

**Why Social Democratic Parties Do Not Appeal to Left-Authoritarian Voters?**

**A Demand-Side Explanation with Evidence from the Netherlands**

Kirill Zhirkov

University of Virginia

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## **Abstract**

Why West European social democratic parties do not attempt to attract left-authoritarian voters by adopting more traditionalist cultural stances? Currently dominant explanations emphasize party strategies associated with coalition politics and costs of ideological shifting. The present article tests an alternative argument that focuses on potential electoral gains from an ideological shift. By modeling support for the Dutch Labour Party in six consecutive elections from 1994 to 2012, I demonstrate that potential increase in vote shares after shifting to a more authoritarian cultural position is negligible. Following this result, I also demonstrate that respondents who vote for the Dutch Labour Party base their choices exclusively on the economic dimension and effectively neglect the socio-cultural one. Furthermore, the overall impact of issue distances on voting choice is generally small throughout the studied period. In conclusion, I discuss potential implications of these findings for political representation in industrial democracies.

*Keywords:* ideological shifting, left-authoritarians, Netherlands, representation, social democrats

An interesting finding in West European politics concerns the representation paradox in the two-dimensional political space. The new dimension of political competition based on social values is now widely seen as a persistent phenomenon in politics of industrial democracies (Albright 2010; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2012; Bornschier 2010). Within the lens of cleavage politics (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), the emergence and rise of the cultural conflict in developed societies can be attributed to a deep social division created by globalization (Kriesi et al. 2006). Content of the new ideological dimension, therefore, is defined by cultural protectionism and attachment to the nation state—as opposed to universalism and international integration. In terms of the standard two-dimensional model of European political space (e.g., Kitschelt 1995), this new cleavage is expected to replace—or fuse with—the older libertarian–authoritarian value conflict and remain orthogonal to the traditional left–right economic dimension.

However, other contributions put forward an important qualification regarding the two-dimensionality of the West European political space—it seems to hold only among individual voters. Parties, in turn, remain largely aligned on a single ideological dimension that incorporates both economic and cultural issues (Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). The latter finding is based on expert judgments but voters seem to also perceive a gap between their own positions and ideological stances of parties (Thomassen 2012). A study employing anchoring vignettes also indicates that as much as 87% of variance in positions of European parties can be explained by a single ideological dimension (Bakker et al. 2015). In other words, it is possible to speak about two different political spaces in Western Europe—one for voters and one for parties—that are far from being perfectly congruent.

More specifically, West European parties usually take left-libertarian or right-authoritarian ideological positions whereas voters are spread more evenly across the two-

dimensional political space. As a result, a large group of voters combining support for redistribution with cultural protectionism remain largely unrepresented by existing parties (Hillen and Steiner 2019; Lefkofridi, Wagner, and Willmann 2014; Thomassen 2012, Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). The phenomenon is normatively important because ideological congruence between voters and their representatives is usually seen as a cornerstone of a democratic polity (Dahl 1989; also see Ferland 2016).

A specific puzzle with regard to this representation paradox concerns strategic choices made by the social democratic parties in West European countries. Most other party families are bound by structural or ideological considerations that do not allow them to move into the left-authoritarian corner of the political space. For instance, left-libertarian parties are historically associated with universalistic social values preventing them from shifting towards cultural protectionism (Kitschelt 1988). Moderate parties on the right, in turn, are likely constrained by influential interest groups that strongly oppose redistribution (Bawn et al. 2012). Social democratic parties are not necessarily affected by these limitations—and, nevertheless, they do not seem ready to adopt a culturally protectionist agenda supported by the largest cross-section of West European voters (Akkerman 2015; Bale et al. 2010; Rooduijn et al. 2014).<sup>1</sup> Given the mainstream party decline across Western Europe (Spoon and Kluever 2019), this ideological inertia is particularly puzzling.

In the present paper, I test a demand-side explanation for the apparent ideological incongruence between social democratic parties and their voters. It focuses on voters' inability to punish parties for ideological estrangement that allows inertial strategies among the elites. In testing this hypothesis, I take advantage of electoral data from the Netherlands that allow tracing

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative view contends that the shift to the right occurs but affects entire national political systems—as a result, the relative position of the social democrats is not changing (Van Spanje 2010).

positions of voters and parties on both left–right and libertarian–authoritarian dimensions since mid-1990s. I use regression analysis to simulate electoral results and demonstrate that potential gains of the Dutch Labour Party from the hypothetical authoritarian shift are negligible. This result is explained by two individual-level mechanisms: issue prioritization and, more importantly, large non-issue voting. In conclusion, I discuss implications of these findings for political representation in industrial democracies.

### **The Demand-Side Explanation**

Currently, the literature is largely dominated by explanations that emphasize the role of party strategies in shaping the political space. First, in order to form viable government coalitions, parties have incentives to position themselves on a single dimension (Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). By doing so, they ensure greater ideological coherence of a potential coalition and minimize internal conflicts. Second, ideological shifting can incur significant costs for a party (DeSio and Weber 2014; see also Downs 1957). Political party making inconsistent ideological statements from one electoral period to the other is likely to be seen by voters as irresponsible and lose votes instead of gaining them.<sup>2</sup> Third, elites of each political party can have their own ideological preferences that do not necessarily coincide with the median party voter (Schofield et al. 1998; see also Bawn et al. 2012). In taking policy positions, parties try to reflect elite preferences as closely as possible—as soon as politicians’ career goals are not threatened.

All three logics outlined above offer plausible explanations for the observed ideological discrepancies between West European parties and their voters. However, in explaining the persistent representation paradox in developed democracies, the analysis of party strategies is not enough. Parties are free in implementing these strategies only as far as they are not punished by

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<sup>2</sup> Although some studies show that mainstream parties do not face significant electoral punishments for ideological shifting (Adams et al. 2006).

the voters. Therefore, in addition to investigating parties' reasons to take positions that are different from their voters, it is necessary to understand why voters effectively allow this. In other words, what are the mechanisms that prevent electoral punishment and weaken political representation in industrial democracies?

One potential explanation for this phenomenon is related to the top-down effect in political communication: political elites make the masses to shift their positions rather than the other way around (Zaller 1992). The individual-level mechanism behind this effect is learning whereby voters simply adopt positions of already preferred parties (Lenz 2009). For instance, a recent study has demonstrated how cues from trusted elites can inform mass attitudes on the immigration issue (Hellwig and Kweon 2016). Social democratic parties in West European countries may use similar mechanisms to push their voters towards a more libertarian position with regard to cultural protectionism.

Second, there is a possibility that mere presence of several independent issue dimensions that have approximately equal levels of political relevance significantly impedes voters' ability to influence party positions. Ideologically cross-pressured voters have to pick the most important issue and then base their electoral choice on it (Lefkofridi, Wagner, and Willmann 2014). Such behavior can be rational: making the best choice from a set of suboptimal options still yields more utility than abstention. If the issue prioritization model is correct, then a specific pattern should be observed: social democratic parties are expected to attract voters who prioritize the traditional left-right dimension. Those whose choices are based on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, in turn, should vote for the radical right parties. This is, effectively, a variant of the issue ownership model (Petrocik 1996; see also Belanger and Meguid 2008), in which social democratic parties are claiming possession over the issues related to income redistribution.

Finally, it is well known that in real-world elections voters use a variety of considerations not necessarily reducible to issue voting. These potential non-issue predictors of electoral choice include partisan identification (Campbell et al. 1960), cleavage structures (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), and peer influence (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944), among others. All these factors, broadly related to social group memberships, can attenuate the effects of issue positions on electoral choice. Social democratic parties, compared to other party families, can be expected to draw a significant share of electoral support from their traditional social bases. Union members as well as those who identify with the broader movement for social welfare can be expected to vote for the social democratic parties regardless of their actual policy positions.

Therefore, part of the motives behind the ideological inertia of the social democratic parties in Western Europe should be looked for in small benefits from the hypothetical shift towards cultural protectionism rather than its high costs. Individuals who vote for the social democratic parties do so because of either the traditional economic dimension or various non-ideological considerations. As a result, adoption of a more authoritarian political position may not lead to a substantial increase in vote share—even if electoral costs of such a move are absent. Being effectively indifferent towards different strategies with regard to positions on multiculturalism, social democratic parties naturally choose inertia as the default option.

### **Data and Measures**

To test this assumption, I used data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES). The DPES continuously collected data on individual voters during elections to the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of the Dutch parliament. The study has existed since 1971 and asked respondents to evaluate positions of themselves and the major parties on various issue dimensions, including redistribution vs. market, since 1986. The issue dimension related to

integration of foreigners into the Dutch society (multiculturalism vs. assimilation) was introduced in 1994. The DPES is the only electoral study in Europe that started to ask respondents about spatial positions of parties and voters on both economic and cultural issues as early as mid-1990s and continues to do so up to the present time. During six elections—in 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2012—respondents and parties were positioned on both redistribution dimension and multiculturalism dimension.

There are substantive characteristics of the Dutch political system—beyond availability of data—that make it a good testing ground. The 150 members of the Dutch lower chamber are elected using party-list proportional representation in a single constituency. There is no electoral threshold, so any party with at least one elected candidate gains representation in the parliament. Two consequences of this institutional design are important. First, such a system makes emergence of new competitors relatively easy, so that existing parties may adjust their strategies to this entry threat. Second, very high proportionality is expected to ensure sincere voting among the electorate—as opposed to strategic one. Historically, deep divisions along religious lines in the Dutch society gave rise to a political system coined as consociationalism (Lijphart 1977). However, by mid-1990s this system gradually weakened following erosion of social conditions that gave a rise to it (Mair 1994; see also Jansen, De Graaf, and Need 2011).

The Netherlands is a multiparty system with relatively high fragmentation—a relatively large number of parties are able to get representation in the parliament. Between 1994 and 2012, as many as 10 to 12 parties were represented in the lower house after different elections. Historically, the Dutch party system was relatively stable reflecting religious divisions within the society, but the situation changed during the last decades. Currently, parties from the full ideological spectrum, from the radical left to the radical right, are represented in the parliament.



For the full list of parties present in the analyzed data, see Table 1. The analyzed sample included only respondents who (a) were eligible to vote, (b) voted, and (c) chose one of the parties positioned on both redistribution and multiculturalism dimensions.

**Table 1.** Political parties present in the data

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CDA: Christian Democratic Appeal
Name in Dutch: Christen-Democratisch Appel
Party family: Christian Democratic
Years available in the data: 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012
PvdA: Labour Party
Name in Dutch: Partij van de Arbeid
Party family: Social Democratic
Years available in the data: 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012
VVD: People's Party for Freedom and Democracy
Name in Dutch: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Party family: Conservative Liberal
Years available in the data: 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012
D66: Democrats 66
Name in Dutch: Democraten 66
Party family: Social Liberal
Years available in the data: 1994, 1998, 2002, 2010, 2012
GL: Green Left
Name in Dutch: GroenLinks
Party family: Green
Years available in the data: 1998
GPV: Reformed Political League
Name in Dutch: Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond
Party family: Confessional (Calvinist)
Years available in the data: 1998
LPF: Pim Fortuyn List
Name in Dutch: Lijst Pim Fortuyn
Party family: Radical Right
Years available in the data: 2002
SP: Socialist Party
Name in Dutch: Socialistische Partij
Party family: Radical Left
Years available in the data: 2006, 2010, 2012
CU: Christian Union
Name in Dutch: ChristenUnie
Party family: Confessional (Calvinist)
Years available in the data: 2006
PVV: Party for Freedom
Name in Dutch: Partij voor de Vrijheid
Party family: Radical Right
Years available in the data: 2010, 2012

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*Note.* Party families defined according to the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Hooghe et al. 2010; Steenbergen and Marks 2007).

As a part of the DPES surveys, respondents are asked questions regarding positions on

several issue dimensions. For instance, the question regarding income differences is as follows: “Some people and parties think that the differences in incomes in our country should be increased. Others think that these differences should be decreased. Of course, there are also people whose opinion is somewhere in between. Where would you place [yourself/party X] on this line?” A respondent has to choose a response from one (preference for increase or larger differences) to seven (preference for decrease or smaller differences). Respondents are asked to position themselves as well as the major political parties on this scale.

Depending on election year, similar questions are asked with regard to positions on the issues of euthanasia, crime, nuclear plants, ethnic minorities, and European unification. In my analysis, all dimensions were recoded so that the value of one represented the most left-wing/libertarian position whereas seven was the most right-wing/authoritarian position. To calculate positions of parties, I used mean placement of each party by voters (e.g., Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991). This approach—as opposed to voter-specific perceptions—can be criticized for neglecting a possibility of parties strategically presenting different positions to various constituencies (Lewis and King 2000). However, existence of objective ideological positions was a necessary assumption for modeling consequences of ideological shifts.

These positions were used to compute distances between voters and parties on issue dimensions that, according to the classic theory of spatial voting, should define individual utility from government policies (Downs 1957; see also Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook 1970). To calculate the variables, I used absolute distances (Westholm 1997). In addition, interactions between distances were included in estimated models in order to account for possible substitution effects (Stoetzer and Zittlau 2015). As a composite measure for utility of voting associated with a party, I used self-assessed likelihood that a respondent would ever vote for it.

This measure has been proven to be the best single predictor of voting choice, outperforming all other measures—including widely used thermometer sympathy scores (Van der Eijk et al. 2006). Actual voting choice was represented by a self-reported nominal variable with unique codes for the major parties.

## Results

### Dutch Political Space, 1994–2012

The first step in my analysis involves understanding the relationships between various non-economic issues in Dutch politics during the last 20 years. Is it possible to speak about an internally consistent cultural dimension of political conflict or, on the contrary, it consists of several loosely related issues? To answer this question, I conduct reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha as the primary indicator in most election years. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 2. It can be seen that scale consistency is growing with time: Dutch voters gradually link non-economic issues with each other more closely. However, the reliability coefficient never crosses the conventional threshold of 0.7 indicating that various cultural issues cannot be combined into a single scale, even in later years. This finding is in line with the earlier analysis that shows cultural protectionism in Dutch politics to be distinct from moral conservatism (Aarts and Thomassen 2008).

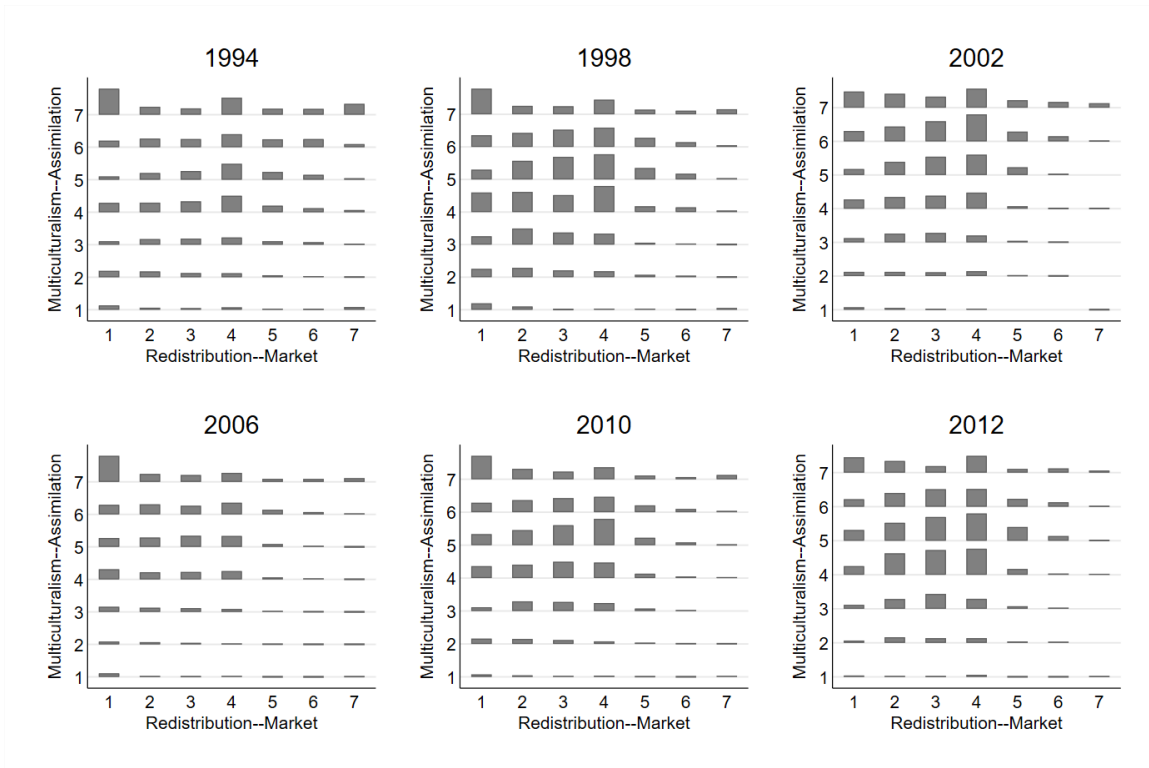
**Table 2.** Reliability of the cultural dimension, 1994–2012

	1994	2002	2006	2010	2012
Five items	0.295	0.331	0.361	n/a	n/a
Four items	0.301	0.407	0.406	0.399	0.441
Three items	0.341	0.485	0.528	0.584	0.617

*Note.* All entries are Cronbach’s alphas. Five items: euthanasia, crime, European integration, nuclear energy, multiculturalism. Four items: crime, European integration, nuclear energy, multiculturalism. Three items: crime, European integration, multiculturalism. Not enough items for year 1998.

Following this result, in subsequent analyses I concentrate on two specific issue dimensions: redistribution and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is chosen to represent the new

ideological cleavage for several reasons. First, theoretically it most closely follows the notion of cultural protectionism that represents the core issue of the new ideological conflict (Kriesi et al. 2006). Second, cultural threat plays the pivotal role in popular opposition to immigration (Ivarsflaten 2005), and in the radical right vote across West European countries (Zhirkov 2014).



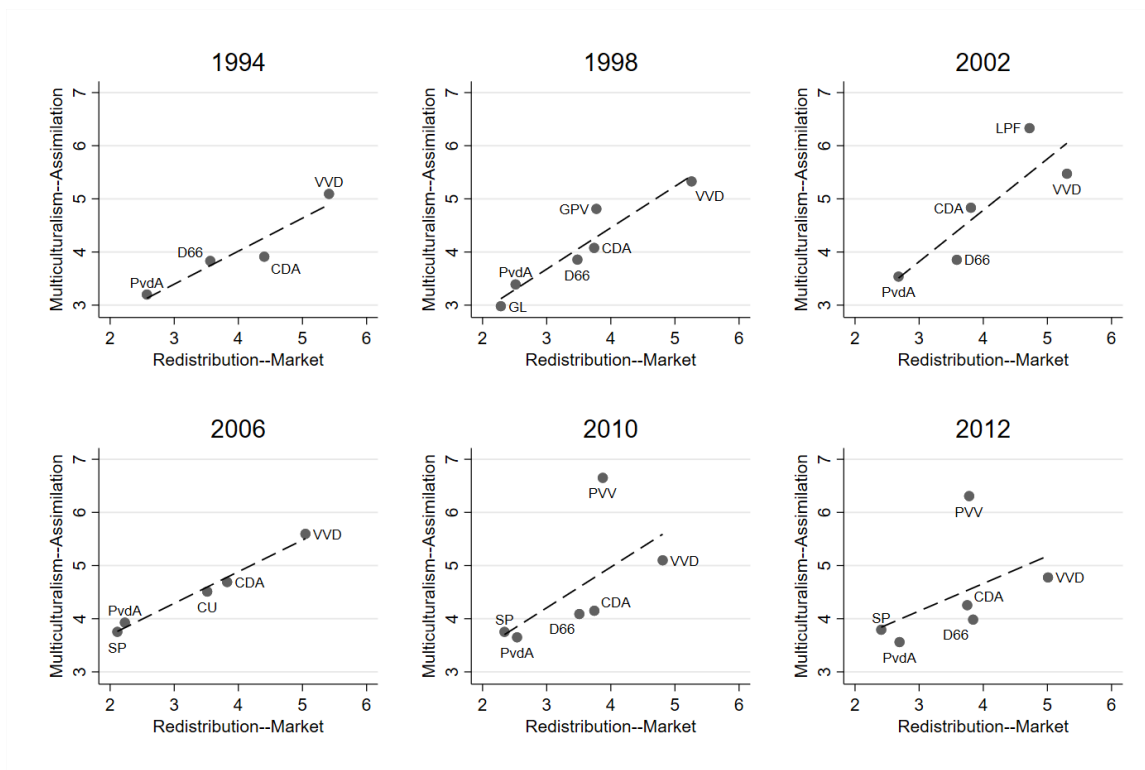
**Figure 1.** Ideological positions of Dutch voters, 1994–2012

After selecting these two dimensions of electoral competition, it is necessary to understand how Dutch voters and parties are distributed in the political space defined by redistribution and multiculturalism. Political positions of individual respondents in the two-dimensional political space across the six elections are presented in Figure 1. The distribution is clearly skewed to the top left corner: most Dutch voters are relatively supportive of redistribution and oppose multiculturalism. The bottom right corner, where respondents with right-libertarian political position are located, is nearly empty. Nevertheless, the correlation between the two

issue dimensions fluctuates between 0.160 (maximum, year 2002) and 0.016 (minimum, year 2010) indicating little to no linkage between them.

Spatial distribution of parties demonstrates a somewhat different pattern (see Figure 2). It can be seen that between 1994 and 2012 Dutch parties have been relatively well aligned on a single dimension that goes from the bottom left corner (left-libertarian position) to top right corner (right-authoritarian position). The only party that clearly deviates from this pattern is PVV that takes positions that are both strongly pro-assimilation and economically centrist. This finding is in line with previously expressed expectations regarding economic shift towards the center among the West European radical right parties (De Lange 2007; Muis and Scholte 2013). Alternatively, radical right parties have a strategic incentive to blur their position on the redistribution in order to emphasize the multiculturalism dimension, which is more advantageous for them (De Sio and Weber 2014; Rovny 2012). If this centrist position is genuine, however, it can explain fragility of the parliamentary coalition between the VVD and the CDA with the PVV support in 2010–2012 that broke down due to disagreements regarding austerity measures.

With regard to distributions of Dutch voters and parties in the political space, my findings are largely in line with earlier results (Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009; Thomassen 2012). Indeed, during the last 20 years in the Netherlands positioning of parties in the political space has been largely unidimensional. At the same time, a large group of voters with left-authoritarian views remains underrepresented by existing parties.



**Figure 2.** Ideological positions of Dutch parties, 1994–2012

### Untangling the Representation Paradox

Would adoption of a more authoritarian political position help the PvdA to gain votes? To answer this question, I start from estimating regression models using actual data from elections covered by the analyzed sample. My goal is to predict individual choices as precisely as possible but, at the same time, keep full effects of the issue distances. Therefore, I follow a two-step procedure. First, I model observed voting utilities using a series of linear regressions, one for each analyzed election. Obtained residuals are independent of distance variables by the model design and, therefore, can be interpreted as total non-issue voting utilities. Second, I fit a series of conditional logit models, again by election year, using issue distances and non-issue utilities (saved residuals from the linear regressions) as the predictors.

In order to estimate potential vote gains of the PvdA after the shift towards a more assimilationist policy position, I employ the hypothetical election results method (Bartels 1996).

I impute the new position of the PvdA on the multiculturalism dimension resulting from a hypothetical move to the authoritarian direction as five on the one to seven scale—position of the median Dutch voter throughout the studied period. Then, I use it to re-calculate distances between the PvdA and Dutch voters on the multiculturalism dimension. To calculate hypothetical probabilities of voting for a more authoritarian PvdA compared to other parties, I use coefficient estimates from the logistic regressions. Then, predicted hypothetical choice for each individual voter is imputed as the party with the greatest predicted probability. Model equations as well as estimates can be found in Appendix.

Table 3 presents predicted shares of the PvdA vote before and after ideological shift towards cultural protectionism. It can be seen that potential electoral gains are generally small—only in year 1998 it exceeds two percentage points. Furthermore, when prediction errors are taken into account, potential gains in all six elections become insignificant due to overlaps in confidence intervals. Therefore, a hypothetical shift towards cultural protectionism does not lead to a significant increase in the PvdA vote share. It means that voters are not expected to reward the PvdA for moving more closely to them in terms of integration policy.

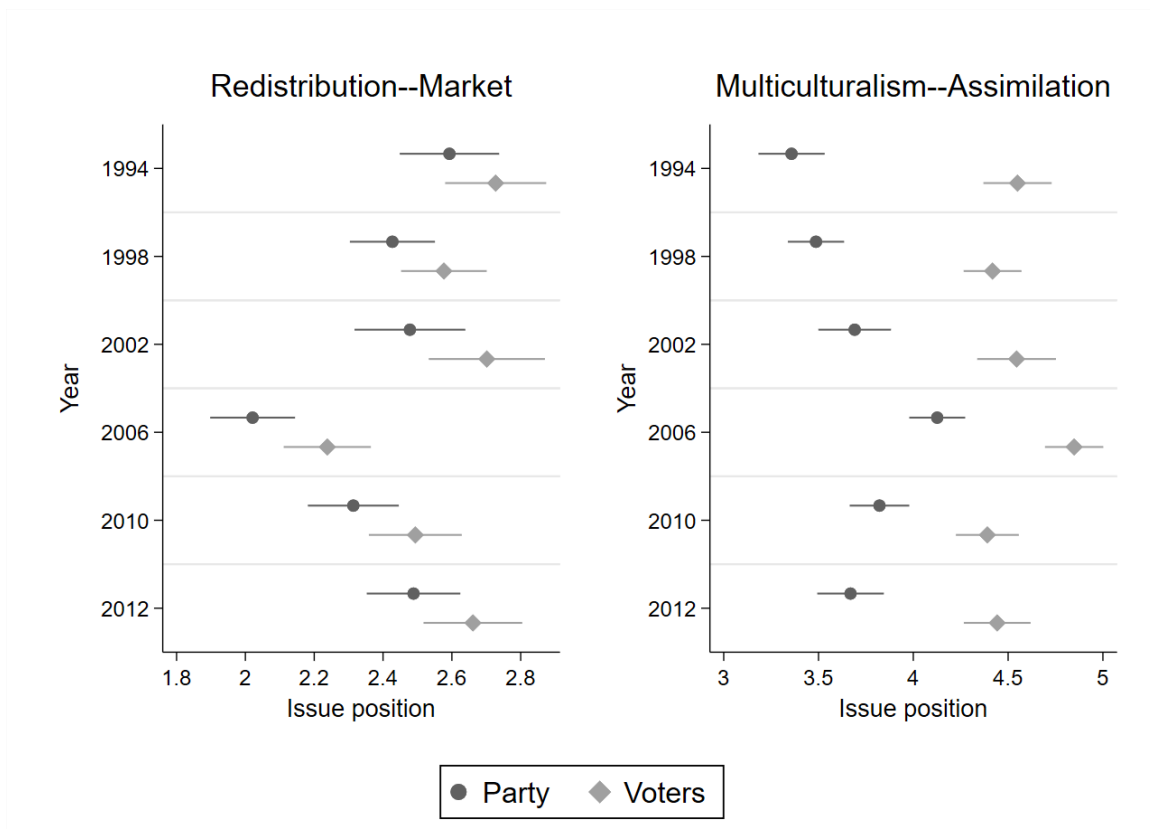
**Table 3.** Predicted PvdA vote share before and after authoritarian shift

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012
Observed position	25.2	21.9	18.9	20.1	14.6	16.3
	[19.0, 28.2]	[19.7, 24.7]	[17.1, 20.6]	[17.7, 24.1]	[13.6, 15.5]	[13.5, 19.3]
Shifted to assimilation	26.7	24.1	20.9	21.7	15.1	18.2
	[23.0, 30.9]	[20.7, 27.5]	[19.2, 24.3]	[18.3, 25.2]	[13.2, 17.7]	[14.7, 23.0]

*Note.* 95% confidence intervals in brackets.

Importantly, neither learning nor projection can explain the representation paradox in the case of the PvdA. Figure 3 compares positions of the PvdA (as assessed by its voters) and the average PvdA voter in six elections from 1994 to 2012. It can be seen that the PvdA and its voters are positioned similarly on the redistribution–market dimension, as differences between

the two are not significant in all analyzed years. On the multiculturalism–assimilation dimension, in turn, positions are different in all studied elections, with voters being significantly more authoritarian than the party. In other words, voters of the PvdA realize the discrepancy between themselves and the party on the cultural dimension but this does not lead them to stop supporting it. This may also mean that the PvdA is ideologically responsive to its voters only on redistribution as an issue owned by the party (Kluever and Spoon 2016).



**Figure 3.** Ideological positions of the PvdA and its voters, 1994–2012

Prioritization among issues definitely made a significant contribution to electoral behavior in the Netherlands between 1994 and 2012. To estimate it, I run conditional logit models independently for three groups—the PvdA voters, the radical right voters, and all other voters—by election year. Table 4 compares effects of the two issue dimensions on voting choice



in three elections where the PvdA faced notable radical right competitors. While the PvdA voters choose exclusively on the redistribution issue, those who voted the LPF in 2002 or the PVV in 2010 and 2012 took into account only the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. In other words, issue voting in a two-dimensional space is still unidimensional—different voters simply care about different policies. This finding also points to a potential mechanism of change in electoral behavior. As soon as an individual with left-authoritarian preferences decides that integration of foreigners is the most important issue, such a person is expected to start voting for the radical right. Due to the issue-ownership effect, social democratic parties are not likely to offer a credible alternative, even if they shift towards cultural protectionism.

**Table 4.** Issue prioritization among voters of different parties

	2002	2010	2012
PvdA voters			
Redistribution	-1.554*** (0.184)	-1.098*** (0.133)	-1.245*** (0.156)
Multiculturalism	-0.020 (0.150)	-0.260* (0.112)	-0.203 (0.125)
Interaction	0.126 (0.079)	0.094 (0.062)	0.168* (0.080)
Radical right voters			
Redistribution	0.116 (0.223)	-0.152 (0.153)	-0.190 (0.302)
Multiculturalism	-1.328*** (0.248)	-0.931*** (0.164)	-1.348*** (0.312)
Interaction	-0.028 (0.129)	-0.113 (0.085)	-0.181 (0.188)
Other voters			
Redistribution	-0.611*** (0.087)	-0.543*** (0.070)	-0.317*** (0.084)
Multiculturalism	-0.657*** (0.085)	-0.513*** (0.067)	-0.567*** (0.086)
Interaction	0.164** (0.049)	0.070 (0.039)	0.034 (0.053)

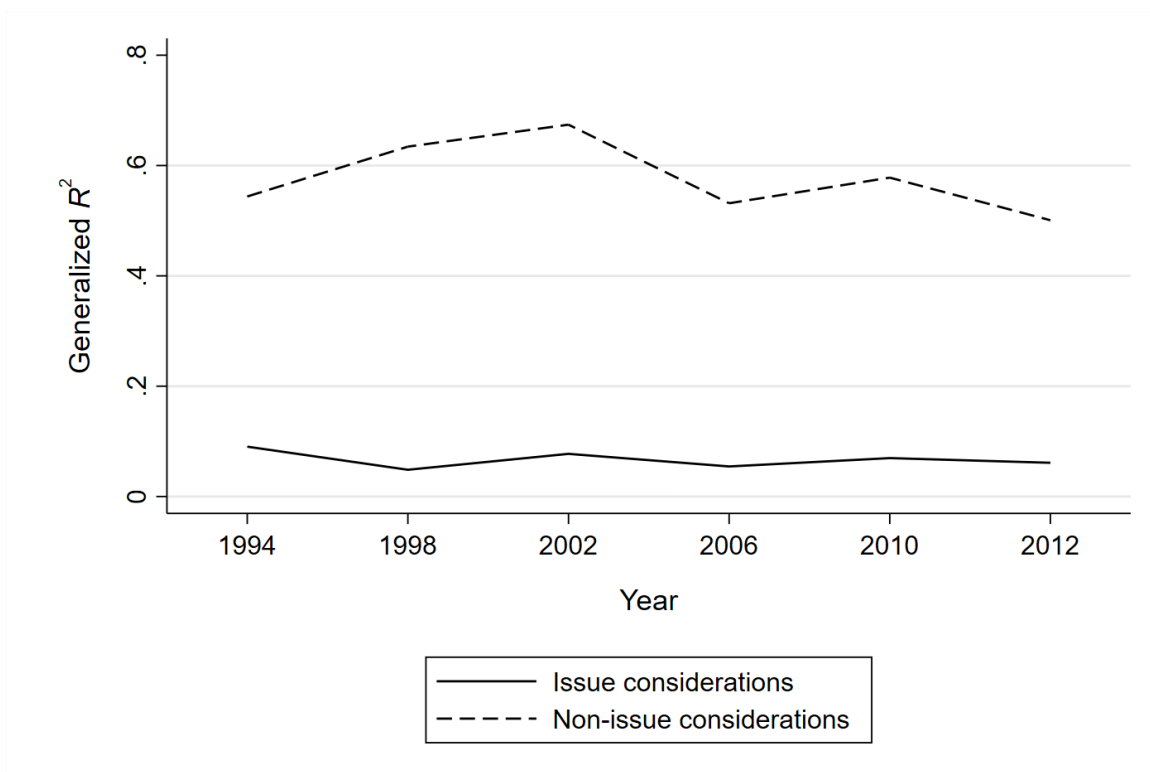
*Note.* Standard errors in parentheses.

Radical right parties are LPF in 2002 and PVV in 2010 and 2012.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

There was, however, a more important mechanism responsible for citizens' inability to push parties towards greater ideological congruence, namely large non-issue voting. Figure 4

compares contributions of issue and non-issue considerations toward electoral choice measured as pseudo- $R^2$  statistics from the conditional logit models estimated by election year. Results show that non-issue considerations are approximately five times more important throughout the studied period. Furthermore, there is no clear trend with regard to issue and non-issue voting. Although it is possible to notice some minor decline of non-issue voting from 2002 to 2012, it is not accompanied by a parallel rise in issue voting. Instead, the latter demonstrates a stable level with pseudo- $R^2$  fluctuating between five and nine percentage points throughout the analyzed elections. In other words, Dutch voters care relatively little about issue distances—therefore, it should be no surprise that parties do the same.



**Figure 4.** Contributions of issue and non-issue considerations to voting choices, 1994–2012

An essential caveat with regard to this result needs to be mentioned. There is a possibility that my model underestimates the degree of issue voting in the Netherlands between 1994 and

2012. By taking into account two particular dimensions—redistribution and multiculturalism—it potentially misses contributions of other issues, such as the EU or the environment, to electoral behavior. I argue that this omission, even if present, does not affect overall conclusions of my analysis. As demonstrated by in-depth research of electoral politics in the Netherlands since 1970s, redistribution and multiculturalism represented the two most important topics in Dutch public opinion during the last two decades (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). Moreover, the magnitude of differences between issue and non-issue considerations is large enough to warrant predominance of non-issue considerations in voting even with other issues included. Therefore, despite the exact numbers presented may not be perfectly accurate for all included election years, the phenomenon they point to—strong preeminence of non-issue considerations in voting behavior—seems to be real.

### **Conclusion**

In the present paper, I have addressed the existing representation paradox in West European democracies. Whereas ideological positions of European voters are defined by two independent issue dimensions, namely economic and cultural, political parties are aligned on a single dimension. Since parties tend to occupy only left-libertarian and right-authoritarian sectors of the political space, individuals who combine preferences for redistribution with cultural protectionism remain effectively unrepresented. Since left-authoritarians form the largest cross-section of the European electorate, the observed phenomenon challenges the normative view of political representation in a democracy. To understand why West European political parties do not move towards the modal voter, I have focused on strategic choices of the social democratic parties. More specifically, I have analyzed the case of the Dutch Labour Party during elections from 1994 to 2012. Simulation of electoral results after a hypothetical authoritarian shift by the

social democrats demonstrates negligible potential increase in vote share.<sup>3</sup> Individual-level mechanisms that explain this result are issue prioritization and, most importantly, prevalence of non-issue considerations in voting.

These findings have implications for party politics in established democracies and for dimensionality of the political space. Historically, deviations from unidimensionality in politics have been seen unfavorably within the discipline because it leads to disequilibria and decision cycles. More recently, scholars have offered a more optimistic view of multidimensionality in politics by emphasizing opportunities that it provides to political actors (De Sio and Weber 2014; see also Riker 1986). My findings once again accentuate negative aspects of multidimensionality, this time for voters' ability to hold parties ideologically congruent. In their issue voting, individuals situated in the "blind corner" of the political space effectively have to follow two steps. They start from choosing the most important issue and then choose a party using this single dimension. Parties, in turn, do not have to adjust their positions on the issues that are secondary to them—as it does not affect their electoral prospects.

What does this mean for the social democratic party family in Western Europe? My findings suggest that social democrats continue to keep a firm hold on issues associated with welfare and redistribution. Their electoral prospects, therefore, critically depend on the ability to maintain ownership over these issues (Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004). The latter, however, is not enough as issue priorities among voters matter as well. In Dutch elections from 1994 to 2012, redistribution was at least as important in voting as multiculturalism. However, strong exogenous shocks can change the structure of issue priorities in the population threatening

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<sup>3</sup> There is experimental evidence that, even though direct gains to the social democrats from a right-wing shift on immigration are almost non-existent, this can boost left-wing voting overall. Such a shift attracts voters who otherwise vote the radical right and repels voters who switch to the libertarian left (Hjorth and Larsen 2022).

electoral perspectives of the social democratic parties and boosting popularity of the radical right. Finally, consequences of the Great Recession in Europe—such as cuts in welfare programs—may hurt credibility of the social democratic agenda and provoke voters' switching towards the radical left (Hernandez and Kriesi 2016).

Another implication of my results concerns overall importance of policy positions in voting behavior. According to an influential argument, ordinary people do not think about politics in ideological terms—instead, political decisions are made and justified on the basis of group loyalties (Converse 1964). Presented findings from Dutch elections between 1994 and 2012 show support this claim: Compared to non-issue considerations, policy voting is about five times less important in explaining party choices. Moreover, there is no noticeable increase in issue voting over time (cf. Green-Pedersen 2007). Instead, the level of policy voting remained relatively stable in the Netherlands between 1994 and 2012. As soon as voters generally fail to vote ideologically, parties have no incentives to make shifts in the policy space because they face no punishment for staying and will have no gains from moving.

This conclusion sounds grim for the standard view of political representation that emphasizes programmatic congruence between voters and their representatives. However, it also calls for the better analysis of alternative representation mechanisms that rely on group loyalties. Programmatic linkages between citizens and parties attract disproportionate attention of political scientists but they make only one possible accountability mechanism (Kitschelt 2000). By now, there seems to be more and more empirical evidence that other mechanisms may be widespread not only in emerging democracies but also in developed ones. Given recent transformations in West European politics, understanding how personal charisma, group loyalties, and other non-programmatic linkages affect political representation is of growing importance.

## Appendix

Linear regression model:

$$u_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 r_{ij} + \beta_2 m_{ij} + \beta_3 r_{ij} m_{ij} + \sum_j \beta_{4j} p_j + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

where  $i = 1, \dots, I$  is voter identifier,  $j = 1, \dots, J$  is party identifier,  $u_{ij}$  is observed voting utility,  $r_{ij}$  is distance on the redistribution dimension,  $m_{ij}$  is distance on the multiculturalism dimension,  $p_j$  is party dummy, and  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  is error. For identification purposes,  $\beta_{41} = 0$ . Results are presented in Table A1. Predicting utilities:

$$\hat{u}_{ij} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 r_{ij} + \hat{\beta}_2 m_{ij} + \hat{\beta}_3 r_{ij} m_{ij} + \sum_j \hat{\beta}_{4j} p_j.$$

Calculating residuals:

$$e_{ij} = u_{ij} - \hat{u}_{ij}.$$

Logistic regression model:

$$\Pr(y_i = j) = \frac{\exp(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 r_{ij} + \gamma_2 m_{ij} + \gamma_3 r_{ij} m_{ij} + \gamma_4 e_{ij})}{\sum_j \exp(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 r_{ij} + \gamma_2 m_{ij} + \gamma_3 r_{ij} m_{ij} + \gamma_4 e_{ij})},$$

where  $y_i$  is categorical variable denoting party choice. Results are presented in Table A2.

Predicting choice probabilities before the shift:

$$\widehat{\Pr}(y_i = j) = \frac{\exp(\hat{\gamma}_0 + \hat{\gamma}_1 r_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_2 m_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_3 r_{ij} m_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_4 e_{ij})}{\sum_j \exp(\hat{\gamma}_0 + \hat{\gamma}_1 r_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_2 m_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_3 r_{ij} m_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_4 e_{ij})}.$$

Predicting party choice before the shift:

$$\hat{y}_i = \operatorname{argmax}_j \widehat{\Pr}(y_i = j).$$

Predicting choice probabilities after the shift:

$$\widehat{\Pr}(y_i^* = j) = \frac{\exp(\hat{\gamma}_0 + \hat{\gamma}_1 r_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_2 m_{ij}^* + \hat{\gamma}_3 r_{ij} m_{ij}^* + \hat{\gamma}_4 e_{ij})}{\sum_j \exp(\hat{\gamma}_0 + \hat{\gamma}_1 r_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}_2 m_{ij}^* + \hat{\gamma}_3 r_{ij} m_{ij}^* + \hat{\gamma}_4 e_{ij})},$$

where  $y_i^*$  is hypothetical choice after shift and  $m_{ij}^*$  is updated distance on the multiculturalism dimension after shift. Predicting party choice after the shift:

$$\hat{y}_i^* = \operatorname{argmax}_j \widehat{\Pr}(y_i^* = j).$$

**Table A1.** Coefficient estimates from linear regression models

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012
Redistribution ( $\hat{\beta}_1$ )	-0.726	-0.553	-0.478	-0.787	-0.658	-0.752
Multiculturalism ( $\hat{\beta}_2$ )	-0.263	-0.283	-0.759	-0.330	-0.728	-0.653
Interaction ( $\hat{\beta}_3$ )	0.036	-0.007	0.074	0.049	0.101	0.140
Fixed party effects	included	included	included	included	included	included
$N$	4,428	7,524	5,530	8,640	9,810	6,234

**Table A2.** Coefficient estimates from conditional logit models

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012
Redistribution ( $\hat{\gamma}_1$ )	-0.634	-0.821	-0.643	-0.478	-0.702	-0.542
Multiculturalism ( $\hat{\gamma}_2$ )	-0.870	-0.941	-0.866	-0.437	-0.549	-0.562
Interaction ( $\hat{\gamma}_3$ )	-0.066	0.058	0.173	0.026	0.094	0.102
Non-issue considerations ( $\hat{\gamma}_4$ )	0.965	1.308	1.058	0.623	0.858	0.735
Fixed party effects	included	included	included	included	included	included
$N$	4,428	7,524	5,530	8,640	9,810	6,234

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