The Dynamics of Voters' Left/Right Identification: The Role of Economic and Cultural Attitudes

Catherine E. de Vries, Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Geneva[1]

Armèn Hakhverdian, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam

Bram Lancee, Social Science Research Center Berlin & Department of Sociology, University of Amsterdam

Recent work on the dimensionality of political space suggests that party competition throughout Western Europe has undergone substantial changes over the past decades, leading to the mobilization of culturally rooted issues pertaining primarily to immigration. This study explores the extent to which cultural mobilization has affected the way in which people identify with politics. Specifically, it examines if voters' left/right self-placements over the past decades have become more linked to public attitudes towards immigrants and less so to views about the economy. By examining data from the Netherlands between 1980 and 2006, which constitutes a most likely case design, and employing multi-level analysis, this study demonstrates that as time progresses, voters' left/right self-placements are indeed more strongly influenced by immigrant attitudes, while the opposite pattern emerges for economic perceptions. These findings show how issues define one of the chief ways by which the public identifies with politics, namely through left/right ideology. Moreover, the results demonstrate that the issue basis of left/right identification is dynamic in nature and responds to changes in the political agenda. As a result, this study has important implications for our understanding of stability and change in political attitudes.

Key Words: Left/Right Ideology, Public Opinion, Immigration Attitudes, Multilevel Models, the Netherlands

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Introduction

When political scientists, politicians or journalists talk about politics, they almost invariably talk about the 'left' or the 'right'. The terms 'left' and 'right' are not merely a vestigial homage to the seating arrangement in the French Assembly during the Revolution, where supporters of the *Ancien Régime* were seated on the right and revolutionaries on the left, but rather signify distinct historical traditions and lifestyles. The terminology serves as the chief idiom for describing political preferences of candidates, practitioners, experts or the public at large. The poles of the left/right dimension pit a more progressive and redistributive view of the role of the state against a more conservative and market oriented state outlook. Despite its prevalent use mostly associated with the work of Downs (1957), recent evidence, especially from Western Europe, suggests that party competition has undergone substantial changes over the past decades leading to the mobilization of culturally rooted issues relating to traditional life styles, rights of immigrants or Islam (see for example Kitschelt, 1994, 1995; Dalton, 1996; Kriesi, et al., 2006, 2008).

This study examines how the mobilization of more culturally based policy issues affects the way in which people identify with politics. Specifically, it explores how the recent surge in the mobilization of cultural issues affects voters' left/right identification. We expect that as political parties mobilize cultural issues more prominently, voters will use this salient information to adjust their primary political identifications. Previous work on left/right identification indeed suggests that voters' self-placements are influenced by the conflicts and debates they observe in the political system (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Huber, 1989; Freire, 2006, 2008). Given these priors, it seems important to ask: To what extent the mobilization of a new policy issue, 'new' means a controversy previously not salient in party or electoral politics, affects voters' left/right identification? So far we lack a clear theoretical mechanism relating changes in the political agenda to the dynamics in voters' left/right identification.

This study argues that two factors are important in this respect: *issue bundling*, and *issue crowding out*. Issue bundling refers to a process in which new, i.e. previously non-salient, policy issues over time become more-and-more integrated

into the left/right dimension. When a new policy issue emerges due to societal events or the choice of a party (or candidate) to politicize a controversy previously not in play in party politics, and creates partisan divisions as well as remains high on the political agenda (like issues relating to immigrants and their integration within Western European societies of late), parties and voters can no longer dismiss the issue. Parties have a tendency to integrate a new issue into their existing ideological profile to ensure ideological consistency and minimize electoral risk (Riker, 1982; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Hinich and Munger, 1993, see also Meguid, 2005). As a result, the issue becomes more and more associated with the existing profiles of parties while gradually weeding out potential inconsistencies and tensions between the two. Voters are geared towards ideological consistency as well as it lowers the costs of getting informed (see Hinich and Munger, 1993). Thus over the long haul, the new issue leads voters to sort their primal political identifications, i.e. their left/right placements, accordingly.[2] As a consequence of this process of *issue bundling*, the issue basis of the left/right dimension will at least partially be redefined on the basis of the new controversy. At the same time, a process of *issue crowding out* takes place whereby traditionally important issues for left/right identification, like state intervention in the economy, become less important in order to make room for new issue considerations. These dual logics give rise to the expectation that the mobilization of cultural issues in Western Europe has led voters' left/right identifications to be more rooted in immigrant attitudes (*issue bundling*) and less based on their views about the economy (*issue crowding out*).

We test these propositions by utilizing data from the Netherlands between 1980 and 2006. The Dutch case constitutes somewhat of a likely case study. Throughout these 26 years the changes in Dutch political competition have been characterized by a strong mobilization of cultural issues (Pellikaan, Van der Meer and De Lange, 2003; Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer, 2007; Westerwaal and Torenvlied, 2010; Adams, De Vries and Leitner, 2011). This process originated in the early 1980s with the development of a small anti-immigrant party called the Centrum Democraten and by the late 1990s and early 2000s immigration had become

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[2] Although not object of this study, this pattern is also reinforced by generational replacement.

one of the leading topics in party competition reflected in the electoral landslide victory of Pim Fortuyn's party (Van der Brug, 2003). Ever since, immigration, and more recently the issue of Islam specifically, has remained high on the political agenda sustained through the activities of the right-wing populist leader Geert Wilders. These changes in the Dutch issue agenda is perhaps one of the clearest examples of the rise in cultural issues within Western Europe. Consequently, if the logics of *issue bundling* and *issue crowding out* have any theoretical and empirical leverage, they should be able to account for the dynamics in the issue basis of left/right identification of the Dutch public during this time period. If we do not find any evidence for the effects of cultural mobilization on voters' left/right self-placements here, it is unlikely that we find it anywhere else in Western Europe.

Employing Dutch data from 1980 to 2006 and multi-level modeling techniques, the results show that, in line with our expectations, public left/right self-placements have become more strongly linked to anti-immigrant sentiment, while the opposite pattern emerges for economic perceptions. These results lend credence to the idea that as time progresses voters solve inconsistencies rising from the mobilization of previously non-salient issues, in this case immigration, by viewing them through their existing lenses of politics, namely their left/right identification. This process of issue bundling redefines voters' underlying political identifications. At the same time, this reinterpretation of left/right identification almost by definition implies that other issues are crowded out and become less important for their self-identification at least in the short run.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. In the next section, we briefly review the literature on left/right identification in Western Europe. Subsequently, we present our theoretical expectations regarding the mechanisms underlying the dynamics in voters' left/right identification, namely issue bundling and issue crowding out. After outlining the data, method and operationalizations, we present the empirical results. We conclude by drawing several general lessons from our analysis, and elaborate the important implications of our analysis for our understanding of stability and change in left/right ideology and the dynamics in public opinion.

Left/Right Identification in Western Europe

Political positions and preferences are frequently expressed in left/right terms. Indeed, left/right identification is often the only dimension used to describe voters' preferences (see for example Downs, 1957; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Van der Eijk et al. 2005). But how can we conceptualize voters' left/right identification? Building on the seminal work of Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) left/right identification entails three major dimensions, namely a social, value, and partisan component (see also Freire, 2006, 2008). The social component relates to the idea that social structure, chiefly occupation, religion, and spatial location determines one's left/right identification. The value component singles out the importance of voters' attitudes toward the major value conflicts with Western Europe, such as the role of the state in the economy and public life, traditional life styles or individual choice, in shaping voters' left/right self-placements (see Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1995, 1997). Finally, the partisan component suggests that left/right placements merely mirror of voters' overall partisan loyalties (see also Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1997).

While recent work by Freire (2006, 2008) highlights the continued importance of social factors in explaining individual left–right orientations, most authors underline the prominent role of value or issue conflicts mobilized by political parties in shaping voters' left/right attitudes (Huber, 1989; Kitschelt and Hellemans, 1990; Stimson, et al., 2010; Knutsen, 1998; Lachat, 2011). In their influential work on the relationship between 'new politics' issues, i.e. environment, public order or lifestyle issues, and citizens' left/right attitudes, Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990: 230-2) for example demonstrate the crucial role of Green parties. Green parties actively mobilized new politics issues and by doing so altered the content of what it meant to be 'left' or 'right'. In conjunction, work by Huber (1989) suggests that voters' left/right self-placements are heavily influenced by the conflicts and debates citizens observe in the political system. Freire (2006, 2008) also demonstrates that cross-country variation in the degree to which left/right ideology resonates with voters is best accounted for by taking into account the activities of parties. In those systems in

which the clarity of party positions is high, i.e. highly ideologically polarized systems, voters' political attitudes are most strongly anchored by left/right ideology.

Although the prevalent use of left/right terminology to conceptualize voters' preferences, the existing scholarly work thus suggests that the meaning of voters' left/right identification varies substantially across countries and over time. This variation is mainly a factor of the rise of new value conflicts and the role of political parties. Notwithstanding, we currently lack a clear conceptual framework allowing us to understand the mechanism that relates changes in the political agenda to the dynamics of voters' left/right identification. By developing the logics of *issue bundling* and *issue crowding out* which are partly derived from the United States (US) literature on issue evolution and applying them to the Dutch context between 1980 and 2006, this paper attempts to fill this lacuna. In the next section we spell out both logics.

The Logics of Issue Bundling and Issue Crowding Out

In keeping with the influential work of Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990), we know that the mobilization of a new policy issue, and with 'new' we mean a controversy previously not in play in party and electoral competition, is crucial in explaining the dynamics in voters' left/right identification. In recent years, party competition in Western Europe has undergone considerable changes. With the influx of immigrant workers and their families, mainly from North Africa and the former Yugoslavia, throughout Western Europe, we have witnessed the birth of many new parties mobilizing a strong anti-immigrant appeal (see for example Betz, 1994; Kitschelt, 1995; Betz and Immerfall, 1998; Lubbers, et al., 2002; Norris, 2005). These anti-immigrant parties, which are sometimes referred to as right-wing extreme or populist parties, have gained notable electoral successes since the 1980s. These developments have also left their mark on party politics and electoral behavior. Indeed, recent scholarly work suggests that political competition within most Western European polities has undergone profound changes due to the mobilization of culturally rooted issues relating to traditional life styles, rights of immigrants or Islam (for see for example Kitschelt, 1994, 1995; Dalton, 1996; Kriesi, et al., 2006, 2008;

Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). On the basis of Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990) findings highlighting changes in left/right ideological placement due to the mobilization of 'new politics' issues largely by Green parties, we expect the recent mobilization of cultural issues mainly by parties rallying anti-immigrant sentiment to have important consequences for voters' left/right identification. But how exactly does the mobilization a previously not or less salient issue affect the meaning of identifying as 'left' or 'right'?

We outline two logics that explicate the dynamics in left/right identification due to the mobilization of new policy issues: *issue bundling* and *issue crowding out*. These logics are derived from the work on issue evolution in the United States (US) (Carmines and Stimson, 1986, 1989). Using the example of the mobilization of race in American politics, Carmines and Stimson (1986, 1989) developed the theory of issue evolution to explain how new policy issues enter and ultimately come to refine the basis of political competition. The theory of issue evolution predicts the structure of political space to be rather simple, it is characterized by one dominant dimension and fewer than two (see also Stimson, et al., 2010). More so, the essence of the issue evolution idea is that political dimensionality is viewed to be variable over time, not fixed. Political space is fluid to the extent that parties who do not hold political office have an incentive to introduce new policy issues in order to gain winning positions and reap electoral gains. Although the introduction of a new policy issue always involves risks, as parties may lose more voters by changing their issue pallet than attracting new ones, parties that expect to lose in the long term due to disadvantageous positions on the current issue alignment may take a chance as this is the only way for them to alter their electorally marginal position (Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Hobolt and De Vries, 2010).

When a new policy issue emerges due to societal events or the choice of a party or candidate to politicize a controversy previously not part of party competition, it creates a political disequilibrium. That is to say, it creates an unstable situation "in which large numbers of politicians and voters are initially out of line with the new constellation and under pressure (but of quite different sorts for politicians and voters) to resolve the inconsistency." (Stimson, et al., 2010: 5, see also

Carmines and Stimson, 1989) When the issue has political longevity by remaining high on the political agenda and introducing lasting conflict, both parties and voters have to solve their ideological inconsistencies. Issue evolution theory predicts politicians and voters to solve these discrepancies by updating their current ideological positions or by sorting out their previous alignments. Parties can no longer dismiss the newly salient issue and have a tendency to integrate the new issue into their existing ideological profile to ensure ideological consistency and minimize electoral risk (Riker, 1982; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Hinich and Munger, 1993, see also Meguid, 2005). As a result, the issue becomes more and more associated with the existing profiles of parties while gradually weeding out potential inconsistencies and tensions between the two. In addition, we know from the extant work on attitude formation that politics is sufficiently complex that citizens have a need to find shortcuts in the form of attitudinal cues (see for example Feldman and Conover, 1983; Popkin, 1991). Some of these cues take the form of personal predispositions, while others are offered by the actors involved in politics. Voters as bounded rational citizens (Simon, 1985) rely on the actions and information delivered by parties as cognitive cues in order to form their opinions (Feldman and Conover, 1983; Popkin, 1991; Zaller, 1992; Hinich and Munger, 1993). As a consequence, parties are geared towards ideological consistency as this lowers the costs of informing voters at times of elections and thus brings about electoral advantages (Hinich and Munger, 1993). At the same time ideological consistency is also beneficial to voters as it lowers their information costs. As time progresses, we expect inconsistent patterns to give way to more consistent ones based on parties' existing ideological profiles more often than the reverse. Voters subsequently sort their primal political identifications, i.e. their left/right placements, in accordance with the newly salient issue.

This is a process we label *issue bundling*. The extant dimension of political competition, that is the left/right dimension in Western Europe, thus has a strong integrative capacity absorbing new issues into this ideological conflict (see also Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Van der Eijk et al. 2005). As a newly salient policy issue is bundled into the left/right dimension, it redefines what it means to be on the 'left' or the 'right'. As a by-product other issues

have to make way. Limits of attention and information-processing constraints imply "the issue agenda [to have] a zero-sum dynamic" at least to some extent (Singer, 2011: 287). When a new issue emerges on the political agenda, other issues will be given less attention and space in popular discourse. The issues that were previously salient for voters' left/right identification are crowded out at least in the short run. Consequently, we argue that issue bundling is almost automatically accompanied by a process of *issue crowding out* whereby traditionally more prominent issues for left/right identification, like state intervention in the economy, become less important for voters' left/right identification. Note that we assume the content of left/right identification to be dynamic in nature. So, the processes of issue bundling and issue crowding out constantly create contemporaneous equilibriums of what it means to be on the 'left' or on the 'right'. As soon as new societal conflicts emerge or existing issues regain salience, the content of left/right identification will likely adapt and absorb these changes. In the recent case of the financial crisis for example, we may predict that traditional left/right concerns dealing with state intervention in the economy have regained importance.

On the basis of the dual logics, we expect that voters' left/right identifications under the period under investigation, i.e. 1980-2006, have become more rooted in attitudes towards immigrants (*issue bundling*) and less based on their views about the economy (*issue crowding out*) as a result of the increasing mobilization of culturally based issues. These expectations are formalized in the following way:

Issue Bundling Hypothesis: Due to increased cultural mobilization, we expect a stronger association between voters' anti-immigrant attitudes and their left/right self-identification as time progresses.

Issue Crowding Out Hypothesis: Simultaneously, we expect a weaker association between voters' economic perceptions and their left/right self-identification over time.

Data and Measurement

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To test these hypotheses, we utilize 'Cultural Changes 1980-2006' (Culturele Veranderingen) survey collected by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP). The Cultural Changes survey is a (mostly) bi-yearly survey containing 23 national samples of the Netherlands (Beckers et al. 2010). Because not all survey years contained information on economic perceptions and attitudes toward immigrants, we constructed a pooled sample of 17 survey years from 1980-2006 containing 29,384 respondents of at least 18 years of age. The sampling frame does not make a distinction between natives and immigrants. However, the samples hardly contain any ethnic minorities and can therefore be seen as a sample of the native Dutch (Becker 1993). With regard to the variable measuring anti-immigrant attitudes, we can therefore be confident that it captures ethnic discrimination.

The Dutch case constitutes somewhat of a likely case study. Throughout these 26 years under investigation the Dutch landscape has undergone major changes characterized by a strong mobilization of anti-immigrant sentiment (Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer, 2003, 2007; Westerwaal and Torenvlied, 2010; Adams, De Vries and Leitner, 2011). The mobilization of immigrant attitudes originated in the early 1980s with the development of a small anti-immigrant party, i.e. Centrum Democraten, is currently one of the chief issues in party competition and voting behavior especially through the activities of the right-wing populist leader Geert Wilders (Van der Brug, 2003; Van der Pas, De Vries and Van der Brug, 2011). This changing nature of the issue agenda in Dutch politics is perhaps one of the clearest examples of the rise in cultural issues within Western Europe. Consequently, if we do not find any evidence for the effects of cultural mobilization on voters' left/right self-placements here, it is unlikely that we find it anywhere else in Western Europe.

Let us now turn to the operationalization of our main variables and a short description of the empirical method used. *Dependent variable.* Our dependent variable consists of the respondents' self-placement on a 5-point left-right scale. The survey item reads: 'To what extent do you consider yourself left or right? (very much left, moderate left, neither left nor right, moderate right, very much right). The item corresponds with traditional questionnaire items on ideological self-placement, even

though in most European surveys the item contains 10 or 11 categories, while the American National Election Studies version consists of 7 categories.

Independent variables. The variable we use to measure cultural mobilization is a construct developed by Coenders and his colleagues (Coenders et al. 2008; Coenders 1988), initially labeled 'support for ethnic discrimination'. Note that throughout this study we refer to it as anti-immigrant attitudes or sentiment. The scale (alpha = .79) consists of three items where respondents are presented with a fictional situation in which two persons or families – an ethnically Dutch and a foreigner – compete for a job, a house, or a job promotion. Respondents were asked who should get the job, house or the promotion (see also Coenders et al 2008: 274). The scale consists of the number of occasions that the respondent favors native Dutch over foreigners.

The variable to measure attitudes towards economic equality is a construct of three items that deal with preferences for economic redistribution (alpha = .76, see also Lancee, Gesthuizen and Van de Werfhorst, 2011). The first items reads: 'Do you think that in our country the differences between incomes are too big? Or about right? Or too small?' The second item: 'Do you think the differences between high and low incomes should become : much bigger, a little bit bigger, little bit smaller, much smaller.' The third item reads: 'There are people who own much and people who own little. Do you think these differences should become much larger, a little bit larger, stay as they are, a little bit smaller, much smaller?' The scale is simply the summed score of these three items where high values coincide with low preference for redistribution.

Control variables. We draw upon existing studies on the determinants of left/right self-placement for our control variables, which include gender, age, educational attainment, religious denomination, church attendance, being married, union membership, employment status, and being a student (see also Inglehart 1997; Barone et al. 2007; Freire 2008). We include the latter three variables as proxies for labor market position. Unfortunately, the survey did not contain suitable items for income and social class.

Empirical method. We first inspected the data by estimating a single regression predicting left/right self-placement for each survey year, and plotting the coefficients of support for redistributive and anti-immigrant attitudes over time. Figures 1a and 1b depict these coefficients for our 17 surveys with an added linear fit (p < .05). In both figures, we clearly see an increase and decrease for the coefficients for anti-immigrant sentiment and economic redistribution respectively with the passing of time, indicating that the regression slopes vary over time. We tested subsequently whether the slope of these two attitudes also varies significantly across survey years. This was the case (p<.001). In the results section, we therefore proceed with estimating random intercept and random slope models with cross-level interactions between time and the two attitudinal variables. Using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) to estimate the models yields similar findings, both with and without additional procedures to account for clustering per survey. Finally, to interpret and visualise these interaction models, we follow the procedure as suggested by Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006).

<Figures 1a and 1b about here>

Empirical Results

Table 1 presents our estimation results. Model 1 contains the direct effects of redistributive attitudes and anti-immigrant sentiment on left/right identification. In Model 2, we add a cross-level interaction between redistribution and time while Model 3 contains the cross-level interaction between anti-immigrant attitudes and time. Before moving on to the main findings, we note that women, the higher educated, students, union members and the unemployed are more likely to designate themselves as leftwing, while Christians, church goers, and married respondents are more likely to place themselves on the 'right' politically.

<Table 1 about here>

Model 1 shows that both attitudinal variables have a sizeable effect on left/right identification. Those opposed to economic equality and ethnic heterogeneity are much more likely to place themselves on the 'right' than those favoring redistribution and cultural equality. However, for the time-period as a whole, left/right ideology has a much stronger basis in economic than cultural attitudes. That is to say, a typical one standard deviation shift in redistributive attitudes results in a rightward shift of 0.26 points on the left/right scale. In contrast, a one standard deviation shift in anti-immigrant sentiment causes a rightward shift of 0.14 points.

Still, the main contention of this paper is that these effects will not be constant through time. Indeed, the interaction term in Model 2 indicates that the effect of redistribution on left/right ideology decreases as time goes by. In contrast, Model 3 shows that the coefficient for anti-immigrant sentiment increases in size. Figure 2 visualises these interactions. The downward sloping line in Figure 2a shows that the marginal effect of redistribution on left/right self-placement decreases through time. In line with the *Crowding Out Hypothesis* citizens have far weaker associations between left/right and economic issues nowadays than two decades ago. In addition, Figure 2b shows that the marginal effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on left/right identification increases. As the *Issue Bundling Hypothesis* states, anti-immigrant attitudes are a far stronger predictor of one's left/right self-placement nowadays than in the early 1980s. In fact, in terms of magnitude, the impact of these issues has almost equalized. In 2006, an increase of one standard deviation in economic attitudes corresponds to a rightward shift of 0.20 points, while a one standard deviation rise in cultural attitudes results in a shift of 0.17. All in all, economic attitudes used to overshadow cultural attitudes in determining the left-right identification of the Dutch population in the early 1980s, but this difference has all but disappeared in the present day.

<Figure 2 about here>

Conclusion

Political scientists often describe party competition, political behavior or public preferences in left/right terms. Nevertheless, they rarely examine the dynamics of what it means for voters to identify with the 'left' or 'right' (for notable exceptions Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1997, Freire, 2006). This study explores changes in voters' left/right self-placements, and the role of a changing issue agenda in this respect. Utilizing longitudinal data (1980-2006) from the Dutch context which was characterized by major changes in terms of party competition over the past decades, this study provides evidence of a dynamic issue basis of voters' left/right identification. As Dutch politics is more and more characterized by party mobilization of cultural issues relating to immigration over time, the left/right identification of Dutch voters has become more rooted in public attitudes towards immigrants and is linked to redistributive issues to a lesser extent. We explain this in terms of issue bundling and issue crowding out. The logic of issue bundling can be understood as constituting a pressure for parties and voters to link new policy issues to their existing positions on the left/right dimension in order to guarantee ideological consistency and reduce information costs. Issue crowding out means that as a new policy issue becomes integrated at least partially into the left/right dimension, other issues that traditionally were more prominent for left/right identification, like state intervention in the economy, will automatically become less important at least in the short run.

These results from the Netherlands between 1980 and 2006 are important, as they suggest that the mobilization of cultural issues has affected the way in which voters identify with politics. The Dutch case constitutes somewhat of a most likely case study as the mobilization of cultural issues has been among the strongest in Western Europe. As a consequence, we may also expect dynamics in voters' left/right identification in other European countries as well as issues relating to immigration become more and more politicized. Furthermore, the results presented in this study have important implications for parties and their strategies. When the basis of voters' ideological identification is essentially dynamic in nature and responds to changes in

the political agenda, it is clearly open for manipulation, and provides opportunities for new parties or political entrepreneurs. In addition, as time progresses and the electorate sorts itself out on the basis of the new issue and adjusts its ideological identification accordingly, the traditional issue basis of left/right identification is altered at least for some period of time. This redefinition of the 'left' or the 'right' may have significant implications for parties' electoral fortunes.

Naturally, this study also has limitations and leaves several related topics untouched. First, although we provide evidence of a change in the link between anti-immigrant sentiment or redistributive attitudes and voters' left/right self-placements, we cannot make any causal claims on the basis of our analysis. A lab experiment set-up could shed more light on the causal mechanisms. Second, in future work it may prove important to explicitly test the effects of a changing political issue agenda on left/right identification of voters, especially to further test the issue crowding-out hypothesis. To be sure, our data clearly show that redistributive attitudes decrease in importance over time. However, it is theoretically possible that this decrease is not caused by the mobilization of anti-immigrant sentiments, but (also) by more general processes in society, such as meritocratization. This issue could only be solved by employing cross-national data. In doing so, however, one almost automatically loses the longitudinal perspective since comparable data on both anti-immigrant as well as redistributive attitudes do not exist for a large set of countries over time. Finally, an important avenue for further research might be to study the ramifications and behavioural implications of the changing issue basis of voters' left/right identification. Could these dynamics perhaps account for changes in the voter base for traditional left- or right-wing parties like the social or Christian democrats? This may be a worthy topic to explore further.

Overall, this study provides important new evidence for understanding the dynamics of voters' left/right identification. It shows that the issue basis of left/right identification is dynamic in nature, and responds to changes in the political agenda. Hence, this study has important implications for our understanding of stability and change in left/right ideology and the dynamics in left/right competition.

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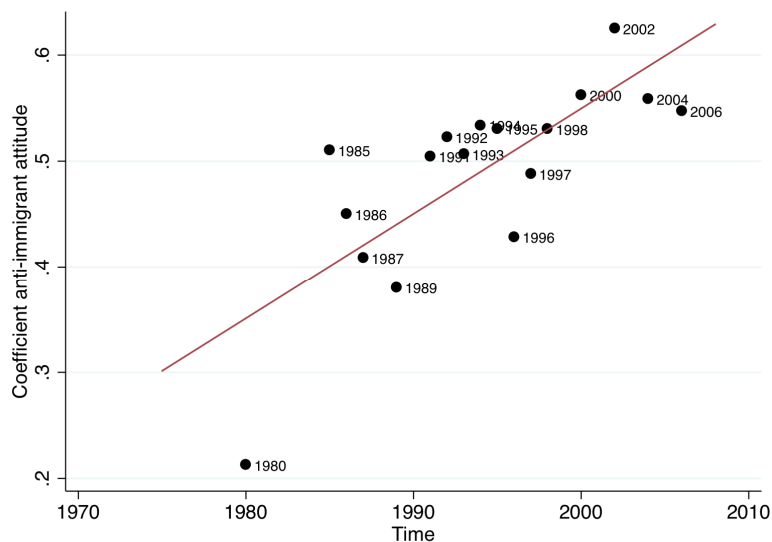
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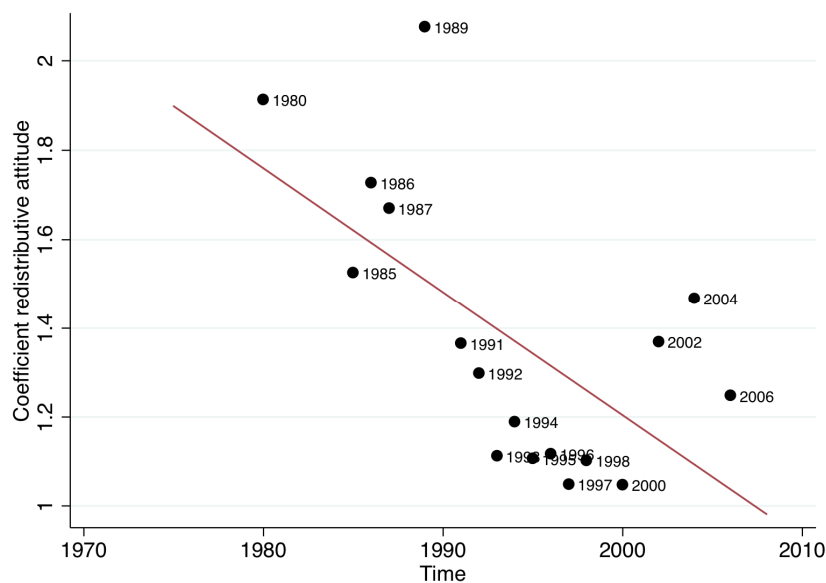
Tables and Figures

Figure 1a. The Effect of Anti-immigrant Attitudes on Left/Right Identification.

Note: Each dot represents the coefficient of anti-immigrant attitudes ($p< .05$) on left/right identification, retrieved from an OLS regression in the respective survey year.
Source: SCP Culturele Veranderingen, 1980-2006.

Figure 1b. The Effect of Redistributive Attitudes on Left/Right Identification.

Note: Each dot represents the coefficient of redistributive attitudes ($p< .05$) on left/right identification, retrieved from an OLS regression in the respective survey year.
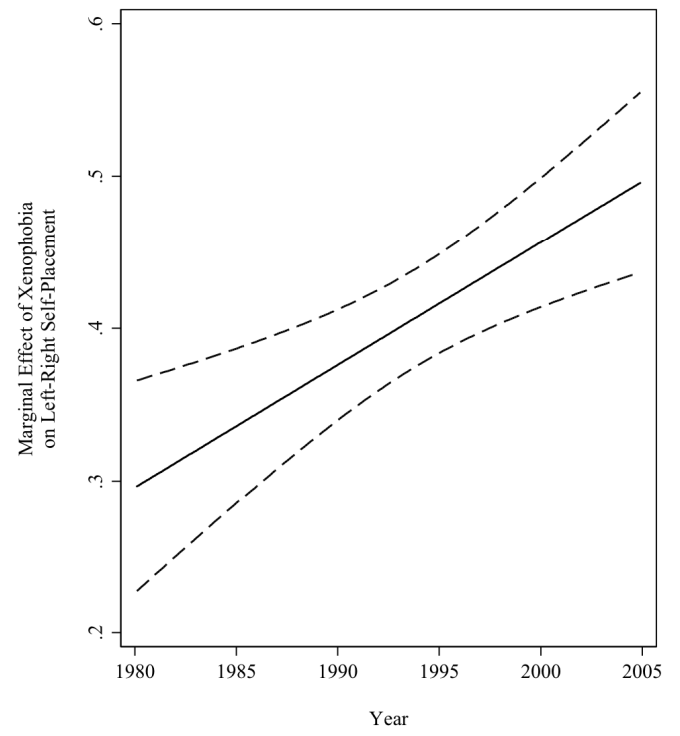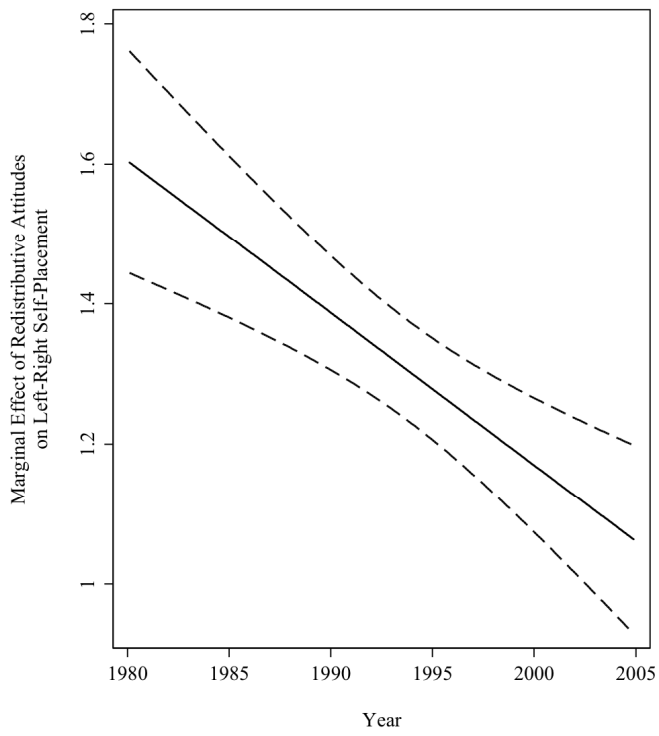*Source*: SCP Culturele Veranderingen, 1980-2006.

Table 1: The Determinants of Left/Right Identification in the Netherlands (1980-2006)

Independent Variables	Model 1 Estimate	(S.E.)	Model 2 Estimate	(S.E.)	Model 3 Estimate	(S.E.)
Issues						
Redistribution	1.300***	(0.025)	1.713***	(0.106)	1.300***	(0.025)
Anti-Immigrant	0.405***	(0.015)	0.403***	(0.015)	0.257***	(0.045)
Time	—	—	0.009***	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Redistribution × Time	—	—	– 0.022***	(0.005)	—	—
Anti-Immigrant × Time	—	—	—	—	0.008***	(0.002)
Socio-economic controls						
Female	– 0.056***	(0.010)	– 0.057***	(0.010)	– 0.056***	(0.010)
Age	– 0.011***	(0.002)	– 0.012***	(0.002)	– 0.011***	(0.002)
Age^2 / 1000	0.113***	(0.021)	0.117***	(0.021)	0.111***	(0.021)
Education (ref = primary and lower vocational)						
Middle vocational	0.026	(0.014)	0.022	(0.014)	0.025	(0.014)
Secondary	– 0.071***	(0.018)	– 0.071***	(0.018)	– 0.072***	(0.018)
Higher vocational	– 0.100***	(0.017)	– 0.107***	(0.017)	– 0.100***	(0.017)
University	– 0.175***	(0.017)	– 0.177***	(0.017)	– 0.174***	(0.017)
Religious denomination (ref = none)						
Catholic	0.301***	(0.016)	0.301***	(0.016)	0.301***	(0.016)
Protestant	0.474***	(0.016)	0.474***	(0.016)	0.475***	(0.016)
Muslim	– 0.117	(0.071)	– 0.128	(0.071)	– 0.114***	(0.072)
Other	0.336***	(0.029)	0.333***	(0.029)	0.334***	(0.029)
Church attendance	0.185***	(0.013)	0.184***	(0.013)	0.191***	(0.013)
Married	0.088***	(0.012)	0.091***	(0.012)	0.089***	(0.011)
Student	– 0.066**	(0.026)	– 0.068**	(0.026)	– 0.067**	(0.026)
Unemployed	– 0.190***	(0.032)	– 0.187***	(0.032)	– 0.190***	(0.032)
Union member	– 0.159***	(0.012)	– 0.157***	(0.012)	– 0.158***	(0.012)
Intercept	2.536***	(0.049)	2.378***	(0.054)	2.509***	(0.053)
Variance (years)	0.001*	(0.0005)	0.0003*	(0.0004)	0.0006*	(0.0004)
Variance (individuals)	0.745***	(0.006)	0.743***	(0.006)	0.744***	(0.006)
Variance (redistribution)	—	—	0.011*	(0.006)	—	—
Variance (anti-immigrant)	—	—	—	—	0.0006*	(0.001)
N (individuals)	29384		29384		29384	
N (years)	17		17		17	
– 2 × Log Likelihood	74748		74819		74726	

Note: *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05. Two-tailed tests of statistical significance.

Source: SCP Culturele Veranderingen, 1980-2006.

Figure 2: The Marginal Effects of Redistributive Attitudes (a) and Anti-immigrant Attitudes (b) on Left/Right Identification (with 95 % confidence intervals)