, they may have some freedom in the policy positions they choose. Hence, we aim to determine how these parties' second dimension positions are associated with their vote shares overall and how they specifically ap-

peal to different groups within the electorate. In the following section, we therefore test the alternative explanations of Social Democratic decline.

Data

We combine data on party positions from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) ([Bakker et al., 2014](#); [Polk et al., 2017](#)) with individual-level data from the European Social Survey (ESS). We combine the data so that the year for the party position matches the election year that the respondent is referring to. Our data covers 42 elections in 13 West European countries from 2002-2016; we do not include CEE countries since Social Democracy never achieved comparatively prominent, stable positions in these states and dynamics of party competition follow a different logic there. Our data covers (ESS rounds in parentheses): Austria (1, 3, 7), Denmark (1, 3, 4, 6), Finland (1, 2, 4, 6), France (1, 4, 6), Germany (1,3,5,7), Greece (1, 2, 4), Ireland (1, 4, 5), Italy (1, 6), Netherlands (1, 4, 5), Portugal (1, 3, 5, 6), Spain (1, 2, 4) and Sweden (2, 3, 5), UK (1, 3, 5). We include the main Social Democratic party in each country.

The dependent variable is vote choice at the previous election (1 if Social Democratic, 0 if not). We exclude non-voters, but Appendix Figure [A1](#) and Figure [A2](#) show that results do not differ substantially if non-voters are included.

We use the CHES' 0-10 GAL-TAN question to assess the impact of second-dimension positions. This question focuses less on immigration and more on questions of rights, freedoms and morality. However, [Kitschelt & Rehm \(2014\)](#) argue that immigration and citizenship ("group") are distinct from morality issues such as abortion or LGBT rights ("grid"). While we would have liked to analyze parties'

immigration position in detail, stances on immigration have only been included in the CHES since 2006. In the Appendix, we nevertheless demonstrate how immigration positions show a similar pattern as GAL-TAN and EU positions.

Figure 1 shows how social democratic parties are distributed on GAL-TAN and Europe over time. There is substantial variation in social democratic parties' GAL-TAN positions. There has also been a move towards more liberal positions. This contrasts with findings in Wagner & Meyer (2017), but note that the positions on immigration do not show such a clear trend towards progressivism.

Figure 1 also shows that there is relatively little variation in Social Democrats' positions on the EU (response scale 1-7). No Social Democratic party takes even a moderately Eurosceptic stance; the only sceptical position is the post-Brexit UK Labour Party in 2017. However, not all parties are at or near 7 on the 1-7 scale. Overall, party-level variation in SD positions is from liberal to centrist position on GAL-TAN and from strong to moderate pro-EU stances on European integration.

We also analyze how age, education and social class determine reactions to social democratic party positions. We base our class coding on the category scheme by Oesch (2006), code education into three categories (tertiary; upper secondary and non tertiary; lower secondary or less) and use a continuous measure for age. Based on our discussion above we should find clear differences in reaction to varying GAL-TAN positions between these groups. Specifically, younger and more educated people as well as those in socio-cultural professions should react positively to more progressive positions. Working-class voters should react negatively to more progressive positions.

The multi-dimensionality of European integration preferences leaves us with less clear expectations. On the one hand, attitudes on European integration are

11

linked to cultural attitudes. On the other hand, the benchmarking model of European integration preferences ([de Vries, 2018](#)) can explain why some winners of globalization might still prefer less European integration.

At the individual level we control for various socio-demographic variables, including gender, religious attendance, union membership and living in a rural versus urban area. We also control for an individual's self-placement on the left-right dimension. While left-right positions may be more attitudinal than structural, general tendencies to be either left or right come with socialization and are rather stable over time. Robustness checks leaving out one control variable at a time did not change our findings.

We control for economic ideology, also measured by the CHES on a 0-10 scale, to isolate the effect of cultural aspects of European integration. At the country-election level we control for the net migration rate (taken from the OECD database; UK numbers are five-year averages), change in GDP per capita and whether the Social Democratic party was in government before the election. We run additional analyses to take into account the competitive context that parties are facing. Here, we control for the mainstream right party position, the presence of a credible radical right challenger (vote share bigger than 3 percent), and the average position of all other parties. We follow [Schmidt-Catran & Fairbrother \(2016\)](#) and run multi-level logit models with random intercepts for each country and country-election.

Results

Table 1 shows that more liberal and more pro-EU positions are not associated with lower vote probabilities for Social Democrats. We include EU positions and GAL-TAN separately (Models 1 and 2) and together (Model 3). It is debatable whether one should control for one dimension while testing the impact of the other. EU positions partly emerge from parties' GAL-TAN views, so the latter are a potential confounder. Yet, if the two dimensions are intrinsically linked, including both issue areas may artificially increase standard errors due to multicollinearity. We therefore show both possible approaches.

Model 1 shows that more pro-EU positions positively affect the probability of an SD vote, although this effect is not statistically significant. In Model 2, we find that less progressive positions on the GAL-TAN dimension are associated with a lower probability of an SD vote ($p=0.1$). For economic left-right positions we find that positions more to the right have a positive impact, but this effect is not statistically significant. We do not find significant effects for the other second-level control variables. Model 3, which includes both variables in one model, shows that the effects of an SD party's EU and GAL-TAN position are considerably reduced when included in the same model.

Figure 2 shows the predicted probability of voting for an SD party conditional on that party's EU position and the GAL-TAN position based on Models 1 and 2. The top panel presents the overall negative effect of less progressive GAL-TAN positions. The difference in the predicted probability for a strongly progressive SD party and one that is more authoritarian is up to 10 percentage points. Social Democratic parties that take up less progressive positions on social issues clearly do

Table (1) Main Effects of EU and GAL-TAN positioning

	(1) EU only	(2) GAL-TAN only	(3) EU and GAL-TAN
EU position	0.208 (0.113)		0.140 (0.103)
GAL/TAN position		-0.136 (0.084)	-0.087 (0.085)
Left-right position, economy	0.050 (0.107)	0.142 (0.102)	0.097 (0.103)
Net immigration	-0.007 (0.012)	-0.013 (0.012)	-0.009 (0.011)
Government participation	0.034 (0.093)	0.033 (0.084)	0.031 (0.089)
GDP change	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Left-right self-placement	-0.326** (0.062)	-0.326** (0.062)	-0.326** (0.062)
Education: Upper Sec. + Non-tert.	-0.183** (0.031)	-0.183** (0.031)	-0.183** (0.031)
Education: Tertiary	-0.417** (0.065)	-0.417** (0.065)	-0.417** (0.065)
Small business owners	0.075 (0.090)	0.074 (0.090)	0.075 (0.090)
Technical (semi-)professionals	0.507** (0.086)	0.507** (0.086)	0.507** (0.086)
Production workers	0.699** (0.142)	0.699** (0.143)	0.699** (0.143)
(Associate) managers	0.397** (0.082)	0.397** (0.082)	0.397** (0.082)
Clerks	0.472** (0.112)	0.471** (0.112)	0.471** (0.112)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	0.319** (0.083)	0.318** (0.083)	0.318** (0.083)
Service workers	0.585** (0.114)	0.585** (0.114)	0.585** (0.114)
union_member	0.336** (0.077)	0.336** (0.076)	0.336** (0.076)
Rural residence	-0.059 (0.033)	-0.059 (0.033)	-0.059 (0.033)
Age	0.010** (0.003)	0.010** (0.003)	0.010** (0.003)
Female	0.071* (0.030)	0.071* (0.030)	0.071* (0.030)
Church attendance	0.056* (0.026)	0.056* (0.026)	0.056* (0.026)
Constant	-1.931** (0.692)	-0.448 (0.423)	-1.338 (0.756)
sd(country)	0.139* (0.055)	0.157* (0.080)	0.140* (0.063)
sd(Country-Study)	0.060** (0.013)	0.058** (0.012)	0.059** (0.012)
Observations	48186	48186	48186

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

(a) GAL-TAN

(b) EU Position

Figure (2) Predicted probability of SD vote
 Note: Marginal effects based on Model 1 (top panel) and Model 2 (bottom panel), Table 1.
 Histograms show distribution of GAL-TAN positions (top panel) and EU positions (bottom panel).

not in general receive more electoral support than those take up more progressive positions.

This analysis uses the GAL-TAN dimension, but the key debate concerning SD positioning often concerns the specific issue of immigration. Appendix Figure A3 shows that more anti-immigrant positions also do not have a positive effect on the probability of voting for an SD party. While these estimates are based on a small sample and should be read with caution, they do not provide any evidence that parties with tougher immigration stances receive more votes.

The bottom panel of Figure 2 shows a substantive positive effect for a party's EU position. SD parties with less positive stances on European integration tend to receive less electoral support. Note that the variation of this variable that we can exploit (between 5 and 7) is for generally favorable positions on European integration. Within this range, less pro-EU positions are associated with a lower probability of voting for an SD party. The difference between an SD party that is strongly in favor (7) of European integration versus one that is less in favor (5) is about 10 percentage points.

Since assuming a linear relationship might not do justice to the actual underlying functional form, we ran additional analysis using a squared relationship (Appendix Figure A4). These models show no clear differences in predicted probabilities for more centrist positions. However, predicted probabilities of voting for SD parties are higher for strongly more progressive and more pro-EU positions.

In contrast to many publicly voiced arguments, we thus do not find that more progressive and more pro-EU positions are associated with lower support for Social Democratic parties. If anything, SD parties that have more authoritarian/nationalist positions and are more critical of European integration receive less

electoral support.

Figure A5 in the Appendix controls for two further variables; the presence of an established radical right party (vote share higher than 3 percent) and the position of the mainstream right party on the same dimension; in countries where there are two or more large mainstream right parties, we take the most authoritarian of these positions. Further Appendix models control for the mean position of all other parties instead of that of the mainstream right party. Again, our findings fail to support the idea that more progressive or more pro-EU positions weaken support for social democratic parties.

We now turn to group differences in responses to SD party positions. We present the predicted probabilities in three panels in Figure 3; the regression table is in the Appendix.

Panel (a) in Figure 3 shows the predicted probability of voting for a Social Democratic party conditional on age. We predict this probability for one more progressive (2) and one less progressive party (5). We find a striking difference: while for a more progressive SD party we find no effect of age at all, predicted probabilities are strongly conditional on age for the less progressive party. When an SD party is more authoritarian/nationalist it receives considerably less support among young voters: a voter in their 20s has a predicted probability of voting for a more progressive SD party that is about 0.15 points higher. We do not find a reversal of this effect for older voters.

Panel (c) in Figure 3 shows how people with different levels of education react to the two types of Social Democratic parties. As expected, we find a strong discrepancy for voters with tertiary education. Among those voters the predicted probability of voting for a more authoritarian/nationalist SD party is about 0.15

(a) GAL-TAN effect by age

(b) EU effect by age

(c) GAL-TAN effect by education

(d) EU effect by education

(e) GAL-TAN effect by occupation

(f) EU effect by occupation

Figure (3) Conditional effects by group

points lower. Highly educated voters react less positively to Social Democratic parties with less progressive positions. In contrast, we do not find significant differences among less educated voters.

Panel (e) in Figure 3 tells a similar story. We can see the predicted probability of voting for the two types of SD parties for different class groups. Again we do not find that members of the working class (i.e. production workers) are less likely to vote for more progressive SD parties. In fact, when they are more authoritarian/nationalist Social Democrats do not perform clearly better among any class group. However, especially among socio-cultural and self-employed professionals the probability of voting for an SD party is significantly lower when this party is less progressive.

In sum, our findings for the GAL-TAN dimension show a clear pattern. We do not find any evidence that SD parties receive less support when they are more progressive. This is not even the case among groups that generally have more authoritarian attitudes, such as less educated voters or production workers. On the contrary, it is less progressive positions that appear to reduce SD parties' electoral appeal. Young, highly educated voters and professionals turn their backs on Social Democratic parties with less progressive positions.

Next, we discuss the predicted probability of voting for a more pro-EU (7) SD party and one that less strongly supports European integration (5). Panel (b) of Figure 3 shows that, conditional on their age, individuals react to different positions of SD parties. A more pro-EU position is generally beneficial for SD parties. This effect is most pronounced among older voters, who support SD parties less when they present less pro-European positions.

Panel (d) of Figure 3 again demonstrates that there is no electoral group for which less pro-EU positions find more electoral support for SD parties. Interestingly, the strongest difference is among less educated voters, where the difference in predicted probabilities conditional on EU positioning amounts to 10 percentage

points.

Finally, Panel (f) in Figure 3 shows that less pro-EU parties consistently receive less support than more pro-EU parties. The most substantial differences are for small business owners, with production workers also supporting pro-EU parties more. Hence, we find that in contrast to GAL-TAN issues, pro-EU positions do not necessarily matter more to those who could be seen as the winners of globalization (young, educated, professionals). Support for SD parties is quite homogenously lower for parties that stand for less pro-EU positions. If anything, this reaction is more pronounced among older, less educated and less professional voters.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper provides little support for one commonly expressed explanation for Social Democratic party decline, according to which these parties have become too progressive in cultural terms and too supportive of European integration. We do not find that Social Democratic parties do better when they are less progressive, less pro-EU or less pro-immigration. Instead, if anything we find the opposite pattern.

Detailed analyses of subgroup behaviour also fail to accord with the patterns this narrative would predict. Older, less educated and working-class voters are not less likely to vote Social Democratic if those parties are more progressive. Instead, we find that Social Democratic parties that are less progressive may fail to attract younger, more highly-educated and professional voters. This is troubling for these parties given that education levels are increasing and manual jobs are in decline. The socio-demographic patterns of reactions to EU integration also fail to point to

a particularly negative reaction among potential ‘losers of globalization’. Hence, as other issues in this special issue demonstrate that preferences for immigration and European integrations structure national political competition ([Bakker et al., 2019](#); [Hobolt & Rodon, 2019](#); [Spoon & Klüver, 2019](#)), authoritarian/nationalist positions of social democratic parties will prove increasingly electorally harmful for these parties.

Future work should address questions. First, we do not yet understand the complete dynamics of party competition. For instance, the GAL-TAN and EU positions of SD parties will of course be driven in part by reactions to competitors on the libertarian left and the authoritarian right. Moreover, the attractiveness of SD party positions also depends on whether other parties offer similar (or more extreme) policies. These factors may influence the success of SD party strategies but are hard to capture fully, although we have tried to so in our analysis.

Second, the empirically observed range of party positions of SD parties is limited. Even the Danish Social Democrats are still more progressive than several other parties in Denmark. It could be that SD parties would do better if they moved wholesale to left-authoritarian stances. We cannot test this claim, but perhaps experimental approaches can provide some insight here. However, the path dependency of ideologies makes such stark shifts unlikely, while the alienation of existing voter bases may outweigh newly attracted voter segments.

Third, political parties can also strategically choose to emphasize or de-emphasize certain issues. The importance of issue competition has certainly increased in Western Europe in the last decades. Varying emphasis strategies may lead to different electoral outcomes for Social Democratic parties. Future research should especially investigate the interaction between salience and positional dy-

namics.

Fourth, we have not considered links between the first and second dimension. Radical-right parties frame economic questions in terms of immigration, a strategy termed ‘welfare chauvinism’. Voters see immigration partly in economic terms, partly in cultural terms, and similar complex linkages exist for European integration. Future work should test how these aspects of immigration and EU politics affect SD electoral success.

Finally, other parties, particularly on the mainstream right, face similar challenges in the transforming political space of post-industrial societies. The most important lesson from our findings is that parties’ strategic positions in post-industrial societies necessarily include trade-offs. Hence, mainstream right parties may also struggle to find the one second dimension strategy that will be always be successful. Calls for the mainstream right to accommodate the radical right may be as misplaced as for the mainstream left. This should be investigated in future work and could provide a general understanding of mainstream party strategies in the face of electoral decline.

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Appendix

Figure A1 and Figure A2 show the predicted probabilities of an individual voting for a social democratic party including non-voters in the reference category.

Figure (A1) Predicted Probabilities - GALTAN including non-voters

Figure (A2) Predicted Probabilities - EU position including non-voters

Figure [Figure A3](#) presents results from a model including immigration positions. Since we in several cases we only have one or maximum two cases per country, we only include study and not country random effects.

Figure (A3) Predicted Probabilities - Immigration

Figure [A4](#) presents the results if we include a squared term for each ideological dimension.

(a) GAL-TAN squared

(b) EU Position squared

Figure (A4) Predicted probability of SD vote

Table [A1](#) shows the predicted probabilities of an individual voting for a social democratic party additionally controlling for the competitive context.

Table (A1) Effects of EU and GAL-TAN controlling for competitive context

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	EU only	GAL-TAN only	EU and GAL-TAN	est4
EU position	-2.218 (2.558)	-1.982 (2.329)		
GAL/TAN position			-0.724* (0.300)	-0.774* (0.311)
Left-right position, economy	0.018 (0.087)	0.023 (0.101)	0.040 (0.086)	0.062 (0.109)
EU × EU	0.201 (0.222)	0.185 (0.204)		
GAL/TAN × GAL/TAN			0.088* (0.040)	0.088 (0.045)
Net immigration	-0.008 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.015 (0.010)
Government participation	0.025 (0.083)	0.015 (0.082)	0.012 (0.081)	0.006 (0.073)
GDP change	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
radrightbin	-0.306 (0.196)	-0.308 (0.187)	-0.322** (0.122)	-0.374** (0.103)
Left-right self-placement	-0.326** (0.062)	-0.326** (0.062)	-0.326** (0.062)	-0.326** (0.062)
Education: Upper Sec. + Non-tert.	-0.181** (0.031)	-0.181** (0.031)	-0.181** (0.031)	-0.181** (0.031)
Education: Tertiary	-0.415** (0.065)	-0.415** (0.065)	-0.416** (0.065)	-0.416** (0.065)
Small business owners	0.075 (0.090)	0.075 (0.090)	0.074 (0.090)	0.074 (0.090)
Technical (semi-)professionals	0.507** (0.085)	0.507** (0.085)	0.506** (0.085)	0.506** (0.085)
Production workers	0.698** (0.142)	0.699** (0.142)	0.698** (0.142)	0.698** (0.142)
(Associate) managers	0.397** (0.082)	0.397** (0.081)	0.397** (0.082)	0.397** (0.082)
Clerks	0.472** (0.111)	0.472** (0.111)	0.470** (0.111)	0.470** (0.111)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	0.319** (0.083)	0.319** (0.083)	0.317** (0.083)	0.318** (0.083)
Service workers	0.586** (0.114)	0.586** (0.114)	0.584** (0.114)	0.584** (0.114)
union_member	0.336** (0.076)	0.336** (0.076)	0.336** (0.076)	0.336** (0.076)
Rural residence	-0.059 (0.033)	-0.059 (0.033)	-0.059 (0.033)	-0.059 (0.033)
Age	0.010** (0.003)	0.010** (0.003)	0.010** (0.003)	0.010** (0.003)
Female	0.071* (0.030)	0.071* (0.030)	0.071* (0.030)	0.071* (0.030)
Freq. of church attendance	0.056* (0.026)	0.056* (0.026)	0.056* (0.026)	0.056* (0.026)
MR EU position	0.038 (0.063)			
EU position all		-0.050 (0.132)		
MR GAL-TAN position			0.081 (0.053)	
GAL - TAN position all				0.054 (0.099)
Constant	5.361 (6.838)	A-6 4.977 (6.397)	0.493 (0.872)	0.912 (0.624)
sd(country)	0.141* (0.069)	0.131 (0.069)	0.186 (0.097)	0.177* (0.090)
sd(Country-Study)	0.045** (0.014)	0.047** (0.015)	0.038** (0.010)	0.039** (0.011)
Observations	48186	48186	48186	48186

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Figure A5 shows the predicted probabilities of an individual voting for a social democratic party additionally controlling for the competitive context.

(a) GAL-TAN squared

(b) EU Position squared

Figure (A5) Predicted probability of SD vote

Figure A6 and Figure A7 show the predicted probabilities of an individual voting for a social democratic party additionally controlling for the mean position of all other parties. This was calculated as the mean position of other parties included in the Chapel Hill expert survey, irrespective of party size.

Figure (A6) Predicted Probabilities - GALTAN controlling for mean position

Figure (A7) Predicted Probabilities - EU controlling for mean position

Table (A2) Regression Table - Interactions Sociodemographic Groups

	(1) Age	(2) Education	(3) Class
EU position	-0.026 (0.272)	0.424 (0.236)	-0.184 (0.283)
GAL/TAN position	-0.431** (0.114)	-0.087 (0.070)	-0.447** (0.150)
Left-right position, economy	0.266 (0.165)	-0.011 (0.119)	0.382** (0.134)
Age	-0.028 (0.023)	0.011** (0.003)	0.011** (0.003)
EU position $\times$ Age	0.005 (0.004)		
GAL/TAN position $\times$ Age	0.006** (0.002)		
Left-right position, economy $\times$ Age	-0.005		

	(0.003)		
Net immigration	-0.124** (0.037)	-0.128** (0.038)	-0.114** (0.039)
Government participation	-0.037 (0.081)	-0.042 (0.081)	-0.044 (0.076)
GDP change	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Left-right self-placement	-0.307** (0.071)	-0.306** (0.071)	-0.306** (0.071)
Education: Upper Sec. + Non-tert.	-0.173** (0.034)	0.667 (0.492)	-0.149** (0.032)
Education: Tertiary	-0.389** (0.071)	2.135** (0.768)	-0.341** (0.076)
Small business owners	0.032 (0.092)	0.011 (0.102)	-5.903** (0.782)
Technical (semi-)professionals	0.498** (0.095)	0.495** (0.095)	-1.830 (1.294)
Production workers	0.591** (0.149)	0.577** (0.152)	-2.608 (1.922)
(Associate) managers	0.343** (0.084)	0.334** (0.087)	-1.795* (0.837)
Clerks	0.463** (0.119)	0.460** (0.124)	-2.191 (1.361)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	0.252** (0.083)	0.235** (0.085)	-0.718 (1.163)
Service workers	0.486** (0.114)	0.482** (0.117)	-2.461 (1.523)
Union member=1	0.340** (0.116)	0.329** (0.113)	0.304** (0.112)
Union member=2	0.121 (0.069)	0.125 (0.067)	0.117 (0.067)
Rural residence	-0.042 (0.035)	-0.041 (0.036)	-0.044 (0.035)
Female	0.096**	0.098**	0.097**

	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.032)
Freq. of church attendance	0.060 (0.031)	0.063* (0.031)	0.062* (0.031)
Education: Upper Sec. + Non-tert. $\times$ EU position		-0.133 (0.099)	
Education: Tertiary $\times$ EU position		-0.369* (0.159)	
Education: Upper Sec. + Non-tert. $\times$ GAL/TAN position		0.017 (0.053)	
Education: Tertiary $\times$ GAL/TAN position		-0.225** (0.085)	
Education: Upper Sec. + Non-tert. $\times$ Left-right position, economy		-0.023 (0.060)	
Education: Tertiary $\times$ Left-right position, economy		0.178 (0.127)	
Small business owners $\times$ EU position			0.888** (0.176)
Technical (semi-)professionals $\times$ EU position			0.414 (0.282)
Production workers $\times$ EU position			0.554 (0.372)
(Associate) managers $\times$ EU position			0.452* (0.180)
Clerks $\times$ EU position			0.368 (0.276)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals $\times$ EU position			0.219 (0.244)
Service workers $\times$ EU position			0.522 (0.287)
Small business owners $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.238* (0.102)
Technical (semi-)professionals $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.323* (0.133)
Production workers $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.405*

			(0.199)
(Associate) managers $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.292** (0.113)
Clerks $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.392* (0.155)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.134 (0.143)
Service workers $\times$ GAL/TAN position			0.332* (0.169)
Small business owners $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.179 (0.115)
Technical (semi-)professionals $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.413* (0.183)
Production workers $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.487* (0.199)
(Associate) managers $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.494** (0.143)
Clerks $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.310 (0.174)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.251 (0.159)
Service workers $\times$ Left-right position, economy			-0.426* (0.166)
Constant	0.267 (1.537)	-2.862* (1.349)	0.845 (1.744)
sd(country)	0.108 (0.068)	0.102 (0.063)	0.092 (0.059)
sd(Country-Study)	0.052** (0.014)	0.052** (0.014)	0.049** (0.013)
Observations	39318	39318	39318
Standard errors in parentheses			
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$			