

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WHERE EXACTLY IS CENTRE-LEFT?

Value and policy profile of social democratic parties in Europe – from the standpoint of national electorates (*value gaps/policy gaps*)

Report on the findings of a study carried out by policy matters, commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

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June 2019



The aim of the study is to discover the extent to which the perceived policy offer of Europe's centre-left parties resonates with the values and preferences of the general public and in particular the socially vulnerable portion of the electorate.



The social democratic parties in Denmark and the United Kingdom have been the most successful in appealing to the electorate's values and preferences, those in Germany and Austria perhaps the least.



European centre-left parties have been most successful in appealing to the electorate's desires and values in economic and social policy, but quite the contrary in migration and integration policy.

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in cooperation with


**policy
matters**

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Contents

	IN BRIEF	3
	FOREWORD	5
	INTRODUCTION: ARE EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS LOSING TOUCH WITH THEIR VOTERS?	7
	OUTLINE OF THE STUDY	9
1	A TROUBLE SHARED IS A TROUBLE HALVED? FINDINGS BY EUROPEAN COMPARISON	11
1.1	From underperformance to new hope? Historical, current and potential electorate of European social democrats	11
1.2	The societal context: political problems and opportunities in the eyes of European electorates in 2018	14
1.2.1	Concerns and confidence	14
1.2.2	Winners and losers from social change	16
1.2.3	Political parties' ability to solve problems	18
1.3	Are they appealing to the right people? Towards whom social democrats are directing their policies in the eyes of the voters	19
1.3.1	Commitment to individual population groups	19
1.3.2	Commitment to personal advancement	21
1.4	Value-driven politics? Comparison of the characteristic norms and principles of the general public and of social democratic parties	21
1.5	Close together or ships that pass in the night? Comparison of the policy preferences of the general public and of social democratic parties	26
1.5.1	Social justice	27
1.5.2	Economy and labour	29
1.5.3	Immigration and culture	30
1.5.4	Social policy	32
1.5.5	EU, globalisation, social change	33
1.5.6	Problem areas: state of democracy, crime	35
1.5.7	Preliminary summary of the policy gap analysis	37
1.6	Right on the ball or heads in the clouds? How do European centre-left parties rate and what are their priorities?	38
2	FINDINGS FOR GERMANY – TAKING INTO ACCOUNT CURRENT AND FORMER SPD VOTERS	40
2.1	In a value trap? The SPD's norms and principles	40
2.2	What does the brand stand for? The SPD's policy profile	41
2.2.1	The electorate as a whole	41
2.2.2	Socially deprived respondents	42
2.3	Core meltdown: comparison of loyal SPD voters and lost core constituents in terms of the policy gap	46
2.3.1	Social justice	46
2.3.2	The economy and labour	47
2.3.3	Immigration and culture	47
2.3.4	Social policy	48



2.3.5	The EU, globalisation and social change	49
2.3.6	Problem areas: state of democracy and crime	49
2.3.7	Preliminary conclusion policy-gap analysis	50
	 CONCLUSION	 52
	 Bibliography	 54

IN BRIEF

- European social democracy is in structural crisis in many places because of a gradual decline in electoral support. In fact, the different social democratic parties face common challenges. These include credible electoral programmes, the representation of underprivileged groups and the question of these parties' general values and principles and their substantive policy orientation. Having said that, there are major differences between the various national centre-left parties. This is the upshot of an international comparative survey, for the purpose of which voters in nine EU member states were questioned about the profile of their respective social democratic parties and their own attitudes and policy preferences.
- In a context of far-reaching everyday concerns and a sense of falling down the social ladder, especially among underprivileged population segments, some social democratic parties have done much better than others in positioning themselves as a viable social force in the national party system. There are also substantial differences concerning the extent to which individual forces on the centre-left are generally perceived as representing the interests of those in need of protection and socially disadvantaged groups.
- When it comes to the values and principles that centre-left parties stand for, people expect, on one hand, a stronger commitment to social equality and justice and, on the other hand, more effort to bring about a society based on (adherence to) rules and regulations, as well as oriented towards merit and achievement. But while in some countries this perception that things have gone awry has moderated somewhat, in others it has become even more pronounced. In the case of certain parties the very essence of their social democratic brand has come under existential assault, especially from the standpoint of underprivileged groups.
- In terms of their substantive policy orientation many people feel that centre-left parties are not doing enough to address their main grievances, such as housing shortages, lack of equal opportunities, crime and lack of a democratic voice. The social democratic approach to justice based on merit and achievement in the welfare state is also regarded as deficient. Furthermore, the electorate, and in particular those at the lower end of the social scale, tend to take more restrictive positions than the centre-left parties. This gives rise to tensions between voters and political parties concerning issues related to immigration, diversity and Europeanisation, sometimes even raising the question of the limits of solidarity. Here again there are major differences between countries. While some parties generally act in line with people's expectations and others deviate from people's perceived preferences in only some respects, other parties seem completely out of tune with popular opinion on critical points.
- Over time, Denmark's social democrats have a particularly good record in this respect, as does the British Labour Party. It is also true that the two parties are themselves very different. The Danish variant of social democracy has largely achieved congruence with popular »common sense« on both social and cultural issues. Besides their needs-oriented approach to socioeconomic matters, they take a comparatively restrictive position on migration and cultural openness. By contrast, the British brand of social democracy has a markedly left-wing profile in all policy areas. Therefore in individual cases certain deviations from the average view are accepted on questions of distribution and aspects of social policy.
- The centre-left parties of Sweden, Poland, France and the Netherlands occupy the middle ground. These parties' substantive and value profiles in some respects chime with those of the surveyed voters, but in others part company with them. The results are fairly close to the average for all countries, however. Needless to say, there are differences here, too. In particular, Sweden's main ruling party scores much higher on social issues (also among the underprivileged) than the largely marginalised opposition parties from Paris, Den Haag and Warsaw. This confers on them the highest credibility in this group as a viable social democratic force.
- The German SPD, the Austrian SPÖ and Italy's Partito Democratico scored particularly badly. Their commitment to the less privileged population segments is regarded as poor, while their values are regarded as fuzzy in many respects. Their concrete policies are also considered to be something of a mishmash. In the two German-speaking countries in particular the electorate regards the parties as culturally too libertarian (individualist), while in socioeconomic terms their policies appear too wishy washy. Apart from that, there is a general impression that they lack commitment when it comes to domestic policy and matters of democracy. This applies especially to socially disadvantaged voters.

- In a special assessment of the SPD their party profile was analysed from the standpoint of their current constituency and of their disillusioned former voters. This reveals that the SPD electorate has narrowed in the direction of wealthier and more satisfied population groups. The core now consists primarily of voters who largely agree with the party's main substantive positions. In contrast, today's SPD has become alienated from many of its former, rather socially conservative traditional and core voters from the lower middle classes: their substantive socioeconomic and cultural positions are poles apart.

FOREWORD

The approval ratings of social democratic parties have plummeted almost everywhere in Europe. The public opinion survey whose results are presented in this report was conceived against this background. In some countries, such as France and its Parti Socialiste and the Netherlands and its PvdA, these parties' ratings have collapsed into single figures. No one could be indifferent to the fact that one of the central pillars of the European party landscape is in a state of crisis, especially in the run-up to the 2019 European elections. The member parties of the social democratic Party of European Socialists (PES) are a key component of the pro-European coalition in Brussels and Strasbourg. Were it to be weakened it would have an adverse effect on the balance of power in the EU, especially when it comes to tackling the future of Europe.

No doubt there are many reasons for the current weakness of European social democracy. In each individual country it is the outcome of a specific combination of national and European factors. There is broad agreement among political scientists, however, that this development also reflects fundamental changes in European societies. In the age of globalisation familiar social and political conflicts have receded into the background, while new ones are coming to the fore. It is evident that a new cleavage is beginning to dominate Europe's political landscape: the conflict of interests between people who favour the further internationalisation of the economy and society, on one hand, and those who would like to preserve the existing order of nation-states and regard the consequences of globalisation – especially those related to European immigration – with scepticism (see Merkel 2017 and Kriesi et al. 2005). This restructuring of political space has hit European social democracy extremely hard because this new line of conflict between those enthusiastic about opening things up and those who are sceptical about it cuts right through the middle of its historical base.

The survey presented here was thus designed to go beyond issues on the traditional left/right axis on the socioeconomic level and also to take account of topics, areas of conflict and questions related to the dichotomy between expansion and contraction.

The aim was to discover:

- where the average person stands on central political questions and topics;
- what socially disadvantaged groups think about these questions and topics; and
- how the stances of centre-left parties on these issues are perceived, both by the average voter and by the socially disadvantaged.

We feel that this dual focus on the population average and on the socially disadvantaged has two particular advantages.

First, the social democratic parties still think of themselves as centre parties. They eschew marginal or extreme positions in favour of policymaking »for the many, not the few«. The question of where the »many« stand on the most important topics and challenges is necessarily a crucial point of orientation for such parties' policy positioning. It enables them to ascertain the extent to which and on what issues they are living up to their claim to be firmly established in the centre ground.

On the other hand, European centre-left parties also present themselves as representing the interests of and standing up for »ordinary people« or the less privileged segments of society. The question of where these »ordinary people« stand on the central social and political issues is thus of the greatest interest to these parties. The same is true of how these social groups perceive the positions of social democrats on important contemporary policy issues. It is not least among these underprivileged groups of voters that the drift away from social democracy is most conspicuous.

Against this background a further dimension was considered in the survey, namely how people view the centre-left parties' commitment and loyalty to certain social groups. Voting decisions are not exclusively rational but also emotional. While technical policy proposals are important, they are not the only determining factors. At least as decisive are factors such as trust, loyalty and a sense of a commonality of interests and value judgements (see Haidt 2012). The survey tried to find out about perceived loyalties (whom do these parties stand for?) using questions about the proximity of centre-left parties to the various social segments and interest groups.

The opinion survey was conducted in nine countries (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and its results are summarised in this paper. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's aim is to contribute to the urgent centre-left policy debate in Europe and to provide pointers to the areas in which the centre-left's competence values, representativeness and acceptance remain intact, but also the areas in which policy reorientation could be necessary.

Dr Ernst Hillebrand,
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

INTRODUCTION: ARE EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS LOSING TOUCH WITH THEIR VOTERS?

Social democracy is one of Europe's main lines of political tradition, but today it is mired in crisis. In many continental European countries, social democracy and the parties affiliated to it have suffered massive, even existence-threatening election defeats in recent years. For example, the French socialists and the Dutch Labour Party have been relegated to the lower echelons of party political contestation, while even apparently still stable forces, such as the German SPD, are struggling to maintain their basic share of the vote. Even in the Scandinavian countries, above all Sweden, the centre-left's historical dominance appears to have been broken, even though its role as strongest force and leading government party remains. Individual positive examples, such as the reliably high electoral support for Portugal's ruling Socialists, or the neck-and-neck contest in the opinion polls between Britain's Conservatives and the Labour Party (although at the time of writing the latter have slumped in the polls and are closer to the third party, the Liberal Democrats due to the Labour leadership's refusal to acknowledge its members 70% opposition to Brexit), highlight – to some extent as a reminder of earlier democratic »normality« – the state of crisis afflicting most of the rest of the red party family.

Many arguments have been put forward in the debate on the European centre-left's structural problems. The recycling of Ralf Dahrendorf's evergreen diagnosis of a social democracy that became a victim of its own success in fulfilling its historical mission is repeatedly set against a critical narrative, according to which many social democratic parties, once in government or tasked with reforms, succumbed all too quickly to the temptation to renounce their role as countervailing power to big business and thereby ceased to be able to offer a credible policy alternative.¹ On top of that come attempts at explanation aimed primarily at social democratic parties' lack of direction during periods of social structural change and evolution of social milieus. In the face of continuing deindustrialisation, the unravelling of pre-political and large-organisational ties and the advent of an individualised »society of singularities« (Reckwitz 2017) the successor to the labour movement no longer knows who it is making policy for and, accordingly, what its policies should look like. At the same time, it has found itself caught between the, to some extent, contrary interests and norms of »modern«, much

more post-materialist and cosmopolitan electoral groups, on one hand, and »traditional«, more socially conservative and communitarian electoral groups, on the other (see Merkel 2017).

In parallel with the growth of the impenetrable thicket in which social democratic parties find themselves, the vote shares of right-wing populist parties are increasing in many European countries. Clearly, the two phenomena have emerged within an overall political framework characterised by a general crisis afflicting the so-called »*Volkspartei*« (literally »people's party«, but in a more neutral sense of »big-tent party«), including those of a conservative orientation. The interrelations between the social democratic nadir and the right-wing populist peak are therefore complex and elude snap judgements. On one hand, it is facile to attribute the success of, say, the AfD, the FPÖ or the Rassemblement National to former centre-left voters jumping ship.² On the other hand, election analyses do seem to indicate that authoritarian and anti-pluralist parties have come to prominence among what remains of the working class in the traditional sense; in other words, what used to be the core constituency of social democrats and socialists, even communists.³ Similarly, research studies show that right-wing populists are able to attract voter groups that tend to regard themselves as belonging to the lower echelons of society (see Hilmer et al. 2017).

Social democrats thus face a twofold challenge: they are caught up in a search for meaning, voters and direction, while at the same time experiencing the encroachment of anti-egalitarian and nationalist forces on a (at least historically) significant portion of their core electorate. This development contradicts the traditional claim of social democracy to be the protector of ordinary people.⁴

¹ On the paradigm of »politics within markets« see Mielke 2017.

² For example, the ARD's voter transition analysis of the Bundestag election in 2017 showed that the shift to the AfD from the CDU and CSU (the so-called »union parties«) was around twice that of the shift from the SPD: https://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2017-09-24-BT-DE/wanderung_embed.shtml (accessed on 14.5.2019).

³ See, for example, the performance of Austrian presidential candidate Norbert Hofer (FPÖ) among workers in the first, later annulled run-off vote in May 2016: Gartner, G. (2016): Wer wen gewählt hat [Who voted for whom] (Infographic, 22.5.2016), <https://derstandard.at/2000037398941/Wer-wen-gewaehlt-hat> (accessed on 14.5.2019).

⁴ This claim was made in Germany most recently using this particular

This situation is exacerbated by the narrowing of the social democratic electorate to generally contented and optimistic population groups, while dissatisfied and insecure groups are turning away from the centre-left, as can be seen, for example, in Germany (see Müller-Hilmer/Gagné 2018). At the same time, it is hotly disputed, at least among German social democrats, what the analytical and strategic response to this development should be (see Hillebrand 2018).

But before new voters or voter groups can be attracted and old ones won back the centre-left needs to position itself in democratic space. After all, social democrats ought to know where they stand. For this purpose an assessment of what values and policies the electorate is attracted to is required, as well as of what social democrats are currently offering. In this way the policy areas in which the parties affiliated to the PES can still exert some pull can be identified, as well as the areas in which certain voter groups are being turned off. It can also be clarified whether or on what issues the big centre-left parties and segments of the population may have drifted apart and where, generally speaking, there is substantial agreement between principal (voters) and agent (parties) even today. Determining issue proximity or distance would be important for social democrats, in particular in relation to underprivileged population groups who feel socially excluded and lacking future prospects, to stake their claim as the party of equal opportunities and fair social progress.

The present study wishes to contribute to this comprehensive survey work. By comparing social democratic parties in nine European countries it examines, first, what expectations people have of (social democratic) politics, first in the electorate as a whole, but also among the underprivileged. Then it explores how people perceive the current profiles of social democratic parties. Finally, people's policy expectations are lined up against party profiles in order to reveal, ideally, overall patterns, but also particular strengths and weaknesses of individual social democratic parties in terms of what they are offering the voters.

formulation by, for example, Sigmar Gabriel in 2016, see DPA (German press agency) report: 'Die SPD muss wieder Schutzmacht der kleinen Leute werden' [The SPD needs to become the protector of ordinary people once again], at www.faz.net/agenturmeldungen/dpa/die-spd-muss-wieder-schutzmacht-der-kleinen-leute-werden-14558190.html (accessed on 14.5.2019).

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The present study is an international comparative survey conducted in nine EU member states. Countries were selected in which right-wing populist parties have done particularly well in national elections in recent years in order to be able to take account of this particular development of party systems. The selection was also intended to include social democratic parties with higher and those with lower approval ratings. It also seemed desirable to include only those countries in which social democrats have played a central role in government at one time or another. A final factor was the distribution of the countries under study by European macro-region. In this way, finally, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom were established as the study area.⁵

The sample population was the electorate of the selected states. For each study country around 1,000 citizens 18 years of age or above were surveyed (16 or above in Austria), making a total of 9,355 cases. The poll was conducted as an online panel survey on the basis of national, high quality online access panels. It was managed cross-border by a central panel administration in order to ensure methodological comparability. To avoid bias, national samples were composed according to age, gender and region. The survey data were weighted socio-demographically after the survey was completed.

The interviews for all surveyed countries were conducted more or less simultaneously between 18 and 29 October 2018.

An important advantage of an online approach is that participants can tackle more complex questions – such as a party's specific policy positions – in their own time and be provided with visualised, fine-grained response scales. In this way sophisticated policy profiles of populations and parties can be created and compared with one another.

The core of the survey instrument comprised two larger item sets. The first included 14 values and principles that the respondents were supposed to rank in order of personal importance, on a scale between 1 (not important at all) and 7 (extremely important), and then, similarly, to evaluate the commitment of their country's social democratic party to the implementation of those values and principles. This again involved positioning them on a scale from 1 (not committed at all) to 7 (very strongly committed). The parties' value and principle profile (value gap) is derived from a comparison of the two distributions.

The second item set comprised a total of 26 pairs of statements expressing opposite positions on key policy issues. This included social and economic policy topics, as well as cultural, social-policy and European questions, as well as their position on democracy. After giving their own stance on the contrary positions, once more on a scale from 1 (statement A) to 7 (statement B), the respondents were asked, similarly, to locate the perceived policy position of the relevant national social democratic party. The combination of the two distributions yielded the alignment of the average position of the population and the perceived average party position (policy gap).

The two comparisons (the value gap and the policy gap) were also carried out for a special subgroup of respondents. Because the research was particularly interested in socially disadvantaged population segments a subgroup of socially disadvantaged was formed.⁶ They were constructed using primarily subjective, but to some extent also objective data reported by study participants on their own life circumstances. On a scale from 1 (right at the bottom) to 10 (right at the top) all respondents were asked to estimate their social status. Part of the group of socially disadvantaged were first and foremost those respondents who placed themselves at the lower end of the scale, from 1 to 4. In order to ensure the socio-structural accuracy of this self-categorisation, in a second step all persons were excluded from the aforementioned group who, when asked about their current activity, identi-

⁵ In the case of Poland, although the ruling PiS Party can be categorised as a right-wing populist party only to some extent, its combination of national-conservative and social populist positions made it suitable for comparison. In the case of the United Kingdom although the UK Independence Party's (UKIP) share of the vote at the last parliamentary election in 2017 was below 2 per cent, the Brexit vote can (partly) be considered a victory for right-wing populists.

⁶ Generally speaking this term is imprecise. Nonetheless, it was chosen to capture social democratic parties' traditional claim to represent »ordinary people«, especially the working class.

fied themselves as executives, higher ranking officials or full-time students.⁷

The focus of the survey (comparison of value and policy profiles) was supplemented with further policy questions, such as the commitment of social democrats to individual population groups and social democrats' perceived political priorities. Respondents were also asked what current challenges they approached with confidence and which with trepidation. Questions were also asked about personal voting behaviour, together with voting record and current party preference.

The survey was rounded off with additional statistical information and questions on respondents' assessment of their personal life situation.

⁷ Only in the case of Poland was this adjustment not made, because of the lack of formal equivalents among officials and management.

1

A TROUBLE SHARED IS A TROUBLE HALVED? FINDINGS BY EUROPEAN COMPARISON

Social democracy is on the defensive throughout Europe. But is that really the case everywhere? A more critical approach would seem to be justified because in some states traditional centre-left parties are currently able to call on the voter support they enjoyed in earlier times. For example, in Portugal and the United Kingdom (taking into account the differences between their electoral systems) the two PES sister parties top 30 per cent.⁸ Antonio Costa's Socialists have managed this even out of government. But the current voter appeal of the other national social democratic parties investigated in this study varies considerably. A general structural weakness is unmistakable. No pattern can be discerned, however, in accordance with which a party's current strength or weakness depends on membership of the government. For example, as things stand at the moment, the Danish and Swedish social democratic parties are at a similar level, even though only the latter is in government for a longer period. On the other hand, the Dutch social democrats were marginalised only as recently as the last election in 2017 in their role as junior coalition partner, while their Polish comrades experienced a comparable decline as early as the end of the government they led in 2005 and have not been able to turn their fortunes around in opposition.⁹

In any consideration of the centre-left's structural plight in Europe as a whole it is worth looking at the situation in individual countries. After all, even during periods of crisis social democracy is not always the same everywhere. Differences may be seen not only in the current share of the vote, but also sister parties' particular orientation and focus. The present study looks at and compares the different profiles of centre-left parties in Europe. No causal links can be established between the policy orientation and electoral success of individual parties, however, which in any case would not make much sense without taking into consideration, for example, personal and party-system factors.

1.1 FROM UNDERPERFORMANCE TO NEW HOPE? HISTORICAL, CURRENT AND POTENTIAL ELECTORATE OF EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

Since the middle of the twentieth century European social democracy has experienced numerous highs and lows. The (western European) »golden age of social democracy« personified by Bruno Kreisky, Olof Palme and Willy Brandt reached its zenith only a few years before sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf postulated the »end of the social democratic age« in 1983. After lurking in the doldrums for a number of years social democrats throughout Europe scored a series of spectacular election victories around the turn of the millennium. In Italy, for example, the L'Ulivo alliance under Romano Prodi garnered 43.4 per cent of the vote in 1996, while in 1997 Tony Blair's New Labour won 43.2 per cent and a year later Gerhard Schröder achieved 40.9 per cent of the vote in Germany. A new era appeared to have dawned for the centre-left: by 1999, social democrats or socialists were in government in 12 of the then 15 EU member states.

Since then, however, the election results of the nine social democratic parties investigated in this study have deteriorated, in some cases dramatically. With the exception of the UK Labour Party (38 per cent), which anyway represents something of a special case because of the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system, in the second half of October 2018, the survey period for this study, social democratic parties generally registered well below 30 per cent in current opinion polls. In Sweden the venerable Socialdemokraterna managed around 29 per cent, while the Danish social democrats scored 26 per cent. Austria's SPÖ, which had furnished the federal chancellor in most parliaments since the 1970s, registered around 26 per cent in the opinion polls and was vying for second place with the right-wing populist FPÖ. Italy's Partito Democratico, with a projected 17 per cent of the votes, had clearly lost the dominance it enjoyed under prime minister Matteo Renzi.

In some instances, however, decline went much further than the loss of a governing majority. In many countries, social democracy appears to have been totally marginalised, as in the cases of the Netherlands (PvdA), France (PS)¹⁰ and Poland

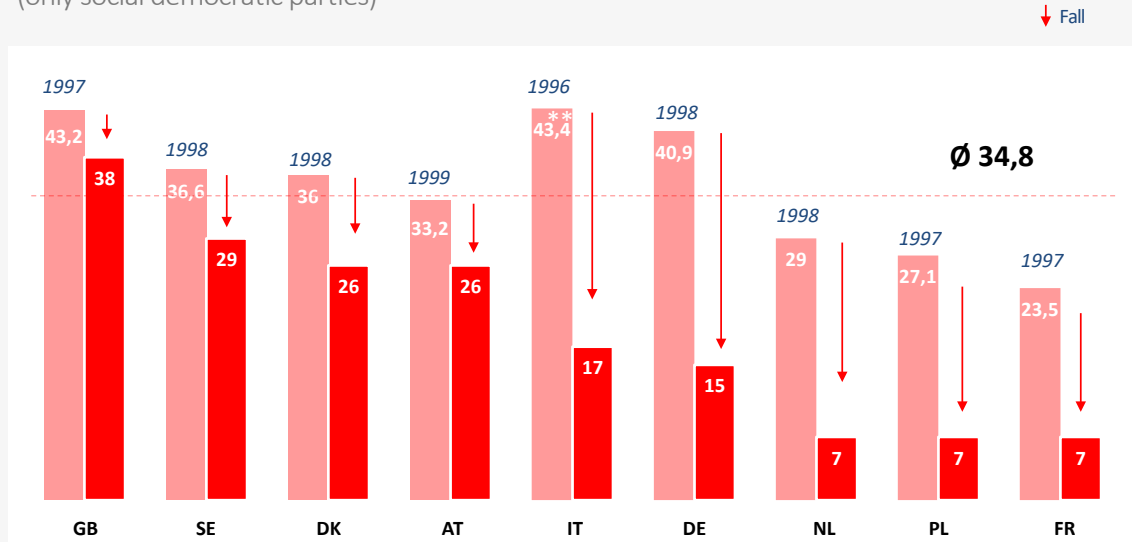
⁸ See www.politico.eu (accessed on 14.5.2019).

⁹ See www.politico.eu and www.parties-and-elections.eu (accessed on 14.5.2019).

¹⁰ Unfortunately, for France the latest findings on the so-called »Sun-

Party preference: comparison with historical election results (in %)

Which party would you vote for if a parliamentary election were to be held this Sunday?
(only social democratic parties)



Notes: * question depending on country; basis for the Sunday question: party voters in the investigated country. ** member of an electoral alliance.
Sources: Election results: parties-and-elections.eu; »Sunday question«: www.pollofpolls.eu, last average value before the reporting date of 24.10.2018 (halfway through the fieldwork period for this study); in the case of the Netherlands, Ipsos 30.10.2018.

(SLD), each of which had slumped to a mere 7 per cent. In Germany, too, at the time of the survey, the SPD, with 15 per cent at best, had fallen to an unprecedented nadir and risks losing its status as a »catch-all party«.

But how suddenly did this collapse occur, in fact? Is it not really the case, as political scientists Franz Walter and Matthias Micus (2011) declared some time ago, that social democracy »has been in crisis, although initially no one noticed, for almost four decades«, during which time it lost support not only »at the margins, but also massively among its core constituency«?¹¹

Looking at the social democrats' election history measured in the present survey shows that, on average, 27 per cent of respondents in all countries identify themselves as »frequent«, in other words, core voters for social democratic parties in the past 10 to 20 years, while 25 per cent characterise themselves as occasional voters on this spectrum. The spread of core constituents here ranges from 39 per cent in Italy, 35 per cent in France and 34 per cent in the United Kingdom to much lower values in Denmark (23 per cent), a country with a strong social democratic tradition, Poland (21 per cent) and the Netherlands (11 per cent). Austria, Germany and Sweden lie somewhere in the middle, with a core voter share of 25

per cent. It is noteworthy here that the proportion of socially disadvantaged respondents who profess to have voted »frequently« for social democrats in the past 10 to 20 years deviates from the average in only two countries, namely Poland (+4) and Sweden (+5). The implication of this is that underprivileged core voters have not constituted the majority in most social democratic electorates for the past two decades. Did the »core constituency« then cease to exist long ago?

There are also national differences with regard to (remaining) potential voters today (in other words, the number of people presently intending to vote and those who could at least envisage it). The largest proportion of potential voters are to be found in the United Kingdom (48 per cent), Sweden (43 per cent), Austria (42 per cent) and Denmark (39 per cent). The lowest potential vote, by contrast, can be found in Italy (29 per cent), France (25 per cent) and the Netherlands (24 per cent). Germany (32 per cent) and Poland (34 per cent) lie somewhere in the middle.

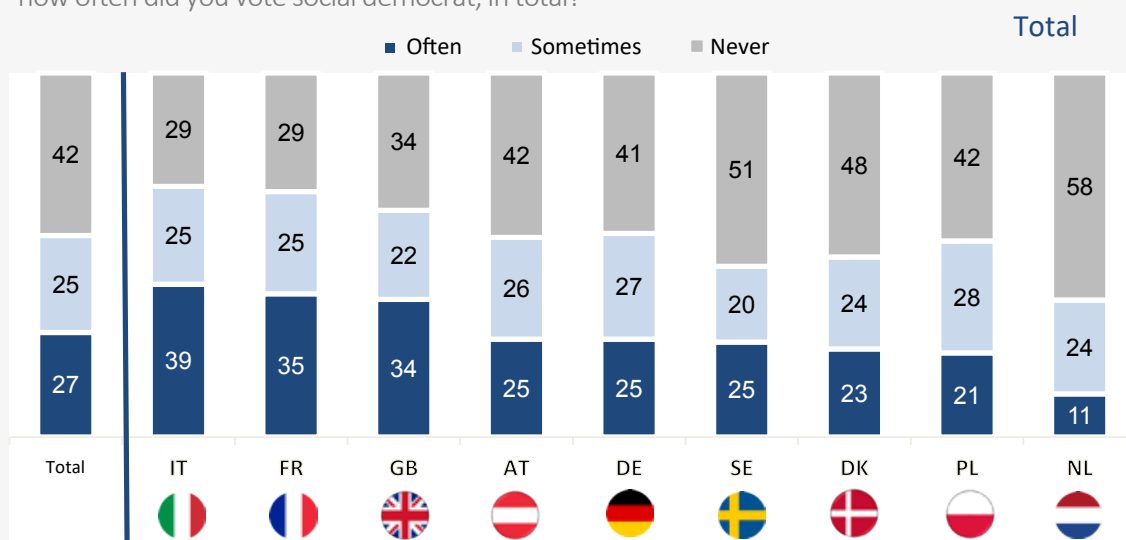
Among socially disadvantaged respondents social democrats still register low to moderately higher values than among respondents as a whole in four of the nine countries examined here (Poland: +4, United Kingdom: +3, Sweden: +2 and Denmark: +2). It is notable here that, with the exception of Poland, these are also the countries with the highest overall potential vote among all those entitled to vote. By contrast, in countries where the total potential vote is already lower, namely in Germany (–6), France, Italy and the Netherlands (–5), social democratic parties would receive a much lower

day question« (»If there was a parliamentary election this Sunday which party would you vote for?«) are from mid-2017.

11 <http://www.demokratie-goettingen.de/publikationen/wieder-zurueck-die-spd-als-volkspartei> (accessed on 8.5.2019).

Potential votes for social democratic parties (in %)

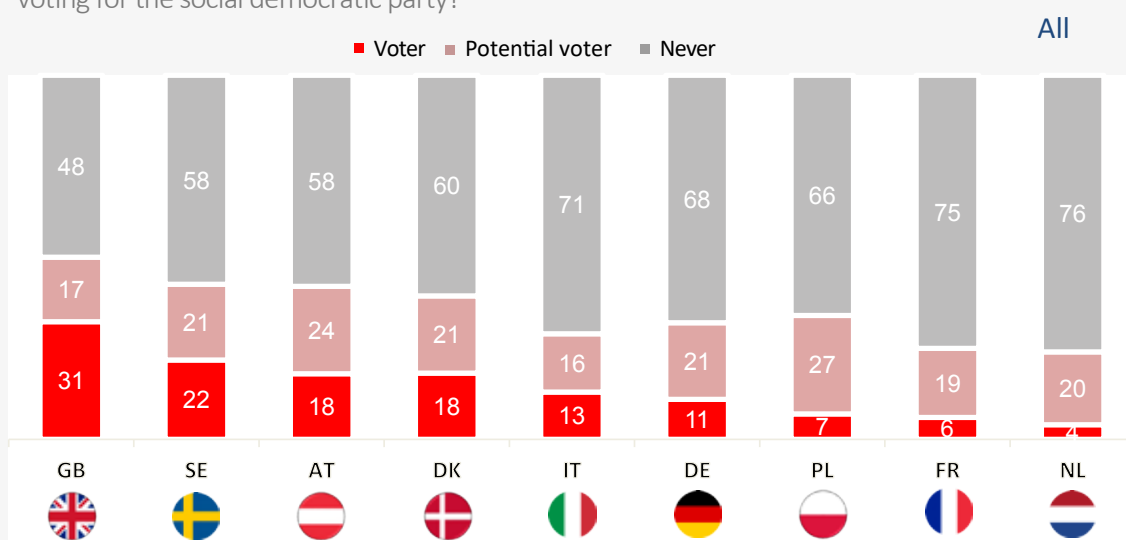
Looking at national elections over the past 10–20 years, how often did you vote social democrat, in total?



Notes: Percentages do not total 100% because of the category »did not vote«.
Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Potential votes for social democratic parties (in %)

Which party would you vote for at present in a national election? / Would you also consider voting for the social democratic party?



Notes: Deviations from 100% rounded up.
Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

vote than the population average. In Austria, the SPÖ's potential vote among the socially disadvantaged does not differ from the general average (–1). This means that underprivileged voters seem to reflect particularly strongly the relevant tendency among the national total electorate as regards their affinity with social democracy.

Overall, then, there are substantial differences within Europe. In some countries social democrats can still count on more than two-fifths of the electorate (as many as half in the United Kingdom) as potential voters and thus basically remain hopeful of retaining a decisive role in the party system. In former western European stalwarts such as France and the Netherlands, however, the potential social democratic vote has shrunk considerably. Even in countries such as Italy and Germany the outlook is gloomy for the foreseeable future. Poland, by contrast, seems to be a special case. Overall, the potential vote lies somewhere in the middle, but recently at least this has not been reflected at the ballot box.

1.2 THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT: POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EYES OF EUROPEAN ELECTORATES IN 2018

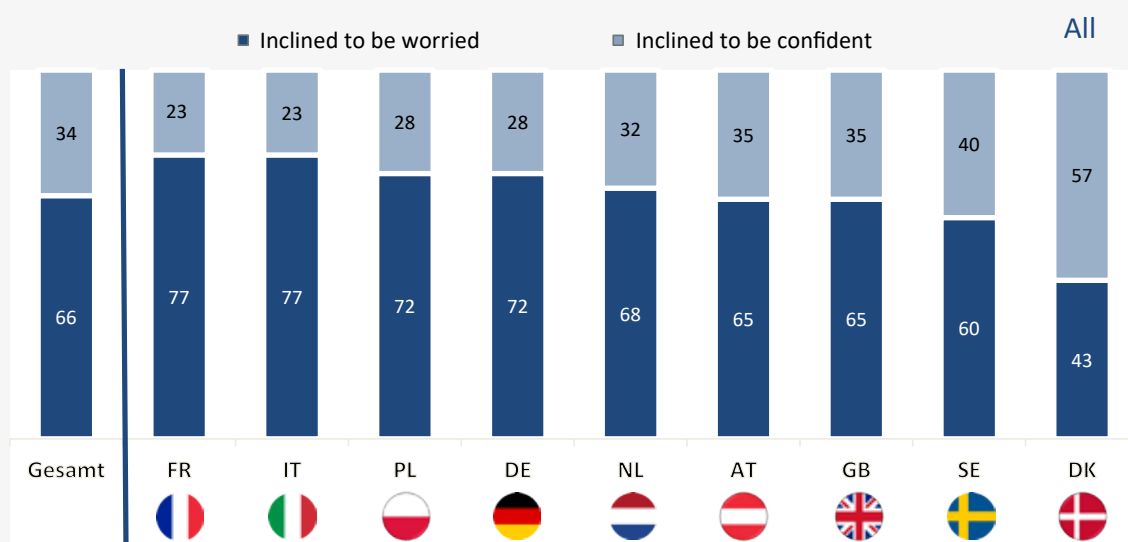
The popularity of individual parties can be analysed only in the overall social context. This is because the relevance of certain political and topical areas at a particular time can exert a decisive influence over the dynamics of a party system, enhancing some forces and constraining others. Because this study is an investigation of the profiles of social democratic parties a broader look at the political and social topics of the hour in the countries under investigation is indispensable. This is the only way of assessing the extent to which the centre-left parties and their policy platforms are operating inside or outside the general range of societal expectations.

1.2.1 Concerns and confidence

The extent to which European populations feel insecure already becomes apparent when they are asked whether they view future developments in their country with trepidation or confidence. In all states, two-thirds of respondents declared themselves pessimistic and only 34 per cent optimistic. Bleakest of all is the mood in France and Italy, where 77 per cent of respondents are worried, followed by Poland and alleged anchor of stability Germany, each with 72 per cent. The Netherlands (68 per cent), Austria (65 per cent), the Netherlands (68 per cent), Austria (65 per cent) and the United Kingdom (65 per cent) are about average. Only the Scandinavian countries are below average in this respect, with 60

Worries about the future of the country (in %)

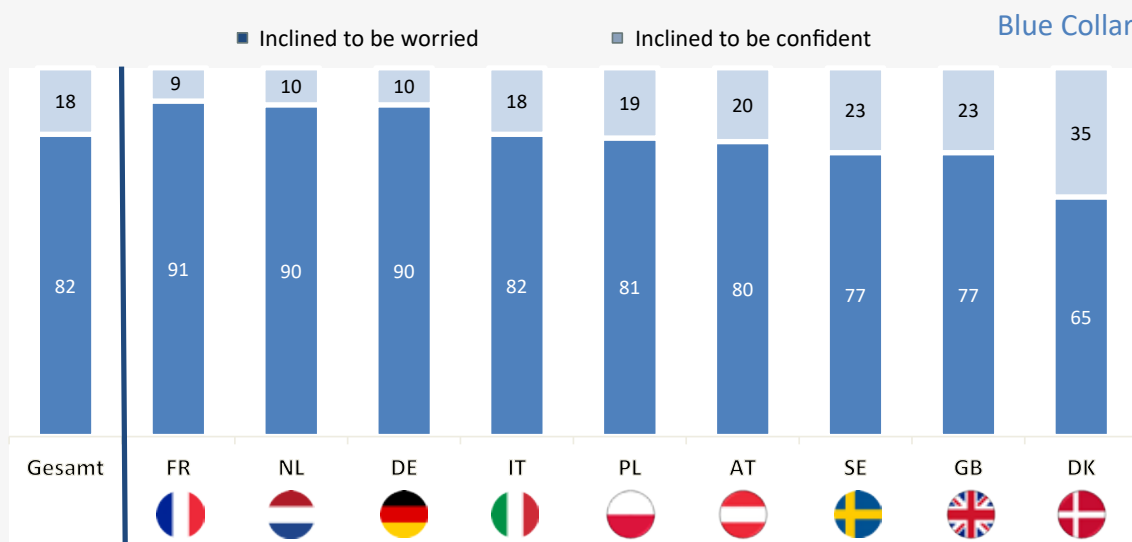
If you think about the future of our country, are you worried or confident?



Notes: Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Worries about the future of the country (in %)

If you think about the future of our country, are you worried or confident?



Notes: Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

per cent of people being pessimistic in Sweden, while in Denmark respondents expressing confidence even outnumber the pessimists by 57 to 43 per cent.

Among socially disadvantaged respondents,¹² who are particularly exposed to social developments, the mood is even gloomier. With the exception of Italy (+5 points) and Poland (+9 points) pessimism in this group is always a double-digit figure higher than the values for the population as a whole – up to 28 points in the case of the Netherlands. Most anxious of all are the socially disadvantaged population segments in the northern industrial core of the old European Economic Community, that is to say, in France (91 per cent), Germany and the Netherlands (each 90 per cent). Following them, with a considerable gap, are Italy (82 per cent), Poland (81 per cent) and Austria (80 per cent), just ahead of Sweden (77 per cent) and the United Kingdom (77 per cent). Socially disadvantaged respondents in Denmark are, relatively speaking, again the most optimistic, even though in contrast to the population as a whole anxiety dominates, at 65 per cent. The upshot is that above all in the traditional heart of the European unification project the socially disadvantaged are deeply unsettled.

Given this widespread pessimism it is worth taking a closer look at individual topics. Among all respondents and on average for all countries in the survey worries about provision

for old age come top, with 64 per cent. Other social issues, such as care provision (60 per cent), distribution of wealth (59 per cent), availability of affordable housing (59 per cent) and health care provision (56 per cent), figure towards the top of the list of concerns. At a similar level, however, are worries about integration and the number of refugees and immigrants (63 and 59 per cent, respectively). On top of that, not least because of transatlantic tensions, comes the foreign policy situation (60 per cent), followed by the environment and nature (57 per cent), the tax burden and domestic security, each at 55 per cent.

Among the countries under examination there are also various differences in rank ordering. For example, old age provision is ranked first in four countries (Germany and, together with housing, Sweden, Poland and Italy), while in France the tax and contribution burden, in the United Kingdom health care provision and the National Health Service, in the Netherlands housing and integration equally and in Austria again integration top the list. Denmark, by contrast, is relatively free of internal concerns; there external and global factors dominate, namely the international situation and the environment.

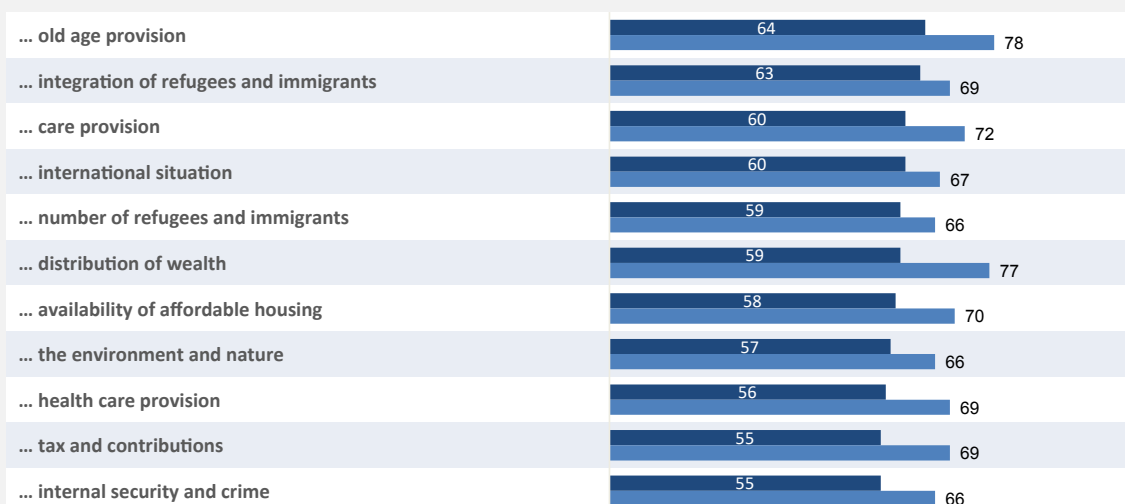
Looking at the disadvantaged population segments in the countries under investigation it is striking that all the main concerns of the population are, once again, much more pronounced. Among the more vulnerable respondents, first and foremost, justice-related and social issues are more prominent, such as the distribution of wealth (77 per cent, +18 points), tax and contributions (69 per cent, +14 points) and

¹² In the graphs the English term »blue collar« is used.

Top 10 concerns (in %)

If you think about the future development of [your country], are you worried or confident about ...? Scale 1–7, values 5–7

All
Blue Collar



Notes: Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

old age provision (78 per cent, +14 points) (see Figure 5). Furthermore, other issues make it into the top 10 concerns, such as inflation and the cost of living (73 per cent, +18 points) as a direct threat to disadvantaged social strata. Issues that are much discussed in the media, such as migration and asylum seekers (66 per cent, +7 points) and integration (69 per cent, +6 points), by contrast, are much closer to the overall value for all respondents and are thus less characteristic of the particular set of concerns of this segment of the population. A total of 66 per cent of this group are worried about internal security, however, 11 points more than among respondents as a whole, a mid-range increase.

Despite the widespread scepticism about the future, there are nonetheless two areas in which confidence predominates throughout Europe, namely technological change (57 per cent) and gender equality (45 per cent). Even 50 per cent of socially disadvantaged respondents are optimistic about technology. Collective uncertainty thus appears to be absent on this issue.

1.2.2 Winners and losers from social change

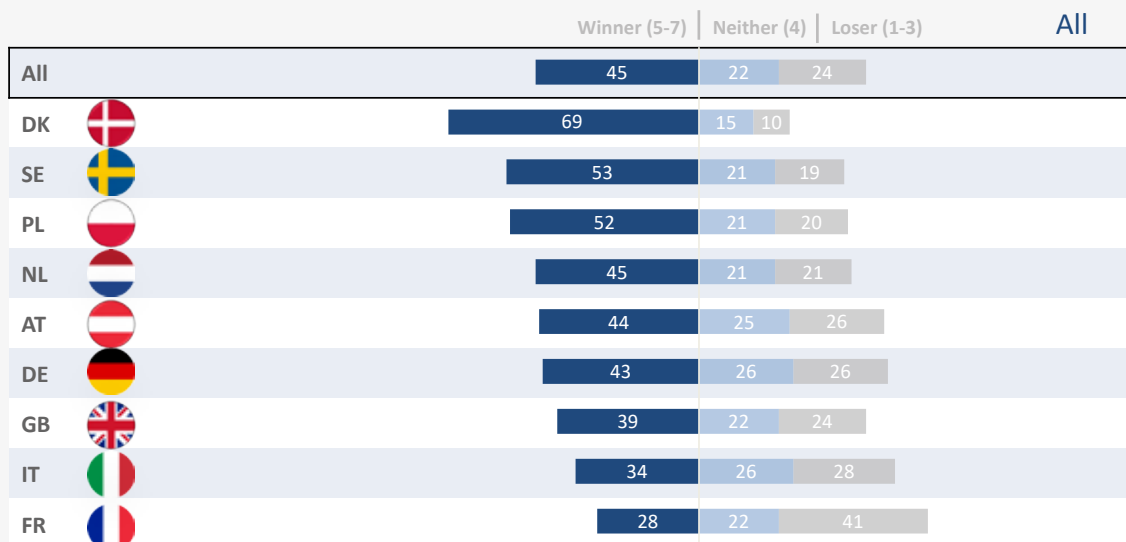
Also of interest is whether respondents regard themselves as winners or losers from social change. Experience shows that answers to this question strongly influence people's satisfaction with the performance of the political system, which bears the main responsibility for people's welfare.

Across national borders 45 per cent of people declare themselves winners and 24 per cent losers, while 22 per cent put themselves somewhere in the middle. The largest share of »beneficiaries« are to be found in Scandinavia (Denmark: 69 per cent, Sweden: 53 per cent), together with economically emerging Poland (52 per cent). In central Europe, winners predominate only in relative terms, with 45 per cent in the Netherlands, 44 per cent in Austria and 43 per cent in Germany. In the United Kingdom (39 per cent) and Italy (34 per cent) only a little over a third of respondents regard themselves as winners, with France at the bottom: there, 41 per cent regard themselves as losers and a mere 28 per cent as winners.

The picture changes considerably, however, if one looks at the socially vulnerable segment alone. Here the losers predominate (60 per cent), with France again bringing up the rear (losers: 74 per cent). The negative outlook of the lower social strata is also evident in Germany: it ranks second lowest with 69 per cent. The values are only a little lower in other traditionally wealthy nations, such as Sweden (66 per cent), Austria (63 per cent) and the Netherlands (61 per cent). The United Kingdom (57 per cent) and the otherwise so strikingly pessimistic Italians (51 per cent) are to be found in the middle, while only in exceptionally positive Denmark (49 per cent) and in Poland (48 per cent) do the socially disadvantaged not characterise themselves mainly as losers.

Social winners versus losers: total (in %)

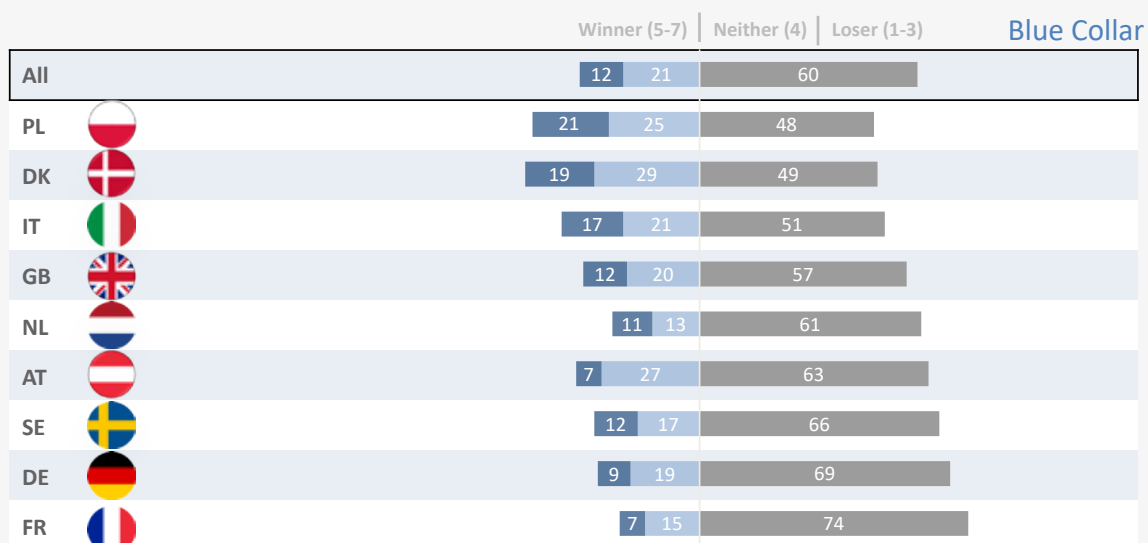
Social change: do you feel you are on the winners' or the losers' side?



Notes: Percentages total 100% if the category »don't know« is included.
Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Social winners versus losers: blue-collar (in %)

Social change: do you feel you are on the winners' or the losers' side?



Notes: Percentages total 100% if the category »don't know« is included.
Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Looking again, however, another, deeper lying pattern emerges. Relative to the initial values for the population as a whole, uncertainty and feelings of social decline dominate primarily among the underprivileged in the old central and northern European models of prosperity with some form of social market economy. For example, the difference between the proportion of »losers« among the socially disadvantaged and all respondents in Austria is 37 points, in otherwise so confident Denmark 39 points, in the Netherlands 40 points, in Germany 43 points and even in »folkhem« (»people's home« conceived as lying between capitalism and socialism) Sweden it is 47 per cent. Clearly dominant here is the feeling of sliding or being at risk of sliding down from the high or fairly similar level of former times.

In traditionally more economically unstable Italy (23 per cent) and among the Polish »newcomers« (28 per cent), by contrast, anxiety and feelings of falling back into the lower social strata are relatively less pronounced. British class-based society ranks somewhere in the middle, with a 33 percentage point difference, similar to France, although the latter seems to be struggling with an exceptional level of pessimism and fears of social decline.

1.2.3 Political parties' ability to solve problems

The analysis of social anxiety reveals, among other things, substantial concerns about social equality and safeguarding living standards. This goes to the very heart of social democratic identity. But what kind of problem-solving capacity do people ascribe to centre-left parties in key areas of social action?

Respondents were asked which party in their national party system they trusted most to solve the problems emerging in a given policy area. One limitation should be taken into account here. Social democratic forces in party systems with only a few parties (as in the United Kingdom) are naturally more likely to gain points for competence than in fragmented party systems in which parliamentary factions may run into double figures, as in the Netherlands. Nevertheless comparisons can be made, albeit with caution.

It is immediately evident that, comparatively speaking, British, Austrian, Danish and Swedish social democrats are perceived as those most likely to perform well in matters of social welfare. As what is after all the historical nucleus of social democracy, 46 per cent of British respondents, 41 per cent of Austrians and 31 per cent of Danes and Swedes attribute the strongest commitment to workers' interests to their centre-left parties. The values are much lower for the Italian Partito Democratico (15 per cent) and their Dutch (20 per cent), Polish (12 per cent) and French (10 per cent) comrades, however. Even the SPD, with 21 per cent, evidently has a problem asserting itself as a protector of employees' interests in the German party system. Similar patterns, albeit for all parties and at a lower level, emerge with regard to other social core competences, such as a fair distribution of wealth. Here, too, British (33 per cent), Danish and Austrian (26 per cent), as well as Swedish (23 per cent) social democrats continue to

register values that buttress their claim to be a positive influence in this respect, relatively speaking. By contrast, German (13 per cent), Italian (11 per cent), French and Dutch social democrats (9 per cent) can no longer be said to stand as guarantors of this fundamental social pledge. The above-mentioned pattern also applies in the case of extremely important specific issues, such as the availability of housing, a decent family policy and health and care provision.

Also of interest is the fact that the poorer performing social democratic parties are also no longer considered to be influential actors when it comes to supporting democracy, which traditionally was one of their hallmarks. For example, only 13 per cent of German respondents consider the SPD to be the primary guardian of democratic stability, while in Sweden, 28 per cent of respondents still attribute this role to the Socialdemokraterna. Italy is something of an exception in this respect, however: 19 per cent regard the Partito Democratico as a force for democracy, making it their greatest strength. This is small comfort, however, because the implication is that the social profile of the Italian centre-left is rather weak.










Looking at party competences from the standpoint of socially vulnerable voters yields the same result as in the case of potential voters: socially disadvantaged groups seem to share the same general attitudes with regard to social democracy and some exhibit them even more strongly. In countries with a relatively poor view of social democratic competences socially disadvantaged respondents tend to attribute even lower values to the relevant parties. In countries that take a more positive view they attribute either similar or, in some cases even higher scores on competence to centre-left parties in comparison with the total population. (Only the relatively well positioned SPÖ deviates significantly downwards from this pattern, while the relatively weak Polish SLD deviates slightly upwards.) This distribution appears most striking in relation to protecting workers' interests. For example, the score given by the socially disadvantaged to social democrats with regard to general competence in this area in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands is 5 points lower than the average for all respondents, while in Denmark it is only slightly lower (–2 points) and in Sweden it is pretty much the same. The British social democrats, finally, do much better among underprivileged voters (52 per cent, +6 points) with regard to protecting workers' interests. The party currently led by Jeremy Corbyn was thus attributed the highest competence as regards representing workers' interests in this group. The popularity of the Labour Party among socially disadvantaged groups varies upwards most strongly in all other social competences, too: health and care provision (+7 points), family policy (+6 points), housing (+6 points) and distribution of wealth (+6 points).

Thus the British Labour Party stands out as the perceived champion of the socially disadvantaged, while in Sweden, Denmark (with some reservations) and also Poland this group scarcely differs from other respondents. In Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, by contrast, the lower social strata tend to regard social democrats with more scepticism. In France, the PS's competence scores are extremely low overall

Party competences (in %)

Please state which party you trust the most to solve your country's emerging problems

All
Blue-collar

National social democratic party	 SPD	 PS	 PvdA	 PD	 SAP	 SPÖ	 SLD	 S	 Labour
Commitment to workers' interests	21 16	10 8	20 15	15 10	31 31	41 32	12 13	31 29	46 52
Commitment to good health and care provision	16 13	9 9	6 5	14 12	22 24	31 26	8 10	26 25	35 42
A good family policy	16 11	11 11	6 5	15 11	25 24	29 23	6 7	28 26	32 38
Affordable housing	15 11	10 7	9 5	13 9	22 20	30 21	7 7	29 23	34 40
Commitment to a fair distribution of wealth	13 11	9 7	9 5	11 8	23 22	26 19	8 11	26 23	33 39
Ensuring democratic stability	13 12	7 5	4 3	19 15	28 29	25 26	7 10	24 26	24 25

Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

and there are scarcely any differences between the socially disadvantaged and other voters. (This comparison is, however, subject to the caveat that in countries such as France and Germany there are left-wing alternatives to the social democrats on social policy, which is hardly the case in the United Kingdom, for example.)

1.3 ARE THEY APPEALING TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE? TOWARDS WHOM SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ARE DIRECTING THEIR POLICIES IN THE EYES OF THE VOTERS

1.3.1 Commitment to individual population groups

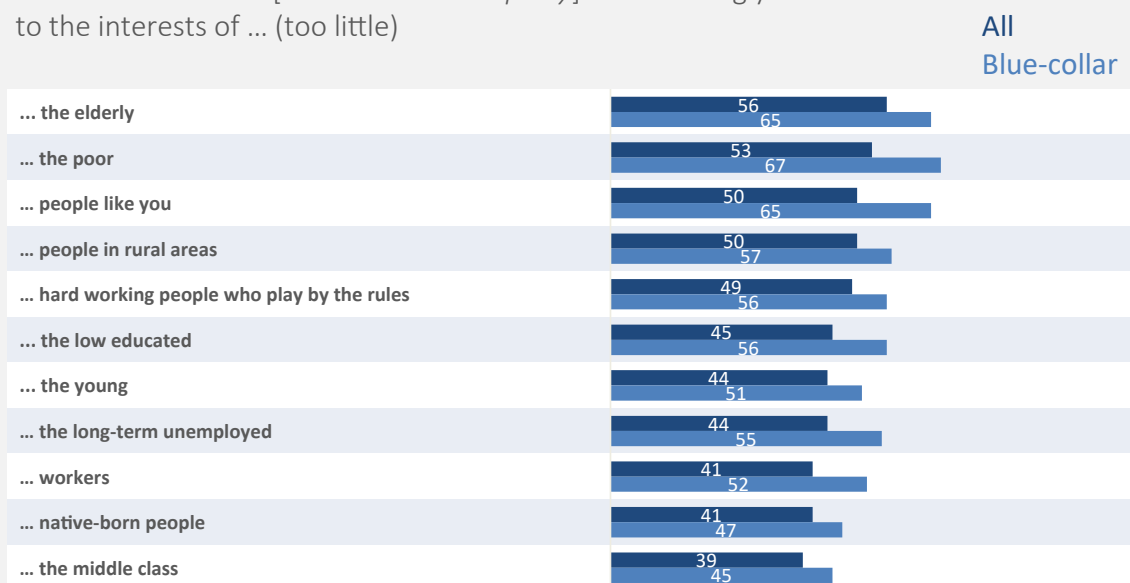
Closely related to the question of how competently social democrats implement policies in their core areas is the fundamental question of whose interests they primarily want to protect. The ideal of clearly delineated target groups with effective lines of communication, however, strongly contradicts the aim of a catch-all party, which is to put down roots in as many parts of the electorate as possible. Given the current crisis facing many social democratic parties it is instructive to analyse their perceived »target group profile« in the population. To this end, survey participants were presented with a list of different population groups, from which they were supposed to indicate which of the listed subgroups the relevant national centre-left party stands up for: too strongly, to the right extent or too little.

An extremely clear pattern emerged for all countries and respondents: their commitment was perceived as too weak above all for groups that were generally in need of protection and support, first and foremost the elderly (56 per cent), the poor (53 per cent) and, in an era in which big cities are booming, the rural population (50 per cent). The two categories »people like you« (50 per cent) and »hard working people who play by the rules« (49 per cent), however, also rank at this level, which reflects the widespread feeling among »ordinary people« that they should receive more consideration. Slightly further behind come the low educated (45 per cent) and young people and the long-term unemployed (44 per cent). Social democrats' commitment to workers, natives and the middle class is regarded as unsatisfactory, with values of 41 and 39 per cent.

The elderly and the poor, sometimes in reverse order, feature at the top of the list in four of the nine survey countries (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland). In the other countries other items come before at least one of the two categories. In France, for example, »people like you« (60 per cent), as well as the rural population and the middle class (59 per cent) are placed second, third and fourth; in Italy neglect of the young tops the table in a period of high youth unemployment. In Sweden, as in France, the rural population ranks second (62 per cent); in Austria hard working people who play by the rules (51 per cent) rank second. In the United Kingdom, finally, »people like you« even head the list of

Inadequate commitment on the part of social democrats (in %)

And what about the [social democratic party]? How strongly is it committed to the interests of ... (too little)



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

those who are ignored, although, at 44 per cent, at a relatively low level.

Considerable percentage differences in perceived lack of consideration for individual groups hinder direct country comparisons. As a result, one may lose sight of the fact that, in some states, the extent of social democratic neglect overall is perceived as even more outrageous. This can be illustrated on the example of the »poor«.

For example, at the lower end of the country spectrum, in Italy 72 per cent of those entitled to vote consider the commitment of the Partito Democratico to the economically vulnerable as inadequate. Similarly, the SPD generally receives poor marks (64 per cent), as do the French socialists (56 per cent), the Polish and Austrian social democrats (55 per cent) and their Swedish sister party (52 per cent). A total of 45 per cent in the Netherlands and Denmark still regard the commitment of their national centre-left parties as inadequate, while in the case of the British Labour Party the figure is only 33 per cent; in fact, 50 per cent of respondents consider the party's commitment to be about right or even too strong. That means that there are enormous differences on a central plank of social democratic policy, the fight against poverty, just under 40 percentage points between the British and Italian parties and over 30 percentage points between the British and German sister parties. This indicates fundamental differences in terms of their social profiles.

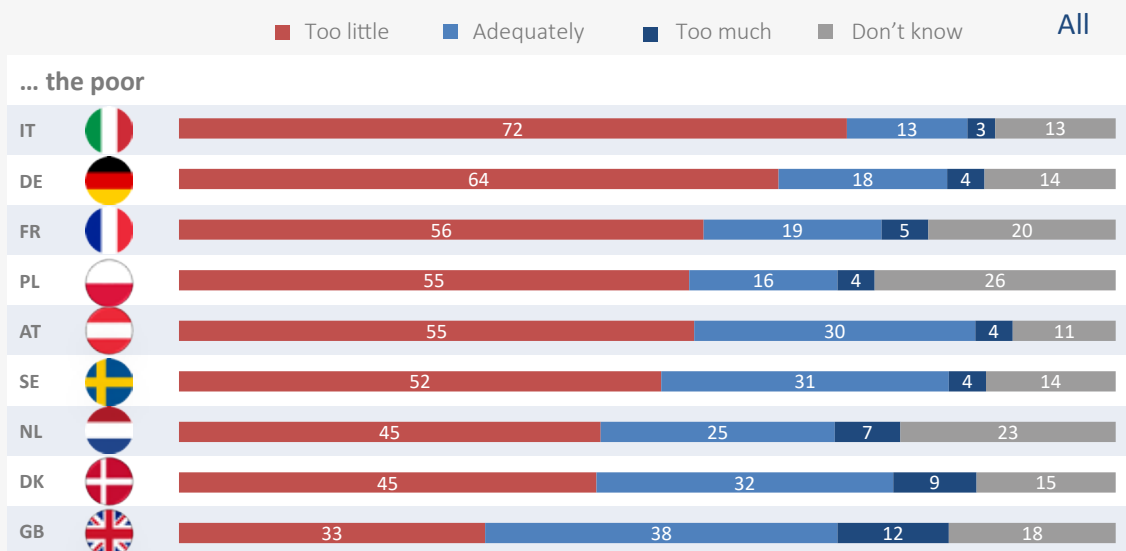
The neglect of all the groups mentioned above by Europe's social democrats is felt even more intensely by socially disadvantaged respondents. The biggest negative deviations arise, however, between groups for whom proximity to the social »relegation zone« is an everyday reality. As a result, a lack of commitment especially to the poor (+14 points), the long-term unemployed, the low educated and workers (+11 points) hits home much harder. These values are surpassed by the category »people like you«, however, with the socially disadvantaged registering values 15 points higher than in the case of all respondents. This indicates that underprivileged groups feel extremely underrepresented by social democratic parties.

Nonetheless, there are major differences between countries here, too. While among the underprivileged in the United Kingdom 45 per cent of respondents consider the Labour Party's commitment to »people like you« to be inadequate, in countries such as France, Sweden, Austria and Germany this value reaches or even surpasses the 70 per cent mark. Once again Italy brings up the rear with a negative value of 78 per cent.

This substantiates the finding that Labour especially, but also the Danish Socialdemokratiet are perceived as solidly representing the socially weaker portions of the population. By contrast, the Italian and German above all, but also the Austrian social democratic parties exhibit glaring deficiencies in this respect. In the middle there are less obvious differences. For example, while the Swedish SAP was still convincing

Inadequate commitment on the part of social democrats (in %)

How strongly do the social democrats stand up for the interests of ... ?



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

when it came to party competences, it seems to have fallen behind somewhat with regard to group-specific interest representation.

Inversely related to the neglected groups, finally, are a number of groups that certain segments of public opinion feel are paid too much attention by centre-left parties. Generally speaking, out in front in this respect are immigrants (31 per cent), followed by the affluent (27 per cent). It is worth nothing that in three countries – Denmark, Germany and Poland – the affluent are placed above immigrants.

Even more interesting are the slightly deviating responses of socially vulnerable respondents. Although they rate the two groups mentioned in the previous paragraph even more emphatically than voters as a whole as receiving too much consideration, the difference in relation to the affluent (+11 points) is even sharper than in relation to immigrants (+6 points). This indicates that the underprivileged feel more resentment concerning social and distributive issues than in relation to foreigners.

1.3.2 Commitment to personal advancement

A traditional core pledge of social democracy is an all-out effort to enable everyone to enjoy upward social mobility. Accordingly, it is central to an analysis of party profiles whether people still buy into such assurances. Asked about the extent to which the respective centre-left parties were committed to the advancement of people like them, only 24 per cent of

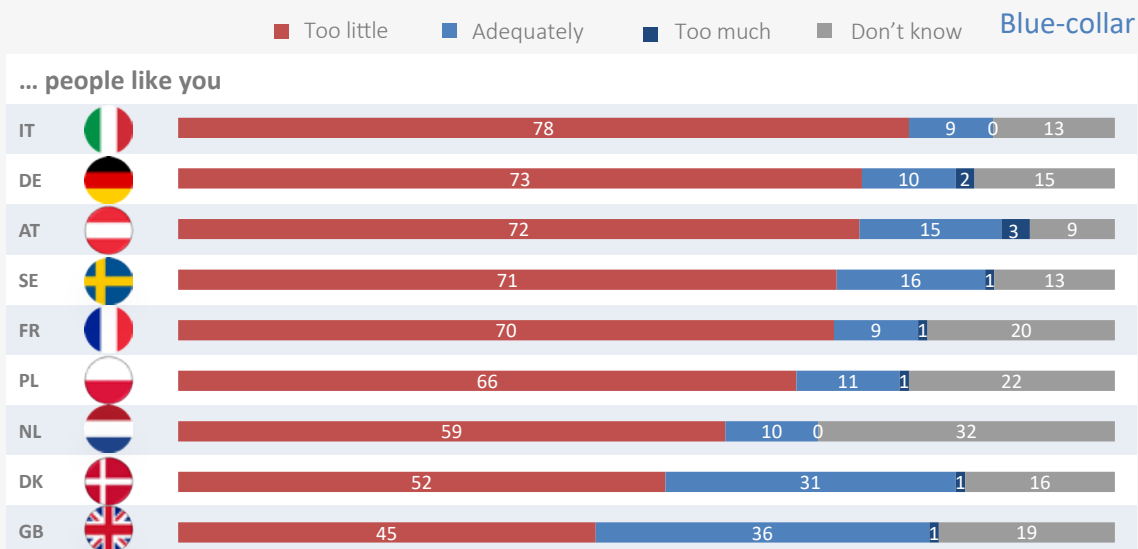
respondents answered »yes«, while 33 per cent were inclined to deny it. As many as 43 per cent were non-committal or undecided. Within the underprivileged group of respondents the values differ only slightly from this pattern. Once again, there are national differences, albeit modest ones. While Italy brings up the rear, with only 15 per cent of socially vulnerable respondents regarding the Partito Democratico as committed to their social advancement and as many as 46 per cent denying it, in the United Kingdom 31 per cent of British underprivileged people still trust the Labour Party in this respect. All the other social democratic parties range between these values, with the German SPD closer to the Italian end of the spectrum (generally yes: 20 per cent; generally no: 39 per cent). There is no country in which confidence in the social democratic promise of social mobility predominates, however. In connection with intense anxiety about social decline (see above) this is a sobering finding for the old left-wing aspiration to social mobility in Europe and for the role that the centre-left hopes to play in bringing it about.

1.4 VALUE-DRIVEN POLITICS? COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERISTIC NORMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

Generally speaking, a party's profile is based not only on specific policy proposals, but at least as much on the values and

Inadequate commitment on the part of social democrats (in %)

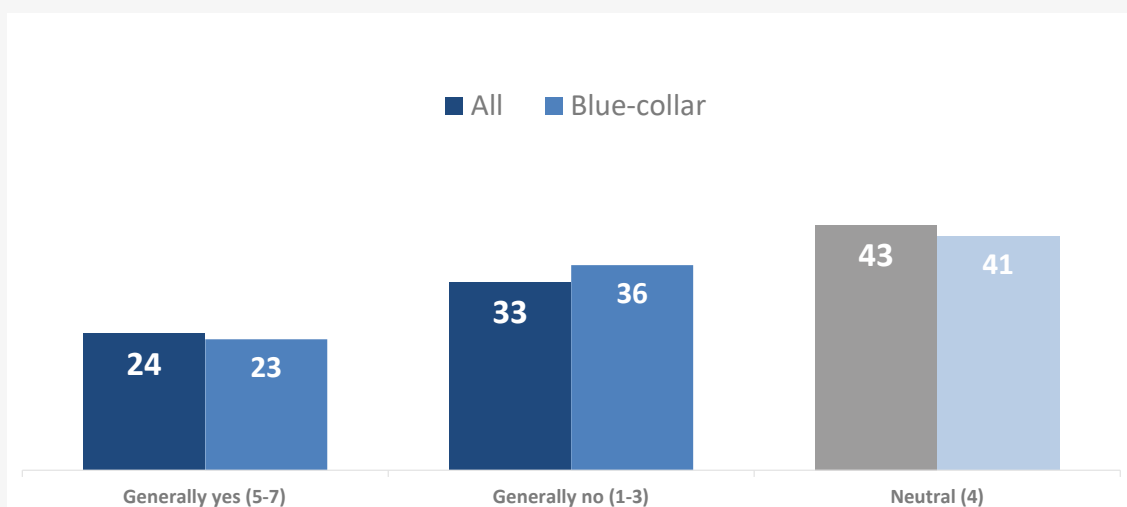
How strongly do the social democrats stand up for the interests of ... ?



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Social democrats: are they committed to social advancement? (in %)

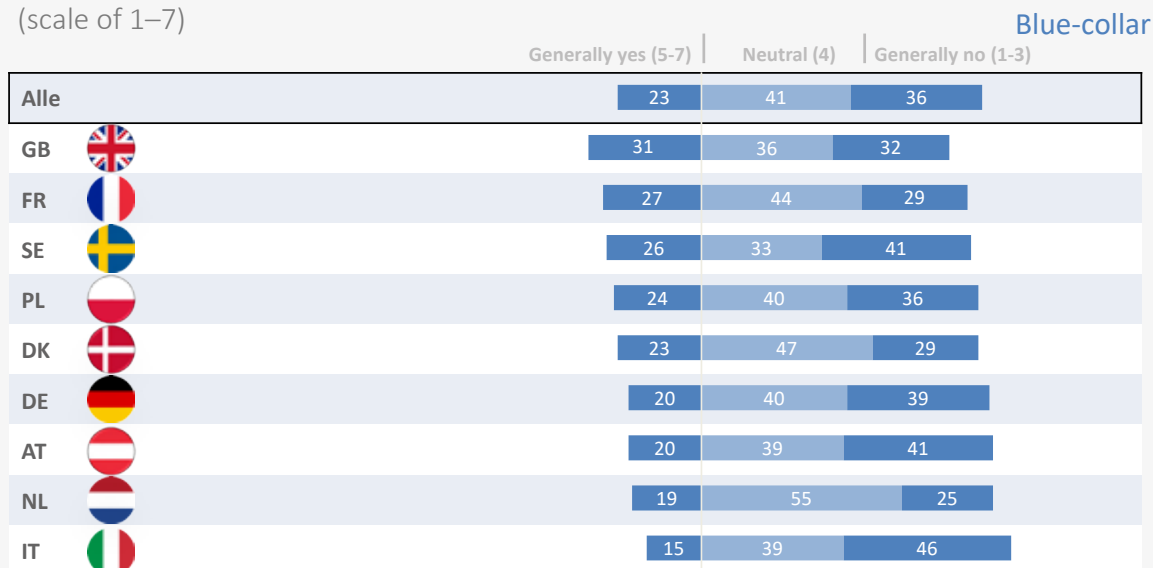
The social democratic party is committed to the social advancement of people like me ... (scale of 1–7)



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Social democrats: are they committed to social advancement? (in %)

The social democratic party is committed to the social advancement of people like me ...
(scale of 1–7)



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

principles underpinning its actions. The traditional self-conception of social democrats in particular tends to come with a strong normative charge, challenging any attempt to portray them as »technocratic« problem-solving parties.

The respondents were presented with a list of 14 norms and principles, which they were supposed to rank in two ways. First, in terms of how important they are to them personally and then in terms of their assessment of their national social democrats' commitment to the implementation of these values and principles in society, on a scale of 1 to 7. The assumption was that the smaller the average difference between the two variables the more the population's normative profile overlapped with that of the relevant social democratic party and vice versa.

It should be said in advance, however, that lower average values for the parties should be factored in to a direct comparison because someone's personal value orientation is likely to be emphasised more strongly than an external assessment of a political entity. That being the case, the relative extent of a value gap is more instructive than its mere existence.

In fact, substantial parts of the electorate exhibit a tendency to regard many of the values and principles we asked about as important for them personally. On average for all the countries in the survey people rated the personal importance of a given value for them higher than 5 (out of 7) in 13 out of 14 cases. Only the principle »faith and religion should play a role in our society«, at 3.5, is regarded as less important. (This

is the only instance in which there was no gap between personal and party positions, which both came out at 3.5.)

What are perceived as the biggest social democratic shortcomings in terms of norms, by contrast, are in the realm that is most important to people: there is a difference of 1.9 points between the average assessment of the commitment of PES parties (4.3) to the principles »that everyone in our society should play by the rules« and »that people should be properly rewarded for their performance« and that of the population (6.2). There is a similar gap with regard to the principle, rated as slightly less important, that »everyone should take responsibility for themselves« (5.9 compared with 4.0). These are followed by gaps of 1.8 points in relation to »law and order« (6.1 to 4.3) and in relation to the principle that »everyone should fulfil their obligations« (6.0 to 4.2). In this top bracket there is also a difference of 1.7 points with regard to the demand that »everyone should be prepared to contribute and make an effort« (5.9 to 4.2).

Social democrats' commitment to fair pay and the principle that people should be rewarded for their efforts is thus rated comparatively low. Particularly interesting in this ranking, however, is its largely social conservative character: in periods of low social trust (see Hilmer et al. 2017) people seem to be particularly sensitive to what they perceive as the failure of some members of society to play by the rules, to be responsible for their own lives and to meet their obligations.

This is followed by perceived differences with regard to the social core of this party family: a 1.6 point difference with regard to the idea that »there should be social justice« (6.0 to 4.4) and that »living conditions should be equal throughout the country « (5.8 to 4.2) and a 1.3 point difference with regard to »solidarity between people « (5.8 to 4.5). There are no grounds for complacency, however. To put it in perspective, the normative gaps with regard to »national pride« (1.5) and »unhindered pursuit of one's own economic interests« (1.4) – in other words, in the case of principles that traditionally are somewhat alien to social democracy – are at a similar level. The fact that social democrats' current values and principles are perceived to be as distant from their core brand as from ideas that have never been associated with them is cause for concern.

Generally speaking, finally, the smallest value gaps (with the exception of religiosity, as already mentioned) are found in the realm of libertarian principles. For example, the perceived commitment of social democrats to »openness to the world and tolerance«, with 4.6, is the highest value among all the principles listed. The average value as regards this principle for society as a whole is 5.7, giving a difference of only 1.1 points. Similarly with regard to the freedom »to do and say what one wants« the gap is 1.3 (5.6 to 4.3).

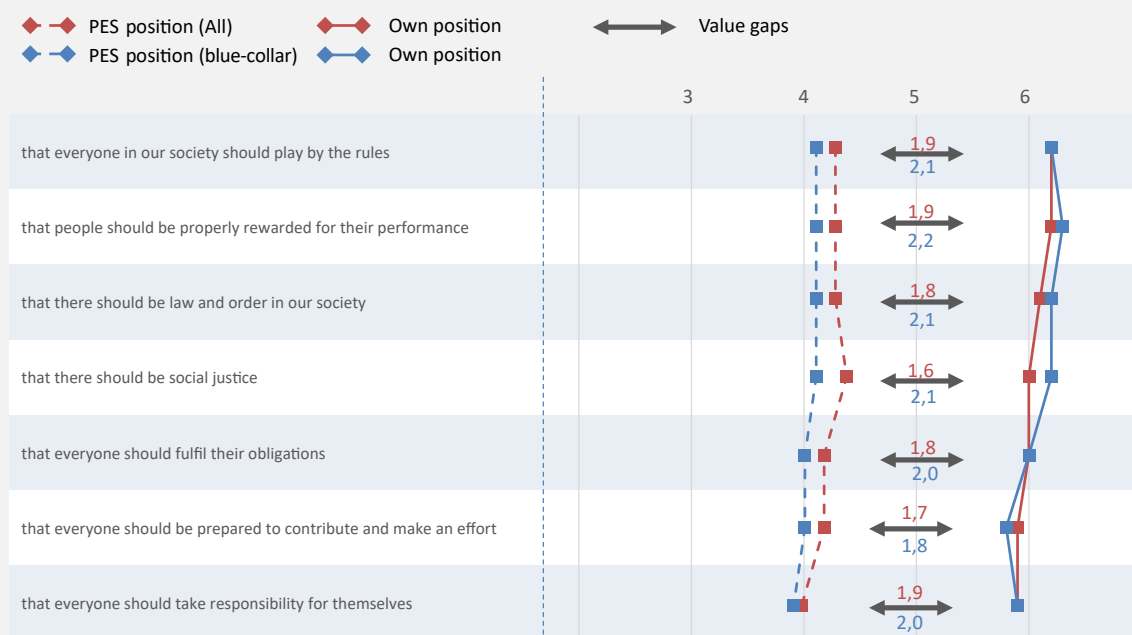
To summarise for the population as a whole of the countries under investigation: the profile of European social democrats is delineated most strongly with regard to libertarian/cosmo-

politan values and principles, while in the social conservative domain »the demand side« prevails. The biggest gaps in the eyes of public opinion are with regard to being rewarded for one's performance and fair pay. The rest of the social core issues lie somewhere in the middle.

Analysis of the value gaps of the socially vulnerable shows that this segment of respondents without exception perceives all shortcomings in relation to social norms more starkly. This even applies to »openness to the world and tolerance« (1.3 points: 5.7 to 4.4), which in intellectual discourse is usually attributed rather to upscale milieus. Furthermore, the rank ordering of the gaps varies: social democrats' inadequate commitment is now also perceived particularly strongly with regard to core social issues, on a par with their shortcomings on social conservative issues. Being rewarded for one's performance and fair pay are rated as most important (2.2 points: 6.3 to 4.1), followed by substantial gaps of 2.1 points in relation to »law and order« (6.2 to 4.1) and »playing by our society's rules« (6.2 to 4.1), but also in relation to »social justice« (6.2 to 4.1) and »equality of living conditions« (6.0 to 3.9). The higher values for social democratic shortcomings mean two things: first, the socially disadvantaged respondents are even more emphatic in their demands with regard to the abovementioned norms than the population overall. Second, social democrats tend to fall short even with respect to their own core values.

Values and principles: personal significance and commitment of PES parties

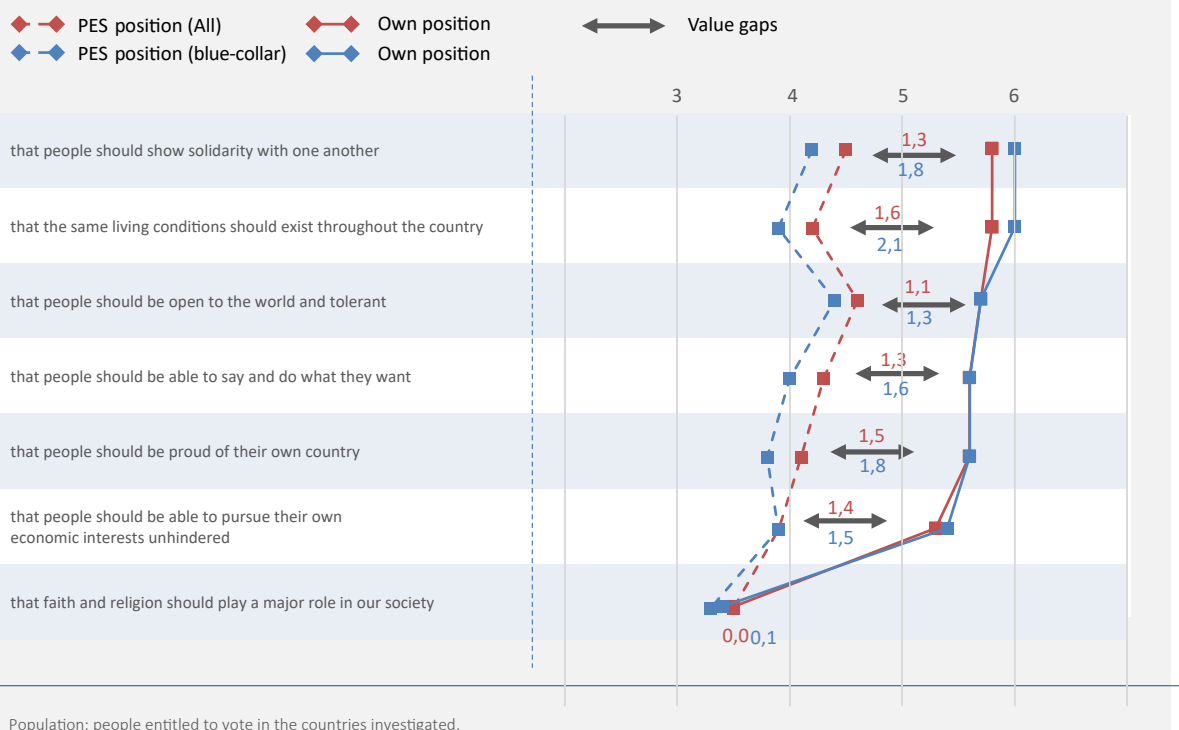
(average value: from 1 [not important at all] to 7 [extremely important/is strongly committed])



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Values and principles: personal significance and commitment of PES parties

(average value: from 1 [not important at all] to 7 [extremely important/is strongly committed])



With regard to social conservative values diagnoses of falling short are even higher for this population segment, at 2.0 points in the case of »fulfilling obligations« (6.0 to 4.0) and »taking responsibility for oneself« (5.9 to 3.9), and 1.8 points with regard to »willingness to make a contribution« (5.8 to 4.0) and »national pride« (5.6 to 3.8).

Particularly notable, at 0.5 points higher, is the value gap with regard to »solidarity« (6.0 to 4.2), a central social democratic pledge to society.

Overall, the socially disadvantaged take a more sceptical view of the value priorities of European social democrats than the general population; what is more, this extends even to the social/solidarity core of the socialist party brand.

Once again, however, it pays to look at individual countries because the size of the value gaps differs strikingly. Taking a parallel view, one of the first things that become apparent is that the Danish social democrats register comparatively low to very low norm deficits in all categories: both among the general population and blue-collars all the gaps are below the 1.0 point mark. The British Labour Party, too, exhibits only modest norm deficits in relation to all the principles asked about and in all cases remains well below the 2 point mark. It performs most poorly on social conservative values, for example, playing by the rules (overall gap: 1.4; among the socially disadvantaged: 1.5) or the demand that people take responsibility for their own lives (both 1.6 points). In the social

and libertarian realm, by contrast, the Labour Party generally remains within the inconspicuous spectrum at 1.0 points.

In the case of the Dutch and French sister parties, too, the deviations are modest, even though in the social conservative domain the value deficits – especially among the socially disadvantaged – sometimes come close to the 2.0 mark and even exceed it, at 2.1 points (France: »law and order«, Netherlands: »playing by the rules of our society«).

In a weaker group comprising Swedish, Austrian and Polish social democrats the benchmark of 2.0 points is exceeded in many norm categories, mainly from the standpoint of the underprivileged. It is notable in this context that the Austrian SPÖ exhibits the most significant deficiency in the social core. Although the Swedish SPA registers a shortfall of 1.8 points with regard to social justice among the underprivileged respondents, the SPÖ eclipses it with 2.7 points. But worse even than that is its score on people being rewarded for their performance and fair pay, with a lamentable value of 3.1 among the socially disadvantaged.

But the problems of this group of parties pale into insignificance compared with those of the German SPD and the Italian Partito Democratico. Among socially vulnerable respondents the party of Willy Brandt exceeded 3.0 deficit points in five of the 14 categories, while the successor party to Italy's Democratic Left did so in six. Both parties scored as follows. Their commitment, on one hand, to playing by the rules (3.1 deficit points among the socially vulnerable) and law and or-

der (3.2 and 3.1 deficit points, respectively among the socially vulnerable), and on the other, to fair pay (3.2 and 3.5 deficit points, respectively among the socially vulnerable), for social justice (3.3 deficit points among the socially vulnerable for both) and for equal living conditions (3.1 and 3.2 deficit points, respectively, among the socially vulnerable) is regarded as unsatisfactory. In Italy the social democratic party is also deemed to display an inadequate commitment to fulfilling one's obligations (3.3 among the socially vulnerable).

Apart from »faith and religion« there are few rays of hope here. For example, there are only two areas in which the SPD's value deficits lie in the »acceptable« zone between 1.0 and 2.0 for the population as a whole and for the socially vulnerable: openness to the world and tolerance (all: 1.2; socially vulnerable: 1.4 points) and the – market liberal – principle of unhindered pursuit of one's own economic interests (all: 1.4; socially vulnerable: 1.5 points). Italy's Partito Democratico, by contrast, does not even manage average values in a single category.

We can see from this comparison that the problems facing the sister parties under investigation in terms of values and principles differ fundamentally. Once again the basic pattern emerges that the British and Danish social democrats do comparatively well, while the German and Italian social democrats fare rather badly or even very badly. The latter exhibit central and critical defects as regards their perceived core brand.

1.5 CLOSE TOGETHER OR SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT? COMPARISON OF THE POLICY PREFERENCES OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES










Having established the profile of values and principles of the European social democratic parties, the question arises of whether meaningful insights can be obtained at the level of concrete policy efforts. The focus here is on the extent to which people's policy demand matches the policy supply of the centre-left parties.

The respondents were presented with 26 pairs of opposing statements on various policy orientations and asked to rank their own policy preferences and what they assumed to be the position of the national social democrats between those statements (on a scale from 1 = total agreement with statement A, to 7 = total agreement with statement B). The proximity or distance between the average population and party position arises from the average responses to the two sub-questions.

We must be clear from the outset that the significance of the average value for the population as a whole with regard to socially polarising policy issues is not particularly high for the evaluation of an individual party profile. For example, an average population value of 4.0 can indicate perfect polarisation.

Value gaps – overview (average deviation between personal significance of a value/principle and perceived party commitment to the same value/principle – scale from 1 [not important at all/not committed at all] to 7 [extremely important/is strongly committed])










Difference between personal significance and commitment of the relevant PES party to individual values/principles

										Value gap (all)	Value gap (blue-c.)
that everyone in our society should play by the rules	2,5 3,1	1,7 1,9	1,8 2,1	2,7 3,1	2,1 2,1	2,5 2,9	1,9 2,2	0,6 0,5	1,4 1,5		
that people should be properly rewarded for their efforts	2,5 3,2	1,6 1,8	1,5 1,7	3,0 3,5	1,8 2,1	2,4 3,1	2,1 2,2	0,7 0,6	1,2 1,2		
that there should be law and order in our society	2,4 3,2	1,7 2,1	1,6 1,8	2,7 3,1	1,9 2,1	2,3 2,6	1,8 2,0	0,6 0,5	1,4 1,5		
that there should be social justice	2,4 3,3	1,4 1,7	1,3 1,8	2,7 3,3	1,1 1,8	2,0 2,7	1,5 2,0	0,6 0,7	1,1 1,1		
that everyone should fulfil their obligations	2,0 2,4	1,7 1,9	1,5 1,7	2,8 3,3	2,0 1,8	2,1 2,5	1,9 1,9	0,5 0,4	1,3 1,1		
that everyone should be prepared to contribute and make an effort	2,2 2,3	1,4 1,6	1,3 1,4	2,5 2,8	2,1 1,8	2,2 2,3	1,6 1,7	0,6 0,4	1,5 1,4		
that everyone should take responsibility for themselves	2,1 2,4	1,7 1,7	1,5 1,6	2,5 2,9	2,1 1,9	2,4 2,5	2,0 2,2	0,8 0,6	1,6 1,6		

Note: Cell shading in accordance with the higher of the two deviations (all, socially vulnerable).
Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Value gaps – overview (average deviation between personal significance of a value/principle and perceived party commitment to the same value/principle – scale from 1 [not important at all/not committed at all] to 7 [extremely important/is strongly committed])

Difference between personal significance and commitment of the relevant PES party to individual values/principles

										Value gap (all) Value gap (blue-c.)
that people should show solidarity with one another	2,0 2,6	1,2 1,5	1,3 1,5	2,2 2,9	1,1 1,5	1,6 2,0	1,7 2,0	0,4 0,5	1,0 1,0	
that the same living conditions should exist throughout the country	2,1 3,1	1,4 1,8	1,1 1,7	2,6 3,2	1,7 2,2	2,0 2,6	1,4 1,9	0,5 0,7	0,9 1,2	
that people should be open to the world and tolerant	1,2 1,4	0,9 1,2	1,0 1,1	1,9 2,4	1,1 1,2	1,1 1,0	1,1 1,3	0,6 0,6	1,2 1,2	
that people should be able to say and do what they want	1,7 2,4	1,2 1,4	1,2 1,1	2,3 2,7	1,1 1,4	1,6 2,1	1,3 1,3	0,6 0,6	0,8 0,9	
that people should be proud of their own country	1,9 2,4	1,4 1,6	1,3 1,5	2,4 2,9	1,5 1,7	1,8 2,2	1,9 2,1	0,3 0,4	1,2 1,2	
that people should be able to pursue their own economic interests unhindered	1,4 1,5	1,4 1,6	1,0 0,9	1,9 2,3	1,8 1,5	1,5 1,8	1,6 1,8	0,4 0,2	1,0 1,1	
that faith and religion should play a major role in our society	0,2 0,2	0,3 0,3	0,2 0,2	0,6 1,2	0,6 0,4	0,0 0,1	0,8 0,6	0,5 0,5	0,1 0,4	

Note: Cell shading in accordance with the higher of the two deviations (all, socially vulnerable).
Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

tion, on one hand, and collective centrism, on the other, unless other supplementary statistical measures are taken into account. Furthermore, it is not the task of social democratic parties always to position themselves squarely in accordance with the population average, which to be sure is influenced by other currents of ideas. However, the variable used here can be of considerable interest if the population, for example, positions itself clearly in relation to a given pole, which might indicate a broad social consensus. On top of that, the analysis of the subgroup of socially vulnerable raises considerable cause for concern, even alarm for social democrats in light of their traditional self-image if the relevant average deviations ever increase.

All in all, the 26 pairs of statements can be sorted into six topical areas.

1.5.1 Social justice

Looking at the social core of social democracy three problematic findings in particular catch the eye, as regards the average for all countries. The first concerns the acute shortage of housing that is currently a widespread problem. People clearly, with an average scale value of 2.9, tend towards the feeling that the state is responsible for finding a remedy (total agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 1) instead of leaving the housing situation to the market (total agreement with which corresponds to scale value 7). Currently, however, social democrats are in alignment with this clear demand only to a certain extent, with a perceived scale

value of 3.5 – in other words, there is a policy gap of 0.6 points in the form of a »shift to the right«¹³ by these parties in the direction of the market principle. This difference is substantially higher among the socially vulnerable, at 1.0 points: even though they rank social democratic parties similarly to the overall population (3.5) they position themselves much more towards the pole »housing is a task of the state« (2.5).

A second problem area is the orientation of education policy. On this issue socially vulnerable respondents, with an average position of 2.5 between a more egalitarian (1) and a more elite (7) education policy, clearly prioritise equality of opportunity over encouraging high achievers. Given that the average party position is ranked at a moderate 3.3, here again a shift to the right – of 0.8 points – is evident.

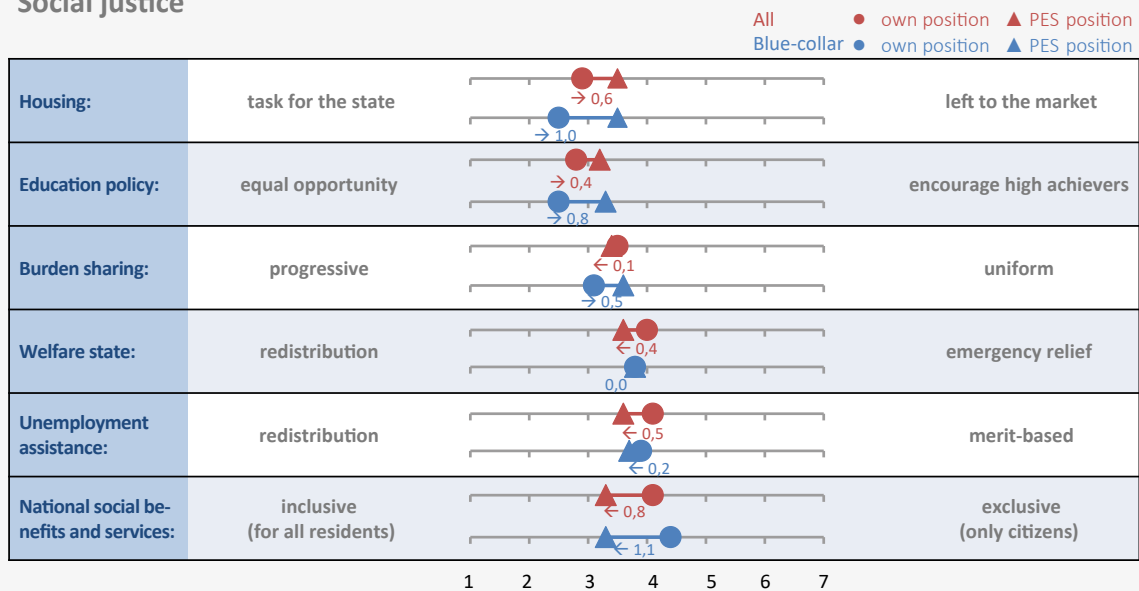
The third problem area is the most pronounced and concerns the organisation of the welfare state during a period of immigration. While the social democratic parties tend to be ascribed rather an inclusive position in this respect (3.3), which

¹³ In the figures the pairs of statements are ordered, as far as possible, in terms of the current left/right schema. »Left« in this case corresponds in socioeconomic terms to state-interventionist, redistributive or universalist positions, while in the cultural domain »left« rather corresponds to cosmopolitan-libertarian positions. When it comes to issues of democracy »left« corresponds, again, rather to representative-democracy positions, satisfied with the status quo, in order to be able to position the systemic critiques and direct democracy that tend to be taken up by right-wing populists on the »right«.

Policy gaps – overview: all countries

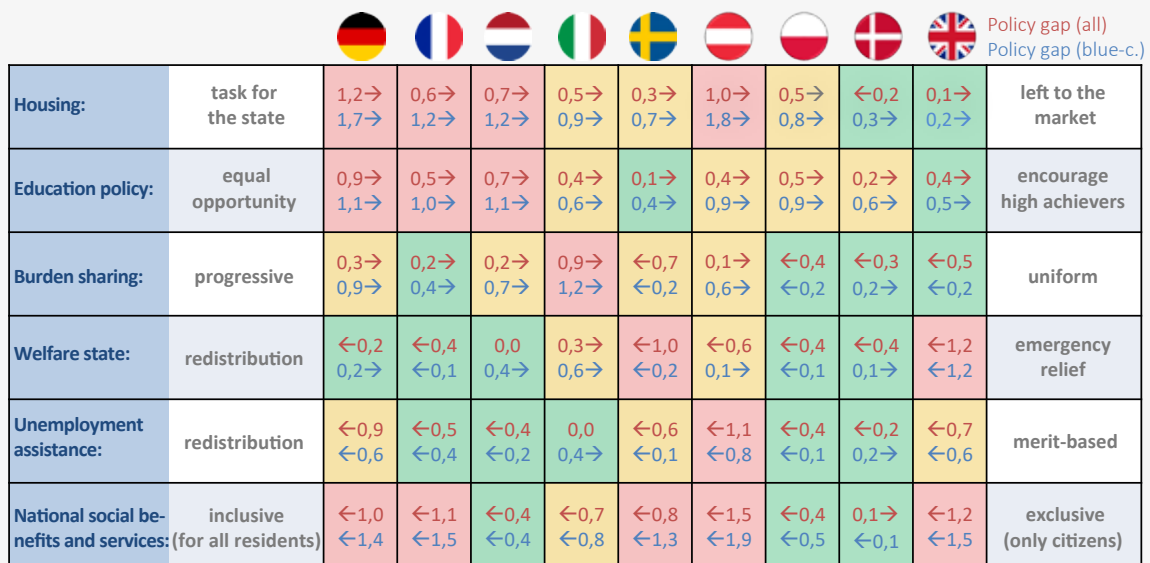
(average value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Social justice



Policy gaps – overview by country (average deviation between own position and party positioning value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Social justice



envisages national social benefits and services also for non-citizens with residence rights (1), instead of reserving welfare-state social security mechanisms exclusively for citizens (7), the population is much less sure (4.1), corresponding to a difference of 0.8 points. Socially vulnerable respondents tend clearly towards the exclusive model (4.4), yielding a deviation to the left of the party position of 1.1 points.

By contrast, no, or at most only minor, deviations can be established on the issues of income-progressive versus uniform burden-sharing in society, a redistributive welfare state versus one confined to providing a social safety net and the organisation of unemployment insurance (universal versus payments calculated on the basis of the number of years of contributions). On these issues people in general and the social democratic parties position themselves somewhere in the middle, in other words, somewhat undecided. It is only according to the socially vulnerable that the parties could do more to impose a heavier burden on the affluent in the fiscal realm (difference: 0.5 points).

The general view, then, is that social democrats have some catching up to do as regards the two key state tasks of housing and equal opportunities, while people in general do not share the parties' keenness to open up social security to non-citizens.

Other major differences also come to light in a comparison of national sister parties, however.¹⁴ The heaviest complaints about a lack of commitment to state housing provision are laid against the SPD (socially vulnerable: difference of 1.7) and Austria's SPÖ (socially vulnerable: difference of 1.8), which would appear to be fraught with danger, given the social housing traditions of Austrian social democracy. Deviations are also discernible among the socially vulnerable on these issues for the French Parti Socialiste and the Dutch PvdA (difference 1.2). By contrast, there is almost perfect agreement between the average citizen's preference and the British Labour Party (socially vulnerable: difference 0.3) and the Danish social democrats (socially vulnerable: difference 0.2).

On education, too, concerns about a lack of commitment with regard to equal opportunity range from higher values with regard to Germany, the Netherlands (both the socially vulnerable: difference 1.1) and France (socially vulnerable: difference 1.0), to the lowest values in the direction of encouraging high achievers in traditionally egalitarian Sweden (socially vulnerable: difference 0.4) and in the United Kingdom (socially vulnerable: difference 0.5).

With regard to access to the welfare state for non-citizens especially the sister parties from Austria, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom are clearly more »cosmopolitan« than the general population and, even more so, the socially vulnerable (a difference of at least 1.3). By contrast, much lower deviations to the left – 0.4 and 0.5 (socially vul-

nerable), respectively – were registered for the Dutch and Polish centre-left parties, while in Denmark the party and the population positions almost coincided.

Overall, then, the Austrian and German, but also the French and, to some extent, the Dutch social democrats register particularly high deviations in the overlapping problem areas, while above all their Danish colleagues achieve substantial accordance with public demand. Similarly, the centre-left parties in Poland, Sweden and even Italy exhibit comparatively fewer substantial deviations. Two findings stand out with regard to the British Labour Party: its policies on housing and education, areas of state activity, are deemed to be just right, while in relation to opening up the welfare state they are positioned as left-universalist.

In the areas that appeared to be unproblematic in terms of the European overall average nevertheless there were some problematic findings for individual parties. For example, the positioning of the Italian Partito Democratico on the question of progressive versus uniform burden sharing deviates sharply to the »right« (socially vulnerable: difference 1.2); in other words, in the direction of non-income-related flat taxation. This perfectly fits the Italian party's massive deficits in its social value profile.

With regard to the organisation of the welfare state the Swedish SAP is perceived by the general population (difference 1.0) and the British Labour Party by socially vulnerable respondents (difference 1.2) as clearly oriented towards redistribution. In this way these parties deviate »left« from the policy preferences of the general population, although when it comes to building a clear social democratic profile this is not necessarily a drawback.

Turning to support for the unemployed, the Austrian SPÖ deviates most sharply in the direction of uniform benefits (all: difference 1.1), the implication of which is that they are not in line with the inclination of the general population towards contribution-based benefits.

1.5.2 Economy and labour

In contrast to issues of social justice, the related area of the economy and labour market policy appears much less problematic, at first sight. Three questions were posed here, concerning the level of company taxation, the degree of state intervention in the economy and how the state handles threats to jobs. On average across countries low deviations were observed only in relation to state handling of threats to jobs and then only among the socially vulnerable. The latter are keen on state protection for endangered employment, while the social democratic parties are considered to be a little too ineffectual on this issue (socially vulnerable: difference 0.5). Otherwise, the average population and party positions on all issues are consistently just »left« of centre.

By country comparison the differences, once again, stand out in sharper relief. In relation to company taxation, for example, the German Social Democrats in particular are perceived as much too business-friendly by underprivileged re-

¹⁴ The higher deviating value (either »all« or »socially vulnerable«) is given in brackets.

spondents (socially vulnerable: difference 1.0), while the Swedish SAP are regarded by the general population as a little too much in love with taxation (all: difference 1.0). Similar differences predominate on the question of endangered jobs: on one hand, socially vulnerable respondents in particular attribute a too business-friendly position to the Italian (socially vulnerable: difference 1.2) and the Polish (socially vulnerable: difference 1.1) sister parties. Austrian, French and German social democrats, too, are perceived as insufficiently interventionist in this area (socially vulnerable: differences 0.6, 0.8, and 0.9). By contrast, generally the reverse is the case in relation to the Danish and Swedish social democrats in the eyes of the general population (all: difference 0.7).

Only when it comes to state intervention in the economy (*dirigisme* versus *laissez-faire*) are only negligible deviations found in all countries.

1.5.3 Immigration and culture

Undoubtedly, one of the most controversial issues of recent years is how to deal with migration, flight, asylum and integration. Right-wing populists in particular have benefitted massively from the political visibility of this complex issue throughout Europe. All the more reason, then, to find out, within the framework of this study, the extent to which public preferences and social democratic policies coincide.

Overall, there are substantial deviations between average attitudes among the electorate and the perceived positions of centre-left parties. While the general population – across all countries – tends more towards the sceptical-restrictive pole in matters of migration and cultural openness, social democratic parties are mainly categorised as tending towards »cosmopolitan«, in some instances markedly so. They tend to be ascribed an open, immigration- and diversity-friendly position. The upshot is that for socially vulnerable respondents the policy gaps are much more striking in this area, first and foremost because they are a lot more reluctant about opening up even than the general population.

This is already evident in relation to the fundamental question of whether immigration is associated rather with enrichment (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 1) or rather with inundation by foreigners (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 7). In this connection differences of 0.9 points among all voters and 1.2 among the socially vulnerable are registered, whereby the respondents tend towards »inundation« (all: 4.4; socially vulnerable: 4.7), while the parties tend towards »enrichment« (3.5).

The discrepancies are even more marked when it comes to weighing cultural diversity against national »dominant culture«. Respondents as a whole perceive a party »shift to the left« of 1.3 points, and among the underprivileged as much as 1.6. Notable here is that the position of the general public tends much more clearly towards restriction than the party position does to the »libertarian« pole. The gap thus appears primarily »on the demand side«: the general population de-

mands a more explicit policy against cultural openness and exposure.

Also when asked more pointedly whether Muslims fit into society well or not, the electorate overall, on average, positions itself as 1.2 points more sceptical (socially vulnerable: difference 1.3) than the centre-left parties.

The biggest gaps, however, are to be found on the issue of how migration is to be managed. Between the options of making immigration easier (1) or limiting immigration (7) the electorate overall on average positions itself on the restrictive scale value 5, the socially vulnerable 40 per cent of the respondents even at 5.2. Because social democrats of both groups are placed slightly »left« of centre substantial deviations arise of 1.4 and 1.8.

Slightly smaller positional gaps in the area of »Immigration and culture« are to be found only in relation to religious matters. On the question of whether the relevant country should be rather multireligious (1) or (as the case may be) exclusively Christian (7), voters tend to position themselves more or less in the centre (all: 4.2; socially vulnerable: 4.3), while the parties are regarded as distinct advocates of religious diversity (all: 3.5; socially vulnerable: 3.4).

All in all, there can be no doubt that broad swathes of the population, in particular representatives of the bottom of the social scale, are characterised by policy positions that are markedly hostile to immigration and multiculturalism and have rather a cultural conservative profile. This has given rise to major tensions between their own preferences and what they perceive to be the profiles of the social democratic parties.

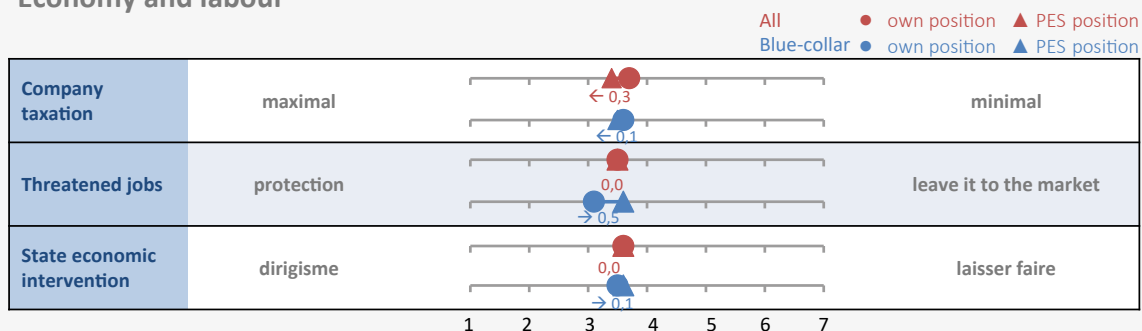
In this area national differences are scarcely discernible, with one significant exception: in Denmark, generally speaking, only minor or no »leftward deviations« are registered as regards the social democratic party in relation to the population as a whole and the socially vulnerable. That means that the profile of Denmark's Socialdemokratiet also tallies with the average »will of the voter« in the cultural domain. This party, however, deviates so strongly from the overall social democratic profile that on some issues it is perceived as closer to the conservative pole. For example, it is considered to be a representative of a national dominant culture (all: 4.5), which locates it well to the »right« of the average values of all its sister parties (3.7).

Deviations between the general population and parties are somewhat lower in Poland, Italy and (to some extent) the Netherlands than in the other countries. In Austria and Germany, by contrast, which in autumn 2015 were the main arenas for the refugee crisis, the profile deviations are somewhat above average. For example, among the socially vulnerable in Germany the discrepancy between their own position and what they perceive to be the SPD position on the issue of promoting or limiting immigration reaches the high watermark of a 2.1 point »shift to the left«. In Austria, indeed, this striking value is registered or even exceeded on four ques-

Policy Gaps – overview: all countries

(average value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Economy and labour



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Policy gaps – overview by country

(average deviation between own position and party positioning value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Economy and labour

		<div> </div> <div> Policy gap (all) Policy gap (blue-c.) </div>									
Company taxation	maximal	0,4→ 1,0→	←0,3 ←0,2	0,0 0,4→	←0,6 ←0,6	←1,0 ←0,5	←0,2 0,3→	←0,5 ←0,4	←0,3 ←0,1	←0,5 ←0,4	minimal
Threatened jobs	protection	0,1→ 0,6→	0,5→ 0,9→	←0,1 0,3→	0,8→ 1,2→	←0,7 ←0,4	0,1→ 0,8→	0,3→ 1,1→	←0,7 ←0,4	←0,3 ←0,3	leave it to the market
State economic intervention	dirigisme	0,1→ 0,4→	0,1→ 0,2→	0,3→ 0,3→	0,1→ 0,1→	←0,2 0,0	0,0 0,0	←0,1 ←0,1	0,0 0,2→	0,1→ 0,0	laissez faire

Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

tions. It should be noted here that, by international comparison, Austrians are particularly sceptical about immigration. Their demands to limit immigration (all: 5.2) are the most vehement of all national populations in the study. Nonetheless, it should be stated, in relation to the SPD and the SPÖ, that once again those social democratic parties register high deviation values that exhibit a tendency to deviate from the public's expectations with regard to social and economic policies.

1.5.4 Social policy

In contrast to the realm of migration, there are much more modest differences between people's own positions and those of social democratic parties on other social-policy issues. For example, when it comes to non-discriminatory language (such as gender mainstreaming) and gender equality, on average for all countries, there are no or only minor differences. On the contrary, on average, the general public largely shares the (moderate) efforts of centre-left parties for social progress on these issues. Among socially vulnerable respondents, views on equality issues are on average slightly more »liberal« (by 0.2 points) and thus favour even more effort from the relevant parties. (It should be noted that the underprivileged segment is disproportionately female, at 59 per cent.)

There is a significant deviation, however, concerning how to handle societal, in other words, sexual, religious or cultural minorities. Notoriously, this issue divides people between libertarian and authoritarian conceptions of society, which tend










to vie with one another especially during periods of growing populism. In the intensified confrontation over whether to extend minority rights (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 1) or rather to ensure societal »precedence« for supposedly »normal« people (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 7) the population as a whole and the socially vulnerable on average position themselves in the middle (both 4.1). Social democrats, by contrast, are perceived as markedly minority-friendly (3.4). The resulting gap, however, is much smaller than with regard to migration.

Comparison between countries shows above-average deviations in the United Kingdom. In particular, the socially vulnerable position themselves as much less libertarian on minority rights (difference 1.4) and non-discriminatory language (difference 1.0) than the position they attribute to the Labour Party. In some ways, however, the British social democrats have remained true to their traditional profile, which is strongly characterised by »deviations to the left« on social and economic issues, but also in the cultural domain.

By contrast, the French Socialists seem to have a particular problem in the struggle for more gender equality (scale value 1). Among socially vulnerable respondents, indeed, their party position is considered to be 0.8 points »to the right« of the public's preference. In France the call for more progress in this area from segments lower down the social scale (socially

Policy gaps – overview by country (average deviation between own position and party positioning value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Immigration and culture

											
Managing immigration	facilitate	←1,7 ←2,1	←1,6 ←1,9	←1,4 ←1,5	←1,5 ←1,5	←1,2 ←1,4	←2,0 ←2,5	←1,0 ←1,0	←0,1 ←0,4	←1,5 ←1,7	limit
Culture	diversity	←1,5 ←1,9	←1,5 ←1,8	←1,4 ←1,5	←1,3 ←1,4	←1,8 ←1,9	←2,0 ←2,3	←1,1 ←1,1	←0,2 ←0,5	←1,5 ←1,8	dominant culture
Muslims in society	fit in well	←1,5 ←1,8	←1,1 ←1,2	←1,1 ←1,4	←0,8 ←0,7	←1,3 ←1,7	←1,9 ←2,3	←1,5 ←1,7	←0,4 ←0,5	←1,0 ←1,2	do not fit in well
Effect of immigration	enrichment	←1,2 ←1,6	←1,1 ←1,3	←0,9 ←1,4	←0,9 ←0,9	←1,0 ←1,3	←1,5 ←2,0	←1,0 ←1,1	0,1 0,0	←0,9 ←1,1	inundation
Religious identity in Germany	multi-religious	←1,0 ←1,1	←0,9 ←1,1	←0,6 ←0,6	←0,7 ←0,7	←0,9 ←1,1	←1,3 ←1,7	←0,7 ←0,7	0,2 0,1	←1,0 ←1,0	Christian
Religion and state	private matter	0,9 1,1	0,9 1,0	0,7 0,9	0,5 0,6	1,3 1,2	0,8 1,1	0,2 0,5	1,0 1,1	0,7 1,0	should be promoted by the state

Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

vulnerable: 2.4) is thus apparently to some extent falling on deaf ears at party level (socially vulnerable: 3.2).

1.5.5 EU, globalisation, social change

There are more than migration issues on the cultural axis of conflict between opening up and isolation of the nation-state, along which the competition between right-wing populists and their (also social democratic) opponents is so often played out. European unification and economic globalisation are also at issue. In fact, these two aspects are of considerable interest. Above all in relation to the European unification project there are, averaging across countries, substantial deviations between party positions and the general public's preferences. This applies especially to the division of competences between the EU level (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 1) and the national level (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 7). On this issue voters overall (4.7), but in particular the socially vulnerable (5.0) tend to want to curb the surrender of sovereignty. Even though the parties are perceived less as clearly pro-European than as standing somewhere in the middle (3.8) differences do arise, of 0.9 and 1.2 percentage points.

Deviations with regard to a »transfer union« between the poorer and richer EU countries manifest themselves similarly. Although the general public again positions itself in the middle (4.2) the parties are positioned 0.7 points more in favour of such a transfer union (3.5).

On other international issues, on average, own positions and perceived party positions are much closer together. This applies to both the future of the nation-state and the effects of globalisation on the labour market, as well as for the dynamics of social change: the parties' »deviations to the left« here are a low 0.1 and 0.3. This apparent concord may merely conceal indecisiveness, however. When it comes to abstract questions of this kind experience shows that many respondents find it hard to identify a clear position, both for themselves and the parties.

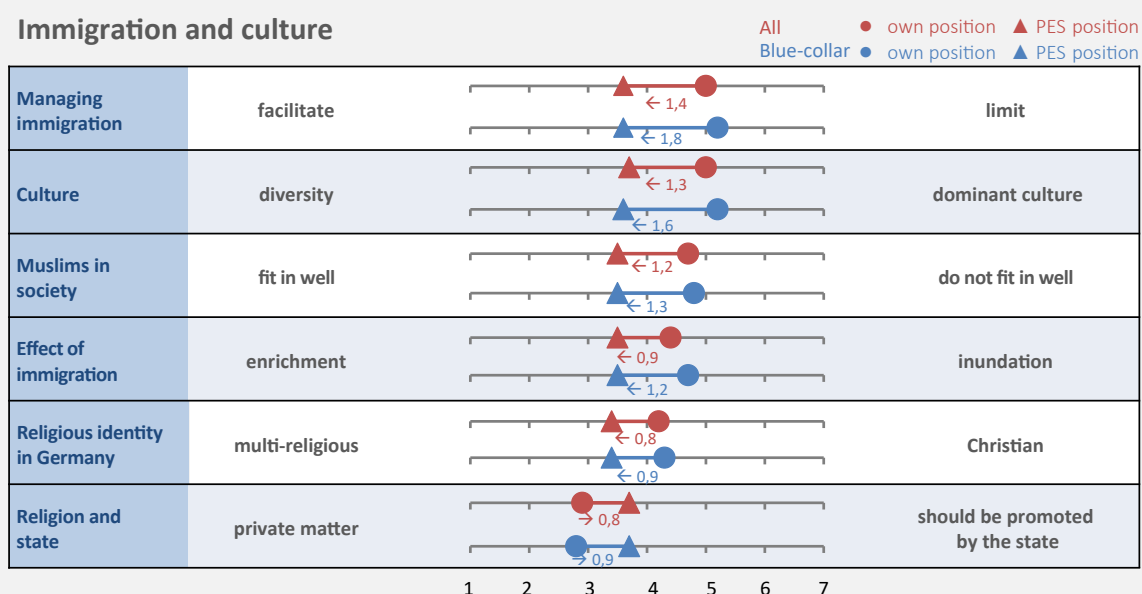
Substantive deviations do arise, by contrast, in the segment of socially vulnerable: on one hand, they position themselves as much more sceptical than the parties with regard to the labour market effects of globalisation (difference 0.7), while on the other, they claim to perceive too strong a tendency among centre-left parties to encourage social change (difference 0.4). Both findings appear plausible against the background of precarious lifeworlds and forms of employment that are at risk in the socially vulnerable segment.

A complex picture emerges if one looks at the various issues at country level. The situation of social democracy in Poland and, again, in Denmark appears least problematic: deviations in those countries are below average in all instances. (In Poland as a net EU beneficiary, furthermore, as in Italy, the social democrats' commitment to the transfer union is regarded as at best lukewarm, while elsewhere such commitment is rated as excessive.)

Policy gaps – overview

all countries (average value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Immigration and culture

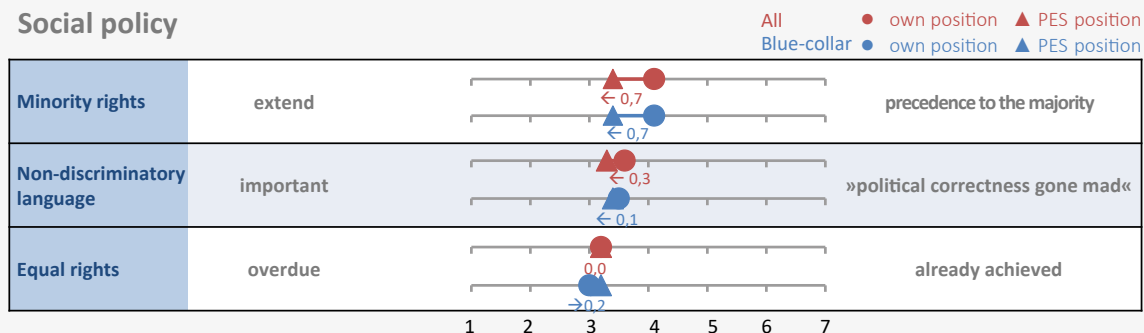


Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Policy gaps – overview

all countries (average value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Social policy



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Policy gaps – overview by country

(average deviation between own position and party positioning value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Social policy

											Policy gap (all) Policy gap (blue-c.)	
Minority rights	extend	←0,7 ←0,6	←0,6 ←0,7	←0,9 ←0,7	←0,5 ←0,3	←0,8 ←0,9	←1,0 ←1,3	←0,7 ←0,2	←0,4 ←0,4	←1,1 ←1,4		precedence to the majority
Non-discriminatory language	important	←0,4 ←0,6	0,1→ 0,4→	←0,5 ←0,1	0,0 0,4→	←0,4 ←0,4	←0,6 ←0,8	0,3→ 0,8→	←0,4 ←0,4	←0,6 ←1,0		»political correctness gone mad«
Equal rights	overdue	0,0 0,3→	0,4→ 0,8→	←0,1 0,3→	0,2→ 0,4→	←0,2 ←0,1	0,0 0,3→	←0,3 0,0	←0,6 ←0,4	←0,2 ←0,2		already achieved

Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

By contrast, a profile comparison of the SPÖ and the SPD once again turns out to be the most strained. Besides high deviation values on EU issues, these parties are seen as much keener than parties elsewhere to see the supersession of the nation-state (socially vulnerable: difference 1.2 and 0.8). In addition, socially vulnerable respondents – as in France and Italy – regard the employment effects of globalisation more sceptically than the perceived positions of the two German-speaking parties (socially vulnerable: difference 1.2 and 1.1). Accordingly, the gap between the optimistic desire to open up to the world and antithetical concerns and reservations is particularly large among Germans and Austrians.

The British Labour Party registers the biggest deviation in relation to its approach to social change. The view of the population overall, but also of the socially vulnerable, is that the Labour Party would like to press ahead with it more than is currently supported by the general public. Given the democratic socialist line taken by Jeremy Corbyn, however, the question arises of what kind of change the respondents have in mind here. It may well be that they mean the radical, openly transformative demands for reform currently being touted by British social democrats.

1.5.6 Problem areas: state of democracy, crime

To conclude our analysis of the policy gap we shall try to shed some light on two topically unrelated areas, democracy and fighting crime, in juxtaposition. The reason for this is that the

respondents' answers in these two areas indicate massive deviations that have the potential to undermine people's trust in the political system.

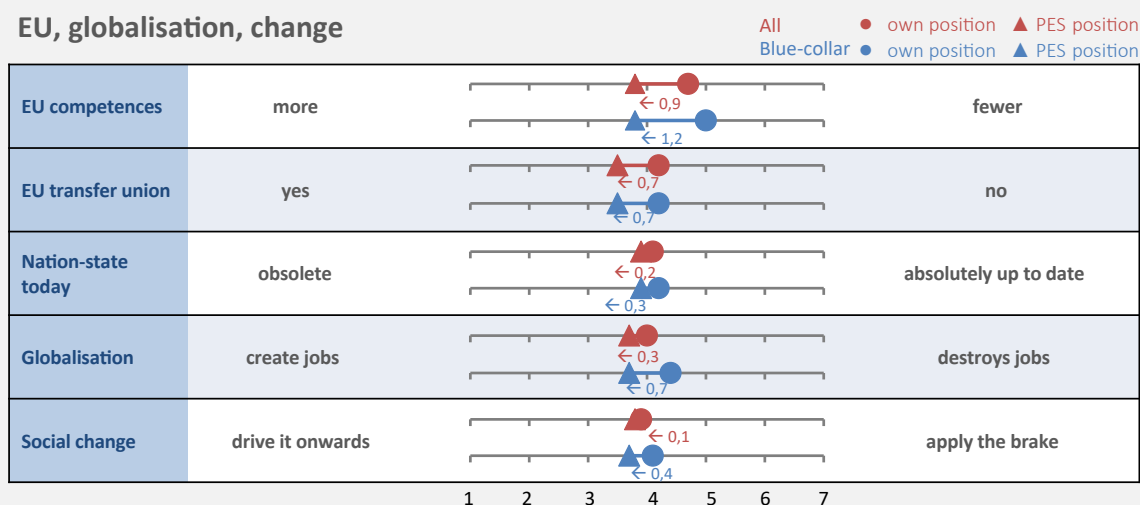
On one hand, on average in all countries the socially vulnerable respondents in particular find fault with their lack of opportunities to exercise their democratic rights, while at the same time accusing the centre-left parties of doing too little to support them (all: difference 0.8; socially vulnerable: difference 1.2). Accordingly, respondents' personal judgement on the state of democracy is much more critical than the one attributed to social democratic parties: they score 0.5 and 1.0 points (socially vulnerable) less satisfied with the current functioning of the political system.

On the other hand, major differences manifest themselves as regards crime trends. Both all (5.0) and socially vulnerable respondents (5.3) take the view that violence and crime are a major social problem at present (full agreement with this statement corresponds to scale value 7). The respondents do not believe that the political parties share this worry, ascribing them middle values of 4.1, resulting in deviations of 0.9 (all) and 1.2 points (socially vulnerable). Having said that, the voters clearly advocate protection through the state monopoly of violence rather than, for example, entrusting the task to individuals. Again there are deviations in relation to the parties, although somewhat smaller in this instance (all: difference 0.4; socially vulnerable: difference 0.6).

Policy gaps – overview

all countries (average value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

EU, globalisation, change



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Policy gaps – overview by country (average deviation between own position and party positioning value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

EU, globalisation, change

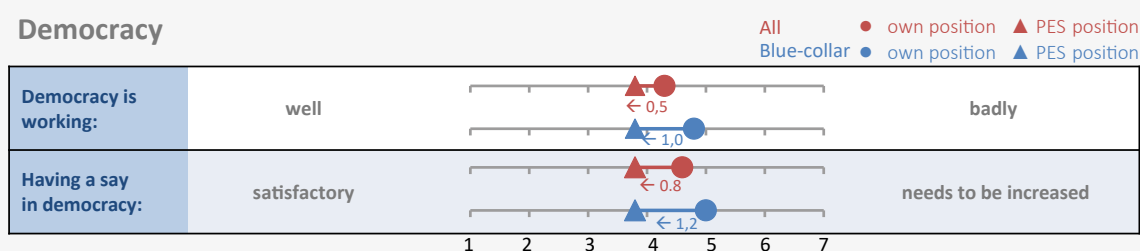
											Policy gap (all) Policy gap (blue-c.)
EU competences	more	←1,0 ←1,5	←0,9 ←1,3	←0,8 ←1,3	←0,9 ←1,0	←1,1 ←1,3	←1,2 ←1,8	←0,8 ←0,6	←0,5 ←0,9	←1,1 ←1,3	fewer
EU transfer union	yes	←1,0 ←1,3	←0,8 ←0,9	←0,8 ←0,8	0,1→ 0,3→	←1,1 ←1,0	←1,1 ←1,3	0,0 0,2→	←0,7 ←0,7	←0,9 ←1,2	no
Nation-state today	obsolete	←0,5 ←0,8	0,2→ 0,2→	←0,2 ←0,3	←0,2 ←0,1	0,2→ ←0,1	←0,5 ←1,2	←0,3 ←0,3	0,1→ 0,0	←0,3 ←0,3	absolutely up to date
Globalisation	create jobs	←0,4 ←1,1	←0,6 ←1,1	←0,2 ←0,5	←0,9 ←1,0	←0,2 ←0,6	←0,4 ←1,2	←0,1 0,0	0,2→ ←0,4	0,2→ ←0,1	destroys jobs
Social change	drive it onwards	←0,1 ←0,5	0,0 ←0,3	←0,5 ←0,8	0,0 0,1→	0,8→ 0,7→	←0,2 ←0,4	←0,1 ←0,3	0,2→ ←0,2	←0,8 ←1,0	apply the brake

Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

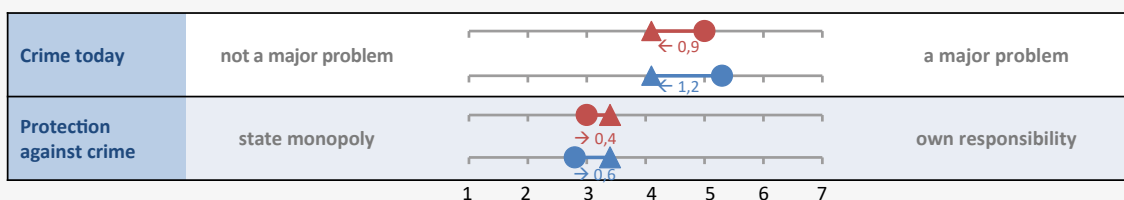
Policy gaps – overview

all countries (average value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Democracy



Crime



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

The interaction of these aspects – democratic deficit and weak response to crime – is worrying because it could give rise to the toxic general impression among the public that politicians do not listen to them enough or properly protect them.

This potential threat varies from country to country, however. When it comes to democracy the values are still more or less acceptable in, especially, the United Kingdom, Denmark and, to some extent, also Poland (the modest deviation can probably be explained by the SLD's rejection of the PiS government's authoritarian attempts to remodel the state). The broad »centre ground«, once more, comprises France, the Netherlands and Italy, as well as, with what is already a high level of deviation of as much as 1.5 points (the socially vulnerable), Sweden and Austria. Well and truly bringing up the rear, however, is again Germany's SPD, which scores, among underprivileged respondents, a deviation of 2.3 points as regards people's opportunities to have their voices heard. In short, in what is already a dismal European outlook, Germany's Social Democrats are regarded as the political force that is least in tune with the electorate's participation needs.

This is all the more grave because by European comparison the SPD is regarded as by far the most complacent on crime. On average, all respondents are more (1.2 points) worried about crime (socially vulnerable 1.8 points) than, they believe, the party of former minister of the interior Otto Schily is. While the values registered in France, Italy, Sweden, Austria

and, to some extent, the United Kingdom just fall short of this level, the popular judgement in the Netherlands (socially vulnerable: difference 0.8) and Poland (socially vulnerable: difference 0.7) is a bit more lenient. By contrast, the Danish social democrats score very small deviations once again (all: difference 1.0; socially vulnerable: difference 0.3).

1.5.7 Preliminary summary of the policy gap analysis

Three central problem areas for European social democracy catch the eye, even more so for the socially vulnerable segment.

- First, public opinion on average holds that, in the social domain, social democrats are betraying their traditions in relation to affordable housing and equal opportunities, two key policy needs and tasks of the state. Besides this poor »internal« performance, another critical issue is that, at the same time, there are reservations about opening up the national welfare state to non-citizens, which runs counter to social democrats' belief in an inclusive welfare state.
- Second, broad swathes of the population are at odds with an open migration and asylum policy, as well as with the goal of a multicultural society. Even though the social democratic parties are not regarded as resolute advocates of opening up, there is nevertheless a substantial policy distance between the centre-left and the general public. (In order to close this gap

Policy gaps – overview by country (average deviation between own position and party positioning value, scale of 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Democracy

											Policy gap (all) Policy gap (blue-c.)
Democracy is working:	well	←1,0 ←1,8	←0,7 ←1,2	←0,5 ←1,2	←0,7 ←0,9	←0,9 ←1,6	←0,5 ←1,3	0,1→ ←0,2	←0,2 ←0,6	0,1→ ←0,3	badly
Having a say in democracy:	satisfactory	←1,4 ←2,3	←0,7 ←0,9	←0,6 ←1,2	←1,0 ←1,2	←0,9 ←1,5	←1,3 ←1,8	←0,9 ←1,1	←0,4 ←0,9	←0,2 ←0,6	needs to be increased

Crime

Crime today	not a major problem	←1,2 ←1,8	←1,1 ←1,4	←0,6 ←0,8	←1,2 ←1,2	←1,1 ←1,4	←1,2 ←1,7	←0,4 ←0,7	←0,1 ←0,3	←0,8 ←1,1	a major problem
Protection against crime	state monopoly	0,5→ 0,8→	0,7→ 0,9→	0,3→ 0,5→	0,1→ 0,4→	←0,2 ←0,2	0,6→ 0,9→	0,6→ 0,8→	0,2→ 0,3→	0,4→ 0,4→	own responsibility

Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

appreciably on the »demand side«, however, social democrats would have to edge towards the conservative part of the spectrum, which would entail a serious ideological rupture.) There is also a cultural gap in relation to European integration, although it is less pronounced. The general public is keener than the social democratic parties on maintaining national sovereignty.

- Thirdly, there is widespread discontent about democracy and the crime situation, which, according to the general view, the parties do not sufficiently heed. This could lead to deep uncertainty, even distrust in relation to social democratic parties.

The situations of the individual national parties must be differentiated, however. While above all in Denmark deviations tend to be at a relatively low level, in the case of the British Labour Party there is a mixture of minor policy gaps on key issues (housing, equal opportunities, democracy) and a substantial, sometimes excessive »left-wing profile« in other socioeconomic and cultural areas. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Austria and Germany register inordinate policy deviations in a number of central areas. Socioeconomic deficits are combined with strong »deviations to the left« in the cultural realm and pronounced policy gaps in the problematic areas of democracy and crime. Socially vulnerable voters in particular are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the Social Democrats.

The other national parties are spread out along the continuum between the two »extremes« in a kind of unexceptional centre ground.

1.6 RIGHT ON THE BALL OR HEADS IN THE CLOUDS? HOW DO EUROPEAN CENTRE-LEFT PARTIES RATE AND WHAT ARE THEIR PRIORITIES?

Finally, the unspoken question is how tangible and graspable the policy profiles of centre-left parties are to the voters. Because even this recognisability decides how quickly people can call to mind the social democratic brand offering and consider it as a real alternative in the competition between parties.

To this end the participants in the study were asked to indicate how easily they found it overall to evaluate the goals of their national social democratic party. Out of European respondents as a whole 38 per cent said »very easily« or »fairly easily«, while 62 per cent rated this task as »fairly difficult« or »very difficult«. Among socially vulnerable respondents these values were similar, at 33 and 68 per cent.

Thus around two-thirds above all of the underprivileged population segments experience moderate or even substantial difficulty in evaluating social democratic policies. Here again, however, parties at national level cannot be lumped together and there is a pronounced gap in Europe. At the upper end of the spectrum 52 per cent of socially vulnerable re-

spondents in the United Kingdom stated that they found it very or fairly easy to evaluate the policy objectives of the Labour Party. The main British opposition party thus enjoys by far the most tangible profile of all parties in the countries under examination. A long way behind in second place comes Poland, with 34 per cent, then Denmark, Sweden and Austria, all on 33 per cent and Italy on 32 per cent. Some way behind this comes the Netherlands on 28 per cent, while in Germany only 27 per cent find it easy to evaluate the SPD and a massive 64 per cent find it difficult.¹⁵ Bringing up the rear once again is the Parti Socialiste, which performed poorly in the last election: only 24 per cent of French respondents were able to categorise its policies without some effort.

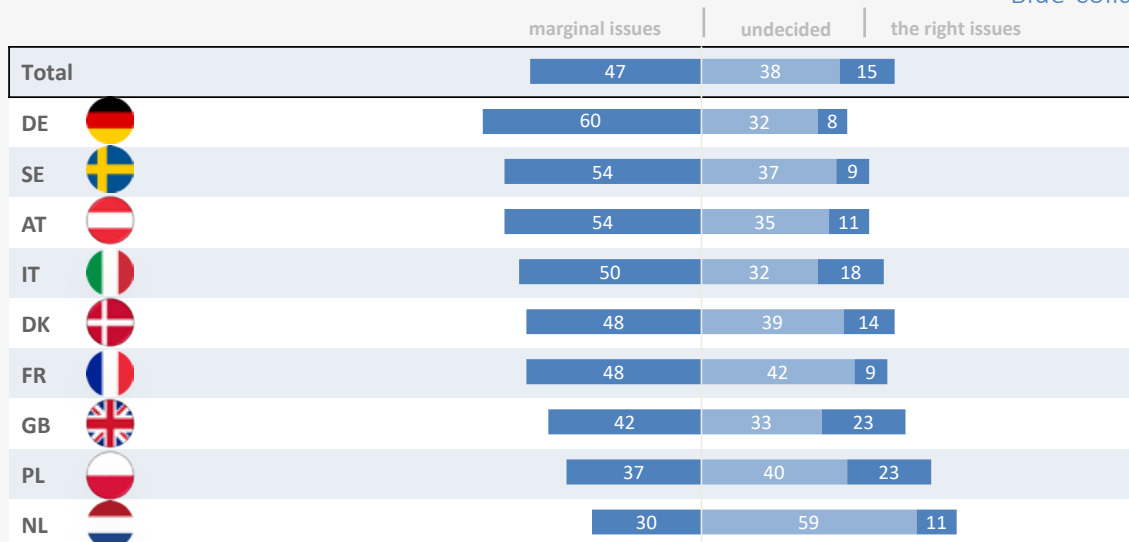
Turning to the question of whether social democratic forces, generally speaking, set the right priorities in their policymaking efforts, 45 per cent of all respondents stated that their national centre-left party currently tends to focus on marginal issues. Only 17 per cent take the view that these parties are focusing on what really matters today, while 38 per cent are undecided. The pattern is broadly similar among socially vulnerable respondents, with 47 per cent pointing to a focus on marginal issues and only 15 per cent a focus on the right issues.

Underneath this generally negative judgement, however, there are once again isolated national glimmers of hope and particular causes for concern. For example, among socially vulnerable respondents Germany's SPD scores highest for its focus on »marginal issues«, with 60 per cent, and indeed it fared poorly in the value and policy analysis. What is more, a paltry 8 per cent of underprivileged Germans believe that the SPD is working on the right issues today. Following close behind are the – again with a weak policy profile – Austrian SPÖ and the Swedish SAP, with a 54 per cent negative rating. Values then improve gradually from Italy (50 per cent) through Denmark, which this time only falls in the middle, and France (both 48 per cent) to the United Kingdom (42 per cent) and Poland (37 per cent). Top performer in this category, however, is the Dutch PvdA, which receives only a 30 per cent »marginal issues« rating, although in this instance the neutral ratings are high. In all likelihood, the at first glance positive result can be attributed to a fairly vague perception of this now substantially diminished former catch-all or »big tent« party. All the more so because a mere 11 per cent declare that the Dutch social democrats are focusing on the »right issues«. By comparison, the British Labour Party and the Polish SLD achieve the highest values on this point, both with 23 per cent.

¹⁵ On this subject see ARD's coverage of the 2017 Bundestag elections, in relation to which 80 per cent of respondents agreed that the SPD did not state clearly enough »what it wanted to do for social justice«.

Social democratic policies: right versus wrong priorities? (in %)

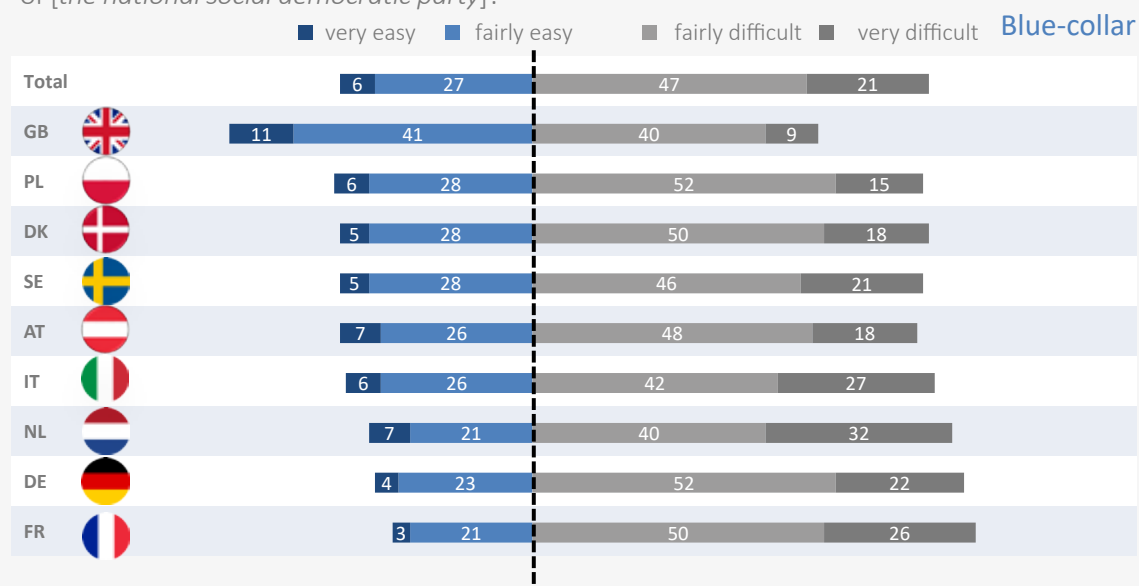
Do you think that the national social democratic party is currently concerned with **Blue-collar**



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Evaluation of social democratic objectives (in %)

Do you, generally speaking, find it rather easy or rather difficult to evaluate the objectives of [the national social democratic party]?



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

2

FINDINGS FOR GERMANY – TAKING INTO ACCOUNT CURRENT AND FORMER SPD VOTERS

Repeatedly, almost invariably the SPD's comparative political profile is located at the lower or negative end of the European rankings among centre-left parties, even though historically it is undoubtedly one of Europe's most successful social democratic parties. For this reason we shall now focus on this party, presenting the core results of the study for Germany once again.

2.1 IN A VALUE TRAP? THE SPD'S NORMS AND PRINCIPLES

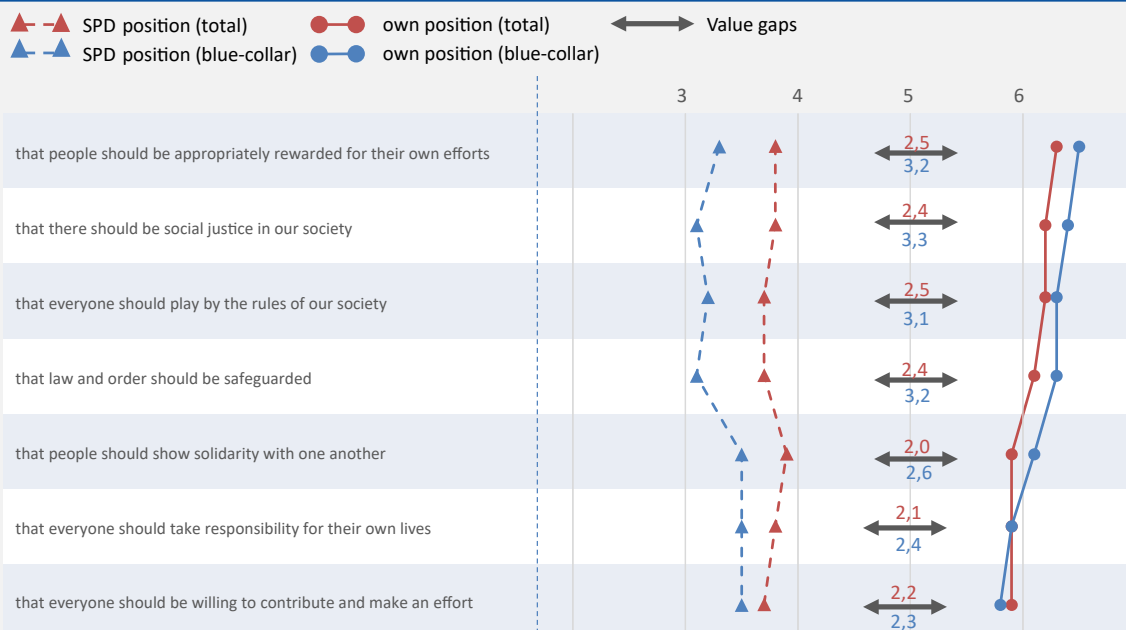
It was already clear from the international comparison of the various parties' values and principles that respondents found German social democrats wanting, to say the least. For ex-

ample, the SPD managed even an average scale value of 4.0 points on only two out of the 14 values and principles (on a scale ranging from 1.0 »no commitment at all« to 7.0 »very strong commitment«). Only a score above this threshold indicates that respondents view a party as at least fairly actively committed. Moreover, the two principles in question are generally part of the libertarian ideological canon. The liberal values of openness to the world and tolerance (4.4) and freedom of action and speech (4.0) dominate the value profile of the former workers' party, above any social or social conservative principles, which indeed are located in the lower part of the scale range.

The SPD's most striking normative shortcomings arise from its combination of, on one hand, principles oriented towards

Values and principles: personal importance / SPD commitment

(corresponds to average value; scale from 1 [not important at all/not committed at all] to 7 [extremely important/very strongly committed])



Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

achieving social equality and, on the other hand, those insisting on the social obligations of all citizens, compared with respondents' personal value profiles. The biggest difference, averaging 2.5 scale points, concerns the principle of performance-related remuneration and playing by society's rules. By comparison, on European average the corresponding deficits amount to 1.9 points. The gap is all the more significant because both the principles in question are high in people's personal value hierarchies (6.3 and 6.2). Following closely behind the »frontrunner« come comparable deficits of 2.4 points in relation to ensuring law and order, but above all in relation to the key brand core of social justice. This would appear to be a crucial problem for a social democratic party. Ranked in fifth place, with 2.2 deficit points, is social support for hard work and commitment.

The SPD's situation with regard to its values and principles is a lot worse among socially vulnerable voters in Germany. For example, the principle of social justice registers the biggest average deficit out of all 14 principles asked about, with a very high 3.3 scale points. Close behind, also with a massive 3.2 deficit points, comes performance-related pay and the commitment to law and order. The upshot is that among the socially vulnerable the brand core of social democracy as guarantor of social and personal security has been severely corroded. The respondents even regard the SPD's efforts to ensure that people play by society's rules and foster equal living conditions (!) as falling short (both 3.1 deficit points).

Most other principles are rated as severely in deficit (see Figure 32).

2.2 WHAT DOES THE BRAND STAND FOR? THE SPD'S POLICY PROFILE

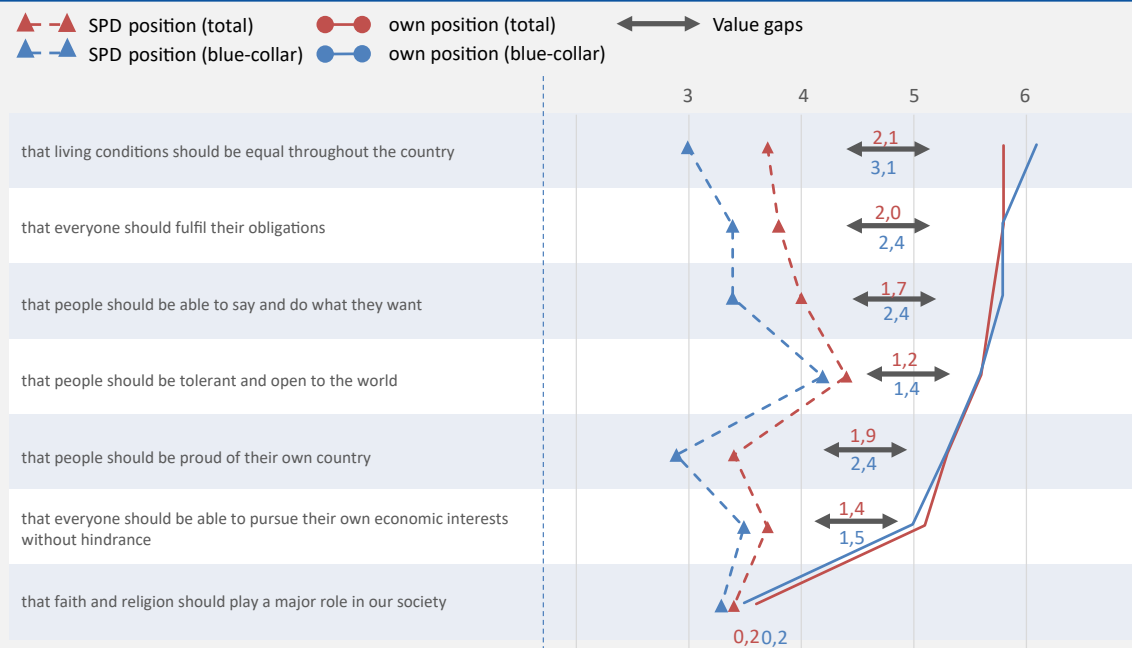
2.2.1 The electorate as a whole

A first, unequivocal finding for voters overall is that, on the »cultural conflict« axis, the SPD has shifted tangibly in a left-libertarian direction. This is where the party's policies are currently perceived as most coherent.

For example, the party of Willy Brandt deviates from the general public's average preferences in particular in the domain of immigration and culture: for example, on the question of making immigration easier (difference 1.7) or affirming cultural diversity (difference 1.5). Furthermore, the party is clearly more EU- and globalisation-friendly than the German population average: for example, this applies to the issues of additional EU competences (difference 1.0), the establishment of permanent intra-European financial transfer payments (difference 1.0) or, to a lesser extent, to superseding the nation-state in general (difference 0.5). There are modest deviations concerning protection of minorities and equal rights, for example, when it comes to strengthening minority rights (difference 0.7) and promoting non-discriminatory language (difference 0.4).

Values and principles: personal importance / SPD commitment

(corresponds to average value; scale from 1 [not important at all/not committed at all] to 7 [extremely important/very strongly committed])



Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

Policy gaps (all respondents): analysis

(corresponds to the difference from the respective average value;
scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Unambiguously: the SPD's position in relation to that of the general public is left-libertarian on the issue of:

Immigration and culture	Diff.	EU and globalisation	Diff.	Minority protection and equal rights	Diff.
Immigration: facilitation vs limitation	← 1,7	EU: more or fewer competences	← 1,0	Minorities: more rights vs priority for the majority	← 0,7
Muslims in society: fit in well vs don't fit in well	← 1,5	EU transfer union: yes or no	← 1,0	Non-discriminatory language: important vs paternalism	← 0,4
Cultural diversity vs dominant culture	← 1,5	Nation-state today: obsolete or up-to-date	← 0,5		
Immigration: enrichment vs inundation	← 1,2				
Germany: multi-religious vs Christian	← 1,0				

Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

To summarise, in the cultural domain, German social democrats are identified as unequivocally progressive, deviating tangibly from the average population preferences and thus performing a clearly delineated subrole in the party system.

By contrast, the SPD's profile in the socioeconomic domain presents, at best, an ambivalent picture. As the total population sees it, at present the party is neglecting two central functions of the state in particular: the provision of affordable housing (difference 1.2) and ensuring equal opportunities through education (difference 0.9). Apart from that, the party's social policy is regarded, to some extent, as much too universalistic. Thus there is a deviation of 1.0 scale points in favour of inclusive national social benefits, which explicitly also include non-citizens. Similarly, the general public are calling for stronger performance-related unemployment benefits than the SPD appears to be ensuring at present (difference 0.9). Therefore, the SPD's view of who should be able to access the welfare state and to what extent differs considerably from that of the general public. This raises key questions of intrasocial justice between party and populace.

In the realm of state intervention in the economy, however, the SPD's positions largely tally with average population preferences. In this area the mainly centrist average positions of both party and population are generally fairly close to one another.

Two central grievances on the part of the population have already become apparent by European comparison: the state

of democracy and internal security. On one hand, the SPD is charged with failing to properly acknowledge what is perceived as Germany's democratic deficit: the SPD maintains that democracy is working well (difference 1.0) and that the general public does not need any more of a say than it already has (difference 1.4). On the other hand, the general public complain that the Social Democrats are insufficiently committed to doing something about what people perceive as a serious crime threat: thus the view attributed to the SPD is that crime does not pose a major problem at present (difference 1.2) and also the state monopoly of violence for dealing with crime is not sufficiently affirmed (difference 0.5).

It is precisely in this combination of the two deficits that the SPD tends to appear as if it neither listens to nor heeds the opinions, voices or concerns of the general public.

2.2.2 Socially deprived respondents

The key findings with regard to the policy profile of Germany's Social Democrats are broadly similar among the respondents who categorise themselves as socially underprivileged. There are a number of peculiarities, however, and overall problems have intensified.

Underprivileged respondents express a more negative judgement than the total population concerning the SPD's markedly left-libertarian policies on cultural and international matters. For example, the SPD is regarded as far too immigration-friendly, with a 2.1 point gap. Similarly, scepticism has increased with regard to the Social Democrats' rather

Policy gaps (all respondents): analysis

(corresponds to the difference from the respective average value;
scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Ambivalent profile, by contrast, with regard to socioeconomic issues:

1. SPD too equivocal on key state functions	Diff.	2. Far-reaching congruity as regards state intervention in the economy	Diff.	But 3. SPD too universalistic with regard to ...	Diff.
Housing: state task vs leave it to the market	1,2 →	Company taxation: maximum vs minimum	0,4 →	National social benefits: inclusive vs exclusive	← 1,0
Education: equal opportunities vs encourage the most talented	0,9 →	Jobs at risk: protect or leave it to the market to decide	0,1 →	Unemployment benefits: uniform vs performance-based	← 0,9
		Economy: dirigisme vs laissez faire	0,1 →		

Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

Policy gaps (all respondents): analysis

(corresponds to the difference from the respective average value;
scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

And: criticism of a lack of commitment to central grievances

Democratic deficit	Diff.	Crime	Diff.
Democracy: working well vs not working well	← 1,0	Crime: not a major problem vs a major problem	← 1,2
Exercising voice: already sufficient vs more required	← 1,4	Protection against crime: state monopoly vs own responsibility	0,5 →

Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

EU-friendly positions (more EU competences: difference 1.5). In comparison with the total population the socially vulnerable are also more distrustful of globalisation. On this issue the SPD is alleged to have too much faith in the employment effects of global economic networking (difference 1.1). Equal rights also stand out: in contrast to respondents as a whole, socially vulnerable, especially female, voters regard the SPD's commitment as inadequate (difference 0.3).

There are substantial deviations on socioeconomic issues, too. The alienation between Social Democrats and socially vulnerable voters thus occurs on both the cultural and the traditional material left/right axis of conflict. For example, the respondents in question, first, criticise the SPD for particularly substantial deficits with regard to the two state functions of housing (difference 1.7) and equal opportunities (difference 1.1). Furthermore, and in contrast to the population overall, there is a substantially stronger commitment to progressive burden sharing in society (difference 0.9) to make state action more feasible in the first place.

Second, the socially vulnerable are even more sceptical about opening up the welfare state to outsiders or non-citizens than respondents as a whole (difference 1.4). Third, representatives of the lower classes, in contrast to respondents as a whole, admonish Social Democrats for their failure to intervene in the economy. For example, they reproach today's Social Democrats with inadequate company taxation (difference 1.0), unsatisfactory commitment to protecting jobs at

risk (difference 0.6) and excessive faith in the market-liberal laissez-faire principle (difference 0.4).

The SPD thus is not living up to the very strong need of the weaker segments of the population for a state that intervenes socioeconomically, redistributes wealth and explicitly protects »its own people«.

The socially vulnerable also exhibit a considerable distance from the SPD's policy profile in relation to the party's lack of commitment to their grievances concerning a perceived democratic deficit and crime. On both issues the deviations between the party and the socially vulnerable are much bigger than in relation to respondents as a whole. For example, the party's supposed lack of commitment to giving the public more of a say gives rise to a 2.3 point gap, while its alleged tendency to play down crime deviates by 1.8 points.

Overall, then, we are forced to conclude that there are few points of contact or reference between underprivileged voters and German Social Democrats.

Policy gaps (blue-collar): analysis

(corresponds to the difference from the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

To an even greater extent than among the general population, the SPD's position is considered left-libertarian on the issue of:

Immigration and culture	Diff.	EU and globalisation	Diff.	Minority protection and equal rights	Diff.
Immigration: facilitation vs limitation	← 2,1	EU: more or fewer competences	← 1,5	Minorities: more rights vs priority for the majority	← 0,6
Muslims in society: fit in well vs don't fit in well	← 1,9	EU transfer union: yes or no	← 1,3	Non-discriminatory language: important vs paternalism	← 0,6
Cultural diversity vs dominant culture	← 1,8	Nation-state today: obsolete or up-to-date	← 1,1	But: equal rights: not yet achieved or already achieved	0,3→
Immigration: enrichment vs inundation	← 1,6				
Germany: multi-religious vs Christian	← 1,1				

Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

Policy gaps (blue-collar): analysis

(corresponds to the difference from the respective average value;
scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Similarly, the findings indicate even more of a deficit with regard to socioeconomic issues:

1. SPD much too equivocal on key state functions	Diff.	And also: state intervention in the economy desired	Diff.	But 2. SPD too universalistic with regard to ...	Diff.
Housing: state task vs leave it to the market	1,7 →	Company taxation: maximum vs minimum	1,0 → !	National social benefits: inclusive vs exclusive	← 1,4
Education: equal opportunities vs encourage the most talented	1,1 →	Jobs at risk: protect or leave it to the market to decide	0,6 → !	Unemployment benefits: uniform vs performance-based	← 0,6
Burden-sharing: progressive vs uniform	0,9 →	Economy: dirigisme vs laissez faire	0,4 → !		

Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

Policy gaps (blue-collar): analysis

(corresponds to the difference from the respective average value;
scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

And: there is much more criticism of a lack of commitment to tackling central grievances

Democratic deficit	Diff.	Crime	Diff.
Democracy: working well vs not working well	← 1,8	Crime: not a major problem vs a major problem	← 1,8
Exercising voice: already sufficient vs more required	← 2,3	Protection against crime: state monopoly vs own responsibility	0,8 →

Population: people entitled to vote in Germany.

2.3 CORE MELTDOWN: COMPARISON OF LOYAL SPD VOTERS AND LOST CORE CONSTITUENTS IN TERMS OF THE POLICY GAP

Despite the significance of the policy weaknesses identified in this study it could of course be argued that Germany's Social Democrats do not really have to bother about any comparison with the preferences of an abstract population average or of an underprivileged group defined for research purposes, as long as they achieve a high policy acceptance and approval within their own electorate.

In this light, we need to take a close look at the SPD's actual electorate, carrying out a policy-gap analysis of, first, current SPD voters (»if there was an election this Sunday who would you vote for?«) and second, of people who claim to have voted SPD in the past »frequently«, but who could not imagine voting for them as things stand (lost SPD core voter). In this way a voter spectrum can be outlined, ranging from the (residual) core of the Social Democratic electorate in 2018 to the once reliable voters who have turned away from the party in recent years. On this basis it might be possible to get some idea of where particular policies might prove attractive, how widespread perceptions of shortcomings are among the party's supporters and in what areas disenchanted voters are particularly disappointed in the SPD.

In the present survey, by the way, around 11 per cent of people stated that they currently intend to vote SPD, while lost core voters make up around 9 per cent of all voters.

As regards the social profile of the two groups it turns out that the remaining SPD voters tend to ascribe themselves above-average social status: 60 per cent of them claim to belong to the upper middle class or upper class, in contrast to 47 per cent of all respondents. Things are rather different among lost core voters, a majority of 52 per cent of whom position themselves rather in the lower half of society. Over time, therefore, the social democratic electorate appears to have increasingly narrowed to more upscale population segments.

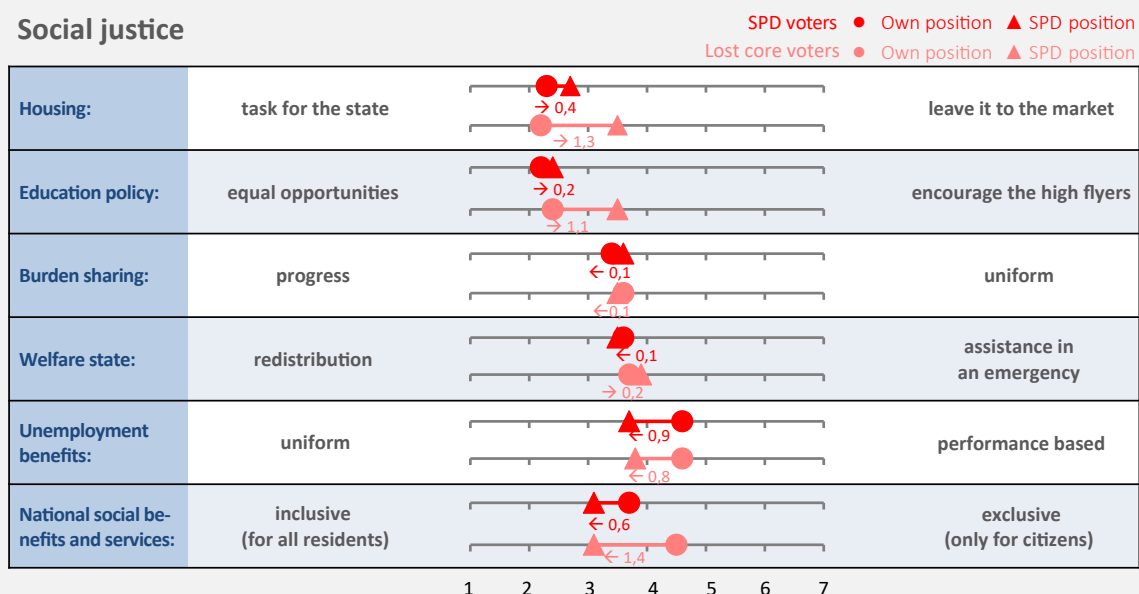
2.3.1 Social justice

When it comes to the Social Democrats' core brand the group of current SPD voters can be given the all-clear, at least to some extent. Above all in the two most pressing problem areas of housing and equality of opportunity the current party electorate does not perceive much deviation between itself and the party (difference 0.4 and 0.2). What is striking here is that respondents attribute to the party a discernibly solution-oriented position (2.7 and 2.4). Deviations arise again only in relation to the welfare state system: even SPD voters take the view that the party's position on unemployment benefits is insufficiently performance-oriented (difference 0.9). and that on welfare state access for non-citizens is too inclusive (difference 0.6). When it comes to social burden

Policy gaps – overview: analysis

(corresponds to the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Social justice



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

sharing and redistribution there are currently no differences at all between the average preferences of party and electorate, with both positioned slightly left of centre.

In the case of lost core voters, by contrast, the picture is much more negative. In addition to their shared criticisms of the inadequate performance/merit orientation of unemployment insurance (difference 0.8) they position themselves much more strongly in favour of an exclusive welfare state mainly for nationals: there is a deviation of 1.4. Furthermore, former SPD voters are strongly critical of the party's housing and education policies – they are simply not convinced that the party is really committed to socially oriented state action in these areas (difference 1.3 and 1.1). A heightened social-policy discontent thus plagues the Social Democratic Party.

2.3.2 The economy and labour

As in the case of the overall population the area of the economy and labour can be categorised as fairly uncontroversial for SPD voters, too. There is extensive or even complete agreement on the issues of corporate taxation (difference 0.2) and state intervention in the economy (0.0). Furthermore, neither the party nor the electorate are inclined in a more radical direction; they are relatively centrist. When it comes to protecting jobs, indeed, there is a moderate »shift to the left« by the party in relation to its voters: on this issue it is perceived as more active or interventionist than the respondents are inclined to be (difference 0.5).

The outlook is a little less sunny among former SPD voters, but still comparatively serene. Only moderate »shifts to the right« emerge from personal and party positioning in the direction of lower corporate taxation (difference 0.6), looser state economic intervention (difference 0.4) and less protection of threatened jobs (difference 0.3). Even though this voter segment might prefer a more active Social Democratic economic policy there is little evidence of any real reason for substantial frustration and disappointment.

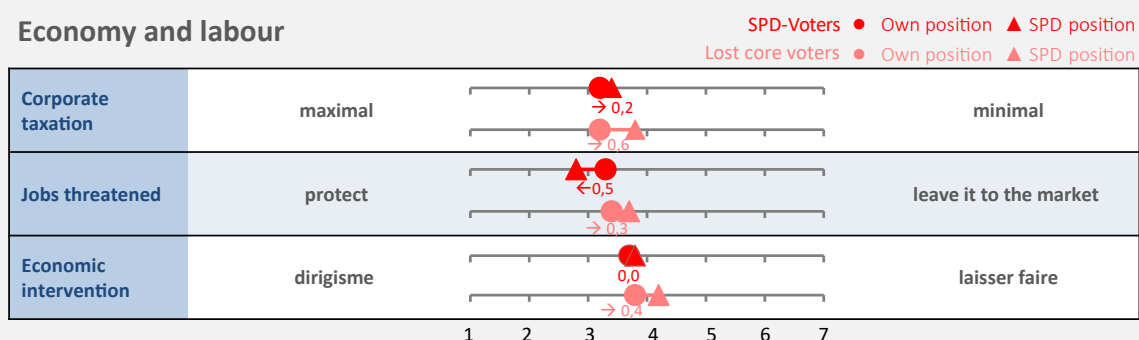
2.3.3 Immigration and culture

On the politically controversial and interrelated issues of migration, asylum seeking and cultural openness the relationship between SPD policy and respondents' personal positions is somewhat contradictory. On one hand, there is less distance between the SPD electorate and the population as a whole, while on the other hand, the party's current support base is slightly, sometimes even substantially less enthusiastic than the party is perceived as being. For example, SPD voters tend to favour limitations on immigration (total agreement with this statement corresponds to a scale value of 7), with an average scale value of 4.8, while the SPD itself (on this issue strongly centrist) is more immigration-friendly, with an average value of 3.6 (total agreement with this statement corresponds to a scale value of 1). This yields a policy gap of 1.2 points. Similar, but smaller deviations also arise on the issues of cultural diversity (difference 0.6), Muslims' ability to integrate (difference 0.7), the enriching effects of immigra-

Policy gaps – overview: analysis

(corresponds to the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Economy and labour



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

tion (difference 0.8) and Germany's multi-religious identity (difference 0.5)

It is thus not accurate to say that the average profile of current SPD voters is unambiguously open to the world and libertarian; on average, the tendency is towards centrist positions. (Naturally, this also masks divisions within the SPD electorate. For example, 47 per cent of this party electorate tends to regard immigration as an enrichment, while 41 per cent tend to the view that the country is being overrun, with 13 per cent undecided.)

By contrast, this finding is much clearer in relation to lost core voters. They locate themselves in no uncertain terms at the sceptical-conservative end of the spectrum, giving rise to large gaps in relation to the perceived SPD position. The biggest divide concerns the promotion or limitation of immigration (difference 2.1), but also whether immigration enriches or overwhelms (difference 2.0). Similarly, reservations about the SPD positions on cultural diversity (difference 1.8) and Muslims (difference 1.7) should be noted.

It is thus becoming clear that a large proportion of the former SPD electorate positions itself clearly at odds with further opening up of society in favour of immigration and multiculturalism. The gap between the party and the population arises proportionately less from the moderately libertarian/individualist SPD position and more from the extremely restricted policy positions of the respondents. Especially against the

background of growing right-wing populism it is interesting that the SPD, in contrast to former years, is no longer able to command the allegiance of such culturally conservative voters, for example, by means of attractive policies in other areas.

2.3.4 Social policy

The other areas of social policy offer fewer reference points for estrangement between party and (former) SPD voters. A modest policy distance with regard to minority rights ought to be mentioned, however (applying both to current and to lost SPD voters): a comparatively libertarian profile is attributed to the party, while respondents locate themselves in a narrow corridor around an average value of 4 (difference 0.7 and 0.9).

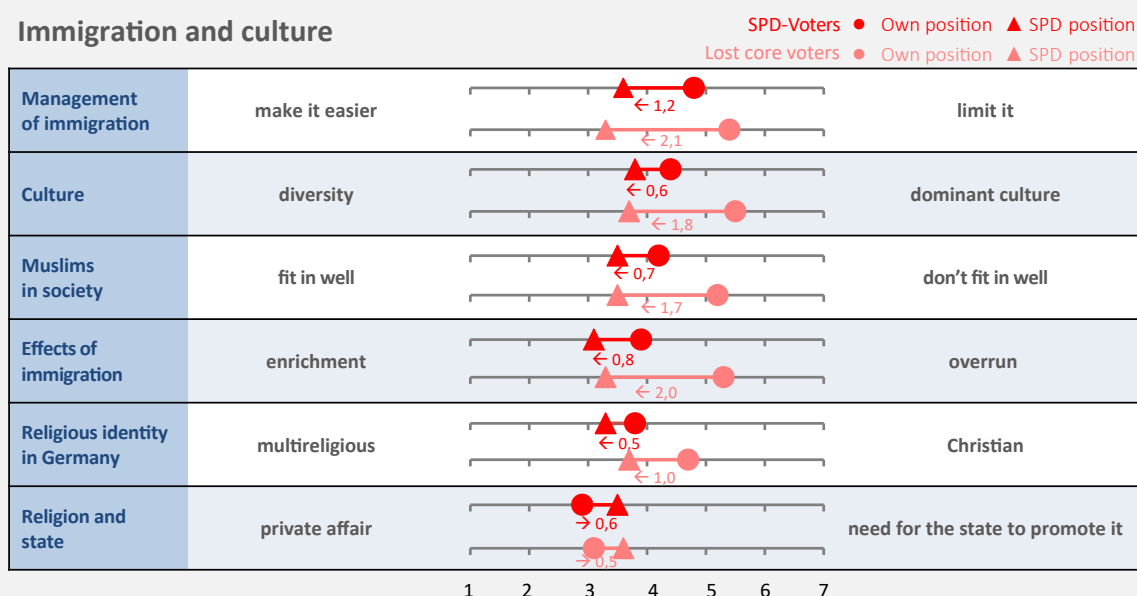
There are slight deviations among current party supporters as regards non-discriminatory speech and gender equality (difference 0.2 and 0.3) and also former voters merely show themselves a little more reserved with regard to current demands regarding »politically correct« speech (difference 0.5). There can be no question of attributing an authoritarian profile to the two groups.

Contrary to well-worn polemics, cultivated by, among others, right-wing populists, about »gender mainstreaming« and »political correctness« this area is not a central driver of the estrangement of its formerly extensive electorate from social democracy.

Policy gaps – overview: analysis

(corresponds to the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Immigration and culture



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

2.3.5 The EU, globalisation and social change

By contrast, a lot more excitement is generated by issues related to Europeanisation and globalisation. From the standpoint of (remaining) voters, SPD positions on the future of the nation-state (difference 0.1), the employment effects of globalisation (difference 0.3) and tackling social change (difference 0.2) pose no problems at all. The same cannot be said of EU policy, however. As regards both the distribution of competences between the EU and nation-states and the establishment of a »transfer union« the social democratic electorate positions itself as much more sceptical – with gaps of 0.9 and 0.8 points – than the SPD, which is perceived as pro-European. In particular in relation to the distribution of competences between nation-states and the EU, social democratic voters, with an average of 4.5 points, tend towards the view that the latter should have fewer competences (scale value 7). Overall, however, this gap is limited.

Among former or »lost« voters, however, the deviations from the SPD position are bigger. When it comes to EU competences and financial transfers once again respondents position themselves as much more sceptical than the party (difference 1.5 and 1.4) and tend more decisively towards preserving the nation-state (difference 0.7). Furthermore, they also distrust economic globalisation more than the party supposedly does (difference 0.6).

On this point, too, there is a marked divergence between the (moderately) libertarian SPD position and the self-identification with the nation-state and more conservative views of many estranged voters, albeit less striking than in the area of immigration.

2.3.6 Problem areas: state of democracy and crime

An interesting pattern can be discerned in the complaints about a democratic deficit and crime. While all voters attribute to the Social Democrats a lack of awareness that there is even a problem, residual SPD voters are behind what they perceive to be the party position. On the question of whether democracy is functioning well or badly in Germany respondents on average position themselves in the middle of the road, like the party itself (difference 0.2); at the most, the party's commitment to a bigger say for ordinary people could be a bit stronger (difference 0.6).

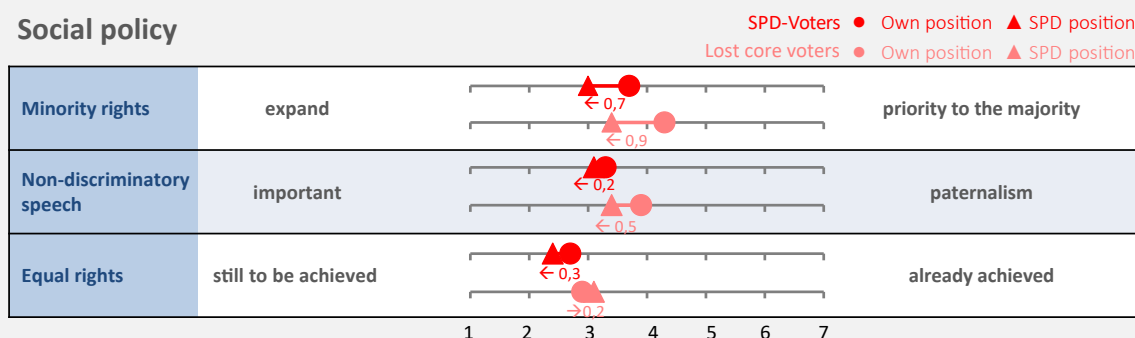
Concerning crime levels today, although for their part the voters tend to perceive a major problem (4.8 as against a scale pole of 7) they attest that the SPD sees things similarly (difference 0.2). As in the case of the major social issues of housing and equal opportunities, party supporters – in contrast to people in general – acknowledge that the party has made positive efforts to solve problems.

Nothing remains of this confidence among former SPD voters. While their own perception of the problems in the two

Policy gaps – overview: analysis

(corresponds to the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Social policy

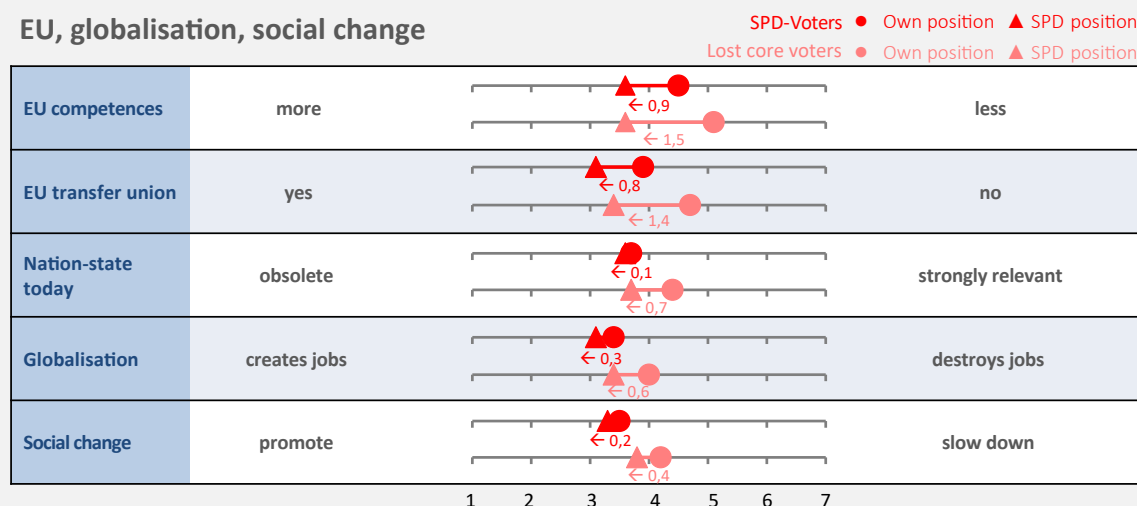


Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Policy gaps – overview: analysis

(corresponds to the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

EU, globalisation, social change



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

areas has increased markedly the SPD is seen as much more inclined to try to explain the problems away. This gives rise to substantial gaps of 1.4 and 1.8 points as regards the functioning of democracy and opportunities to have a say. Turning to crime, the SPD position also deviates – by 1.8 scale points – from respondents' alarm at what they perceive as the major contemporary problems of violence and crime. In these circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that the party is perceived as preferring to leave the population to its own devices in protecting themselves against crime (difference 0.7).

2.3.7 Preliminary conclusion policy-gap analysis

Taking an overall view of the various policy areas, it is reasonable to assume relatively high agreement between policy supply and policy demand on the part of the remaining SPD voters. This group also perceives a positive commitment on the part of the SPD as regards key areas of social change.

The extent to which this result is already the outcome of a gradual sorting and narrowing process, in which the party electorate is increasingly comprising only (for the time being) satisfied voters remains an open question, however. But even here perfect policy harmony is absent: besides individual modest dissonances in the social policy domain (for example, as regards recognition of personal effort and achievement in the welfare state) there is middling potential for tension in the cultural realm of migration and internationalisation because the SPD's position, although not viewed as radical, is discernibly more libertarian/individualist than that of voters.

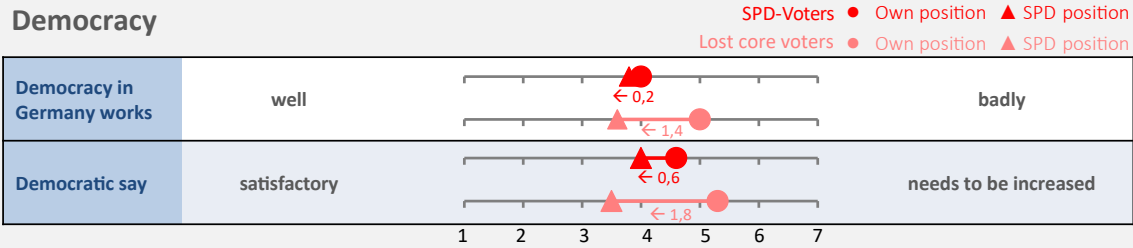
In the case of disappointed former SPD voters, by contrast, we find the full spectrum of problems already identified at the level of the population as a whole and of socially vulnerable respondents. There is enormous discontent concerning the SPD's social policy performance. Furthermore, these voter groups are much more socially conservative on cultural and European policy issues. And on top of that, there is the perception that the need to put things right in relation to democracy and the fight against crime is largely being neglected.

The party's very real separation from more socially conservative milieus could get even worse because it is rooted not on only one axis of conflict (for example, cultural) but also in the socioeconomic, democratic and domestic policy realms. If this continues, one might argue, the broad-ranging centrifugal forces separating parts of the electorate and the SPD on policy might simply become too great to maintain the democratic bond of trust.

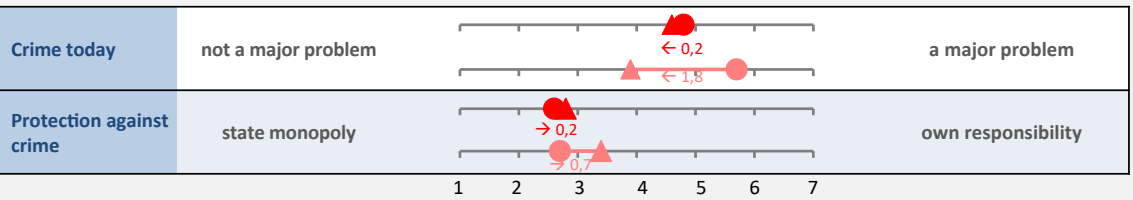
Policy gaps – overview: analysis

(corresponds to the respective average value; scale from 1 [position A] to 7 [position B])

Democracy



Crime



Population: people entitled to vote in the countries investigated.

Conclusion

Much is being spoken and written about the structural – or even final – crisis of social democracy in Europe. There is every reason for such fatalism because, for some time, voter support for the traditional centre-left has been dwindling all over, seemingly inexorably. This overarching finding, however, conceals a range of important differences.

The present study has shown that Europe's social democratic parties, while sharing some sets of problems, differ from one another, sometimes drastically, as regards their appeal to and representation of the voters, their competences, their values and principles and their political recognition factor. And particularly during a period in which populism is gaining ground it is extremely worrying that some of the PES's sister parties are finding it easier, others more difficult to maintain their support among less privileged population segments. Not all incarnations of social democracy are the same, then: collective challenges and negative developments are one thing, whether individual national centre-left parties meet voters' expectations and withstand their judgement are another.

The upshot is that some sister parties find it much easier than others to hold their own within their party system as a competent social force, in the face of everyday concerns and feelings of slipping down the social ladder. Social democratic parties even differ considerably in their traditional role as advocate of the interests of particularly vulnerable population groups.

The situation is similar as regards the value profiles of individual parties. People in most of the countries under investigation expect from their social democrats, on one hand, more commitment to social equality and justice, and on the other, more energy in ensuring that everyone plays by the rules and is rewarded for their efforts. In some countries, in turn, these shortcomings are fairly modest, while in others they are more dramatic. In some places, even the social(ist) core brand is in jeopardy, especially from the standpoint of socially vulnerable groups.

There are European patterns and national specificities, which also applies to parties' policy orientations. On a broader level unmet voter expectations with regard to tackling key grievances, such as housing shortages, lack of equal opportunities, crime and unsatisfactory options for democratic participation are having a negative effect. Insufficient respect for

»ordinary hardworking families« in the social security system is another complaint. In the cultural domain, voters – especially those lower down the social scale – tend to be more conservative than social democratic parties, giving rise to tensions concerning migration, asylum seekers, diversity and Europeanisation, highlighting the limits of national solidarity. But there are also major differences between countries. While some social democratic parties generally satisfy the demands of the voters, others deviate substantially from people's preferences only in certain areas, while yet others register major differences in every critical area.

The British and the Danish social democrats are found fairly constantly at the positive end of the spectrum across every area of analysis. Even so, there are major differences between the two parties. Taking the Danish model, Socialdemokratiet appears to make the most effort to achieve congruence with the average common sense of the population as a whole in both the social and the cultural domains. In keeping with this, besides a custom-made, non-radical socio-economic profile, is its relatively conservative approach to migration and cultural opening.

The British model stands in sharp contrast to this. The Labour Party today favours a consistent and thus distinct »left-wing profile« in all policy areas, for which in individual instances it runs the risk of substantial policy gaps over against the average population, both on social and redistribution issues and on social policy aspects.

In the centre ground comprising France, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden, by contrast, there is a mixture of policy congruities and deficits, tending towards average values for all countries. Nevertheless, the findings for these parties are not entirely equivalent. Thus, first and foremost the Swedish party that traditionally provides the country's prime minister achieves much higher values for party social competences (also among less privileged voters) than the largely marginalised opposition parties in Paris, Den Haag and Warsaw. As a result, the Swedish party scores the highest credibility as an influential social democratic force.

The problems facing in particular Germany's SPD (with specific differences), Austria's SPÖ and Italy's Partito Democratico are extremely entangled. Their commitment to less privileged population segments is certainly unsatisfactory, their values

are anaemic and in the policy realm, too, the situation is particularly unfavourable. In the two German-speaking countries in particular the parties are perceived by the population as representatives of policies that are both too libertarian from a cultural standpoint, and too wishy washy from a social and economic standpoint. Consequently, in particular their relationship to socially disadvantaged voters has been damaged on both axes of conflict. On top of that, there is widespread popular discontent concerning the parties' perceived indifference towards failures of democracy and fighting crime.

It should be pointed out, however, that on their own these findings only go so far towards explaining the parties' performance in elections. For example, in the mid-range of the results presented here we can find both entirely marginalised parties such as the French *Parti Socialiste*, but also parties with a relatively strong base, such as the Swedish *Socialdemokraterna*. Other factors, such as personal aspects or the party system, thus have to be taken into account. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the findings presented in this study can provide an insight into the inner resilience of what social democracy has to offer.

In a closing special focus on the SPD it also became clear that in the case of German social democracy such resilience is in short supply. The analysis of the party profile among current and former voters suggests that as time goes by its dwindling electorate is appreciably narrowing in the direction of better-off and more satisfied population groups. In essence, today's loyal voters are those who are still largely on board with the party's central policy positions. As things stand, however, there is a broad estrangement between the modern SPD and many of its former traditional or core voters from the lower middle class. The two are at odds both at the cultural level, but also on the socioeconomic level. How long social democrats can leave things like this is one of the most pressing issues of our time, in which there is no shortage of radical opponents of freedom, justice and solidarity.

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WHERE EXACTLY IS CENTRE-LEFT?

Value and policy profile of social democratic parties in Europe



The study takes a demoscopic approach to investigate, in nine countries, how the overall population, and the socially vulnerable in particular, perceive the policies of centre-left parties and the values these parties represent. It then compares these perceptions with the values and policy contents the population professes to prefer. The differences show the extent to which Europe's centre-left parties are in tune with the expressed values and wishes of the population, especially the socially vulnerable segment.



By international comparison Europe's centre-left parties fare very differently in this endeavour. For example, the perceived policies and values of the Danish and British social democrats have managed to remain relatively close to those of the population. By contrast the German and Austrian social democrats are furthest away. Overall, the centre-left parties we investigated have managed to remain in line with the desires of the population average better than with those of the socially vulnerable.



Depending on the topical area in question, there can be major discrepancies between the perceived policies of the centre-left parties and the preferences of the electorate. As regards economic and social policy, for example, »demand and supply« are still relatively in line with one another. When it comes to European policy, immigration, integration and domestic security, however, the situation is very different. Above all the socially vulnerable segment of the population on average wants to pursue a more restrictive course than the one they perceive social democrats to want to take.

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