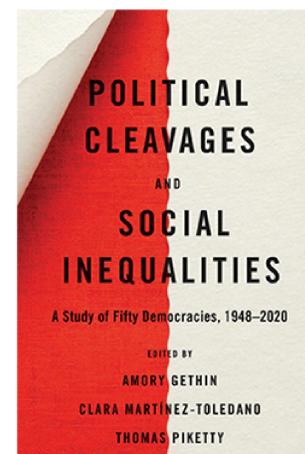


Brahmin Left Versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies

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Motivation

1. **Rise of identity-based divides** in Western democracies, embodied by the growing success of far-right and green movements.
2. **On what dimensions of political conflict** (education, income, etc.) have these transformations aligned? Is this change the outcome of recent events (China shock, immigration) or of a longer-run process?

A New Dataset on Electoral Divides in 21 Democracies

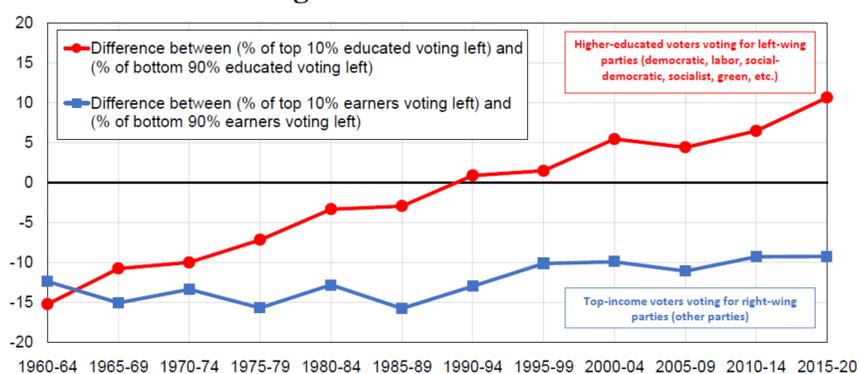
1. **Collection of all post-electoral surveys** ever conducted in Western democracies (Western Eur., US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand).
2. **Harmonization of voting + sociodemographic variables:** income, education, age, gender, religion, race/ethnicity, etc.
3. **Part of a larger project** on political divides in 50 democracies, the World Political Cleavages and Inequality Database, presented in our book *Political Cleavages and Social Inequalities* → WPID.world.



1) The Disconnection of Income and Education

1. In the 1950s-1960s, higher-educated and high-income voters were significantly less likely to vote social democrats and affiliated.
2. **Complete reversal of the educational cleavage**, leading to a divergence between a “Brahmin Left” (high education) and a “Merchant Right” (high income). Robust to controls and alternative indicators.
3. Visible in nearly all Western democracies, despite their major historical and institutional differences (exceptions: Ireland & Portugal).
4. **No major shift in other dimensions** of electoral divides (age, rural-urban, religion), with the exception of gender.

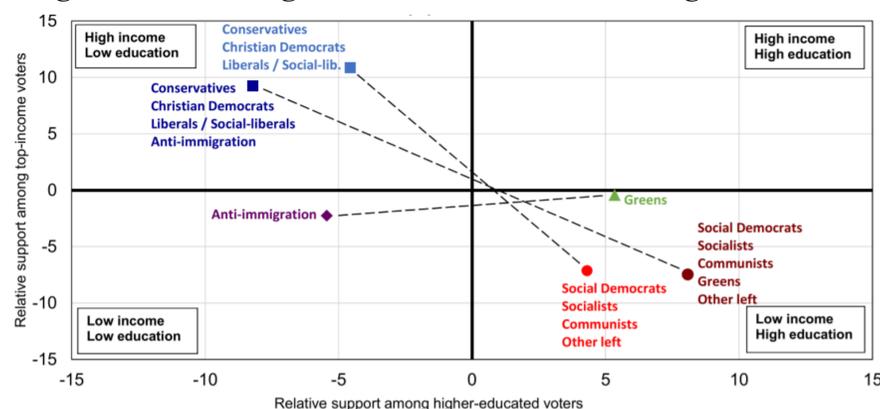
Figure 1 – The Disconnection of Income and Education Cleavages in Western Democracies



2) The Fragmentation of Western Party Systems

1. **Increasing party fragmentation** in multi-party systems in recent decades, with the rise of anti-immigration and green parties.
2. This fragmentation has **accelerated the reversal of educational divides**, as these parties distinguish themselves in terms of education, not income.

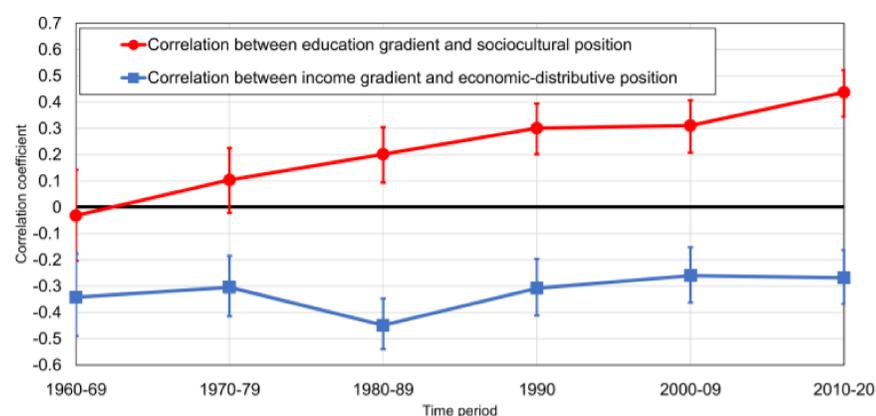
Figure 2 – The Fragmentation of Political Cleavage Structures



3) The Rise of Sociocultural Divides

1. We match our surveys with the **Comparative Manifesto Project** database to study the link between political supply and demand.
2. **The rise of anti-immigration and green parties has led to greater sociocultural ideological polarization**, while economic polarization has remained stable.
3. Strong and rising correlation between parties’ sociocultural positions and the educational composition of their electorates → **sociocultural divides play a key role in generating the divergence of income and education cleavages**.

Figure 3 – Multidimensional Ideological Conflict and the Divergence of Income and Education Cleavages



Conclusion

1. New political conflicts in Western democracies primarily divide voters with different education levels – not income, age, or geography.
2. Future research could investigate:
 - *Why* education is dividing voters over sociocultural issues.
 - *How* this shift occurred (supply vs. demand).