

Lost in Fragmentation? European social democracy between crisis and opportunities

Tarik Abou-Chadi

University of Oxford

18 November 2022
FEPS Next Left Lecture

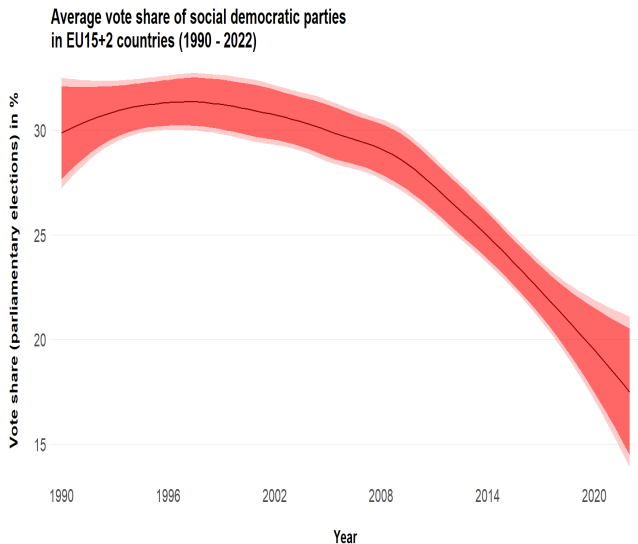
Outline

Social democratic parties in a fragmented space

How did they get there?

What can they do?

Electoral decline of social democratic parties



Social democracy - a new hope?



Social Europe

THEMES ▾ PUBLICATIONS ▾ PODCAST VIDEOS NEWSLETTER 🔍

A social-democratic decade ahead?

ROBERT MIKŠ 20th June 2022

Now Austria's SPÖ too has left its competitors far behind, Robert Mikš asks in the *Zeitgeist* moving to the left?



Report for the Forum David Wagner, titled 'The White Elephant in Berlin – Why the new leadership generation (and gender) among the ranks of social democratic leadership'

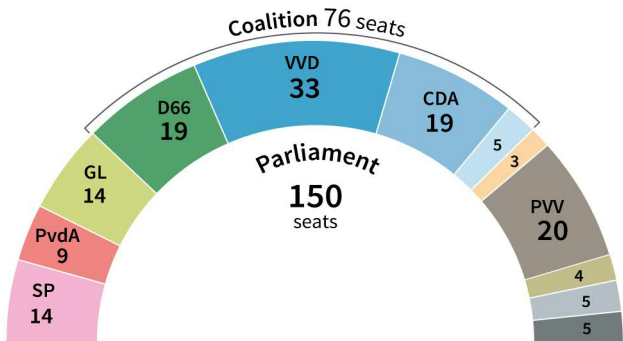
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES ADVERTISEMENT



Fragmentation is core development against which to assess social democratic success and failure

“Dutchification”

The Netherlands' parliament



- SP: Socialist Party
- PvdA: Labour Party
- GL: Green Left
- D66: Liberal Democrats
- VVD: Liberal-conservatives
- CDA: Christian Democrats
- CU: Christian Union
- SGP: Calvinists
- PW: Freedom Party (*Extreme right*)
- 50+ Pensioners' interests
- PvdD Animal Party
- Others

Source: NOS

© AFP

Fragmentation – what and why?

- ▶ Increasing fragmentation of vote and seat shares in Western Europe
- ▶ Reasons...
 - ▶ Transformation of social milieus
 - ▶ Pluralization of political demands
 - ▶ Decline of intermediate organizations (e.g. unions, churches)
 - ▶ Political entrepreneurs (new party success)

Social democratic parties and fragmentation

What is success in a fragmented political space?

Social democratic parties and fragmentation

What is success in a fragmented political space?

- ▶ Lead government (coalition) close to party's political ideal point

Social democratic parties and fragmentation - 3 scenarios

- ▶ Scenario 1 *Hegemony*
 - ▶ Social democratic party is strongest party/leads government
 - ▶ DE, DK, ES, PT

Social democratic parties and fragmentation - 3 scenarios

- ▶ Scenario 1 *Hegemony*
 - ▶ Social democratic party is strongest party/leads government
 - ▶ DE, DK, ES, PT
- ▶ Scenario 2 *Partial Hegemony*
 - ▶ Social democratic party is strongest centre-left party but not overall
 - ▶ AT, IT, SE, UK

Social democratic parties and fragmentation - 3 scenarios

- ▶ Scenario 1 *Hegemony*
 - ▶ Social democratic party is strongest party/leads government
 - ▶ DE, DK, ES, PT
- ▶ Scenario 2 *Partial Hegemony*
 - ▶ Social democratic party is strongest centre-left party but not overall
 - ▶ AT, IT, SE, UK
- ▶ Scenario 3 *Implosion*
 - ▶ Social democratic party is one of many
 - ▶ FR, NL

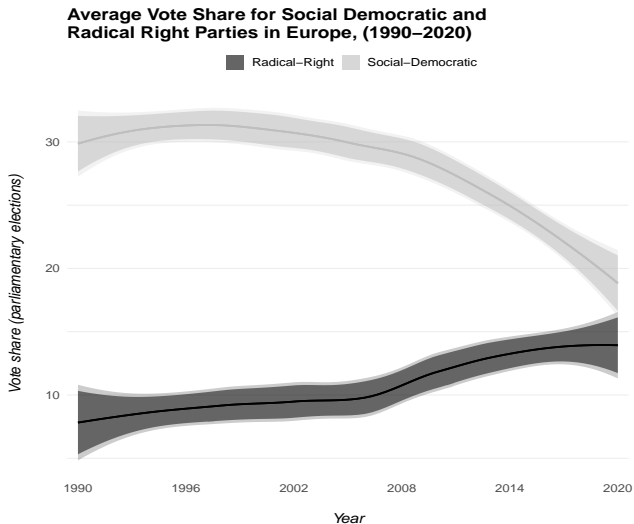
Outline

Social democratic parties in a fragmented space

How did they get there?

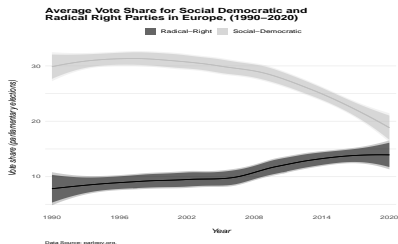
What can they do?

Soc Dem vs. RRP 1990 – 2020



Data Source: parlgov.org.

Soc Dem vs. RRP 1990 – 2020



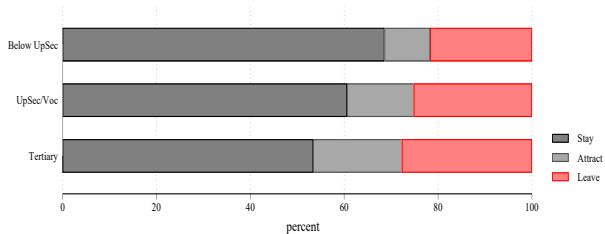
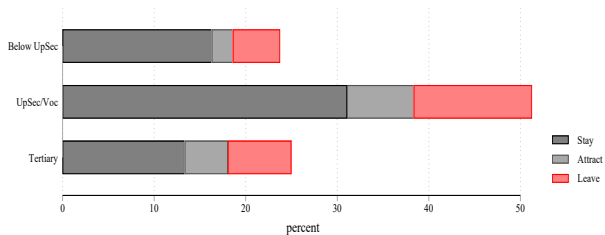
Narrative:

- ▶ Social democratic parties have lost working class; new home with RRP
- ▶ Alienation of working class through neo-liberal economic and progressive cultural positions
- ▶ Shift toward less progressive and left-nationalist position to win back working class

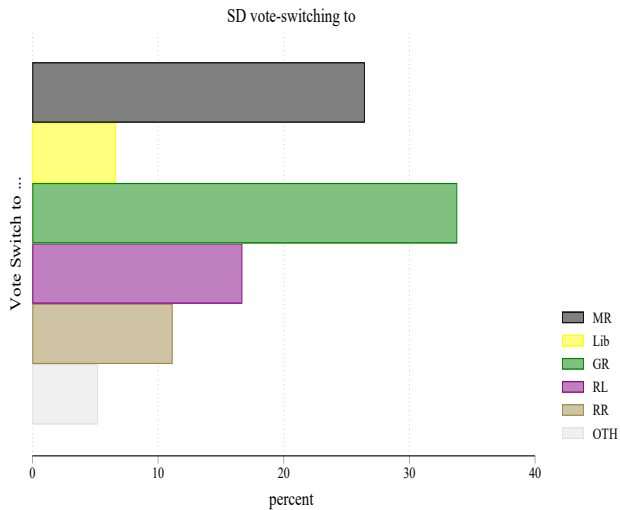
Evidence

- ▶ Empirical evidence on ...
 - ... who left
 - ... where they went
- ▶ Eight countries (AUT, CHE, DEU, DNK, FIN, NLD, NOR, SWE) since 2000

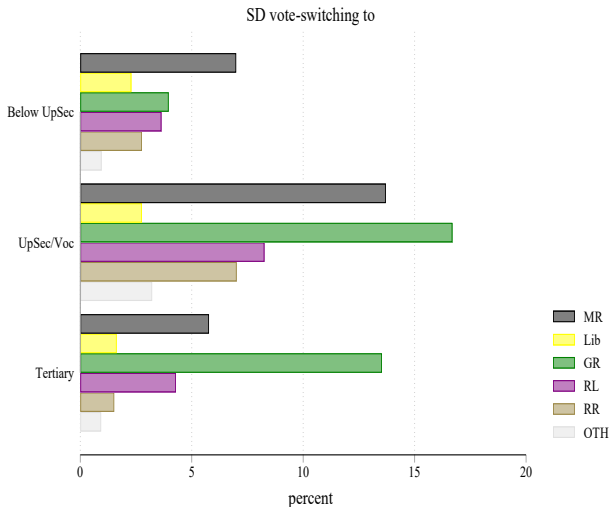
Who left? Education



Vote switching



Vote switching – education



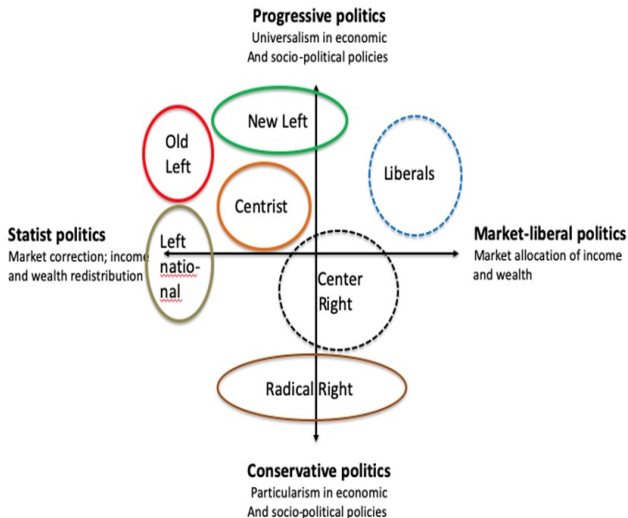
Outline

Social democratic parties in a fragmented space

How did they get there?

What can they do?

Strategic options

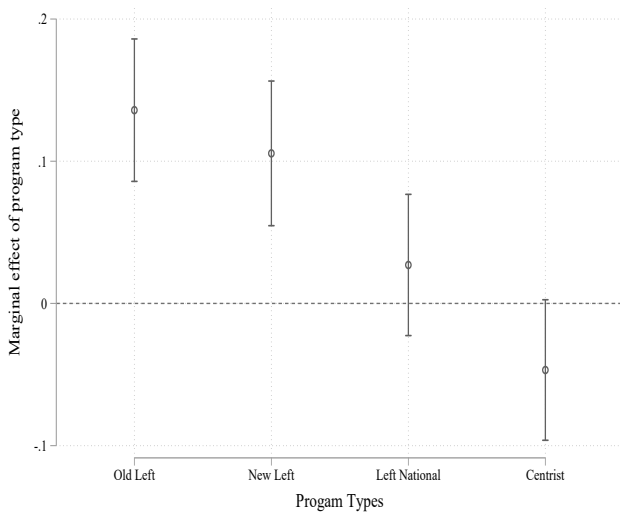


Empirical analysis

- ▶ Vignettes of stylized social democratic programs
- ▶ Six countries (AT, CH, DE, DK, ES, SE) in 2020 & 2021
- ▶ Conjoint experiment and bundle ratings

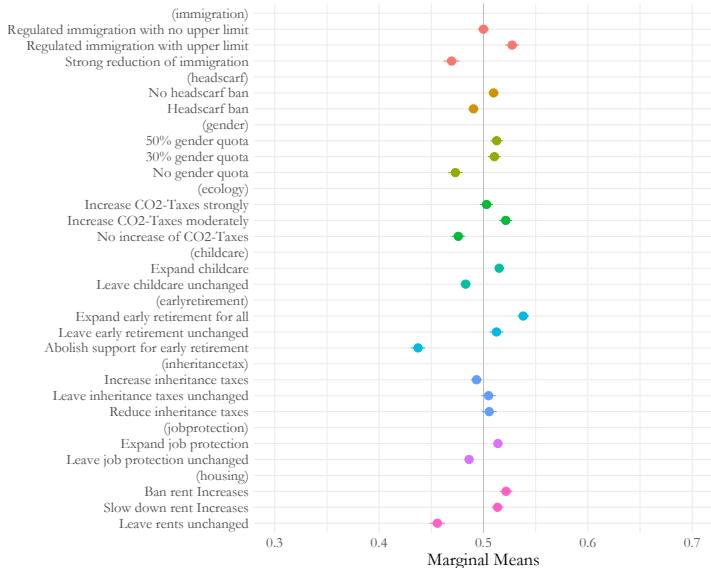
		"Old Left"	"New Left"	"Centrist"	"Left Nationalist"
Eco/Social consumption	Public subsidization of early retirement	Expand for everyone	no position (random)	leave unchanged or abolish	Expand for everyone
Eco/Social investment	Public childcare services	no position (random)	expand strongly	expand strongly	leave unchanged
Economic redistribution	Inheritance tax on private wealth	increase	increase	increase or leave unchanged	increase
Cultural progressivity	Immigration regulation	Controlled, but without upper limit	Controlled, but without upper limit	controlled, with or without upper limit	Upper limit or reduction
Cultural progressivity	Ban on head scarves for civil servants	no position (random)	no	no position (random)	yes
Cultural progressivity	legal quota for women on executive boards	no position (random)	50% mandatory	50% mandatory or 30% minimum	30% minimum or none
Cultural progressivity	Taxation of CO2 emissions	no position (random)	increase massively	increase moderately or no increase	increase moderately or no increase
Eco/Social consumption	Employment protection in manufacturing	increase strongly	leave unchanged	leave unchanged	increase strongly
Eco/Social investment	Public control of rent prices in urban areas	ban or slow down rent increases	ban or slow down rent increases	slow down or leave unchanged	ban or slow down rent increases

Program ratings



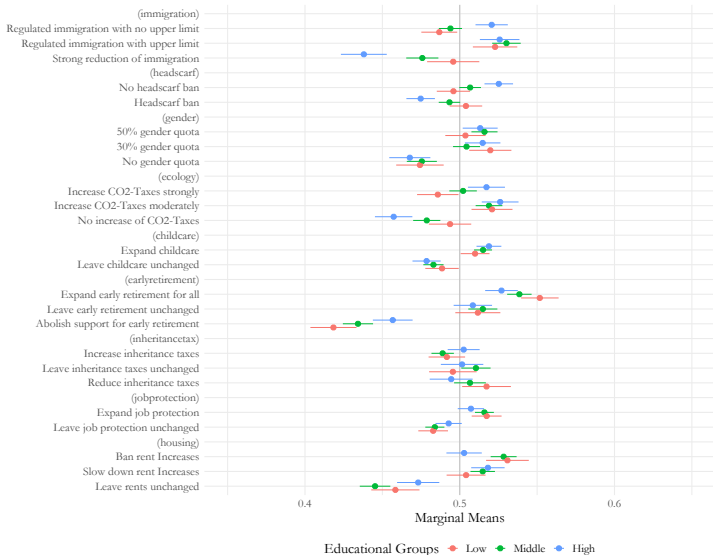
Conjoint - marginal means

Conjoint 1 (Pooled: AT, CH, DE, DK, ES, SE):
Program Choice (Only potential SD Voters)



Conjoint - education groups

Conjoint Experiment (Pooled):
Program Choice Conditional
on Education (Only Potential SD-Voters)



Summary findings

1. Left-nationalist (and centrist) strategies with little support
2. Lower educated, working class voters decide based on econ rather than culture
3. Stronger trade-offs based on age

Conclusions – challenges

- ▶ Wrong idea of how and who SD parties lost
- ▶ Wrong idea of who their support base is and what it wants
- ▶ Focus too strongly on losses and not on gains
- ▶ Age distribution of support

Conclusion - 3 Propositions

1. Multi-party & multi-issue space demands re-evaluation of support bases, strategies and “success”
2. Progressive positions are a necessary conditions for future electoral success
3. Realization of social democratic policy is not (only) based on success of social democratic parties