

Party Systems and Political Change in Europe ¹

Larry M. Bartels
Vanderbilt University
larry.bartels@vanderbilt.edu

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Abstract

I examine how party systems in 21 European democracies have shaped, and been shaped by, changes in citizens' economic and cultural values over the past two decades. I map the distributions of economic and cultural values in each political system over time and across generations, and measure the extent to which supporters of different political parties in each system have distinctive values. I distill three ideal-types of European political systems—*Nordic*, *Catholic*, and *post-communist*—with characteristic configurations of social values, dissensus, and partisan conflict. Dynamic analysis suggests that value change is largely exogenous, while polarization is strongly affected by prior value change, changes in dissensus, and—in the case of societal polarization—changes in party systems. These findings shed light on the nature of the relationship between citizens and parties in European political systems and on the substance of past and potential future political change in Europe.

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Party Systems and Political Change in Europe

Democratic political systems are supposed to be animated by, and responsive to, the fundamental social values of their citizens. Thus, significant shifts in social values should be expected to have significant political ramifications. However, systematic comparative analysis of shifting social values and their political ramifications has been surprisingly rare. Scholars of comparative politics, building upon Ronald Inglehart's (1977; 1990) pioneering work on the rise of "postmaterialist" values in advanced industrial societies, have traced the emergence of new value cleavages (e.g., Flanagan and Lee 2003; Kriesi et al. 2006; Bornschieer 2010; Tormos 2012); but most of this work has focused on specific values in isolation rather than in the context of broader party systems, and on the social *bases* of value cleavages rather than on the social and political *ramifications* of value conflicts.

Scholars of political polarization in the contemporary U.S. (e.g., Layman 2001; Fiorina 2005; Hetherington 2009; Levendusky 2009) have also devoted substantial attention to social values; but they have generally focused less on broad shifts in values than on changing patterns of partisan conflict regarding those values. For example, Geoffrey Layman's (2001) detailed analysis of contemporary American cultural politics provided ample evidence of the increasing political salience of religious and moral issues (2001, 114, 217, 248, 323) and of increasing partisan divisions with respect to those issues among both political elites (2001, 106, 108, 111, 126, 213) and ordinary citizens (2001, 155, 171-175, 188, 190-191), but no evidence regarding overall shifts in moral values, only cursory attention to changes in religious affiliation and church attendance (2001, 312), and only a very brief discussion of "societal polarization" with respect to cultural issues (2001, 328).

Layman's (2001, 328) conclusion with respect to "societal polarization"—that "Most ordinary Americans are rather indifferent toward the cultural conflict and have

fairly moderate views on the issues surrounding it”—is echoed in Morris Fiorina’s (2005, 78) broader characterization of the American “culture war” as a phenomenon of “elite polarization that is largely without foundation in a polarized electorate.” But how is it that Americans have come (if indeed they have come) to be increasingly divided along partisan lines while remaining “fairly moderate” and, indeed, “rather indifferent toward the cultural conflict” documented by Layman and others? Scholars of American politics have been hamstrung in their efforts to address this puzzle by their narrow focus on what is, in effect, a single instance of political change—the U.S. political system over the past 30 years or so.

In this essay, I propose a framework for mapping changes in social values and their impact on party systems. I employ that framework to develop a typology of European political systems and to explore the political causes and consequences of changing social values in those political systems over the past two decades. My analysis encompasses both economic and cultural values, and changes in those values stemming from both generational replacement and period effects.

One aim of this effort is simply to provide a systematic description of potentially important political changes in contemporary Europe. However, I also hope to shed light on the causal processes underlying those changes. To that end, I offer a systematic dynamic analysis of observed interrelationships among key features of the distributions of economic and cultural values in European political systems. The results of this analysis suggest that political polarization stems in significant part from broad changes in social values—in particular, from declining economic and cultural conservatism both across and within generational cohorts. They also suggest that, over time, the distinct processes of *partisan* polarization and *societal* polarization are causally intertwined, notwithstanding the emphasis in recent studies of U.S. politics on distinguishing between (increasing) “partisan sorting” and (mostly stable) “societal polarization.”

Economic and Cultural Values

I begin with the basic economic and cultural values of citizens in contemporary Europe. My analysis is based on survey data from the European Values Study (EVS), a collaborative project involving universities and research institutes in 47 European countries and regions.² The EVS data set includes four waves of surveys conducted in 1981-1982, 1990-1993, 1999-2001, and 2008-2010.³ While some countries and questions have been included in all four waves, most have not; the roster of participating countries and the body of repeated survey content have both increased substantially over the duration of the project. Given my interest in mapping political change over time and across countries, I focus here on a substantial subset of survey items included consistently in the second, third, and fourth waves of the EVS project, and on the 21 countries included in those three waves.⁴ Table 1 lists the 21 countries and the number of survey respondents in each country in each of the three most recent waves of the EVS survey.

*** Table 1 ***

Table 2 reports the results of a factor analysis of 30 politically relevant survey items included consistently in the European Values Study.⁵ The factor analysis distills

² Documentation and survey data are available from the EVS website: <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>.

³ For simplicity, I refer to these as the 1990, 1999, and 2008 EVS waves. Deviations in survey timing in specific countries are noted in Table 1.

⁴ Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were also included in all three waves, but with no data on party support in the 1990 wave, so they are excluded from my analysis.

⁵ Item-specific non-response rates (including a few instances in which specific questions were not asked in every country in every wave) range from less than 2% for the child-rearing items to 19% for the left-right scale, averaging 6.8%. In order to avoid losing observations, I have imputed missing data on the basis of linear regression analyses employing all of the variables listed in Table 2.

responses to these items into two general dimensions, which I refer to as *Economic Values* and *Cultural Values*. The *Economic Values* index primarily captures respondents' views about the role of the state in the economy, individualism, economic competition, and economic equality. The *Cultural Values* index primarily reflects views about gender roles, child-rearing values, religion, and abortion. Each index is a weighted average of responses to all 30 survey items, each rescaled to range from 0 (for the most progressive response option) to 100 (for the most conservative response option). Table 2 reports the weight assigned to each item in the construction of each index as well as the factor loadings for each item on each dimension.

***** Table 2 *****

The *Economic Values* and *Cultural Values* scales provide unusually broad and precise measures of each survey respondent's relevant economic and cultural views. Appropriately, for my purposes here, they tap general values rather than concrete policy preferences. Connections between values and policy preferences are likely to vary considerably depending on individual citizens' differing levels of political information and engagement (Sniderman, Brody and Kuklinski 1984; Zaller 1992), countries' distinctive historical circumstances and policy agendas (McClosky and Zaller 1984), and the political strategies of parties and leaders (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). It is worth noting that the values scales do not tap "political ideology" in the conventional sense of that term; a general measure of left-right orientation, which serves as the sole measure of citizens' preferences in many studies of European politics, is only modestly related to my index of *Economic Values* (with a factor loading of .389) and even more weakly related to my index of *Cultural Values* (with a factor loading of .145).

The complex of cultural values captured by the factor analysis reported in Table 2 appears quite consistently in all of the countries included in my analysis.⁶ The complex of economic values also appears quite consistently in most countries, although in some places a three-dimensional factor structure is necessary to disentangle economic values from related attitudes—for example, toward immigrants and people of different races.⁷ For purposes of cross-national comparison I ignore these national differences in

⁶ Separate two-dimensional factor analyses of survey responses from each country consistently produce cultural dimensions very similar to the one represented in Table 2. The correlations between country-specific and cross-national factor loadings range from .80 to .99, averaging .94, while the correlations between individual respondents' country-specific index scores and the index scores implied by the cross-national analysis range from .93 (in Romania) to .998 (in Belgium), averaging .98.

⁷ In 16 countries, country-specific factor analyses produce an economic dimension very similar to the one captured by my cross-national index of *Economic Values*, with correlations between country-specific and cross-national factor loadings ranging from .81 to .98 and correlations between individual country-specific and cross-national index scores ranging from .86 to .99. The exceptions reflect a variety of specific deviations from the common structure of economic values represented in Table 2. In Portugal and Poland, perceptions of the causes of poverty loom larger than more abstract views about economic competition and the appropriate role of government, producing correlations with the cross-national *Economic Values* dimension of .64 and .75, respectively. In Romania, child-rearing values of independence and imagination load strongly on what is otherwise a fairly typical economic dimension, producing a correlation with the cross-national *Economic Values* dimension of .44. In Austria and (especially) Slovenia, economic conservatism is strongly correlated with aversion to immigrants and people of other races as neighbors; the resulting hybrid dimension is strongly correlated with the cross-national *Economic Values* dimension in Austria ($R=.82$), but only very weakly correlated with the cross-national index of *Economic Values* in Slovenia ($R=.20$). In most of these deviant cases, a three-dimensional factor structure produces an economic factor strongly correlated with the cross-national index of *Economic Values*. For example, in Slovenia a three-dimensional factor structure produces one factor strongly correlated with *Cultural Values* ($R=.98$), one strongly correlated with *Economic Values* ($R=.89$), and one overwhelmingly reflecting attitudes toward immigrants (with a factor loading of .77), people of different races (.75), and homosexuals (.31); none of the other factor loadings exceeds .14.

value structures, focusing instead on the prevalent understanding of economic and cultural values reflected by the factor loadings and index weights reported in Table 2.

Figure 1 summarizes the distributions of economic and cultural values in the most recent (2008) EVS survey wave. In each case, the range of observed index values spans nearly the entire range of available responses, from the most progressive response to each of the 30 items (an index value of 0) to the most conservative response to each item (an index value of 100). The distributions of *Economic Values* are roughly Normal, especially the summary distribution of responses from all 21 countries (represented by the thick line in the top panel of Figure 1).⁸ The corresponding summary distribution of *Cultural Values* is considerably more dispersed and somewhat right-skewed, indicating a good deal of dissensus and a preponderance of progressive values. It is also clear from the figure that the country-specific distributions of *Cultural Values* are much more distinct than those for *Economic Values*, indicating much more national variation in Europeans' views regarding gender roles, child-rearing values, religion, and abortion than in beliefs about appropriate economic arrangements.

***** Figure 1 *****

Not surprisingly, individuals' economic and cultural values are correlated; however, the correlation is more modest than might be supposed—just .25.⁹ Thus,

⁸ The summary distributions presented in Figure 1—like the factor analysis reported in Table 2—are derived from the pooled survey data without regard to country. Thus, each political system represented in the EVS data is effectively weighted in proportion to the number of survey respondents in Table 1.

⁹ For a limited subset of EVS survey respondents, it is possible to relate the economic and cultural values measured here to a 12-item scale of *Postmaterialist Values* (Inglehart 1977; 1990). The correlations (–.33 for cultural conservatism and –.30 for economic conservatism) barely exceed the correlation between *Economic Values* and *Cultural Values* (for the same subset of respondents, .28), underlining the fact that the value dimensions represented in Table 2 are quite distinct from those studied by Inglehart.

there are plenty of people who combine conservative economic values with progressive cultural values or vice versa. (Dividing each scale at its median, the former group ranges from 8% in Poland to 40% in Denmark, while the latter group ranges from 6% in Denmark to 40% in Poland.)

Figure 2 shows the average position of survey respondents in each country in the most recent (2008) round of the EVS project, in a two-dimensional space defined by more or less conservative *Economic Values* (on the horizontal dimension) and more or less conservative *Cultural Values* (on the vertical dimension). Average economic values vary only modestly across countries, with about ten points on the 100-point scale separating Spain and France on the left from Romania and the Czech Republic on the right. Average cultural values vary more markedly, with Romania and Poland about 25 points more conservative than Sweden and Denmark at the progressive end of the value scale (represented by lower values in Figure 2). The aggregate-level correlation between economic conservatism and cultural conservatism is .38—somewhat higher than the corresponding individual-level correlation, .25.

*** Figure 2 ***

Changing Values

The national economic and cultural values summarized in Figures 1 and 2 reflect the most recent available EVS survey data. However, the longitudinal structure of the EVS project also makes it possible to map the trajectory of shifting economic and cultural values in each political system over a period of almost two decades. Figure 3 displays the changing levels of average economic and cultural conservatism in each system—and the changing *average* levels across all 21 systems—from 1990 to 1999 to 2008. Although there is considerable cross-national variation, especially with respect to cultural value change, the general trend in both domains is clearly in a progressive direction. The average level of cultural conservatism declined by more than seven

points on the 100-point scale illustrated in Figure 1, from 51.7 in 1990 to 44.6 in 2008; the corresponding average level of economic conservatism declined by about half that much, from 56.6 in 1990 to 53.2 in 2008.

***** Figure 3 *****

Figure 4 shows the extent of economic and cultural liberalization in each political system over the 18 years spanned by my analysis. The Czech Republic, in the top right corner of the figure, has experienced substantial liberalization both economically and culturally, while Romania, near the bottom left corner, has become only slightly less economically conservative and slightly *more* culturally conservative over this period. Most of the other political systems represented in the figure have experienced modest economic liberalization (from one to five points on the 100-point scale) and more substantial cultural liberalization (from five to ten points on the 100-point scale).¹⁰

***** Figure 4 *****

To some extent these changes reflect generational shifts, as less conservative cohorts have gradually replaced their more conservative elders. The extent of generational liberalization in each country may be roughly measured by the difference in economic or cultural conservatism between older and younger respondents in the same EVS surveys.¹¹ For my purposes here it is convenient to focus on the average

¹⁰ Of course, these apparent shifts in economic and cultural values are affected by sampling error in the EVS surveys. However, the country-by-country shifts are fairly precisely estimated, with standard errors ranging from 0.3 to 0.7 on the 100-point scales.

¹¹ My estimates of generational change are derived from separate linear regression analyses relating the economic and cultural values of EVS survey respondents in each country to the respondents' birth years, with indicator variables for each survey wave to capture period effects. These estimates may overstate the absolute magnitude of generational shifts by making no separate allowance for life-cycle effects (if cohorts tend to become more conservative as they age, which does not seem unlikely); however, since the magnitudes of life-cycle effects in the

differences in values associated with an 18-year age difference, reflecting the extent of generational replacement over the 18 years separating the second and fourth EVS waves. Figure 5 compares these 18-year age differences in economic and cultural values in each country (represented on the horizontal axis in each panel) to the corresponding overall shifts in values summarized in Figure 4 (on the vertical axis).

*** Figure 5 ***

On the economic dimension (in the left panel of Figure 5), the extent of generational liberalization ranges from -0.7 points on the 100-point scale (younger respondents were slightly *more* conservative than older respondents) in Slovakia to about 2.5 points in France and Spain. Generational liberalization was much more substantial in the realm of cultural values (in the right panel of Figure 5), ranging from 2.2 points in Sweden to 8.1 points in Spain. It is tempting to suppose that this substantial generational liberalization accounts for the significant overall shifts in cultural values evident in Figure 3. However, Figure 5 casts considerable doubt on that supposition, as there is no evident relationship between the extent of generational liberalization in each country and the overall magnitude of liberalization (as measured by the difference in average values between the second and fourth EVS waves). For example, roughly typical generational shifts in cultural values (about 5 points on the 100-point scale) were associated with substantial overall cultural liberalization (10 or 11 points) in Poland and Portugal, moderate overall cultural liberalization (5 or 6 points) in Slovakia and Great Britain, and *no* overall cultural liberalization (-1 point) in Romania. Even more strikingly, Sweden experienced a larger overall shift in cultural values than any other country represented here (11.3 points) despite having the

various European countries analyzed here are likely to be roughly similar, this omission is unlikely to produce substantial biases in my cross-national comparisons.

smallest average difference in cultural values between young and old people. Clearly, national shifts in values are not primarily driven by generational change.¹²

Dissensus, Partisan Sorting, and Political Polarization

So far, my description of European political systems has focused on changing national average levels of economic and cultural conservatism over the past two decades. However, the scholarly literature on political polarization in the contemporary U.S. (e.g., DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Fiorina 2005; Hetherington 2009) has emphasized the potential political significance of two other features of national distributions of social values—the extent of value consensus or dissensus in a society, and the extent to which supporters of different political parties hold distinctive social values. These aspects of the distribution of social values have generally received a good deal less attention from scholars of European politics.¹³

The first of these features is nicely reflected in the standard deviation of the national distribution of economic or cultural values, which I will employ here as a measure of *social dissensus*. The second is often represented in the literature on U.S. politics by the difference in average values between Democrats and Republicans; however, a more general measure of *partisan sorting*—among other things, more readily adaptable to the multi-party systems of Europe—is the multiple correlation between economic or cultural values and party support.¹⁴

¹² On the relative importance of generational change and adult political learning in the rise of “postmaterialist” values, see Tormos (2012).

¹³ Notable recent exceptions include Jæger’s (2009) work on welfare regimes and levels of public consensus regarding support for redistribution and Adams, Green and Milazzo’s (2011) work on depolarization in Britain.

¹⁴ For my purposes here, this multiple correlation is easily calculated by regressing the economic or cultural index values for a given countries’ respondents in the EVS surveys on a

The literature on political polarization in the U.S. has involved a good deal of squabbling over definitions—in particular, whether the term “polarization” should be applied to what I refer to here as *partisan sorting* or reserved for what I refer to as *social dissensus* (Hetherington 2009). Terminology is further complicated by the fact that scholars use the term “polarization” sometimes to refer to *high levels* of social dissensus or partisan sorting and sometimes to refer to *increasing levels* of social dissensus or partisan sorting. Since my analysis focuses on both levels and changes, I will use the terms *social dissensus* and *partisan sorting* to refer to levels, reserving the term “polarization” to refer to increases in those levels. More specifically, I adopt the terms *societal polarization* (Layman 2001, 328) and *partisan polarization* (Fiorina 2005, 25) to refer to increases in *social dissensus* and *partisan sorting*, respectively.

While the nomenclature employed in studies of polarization in the contemporary U.S. is sometimes tangled, there is less controversy regarding the facts on the ground; most scholars seem to agree that the past three decades have produced a good deal of *partisan polarization* but much less, if any, *societal polarization* (Layman 2001; Fiorina 2005; Hetherington 2009; Levendusky 2009). The descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 suggest that the U.S. is roughly typical in the latter regard, but far from typical

series of dichotomous variables indicating support for each of the parties in the country’s political system; the multiple correlation is the square root of the familiar R-squared statistic from this regression. This measure appropriately reflects the relative importance of each party (and of non-partisans) in the political system (within the limits of sampling error), and the extent to which social values are predictable on the basis of party adherence. Although it does not directly capture the *magnitude* of value differences between adherents of different parties, systems with relatively homogeneous parties (Rehm and Reilly 2010) will (as they should) look better-sorted along partisan lines, other things being equal. I include indicator variables for each political party with at least 100 supporters in the EVS surveys (generally about 2-3% of the total national sample).

in the former regard.¹⁵ On average, the 21 European political systems considered here have experienced little change in social dissensus (with a modest but temporary increase in cultural dissensus and a modest, mostly temporary *decrease* in economic dissensus in the late 1990s), only a slight increase in economic partisan sorting, and a considerable *decline* in cultural partisan sorting from 1990 to 2008. Most have also experienced a perceptible decline in the integration of social values across domains, as measured by the correlation between individual citizens' economic and cultural values; this development, too, is at odds with U.S. experience. These discrepancies suggest that any successful explanation of polarization in the contemporary U.S. will have to account for, or at least be consistent with, very different empirical patterns in other affluent democracies over the same period of time.

***** Table 3 *****

In addition to underlining the atypicality of recent political developments in the U.S., the European data allow us to explore interrelationships among the various features of political systems summarized in Table 3, and thus to shed light on the causal processes underlying political change. One of the most striking, non-obvious relationships evident in these data is a strong correlation between progressive values and the extent of partisan sorting in a given political system. This relationship is displayed in the left panel of Figure 6, which shows the overall level of partisan sorting in each system (averaging the separate measures for economic and cultural values in all three EVS survey waves) as a function of overall conservatism (also averaging the separate measures for economic and cultural values in all three EVS survey waves). It is clear from the figure that the political systems of post-communist Central Europe are

¹⁵ In comparing Europe with the U.S., I ignore the fact that studies of political polarization in the U.S. mostly focus on *policy preferences* rather than on economic and cultural *values*. The EVS cumulative data file includes U.S. survey data from 1990, but not from 1999 or 2008, so incorporating the U.S. more explicitly in the framework developed here would require identifying and merging comparable survey data from other sources.

generally quite conservative and relatively disorganized, in the sense that value conflict is largely unrelated to partisanship. However, even within the long-established political systems of Western Europe there is a very strong negative relationship ($R=-.74$) between conservatism and partisan sorting—from Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands in the upper left (most divided along partisan lines) to Portugal and Ireland in the lower right (least divided along partisan lines). Indeed, the statistical relationship between conservatism and partisan sorting in Western European countries (represented by the dashed line in Figure 6) is virtually identical to the relationship in all 21 systems (represented by the solid line in the figure).

***** Figure 6 *****

It is tempting to suppose that the level of partisan conflict in a political system simply reflects the extent of underlying disagreement regarding fundamental social values; but that appears not to be the case. The empirical relationship between partisan sorting and social dissensus (measured by the average standard deviation of economic and cultural values in each of the three EVS survey waves) is summarized in the right panel of Figure 6. Again, the post-communist systems stand out as being much more consensual and (with the notable exception of the Czech Republic) much less divided along partisan lines than most of the Western European democracies. However, among the Western European democracies the correlation in the right panel of Figure 6 ($R=.28$) is distinctly weaker than the correlation in the left panel ($R=-.74$), notably due to the anomalous cases of Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, which exhibit significant value conflict along partisan lines despite being rather consensual societies by Western European standards.

Of course, broad empirical relationships of the sort displayed in Figure 6 can be difficult to interpret in causal terms. V. O. Key's classic analysis of factional politics in the racially repressive "one-party system" of the mid-twentieth-century U.S. South suggested that "over the long run the have-nots lose in a disorganized politics" (Key

1949, 307). In the present context, Key's thesis might be taken to imply that the relatively consensual and conservative political systems in the lower portions of Figure 6 are relatively consensual and conservative, at least in part, *because* their party systems fail to provide effective frameworks for value conflict. The longitudinal structure of the EVS survey data makes it possible to test that thesis systematically—a possibility I take up in a later section of this paper.

Obviously, the aspects of political systems considered here, and summarized in Table 3, do not capture every important difference among European democracies, even with respect to the economic and cultural values defined by the factor analysis reported in Table 2. Perhaps most importantly, neither *social dissensus* nor *partisan sorting* captures the sheer *intensity* of political disagreement regarding economic and cultural values and the concrete policy issues in which those values are bound up. In principle, at least, it is possible for people with very disparate values to coexist happily as long as their disagreements are not politically salient. For example, people with very different religious values coexisted within both major U.S. political parties in the 1960s, but the increasing prominence of cultural issues on the political agenda in the 1980s and '90s—and the increasingly clear alignment of Democratic and Republican elites on opposite sides of those issues—triggered substantial partisan polarization in the cultural values of rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans (through changes in both cultural views and partisan loyalties) and an increase in the electoral relevance of cultural issues (Hunter 1991; Adams 1997; Layman 2001; Hetherington and Weiler 2009).

More prosaically, my analysis of social values and party systems is highly dependent upon the quality of data produced by the EVS surveys. These surveys are unusually rich in tapping a broad range of politically relevant economic and cultural values, as the list of variables in Table 2 attests. However, the organizational structure of the EVS project—with semi-independent teams of scholars conducting the surveys

in each country in each wave—may exacerbate the inevitable difficulties of ensuring comparability in long-term cross-national research projects. Moreover, the primary focus of the EVS project on social questions and concerns is reflected in a relative dearth of specifically political content.

The single most important political characteristic of survey respondents, for my purposes here, is party adherence. However, the only question consistently tapping that characteristic in the EVS surveys asked not about general partisan loyalties but about immediate (hypothetical) vote intentions: “If there was a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?” The proportion of survey respondents classified as supporters of any specific political party on the basis of this measure varies substantially, not only across countries but also within each country over time. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell how much of this variation reflects real changes in underlying partisan loyalties and how much reflects idiosyncracies of survey timing or minor variations in survey administration.¹⁶

A Typology of European Political Systems

The relationships depicted in Figure 6 are just two of several that could be used to illustrate interconnections among the various features of political systems

¹⁶ In 1990, survey respondents were asked: “If there was a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?” 4.8% said they would not vote or “none,” while 24.3% didn’t answer or said they didn’t know. In 1999, the same question was accompanied by a show card listing response options. Now 10.4% said they would not vote, while 2.6% said they would cast a blank ballot (an option that does not seem to have been explicitly offered in 1990); the proportion who didn’t answer or didn’t know fell slightly, to 21.6%. In 2008, respondents were asked: “If there was a general election tomorrow, can you tell me if you would vote?” 17.3% said no, while 8.1% didn’t know or didn’t answer. A further 15.1% said yes, but then didn’t know or didn’t answer the follow-up question (with show card listing response options), “Which party would you vote for?” Thus, the proportion of respondents who indicated support for any specific party (including “other”) fell from 70.7% in 1990 to 65.3% in 1999 and 59.4% in 2008.

summarized in Table 3. Rather than multiply such examples, my aim in this section is to provide a more general sense of how these various features commonly fit together. To that end, Table 4 presents a typology of contemporary European political systems, with three ideal-types representing distinctive configurations of economic and cultural values, social dissensus, and partisan conflict. I refer to these ideal-types as *Nordic*, *Catholic*, and *post-communist*, respectively.

*** Table 4 ***

The *post-communist* type is a configuration of values and value conflict more or less closely approximated by all seven of the former communist systems included in my analysis (leaving aside the former East Germany)—Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia. The *Catholic* group includes the seven predominantly Catholic countries of Western Europe—Spain, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Belgium, France, and Austria—with the most Catholic countries generally being most typical in political respects as well.¹⁷ The *Nordic* group includes the remaining Western European systems, with Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland most closely approximating the ideal-type and three other Northern European countries—Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany—as somewhat less typical examples.

Of course, this typology represents a considerable simplification of a complex political reality. The continental systems at the bottom of the *Nordic* and *Catholic* lists—Germany, Austria, France, and the Netherlands—have more in common with each other than with the paradigmatic *Nordic* and *Catholic* systems, Sweden and Spain. Meanwhile, the *post-communist* label obscures some significant variation along the

¹⁷ According to the CIA's *World Factbook* (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2122.html>), the percentages of Catholics in the countries classified here as approximating the *Catholic* ideal-type range from 94% (in Spain) to 74% (in Austria). The corresponding percentages in the *Nordic* countries range from 34% (in Germany) to less than 1% (in Finland).

same lines evident in Western Europe, with the Czech Republic and Bulgaria sharing features of the *Nordic* system and Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia (as it happens, all countries with predominantly Catholic populations) leaning distinctly toward the *Catholic* pattern. Nevertheless, the simple tripartite classification in Table 4 seems convenient for the purpose of surveying the broad terrain of contemporary European political systems.

The remaining rows of Table 4 summarize the distinctive features of each type of political system.¹⁸ The *Nordic* systems are notable for their combination of progressive cultural values and high levels of economic conflict, with unusually high levels of both economic dissensus and (especially) partisan sorting. (The latter characteristic accounts for most of the anomalies in the empirical relationship between partisan sorting and dissensus depicted in the right panel of Figure 6.)

The *Catholic* systems, on the other hand, are notable for their combination of progressive economic values and high levels of cultural dissensus. In addition, the *Catholic* systems have unusually high rates of generational change, with young people holding distinctly more progressive values than their elders. This is perhaps not surprising when it comes to cultural values, as increasing numbers of young Catholics in these and other countries have rejected the Church's traditional moral precepts regarding abortion, marriage, and sexual practices. However, it may be more surprising to find that the economic values of young people in the Catholic countries of Europe are even more distinctively progressive, relative to their elders'. Spain, France, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Austria, and Portugal all have higher-than-average generational differences in economic values. And although some of these countries remain

¹⁸ Roughly, "High" and "Low" values in Table 4 are at least half a standard deviation above or below the overall 21-country mean, while "Very High" and "Very Low" values are at least a full standard deviation above or below the overall mean.

economically conservative, overall, their economic values are actually more progressive than those of the *Nordic* countries in my typology.

The value configurations of the *post-communist* systems contrast sharply with those of both the *Nordic* and *Catholic* systems. Whereas the *Nordic* systems are culturally progressive and economically divided, the *post-communist* systems are culturally conservative and economically quiescent, with notably low levels of both economic dissensus and partisan sorting. And whereas the *Catholic* systems are economically progressive and culturally divided, the *post-communist* systems are economically conservative and culturally quiescent. Finally, the average correlation between the economic and cultural values of individual citizens is markedly lower in the *post-communist* systems than in either the *Nordic* or (especially) the *Catholic* countries. By comparison with the older political systems of Western Europe, the new democracies of Central Europe are generally more conservative and more consensual, with less value conflict along partisan lines. Of course, whether they will retain these distinctive features or gradually evolve toward Western European patterns remains to be seen.

Changing Values and Changing Party Systems

I have characterized and classified European political systems on the basis of five distinct features of their economic and cultural values: conservatism, dissensus, partisan sorting, generational change, and cross-domain value integration. The typology of political systems set out in Table 4 provides a static picture of the empirical relationships among these distinct features. However, it is by no means obvious whether or how these various characteristics of party systems are causally related. Fortunately, the longitudinal structure of the EVS project provides significant additional analytical leverage in this regard. Careful attention to the relative timing of important changes in European political systems can shed important light on

questions of causality. In particular, the logic of “Granger causality” (Granger 1969) suggests that a statistical relationship between the current value of a characteristic Y and the previous history of another characteristic X—even after allowing for the previous history of Y itself—provides evidence that X has a causal effect on Y.

In the present context, we can further refine the assessment of causality by focusing on the relationship between *changes* in specific features of political systems and *previous changes* in potentially related features of those systems, using the three relevant waves of EVS survey data to construct separate measures of change for the 1990s and 2000s. Focusing on changes in changes, the Granger logic implies that a causal impact of X on Y should appear as a statistical relationship between a *change* in Y (between 1999 and 2008) and a *lagged change* in X (between 1990 and 1999)—even after allowing for the *lagged change* in Y itself.¹⁹ Thus, my statistical analysis relates *changes* in each of the major aspects of political systems—conservatism, dissensus, and partisan sorting—between the third EVS wave in 1999 and the fourth wave in 2008 to prior changes (between the second EVS wave in 1990 and the third wave in 1999) of all three sorts, and to the extent of generational liberalization as measured by cohort differences in economic and cultural values in each country.

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5. Since my aim is to summarize broad patterns of political change rather than to test specific theories regarding changing economic or cultural values, I constrain the corresponding parameter estimates (with the exception of intercepts for the three distinct groups of political

¹⁹ In order for a statistical relationship of this sort to be spurious, it must either be the case that changes in Y cause subsequent changes in both X and Y, but with very different (and peculiar) lags, or that some unobserved factor Z independently causes changes in X and, a decade later, changes in Y. Neither sort of confound is logically impossible, but neither seems very likely in this context.

systems) in my analyses of economic values and cultural values to be equal.²⁰ And since the various aspects of political change analyzed here are likely to be interrelated in complex ways, I allow for correlations among the residuals from the six separate regression analyses (one for economic values and one for cultural values in each column of Table 5) by employing a Seemingly Unrelated Regression framework.²¹

***** Table 5 *****

The analysis of value change in the first column of Table 5 suggests that shifts in economic and cultural values were largely exogenous in the system of variables examined here. Aside from the sizeable negative intercepts in five of six instances (reflecting the second half of the decline in conservatism in most European political systems evident in Figure 3), the only “statistically significant” coefficient is on lagged value change; this negative coefficient implies some regressive tendency in social values, with shifts in one decade partly reversed in the next decade.²² Value change was

²⁰ Appendix Tables A1 and A2 present parallel results from dynamic analyses of economic and cultural values with unconstrained parameters. Allowing the economic and cultural parameters to differ improves the statistical fit of the models by only 5%, on average, and the two distinct sets of estimated effects are broadly similar in pattern, albeit considerably less precise (with standard errors 66% larger than those in Table 5, on average).

²¹ The Seemingly Unrelated Regression framework exploits correlations in the residuals from the six separate equations to improve the efficiency of the parameter estimates. Here, the correlations range in magnitude from -0.43 to $+0.45$, and the resulting improvements in efficiency range from 2% to 30%, averaging 15%.

²² In part, this apparent regressive tendency is attributable to sampling error in the measures of conservatism derived from the EVS surveys. (If, simply by chance, the 1999 survey sample in a given country was too conservative, that would produce a higher-than-warranted estimate of lagged value change from 1990 to 1999 and a lower-than-warranted estimate of subsequent value change from 1999 to 2008, inducing a negative correlation between successive changes. Likewise, a too-progressive 1999 survey sample would produce a lower-than-warranted estimate of lagged value change from 1990 to 1999 and a higher-than-warranted estimate of subsequent value change from 1999 to 2008, similarly inducing a negative correlation between successive

essentially unrelated to generational liberalization (not surprisingly, in light of the non-relationships in Figure 5), but probably modestly accelerated (that is, declines in conservatism were increased) by previous increases in both social dissensus and partisan sorting.

The statistical analysis of social dissensus reported in the second column of Table 5 provides more (and more precise) evidence of dynamic interrelationships among the various aspects of political change considered here. Here, there is an even stronger regressive tendency, with previous societal polarization (or de-polarization) largely disappearing over the course of the subsequent decade. In addition, however, both declining conservatism and partisan polarization in the 1990s contributed significantly to increasing societal and partisan polarization between 1999 and 2008. For example, a typical (5.5-point) decline in overall cultural conservatism between 1990 and 1999 was associated with an additional 0.6-point increase in cultural dissensus in the subsequent decade. Thus, it appears that rapid changes in social values triggered significant increases in social dissensus in Europe in the first decade of the 21st century.

In addition, the substantial positive effect of lagged changes in partisan sorting on subsequent changes in social dissensus provides striking evidence that citizens' fundamental values were shaped, in part, by partisan politics. When economic or cultural disagreements become more strongly associated with political parties, overall dissensus in society tends to increase, and when disagreements across party lines are blurred, the society as a whole tends to become more consensual. Although the parameter estimate in Table 5 (.086) looks small, the magnitude of the effect implied by this estimate is substantial. For example, Portugal, Denmark, the Netherlands, and

changes.) The estimated effects of lagged societal polarization on subsequent societal polarization and of lagged partisan polarization on subsequent partisan polarization are similarly biased downward by sampling error in the 1999 estimates of social dissensus and partisan sorting, respectively.

Germany all experienced substantial partisan *depolarization* on both the economic and cultural dimensions during the 1990s; the *average* resulting decrease in social dissensus over the subsequent decade implied by my dynamic analysis is .88—about two-thirds of a standard deviation in the overall distributions of economic and cultural dissensus in 2008. While scholars of party politics often assert that the configuration of parties in a political system can have significant effects on public opinion, the analysis presented here is rare in providing solid cross-national statistical support for that assertion.

My parallel analysis of changes in partisan sorting, presented in the third column of Table 5, documents the significant ramifications of generational liberalization for contemporary European party systems, especially in the cultural domain. An average level of generational cultural liberalization was associated with a 7.8-point increase (more than one standard deviation) in partisan polarization, while the highest observed level, in Spain, was associated with a 13.4-point increase (more than two standard deviations) in partisan polarization. On the whole, the increases in partisan polarization implied by these generational effects were largely offset by the large negative intercepts for cultural partisan polarization, especially in post-communist and Catholic systems; nevertheless, it seems clear that generational value change has created substantial political tensions in many European countries, and that these tensions have typically been reflected in an increasing tendency for people with similar cultural views to gravitate into distinct partisan camps.

Perhaps more surprisingly, there is also a strong statistical tendency for partisan polarization to occur in countries where social dissensus has previously *declined*. Thus, while changes in social dissensus in the 1990s were mostly reversed over the course of the subsequent decade (as indicated by the substantial negative parameter estimate, $-.849$, in the second column of Table 5), those largely transitory changes seem to have triggered significant longer-term changes in party systems. For example,

Denmark experienced a substantial (1.9-point) decrease in economic dissensus in the 1990s; the statistical results in Table 5 suggest that this decrease should have produced a 5.6-point *increase* in partisan sorting between 1999 and 2008. (The actual increase was 7.6 points.) Conversely, the substantial (2.6-point) *increases* in cultural dissensus in Poland and Slovenia in the 1990s would be expected to produce a 7.7-point *decrease* in subsequent partisan sorting, other things being equal. (In fact, the observed correlations between party support and cultural values declined by about 11 points in both of those countries between the third and fourth waves of the EVS survey.) *Why* increasing social dissensus should lead to subsequent partisan depolarization is by no means clear; however, the magnitude and consistency of this relationship makes it an intriguing topic for further research.

The statistical analyses summarized in Table 5 account for changes in average economic and cultural values over the course of a decade with an average error of about two points on the 100-point values scales, changing levels of social dissensus with an average error of less than one point, and changing levels of partisan sorting with an average error of about five points. Figure 7 provides a case-by-case graphical summary of these errors in accounting for levels of social dissensus (in the left panel of the figure) and partisan sorting (in the right panel). Only one of the observed changes in social dissensus (for economic values in Austria) is more than two points higher or lower than the projections based on the statistical analysis, with two additional instances of discrepancies exceeding 1.1 points (for cultural values in Italy and Romania). Three of the observed changes in levels of partisan sorting are more than eight points higher or lower than the projected changes (for economic values in France, Portugal, and Great Britain). These scattered exceptions notwithstanding, my statistical analysis successfully captures much of the observed variation in patterns of societal and partisan polarization and depolarization in European political systems in the 2000s.

*** Figure 7 ***

Illustrative Cases: Sweden and Denmark, the Czech Republic and Poland

The dynamic analysis presented in Table 5 provides a rather abstract account of patterns of political change in contemporary Europe. In this section, I draw upon four specific cases to illustrate the statistical results and to explore their concrete political implications. In particular, I compare the two most typical examples of the Nordic configuration identified in Table 4—Sweden and Denmark—and two post-communist systems—the Czech Republic and Poland. I trace observed changes in economic and cultural values, social dissensus, and partisan sorting in each country, assess the extent to which those changes are captured by my dynamic analysis, and use the results of the analysis to project further political changes.

Figure 8 traces the trajectories of economic and cultural values and their implications for political change in Sweden (represented by blue lines) and Denmark (represented by red lines). The solid lines in the figure represent actual shifts in economic and cultural values and partisan sorting from 1990 to 1999 to 2008, while the dashed lines represent projected shifts, based on the statistical analysis reported in Table 5, from 1999 to 2008 and, by extrapolation, from 2008 to 2017.²³

*** Figure 8 ***

It is clear from Figure 8 that in the immediate wake of the financial crisis of the early 1990s, Sweden became considerably more progressive, considerably more consensual, and considerably more polarized along partisan lines. Between the 1990

²³ My extrapolations beyond 2008 ignore the intercepts estimated in Table 5, since there is little reason to expect them to remain constant from one decade to the next. Thus, the projected shifts shown in Figure 8 (and in Figure 9 below) illustrate the implications of observed changes in values, dissensus, and partisan sorting in each country between 1999 and 2008, given the parameter estimates reported in the top panel of Table 5.

and 1999 EVS surveys, the Swedish public moved almost 5 points to the left (downward in the first panel of the figure) on the economic values scale and more than 10 points to the left on the cultural values scale. Over the same period, both economic and cultural dissensus (as measured in the second panel of the figure by the standard deviations of individual values) declined substantially. However, these declines in dissensus were accompanied by significant partisan polarization (in the third panel of the figure), as the relatively centrist Liberal People's Party and Centre Party lost substantial support while the Left Party and the culturally conservative Christian Democrats gained support.

The implications of these shifts, given the statistical results presented in Table 5, were that Sweden in the 2000s should have been expected to experience slight further liberalization, a substantial rebound in social dissensus, and further partisan polarization in both the economic and cultural realms; these expectations are indicated by the first set of dashed blue lines in Figure 8. The overlaid solid lines, representing actual changes over the same period, indicate that these expectations were, for the most part, fulfilled between 1999 and 2009. Swedes did become slightly more progressive, both economically and culturally (in each case, by a bit less than one point on the 100-point scale). Social dissensus increased significantly (though cultural dissensus increased less than would have been expected on the basis of the statistical results reported in Table 5, and economic dissensus increased more than would have been expected). Thus, whereas the partisan polarization of the 1990s occurred in a *society* that was actually becoming more consensual, the delayed effect of that partisan polarization was to exacerbate fundamental societal disagreements about cultural and (especially) economic values.

Meanwhile, the Swedish party system continued to polarize, both with respect to economic values (at a slightly faster rate than is implied by the dynamic analysis summarized in Table 5) and with respect to cultural values (at a slower-than-expected

rate in light of that analysis). On the economic dimension this partisan polarization was broad-based, with adherents of the Left, Green, and Social Democratic parties all moving sharply to the left and adherents of the Moderate and Liberal People's parties moving slightly to the right. On the cultural dimension supporters of both major parties moved a bit further to the left, in parallel with the public as a whole; but the culturally conservative Christian Democrats dramatically reversed course, returning most of the way to their 1990 position by 2009, while the Greens and the Liberal People's Party outflanked the culturally progressive Left Party.

The implications of these shifts for further change in the Swedish political system, given the statistical results presented in Table 5, are represented by the right-most dashed blue lines in Figure 8. They suggest little change in the cultural domain, but considerable change in the economic domain, including a modest further decline in economic conservatism, a substantial reversal of societal polarization, and a substantial reversal of partisan polarization. (As of 2008, Sweden had the highest levels of both economic dissensus and partisan sorting of the 21 European political systems included in my analysis.) Change of this magnitude would presumably require a significant decline in popular support for the more extreme parties in the Swedish political system, as well as a shift toward the economic center by the economically conservative Moderate Party.

Denmark, like Sweden, experienced a substantial decline in social dissensus in the 1990s, especially in the economic domain. However, while societal depolarization in Sweden was accompanied by partisan polarization, in Denmark it was accompanied by partisan *depolarization*—a substantial decline in the strength of the relationship between economic and cultural values on one hand and party support on the other. One implication of this difference for political change in the 2000s is clear in Figure 8: prior partisan polarization in Sweden contributed to substantial societal polarization in the 2000s, while partisan *depolarization* in Denmark mitigated subsequent societal

polarization. However, in both cases the significant decline in social dissensus in the 1990s contributed to partisan polarization in the 2000s. In Denmark, as I have already suggested, the negative coefficient for lagged societal polarization in the third column of Table 5 accounts for most of the observed 7.6-point increase in economic partisan sorting between 1999 and 2008. Societal depolarization in the 1990s was much less extensive in the cultural realm, and so too was partisan polarization in the 2000s.

Partisan polarization in Denmark—unlike in most contemporary European party systems—occurred in part through a sheer increase in partisan attachments. The proportion of Danes in the EVS survey expressing no party preference declined from 27% in 1999 to 20% in 2008, with net increases in support for the Socialist People’s Party (whose supporters occupy the left end of the Danish political spectrum) and, to a lesser extent, the Danish People’s Party (whose supporters hold *absolutely* conservative economic values and *relatively* conservative cultural values). The largest parties in the Danish system, the Liberals and Social Democrats—like their counterparts in Sweden—maintained quite consistent levels of support over this period.

The projections for Denmark in the decade after 2008 provide little reason to expect significant changes in the economic domain—the projected trends in economic values, economic dissensus, and partisan sorting are all more or less flat. However, in the cultural domain the changes observed during the 2000s would seem to imply a modest resurgence in cultural conservatism, a substantial increase in cultural dissensus (reversing the societal depolarization of the 2000s), and significant partisan polarization. In all these respects, the implications of my dynamic analysis for Denmark in the cultural domain are almost exactly the reverse of the projections for Sweden in the economic domain.

Figure 9 traces the trajectories of economic and cultural values and their implications for political change in two post-communist systems, the Czech Republic (represented by purple lines) and Poland (represented by red lines). As in Figure 8, the

solid lines in the figure represent actual shifts in economic and cultural politics, while the dashed lines represent projected shifts based on the statistical analysis reported in Table 5.

***** Figure 9 *****

It is clear from Figure 9 that both the Czech Republic and Poland became substantially less conservative, both economically and (especially) culturally, in the first decade following the collapse of communism. However, this liberalization slowed considerably in the next decade, and even reversed slightly for economic values in Poland and for cultural values in the Czech Republic. The modest magnitudes of these shifts after 1999, all of which are fairly well captured by the statistical analysis reported in Table 5, underline the extent to which changes in economic and cultural values are exogenous and, once they occur, fairly stable. Thus, extrapolating further into the future, there is little basis in my analysis for expecting significant further liberalization in these or other post-communist systems.

Shifts in social dissensus after 1999 were both more mixed and less well accounted for by my dynamic analysis. The significant societal polarizations of the 1990s—with respect to cultural values in Poland and economic values in the Czech Republic—mostly ceased, but did not reverse as the statistical results presented in Table 5 suggest they should have. In both these cases, the strong general tendency for societal polarization to erode over time (reflected in the large negative coefficient for lagged societal polarization in the second column of Table 5) seems to have been less effective than the countervailing tendency for partisan polarization to produce subsequent increase in societal polarization (represented by the positive coefficient for lagged partisan polarization in the second column of Table 5).

Indeed, the decade of the 1990s saw substantial partisan polarization in both countries—with respect to economic values in the Czech Republic and both economic and cultural values in Poland. However, these increases in partisan sorting were largely

eroded over the course of the subsequent decade, leaving the party system little more polarized than it had been at the beginning of the post-communist era. These shifts, unlike the corresponding shifts in social dissensus, are very well captured by the statistical analysis reported in Table 5. Partly that is a reflection of the large negative intercepts for post-communist countries in the third column of Table 5, which simply register a region-wide erosion of partisan sorting in the second decade following the collapse of communism. However, there is more to it than that, as the much more modest actual and predicted declines in cultural partisan sorting in the Czech Republic in Figure 9 suggest.

Why did the Czech party system after 1999 become much less polarized in the economic domain but—unlike Poland and most of the other post-communist systems—only slightly less polarized in the cultural domain? The statistical analysis reported in Table 5 attributes that difference to two things: different patterns of generational change in the two domains and different patterns of *societal* polarization in the 1990s. First, the Czech Republic has experienced substantial generational change in cultural values but little generational change in economic values. Since generational liberalization has a substantial *positive* impact on partisan polarization in the analysis reported in Table 5, generational change offset much of the large expected decrease in cultural partisan polarization implied by the negative intercept for post-communist countries (reducing the projected decline from 12.2 to 5.0), but had no similar effect on economic partisan polarization. However, that much is also true of the other post-communist countries, which all experienced substantial generational change in cultural values (ranging from 2.2 to 2.7) but little or no generational change in economic values (ranging from -0.4 to 0.2). The key difference between the Czech Republic and the other post-communist systems is that, while economic dissensus increased significantly in the Czech Republic between 1990 and 1999 (from 11.4 to 12.8), cultural dissensus increased only slightly (from 12.4 to 12.5)—the smallest

increase by far in the post-communist region. (Cultural dissensus in Poland, for example, increased from 12.3 to 14.9 over the same period.) The substantial negative impact of lagged societal polarization on partisan polarization in Table 5 suggests that increases in cultural dissensus in the 1990s produced substantial declines in cultural partisan sorting after 1999 throughout the post-communist region—*except* in the Czech Republic.

Tracing the economic and cultural values and popular support of specific parties in the Czech system from 1999 through 2008 provides a clearer picture of the differential erosion of partisan sorting in the economic and cultural domains. Three of the four largest parties in 1999 had lost substantial support by 2008—the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Freedom Union (US), and the Communist Party (KSCM). These three parties had accounted for most of the partisan sorting on economic values in 1999, with ODS and US on the far right (with average economic values of 69.9 and 63.8, respectively) and KSCM on the left (at 47.7). Thus, the erosion of their support (and the concomitant increase in the proportion of respondents reporting no party preference) significantly reduced economic polarization in the Czech party system. However, none of these three parties had developed similarly distinctive cultural appeals; the average cultural values of their supporters in 1999 only ranged from 41.7 to 43.5. The culturally distinctive parties in the Czech system, the Green Party (SZ) on the left (at 37.8) and the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) on the right (at 58.3), were much smaller, but maintained or increased their popular support after 1999, mitigating the erosion of partisan sorting in the cultural domain.

In Poland, on the other hand, the four established parties that lost substantial popular support between 1999 and 2008—Solidarity Electoral Action, the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD), the Union of Freedom (UW), and the Polish Peasants Party (PSL)—were culturally as well as economically distinctive, with average cultural values of 67.4, 54.0, 52.2, and 63.8, respectively, in 1999. The largest new party (and the

largest party in the Polish system as of 2008), Civic Platform (PO), was culturally more moderate than all of the previous parties had been, presumably reflecting its origins in a merger of factions from the culturally conservative Solidarity Electoral Action and the culturally progressive Union of Freedom. Thus, the evolution of the Polish party system, unlike the evolution of the Czech party system, produced a substantial reduction in cultural partisan sorting in the first decade of the new millennium.

In the economic domain, the supporters of both Civic Platform and the other major new party in the post-2001 Polish system, Law and Justice (PiS), espoused moderately conservative values virtually indistinguishable from those of the previous supporters of Solidarity Electoral Action and Union of Freedom—and thus from each other. Supporters of the two surviving parties, PSL and SLD, retained similar, relatively progressive economic values; however, the substantial decline in their popular support (from a combined 30% in the 1999 EVS survey to 7% in 2008) and the rise of the economically indistinguishable PO and PiS left the Polish party system much less polarized with respect to economic values in 2008 than it had been in 1999.

Extrapolating the implications of the dynamic analysis reported in Table 5 into the future, it appears likely that both Poland and the Czech Republic will experience significant declines in social dissensus—mostly due to their significant declines in partisan sorting in the 2000s. Both countries may also experience renewed partisan polarization in the cultural domain as generational shifts in cultural values ramify through their party systems. (Generational pressures in the economic domain are much weaker.) In Poland, renewed partisan polarization would presumably require either a resurgence of support for SLD or (perhaps more likely) a gradual shift to the cultural left by Civic Platform. In the Czech Republic, the Civic Democratic Party may be able to consolidate a position as the clear conservative alternative to the Social Democratic Party in the cultural domain, as it already has in the economic domain.

Conclusion

For the study of political polarization to progress beyond just-so stories, we need systematic comparison of multiple cases and systematic attention to sequences of political change involving potentially complex interactions with multiple moving parts. The dynamic analysis presented in Table 5 suggests that this sort of comparative analysis is feasible and potentially fruitful: by focusing on interrelationships among a few key features of the distributions of economic and cultural values, that analysis accounts for from thirty to sixty percent of the observed variation in rates of societal and partisan polarization in contemporary European political systems.

One important implication of this analysis is that polarization stems in significant part from broad changes in social values, including both generational liberalization and declining conservatism within birth cohorts. Thus, focusing on changes in the *distribution* of values while ignoring more fundamental changes in the *overall preponderance* of values in a society is likely to produce a markedly incomplete account of the process of polarization. Another important implication of my findings is that *partisan* polarization tends to exacerbate *societal* polarization, whereas societal polarization tends to *mitigate* partisan polarization. If this pattern holds in the U.S. as well as in Europe, “the myth of a polarized America” (Fiorina 2005) may become rather less mythical as recent increases in “partisan sorting” gradually trigger increasing economic and cultural dissensus in American society.

Of course, there is a great deal more to be learned about processes of polarization and about the impact of changing social values on the politics of contemporary European democracies. Thus, it seems fitting to conclude this report with a brief discussion of some key issues unaddressed in my analysis.

First, my specific focus on economic and cultural values gives short shrift to a variety of other actual and potential bases of political conflict that happen to be less consistently represented in the EVS surveys, including “postmaterialist” values

(Inglehart 1977; 1990) and the complex of values and social tensions activated by globalization, immigration, and European integration (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; Kriesi et al. 2006).

Second, by focusing on the social values of ordinary citizens (and by relying solely on the EVS surveys for data) I have bracketed the role of political elites in shaping and organizing social values. In the U.S., elite polarization clearly seems to have preceded, and presumably contributed to, partisan polarization among ordinary citizens (Adams 1997; Hetherington 2001; Layman 2001; Levendusky 2009). Conversely, elite *depolarization* in Great Britain seems to have produced “mirror images” of the U.S. trends, with “significant declines in the association between British citizens’ policy positions and their partisanship (*partisan sorting*)” (Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012, 507).

A more explicit account of the role of political elites in the processes of political change examined here would require merging survey data with data on the positions and priorities of parties and leaders. For example, Simon Bornschier (2010) has used campaign media content analysis to map the shifting positions of specific parties and issues in a two-dimensional political space roughly corresponding to the two-dimensional space of economic and cultural values analyzed here. Of course, the positions and priorities of party leaders are themselves likely to be affected in potentially complex ways by changing social values. James Adams, Andrea Haupt and Heather Stoll (2008) have examined the impact of shifts in public opinion on shifts in overall party ideology (as measured by the content of party manifestos), revealing intriguing differences in responsiveness between left-wing and right-wing parties.

Connections between citizens and political elites (in both directions) are likely to be shaped by—and reflected in—electoral politics. Unfortunately, the EVS surveys are not designed to facilitate analysis of elections and voting behavior. Thus, my analysis sheds no direct light on the electoral ramifications of changing social values. Further

work with additional data will be necessary to provide a clearer picture of whether and how the changes in social values documented here have altered the electoral salience and impact of economic and cultural values and the electoral fortunes of specific political parties or types of parties (Bartels 2006; Claggett and Shafer 2010). This sort of work will require close attention to the implications of differences in national electoral rules and the historical trajectories of party systems.

Finally, like much of the existing scholarly literature on political polarization, my analysis takes for granted the potential political significance of changing distributions of social values. Systematic studies of the impact of polarization on public policy (Lindqvist and Östling 2010) are unfortunately rare; even the effects of broad shifts in economic and cultural values of the sort documented in Figure 3 are more often assumed than demonstrated (Brooks and Manza 2007). However, my hope is that the systematic mapping of economic and cultural values over time and across political systems provided here may facilitate more rigorous examinations of the *consequences* as well as the *causes* of changing values.

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Table 1: EVS Survey Sample Size by Country and Wave

	1990 Wave	1999 Wave	2008 Wave	Total
Austria (AT)	1,460	1,522	1,510	4,492
Belgium (BE)	2,792	1,912	1,509 ^(f)	6,213
Bulgaria (BG)	1,034 ^(b)	1,000	1,500	3,534
Czech Republic (CZ)	2,109 ^(b)	1,908	1,793	5,810
Germany ^(a) (DE)	3,437	2,036	2,051	7,524
Denmark (DK)	1,030	1,023	1,507	3,560
Spain (ES)	2,637	1,200	1,497	5,334
Finland (FI)	588	1,038 ^(e)	1,134 ^(f)	2,760
France (FR)	1,002	1,615	1,501	4,118
Great Britain (GB)	1,484	1,000	1,549 ^(f)	4,033
Hungary (HU)	999 ^(b)	1,000	1,513	3,512
Ireland (IE)	1,000	1,012	982	2,994
Iceland (IS)	702	968	808 ^(f)	2,478
Italy (IT)	2,018	2,000	1,519 ^(f)	5,537
Netherlands (NL)	1,017	1,003	1,552	3,572
Poland (PL)	982	1,095	1,479	3,556
Portugal (PT)	1,185	1,000	1,553	3,738
Romania (RO)	1,103 ^(d)	1,146	1,489	3,738
Sweden (SE)	1,047	1,015	1,174 ^(f)	3,236
Slovenia (SI)	1,035 ^(c)	1,006	1,366	3,407
Slovak Republic (SK)	1,136 ^(b)	1,331	1,509	3,976
Total	29,797	26,830	30,495	87,122

(a) Nationally representative samples constructed by weighting separate samples from West and East Germany; (b) 1991; (c) 1992; (d) 1993; (e) 2000; (f) 2009.

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Economic and Cultural ValuesPrincipal factors with oblique promax rotation; $N=87,122$.

	<i>Economic Values</i>		<i>Cultural Values</i>	
	Rotated Factor Loadings	Index Weights	Rotated Factor Loadings	Index Weights
Political view: left-right	.389	.1237	.145	.0435
Private vs. government ownership	.495	.1320	-.129	-.0141
Individual vs. state responsibility	.468	.0975	-.165	-.0168
Competition good vs. harmful	.477	.1177	-.072	.0003
Why people live in need: injustice	-.438	-.0673	.047	-.0016
Why people live in need: lazy	.393	.0639	.083	.0175
Take any job when unemployed	.322	.0638	.096	.0217
Freedom more important than equality	.303	.0353	-.136	-.0084
Equalize incomes vs. incentives	-.283	-.0534	.072	.0046
Desire less emphasis on money	-.178	-.0255	-.028	-.0072
Desire more respect for authority	.036	.0100	.289	.0366
Proud of national identity	.089	.0252	.210	.0390
Don't like immigrants as neighbors	.090	.0210	.186	.0309
Don't like different races as neighbors	.076	.0198	.215	.0381
Don't like homosexuals as neighbors	.066	.0145	.372	.0429
Teach children imagination	-.050	-.0101	-.226	-.0256
Teach children hard work	.055	.0093	.242	.0246
Teach children obedience	-.061	-.0047	.248	.0229
Teach children independence	.082	.0059	-.322	-.0287
Teach children religious faith	-.069	-.0039	.483	.0526
Marriage is outdated	-.075	-.0150	-.244	-.0268
Being housewife as fulfilling as paid job	.011	.0078	.283	.0452

Women need children to be fulfilled	.037	.0089	.338	.0346
Children need both parents	.078	.0193	.341	.0462
Children suffer with working mother	.032	.0149	.374	.0612
Approve of single mothers	-.032	-.0104	-.389	-.0399
Churches answer social problems	-.061	-.0034	.477	.0574
Churches answer moral problems	-.028	.0045	.543	.0712
Approve abortion: no more children	.100	.0095	-.556	-.0691
Approve abortion: unmarried mother	.073	.0016	-.567	-.0708

Table 3: Descriptive StatisticsMeans, *standard deviations*, and ranges of 21 country averages.

	1990 Wave	1999 Wave	2008 Wave
Economic Conservatism (Mean)	56.61 3.59 49.7-66.5	54.14 2.65 49.0-59.3	53.22 2.57 46.7-57.6
Economic Dissensus (Standard Deviation)	12.11 1.03 10.4-13.9	11.66 0.86 9.9-12.9	11.95 1.31 9.5-14.6
Economic Partisan Sorting (Multiple R \times 100)	33.60 15.31 12.2-58.3	33.56 12.66 17.7-57.1	33.89 16.22 12.8-61.4
Cultural Conservatism (Mean)	51.70 6.96 36.9-68.0	46.18 7.11 31.4-56.6	44.55 7.01 30.6-56.9
Cultural Dissensus (Standard Deviation)	14.04 1.34 12.0-16.8	14.47 1.27 12.3-17.1	14.08 1.32 12.0-16.8
Cultural Partisan Sorting (Multiple R \times 100)	29.82 8.10 12.8-49.0	27.13 6.53 17.6-41.8	24.88 8.41 8.2-46.8
Cross-Domain Integration (R \times 100)	24.90 14.15 -9.8 to 45.4	22.59 13.37 -4.6 to 50.5	21.19 12.56 -0.8 to 46.5
Economic Generational Change (Annual Cohort $\Delta \times$ 18)		0.88 1.04 -0.67 to 2.60	
Cultural Generational Change (Annual Cohort $\Delta \times$ 18)		4.71 1.19 2.21 to 8.09	

Table 4: A Typology of European Political Systems

	Nordic Configuration	Catholic Configuration	Post-Communist Configuration
Examples (from most to least typical)	Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Great Britain, Netherlands, Germany	Spain, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Belgium, France, Austria	Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Rep., Slovenia
Economic Conservatism (Average Mean)	(54.5)	<i>Low</i> (53.1)	<i>High</i> (56.4)
Economic Dissensus (Average Standard Deviation)	<i>High</i> (12.7)	(11.8)	<i>Low</i> (11.3)
Economic Partisan Sorting (Average Multiple R ×100)	<i>Very High</i> (48.8)	(30.1)	<i>Low</i> (22.2)
Cultural Conservatism (Average Mean)	<i>Very Low</i> (40.6)	(49.4)	<i>High</i> (52.4)
Cultural Dissensus (Average Standard Deviation)	(14.0)	<i>High</i> (14.9)	(13.6)
Cultural Partisan Sorting (Average Multiple R ×100)	(28.8)	(28.1)	<i>Low</i> (24.9)
Cross-Domain Correlation (Average R ×100)	(28.6)	<i>High</i> (32.1)	<i>Very Low</i> (8.0)
Economic Generational Change (Average Annual Cohort Δ ×18)	(.92)	<i>High</i> (1.84)	<i>Low</i> (-.11)
Cultural Generational Change (Average Annual Cohort Δ ×18)	(4.23)	<i>High</i> (5.40)	(4.49)

Table 5: Joint Dynamic Analysis of Economic and Cultural Values

Seemingly Unrelated Regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses); economic and cultural parameter estimates (except intercepts) constrained; N=21.

	Value Change (Δ Mean, 1999-2008)	Societal Polarization (Δ Std Dev, 1999-2008)	Partisan Polarization (Δ Mult R \times 100, 1999-2008)
Generational Liberalization (Annual Cohort $\Delta \times$ 18)	.637 (.519)	.083 (.213)	2.984 (1.504)
Lagged Value Change (Δ Mean, 1990-1999)	-.274 (.074)	-.100 (.034)	-.193 (.237)
Lagged Societal Polarization (Δ Std Dev, 1990-1999)	-.534 (.366)	-.849 (.146)	-2.958 (1.165)
Lagged Partisan Polarization (Δ Mult R \times 100, 1990-1999)	-.077 (.040)	.086 (.015)	-.038 (.121)
<i>Economic Intercepts</i>			
Nordic Countries	-2.86 (.80)	.08 (.34)	-.57 (2.53)
Catholic Countries	-3.06 (.88)	-.26 (.37)	-.87 (2.68)
Post-Communist Countries	-.56 (.75)	-.96 (.30)	-7.43 (2.28)
Standard error of regression	1.65	.72	5.50
R ²	.34	.58	.53
<i>Cultural Intercepts</i>			
Nordic Countries	-4.65 (1.50)	-.96 (.61)	-6.71 (4.17)
Catholic Countries	-5.86 (1.74)	-.23 (.71)	-10.98 (4.85)
Post-Communist Countries	-3.86 (1.56)	-.49 (.62)	-12.22 (4.26)
Standard error of regression	2.09	.72	4.01
R ²	-.03	.30	.59

Table A1: Dynamic Analysis of Economic Values

Seemingly Unrelated Regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses);
N=21.

	Value Change (Δ Mean, 1999-2008)	Societal Polarization (Δ Std Dev, 1999-2008)	Partisan Polarization (Δ Mult R \times 100, 1999-2008)
Generational Liberalization (Annual Cohort $\Delta \times 18$)	.795 (1.238)	.495 (.479)	3.708 (3.856)
Lagged Value Change (Δ Mean, 1990-1999)	-.185 (.181)	-.162 (.070)	-.949 (.565)
Lagged Societal Polarization (Δ Std Dev, 1990-1999)	-.736 (.565)	-.980 (.218)	-2.064 (1.766)
Lagged Partisan Polarization (Δ Mult R \times 100, 1990-1999)	-.086 (.067)	.123 (.026)	-.003 (.211)
<i>Intercepts</i>			
Nordic Countries	-3.00 (1.12)	-.18 (.43)	-1.59 (3.47)
Catholic Countries	-3.22 (1.48)	-.77 (.58)	-2.08 (4.61)
Post-Communist Countries	-.11 (.97)	-1.44 (.38)	-10.64 (3.00)
Standard error of regression	1.66	.65	5.05
R ²	.34	.66	.60

Table A2: Dynamic Analysis of Cultural Values

Seemingly Unrelated Regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses);
N=21.

	Value Change (Δ Mean, 1999-2008)	Societal Polarization (Δ Std Dev, 1999-2008)	Partisan Polarization (Δ Mult R \times 100, 1999-2008)
Generational Liberalization (Annual Cohort $\Delta \times 18$)	.313 (.621)	-.073 (.265)	2.845 (1.592)
Lagged Value Change (Δ Mean, 1990-1999)	-.288 (.097)	-.098 (.042)	-.066 (.256)
Lagged Societal Polarization (Δ Std Dev, 1990-1999)	-.131 (.573)	-.491 (.249)	-3.148 (1.497)
Lagged Partisan Polarization (Δ Mult R \times 100, 1990-1999)	-.069 (.061)	.031 (.025)	-.085 (.150)
<i>Intercepts</i>			
Nordic Countries	-3.81 (1.76)	-.66 (.74)	-5.96 (4.44)
Catholic Countries	-5.05 (2.05)	-.19 (.86)	-10.09 (5.15)
Post-Communist Countries	-3.65 (1.80)	-.47 (.74)	-10.81 (4.45)
Standard error of regression	1.99	.66	3.95
R ²	.06	.41	.60

Figure 1: Distributions of Economic and Cultural Values, 2008

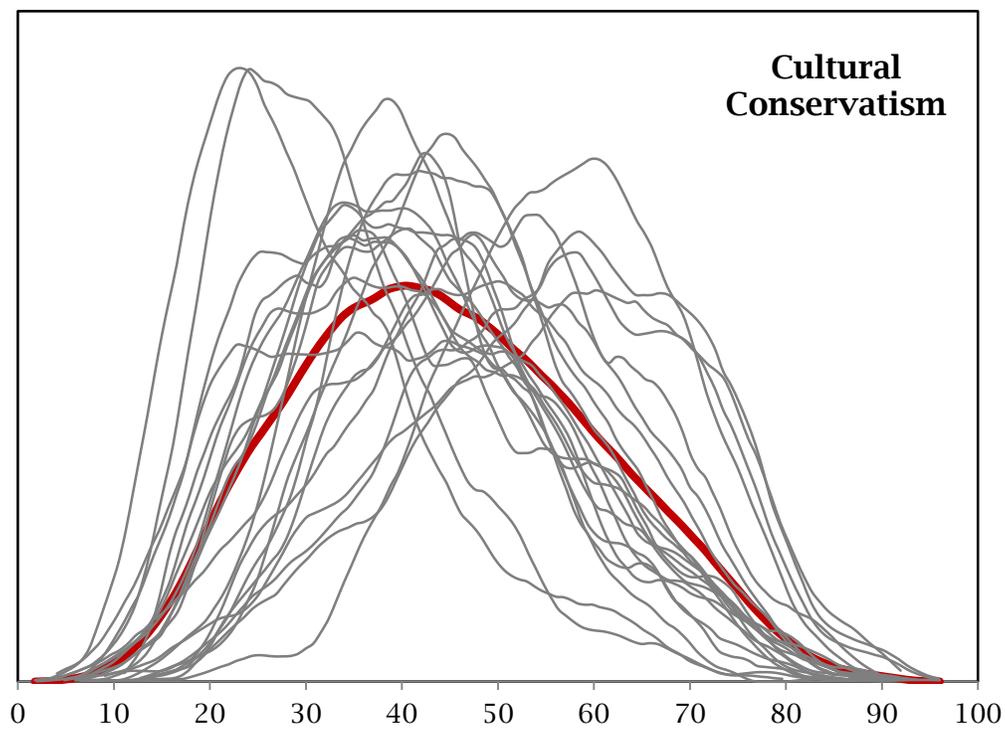
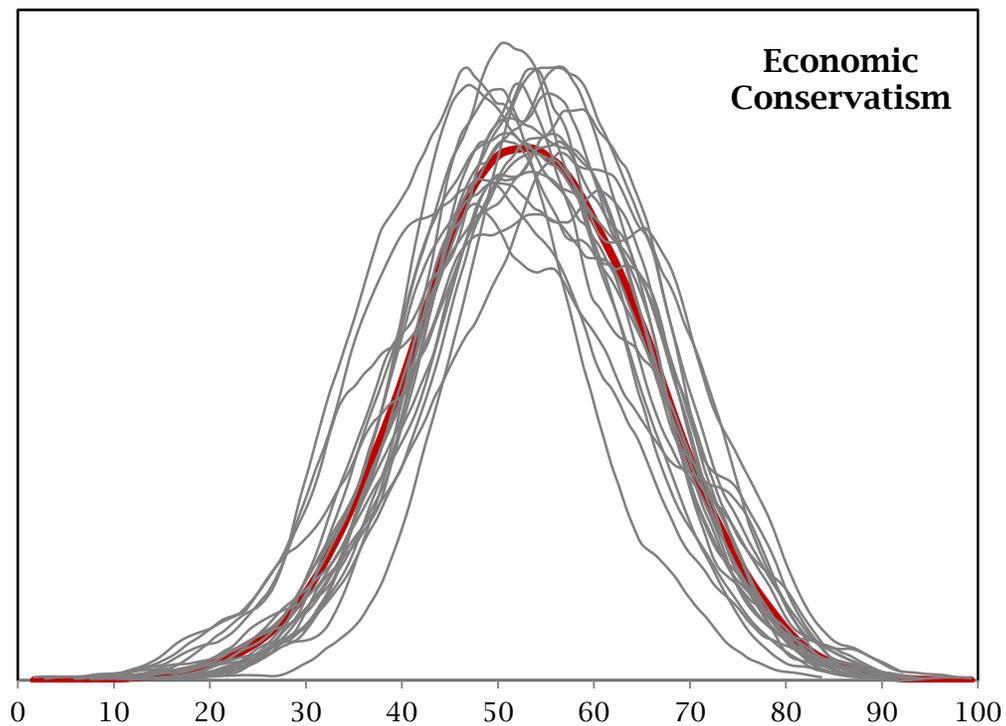


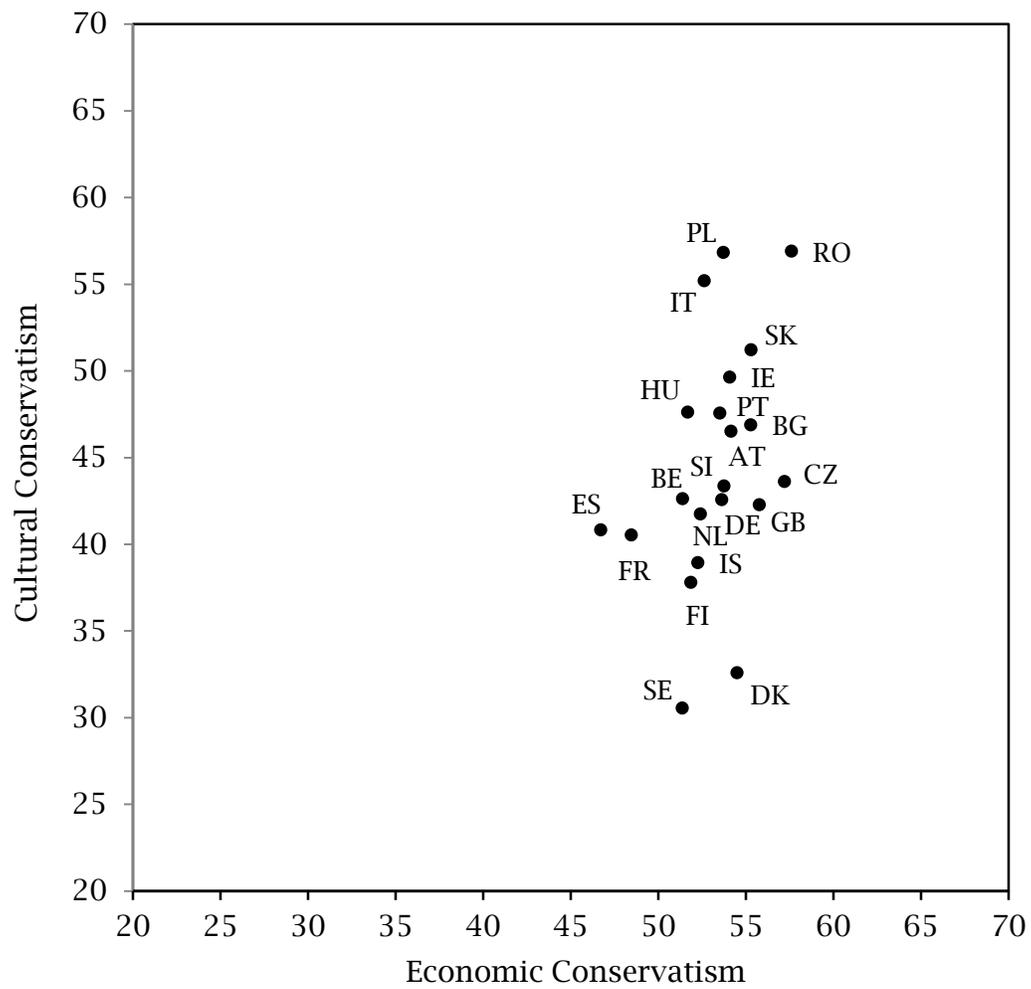
Figure 2: Average Economic and Cultural Values, 2008

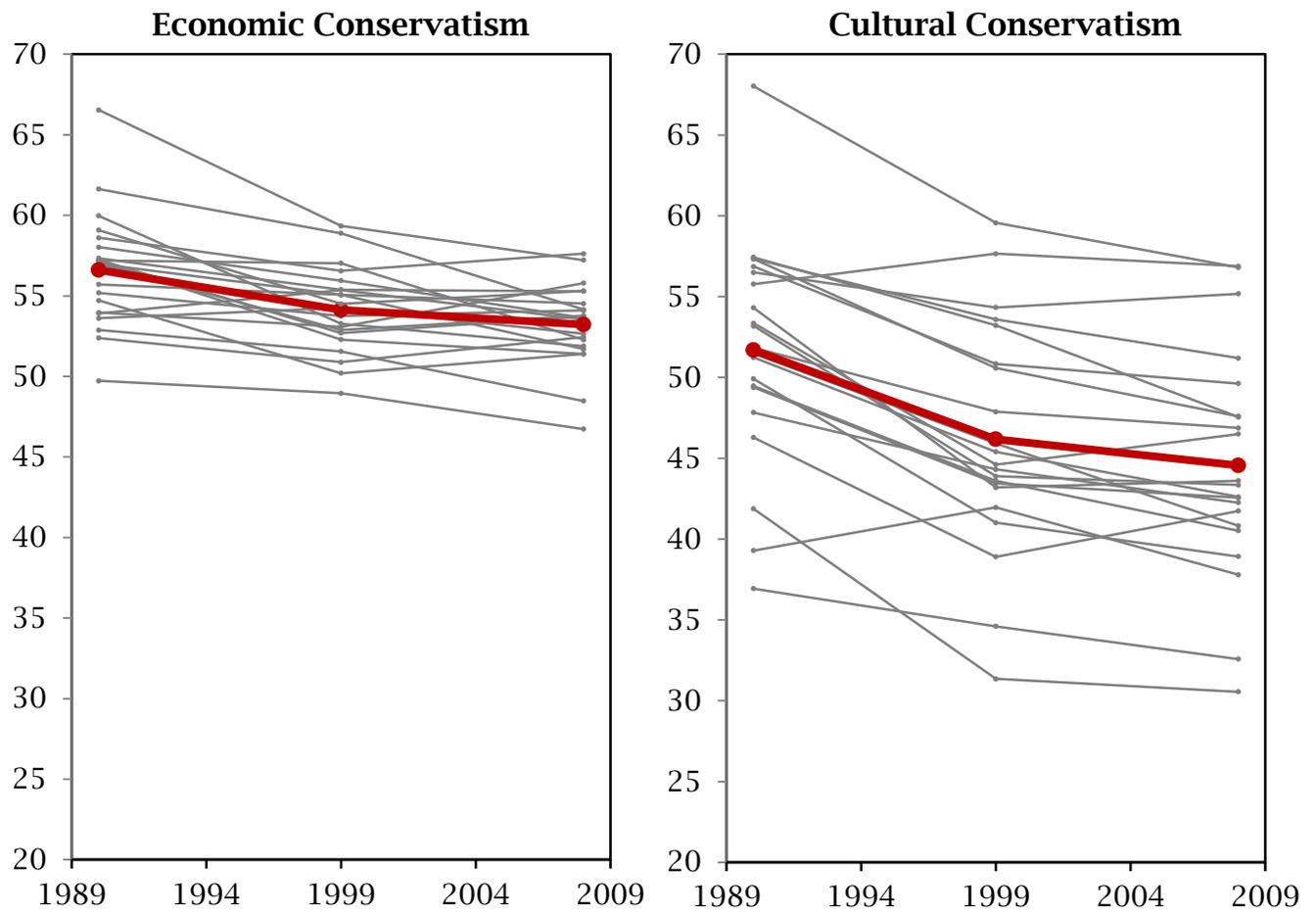
Figure 3: Changes in Average Economic and Cultural Values, 1990-2008

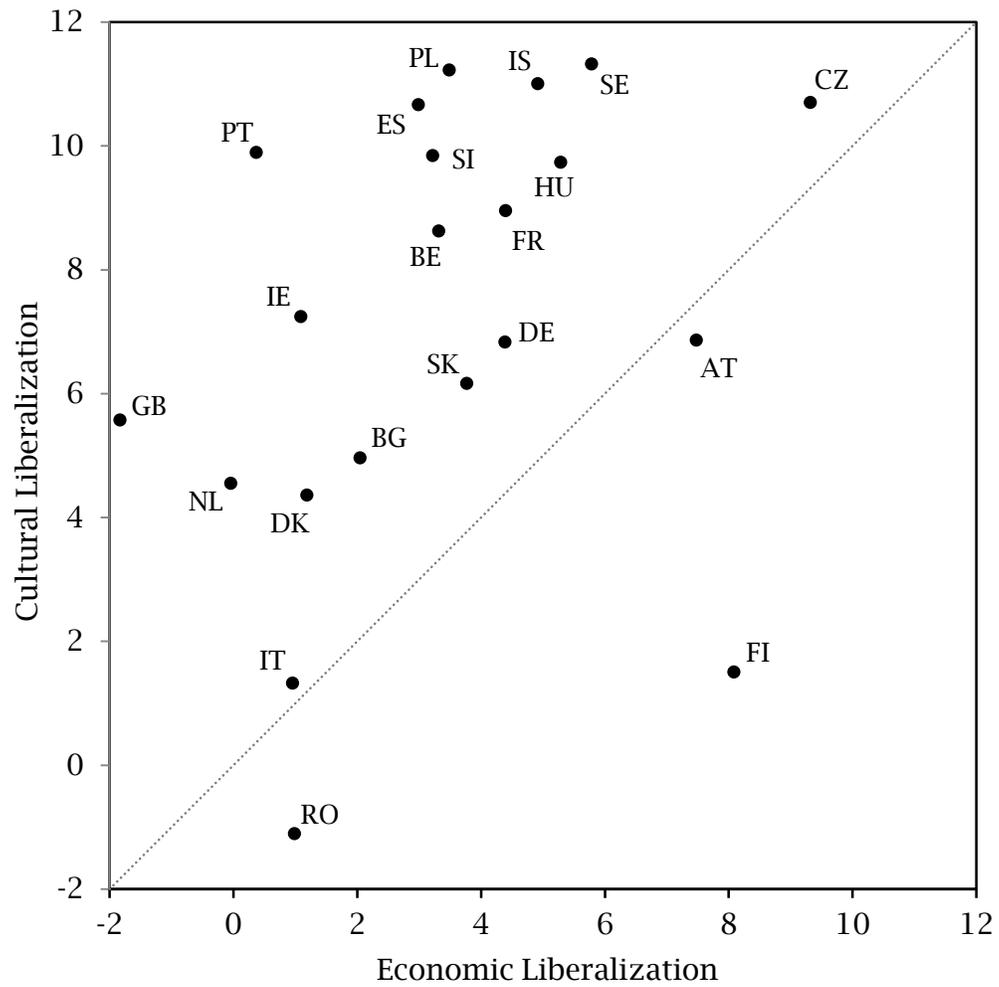
Figure 4: Economic and Cultural Liberalization, 1990-2008

Figure 5: Generational Change and Liberalization

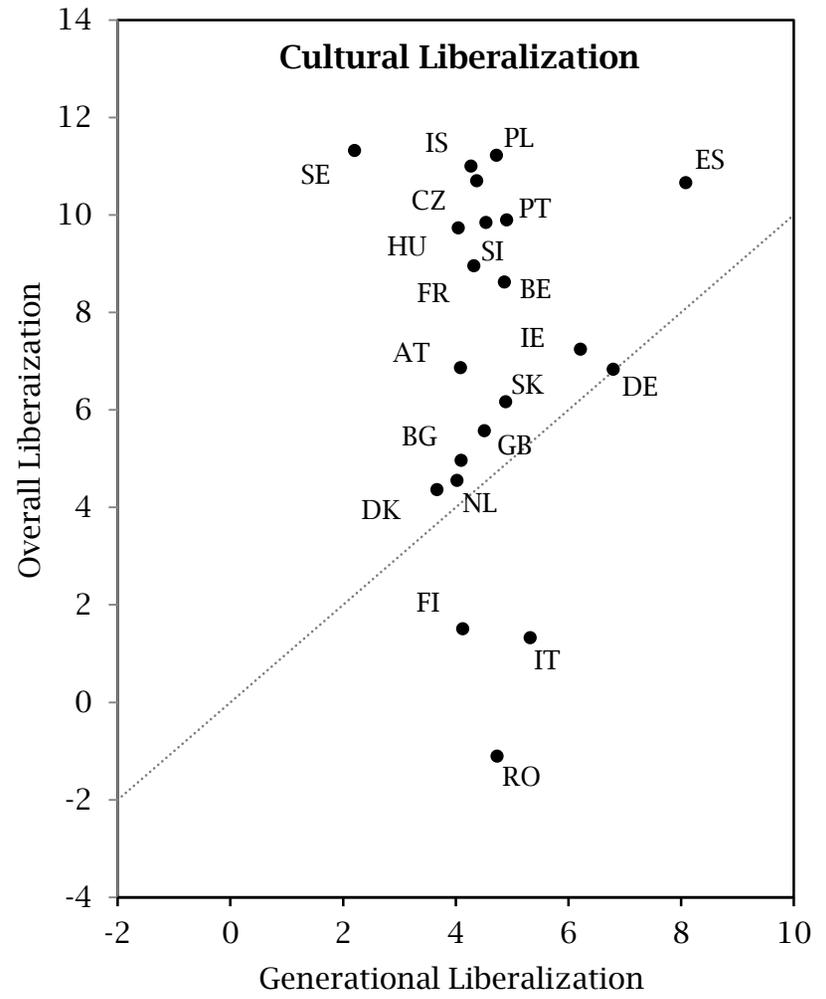
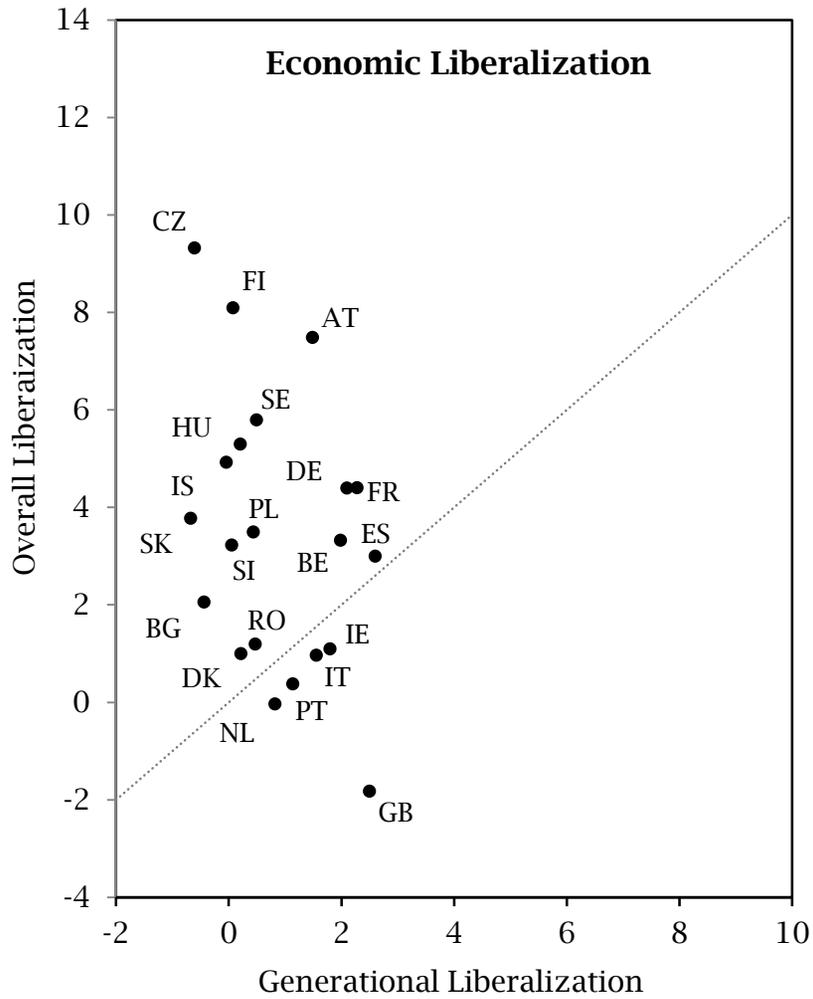


Figure 6: Conservatism, Dissensus and Partisan Sorting

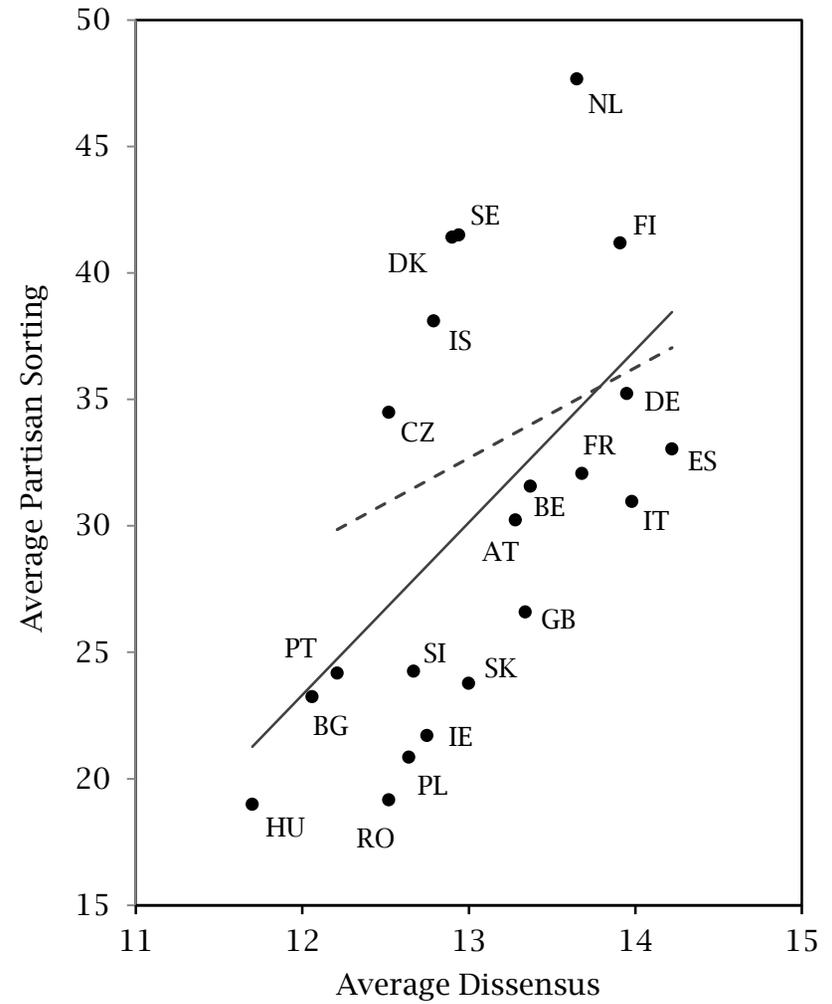
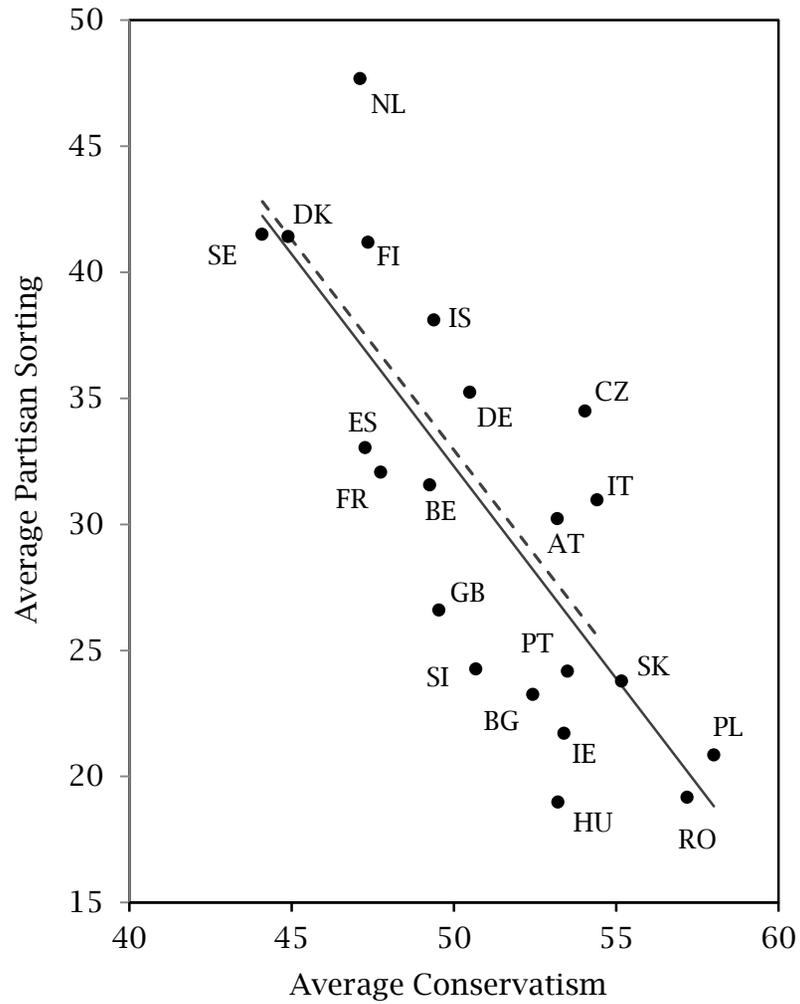


Figure 7: Projected and Actual Changes in Dissensus and Partisan Sorting, 1999-2008

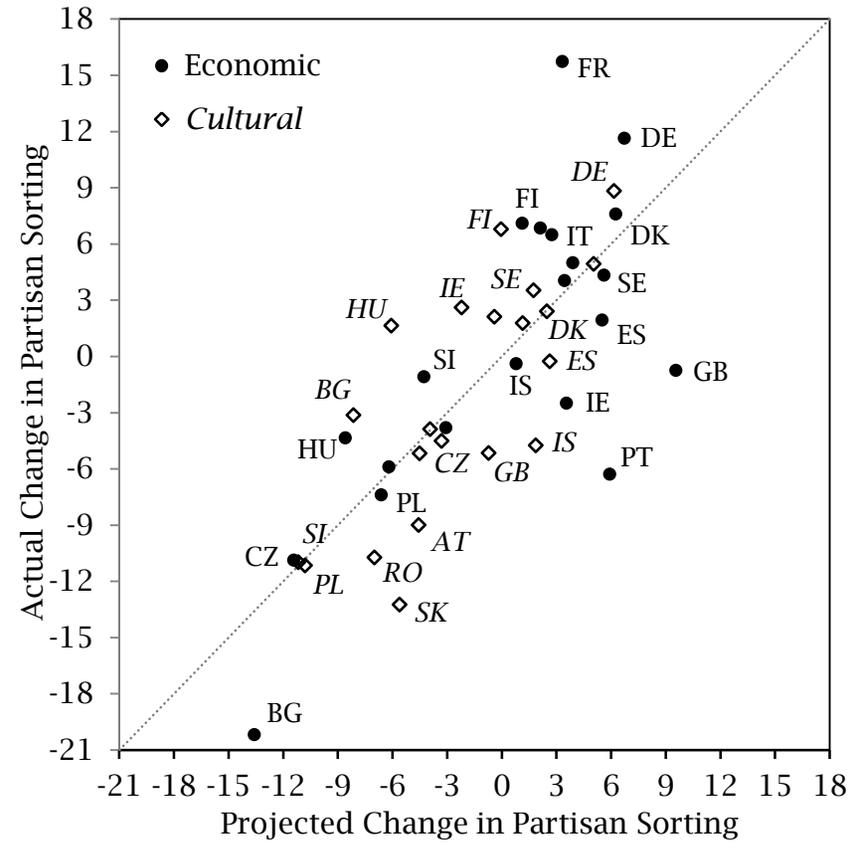
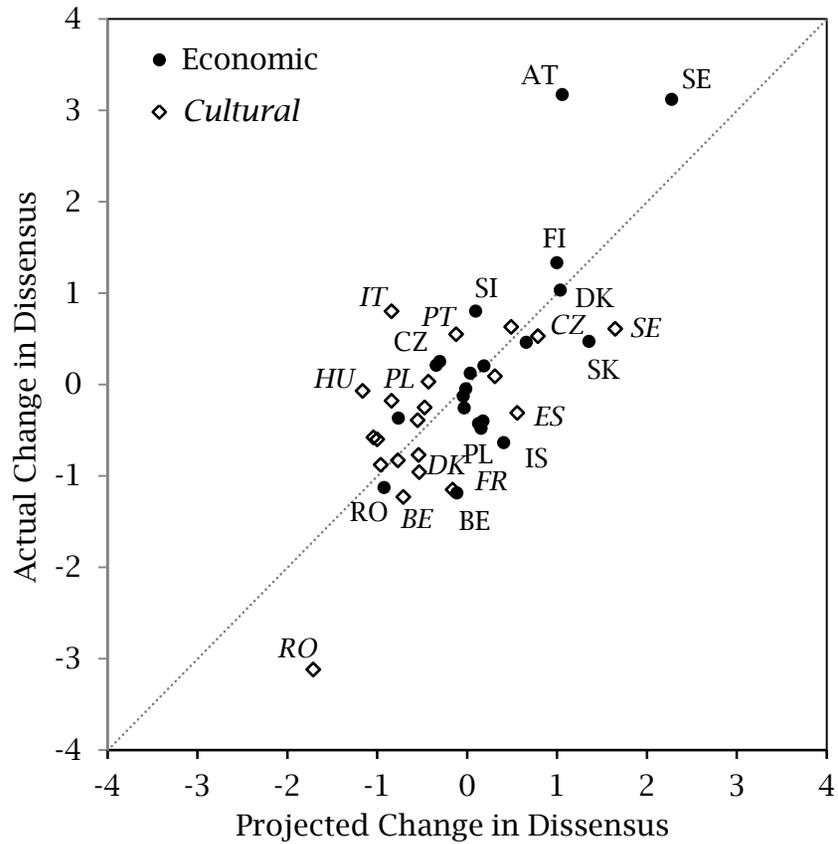


Figure 8: Trajectories of Political Change in Sweden and Denmark

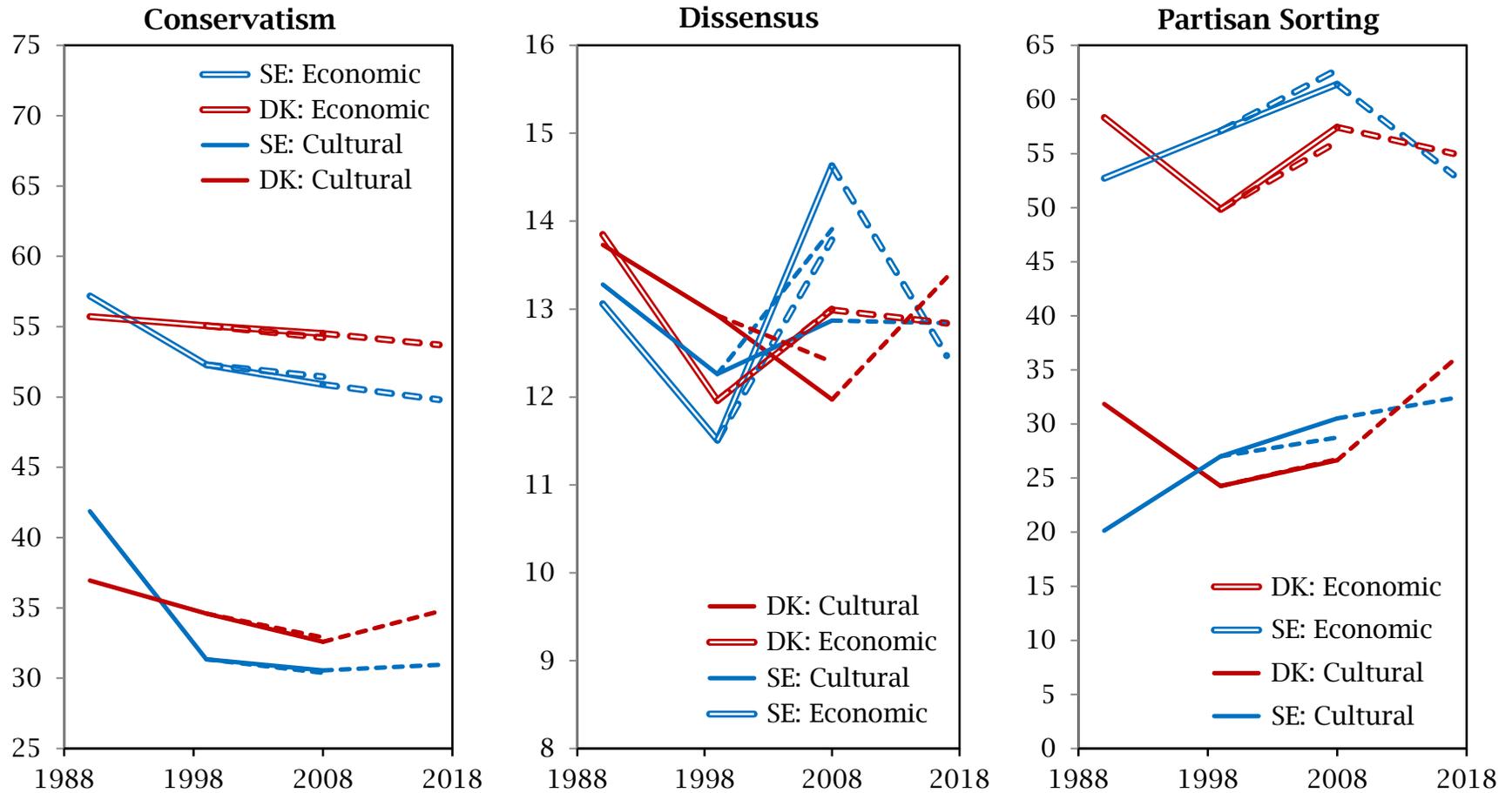


Figure 9: Trajectories of Political Change in the Czech Republic and Poland

