Making sense of party strategy innovation: Challenge to ideology and conflict mobilisation as dimensions of party competition

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Abstract

This article develops a pooled comparative analysis aimed at addressing two of the three overarching research questions of the special issue. We first discuss an 'end of ideology' research question: that is, whether party constituencies and party strategy show clear challenges to classic 20th century ideological alignments. Second, we investigate the type of issue strategy that parties employ in this new ideological environment, expecting mainstream parties to stress a problem-solving approach, while challenger parties should focus privilege a conflict mobilisation strategy. Finally, the paper combines these two fundamental dimensions (ideological consistency; reliance on problem-solving vs. conflict-mobilisation strategies) in order to identify party strategy innovations in current West European elections.

Keywords: Issue competition; Issue yield; Party strategies; Political ideology; Political space

Word count: 9056

1. Introduction

In opening up this special issue, D'Alimonte *et al.* (2019) proposed an overarching framework for analysing six general elections that took place in Western Europe between 2017 and 2018. At the core of this framework lies the idea that an environment that is less and less structured by 20th century ideological alignments (from the point of view of both parties and voters) would offer parties the possibility to rely on cross-ideological issue strategies packaging together the different (and sometimes ideologically inconsistent) issue opportunities made available to each of them by their constituencies and public opinion. The *issue yield* framework is a natural candidate for analysing such an environment, with its ability to cover multi-dimensional issue competition without any assumption of issue organization along overarching ideological dimensions, neither on the voter nor on the party strategy side. The core idea of the issue yield model is that a party will construct its policy package by emphasising issues with the highest *yield*, i.e. those that provide the party with win-win combinations of policy support and party credibility both within its constituency and in the general public; in other words, those allowing to win over new voters without sacrificing existing support (De Sio 2018; De Sio and Weber 2014; De Sio and Weber in this issue).

Three broad research questions were formulated in the development of this framework, and we focus in this paper on the first two of them. The first one concerns the extent to which parties' issue stances reflect a state of *low ideological consistency*, when seen in terms of an ideal-typical, 20th century progressive-conservative dimension. In other words, we want to assess to what extent different present-day parties mix positions that would be classically labelled as *conservative* with others – on other issues – that would be classically labelled as *progressive*. This question will be addressed at two different levels: the issue opportunities that stem from the distributions of preferences (and perceptions of party credibility) among

citizens (demand side) and the issue opportunities seized by parties and reflected in their campaign strategy (supply side). On the demand side, we investigate whether the contemporary combinations of issue preferences of parties' supporters challenge classic, progressive-conservative ideological alignments. And at the party strategy level: do political leaders understand such current characteristics of their party constituency and mirror such cross-ideological nature in their party strategy, thus exploiting it as a competitive resource? As explained in more detail in the 'Data and methodology' section, our analysis of parties' issue opportunities will rely on pre-electoral survey data, allowing us to measure parties' issue yields (constructed on the basis of citizen preferences and their perceptions of party credibility) on a variety of issues. For the analysis of party strategies, these data will be complemented by data on parties' issue emphases during the campaign, as reflected in their Twitter messages.

The second research question focuses on a different aspect of the issue opportunities faced by parties: do they favour a *problem-solving* or a *conflict-mobilisation* approach? As will be argued below, a higher voter availability across classical ideological boundaries was first exploited, from the 1980s on, by *mainstream* parties wishing to deploy catch-all appeals relying on their claimed superior a-ideological *problem-solving* competence. On the contrary, recent years have seen new challenger parties exploiting a similar voter availability across ideological boundaries by providing mobilising appeals focused on *conflictual* issues, such as immigration, for instance. As a result, it is worth exploring to what extent parties in the six elections we consider (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom in 2017 and 2018) are characterised by issue opportunities that are – for each party – prevalently related to a problem-solving reputation or instead to a conflict mobilisation potential; and to what extent such parties characterise their strategy in these terms.

These two questions can be finally combined in a concluding research question confronted in this paper. Do these two general criteria (divergence from a progressive-conservative dimension of party competition and problem-solving vs. conflict-mobilisation) allow us to classify parties in a way that meaningfully identifies the new challengers emerging in West European party systems, without having to resort to idiosyncratic party types? Recent literature has contrasted *mainstream* parties with new, different types of parties with specific characteristics (*niche*, *challenger* or *populist* parties). We instead express the more general expectation that, using conceptualizations (and measurement) that rely on a *continuum*, mainstream parties should be characterised by a relatively high level of ideological consistency with the classical progressive-conservative dimension and by a prevalent focus on a problem-solving approach. If this is confirmed (and other parties are instead characterised by lower ideological consistency and reliance on conflict mobilisation), we might be able to subsume the aforementioned categorical and specific classifications of parties into a more general and continuous characterisation, allowing for greater flexibility and heuristic ability. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the theoretical foundations for our research questions as well as our empirical expectations. Section 3 presents data and methodology, while Section 4 discusses empirical findings. Conclusions follow.

2. Building party strategy in a non-ideological context

2.1 Assessing ideological consistency on a progressive-conservative dimension

Our attempt to develop and test an innovative conceptualization for classifying political parties starts from a first research question: whether, in six West European countries in 2017-18, there is a significant presence of political parties whose issue stances are characterized by a low level of ideological consistency. Our choice here is to select, among different

possibilities,[1] an ideological conceptualization on the basis of an *empirical* criterion, i.e. a scheme that would approximate an ideal-type of how ideological confrontation *actually* took place in Western democracies in the second half of the 20th century; something that would then represent a proper yardstick for identifying whether some parties in 2017-18 present a low level of ideological consistency. We suggest that such a tool might be the conceptualisation first clearly suggested by Middendorp (1978) in terms of *progressiveness* and *conservatism*. In a nutshell, this contribution identified a conceptual model with two main features. First, the idea that citizen attitudes in Western Europe in the 1970s (in historical perspective, an age of still strong ideological structuring) could be effectively summarised as being organised on *two* main dimensions: one socio-economic and one broadly cultural. Second, the observation that political parties (and their constituencies) would in fact package their stances mostly along a *single* axis ranging from a combination of economic pro-state and culturally liberal stances (identifying a *progressive* pole) to a combination of economic pro-market and culturally conservative stances (identifying a *conservative* pole). In spatial terms, this corresponds to the idea that the two-dimensional space would not be uniformly populated, but rather see a concentration of party stances along the *diagonal*. Similar trends were documented by Kitschelt (1994) for the organization of citizens' opinions, effectively suggesting the presence of analogous patterns for parties and voters. These patterns in fact

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[1] Our attempt goes in the direction suggested e.g. by Converse (1964), where ideological consistency is seen in terms of the presence (in some individuals) of a low number of organizing principles that allow her to consistently organize (or produce, when needed) opinions on a large number of different issues. The problem is that no 'objective' scheme for ideological consistency can be identified; as effectively shown by Rokeach (1973), four fundamental ideologies of the 20th century provided, each, apparently consistent organizing principles for very different combinations of opinions and attitudes, so that some combinations that would appear consistent in one ideological scheme would appear inconsistent on the other. Hence our reliance (see below) on a scheme that has been shown to be *empirically* relevant for the organization of party competition and citizens' attitudes in the second half of the 20th century.

would correspond to the prevailing ideological labelling of 'left-right' common in Western Europe, and would parsimoniously make sense of the coexistence of two-dimensional attitudes with a common unidimensional, left-right public ideological framing of party competition (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Hooghe *et al.* 2002; Kitschelt 1994; Lachat 2018; Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009).

The reconstruction of a scheme which for a long time has been recognized as an effective summarization of the prevailing spatial organization of political conflict in Western Europe[2] has the additional benefit of a clearer recognition of *deviating* patterns, allowing a better understanding of why some political phenomena appear as challenging our traditional ideological view of political attitudes and party competition. On the one hand, research has highlighted the increasing presence of *voters* characterised by combinations of attitudes that challenge classic 20th century ideological alignments, such as in the example of 'left-authoritarians' (see e.g. Lefkofridi *et al.* 2014; Ramiro 2016). On the other hand, we can clearly observe the emergence of innovative *party* strategies that challenge such classic alignments. Examples of such strategies are those of the recent turn of several radical right-wing parties (FN, PVV, FPÖ, even partly the Lega) that, abandoning the initially successful

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[2] It is worth observing that this spatial organization of political conflict and party competition should not be taken as an absolute reference, but as typical of a very specific era of political conflict, roughly corresponding to the second half of the 20th century. In fact, parties that had emerged and thrived in the pre-war era (such as classically liberal parties) testify for the past relevance of other ideological dimensions such as liberalism (or even fascism). Some of these parties were still relevant in West European countries, challenging such spatial organization, in the age were the ideal-typical proposal by Middendorp was formulated, although they were not anymore the main parties structuring party competition.

'winning formula' of the radical right (Bornschier 2010; Kitschelt 1995; Kriesi *et al.* 2008),

increasingly combine conservative stances on cultural issues (especially immigration) with

relatively left-wing positions on workers' protection, income redistribution and international

trade. We do not enter here the debate about the determinants of such new voter attitudes and

party strategies. But we note that the connection between the emergence of voter availability

on such unusual issue packages and the success of parties exploiting such availability has

been related in the literature to processes of economic and societal transformation, which have

introduced significant tensions in the classic progressive combination of welfare protection

and openness towards external immigration; hence the importance of 'welfare chauvinist'

positions that characterize all the aforementioned examples (e.g., De Koster et al. 2012;

Kitschelt 1995; Rydgren 2008; Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016). At the same time,

other innovative political entrepreneurs such as Matteo Renzi and Emmanuel Macron appear

to challenge classical progressive-conservative alignments with a much different view of

recent transformation processes. In fact, their challenge takes place in a 'free market-

cosmopolitan' direction, by combining culturally liberal attitudes on civil rights and

immigration with a right-wing emphasis on free markets, deregulation and free trade.[3]

Thus, the first question clearly concerns the usefulness of traditional, 20th century progressive-

conservative ideological alignments for understanding contemporary political developments.

On the demand side, we would like to know to what extent parties' issue opportunities, which

result (along with their perceived credibility) from the issue preferences of their supporters

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[3] This does not mean that we assume any 'historical turn' as regards the ideological consistency of party competition. The dimensionality of party competition in Western Europe was already challenged in the 1970s, when post-materialist issues entered the arena, leading to a realignment that is in a way at the origin of the diagonal-shaped competition axis that we introduced previously. Thus, we might be simply experiencing a new challenge by new dimensions of conflict, which might be reabsorbed in the next years of decades in terms of some rotation of the main competition axis. However, our main focus here is in seeing whether we are currently witnessing a challenge to the main dimension of competition, and whether the successful exploitation of such issue opportunities is a common trait of the political actors who have challenged mainstream parties in recent years. We remain agnostic about the future direction of this process and whether it may result in a stable realignment.

and which are captured by the concept of issue yield, diverge from the traditional main dimension of electoral competition. And for which (categories of) parties? On the supply side, we further ask whether parties fully exploit the (perhaps ideologically contradictory) issue opportunities they are offered, or whether they rather prefer to stick to more classic progressive-conservative ideological strategies, fearing potential contradictions.

Adopting the aforementioned progressive-conservative axis as a yardstick for a high level of ideological structuring, it is quite straightforward to translate our first research question in empirical terms: We will assess to what extent, in 2017-2018, party constituencies (demand side) and party stances (supply side) still tend to cluster on this classical ideological, progressive-conservative diagonal, or rather challenge it, by showing unexpected, off-diagonal combinations. Note that parties' issue opportunities and issue strategies can deviate from the classical diagonal in two ways: in a 'free market-cosmopolitan' direction, corresponding to a combination of pro-market and culturally libertarian stances, or in 'welfare nationalist' direction, combining conservative cultural positions with relatively left-wing or centrist economic stances. This also means that parties representing these two types of challenges share a common trait by being placed off the diagonal, albeit on opposite sides. Of course, the cross-sectional nature of our data does not allow answering a de-ideologisation research question in processual terms, but rather the specific observed *state* of a *cross-ideological challenge* testified by a snapshot taken in a particular election year. However, it is still interesting to understand to what extent this ideological yardstick allows to meaningfully classify the new phenomena seen above. This leads to our first empirical expectation:

Proposition 1. In a two-dimensional economic-cultural space, we expect the issue opportunities of most (especially classical mainstream) parties to align on the diagonal, representing the typical 20th century progressive-conservative ideological alignment, while those of new challenger parties (both 'free market cosmopolitans'

and 'welfare nationalists') should lie off such diagonal. This should take place in terms of both party constituencies (supply side) and party strategy (demand side).

At the same time, this spatial framework suggests an even more challenging line of analysis. Even a cursory look at recent political developments in Western Europe shows that what is often identified as a general 'cultural' dimension (see e.g. Hooghe *et al.* 2002) in fact hides an inner multidimensionality, that has become more and more politically relevant. This is especially important as attitudes on immigration are showing more and more visible *conservative* majorities in most West European countries, while attitudes on civil rights, for example, are instead showing *progressive* majorities in the same countries (and with an opposite trend, with the increasing recognition of gay marriages or unions, and the recent legalisation of abortion in Ireland). Not to mention EU integration, which presents even larger difficulties in being packaged together with generally progressive or conservative cultural stances. This clear multidimensionality presents an even more interesting challenge: if new party innovators are increasingly exploiting their cross-ideological *off-diagonality*, what sub-dimension are they mostly exploiting? We will combine the economic dimension (kept as a reference)[4] with different cultural subdimensions (immigration, cultural liberalism in general, and Europe): are there differences in the extent and relevance of *off-diagonality* with respect to each of these dimensions? Here we do not express clear *a priori* empirical expectations (although the recent politicisation of the immigration dimension might suggest its potential as

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[4] This is not to claim that the economic dimension does not present some degree of multidimensionality: key examples here might be economic globalisation, inclusiveness of the welfare state (especially towards migrants), and the Euro. However, we argue that most issues pertaining to the economic dimension are still mutually associated in classical left-right terms; at least, much more than issues in the different sub-dimensions of the cultural dimension.

a cross-cutting resource, especially with reference to the aforementioned literature on welfare chauvinism), so that our assessment will be in exploratory terms.

2.2 Problem solving vs. conflict mobilisation

The second research question is instead concerned with the broad strategic characterisation that parties might employ. It centres on a contrast between a problem-solving approach, which tries to frame politics as a mostly technical process, with leaders and parties competing (and mobilizing voters) in an a-partisan fashion, on the basis of their competence at addressing current social and economic problems, and a conflict-mobilization approach, in which the emphasis lies on conflictual issues. Similar to the first research question, we will address this question both on the demand side (parties' issue opportunities, as captured by the concept of issue yield) and on the supply side (how parties' strategies exploit or not such opportunities). As previously shown (see D'Alimonte *et al.* in this issue), a first historical instance of party strategy accompanying and exploiting a process of citizen de-ideologisation was in fact proposed, from the 1980s on, by *mainstream* parties appealing to voters across ideological boundaries, based on their claim of a-ideological *competence* and *problem-solving* ability for handling the country's most pressing challenges. Such a broad strategy, which emphasizes *valence issues* (Stokes 1963), was perhaps pioneered by François Mitterrand (especially in the 1987 campaign, after the 1983 austerity turn),[5] but then can be traced as

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[5] Mitterrand's new strategy (Daley 1996; Northcutt 1988, 1991) even apparently inspired the development by Bernard Manin of the notion of *audience democracy*, which clearly theorises political leaders that are less and less committed to specific policy programs, and instead have to prove able to handle unexpected challenges, in an increasingly interdependent and unpredictable environment.

supporting the success of leaders such as Tony Blair (Clarke 2004; Clarke *et al.* 2009; Green and Hobolt 2008), and to some extent of Gerhard Schroeder and Angela Merkel (Clarke and Whitten 2013; Debus *et al.* 2014). For these strategies, cross-ideological availability of public opinion was a precondition for successfully appealing to voters of other parties, on non-ideological, *competence* grounds. However, in recent years, especially after the economic and migration crisis, the same condition (availability of voters across ideological boundaries) has inspired a different approach, typical of smaller, challenger parties: they aim at exploiting such potential voter availability on clearly *conflictual* (though often majoritarian) issue positions, employing a *conflict mobilisation* approach. A typical example might be immigration: a clearly conflictual issue (with pro- and anti-immigration positions clearly defined and visible in the public debate), albeit with some strongly majoritarian position (typically in favour of more restrictive immigration rules) that, in most countries, is widely shared by citizens across ideological boundaries. It is clear that this characteristic (broad support for an option across ideological boundaries) already fulfils the first condition for a high-yield issue,[6] suggesting the enormous campaign potential of such positions in a conflict-mobilisation approach. Then, the key question is whether parties' issue yield configurations create incentives for them to favour one of these broad strategies, and whether they seize these opportunities in their campaign communications. Also, do parties align on this continuum from problem-solving to conflict-mobilization according to some meaningful pattern?

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[6] The other condition is party-specific. It concerns the level of unanimity on that option within the party. An issue goal which is (almost) unanimous within a party but also widely shared at large represent a key asset for the party to attempt electoral expansion without risking its existing base.

Before moving further, it is worth stressing that – in this regard – issue yield theory provides a significant competitive advantage over other frameworks for issue competition such as *issue ownership* (Petrocik 1996) and *issue entrepreneurship* (Hobolt and De Vries 2015; de Vries and Hobolt 2012). Compared to the issue ownership approach, issue yield does not rely on the long-standing reputations of parties, but on distributions of preferences: as such, it introduces a much more dynamic view of party strategy, which can quickly incorporate new issues or react to sudden changes in public opinion. Compared to issue entrepreneurship, issue yield is not limited to small or new parties and it does not assume that parties necessarily take extreme positions to mobilize voters on an issue. As a result, we argue that our theoretical framework offers a broader scope of analysis, thus allowing to analyse opportunities and strategies for both mainstream and challenger and old and new parties.

In order to capture empirically which parties face stronger incentives to mobilize voters on the basis of conflictual issues, or rather should follow a problem-solving approach, we will rely on the distinction between positional and valence issues (Stokes 1963). We are aware that this concept may not be sufficient to fully capture the complexity of the *problem-solving* vs. *conflict-mobilisation* distinction. In fact, a key underlying distinction might be in terms of the overall framing of current economic and societal transformations such as economic globalisation, European integration, or technological change. One could say that a problem-solving vision might in fact imply a mostly positive, technical and relatively uncontroversial view of these processes, with government essentially shrinking to efficient governance of changes that are not put into question (with, for instance, a focus on the international competitiveness of the country). On the other hand, a conflict-mobilisation view would adopt a critical attitude towards these processes, seeing them in divisive terms and attempting to mobilise discontent and conflict, in view of changing the direction of these processes (in a way that is not completely unrelated to how conflict mobilisation on processes such as

national or industrial revolution shaped the emergence of West European party systems).

However, capturing these differences in framing is inevitably complex, and we will approach

this research question by focusing on the operational distinction between valence and

positional issues.[7] This leads to our second set of empirical expectations:

> Proposition 2. Parties should show variance in terms of their balance of positional and
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> valence issues, with mainstream parties characterised by a problem-solving approach
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> (prevalence of valence issues), and challenger parties instead characterised by conflict
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> mobilisation (prevalence of positional issues). This should apply both in terms of issue
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> opportunity configurations (party constituency stances and party credibility) and in
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> terms of party strategy (campaign communication).

2.3 A two-dimensional classification of political parties

Finally, the two aforementioned questions can be combined in a concluding research question

confronted in this paper. Do these two criteria (challenge of classical ideology; problem

solving vs. conflict mobilisation) allow us to classify parties in a way that correctly identifies

innovations in party strategy without resorting to specific party types?

Indeed, it is true that in recent years several new types of parties have been introduced (in

general, all opposed to *mainstream* parties): *niche* parties (Meguid 2005, 2008), *challenger*

parties (Hino 2012; Hobolt and Tilley 2016; Müller-Rommel 1998), *issue entrepreneurs*

(Hobolt and De Vries 2015; de Vries and Hobolt 2012), not to mention the increasing number

of parties that political commentators identify as *populist*, with a clear conceptual stretching

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[7] In each of the surveyed countries, a country team had the task to identify which issues were

prevalently framed in *valence* terms in the public debate and which in *positional* terms. See

below.

of the original meaning of the term. A problem with this proliferation of specific categories is that they discourage the emergence of a common perspective for analysing the strategy of *both* mainstream and other types of parties. And this in turn affects the productivity of existing theories: if we only understand well the strategy of non-mainstream parties (and only understand mainstream parties in *reactive* terms), our theories will become asymmetrical and unable to provide a proactive perspective for mainstream parties.

In this regard, issue yield already provides a solution for this problem, as it is agnostic to party type and size. As shown elsewhere in this issue (see De Sio and Weber, also Kritzinger *et al.*, Ditmars *et al.*) a predictor of electoral success in the six elections considered here appears indeed a *strategic campaign* leveraging *high-yield issues*, rather than being a mainstream or other party. We then want to push this a little further: if issue yield is able to subsume party strategy across different party types, why cannot broader, issue yield-based dimensions of party strategy be used to provide a general and more fine-grained classification of political parties, where specific types would only correspond to particular combinations in a continuum? This is the final research question addressed in this paper. Here our empirical expectation is a combination of the previous two, with mainstream parties defined by: a) a relatively high level of ideological consistency; b) a prevailing problem-solving characterisation. As for new challengers, we have less structured expectations: while they in general can be expected to combine ideological off-diagonality with a conflict-mobilisation characterisation, we might distinguish between 'welfare nationalist' and 'free market cosmopolitan' challengers, who depart in different directions from the traditional main axis of electoral competition. Once again, mainstream parties would be confronted with different types of *non-mainstream* parties; but this time all would be included in an encompassing continuous space. Thus, in terms of empirical expectations,

Proposition 3. In a two-dimensional combination of off-diagonality and problem-solving vs. conflict-mobilisation characterisation, different types of parties should cluster in specific regions: classic mainstream parties combining low off-diagonality with problem-solving; welfare nationalist parties combining high off-diagonality with conflict mobilisation; other types of challenger parties presenting perhaps unusual combinations. This should apply both in terms of issue opportunity configurations (based on the preferences of their constituents) and in terms of party strategy (as reflected in their campaign communication).

3. Data and methodology

Similar to the other articles in this special issue, we rely on two sources of data to analyse parties' issue potentials and their electoral strategies. First, voter surveys were conducted in each country during the electoral campaign. As discussed in more detail in the corresponding country analyses (see also D'Alimonte et al. in this special issue), these were CAWI surveys based on samples of about 1000 respondents, conducted one month before the election day.[8] These individual-level data include questions about citizens' positions on a number of campaign issues, as well as their perception of parties' credibility in achieving the corresponding goals. A list of 20 to 30 potentially relevant campaign issues, of both positional or valence character, was established by a team of two country experts at the outset of the

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[8] The samples were extracted from a Web panel to be representative of the electoral population on basic socio-demographics (sex-age combinations, geographical areas) and then weighted to match additional population characteristics (education, past vote).

electoral campaign.[9] For issues identified as positional, respondents were asked about their

own preferred position, on six-point scales, anchored at the extremes by the two rival goals.

They were then asked about which parties (multiple choices available) they think are credible

for achieving that goal (i.e., the side of the issue on which they stand). For issues identified as

valence, it is assumed that all citizens share the same goal, and respondents were directly

asked about which parties they consider to be credible in achieving that goal. The second

source of data focuses on parties' campaign activities. In each country, we collected and

coded all tweets issued by parties and their frontrunner, in the last four weeks before the

election.[10] For the analyses, we focus only on tweets that include some issue-related content

(and we exclude retweets). This allows us computing the salience of specific issues in a

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[9] These country-specific lists of issues are available in Table A1 in the Appendix. A key

motivation for an appropriate selection by experts was that such issue selection would

constitute the guide for classifying party tweets during the campaign (see below). As a result,

experts were strongly urged to provide an appropriate issue coverage; and an indirect

validation of this choice came with the Twitter coding process where in all countries only

very few tweets were classified as related to "other issues" and inter-coder reliability was very

high (data available on request).

[10] Issue coding on the Twitter corpus was performed by two independent coders for each

country, who assigned each tweet (if including issue content) to one of the previously

identified issues, using actual issue item wordings from the CAWI questionnaire as coding

guide. The redundancy of the coding process allowed to assess inter-coder reliability, which

was very good or excellent in all countries. More information on this coding procedure, as

well as information about intercoder reliability, can be found in the corresponding country

articles of the special issue.

party's campaign, measured as the share of a party's issue-related tweets that address a given issue.[11]

As emphasized in the previous section, our goal is to characterize parties' issue opportunities (demand side) and their issue strategies (supply side) on two dimensions: the degree to which they deviate from the main axis of ideological competition, and the extent to which they privilege a conflict-mobilization versus a problem-solving approach. All of the corresponding measures start from the concept of *issue yield* (De Sio and Weber 2014). It is a summary measure that identifies to what extent a specific goal (either one of two rival goals on a positional issue, or a single shared goal on a valence issue) qualifies as an electorally productive resource for a specific party. We rely on the refined measure of issue yield introduced by De Sio and Weber (in this special issue), in which issue yield depends on the level of support for that goal, both at large and among the party supporters, and on the degree to which the party is considered to be credible for achieving that goal, again both at large and within the party. This issue yield measure ranges between -1 and +1, with higher values denoting goals that are electorally more promising for a given party.

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[11] This use of Twitter data is agnostic about the size (and socio-demographic bias) of Twitter use in a given country, as it relies on the 'press release assumption' (De Sio *et al.* 2018). That is, we assume that parties use Twitter for communicating with the media, as in a *press release*, even in countries with low or elite-only Twitter penetration. As a result, the relative frequencies of issue mentions by a party on Twitter effectively indicate the issues that the party would like to see covered by the media. However, measuring the relative salience of issues in parties' communication is difficult if they issued very few tweets. For that reason, we limit the analysis to parties with at least 25 issue-based tweets.

On this basis, we derive a series of measures of parties' issue profiles, which are presented in

the remainder of this section, and which are summarized in Table 1. In order to address our

first research question, we start by deriving measures of the location of a party's optimal issue

opportunity potential on economic issues and on cultural issues. On any positional issue, a

party has one issue yield score for each of the two opposed goals. The difference between

these two values (the yield differential) tells us to what extent a party's potential on that issue

lies on the pro-State or pro-market side (for an economic issue), or on the liberal or

conservative side (for a cultural issue). In Austria, for instance, the SPÖ has higher yield for

the goal of maintaining current job market regulations (issue yield of 0.39) than for the rival

goal of job market deregulation (yield of -0.01). The Greens, in contrast, have almost identical

values for both goals (0.06 and 0.04). On that issue, the SPÖ's issue potential is thus more

decidedly pro-State than for the Greens. The yield differential, computed for each party and

issue, takes a positive value if the party has higher yield for the progressive goal and a

negative value in the opposite case. It will be 0 if a party has the same yield for both goals. In

our data, these yield differentials range roughly between –0.9 and +0.9. We can further

average them for the main two dimensions of the political space, distinguishing between

economic and non-economic issues, in order to obtain the location of a party's optimal issue

potential in a two-dimensional political space. Note that while this can be interpreted as a

position in the political space, it corresponds to the location of the party's optimal *issue*

opportunity configuration (as defined by issue yield theory), rather than the position of the

party itself or its supporters. Once parties' issue opportunities are located in that way in the

two-dimensional political space, we can finally determine how strongly such issue

opportunity configurations challenge the traditional axis of electoral competition, by

computing the perpendicular distance to the main diagonal.

Up to that point, the analysis focuses only on the location of parties' *issue opportunities*. In order to characterize their *issue strategies* (right-hand column in Table 1), we also need to account for parties' decisions about which issues to stress in their campaign communication. To that end, we compute a similar average yield differential, this time weighting the contribution of each issue by the corresponding share of issue-related tweets, so that issues stressed more by a party will have a stronger impact in calculating the location of the party's issue strategy.

In constructing such measures of parties' issue opportunities and their issue strategies, we will start by simply distinguishing between an economic and a non-economic dimension. Yet, we will then perform a more in-depth analysis on more specific cultural sub-dimensions. More precisely, we will split non-economic issues into three groups: European integration, immigration, and a residual category, to which we refer as cultural liberalism, that includes all non-economic issues which pertain neither to immigration nor to European integration.[12] In that way, we will be able to identify parties that challenge traditional ideological alignments on the two sets of issues that seem most relevant for the redefinition of the space of party competition in contemporary West European countries.

[Table 1]

For our second main research question, we are interested in the contrast between problem-solving and conflict-mobilisation approaches. The key quantities on which we rely are

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[12] This residual category is dominated by items about traditional lifestyle and moral issues (euthanasia, gay marriage, gender quotas, etc.), but also includes some items on law and order, environment and energy, as well as the use of referenda.

average yield values for valence issues and for positional issues.[13] If a party enjoys higher yield for positional issues than for valence issues, it means that it should be incited to favour a conflict-mobilization approach. When dealing with issue opportunities (left-hand column in Table 1), this characteristic is measured as the (logged) ratio between the average issue yield for positional issues and the average issue yield for valence issues; thus, expressing to what extent the party is characterised by a prevalence of positional or valence-based issue opportunities. As regards the characterization of party strategies (Table 1, right-hand column), we calculate the same logged ratio, but here each original issue yield value is *weighted* by the Twitter emphasis given by the party to the issue (expressed by the share of all issue-based tweets that is dedicated to an issue). As a result, this measure correctly reflects the effective balance of the types of issue opportunities as exploited in the actual party campaign.

4. Results

4.1 De-ideologisation?

Are parties' issue potentials still structured by one main axis of conflict? To address this first research question, we will proceed in two steps. First, we focus on parties' issue potentials, as captured by the concept of issue yield. This allows determining whether the (party-specific) issue opportunities available to political parties and candidates form programmatic packages that challenge the traditional main axis of electoral competition. Second, we will add one

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[13] We have noted before that a party has two issue yield values for each positional issue, corresponding to each one of the rival goals. When computing here the average yield of all positional issues, we only take into account the one goal among these two for which the party's yield is higher. In the previous example based on the Austrian SPÖ, the issue yield for the issue of job market (de)regulation would thus be 0.39.

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more element to this analysis: parties' decisions about which issues to strategically emphasise. In that way, we will not only be able to say whether some parties should be incited to present new issue packages, but also how strongly they have seized such opportunities. To describe parties' issue opportunities, we focus on the progressive or conservative character of their issue yield configurations (average yield differential – across multiple issues – between the progressive and conservative goal defined over each issue), separately for the economic and the cultural dimension of the political space (Figure 1). The vertical dimension indicates the degree to which a party's electoral potential on the cultural dimension corresponds to progressive goals (high value) or conservative goals (low values). The horizontal dimension does the same for the economic dimension, with low values for economic left-wing goals and high values for right-wing goals. It is important to stress again that the map of the political space depicted in Figure 1 presents the parties' optimal *issue opportunities*, rather than their programmatic issue positions. In Austria, for instance, the SPÖ's optimal issue opportunity configuration is in the upper-left quadrant, close to the diagonal, corresponding to a combination of left-wing and culturally progressive goals. Two general observations can be made. First, as expected, many parties are located relatively close to the diagonal, indicating that the traditional ideological dimension is still relevant to describe the space of party competition. This is particularly the case in Austria, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. At the same time, however, some parties' issue opportunities, in each country, deviate from this main dimension. Second, we also notice that parties' potentials are generally more differentiated on the cultural than on the economic dimension.

[Figure 1]

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To summarize more precisely the degree to which parties' potentials on a given dimension are differentiated, we use a standard measure of polarisation (Dalton 2008).[14] This reveals very large differences between dimensions (Table 2). In general, polarisation is higher on the cultural dimension than on the economic one. This shows that the opportunities for parties to present distinct packages of issue positions are more limited in the economic domain. Furthermore, this contrast becomes even stronger when cultural issues are divided into subdimensions.[15] While polarisation on the cultural liberalism subdimension is similar to the one on economic issues (and relatively low), the immigration and European integration domains offer marked opportunities for conflict mobilisation. Averages across countries show this very clearly: the polarisation index, the values of which can be interpreted similarly to a standard deviation, range from 0.16 for the economic dimension, to 0.24 for the cultural dimension, 0.32 for immigration, and up to 0.44 for European integration. Furthermore, with a few small variations, this ranking holds in all countries.[16]

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[14] The polarisation index is defined (Dalton 2008) as $\sqrt{\sum_i v_i (p_i - \bar{p})^2}$, where v_i is the vote share of party i, p_i the location of its potential on the corresponding dimension, and $\bar{p}$ the weighted average location of parties' potentials, weighted by their vote shares. For this and all weighting procedures based on party size, vote shares in each country were rescaled to sum to 1 for the parties included in the analysis.

[15] The corresponding figures, similar to Figure 1 but with one of the cultural subdimensions, are presented in the Appendix (Figures A1-A3).

[16] There are two exceptions to this pattern. In Italy, polarisation is higher on immigration than on Europe. And in the UK, polarisation is larger on the cultural dimension than on immigration.

[Table 2]

With the partial exception of the United Kingdom, it is thus on the new cultural issues, linked

to immigration and European integration, that parties' strategic opportunities diverge most

strongly from one another. This is in line with previous scholarship which points to the central

role of these issues in transforming the dynamics of party competition (e.g., De Vries *et al.*

2013; Kriesi *et al.* 2008).

So far, this analysis points to differences between types of issues and allows identifying

which ones are likely to lead to more intense positional competition. In principle, however,

this could still take place with positions that are ideologically consistent across the economic

and cultural dimensions. To go one step further, we focus on the key measure that we defined

in the previous section: the perpendicular distance from the diagonal. In the Netherlands, for

example, we see in Figure 1 that the Freedom Party (PVV) is quite distant from the main axis,

whereas the issue opportunities of the Labour Party (PvdA) and of the Christian-Democrats

(CDA) are very close to the traditional main axis of electoral competition. Before looking in

more detail at which specific parties are likely to challenge this main dimension, we average

these distances by country (weighting them by party size), in order to compute a country-level

index of deviation. Note that this will vary depending on how the cultural dimension is

defined. In Table 3, we present the corresponding values for four different political spaces,

structured by the economic dimension and by either the overall cultural dimension or one of

its subdimensions. The differences between the results based on either of the cultural

subdimensions illustrate very clearly on which type of issues the traditional party alignments

are being more strongly challenged. The average level of 'off-diagonality' is weakest with

cultural liberalism, and strongest with European integration. Again, the pattern is very

consistent across countries (with the exception of Italy, where parties deviate more strongly from the diagonal on immigration than on Europe).

[Table 3]

We can then consider not only the overall degree of challenge to the usual partisan alignment, but also look at which parties' issue opportunity configurations present such challenges, and how these deviate from the traditional alignment captured by the diagonal. For that, we turn to the level of parties and to the perpendicular distance from the diagonal of each party's configuration. These distances will again depend on how we define the cultural dimension (i.e., either the overall cultural dimension or one of its subdimensions). Figure 2 presents these deviations from the mean based on a political space defined by the economic dimension and by European integration (left-hand panel),and when the cultural dimension is defined in terms of immigration policies (right-hand panel).[17] In both cases, we distinguish between parties that are above or below the diagonal. Positions below the diagonal, which correspond to an orientation on economic issues which is more moderate or left-wing than what you would expect based on their cultural stances, are denoted as a 'welfare nationalist' challenge. Parties with a strategic potential above the diagonal, in contrast, correspond to a 'free market cosmopolitan' challenge, in which cultural opportunities are more liberal or permissive than what would be expected on the basis of their economic profile. In Figure 2, the deviation from

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[17] We selected the two spaces defined by combinations of the economic dimension with, respectively, EU integration and immigration because these are the two spaces where we find the highest level of challenge to the classic axis of competition.

the diagonal is represented by the length and direction of each party's bar (the additional spikes will be introduced later).

[Figure 2]

These data about party-level deviations from the standard ideological alignment show some striking similarities across the six countries. In each case, the clearest challenger with an electoral potential below the diagonal (i.e., with a negative distance in Figure 2) is the party that embodies the family of right-wing populist parties: the Austrian FPÖ, the German AfD, Le Pen in France, the Lega in Italy, the PVV in the Netherlands, and the British UKIP (with the Conservatives facing a relatively similar opportunity structure). Furthermore, all of these parties face similar opportunities to diverge from the main dimension of electoral competition, whether the cultural dimension is defined in terms of European or immigration-related issues.

In contrast, identifying clear challengers in the opposite direction (that is, parties with a potential lying above the diagonal in Figure 1) is less straightforward. This is also due to the fact that the parties that challenge the main dimension of competition usually are not the same ones on European integration and on immigration. On the latter, which has often been seen as the key issue for the mobilisation of right-wing populist actors, fewer parties face a strong incentive to challenge classic ideological alignments. This appears clearly in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, countries in which no party faces strong incentives to put forward a package of issues combining centrist or right-wing economic position with support for Europe and permissive immigration policies. In Austria and the Netherlands, the Greens, as well as social-liberal parties (D66, NEOS), face incentives to mobilise on such a combination of issues. Though this incentive to depart from traditional issue packages is less

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strong than for the populist right. Italy, finally, is the only country in which some parties appear to face clear opportunities to combine centrist economic positions and policies that are favourable to immigration (or at least that do not suggest moving the status quo in a more restrictive direction): these are not only the PD and its ally +EUR (which appear in line with the strategic change impressed by Matteo Renzi) but also the more radical left-wing LeU. Incentives to challenge classic ideology in a more European direction are somewhat stronger in all of the countries. At the same time, it is also a more varied set of parties that face such incentives (thus expressing a more pro-EU stance than expected based on their economic positions). While Green and social-liberal parties in Austria and the Netherlands occupy here a similar position, they are joined by mainstream parties in Germany (FDP, CDU-CSU), France (Macron and Fillon), the Netherlands (CDA), or the UK (Liberal Democrats).

To sum up, we do find that some parties in each country face clear incentives to present packages of issue positions that do not correspond to the traditional ideological alignments. This is most evident for the right-wing populist challengers, for which the most promising electoral strategy is to combine restrictive immigration stances, opposition to European integration, and moderate or left-of-centre economic policies; but nevertheless, there are also incentives to break the usual main dimension of party competition in a *liberal* direction, by pushing in a pro-European dimension, towards liberal immigration rules, or both.

As outlined above, the next step in our analysis is to account for party strategies, considering to which extent parties did seize on these strategic opportunities to redefine the space of electoral competition. To that end, we summarise again the yield differentials for various dimensions of the political space, but this time weighting the different political issues by the share of tweets that parties and candidates formulated on the corresponding issue. If parties give more emphasis to issues on which their potential deviates from the main axis of competition, this will accentuate their off-diagonality.

Summarising these party configurations in terms of the average distance from the diagonal, we can see that parties do indeed tend to give more weight to issues that depart from the main axis, resulting in larger average distances from the diagonal (Table 4). The challenge to the main axis of competition is stronger when party strategies are taken into account, for the general cultural dimension, as well as for each of its subdimensions. This means that parties tend, on average, to give greater weight in their campaign communications to issue positions that depart from classical ideological alignments.

[Table 4]

To look into more detail at this strategic aspect, we can turn again to Figure 2. While the bars, on which we commented before, indicate the location of parties' issue potentials, the additional spikes, that start at the end of each bar, show how the measure of off-diagonality increases or decreases when party strategies are considered. To illustrate this with one example, we see in Figure 2 that the Dutch PVV is the party that most clearly challenges the main dimension of party competition, in the welfare-nationalist direction. We can now further notice that this challenge is even more acute once the party's strategic issue emphases are accounted for. A similar observation can be made for other right-wing populist parties or candidates (Le Pen, Lega, UKIP on Europe). And more generally, parties which face incentives to challenge established ideological alignments in a welfare-nationalist direction (that is, parties which were below the diagonal in Figure 1) tend to seize these opportunities and emphasise more strongly such issues. This is a central finding as it shows that many right-wing populist challengers are able to identify these issue opportunities and give them a larger role in their campaign, thus reinforcing the specificity of their ideological appeal (although this does not apply to the FPÖ or AfD). However, not all parties are able to capitalise on their

issue opportunities in a similar manner, and it is rather difficult to identify systematic patterns in party strategies. In France and in the UK, parties and candidates' emphasis on European issues seem to further raise the level of ideological challenge, with strategies that move all parties further away from the diagonal. To some extent, a similar pattern can be found in Italy with respect to the immigration issue. In other countries, however, changes are more limited. But in any case, parties do not tend to decrease the level of ideological challenge.

4.2 Problem solving vs. conflict mobilisation

We now come to our theoretical expectation of a party differentiation in terms of their problem-solving vs. conflict-mobilisation characterisation, with the additional expectation of mainstream parties being mostly characterised by a prevalence of problem-solving. Figure 3 reports such characterisation for all parties. For each party, the vertical bar expresses the original characterisation of the available issue opportunities for the party (prevalence of problem-solving for values below 0, prevalence of conflict-mobilisation for values above 0), while the spike expresses how the party's Twitter strategy was different from the original characterisation (i.e., giving more emphasis to conflict mobilisation or problem solving).

[Figure 3]

Values are expressed in terms of a positional-valence ratio. As mentioned previously, this is the logged value of the ratio between the average issue yield for positional issues and the average issue yield for valence issues. Looking first at bars (issue opportunities, i.e. demand side), parties close to the neutral line (logged ratio=0) are those that have a balanced characterisation (average issue yield is the same for positional and valence issues); parties below such line (logged ratio lower than 0) see a prevalence of valence issues (average

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positional yield tends to be a *fraction* of the average valence yield) while parties above the line (positive values) see a prevalence of positional issue opportunities (average positional yield tends to be a *multiple* of the average valence yield). The same interpretation applies to spikes (which express the Twitter strategy of the party on top of such issue opportunities). Looking at the empirical distribution, the first observation concerns the presence of a meaningful variance in party characterisation. In all countries a wide range of values is represented, covering both rival sides of party characterisation. Even if we exclude outliers such as Leu and +Eur in Italy, and the Greens in the UK (strongly characterised respectively as conflictual or problem-solving), we see that – in all countries – parties are distributed over a range that goes from a logged positional/valence ratio of -0.7 (corresponding to an actual ratio of 0.5: a clear *problem-solving* characterisation, with the average positional yield being *half* as large as the average valence yield) to +0.7 (i.e. a ratio of 2: a clear *conflict-mobilisation* characterisation, with the average positional yield being *twice* as large as the average valence yield). Moreover, parties appear uniformly distributed on both sides: if we separately count party characterisations for issue opportunities and Twitter strategy (thus with 2 observations per party), 36 observations see a prevalence of conflict mobilisation, while 42 see a prevalence of problem solving.

A second observation concerns the relative consistency between issue opportunities (bars) and the parties' Twitter campaigns (spikes). Of the 39 parties included in the analysis, 29 (74 percent) retain in their Twitter campaign the same characterisation (i.e., a prevalence of either problem-solving or conflict-mobilisation) of their original issue opportunity configuration; and, for those that changed their characterisation in the campaign, changes are very often minor.

This said, it is then worth turning to our second empirical expectation, i.e., that mainstream parties should be mostly characterised as problem-solvers, with challenger parties mostly

conflict-mobilising. A good starting point here is to look first at the recent wave of radical right-wing challenger parties and candidates. Here a result is clear: these parties are effectively identified by the criterion of a conflict-mobilisation characterisation. Le Pen, AfD, Lega (and FdI), PVV and UKIP are all clearly (and consistently: both in terms of issue opportunities and party strategy) characterised as conflict-mobilisers. The FPÖ has a slightly more balanced configuration, which in a way reflects the relatively more low-profile strategy of this party in the 2017 campaign. Looking at what other actors are consistently classified as conflict-mobilisers (i.e. positionally characterised), these include the liberal Neos in Austria, François Fillon (with his strongly pro-EU and pro-market positional characterisation) and Benoit Hamon (with a classic left-wing characterisation, and low valence credibility) in France, the SNP in the UK. As for Italy, parties consistently classified as conflict-mobilisers include (besides the already mentioned radical right-wing Lega) the liberal +Eur, the radical left LeU, the radical right-wing FdI, and finally (and perhaps surprisingly) the centre-left, incumbent Pd, which represents the only case of a mainstream party consistently classified as a conflict mobiliser. However, this outcome is less surprising when looking at the specific strategy of the Pd, whose leader (since 2014) Matteo Renzi changed the party characterisation in a much more liberal, positional direction (pro EU, civil rights and immigrant integration), while suffering a loss in valence credibility.

Moving to the side of problem-solvers, the analysis in fact confirms our expectation. Mainstream parties and candidates with government experience appear consistently classified here, including Kurz, SPÖ, Emmanuel Macron (and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan), CDU-CSU, FDP, SPD, CDA, the British Conservatives. The few exceptions are the former Green Peter Pilz (along with the British Greens and the Dutch GroenLinks), the far-left Philippe Poutou (along with the Linke and the Dutch Socialist Party), and finally the Five-Star Movement in Italy. In all these cases the valence resources of these parties come from specific issues (such

as environmental protection and fight to unemployment); this also applies to the Five-Star Movement, which also relies on its valence credibility on issues such as corruption.

Finally, a small number of parties have a more balanced characterisation, resulting in different prevailing signs (usually due to small differences) in terms of issue opportunities vs. actual campaign. Here some key examples are of small and characterised actors, albeit with a government experience (e.g. the FPÖ, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the German Greens), or of mainstream parties that developed a more positionally characterised campaign (such as Fi, PvdA, D66, the British Labour and LibDems). Overall, our expectations appear confirmed, as the operational distinction between problem solving and conflict mobilisation strategies appears to meaningfully separate mainstream parties from new challenger parties, albeit of different types.

4.3 Classifying parties: from categorical distinctions to continuous dimensions?

We finally come to our concluding empirical assessment: whether a combination of the two aforementioned dimensions (ideological consistency, problem-solving vs. conflict-mobilization) allows providing a meaningful classification of parties (along a continuum) allowing to parsimoniously understand innovation in party strategy.

Figure 4 presents a visual summary of the combination of two measures, focusing on the supply side, that is, accounting for parties' strategic decisions about which issues to emphasize in their campaign. On the horizontal axis, we report values of ideological consistency, in terms of a party's deviation from the classic 20th century ideological diagonal. This is the same measure than the one used previously in Figure 2. Ideologically consistent parties are in the middle of the chart, close to a value of 0. Ideological challengers which are more progressive on the *cultural* than on the economic dimension (the 'free trade cosmopolitans') have positive values and lie towards the rightmost extreme. 'Welfare

nationalist' challengers, who are more progressive on the *economic* than on the cultural dimension, lie towards the leftmost extreme. As in our previous analyses, this measure of off-diagonality depends on the definition of the cultural dimension. In Figure 4, we report results based on the immigration sub-dimension. On the vertical axis, we instead report values of the conflict-mobilisation vs. problem-solving characterisation (the measure used in Figure 3). Conflict-mobilisers are at the top and problem-solvers at the bottom. Before examining Figure 4 it is worth reminding that our theoretical expectation was of a distribution with clusters testifying an association between conflict mobilisation and low ideological consistency; thus, with mainstream parties being characterised by high ideological consistency and problem-solving characterisation, and both types of ideological challengers characterised by conflict mobilisation. As a result, we would expect to observe three clusters roughly organised in a V shape.

[Figure 4]

This expected pattern appears essentially confirmed by the empirical distribution reported in Figure 4. Here we first observe a confirmation of the expectation on mainstream parties: most of them appear to concentrate in a cluster situated at the centre-bottom position of the chart, i.e., with a high level of ideological consistency between economic and immigration attitudes (horizontal location – which expresses off-diagonality – close to 0) and a prevalently problem-solving overall characterisation. A second (albeit less dense) cluster of radical right-wing parties is then clearly visible in the top left corner: these are parties that combine a 'welfare nationalist' ideological challenge with a clear conflict-mobilisation characterisation. Finally, the diagonal that connects the central cluster to the top right corner shows the path where some 'free trade cosmopolitan' challengers lie; with the strongly characterised cases of

LeU and +Eur (much more progressive on cultural issues than they are on economic issues; and clearly conflict-mobilisers), but with other parties such as the Pd, D66, the PvdA and other parties aligned in the same direction. Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in fact, the central cluster tends to lie slightly on the left of the 0 value. This means that the issue opportunities of most mainstream parties – still characterised by a relatively high ideological consistency – tend anyway to see a slight deviation towards more conservatism on immigration than predicted by their economic characterisation.

Similar findings apply when the non-economic dimension of the political space is based on stances towards European integration, instead of immigration (see Figure A4 in the appendix). Here however some difference emerges: while the V-shaped pattern appears confirmed, this time the slight ideological deviation of mainstream parties has the opposite sign: such parties' issue opportunities tend to be more pro-EU than would be consistent with their more moderate economic position; in other words, while those parties could be described as having a moderate anti-immigrant bias, they have at the same time a moderate pro-EU bias. But what is confirmed here is the V-shape of the diagram, with the combination – for mainstream parties – of a problem-solving characterisation with higher levels of ideological consistency.

5. Conclusion

We opened up this chapter by setting the focus on the first two overarching research questions that animate this special issue. The first one is the extent to which some (especially new) parties are characterised by issue opportunities and strategies that significantly challenge classic, 20th century ideological alignments. The second is whether a significant differentiation emerges in terms of the characterisation of each party as a *problem solver* or as a *conflict mobiliser*. Finally, we suggested that a combination of these criteria might provide a useful two-dimensional party classification scheme useful for understanding the

characteristics of the challenges that are impacting West European party systems, without the need to resort to specific, idiosyncratic party types.

In general, we mostly found empirical support for our expectations. First, the criterion of challenge-to-ideology indeed appears as useful, as it both highlights significant differentiation between parties, and a differentiation that is meaningfully associated to some of the key strategy innovators of this election year. Albeit in different directions, both radical right-wing parties and other types of innovators appear as 'ideological challengers': they are characterised a by a configuration of issue opportunities that significantly challenges classic ideology (either in a 'welfare nationalist' or in a 'free-market cosmopolitan' direction), and they strategically exploit such configuration in their campaigns. Secondly, even the criterion of conflict mobilisation (the continuum between 'problem solvers' and 'conflict mobilisers') allows to meaningfully separate older mainstream parties (still mostly characterised by larger problem-solving credibility and exploiting this specific strategy type) from new challengers, that clearly invest on conflict mobilisation. Finally, the combination of both criteria clearly identifies these categories in terms of distinct clusters of parties, showing the association between the two criteria: new challengers appear combining an emphasis on conflict mobilisation with a significant challenge to classic ideological alignments.

In our view, these findings provide important and useful coordinates for the interpretation of the wave of crisis and change that is investing West European party systems. This is because our point of departure was the adoption of issue yield theory as a framework for analysis. Compared to other frameworks, the added value of such theory lies in its lack of assumptions about ideological consistency (and indeed even about the presence of overarching dimensions), and in its ability to parsimoniously include different types (valence or positional) of issue resources. It is then clear that the additional heuristic and explanatory value of theory will be even more enhanced in conditions of de-ideologisation and creative

mix of positional and valence resources. This appears to be the case in the six West European elections we considered; in such conditions, classic left-right schemes clearly appear inadequate (hence, unsurprisingly, the skyrocketing use by political commentators of the increasingly catch-all category of *populism*), and simplified dichotomies such as mainstream vs. challenger appear of little informative content. On the contrary, we argue that our bi-dimensional scheme, combining challenge-to-ideology with conflict mobilisation (vs. problem solving), offers a possibility that is at the same time parsimonious and informative, while effectively allowing to identify clusters of parties that are already commonly identified by existing party classifications. With the big advantage that our scheme is based on a *continuous* operationalisation of both dimensions. This not only allows more nuanced classifications of parties (and the identification of key differences within clusters), but most importantly, allow through time the assessment of *change*, by offering the possibility to trace how parties gradually acquire different characteristics. We argue that this might be an important quality, at a time where West European party systems appear in a tumultuous stage of change.

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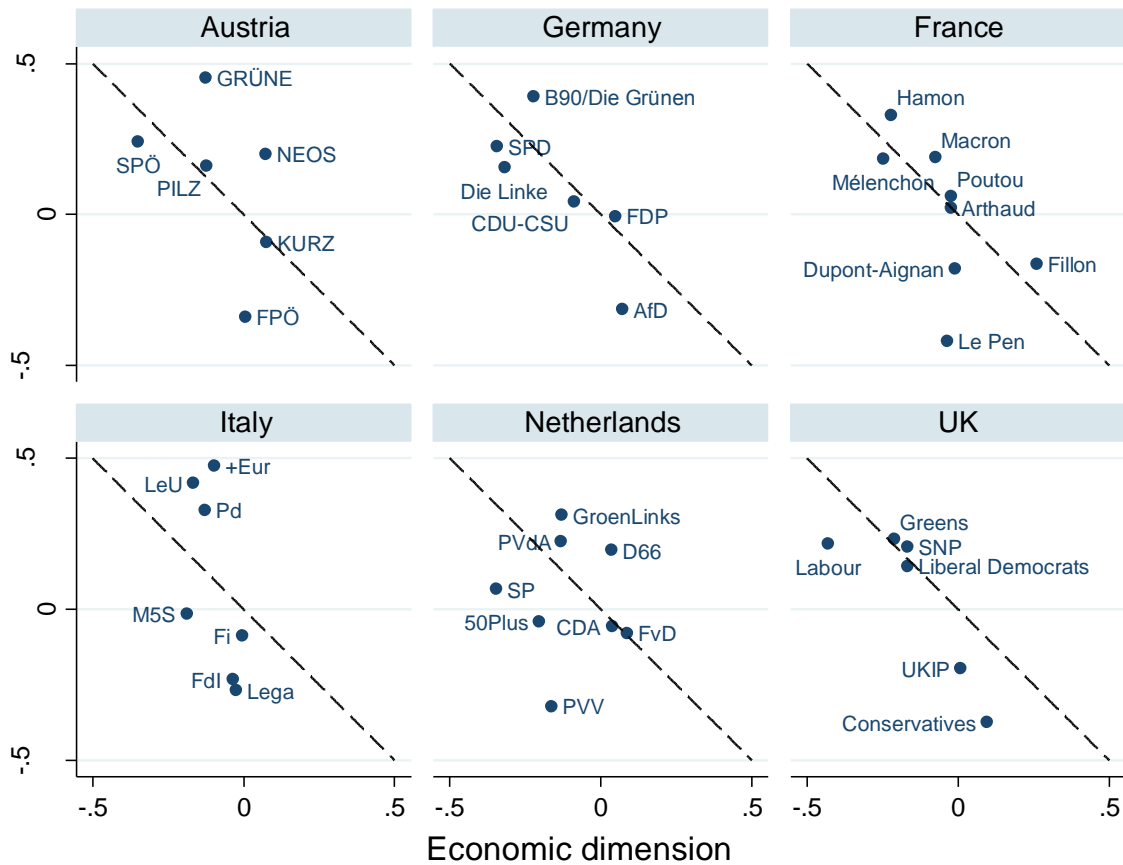
Figure 1. Parties' and candidates' issue opportunities in a two-dimensional political space, and traditional axis of political competition (dashed line). The parties' locations indicate their optimal issue opportunity configurations, based on issue yield theory.
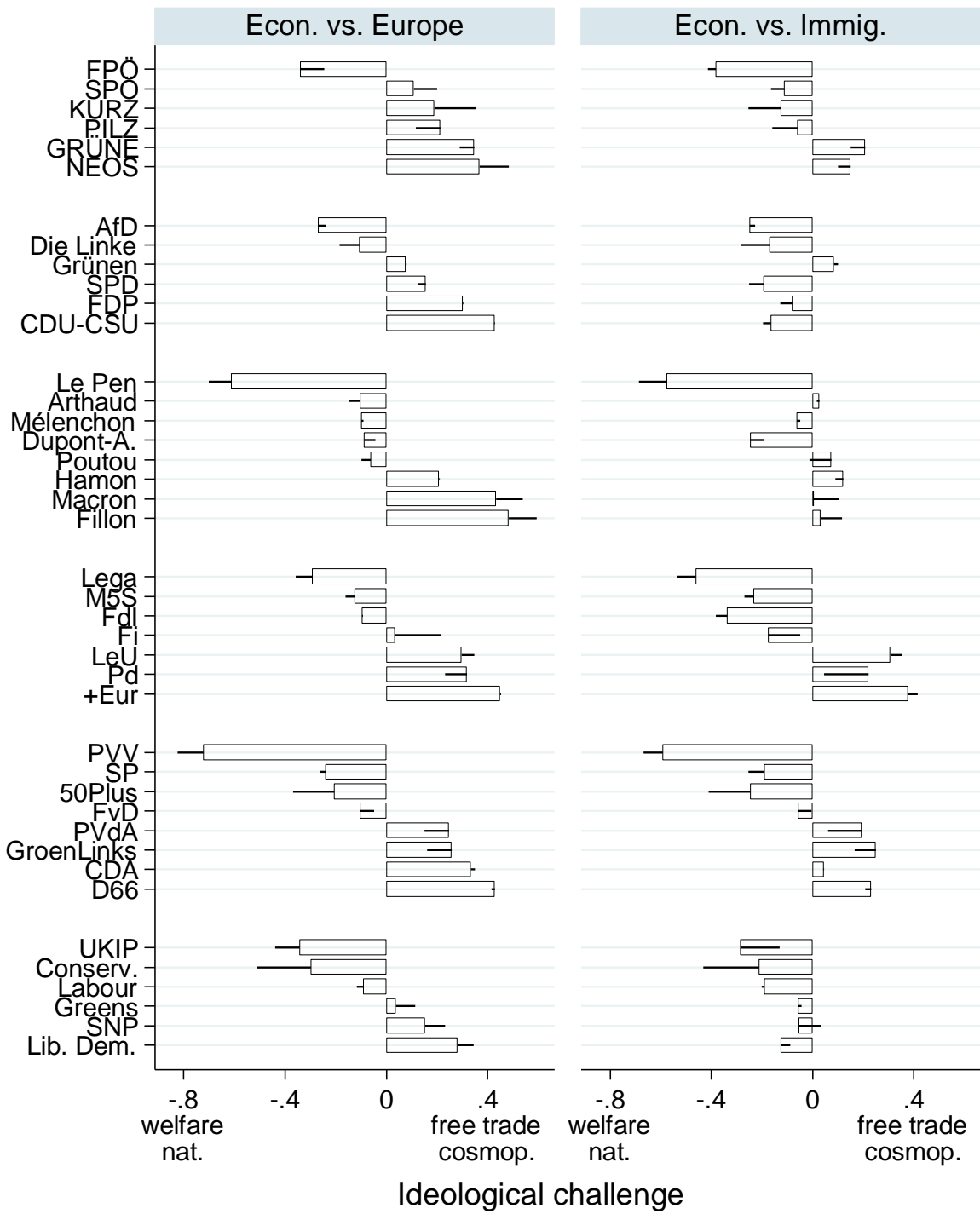
Figure 2. Magnitude and direction of the deviation from the diagonal

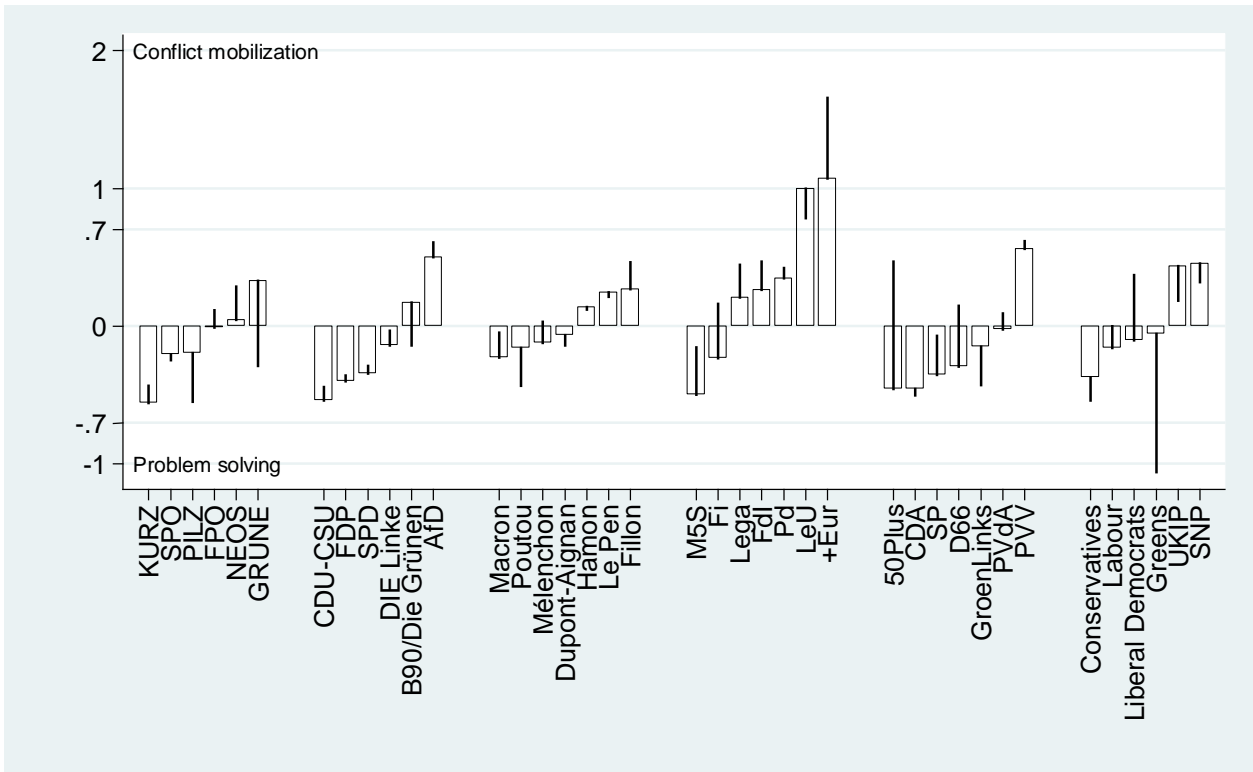Figure 3 - Party characterisation on a problem-solving (bottom) to conflict-mobilisation (top) continuum, for both issue opportunities (bars) and actual party campaigns on Twitter (spikes). Values are logged positional/valence ratios: a value of zero implies equal values for positional and valence issues; 0.7 and 1 respectivly imply values two and three times larger for positional issues than for valence issues.

Figure 4. Parties' mobilisation strategy and degree of ideological challenge (in a space defined by economic issues and immigration)

Making sense of party strategy innovation: Challenge to ideology and conflict mobilisation as dimensions of party competition

Online Appendix

Figure A1. Location of parties' and candidates' electoral potentials in a two-dimensional political space defined by economic issues and immigration

Figure A2. Location of parties' and candidates' electoral potentials in a two-dimensional political space defined by economic issues and European integration

Figure A3. Location of parties' and candidates' electoral potentials in a two-dimensional political space defined by economic issues and other cultural issues
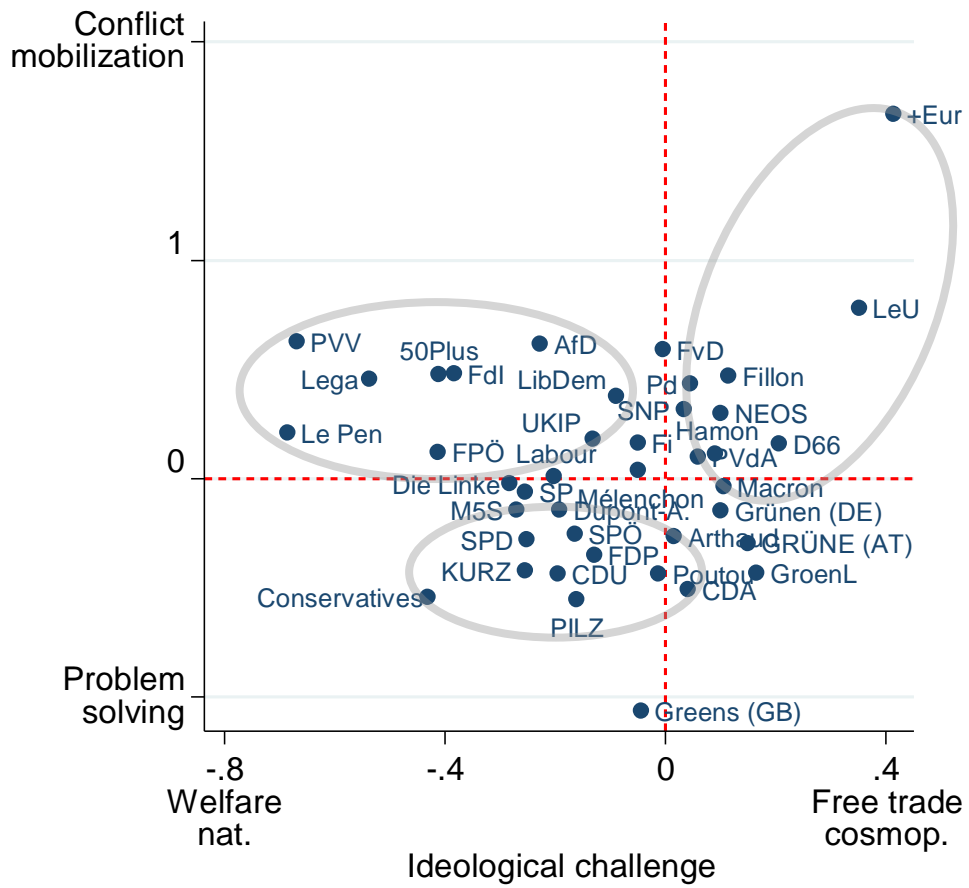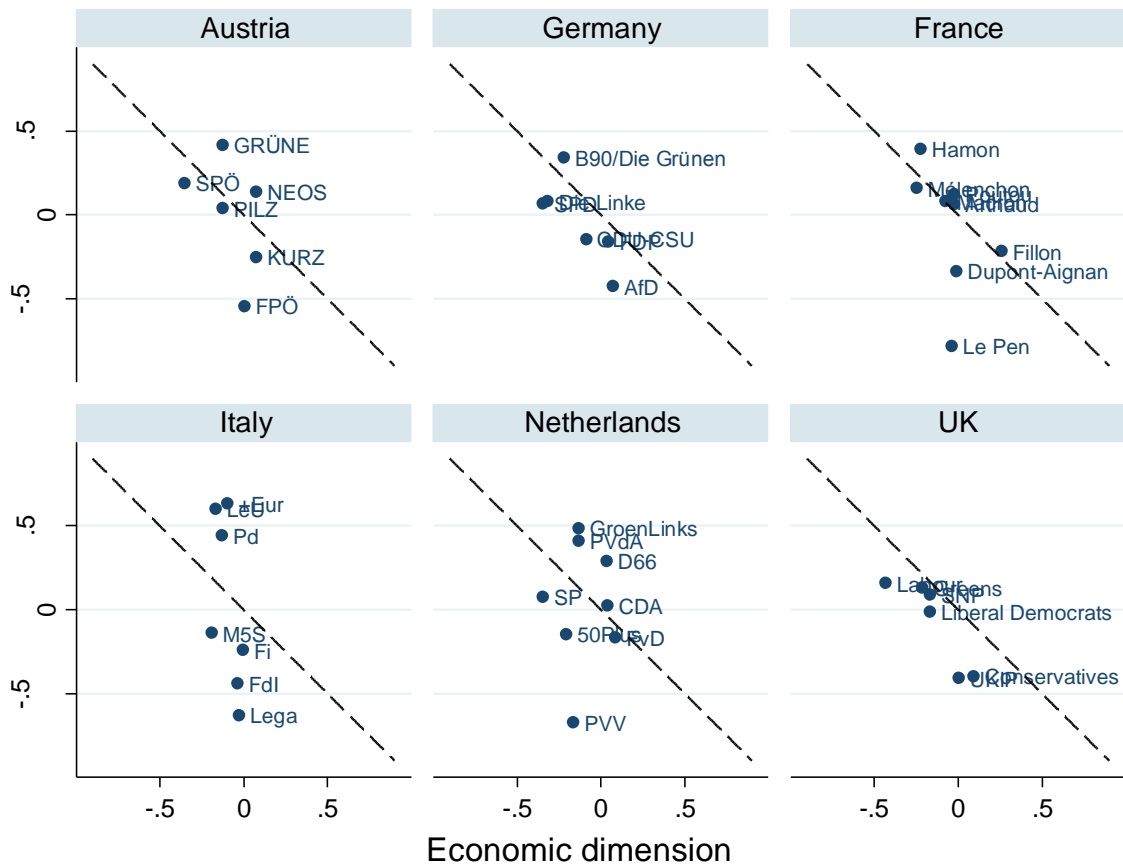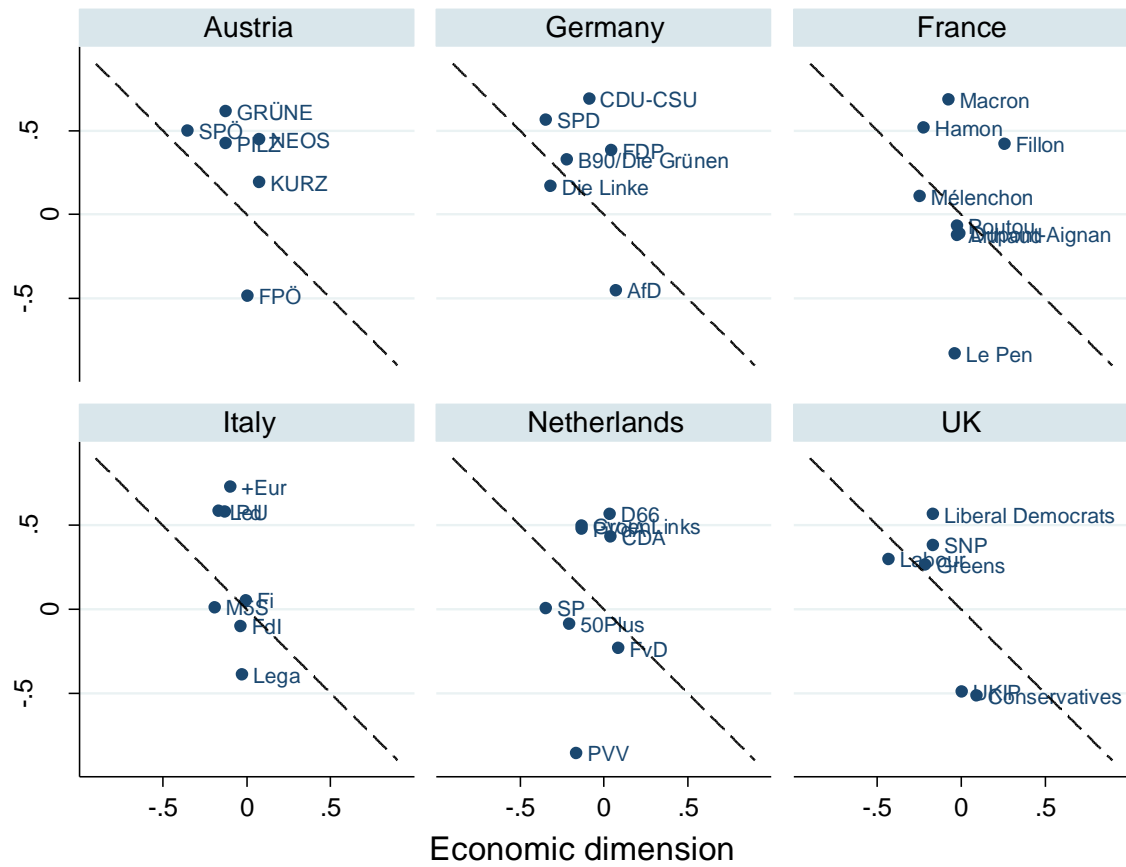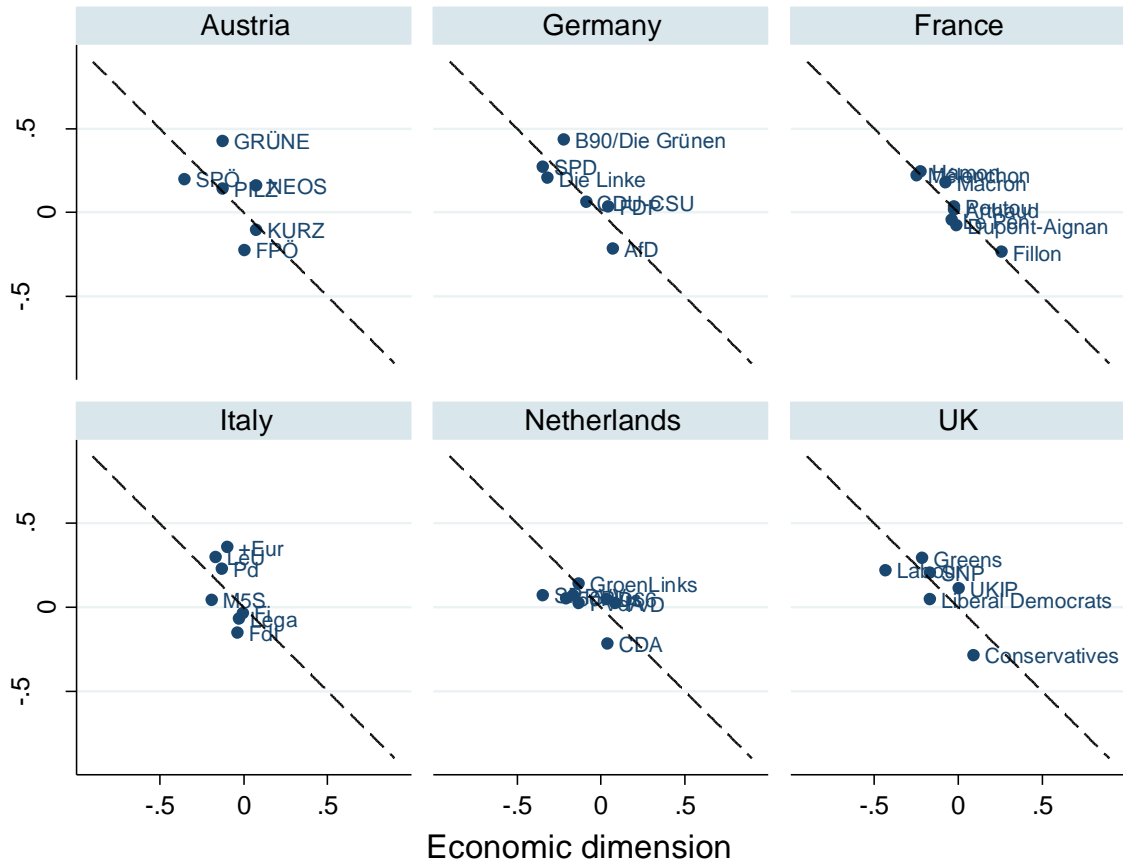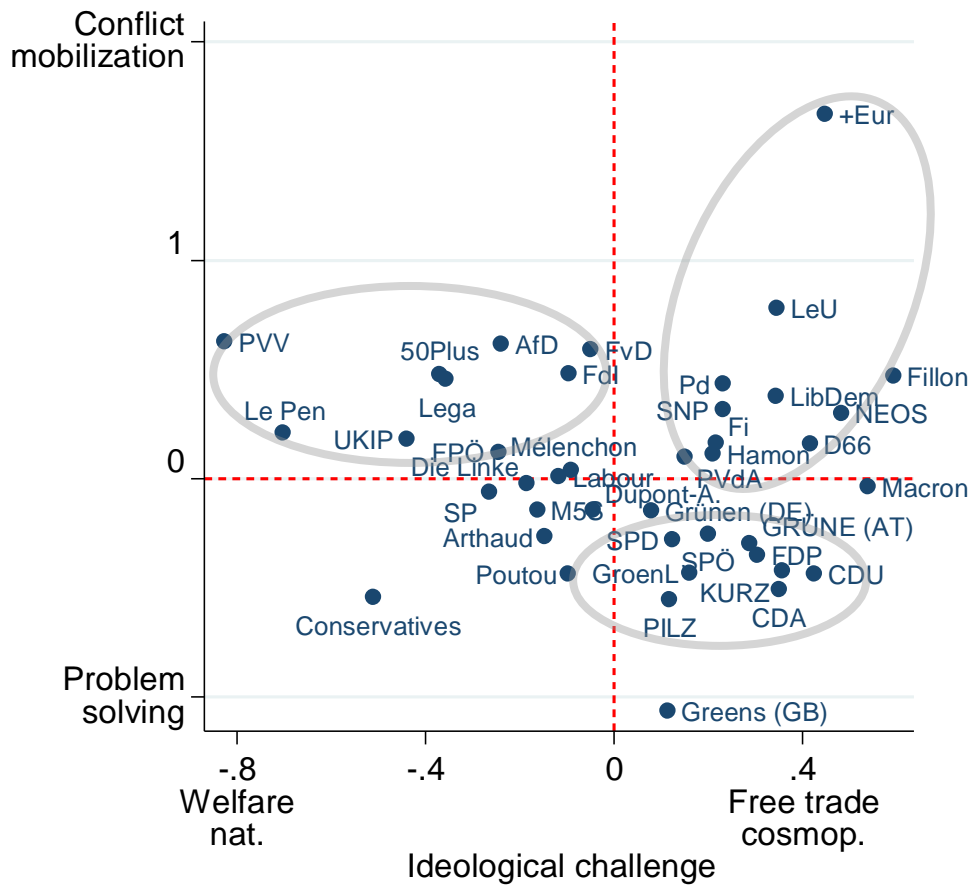
Figure A4. Figure 3. Parties' mobilisation strategy and degree of ideological challenge (in a space defined by economic issues and European integration)

Table A1. Positional and valence goals tested in the six countries (English translations)

Austria

Type	Goal A	Goal B
Positional	Require foreigners in Austria to fully adapt to Austrian culture	Allow foreigners in Austria to preserve their own culture
Positional	Make asylum rules more restrictive	Keep current asylum rules
Positional	Diesel cars should be banned	No cars should be banned
Positional	Introduce stronger direct democracy measures	Keep current level of direct democracy measures
Positional	Stay in the EU	Leave the EU
Positional	End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Austria	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Austria
Positional	Allow gay marriages	Do not allow gay marriages
Positional	Politics should implement gender quotas	Politics should not enforce gender quotas
Positional	Reduce income differences	Do not reduce income differences
Positional	Deregulate the job market	Keep current regulations in the job market
Positional	Increase the minimum wage above 1500 euros	Do not increase the minimum wage above 1500 euros
Positional	Keep current pension age	Increase pension age
Positional	Austria should have a property tax on inheritance	Austria should not have a property tax on inheritance
Positional	The EU has to enforce refugee quotas in all member states	Each member state of the EU should decide by its own on refugee quotas
Positional	Austria should introduce a comprehensive school for all children until 14	Austria should not introduce a comprehensive school for all children until 14
Positional	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	Cut taxes and spend less on health and social services
Positional	Surveillance measures should be extended	Surveillance measures should not be extended
Positional	Promoting the production of sustainable energy	Maintaining the current mix of sustainable and fossil energy
Positional	Austria should abolish the obligatory membership in trade associations	Austria should not abolish the obligatory membership in trade associations
Positional	Fight unemployment even at the expense of high national debt	Don't decrease unemployment if it means higher national debt
Positional	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	Mantain current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants
Valence	Fight corruption	
Valence	Fight crime and keep our communities safe	
Valence	Support economic growth	
Valence	Protect the environment	
Valence	Providing affordable homes	
Valence	Control immigration	
Valence	Fighting poverty of Elderly People	
Valence	Providing Social Justice	
Valence	Protect Austria against terrorist attacks	
Valence	Fight unemployment	

Germany

Type	Goal A	Goal B
Positional	The current budget surplus should be used for reducing taxes	The current budget surplus should be used in infrastructure and education
Positional	Diesel cars should be banned	No cars should be banned
Positional	Keep the decision of nuclear power phase-out	Withdraw the decision of nuclear power phase-out
Positional	Building more wind turbines	Stop building wind turbines
Positional	Stay in the EU	Leave the EU
Positional	The EU has to enforce refugee quotas in all member states	Each member state of the EU should decide by its own on refugee quotas
Positional	In order to maintain the EURO, Germany should transfer money to poorer countries	Germany should not pay any money to poorer countries within the EURO zone
Positional	Repeal gay marriages	Keep gay marriages
Positional	Make immigration rules more restrictive	Keep current immigration rules
Positional	Reduce income differences	Do not reduce income differences
Positional	Require foreigners in Germany to fully adapt to national culture	Allow foreigners in Germany to preserve their own culture
Positional	Deregulate the job market	Keep current regulations in the job market
Positional	Increase pension age	Keep current pension age
Positional	Politics should implement gender quotas	Politics should not enforce gender quotas
Positional	Introduce possibilities for binding referenda	Don't introduce binding referenda
Positional	Limit the number of refugees	Accept more refugees
Positional	Minimal wages should be increased to a minimum of 10 EUR	Minimal wages should be abolished
Valence	Fighting crime	
Valence	Protect the environment	
Valence	Support for families and children	
Valence	Support the economic growth	
Valence	Providing affordable homes	
Valence	Maintaining infrastructure	
Valence	Fighting poverty of elderly	
Valence	Providing social justice	
Valence	Protect from terrorism	
Valence	Fight unemployment	

France

Type	Goal A	Goal B
Positional	Deregulate the job market	Keep current regulations in the job market
Positional	Repeal gay marriages	Keep gay marriages
Positional	Legalise soft drugs	Keep soft drugs illegal
Positional	Keep current immigration rules	Make immigration rules more restrictive
Positional	Restrict welfare for immigrants	Keep welfare for immigrants
Positional	Accept more refugees	Limit the number of refugees
Positional	Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	Authorise Islamic veil in public spaces
Positional	Lower pension age	Increase pension age
Positional	Reduce income differences	Don't reduce income differences
Positional	Limit economic globalisation	Encourage economic globalisation
Positional	Stay in the EU	Leave the EU
Positional	Leave the Euro	Stay in the Euro
Positional	Abandon nuclear energy	Keep using nuclear energy
Positional	Restrict access to abortion	Keep access to abortion
Positional	Legalise euthanasia	Keep euthanasia illegal
Valence	Make France count more in Europe	
Valence	Make EU more democratic	
Valence	Support economic growth	
Valence	Fight corruption	
Valence	Protect the environment	
Valence	Protect France from the terrorist threat	
Valence	Make women's role in society more important	
Valence	Fight unemployment	
Valence	Improve the quality of education	

Italy

Type	Goal A	Goal B
Positional	Leave the European Union	Keep Italy in the European Union
Positional	Make the EU economic policies more flexible	Maintain the EU economic austerity
Positional	Keep soft drugs illegal	Legalize soft drugs
Positional	Stay in the Euro	Leave the Euro
Positional	Intensify the fight against tax evasion	Do not intensify the fight against tax evasion
Positional	Increase economic bonuses to families with children	Do not increase economic bonuses to families with children
Positional	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	Introduce a flat tax (pre-fixed % of income tax, regardless of the income)
Positional	Maintain same-sex unions	Abolish same-sex unions
Positional	Limit economic globalization	Promote economic globalization
Positional	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship
Positional	Decriminalize the excess of legitimate defens	Maintain the current legislation on the excess of legitimate defense
Positional	Deregulate the job market, making firing workers less costly for firms	Keep current regulations in the job market, making more difficult for firms to f
Positional	Keep current pension age	Reduce pension age
Positional	Legalise and regulate prostitution	Keep the current norms on prostitution
Positional	Introduce a basic income for those living under the poverty line	Do not introduce a basic income for those living under the poverty line
Positional	Reduce income differences	Do not reduce income differences
Positional	Limit the number of refugees	Keep accepting refugees like now
Positional	Do not introduce the hourly minimum wage	Introduce the hourly minimum wage
Positional	Scrap the cost of university tuition fees	Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees
Positional	Abolish the current legislation on the End-of-life	Keep the current legislation on the End-of-life
Positional	Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	Abolish mandatory requirements for vaccines
Positional	Maintain the current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	Reduce access to welfare benefits for immigrants
Valence	Make Italy count more in Europe	
Valence	Fight corruption	
Valence	Reduce the costs of politics	
Valence	Boost economic growth	
Valence	Make citizens safer from crime	
Valence	Fight unemployment	
Valence	Fight pollution and land disruption	
Valence	Fight poverty	
Valence	Renew Italian politics	
Valence	Ensure a weel-functioning healthcare	
Valence	Improve the education system	
Valence	Protect Italy from the terrorist threat	

Netherlands

Type	Goal A	Goal B
Positional	Require employees to give employers a fixed term contract after two years	Do not require employees to give employers a fixed term contract after two years
Positional	Allow foreigners in The Netherlands to preserve their own culture	Require foreigners in The Netherlands to fully adapt to Dutch culture
Positional	Abolish the deductible in health insurance, even if this means higher fees	Do not abolish the deductible in health insurance
Positional	Increase defense spending, to come closer to the NATO norm	Do not increase defense spending
Positional	The Netherlands should leave the EU	The Netherlands should stay in the EU
Positional	Completely close the Dutch borders to immigrants	Do not completely close the Dutch borders to immigrants
Positional	Reduce income differences	Do not reduce income differences
Positional	Allow elderly to be assisted in ending their life	Do not allow elderly to be assisted in ending their life
Positional	Increase the tax on meat to the 21% tariff	Do not increase the tax on meat
Positional	Reduce the pension age to 65	Keep the pension age at 67
Positional	Introduce possibilities for binding referenda	Only keep the current possibilities for non binding referenda
Positional	Maintain the current refugee policy in The Netherlands	Take in less refugees in The Netherlands
Positional	Abolish the student loans and bring back the student scholarship	Maintain the student loans and do not bring back the student scholarship
Positional	Maintain the current weed policy	Legalise the selling and growing of weed
Positional	Maintain the right to social provisions for Dutch residents without citizenship	Restrict the right to social provisions to Dutch nationals only
Valence	Improve care for the elderly and the disabled	
Valence	Maintain the current economic growth	
Valence	Fight environmental pollution	
Valence	Protect the Netherlands against terrorist attacks	
Valence	Further reduce unemployment	

United Kingdom

Type	Goal A	Goal B
Positional	Keep Britain in the European Single Market	Leave the European Single Market
Positional	Keep Britain in the European Union	Leave the European Union
Positional	Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence
Positional	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	Dismantle Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)
Positional	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	Rely on the private sector to build affordable homes
Positional	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	Allow foreigners in Britain to preserve their own culture
Positional	Allow the expansion of fracking to produce more oil and gas	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas
Positional	End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain
Positional	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	Repeal the law that allows gay marriages
Positional	Expand the provision of grammar schools	Limit the provision of grammar schools
Positional	Reduce income differences	Do not reduce income differences
Positional	Increase the minimum wage	Do not increase the minimum wage
Positional	Nationalize Britain's railways	Keep Britain's railways in private
Positional	Cut taxes and spend less on health and social services	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services
Positional	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees
Positional	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	Allow the Islamic veil in public spaces
Positional	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	Maintain current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants
Positional	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	
Valence	Improve the NHS	
Valence	Fight crime and keep our communities safe	
Valence	Protect the environment	
Valence	Boost economic growth	
Valence	Control immigration	
Valence	Provide leadership for the country	
Valence	Protect pensions	
Valence	Improve the quality of schools	
Valence	Protect the UK from terrorist attacks	
Valence	Reduce unemployment	