

Political conflict, social inequality and electoral cleavages in Central-Eastern Europe, 1990-2018

Attila Lindner, Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, Tomasz Zawisza

▶ **To cite this version:**

Attila Lindner, Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, Tomasz Zawisza. Political conflict, social inequality and electoral cleavages in Central-Eastern Europe, 1990-2018. 2020. halshs-03047677

HAL Id: halshs-03047677
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03047677

Preprint submitted on 8 Dec 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

World Inequality Lab – Working Paper N° 2020/25

Political conflict, social inequality and electoral cleavages in Central-Eastern Europe, 1990-2018

Attila Lindner
Filip Novokmet
Thomas Piketty
Tomasz Zawisza

November 2020

WORLD INEQUALITY LAB

WID.WORLD
THE SOURCE FOR GLOBAL INEQUALITY DATA

Political conflict, social inequality and electoral cleavages in Central-Eastern Europe, 1990-2018[1]

Attila Lindner, Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, Tomasz Zawisza

Abstract

This paper analyses the electoral cleavages in three Central European countries countries—the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland—since the fall of communism until today. In all three countries, the left has seen a prolonged decline in support. On the other hand, the "populist" parties increased their support and recently attained power in each country. We relate this to specific trajectories of post-communist transition. Former communist parties in Hungary and Poland transformed themselves into social-democratic parties. These parties' pro-market policies prevented them from establishing themselves predominantly among a lower-income electorate. Meanwhile, the liberal right in the Czech Republic and Poland became representative of both high-income and high-educated voters. This has opened up space for populist parties and influenced their character, assuming more 'nativist' outlook in Poland and Hungary and more 'centrist' in the Czech Republic.

[1] We are grateful to Anna Becker for the outstanding research assistance, to Gábor Tóka for his help with obtaining survey data on Hungary and to Lukáš Linek for helping with obtaining the data of the 2017 Czech elections. We would also like to thank Ferenc Szűcs who provided invaluable insights.

1. Introduction

The legacy of the communist regime and the rapid transition from a central planning economy to a market-based economy had a profound impact on the access to economic opportunities, challenged social identities and shaped party politics in all Central European countries. This paper focuses on three of them - Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland - to provide insights on the changing relationship between economic inequality and party support in the aftermath of the Cold War.

Combining and harmonizing survey data on electoral behavior since the first free national elections in 1990/1991, this paper aims to shed light on the drivers behind the political changes observed over the last 30 years. In all three countries, the left has seen a decline in support since the fall of the Iron Curtain. Populist and nativist political movements, on the other hand, have emerged and increased their popularity ever since. The conformity of these political developments suggests that the transition from communism to democracy had important implications for the evolution of electoral cleavages. This paper therefore studies the role of post-communist legacies, democratization, economic growth and rising income inequality in explaining the left's decline. It further aims to understand the social and ideological coalitions underlying subsequent party dynamics and in particular how populist and nativist parties could become a dominant force in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

From communism to democracy

The three Central European countries studied here share a common legacy of communist systems. In the aftermath of the Second World War, they fell under the influence of the Soviet Union, which was characterized by a socialist ideology, a one-party system and a centrally planned economy. Nevertheless, Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Polish communist parties functioned relatively autonomously and could therefore develop their own form of communism within each country. This autonomy was, however, limited which became apparent through the Soviet interventions in response to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 as well as to the Prague Spring in 1968. Soviet troops continued to be present throughout the entire period in all three countries.

The transition of political institutions from communism to democracy took place in just two years between 1989 and 1991. The transition from a centrally planned to a market-based economy, however, was longer and more painful. The experience with democracy during the

initial years was accompanied by rising unemployment and a dramatic deterioration of living conditions for many. Rising average incomes right after the immediate shock of transition were soon followed by a rapid growth in income inequality. All three countries experienced a sharp rise in the top-1-percent income share. Poland's top-1-percent share which was at 10% by 1995 was slightly higher than the top-1-percent income share in Hungary and the Czech Republic, where it stood at around 7% at the time. At the peak of the economic boom and prior to the Great Recession, the top-1-percent share reached 15% in Poland and 10% in Hungary and the Czech Republic.[2]

The dramatic economic changes and the opening up of the public sphere revealed deep cultural and ideological cleavages, which were suppressed for many years by controlled discourse and compressed economic inequality in the communist era. Nevertheless, the commonly shared desire to join key Western and Transatlantic institutions such as NATO and the European Union alleviated the political consequences of these deeply rooted cleavages in the initial years. The three countries became members of NATO in 1999 and members of the European Union in the 2004 enlargement. By mid-2000 all three countries had joined the key multilateral institutions meant to ensure prosperity and peace in Europe.

2. The party system since democratization

We start our analysis by describing the evolution of the party system in the three central European countries under study.

Czech Republic. The first democratic elections in Czechoslovakia took place in June 1990. The absolute winner was the Civic Forum (OF) [3], a political movement springing from the anti-communist demonstrations during the Velvet Revolution. Right parties together obtained 75 percent of the votes in the 1990 elections (Figure 1a), 50 percent of the total votes were cast for the Civic Forum alone.[4] The Civic Forum united dissident groups from the broad anti-

[2] Bukowski, P. and Novokmet, F. (2019). "Between Communism and Capitalism: Long-Term Inequality in Poland, 1892-2015." WID. World Working Paper 2019/08.
Novokmet, F. (2018). "The long-run evolution of inequality in the Czech Lands, 1898-2015". WID.World Working Paper Series No 2018/06.
Mavridis, D., and Mosberger, P. (2017). "Income inequality and incentives the quasi-natural experiment of Hungary, 1914-2008." WID. World Working Paper Series, (2017/17).

[3] Public Against Violence (VPN) was its counterpart in Slovakia.

[4] We put Civic Forum on the right of the political spectrum due to its dominantly liberal leadership (it had many members of the dissident *Charter 77* initiative) and due to the fact that the right-wing liberal Civic Democratic Party (ODS) was formed from it.

communist platform. Kitschelt et al. (1999, p.102) justify their success by pointing out that in the absence of "pre-existing proto-parties on the scene after the sudden collapse of the communist regime, political support initially congealed around broad anti-communist electoral alliances that emphasized civil rights and democratic reforms".

The following elections saw parties' programs differentiate more clearly, especially on economic-distributive issues (ibid.). The right continued to dominate elections in 1992 and 1996, obtaining close to 60% of votes (Figure 1a). The respective governments were led by the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), a pro-market center-right party, and the strongest party to emanate from the Civic Forum after its dissolution. The Civic Democratic Party, under its leader Vaclav Klaus, was the main architect of the reforms following transition in the Czech Republic.[5]

The widespread disillusionment that followed the shattering of the "Czech transitional miracle" accompanied by the perceived failure of voucher privatization and corruption scandals led to a strong rise of the left in the mid-1990s and a major political and financial crisis of 1997 resulted in the fall of the ODS government. However, in contrast to Poland and Hungary, the largest party on the left, the centre-left Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), is not a direct successor of the former ruling communist party.[6] Instead, the successor party is the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), which assumed a more unreformed position, and thus chose not to follow its Hungarian and Polish counterparts, who transformed themselves into social democratic parties to appeal to the broader electorate (Grzymala-Busse 2002). As seen in Figure 1a, the Czech electoral competition between 1998 and 2013 was characterized by a close race between the left and the right with both of their vote shares close to 50%. The governments in this period were led either by the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) or by the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). The entire period was generally marked by a notable stability in party competition (for instance, in stark contrast to the right-wing parties in Poland),with the two main parties on the left and on the right alternating at the top, and followed by relatively stable vote shares of the Communist Party (KSČM) and the Christian Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL) (Deegan Krause and Haughton 2010).

[5] Hanley, S. (2007). *The new right in the new Europe: Czech transformation and right-wing politics, 1989–2006*. Routledge.

[6] Although the party played a prominent role on the Czech political scene before WWII, it basically started from scratch after 1989 (it obtained only 4% of votes in the 1990 elections).

The implosion of the two 'mainstream' parties—first the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in 2013 and then the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) in 2017—resulted in a profound realignment of the Czech political scene. On the right, new parties emerged such as conservative Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) or Mayors and Independents (STAN) and most importantly the "technocratic populist" ANO 2011 of the billionaire Andrej Babiš, which became the winner of the 2017 elections. Furthermore, the support for the populist radical right (Freedom and Direct Democracy, SPD) has increased. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, a prominent newcomer is the anti-establishment cosmopolitan-liberal Pirate party which came third in the 2017 elections. What most of the newcomer parties have in common is their programmatic focus on the fight against corruption, (and enduring corruption scandals are an important reason for a decline of mainstream parties). Meanwhile, as Figure 1a shows, the vote share obtained by left parties collapsed dramatically in the latest election in 2017. As the traditional supporters of the center-left ČSSD switched support to ANO 2011, the left parties obtained less than a third of all votes.[7]

Hungary. The first election in Hungary resulted in a fragmented party system with 11 parties receiving more than 1% of the vote share. This fragmented system articulated a number of cross cutting and weakly correlated political cleavages.[8] Notable political cleavages were present between the former communist parties (MSZP, MPP) and the parties formed from the opposition movements of the 1980s. A further cleavage could be drawn among the communist-era dissidents between the pro-market, liberal parties (SZDSZ, Fidesz) and the right-wing Christian national parties (MDF, KDNP, Fkgp). The latter group received around 60% of the votes and so the first democratically elected government in Hungary after the communist area was formed from right-wing parties.

Nevertheless, the economic hardship caused by the transition took its toll and the support for governing right-wing parties soon decreased dramatically. People's nostalgia for the socialist regime (often referred to as the "merriest barrack in the socialist camp") and the perceived incompetence and factionalism of the right-wing government put into power the formal communist party (MSZP) in the second Hungarian elections in 1994. Although MSZP had a majority in the parliament and could therefore have governed alone, they opted to form a

[7] The center-left party lost some supporters from areas they were traditionally strong in, such as the industrialized regions of Ústí nad Labem and Ostrava. At the same time, the Czech Pirate Party became the most important party on the left.

[8] Gábor, T. and Popa, S. (2013). "Hungary." in *Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, 3rd revised and updated edition, ed. by Sten Berglund, Joakim Ekman, Kevin Deegan-Krause, and Oddbjorn Knutsen. Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, pp. 291-338.

coalition with the largest liberal party, the SZDSZ, to improve the international reputation of their government and show their commitment to the market system and democracy. The government formed from this peculiar coalition between former communists and dissidents implemented a radical reform agenda that involved a series of austerity measures and pro-market polices.

Meanwhile, the other liberal party, Fidesz, became more and more conservative and ascended to be the leading force of the center-right.[9] By the next election in 1998, Fidesz became the dominant party on the right and this electoral success put them in power. A right-wing coalition government was formed from Fidesz and the Independent Smallholders' Party (Fkgp), a populist agrarian party.

The alliance of SZDSZ with the former communist party (MSZP) and Fidesz' shift to the right eliminated the independent liberal pole in the Hungarian party system and lead to the emergence of a major political cleavage between the left-liberal parties and right-wing Christian national parties. In Figure 1b, we plot the voting share by this political cleavage starting with the first democratic election in 1990. The vote shares of left-liberal and right-wing parties were each close to 50% until 2010.[10] Governments formed from right-wing parties (1998-2002) and from left-liberal parties (2002-2010) were alternating in power. In this period, something very close to a two-party system emerged and the different cleavages were absorbed in the opposition between the two poles.[11]

In 2010 a significant realignment of the party system took place. Support for the left and liberal parties which were in power between 2002 and 2010 collapsed. Their electoral base dropped from around 50% to 20% as a result of the economic hardship ignited by the Great Recession and the perceived failure of their austerity driven "reform" agenda. Meanwhile, the Fidesz party lead by Viktor Orbán received more than 50% of the votes. The winner-take-it-all aspect of the electoral system translated this success into a super majority for them in the Hungarian parliament.

---

[9] Gergely, K. and Tóka, G. (2001). "The Electorate, 1990-1998." in *Hungary: Government and Politics 1848-2000*, ed. by Mária Ormos and Béla K. Király. Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, pp. 495-518.

[10] We assign Fidesz to the left-liberal parties in the 1990 election. In the early 90s, Fidesz was a center liberal party with its closest ideological ally being the SZDSZ. However, the 1993 party congress changed Fidesz political position from liberal to civic-centrist and after the 1994 elections the party moved to the conservative right.

[11] Toka, Gabor. Hungary in Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe, 2nd revised and updated edition, ed. by Sten Berglund, Joakim Ekman, and Frank H. Aarebrot. Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, pp. 289-336.

Furthermore, two new political forces emerged in the 2010 election. Jobbik (The Movement for a Better Hungary) built up support from far-right voters and dissatisfied voters who lost their faith in "traditional" left- and right-wing parties, while LMP (Politics Can Be Different) was formed around green issues. While these new parties opposed vehemently the policies implemented by Fidesz, they also kept equal distance from the left-wing parties that were in power between 2002 and 2010. As a result, the party system that resembled a two-party system up until 2010 became again more fragmented. In this political landscape, the winner-takes-it-all aspect of the Hungarian electoral system, which was further strengthened in the new constitution passed in 2011, worked in favour of Fidesz.[12] The party could translate a 45-50% electoral support to a super majority representation in the Hungarian parliament in the subsequent elections both in 2014 and in 2018.

This unprecedented electoral mandate allowed Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orbán to reshape and takeover key economic and political institutions. The government adopted a new constitution and passed a new media law, which made the public broadcaster an outlet of the Fidesz party. Public procurements, which were predominantly funded from the EU Cohesion Funds, have been won by a small set of entrepreneurs that are loyal to the prime minister. Meanwhile, Fidesz adopted more and more Eurosceptic and populist elements in its rhetoric and its policies. For instance, before the 2014 election the government's flagship policy was "rezsicsökkentés" that compelled utility suppliers, which were predominantly owned by multinational companies, to cut utility prices. The party also took on a strong anti-immigration and anti-refugee rhetoric in response to the refugee crisis in 2015 and developed nativist tendencies.

In response to the third consecutive super-majority for Fidesz (2010, 2014, 2018), political cleavages between the opposition parties started to vanish. They were replaced by one dominant cleavage defined in relation to Viktor Orbán's regime.

Poland. The history of the Polish party system after 1989 can be structured around two key periods: 1) the post-communist consensus on transition to a market economy (1989-2005) and 2) the liberal-nativist divide (2005 onwards). In the former period, the cleavage between the parties of the former regime and those coming from the opposition movement was dominant. In the latter period, we see the emergence of an economic-distributive cleavage, as well as a

[12] Tóka, Gabor. "Constitutional Principles and Electoral Democracy Constitution Building" in *Consolidated Democracies: A New Beginning or Decay of a Political System?* Ed. by Ellen Bos and Kálmán Pócza. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2014.

liberal-nativist one. In the 1989 legislative elections, a third of the lower-house seats were contested by representatives of the Solidarity opposition movement. The communist government hoped to win most of these seats and thereby legitimize its program of economic liberalization. However, Solidarity campaigned on a pro-democracy platform with immense success. A coalition government composed of Solidarity and breakaway satellites of the communist party led to a non-communist government which formed and enacted the Balcerowicz plan setting the tone for Poland's economic transition. The plan's main goal was to rapidly create a free-market economy through price liberalization, a tight monetary policy, and privatization of state-owned enterprises.

The first fully free parliamentary election was in 1991, and was won by the right on the platform of ridding politics of elements of the communist regime. However, it was marked by a severe splintering of groupings formerly under the Solidarity banner along economic, socio-cultural and anti-communist dimensions. Between 1991 and 2005, the two dominant political cleavages were the pace and shape of economic reform on the one hand, as well as parties' relationship with the former communist regime, on the other. Figure 1c shows the vote shares for the Left and Right in Poland since 1991. As can be seen, the period 1991-2005 was characterized by alternating right-wing and left-wing governments. Underlying this was significant initial fragmentation and volatility in the composition of parties on the right of the political spectrum[13], while the Left continued to be dominated by the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL).

The left-wing electoral victories in this period, in 1993 and 2001, were a product of fatigue with economic reforms pursued by preceding right-wing governments, their internal divisions, as well as their perceived incompetence. Nonetheless, under the two left-wing SLD-PSL[14] governments, the overall direction of reform was maintained. They pursued fiscally conservative policies and sustained efforts towards Poland's accession to international organizations such as NATO and the EU[15].

Meanwhile, on the right, there was an absence of programmatic clarity on economic issues among most other post-Solidarity parties, and the Democratic Union (UD, later the Freedom

[13] In 1991, there were 8 right-wing parties which received more than 2% of the vote, although none received more than 12% in an election without an electoral threshold. Only 3 right-wing parties crossed the 5% threshold in the 1993 elections, leading most of these to unify under the AWS coalition for the 1997 election.
[14] PSL, the Polish People's Party, was an agrarian satellite party under communism, and was SLD's coalition partner in the 1993-1997 and 2001-2005 governments, as well as Civic Platform's partner in 2007-2010.
[15] The privatisation of state-owned enterprises continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s, apparently irrespective of whether the government was from the Left or Right (see Hagemajer et al., 2018).

Union, UW), was the only party with a consistent market-liberal platform. At the same time, for the other parties on the right, the socio-cultural and the cleavage with ex-communists were central.[16] There were groupings both on the right and left which opposed aspects of the economic transformation, but pro-reform wings tended to dominate economic policy when in government[17]. The right-wing Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS)-led government formed after the 1997 elections opted for a series of reforms in coalition with the market-liberal UW, with Balcerowicz again as Minister of Finance. As an illustration of the continuity of economic policy between the left and right-wing governments of the time, the outlines of the pension reform which shifted the state pension from a defined-benefit to a defined-contribution system were already begun under the SLD-PSL government. Even Balcerowicz admitted in 1997 that "the SLD's economic policies and goals expressed by Marek Belka, the new Finance Minister, are virtually indistinguishable from those of UW"[18].

Austerity under the 2001-2005 left-wig government led to the collapse of the Left in the 2005 election and the emergence of two major parties on the right, namely Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS), which have been dominating electoral competition in Poland since. The former party can be seen as being in the tradition of the market-liberal Freedom Union, while the latter inherited the socially conservative outlook of some of the right-wing parties in the early 1990s.[19] Civic Platform primarily emphasized the need for infrastructure development and further integration into the EU, while Law and Justice reached out to groups who did not share the gains of the transition, a conservative social platform, a rejection of the post-1989 consensus[20] and a weeding out of corruption. Several smaller parties also emerged on both Right and Left, but were often short-lived.[21] In 2005, the first coalition government involving PiS emerged, with an agrarian anti-system party (Self-Defense) and a minor socially

[16] Kitschelt, H., Mansfeldova, Z., Markowski, R., and Toka, G. (1999). *Post-communist party systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation*. Cambridge University Press.

[17] Prominent groupings critical of the pace and shape of reform from within Solidarity included the Labor Union (UP), which ultimately joined SLD in an electoral alliance in 2001. Interestingly, the electoral arm of the Solidarity trade union, NSZZ Solidarność, scored similarly to SLD on socio-economic issues in the 1990s (Kietschelt et al., 1999). However, cooperation between SLD and NSZZ Solidarność would have been unthinkable to many of the trade union's leaders given SLD's post-communist legacy and never occurred, making UP the only party which formally cooperated with SLD in the 1990s.

[18] *Financial Times*, 27 March 1997.

[19] In fact, Law and Justice can be seen as a direct descendant of the conservative Centre Agreement party (Porozumienie Centrum, PC), founded in 1990 by Jarosław Kaczyński and which did well in the 1991 elections on staunchly anti-communist platform, receiving 8.7% of the vote. This party then joined the AWS umbrella for the 1997, and members of PC formed the core of Law and Justice after it was formed by Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński for the 2001 elections.

[20] For instance, in 2005 Law and Justice argued that a new "fourth Polish republic" must be created, rejecting the corrupt norms of public life characterizing the Third Polish Republic (the official name of the Polish state post-1989).

[21] These parties include Self-Defence, LPR, the Palikot Movement, the Modern Party and Kukiz'15.

conservative party (LPR) as coalition partners. However, this collapsed in 2007 after a corruption scandal involving the minor coalition partners, ushering in a period of two consecutive PO-dominated governments between 2007-2015. In the 2015 election, PiS managed to obtain a majority of seats in parliament and form a government without a coalition partner. This election saw no left-wing parties attain seats in parliament for the first time since 1991, after a left-wing coalition led by SLD failed to cross the 8% threshold for having seats for coalitions. The 2019 election saw PiS maintain its number of seats from 2015, with PO continuing to dominate the opposition benches, and with a return of left-wing seats to parliament as part of the Left electoral coalition. This period is marked by a decline of the importance of the cleavage between former dissident groups and former communist parties.

Similarities and differences across the three countries. As we can see, there are some general tendencies in the evolution of party system across the three countries. While the early elections were very specific to the institutional and political environment, very soon the competition between left and right parties dominated the political landscape. In that sense, political cleavages resembled the traditional left and right competition observed in Western democracies. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that the social democratic parties in Hungary and Poland—as direct successors of former communist parties—had distinguished themselves weakly from their liberal and right-wing competitors on economic-distributive issues to show their commitment to a market system and democracy, as well as to emphasize a decisive break with the past.[22] At the same time, in Hungary and Poland the cleavage between former communist parties and parties originating from opposition movements dominated the first phase of transition, whereas this was not the case in the Czech Republic.

Kitschelt et al. highlight that these differences in the nature of political conflict in the post-communist countries stem from the specific form of communist rule (or 'varieties' of communism).[23] In Hungary and in Poland the 'nationally accommodative' communist variety of the communist rule was more accommodative of social demands for economic liberalization. This created broad political consensus on the need for market reforms and generally on economic policy, and parties instead "developed sharper programmatic contours around socio-cultural issues".[24] By contrast, on the heels of the 'bureaucratic authoritarian' variety of

[22] Grzymala-Busse, A. M. (2002). *Redeeming the communist past: The regeneration of communist parties in East Central Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
[23] Kitschelt, H., Mansfeldova, Z., Markowski, R., and Toka, G. (1999). *Post-communist party systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation*. Cambridge University Press.
[24] See page 386 in Kitschelt, H., Mansfeldova, Z., Markowski, R., and Toka, G. (1999). *Post-communist party systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation*. Cambridge University Press.

communism in Czech Republic (and East Germany), the communist party adopted a hardline attitude until the end. In the absence of a broad consensus on economic policy, economic-distributive issues became the single most important programmatic cleavage on the political spectrum in Czech Republic.

In all three Central European country we find that the support for traditional left parties collapsed towards the end of the period we study here. In many cases, this collapse in support is driven by the fact that left-wing parties in the region often pursued conservative economic policies and fiscal austerity in particular.[25]

Furthermore, the slower than anticipated economic catch-up to Western European living standards accompanied by the economic impact of the Great Recession shook the political and economic institutions in Central Europe. In each country, nativist and populist parties[26] attained power starting with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in 2010, Law and Justice in 2015, and ANO in 2017.[27] We will describe below what drives these tendencies.

3. Inequality and Political Cleavages

3.1. Income

We first look at the evolution of income based electoral cleavages in three countries since the early 1990s. Following Piketty,[28] we present the evolution of income gradients as summarized by the simple steepness indicator, namely the difference between the fraction voting left (right) among top 10% income earners and the fraction voting left (right) among bottom 90% income earners.

Czech Republic. Figure 2a shows the evolution of the income gradient between top 10% and the bottom 90% in the Czech Republic. The figure provides clear evidence of "class-voting" in the Czech Republic and confirms the claim that economic-redistributive divides have been a major political cleavage. Namely, voters in the top 10% of income in the Czech Republic

[25] Tavits, M., and Letki, N. (2009). "When left is right: Party ideology and policy in post-communist Europe". *American Political Science Review*, 103(4), 555-569.

[26] The term 'populist' has been contentious, and we choose to use it in the way it has been developed in the political science literature, namely as a 'thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", and argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people' (see Mudde, 2004).

[27] Pew Research Center, (2019). "European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism", Report available here: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/appendix-a-classifying-european-populist-parties/

[28] Piketty, T. (2018). "Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality and the Changing Structure of Political Conflict. Evidence from France, Britain and the US 1948-2017", *WID Working Paper* 2018/7.

always vote more for the right (ODS-Top09) than voters in the bottom 90% of income.[29] In contrast, the left (ČSSD-KSČM) exhibits a negative income gradient and mirrors that of the right. The income gradient of the Christian democrats (KDU-ČSL) has been consistently around zero, in line with its centrist positioning.

It is interesting to note that the importance of class-voting has come full circle from the first democratic elections in 1990 to the most recent elections in 2017. The 1990 elections, as discussed above, could more be seen as the democratic plebiscite. Already by the mid-1990s, programmatic left-right competition on economic issues crystallized in the Czech Republic, epitomized by competition between the liberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) on the right side of the spectrum and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) on the left. Indeed, the Czech Social Democratic Party has programmatically positioned itself on economic (and social policy) issues and it has also refused to play the card of 'cultural liberalism'.[30] In addition, the Left in the Czech Republic includes the electorally relatively strong Communist party (KSČM), which has consistently promoted an anti-market position and disproportionally attracted the support of low-income voters.

Looking at the results of the 2017 elections, the question whether these results suggest a structural decline of class voting in the Czech Republic naturally arises. The income gradient of the left shows a declining trend since the early-2000s, with an even more notable decline in 2017.[31] On the other hand, a drop in the gradient of the established right (principally of ODS) in 2017 is still more precipitous, and it is only partly compensated by the rising income gradient of ANO2011.

Overall, the 'cultural' discourse has undoubtedly become more important in the Czech elections. The erosion of two mainstream parties, firmly positioned on the opposite poles of the traditional left-right axis, and the victory of the populist ANO2011 with a (deliberately) less crystalized programmatic profile (the party principally ran on the anti-corruption platform), may suggest that the identity-based politics is on rise in the Czech Republic and that the Czech political arena has started to assume contours observed in Hungary and Poland.

Hungary. Figure 2b shows the evolution of the income gradient between top 10% and the bottom 90% in Hungary from 1998 onwards. The figure highlights that, in contrast to Czech

[29] Figures A1a and A2a show a steeply rising profile of voting for right-wing parties (declining profile of voting for left-wing parties), with almost 70% of vote within the top 10% income groups voting for right).

[30] Page 438 in Perrotino and Polašek (2013). "Czech Republic". In Escalona, F., Vieira, M., & De Waele, J. M. (eds.). *The Palgrave handbook of social democracy in the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 416-433.

[31] Note that although the income gradient of ČSSD becomes insignificant in 2017, the income gradient of the Communist party remains consistently negative.

Republic, "class" voting aspects play a rather limited role in understanding political cleavages in Hungary, with the exception of the last elections in 2018. In fact, the characteristics of the supporters for the left and right parties are quite the opposite of what we would expect based on traditional "class voting" in 1998 (and also in 2014), when left parties have a larger fraction of top 10% voters than right-wing parties. Overall, the income gradient in party support remains quite flat until the last election in 2018.

The missing income gradient in explaining the support for social democratic parties can partly be ascribed to the cooperation between liberal and left parties since 1994. Since the major left party in Hungary (MSZP) was the successor of former communist parties, they sought to establish credibility regarding their commitment to a market economy. To demonstrate a decisive break with the past, the left-wing parties often pursued conservative economic policies, in particular that of fiscal austerity[32], and sought out an alliance with the market-liberal SZDSZ party. The liberal-left coalition implemented a series of austerity measures in 1995 (Bokros package), in 2006-2008 (Gyurcsány package), and in 2008-2010 in response to the Great Recession. These measures eroded the party's support in low income groups, but won some popularity among the top 10% voters as they saw these policies as a step into the right direction in reforming the country.[33]

Interestingly, in the 2018 election we see a voting pattern that is consistent with class voting. The right-wing Fidesz party gets disproportionately more votes from the rich than from the poor, while left-wing parties attracted the opposite type of voters. Nevertheless, it is unclear yet whether these results suggest a structural emergence of class voting in Hungary or whether such a voting pattern constitutes an outlier. The 2018 election was uniquely centred around the issue of immigration, a topic which only recently became relevant in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis. It is notable that for the 2014 general election the Fidesz' flagship policy in the campaign was "rezsicsökkentés". The policy which compelled utility firms to decrease their prices was highly popular among low-income voters. In that election Fidesz attracted a larger fraction of the voters from the bottom 90% than left-wing parties.

[32] Tavits, M., and Letki, N. (2009). "When left is right: Party ideology and policy in post-communist Europe". *American Political Science Review*, 103(4), 555-569.

[33] Survey data of the Hungarian Election Studies in 2009 showed that MSZP's left-wing identity was questioned by many: around 62 percent of voters thought that MSZP was the party of the elite and only 25 percent agreed that the socialists represented the workers and the poor, see page 454 in Bíró-Nagy, András (2013). "Hungary". In: De Waele J. M., Escalona F., Vieira M. (eds.): The Palgrave Handbook of Social Democracy in the European Union. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke; New York, p. 452-469.

Figure 2b also shows the income gradients for other right-wing parties. In 1998 and in 2002 the voting gradient of the non-Fidesz right is similar to that of Fidesz. After 2010, the voting gradient for Jobbik, the far-right radical nationalist party, diverges from Fidesz as a larger fraction of its electoral base is drawn from voters at the bottom 90%. By the end of the period, Jobbik's income gradient looks more similar to that of the left-wing parties than to that of Fidesz. This might also reflect that the political cleavage between left-wing parties and Jobbik has been vanishing over time.

Poland. Figure 2c shows the evolution of the income gradient between the top 10% and bottom 90% in Poland over time. With the notable exception of the main liberal party in the 1990s, as in Hungary we initially find little evidence of "class" voting, until the emergence of political competition between Law and Justice and Civic Platform from 2005 onwards. For the three elections between 1991 and 1997, we present the income gradients for three parties. The first is SLD on the left. The second, on the right, is the post-Solidarity NSZZ "Solidarność" (in 1991 and 1993), which then became the core of the AWS party in 1997. This latter group continues the tradition of the Solidarity trade union as a political party. Additionally, we show the income gradient for the Democratic Union (UD), which later transformed into the Freedom Union (UW) and represented both an economically and socially liberal electoral platform.[34]

In the first fully free elections after the transition, in 1991, we only see evidence of an income gradient for the liberal UD party. In 1993 and 1997, voters from the bottom 90% tended to be slightly more likely to vote for the main left-wing party – SLD – than the top 10%, although this was reversed in the 2001 and 2005 elections. This weak income gradient is reflective of a similar trend found in Hungary in this period and is likely to demonstrate the constraints faced by post-communist parties.[35] The main party inheriting the Solidarity tradition, NSZZ Solidarność, tended to have a small negative income gradient in 1991 and 1993, and in this period is more likely to justify the claim of being a working-class party than SLD. However, after NSZZ Solidarność constituted AWS in the 1997 elections, in which AWS won the largest share of the vote, the party seems to have had increased its relative appeal to the top 10%.

[34] This party gained the largest share of the vote in 1991, admittedly in an extremely fragmented election. The positive income gradient persists for this party until the 1997 elections. Like UW, it was then the junior partner in the governing coalition and its head, Leszek Balcerowicz, was crucial in shaping the government's economic reforms. Balcerowicz was also the key political architect of Poland's transition to a free market economy in 1989-1991.

[35] Tavits, M., and Letki, N. (2009). "When left is right: Party ideology and policy in post-communist Europe". *American Political Science Review*, 103(4), 555-569.

The 1997 election is notable in particular for the post-Solidarity coalition coalescing around a platform of opposition to the ex-communists, with significant programmatic differences between AWS and UW as members of the 1997-2001 government (Curry, 2003). As has been mentioned above, this coalition government converged on a series of reforms, key elements of which were the generous legacy-defined benefit pension system, and a health-care reform package devolving medical services to municipal institutions and private health care providers.[36] By 2001, both the AWS and UW vote collapsed and either party failed to get seats in parliament. Thus, from 2001 onwards, we continue to show the gradient for SLD on the left and the two emergent right-wing parties, PiS and Civic Platform, which become the dominant political actor on the political scene. Their emergence follows the 2001-2005 SLD-led government, which ended its term amidst scandals relating to privatizations of state companies as well as significant budgetary cuts.

While in the 1990s we did not observe a stark gradient in income for SLD, nor for AWS in 1997, a very sharp positive gradient emerges for the Civic Platform from 2005 onwards, and a sharp negative gradient emerges for PiS in the same period. Interestingly, in 2001, we do not see a relationship between belonging to the top 10% and a vote for either the Civic Platform nor PiS. By 2005, however, we see a distinct separation between these two parties along the income dimension, with the PiS vote capturing a larger share of the vote from the bottom 90% than the top 10%, while the top-10% was more likely to vote for Civic Platform. In 2007, voters in the top-10% were 17% more likely to vote for Civic Platform than voters in the bottom-90%, while voters in the top-10% were 8% less likely to vote for PiS even after we control for education, age and gender. The negative income gradient for PiS was a feature of Polish elections in all subsequent elections, although the positive income gradient for Civic Platform becomes less strong for the 2015 election. The latter phenomenon is likely a reflection of a trend of the Civic Platform towards being more of a catch-all party, also borne out by the success of the pro-market and socially liberal Modern Party in the 2015 election. If anything, belonging to the bottom 90% strengthened the probability of an individual voting PiS in 2015.

Similarities and differences. Class voting patterns show considerable variation over-time and across the three countries. However, some clear patterns emerge. The income-based division between right and left is a long-standing feature of the Czech Republic, which has only been disrupted recently by the rise of ANO. At the same time, in Poland and in Hungary neither the left nor the right experienced strong income gradients in the 1990s. We believe these

[36] Two further important reforms included a reform decentralizing the administrative structure of the country, on the grounds this would strengthen democracy, as well as a reform of the education system.

developments are reflective of the communist legacy of the left parties in Poland and Hungary, which faced legitimacy issues about their commitment to market economy and chose to implement pro-market polices.

From 2005 onwards, an income-based cleavage appeared after the emergence of Law and Justice in Poland, which explicitly targeted voters who had not benefitted from the fruits of transition. In Hungary, income-class voting along the traditional left-right dimension emerged only in the last election whether this change remains permanent or is just a temporary phenomenon remains to be seen. It is certainly noteworthy that the "populist" parties now in power attracted different types of voters in the different countries in the most recent elections. Law and Justice in Poland attracted lower-income voters, ANO positioned itself at the center between traditional left and right parties, and Fidesz mainly attracted higher-income voters.

3.2. Education

Piketty has recently argued that left-wing parties in Western Europe, have profoundly transformed themselves from parties of low-educated to high-educated voters.[37] He further argues that this reversal of the education cleavage could be seen as one of the most important political realignments in recent decades. Looking at the education gradient in Figure 3—expressed as the difference between the fraction of university graduates voting left (right) and the fraction of non-university graduates voting left (right)—reveals that these tendencies are only observed in Hungary but not in the Czech Republic or Poland.

Czech Republic. Figure 3a shows the evolution of the education gradient in the Czech Republic. Broadly in line with income, the development of education gradient shows that voting for Right (Left) is associated with higher (lower) education. It can be seen that college-educated voters have always tended to vote more for the Right. The gap has been consistently large and positive, suggesting a difference of 10 to 20 percentage points between voters with a university degree and lower education. The Left, on the other hand, has disproportionally attracted lower educated voters. The education gradient of the ČSSD has displayed a more irregular pattern (negative most of the time, but around zero in 2002 and 2017), while that of the Communists has been negative throughout. Overall, the observed patterns do not suggest a clear trend and there is no indication that the educational cleavage has been reversed as observed in Western Europe.

[37] Piketty, T. (2018). "Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality and the Changing Structure of Political Conflict. Evidence from France, Britain and the US 1948-2017", *WID Working Paper* 2018/7.

Hungary. Figure 3b shows that in Hungary the education level is more important than income in explaining voting behavior. In the 1998 elections left parties (MSZP, MPP) were more popular among low-educated voters, while the liberal party, SZDSZ, was more popular among higher-educated voters. Meanwhile, we do not observe a stark gradient in education for Fidesz and other right-wing parties. Thereafter, the left wing parties attracted more and more highly educated, urban voters, while Fidesz became more popular among lower educated, rural voters. These differences become especially apparent in the most recent elections in 2018. By then the left has become the party of the intellectual elite (Brahmin left), while the right seems to attract voters from the business elite (Merchant right) – a pattern which is also observed in major Western European countries.[38]

Poland. In Figure 3c, we see the education gradient in Polish elections in 1991-2015. Analogously to the pattern for income, in 1991 there does not appear to be a tendency of individuals with lower education to vote more for SLD than those with high education. If anything, the contrary seems to be true, and this persists for the entire period 1991-2015. Combined with weak evidence of an income gradient, which was only occasionally and slightly negative for SLD in 1993-1997 and 2007-2015, the SLD is the strongest candidate for a "Brahmin left" party in the specific context of post-transition Poland. It would appear that NSZZ Solidarność had a small but noticeable negative gradient in education in 1991-1993, although this disappears in the 1997 after this party founded the AWS coalition[39]. Finally, a very strong positive education gradient exists for the UD/UW party in 1991-1997.

As was the case for income, there is no education gradient for both Civic Platform and PiS in 2001. However, by 2005 a separation occurs between the two parties, with a gap opening up between voters with college education and those below. From this point on, voters with higher education were more likely to vote for Civic Platform, while those with below college education were more likely to vote for PiS. However, as for income, the education gradient for Civic Platform declined somewhat in 2015. The negative gradient in voting for PiS remained to be strong in both 2011 and 2015.

Similarities and differences. While the role of income based class voting showed considerable differences across the three countries, education seems to have played a more consistent role in

[38] Piketty, T. (2018). "Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality and the Changing Structure of Political Conflict. Evidence from France, Britain and the US 1948-2017", *WID Working Paper* 2018/7.
[39] AWS, however, was comprised of a multitude of other right-wing groupings, although NSZZ Solidarność was its initiator and largest constituent.

determining political cleavages in Central European countries. Until very recently, the Czech right, which has been over-represented among high-education voters, has resembled the liberal wing of the Polish right and SZDSZ in Hungary.[40] These had also been the political groupings which set the tone for the post-communist economic transition in these countries.

At the same time, voting for the nativist/populist right in Hungary and Poland had a distinctive education dimension. Both Fidesz and Law and Justice in Poland attract low-education voters. It is notable that this is not the case for ANO, whose success was neither tied to a strong income nor to an education voting gradient. Since in the most recent elections Fidesz has exhibited a positive income gradient, it comes closest to the Merchant Right category. However, this is not the case for Law and Justice, which tended to also attract low-income voters.

3.3. Openness and redistribution

We investigate the contribution of ideological differences concerning two major and contentious political issues - openness and redistribution - to political cleavages in CEE. We do this by comparing the voters of various parties across two dimensions: their attitudes toward the European Union (EU) and their preferences for redistribution. Figure 4 shows the two-axis political spectrum chart along these two dimensions in the mid-2000s and in the most recent elections.[41]

Czech Republic. As it is shown on Figure 4a, the Right (ODS-Top09) and Left (ČSSD-KSČM-SZ) in the Czech Republic are markedly divided on distributive issues. As suggested above, the distributive conflict has been one of the key cleavages in the Czech electoral competition. This divide has remained significant and stable between 2006 and 2017 (albeit the notably smaller vote shares for left-wing parties in 2017).

There was less disagreement on the EU dimension between voters of Left and Right in the mid-2000s. Voters of the Right were on average moderately more pro-EU than voters of the Left. This difference increased by 2017 when the enthusiasm for the EU had more notably cooled down among left voters. Interestingly, based on EU attitudes and stated preferences for

[40] It is only with the rise of ANO in 2017 that the over-representation of the right among high-income voters has declined in the Czech Repbulic. The analogous decline of high-income voting for Civic Platform in 2015 is also notable, and may possibly be seen as a common phenomenon in the face of rising populist competitors.

[41] The support for redistribution is the lowest for the Czech Republic (the average is 3.31 on a scale of 5), second comes Poland (3.83) and finally Hungary (4.24), which strongly favors redistribution. In terms of the EU attitudes Poland is the most enthusiastic (5.65 out of 10), then comes Hungary with 4.52 and the Czech Republic is somewhat less enthusiastic with 4.47.

redistribution, by 2017 the typical attitudes of the Left voter in the Czech Republic begins to resemble the voters of Law and Justice in Poland.

On the other hand, the supporters of ANO2011 in 2017 show more 'centrist' attitudes on both issues. This centrist positioning could in part explain the success of the party in attracting voters from both the center-left and center-right.[42] The supporters of the Pirate Party, which came third in the 2017 elections, are closer to established right-wing parties on these two dimensions, and show on average the highest support for the EU. Unsurprisingly, the supporters of the radical right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) lead in their anti-European attitudes. Interestingly, it seems that new parties generally attract voters with a relatively less marked position on redistributive issues than established parties on the right and left.

Hungary. Figure 4b shows the political position of the electorates of various parties for Hungary. The figure shows that distributional issues do not cut party lines in Hungary, especially in 2006 when the voters of the two major parties competing for power (MSZP and FIDESZ) have a very similar positions on redistribution. If anything it is striking that the supporters of the Fidesz party were more egalitarian than the voters of the left parties in 2006. Only the supporters of smaller parties distinguish themselves based on distributional issues. While the far-right party voters had egalitarian preferences, the liberal SZDSZ supporters were strongly anti-egalitarian in 2006.

By 2018 there had been a shift in the position of the parties with respect to redistribution: Fidesz became a more inegalitarian party, while the left acquired support from more egalitarian voters, as it is usually the case in other Western European countries. Furthermore, the far-right party (Jobbik) also moved toward the center. As a result, left parties and Jobbik attracted similar voters in terms of attitudes toward redistribution.

Figure 4b also shows the main parties location in terms of their voters' EU attitudes. As usual, supporters of right-wing parties such as Fidesz and Jobbik are less enthusiastic about the EU. Between 2006 and 2018 the gap between Fidesz and the traditional left increased substantially as Fidesz' voters became more and more anti-European. Surprisingly, the far-right party Jobbik

[42] The leader of ANO2011, Andrej Babiš is not a hardline Eurosceptic and his views on the EU could rather be seen as pragmatic. ANO2011 also refused to form a government coalition with the far-right SPD and unambiguously rejected the prospect of SPD's demand for the Czech EU referendum. See pages 232-3 in Hanley and Vachudova (2018). "Understanding the illiberal turn: democratic backsliding in the Czech Republic." *East European Politics*, 34:3, 276-296

has become more pro-European as it replaces Fidesz in its previous position in the graph. This reflects that the party has moderated its position on key issues to attract center-right voters.

Poland. In Figure 4c, we show the political cleavages across the two dimensions for Poland for 2001 and 2015. In 2001, PiS, Civic Platform and SLD all occupied a pro-EU space, as their voters had more pro-EU attitudes than voters for other parties or absentees. It is interesting to note that although the Civic Platform voters were very economically liberal, and PiS voters were less egalitarian than those of SLD, PiS and SLD were close to each other along the redistributive dimension.

In the period following Poland's accession to the EU between 2004 and 2015, the PiS electorate became significantly more Eurosceptic, occupying part of a space similar to the one that had been shared by the heavily Eurosceptic agrarian Self-Defense and the nativist LPR in 2005. At the same time, in 2015 PiS continued to occupy the egalitarian part of the electoral space, which was now vacated by SLD. Civic Platform, on the other hand, remained firmly in the economically liberal and pro-EU space, which it now shared with the much reduced SLD electorate. Surprisingly, in the absence of a pro-EU and pro-egalitarian party in the 2015 elections, PiS appears to have gained more votes than either Civic Platform or SLD among pro-EU and pro-egalitarian voters.

Interestingly, in 2001 SLD occupies rather firmly the egalitarian section of the electorate. This likely reflects that the SLD's core electorate consisted of individuals with ties to the former regime, as well as voters who appreciated the party's achievements in diminishing the costs of transformation. However, many of these voters were disillusioned in the subsequent election in 2005, and the party at that point became indistinguishable from liberal parties on distributional issues. It is plausible to think of the success of PiS from 2005 onwards as being a product of it moving into the egalitarian space hitherto occupied by SLD, while at the same time taking up a more socially conservative and nativist position. This trend is likely to have been reinforced subsequently by the collapse of some prominent but smaller competitor parties in this part of the electoral space.

Similarities and differences. Distributional issues are important correlates of voting behavior in the Czech Republic and in Poland, but less so Hungary. At the same time, attitudes toward the EU seem to be a key cleavage in all three countries studied here. In the 2000s, neither Fidesz nor PiS tended to attract voters with pro-EU attitudes. The space for voters with anti-EU sentiments was instead occupied by staunchly nativist and populist parties (MIEP in Hungary,

Self-Defence and LPR in Poland). However, by the 2010s both Fidesz and PiS had shifted to more Eurosceptic voting bases, just as the earlier nativist/populist party either disappeared (Poland) or became more pro-EU (Hungary). At the same time, Fidesz and PiS differ radically in the redistribution dimension. Fidesz tends to attract anti-egalitarian voters, while the PiS supporters have more positive attitudes toward redistribution. This suggests that the two parties aimed for a similar position in identity politics, but attract different classes of voters otherwise.

By the late 2010s, electoral competition in Hungary was structured between a nativist and inegalitarian right, and an egalitarian and pro-EU left. In Poland, electoral competition instead tended to occur between a nativist and egalitarian right, and a pro-EU and inegalitarian right. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic there continued to be a strong and stable cleavage between a staunchly anti-egalitarian right and a staunchly egalitarian left, with the left slightly more Eurosceptic than the right. Instead, the main alteration in political competition was the entry of the populist ANO in the center.

3.4. Immigration.

Although the number of immigrants has been relatively low in the three countries studied here, the migration issue has become increasingly salient in Central European politics since the 2015 refugee crisis. In the Czech Republic, Poland and in Hungary we see that attitudes toward immigrants have become more negative over time, albeit they started from very different levels (see Figure A8 in the Online Appendix). While Hungary and the Czech Republic were already pessimistic about the benefits of immigration in the 2000s, Poles held generally favorable attitudes towards immigrants the at the time. For instance, while almost 50% of Czechs and Hungarians believed that immigrants make the country a worse place to live in 2006, this number was only 15% among the Poles. By 2018 people with negative attitudes increased above 60% both in the Czech Republic and in Hungary and to 22% in Poland

Since Hungary is placed on the main (Western Balkans) migration route, which became the most important route for refugees to get to Central Europe in the summer of 2015, it is not surprising that attitudes toward immigration became salient there. Although Poland and the Czech Republic received only a negligible number of immigrants during this refugee crisis, negative attitudes toward immigration strengthened in these countries, too.

Surprisingly, the change in attitudes toward immigration did not create a major political cleavage in Hungary and in the Czech Republic. In both countries, the use of anti-immigration rhetoric became the standard for all major parties. Immigration was often portrayed as a threat

to the traditional way of life and collective national identity, while the (potential) benefits of immigration were rarely mentioned. However, we find no indication that (changing) attitudes toward immigration realigned party support.

For instance, the 2018 general election campaign in Hungary was dominated by issues surrounding immigration and the response to the 2015 refugee crisis. The Hungarian government built a barrier on its border with Serbia and Croatia and vehemently opposed any EU level reallocation of refugees. While the government pictured itself as the defender of the nation in the election campaign, the opposition parties were accused of supporting refugees and immigrants. Still, we find no indication that support for immigration changed differentially between Fidesz, left-wing and Jobbik supporters in this period. There was a similar shift in attitudes across all parties. This example highlights that even if the discussion on immigration is a relatively new phenomena in these countries, it has mainly reinforced existing political cleavages and that the issue so far has not lead to a significant realignment of party support.[43]

On the contrary, attitudes toward immigration played some role in the 2015 Polish election. The PiS voters became somewhat more pessimistic about immigration between 2006 and 2016, whereas this was not the case for Civic Platform voters. The change in attitudes along party lines suggests an increasing political cleavage in relation to immigration here. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the Polish election in 2015 took place at the height of the European refugee crisis, while the more recent elections in the Czech Republic and in Hungary took place two and three years later, respectively. Because immigration no longer stands out as a key issue in the 2019 Polish election, it appears that the impact of the refugee crisis on political cleavages was more limited in the long term, as was also the case in Hungary and in the Czech Republic.

4. Summary: How did political cleavages evolve in Central European countries?

Politics in Central European countries have been turbulent in the last 30 years and this was accompanied by changing political cleavages. Nevertheless, there are notable similarities among the three countries studied here.

[43] Even if the refugee crisis did not create a new dividing line in party politics, it might have a potentially large impact of the electoral success of Fidesz in 2018. The fact that the main campaign agenda was about immigration implied that identity issues were the dominant topic in the campaign. As a result, issues on which Fidesz' position is less popular (e.g. redistribution, health care, education) received only limited attention in the campaign. Immigration could therefore have a big impact on the election outcomes through setting the political agenda.

One of the most salient cleavages for the three countries we study appears to be education, with liberal free-market parties dominating the high-education vote immediately after the transition from communism: ODS in the Czech Republic, SZDSZ in Hungary and UW/UD in Poland. To a large extent, this education cleavage was mirrored by a cleavage in income in the Czech Republic and in Poland, but not in Hungary. In each country, these political parties had an overwhelmingly important influence on the nature of economic reforms, in Poland and the Czech Republic as key members of right-wing governing coalitions, and in Hungary as a partner in a coalition with the ex-communist MSZP.

The key differences between the three countries can be seen when we compare the emergence and success of parties catering to a low-income and low-education electorate. It is particularly insightful to compare the experience of Hungary and Poland on the one hand with that of the Czech Republic on the other. In Poland, neither the post-communist SLD on the left, nor the myriad of right-wing parties which emerged out of the Solidarity movement, established themselves as either low-income or low-education parties. In Hungary, the ex-communist MSZP was initially a party with an electoral base of lower education, but this was eroded over time since MSZP was implementing pro-market policies when in power. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic both the ex-communist KSČM and the social-democratic ČSSD established themselves as low-income and low-education parties.

Why did left parties in Poland and Hungary not take up that role by pursuing more egalitarian policies, for example? An important factor is that the main left parties in both countries were the successors of the ruling parties under the previous socialist regime. The desire to break with the communist past hindered these parties from pursuing a distributional agenda and to fill the traditional position of left-wing parties. We can find a notable example of this phenomenon in Hungary. When the former communist party MSZP won the elections in 1994 and obtained a majority representation in the parliament, it decided to join forces with the pro-market liberal SZDSZ to form the government rather than pushing for more redistribution single-handedly.

By the 2000s, the left wing parties in Hungary and Poland were not viable alternatives for lower-education or lower-income voters. This had profound implications for subsequent political competition in these countries. After the initial transition period, corruption scandals and austerity had a critical influence on the disillusionment with governments dominated by the ex-communist left. Starting in 2005, PiS in Poland discovered the concept of ‘class’ and managed to attract lower income and lower education voters who had not benefitted from the fruits of transition, while at the same time putting forward a conservative and nativist political platform.

The formerly market-liberal Fidesz rode a wave of anger at the MSZP government in 2010 and ultimately merged with a nativist platform in a similar way. The Fidesz electoral base, however, differed from that of PiS as it obtained considerable support from high-income voters and became a high-income party by the most recent elections. The opposition to PiS in Poland was centered around the market-liberal and pro-EU Civic Platform. In Hungary instead opposition to Fidesz was centered around the pro-EU MSZP which became more economically egalitarian in recent years.

In contrast, the collapse of support for the left in the Czech Republic was not matched by the rise of a nativist political alternative as in Poland and Hungary. Rather, the rise of ANO may best be explained by their focus on a 'centrist populism'. While rejecting establishment politicians as the corrupt elite, this party is close to the center of the electorate in terms of attitudes on redistribution and the EU, and does not exhibit a strong gradient either in income or education. We posit that the type of right-wing populism found in Poland and Hungary was simply not viable as an electoral strategy in the Czech Republic, as the main parties in the Czech Republic had already dominated the polar positions on the economic-redistributive and nativist parts of the political spectrum.

Importantly, the present-day cleavages found in Central Eastern Europe have started to resemble those found in Western European countries. Both the nativist-globalist conflict, as well as the pro- and anti-redistribution cleavage, manifest in the electoral competition observed in Poland, Hungary and in the Czech Republic. Interestingly, however, the pro-EU vote is associated with the market-liberal parties in Poland and the Czech Republic, and with egalitarian left-wing parties in Hungary.

What can explain these observed differences? Both Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland positioned themselves to take advantage of the vacuum that the left-parties had created through their disappearance. However, Fidesz's market-liberal roots made it opt for a different stance on redistribution than PiS which consciously headlines redistributive policies. Furthermore, Fidesz took power in 2010 after the collapse of the left which can be attributed to their perceived incompetence to govern through and handle the Great Recession. As a result, these parties could not be a viable alternative for low-income voters and so Fidesz did not need to implement redistributive policies to attract these voters. Instead, Fidesz achieved a large electoral coalition premised on a rejection of the left-wing incumbent parties. On the other hand, PiS came into power in 2015 after its main competitor, the Civic Platform, handled the Great Recession

relatively successfully. In that context, PiS managed to persuade low-income voters by implementing pro-redistribution policies.

5. What drives this populist trends?

As we discussed above each country today has a populist party in power. Various, explanations have been offered to explain the recent rise of populism worldwide, generally pointing to cultural or economic factors, or (more plausibly) to the mixture of both. For example, the 'cultural backlash' hypothesis of Norris and Inglehart[44] relates the successes of populists to a secular shift from materialist to post-materialist values in developed countries. While the rising economic prosperity and security induced the younger, urban and more educated to increasingly adopt secularized and liberal values, it has produced a cultural backlash from the socially-conservative part of the population. Those have felt 'alienated' and turned their support to populist parties. Moreover, the cultural backlash has been reinforced by deteriorating economic conditions, reflected in growing inequality. Globalization, increased trade integration and capital movement, created clear winners and losers, and hence additionally increased economic insecurity.

At the same time, the literature has suggested that established parties have failed to respond to these challenges.[45] To a large extent, both the mainstream left-wing and right-wing parties have become representatives of the 'winners' of globalization, i.e. the highly educated with a cosmopolitan value system.[46] In particular, social-democratic parties have transformed themselves from the representatives of the low-educated and to those of the more-educated and turned to a both economically and culturally liberal agenda. As a result, those "left behind" have increasingly turned to populist parties.

Importantly, we find that the initial conditions were decisive in shaping the nature of this backlash in Central Eastern Europe. To a certain extent, the populist parties have responded to an increase in demand for protection from economic insecurity and from the radical change in cultural values.[47] A mixture of conservative identity politics and economic redistributive

[44] Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. (2018) *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism*, Cambridge University Press.
[45] Piketty, T. (2018). "Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality and the Changing Structure of Political Conflict. Evidence from France, Britain and the US 1948-2017", *WID Working Paper* 2018/7
[46] Gennaioli, Nicola and Guido Tabellini, 2019. "Identity, Beliefs, and Political Conflict," CESifo Working Paper Series 7707, CESifo.
[47] *Lower-educated* working class has actually always been predominantly socially-conservative.

policies of populist parties such as Law and Justice in Poland or Fidesz in Hungary has fallen on fertile ground. This has coalesced into the broader "social-nativist" agenda.[48] However, we see in both of these countries that no redistributive-economic political cleavage between the Left and Right was shaping political competition during the first phase of transition which could explain why the populists could later fill this gap. In the Czech Republic, where such a cleavage was salient and had long existed, the populist entry did on the other hand not have a strong redistributive dimension.

The parties of the left in Hungary and in Poland are in some respects akin to the Brahmin left, since these parties tend to rely on a relatively highly educated electorate with a higher income as well than traditional social-democratic parties. This has opened up space for nativist populism in Hungary and Poland. Between these two countries, however, there are important differences. In Poland, the emergent nativism is more egalitarian. In Hungary, the picture is more nuanced as the electoral coalition sustaining Fidesz is different, and populism therefore more inegalitarian. In the Czech Republic, however, where the left has been representing low-income and low-education individuals from the beginning, populism has taken a centrist, and less nativist, stance.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the post-transition trajectories of ex-communist parties seem to be important determinants of the nature of subsequent political competition in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In Hungary and Poland, the post-communist left adopted economic policies indistinguishable from its right-wing competitors, and was equally hard to distinguish from the right in terms of its representation among highest income and education votes. On the other hand, the trajectory of the post-communist party in the Czech Republic, which remained relatively hardline following transition, enabled income and education cleavages to arise along more traditional lines. We argue that these features had important implications for the emergence of populist parties in each of these countries. The continued strength of the economy under the liberal Civic Platform in the aftermath of the Great Recession prevented a wholesale rejection of this party by the electorate, but instead led Law and Justice to focus on issues of income inequality. Combined with the anti-communist and economically agnostic roots of Law and Justice, this contributed to the mix of nativism and egalitarianism this party decided to stand

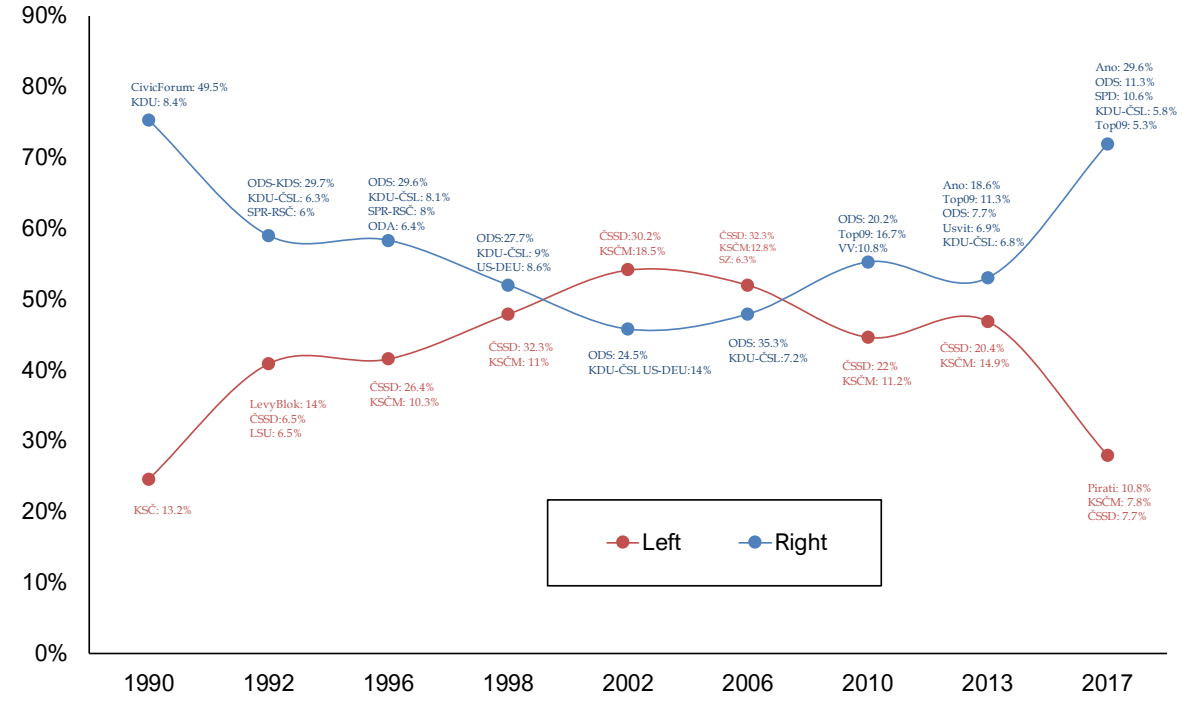
[48] Piketty, T. (2020). *Capital and ideology*. Harvard University Press.

for. In contrast, the electoral coalition behind the success of Fidesz appears much broader, and while partly based on the support of low-education voters, there is at the same time an anti-egalitarian electoral base. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic, the rise of ANO was associated with the continued presence of a market-liberal right and a more traditional left-wing voter base, resulting in what might be termed "centrist managerial populism".

Finally, it is interesting to consider what these facts imply for the future of political competition in these countries. A salient feature of the analysis for Poland is that in 2015 there was no egalitarian and pro-EU contender in the elections, and that PiS marginally won the support of the pro-EU egalitarian part of the electorate. The country's political system currently appears to be in a state of flux. For instance, there is some sign that income is no longer a predictor of a vote for the Civic Platform. The party, as well as the Left, instead begin to share features of the "Brahmin left", as pro-EU and college education are increasingly strong predictors of their vote. The Together Party in Poland is a new entrant without any a post-communist baggage, a strongly egalitarian platform and a generally internationalist outlook. However, its support remains extremely limited. Meanwhile, it would appear that PiS is being forced to increasingly rely on socio-cultural cleavages, as the impact of its initial redistributive policies wears off. In addition, it is beginning to compete with an increasingly vocal far right on this dimension. Whether a credible egalitarian competitor to Law and Justice arises eventually remains an open question.

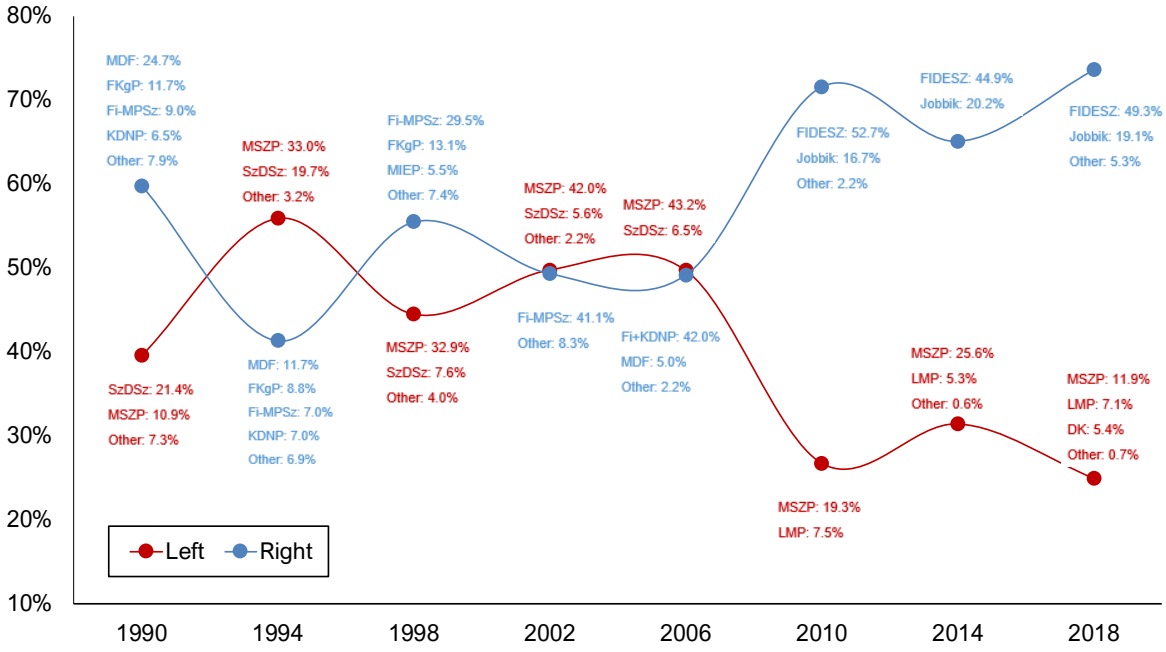
Meanwhile, in Hungary the party system started to evolve again around two poles. On one side we see Fidesz, which builds an electorate base that resembles that of the Republican party in United States. It is able to attracts low-educated, rural voters and also high-income voters by providing a mixture of pro-market policies and nativist/anti-globalization stances. On the other side, we see that the political cleavages between Jobbik and the left-wing parties vanished over time. The left-wing parties gain attraction among cosmopolitan, educated voters living in larger cities, while Jobbik attracts more nativist and rural voters. Both voter types share similar opinions on distributional issues. Whether the cooperation between left-wing parties and Jobbik can emerge as a viable electorate alliance against Fidesz and whether the emergence of class voting remains a long-standing feature of Hungarian politics still remains to be seen.

Figure 1a: National Elections in the Czech Republic



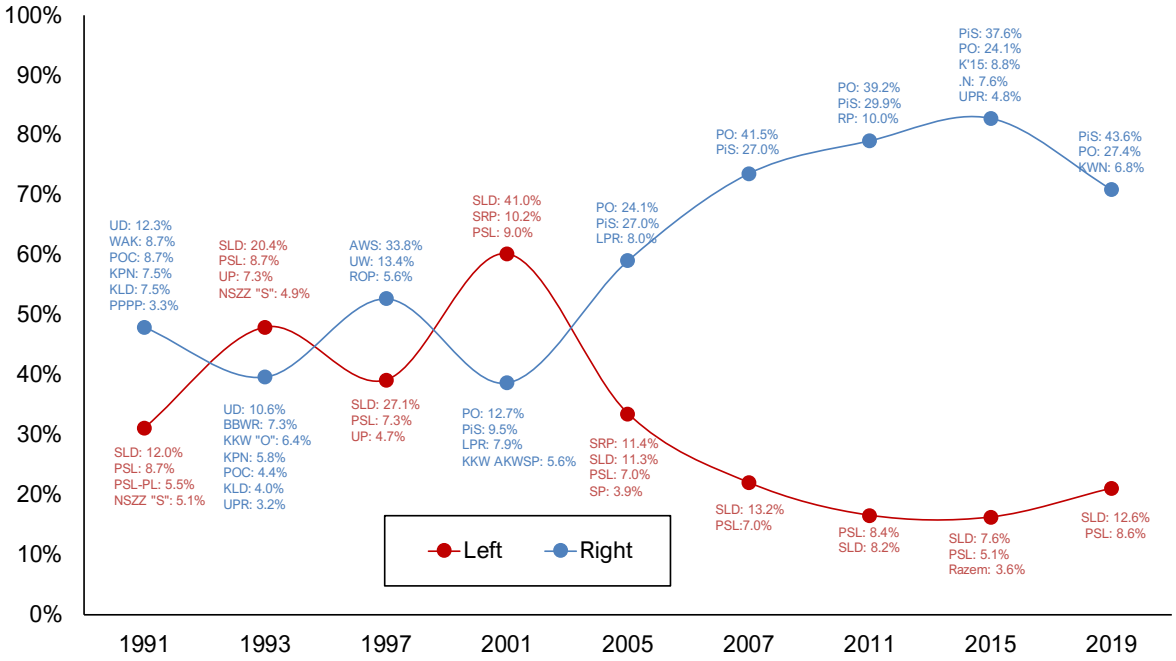
Data source: Official Election Results
Note: Labels show parties that obtained more than 5% of all votes

Figure 1b: National Elections in Hungary



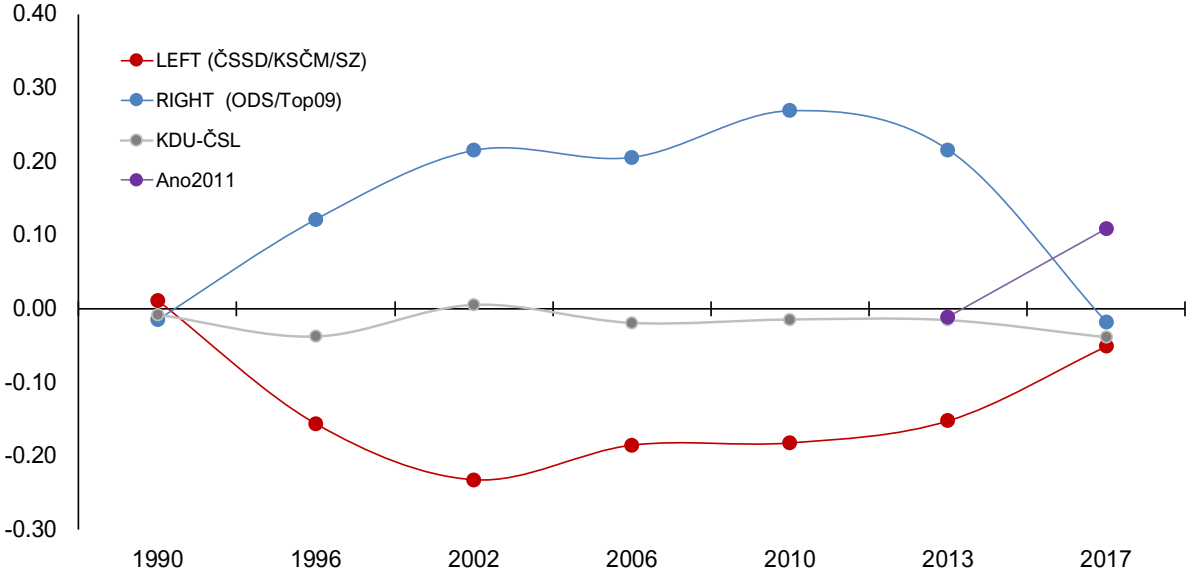
Data source: Official Election Results, parlgov.org.
Note: List votes are reported. Parties are categorised as right if they have a score of 5 or lower on a 0 to 10 scale of left/right dimension, otherwise they are categorised as left. After 2006 votes for Fidesz include votes for KDNP.

Figure 1c: National Elections in Poland



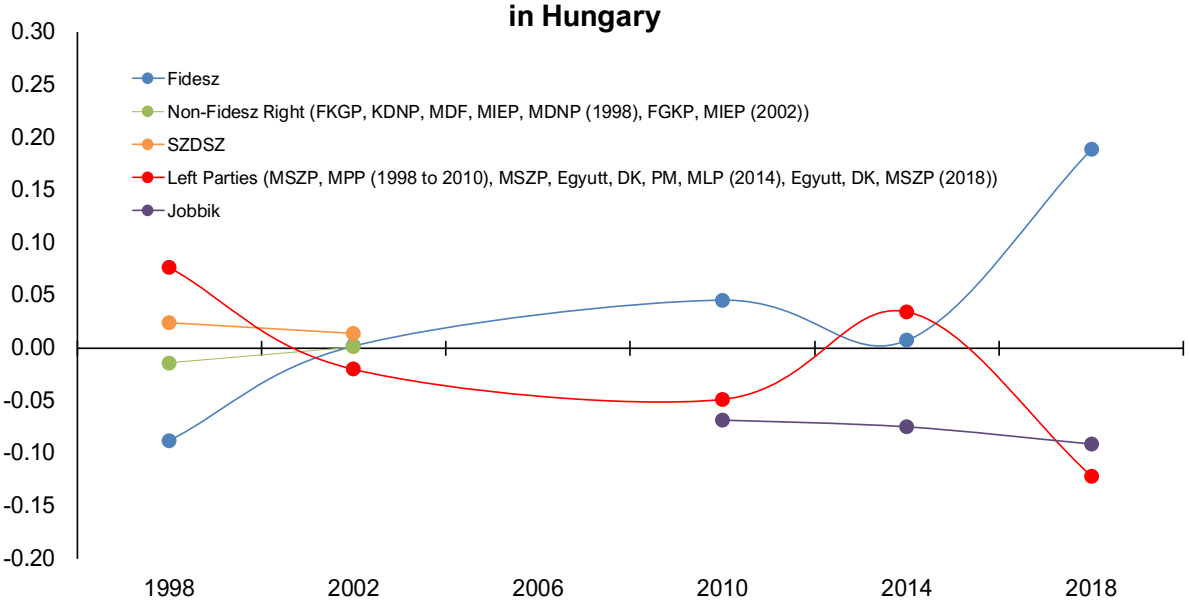
Data source: Official Election Results
Note: Labels show parties that obtained more than 3% of total votes

Figure 2a: The income cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters in Czech R.



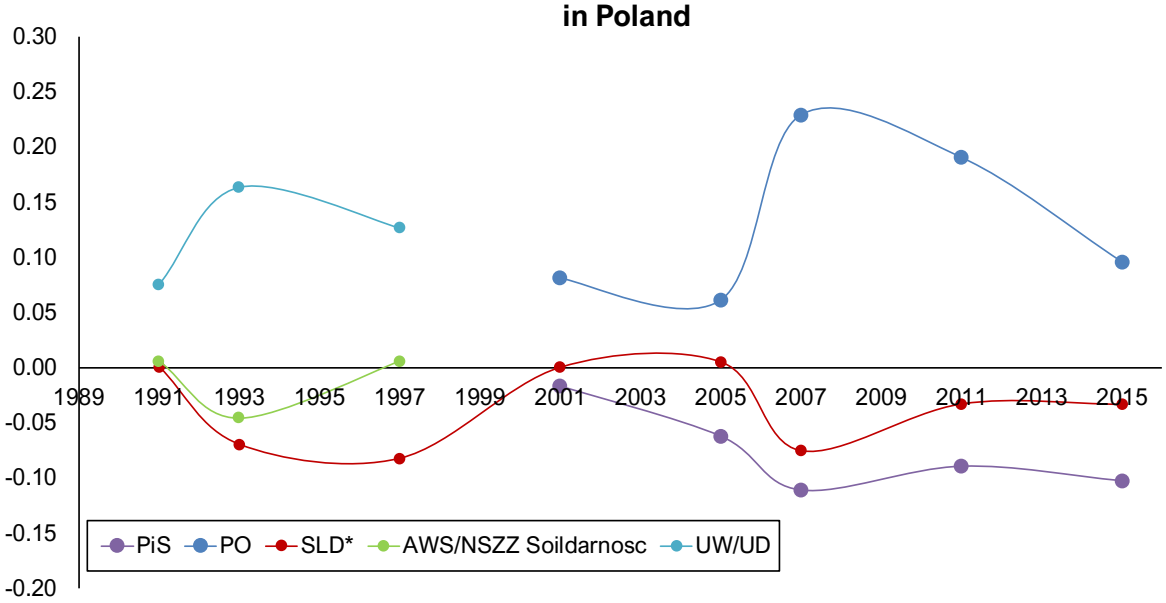
Difference between % [party] vote among top 10% income voters and % [party] vote among bottom 90% income voters (after controls)
Reading: in 1996, Left obtain a score that is 16 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; in 2017, their score is 5 pp lower
Controls include age, gender, and educational attainment.
Data source: Post-Election Surveys; *Note: Right in 1990 includes Civic Forum*

Figure 2b: The income cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters in Hungary



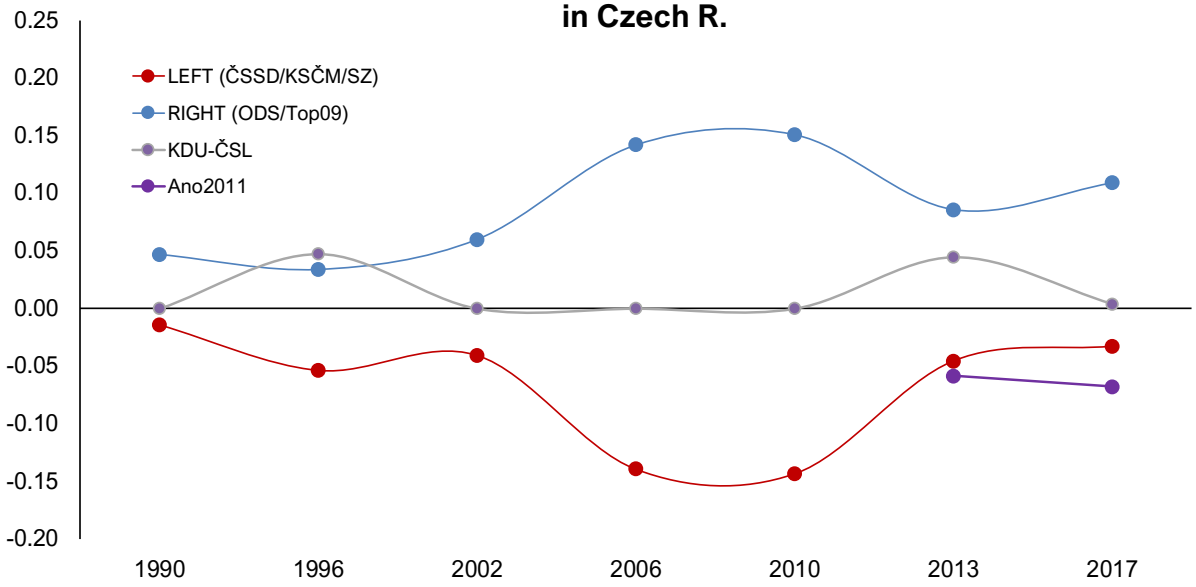
Difference between % [party] vote among top 10% income voters and % [party] vote among bottom 90% income voters (after controls)
Reading: in 1998, Fidesz obtains a score that is 8.8 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; in 2018, their score is 18.9 pp higher. Controls include age, gender, and educational attainment.
Data source: Post-Election Surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years. Data on household income is not available for the election year 2006.

Figure 2c: The income cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters in Poland



Difference between % [party] vote among top 10% income voters and % [party] vote among bottom 90% income voters (after controls)
Reading: in 2007-2015, PiS obtains a score that is 8-12 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; Civic Platform obtains a score that is 12-17 points higher.
Data source: POLPAN (1991-1997), CSES (2001, 2005) and ESS (2007-2015)

Figure 3a: The education cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among college and non-college voters in Czech R.

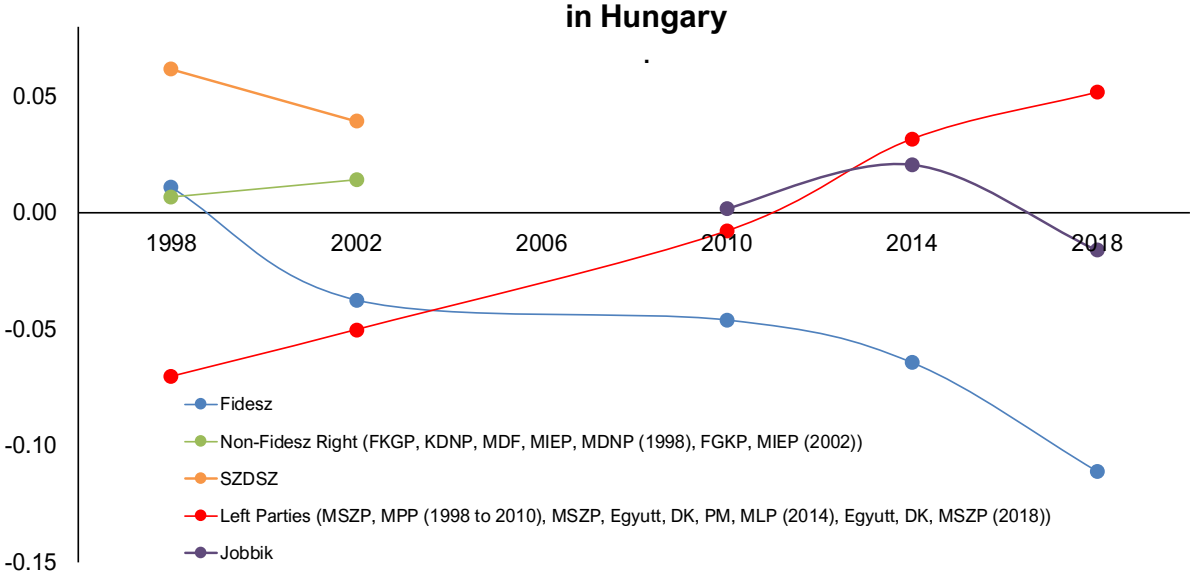


Difference between % [party] vote among those with the univeristy attainement and % [party] vote among non-univeristy attainement voters (after controls)

Reading: in 1996, right-wing parties obtain a score that is 3 pp higher among those with university attainement than among the non-univeristy attainement in CzechR; in 2017, their score is 11 pp higher. Controls include age, income decile, and gender.

Data source: Post-Election Surveys

Figure 3b: The education cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among college and non-college voters in Hungary

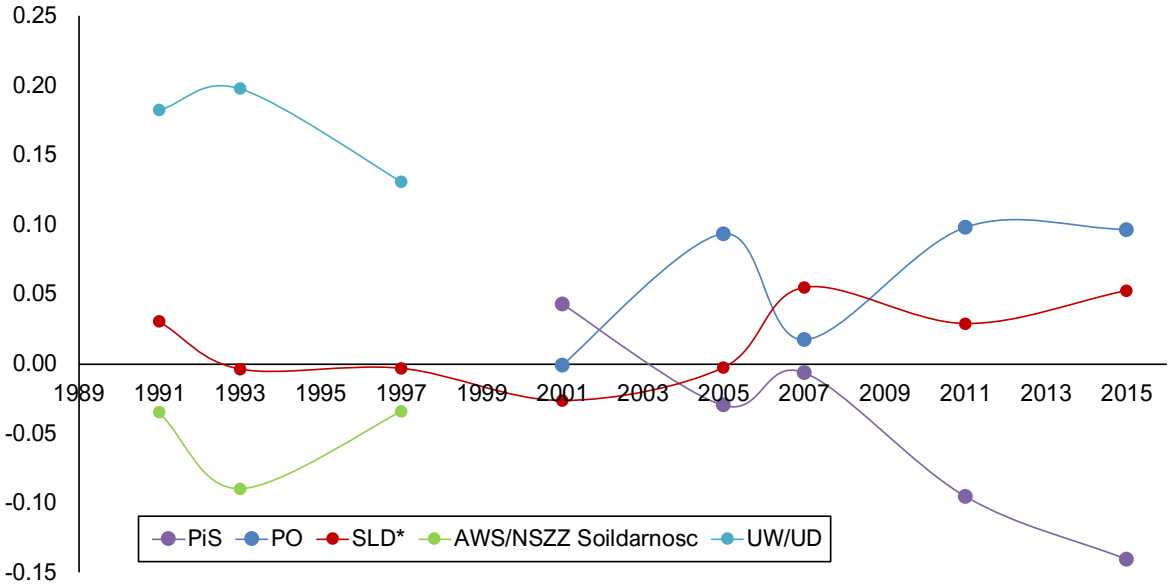


Difference between % [party] vote among those with a univeristy degree and % [party] vote among voters without a university degree (after controls)

Reading: in 1998, Fidesz obtains a score that is 1 pp higher among those with university attainement than among the non-univeristy attainement in Hungary; in 2018, their score is 11 pp lower. Controls include age, income decile, and gender,

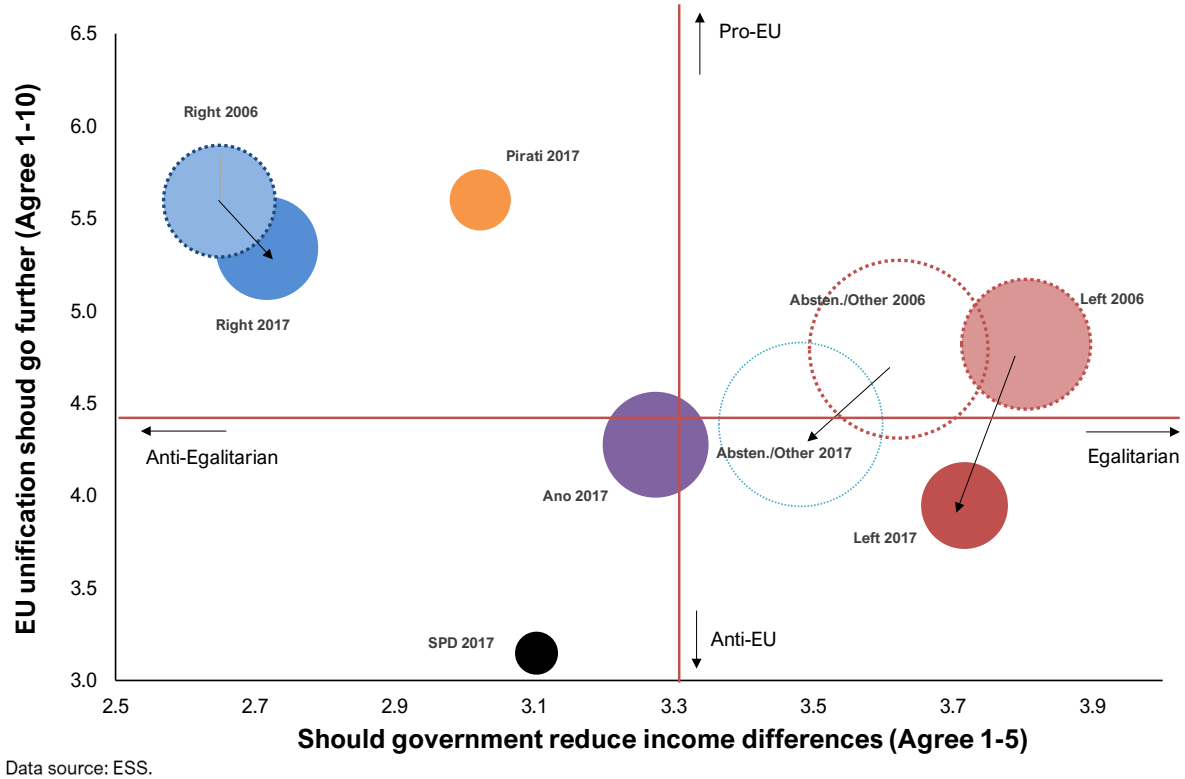
Data source: Post-Election Surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years. Data on householdincome is not available for the 2006 elections.

Figure 3c: The education cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among college and non-college voters in Poland



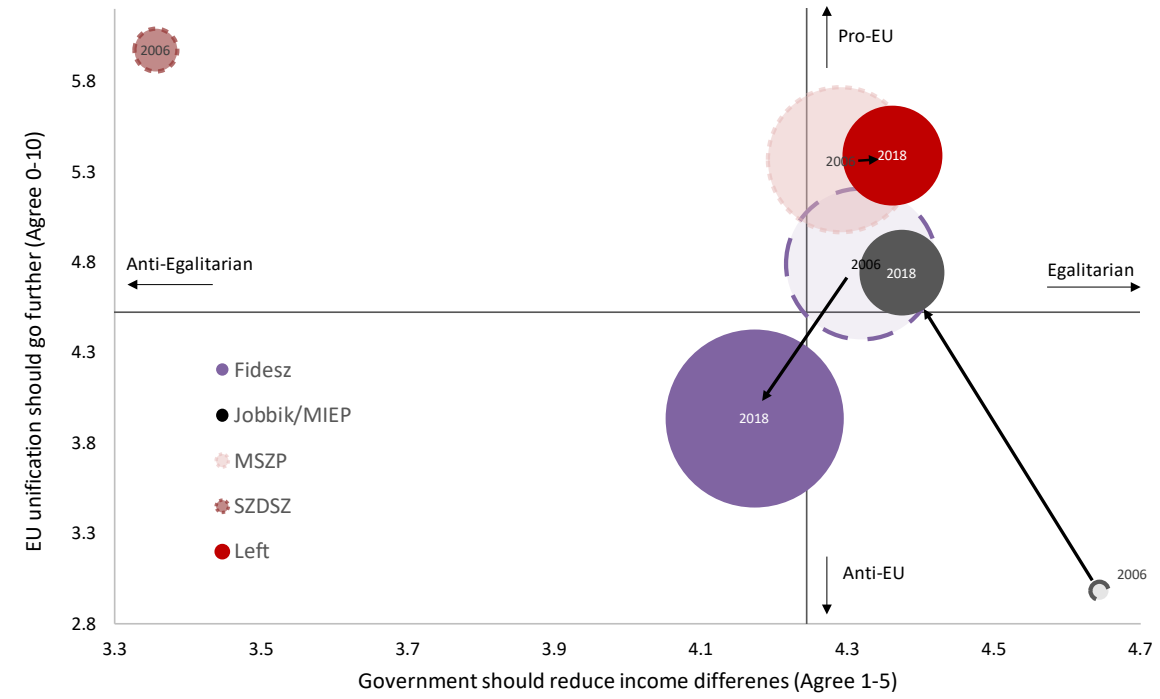
Difference between % [party] vote among those with a univeristy degree and % [party] vote among voters without a university degree (after controls)
Reading: in 2007-2015, PiS obtains a score that is 1-11 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; Civic Platform obtains a score that is 5-11 points higher.
Data source: POLPAN (1991-1997), CSES (2001, 2005) and ESS (2007-2015)

Figure 4a: Ideological dimensions of political competition in the Czech R., 2006 and 2017



Data source: ESS.

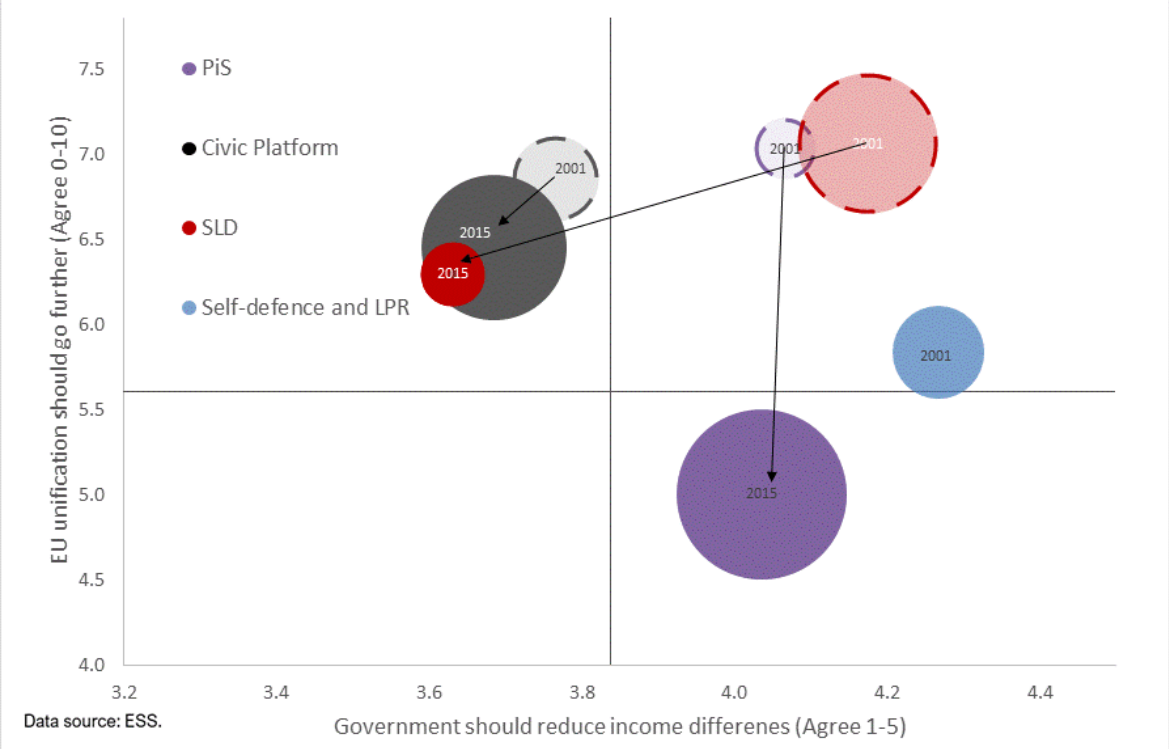
Figure 4b: Ideological dimensions of political competition in Hungary, 2006 and 2018



Data source: ESS.

Note: Vertical and horizontal lines show means of variables in 2018. Votes for the Left in 2018 comprise votes for MPP, LMP, DK, Együtt, Momentum and Párbeszéd.

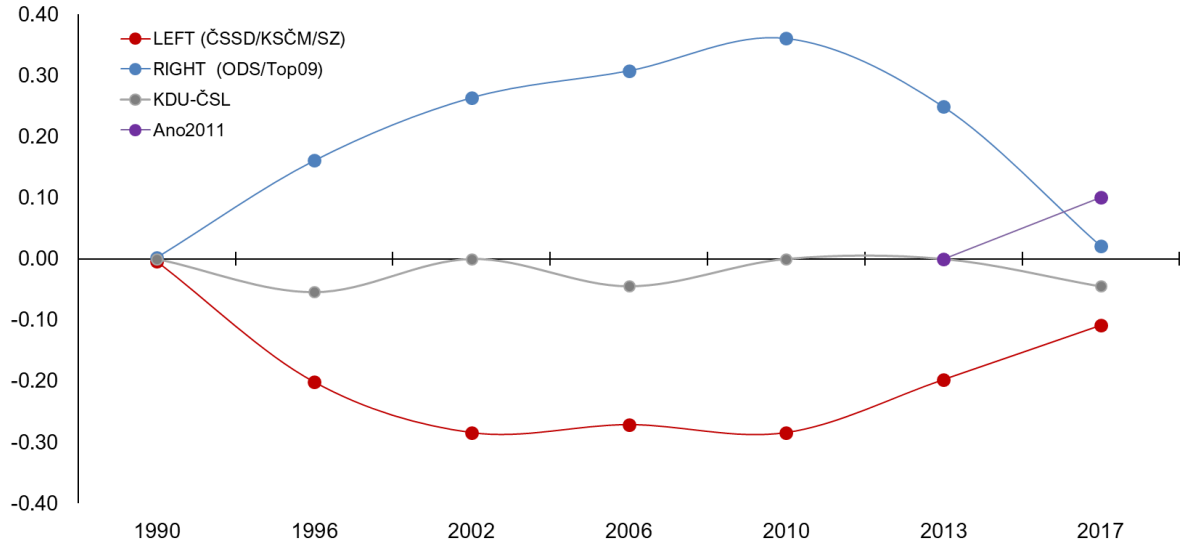
Figure 4c: Ideological dimensions of political competition in Poland, 2001 and 2015



Data source: ESS.

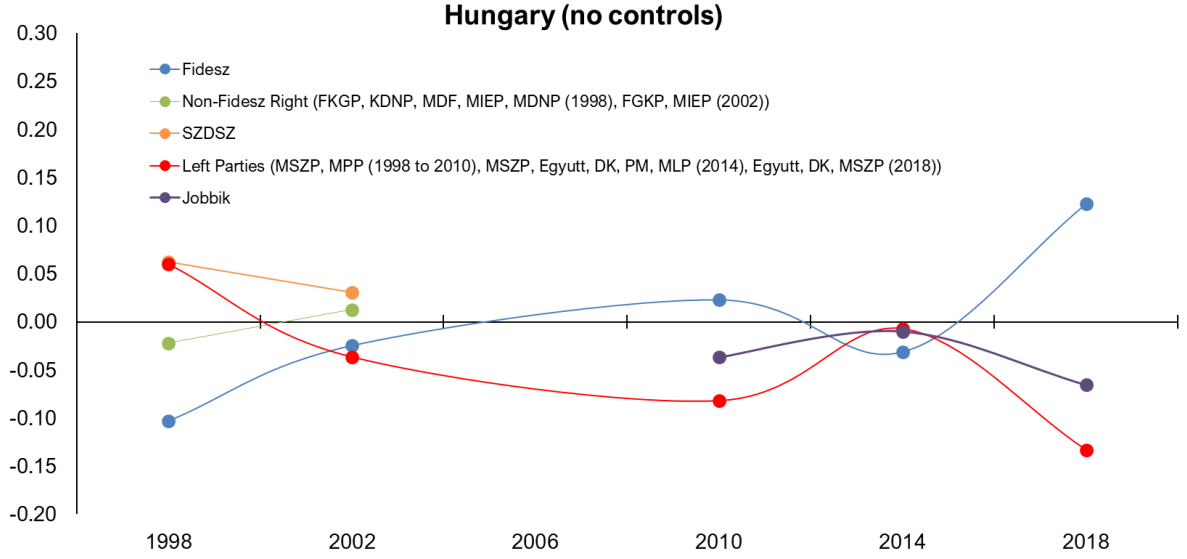
Appendix figures

Figure A1a: The income cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters in Czech R. (no controls)



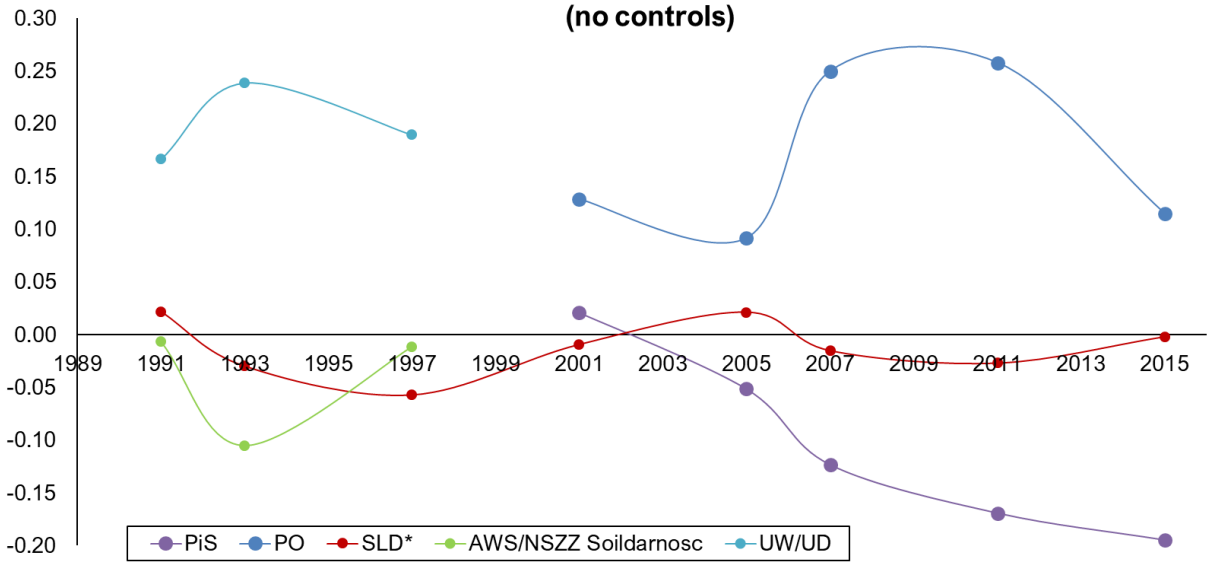
Difference between % [party] vote among top 10% income voters and % [party] vote among bottom 90% income voters (no controls)
Reading: in 1996, Left obtain a score that is 20 points lower among top 10% group than among the bottom 90%; in 2017, their score is 10 pp lower
Data source: Post-Election Surveys; Note: Right in 1990 includes Civic Forum

Figure A1b: The income cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters in Hungary (no controls)



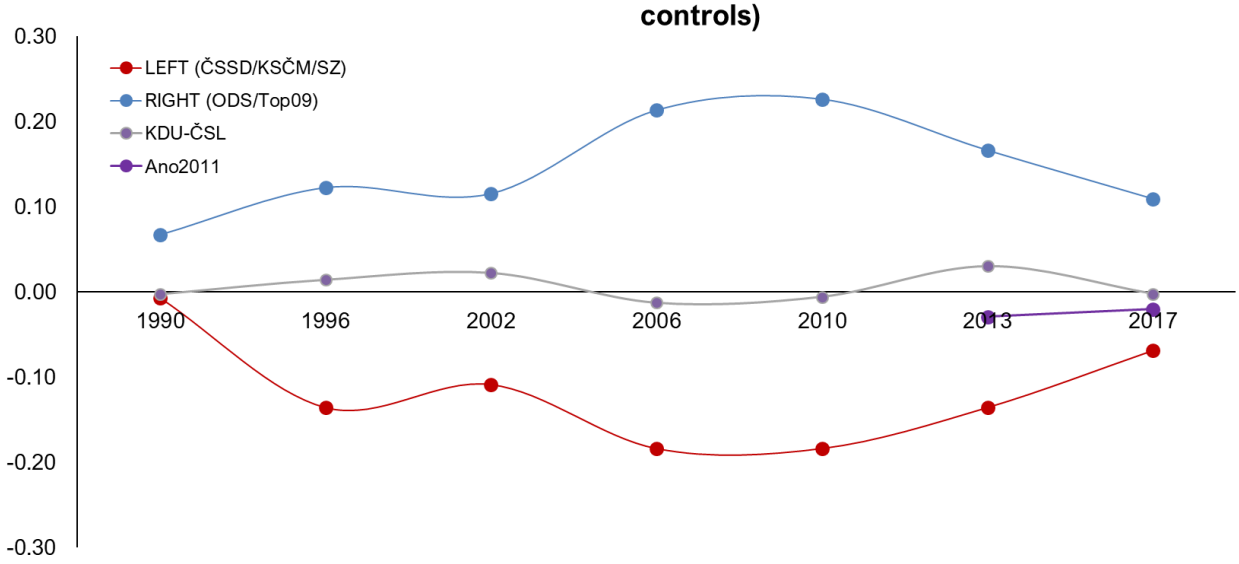
Difference between % [party] vote among top 10% income voters and % [party] vote among bottom 90% income voters (no controls)
Reading: in 1998, Fidesz obtain a score that is 10.3 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; in 2018, their score is 12.3 pp higher.
Data source: Post-Election Surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years. Data on income is not available for 2006.

Figure A1c: The income cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters in Poland (no controls)



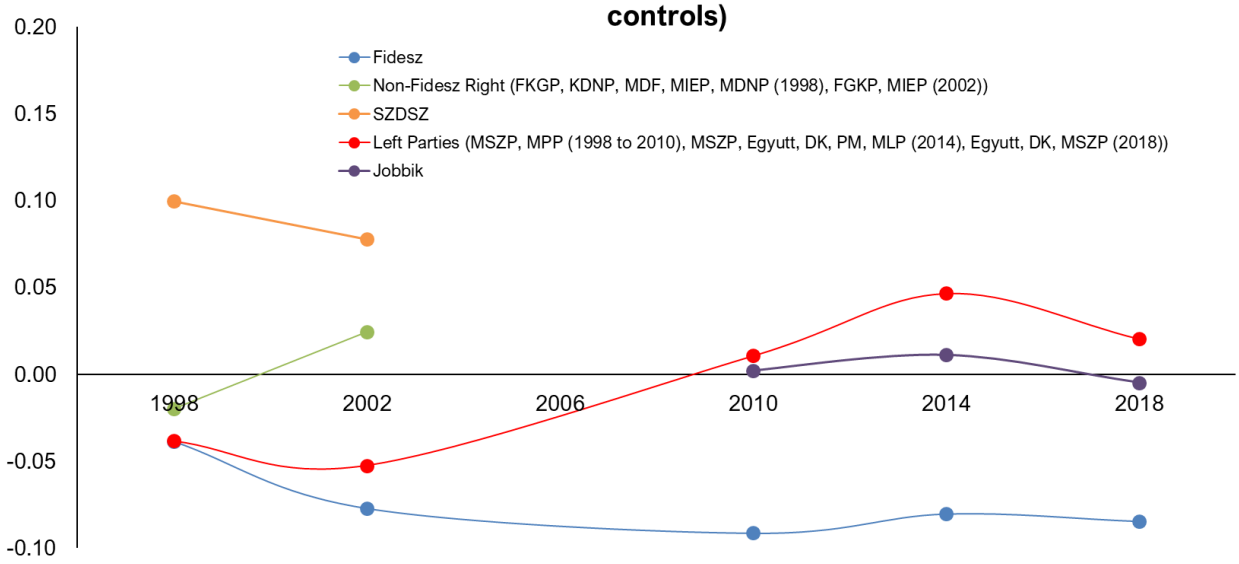
Difference between % [party] vote among top 10% income voters and % [party] vote among bottom 90% income voters (no controls)
Reading: in 2007-2015, PiS obtains a score that is 8-12 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; Civic Platform obtains a score that is 12-17 points higher.
Data source: POLPAN (1991-1997), CSES (2001, 2005) and ESS (2007-2015)

Figure A2a: The education cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among college and non-college voters in Czech R. (no controls)



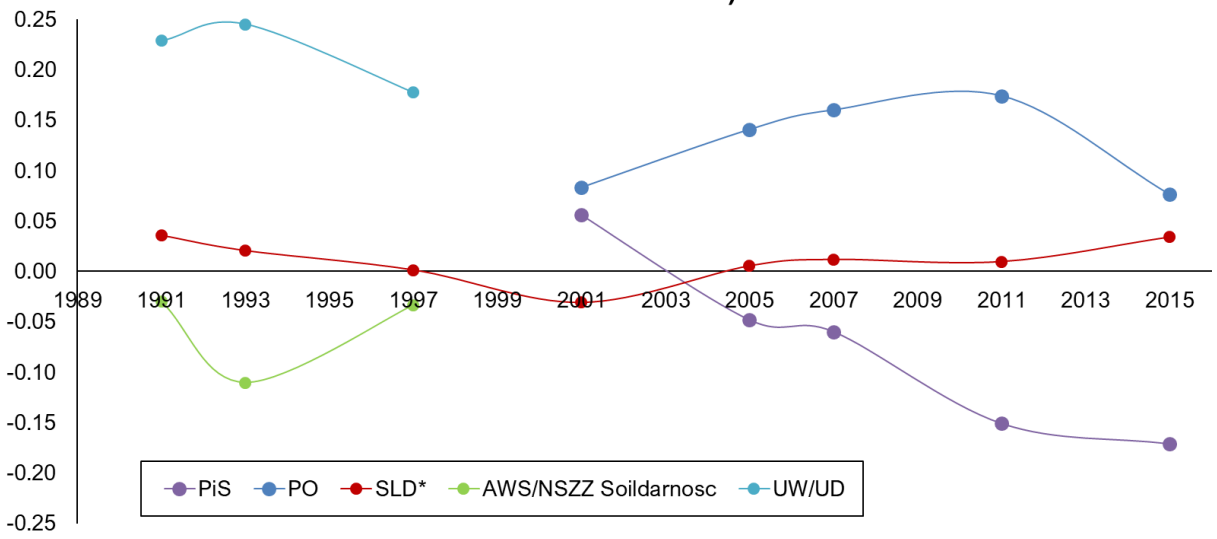
Difference between % [party] vote among those with the univeristy and % [party] vote among non-univeristy attainement voters
Reading: in 1996, right-wing parties obtain a score that is 12 pp higher among those with university attainement than among the non-univeristy attainement in CzechR; in 2017, their score is 11 pp higher.
Data source: Post-Election Surveys

Figure A2b: The education cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among college and non-college voters in Hungary (no controls)



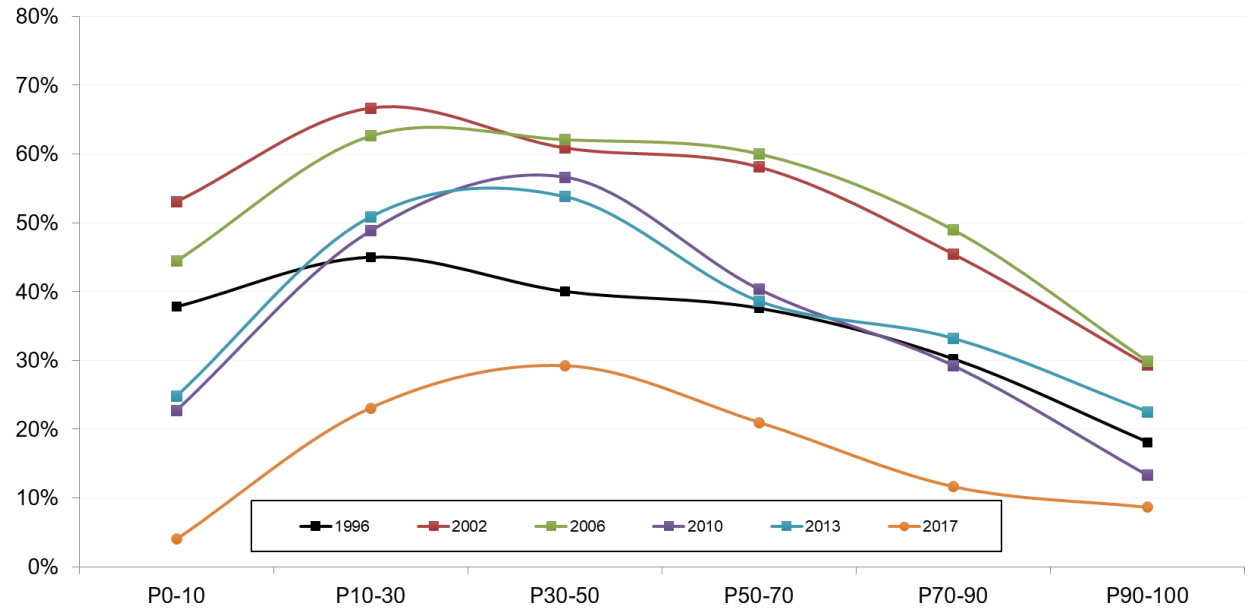
Difference between % [party] vote among those with the univeristy attainement and % [party] vote among non-univeristy attainement voters.
Reading: in 1998, Fidesz obtains a score that is 1 pp higher among those with university attainement than among the non-univeristy attainement in Hungary; in 2018, their score is 8.5 pp lower.
Data source: Post-Election Surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years. Data on income is not available for 2006.

Figure A2c: The education cleavage: difference between % vote share for political parties among college and non-college voters in Poland (no controls)



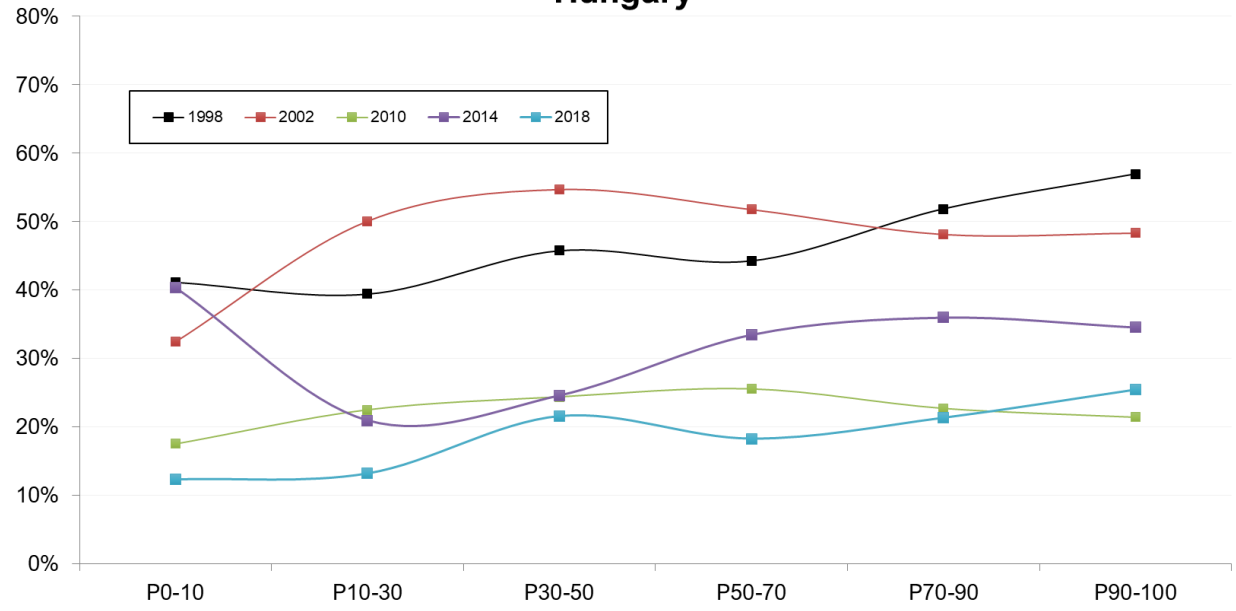
Difference between % [party] vote among those with a university degree and % [party] vote among bottom without a university degree
Reading: in 2007-2015, PiS obtains a score that is 1-11 points lower among top 10% income group than among the bottom 90%; Civic Platform obtains a score that is 5-11 points higher.
Data source: POLPAN (1991-1997), CSES (2001, 2005) and ESS (2007-2015)

Figure A3a: Voting for Left (CSSD-KSCM-SZ) parties by income groups



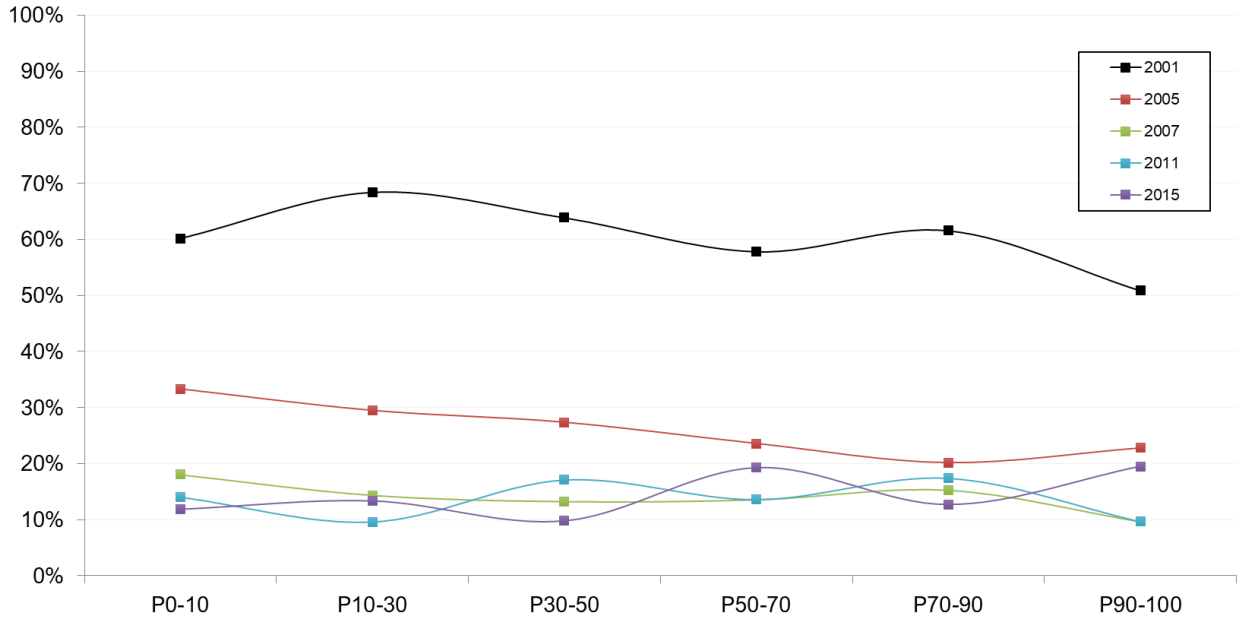
Data source: Czech Post-election surveys
Note: Estimated among voters

Figure A3b: Voting for Left parties by income groups in Hungary



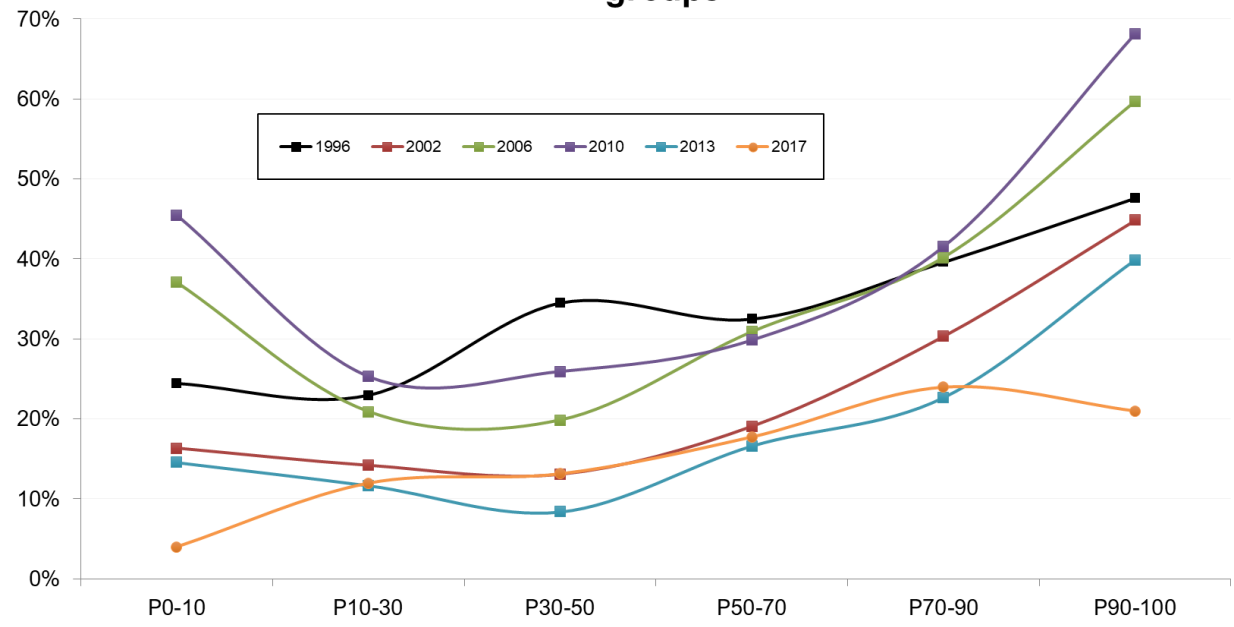
Data source: Hungarian post-election surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years.
Note: Votes for the Left in 1998 and 2002 comprise votes for MSZP, SZDSZ and MPP, in 2010 they comprise votes for MSZP, SZDSZ, LMP, MSZDP and MPP, and in 2018 votes for MPP, LMP, DK, Együtt, Momentum and Párbeszéd.

Figure A3c: Voting for Left parties by income groups in Poland



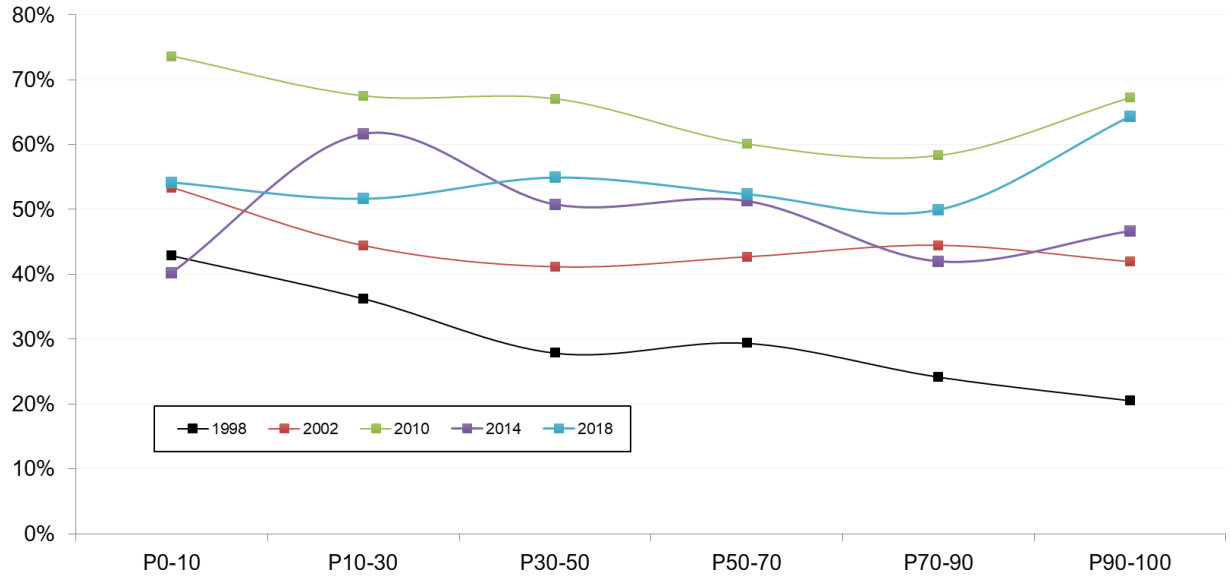
Data source: CSES (2001, 2005 only) and ESS

Figure A4a: Voting for Right (ODS-Top09) parties by income groups



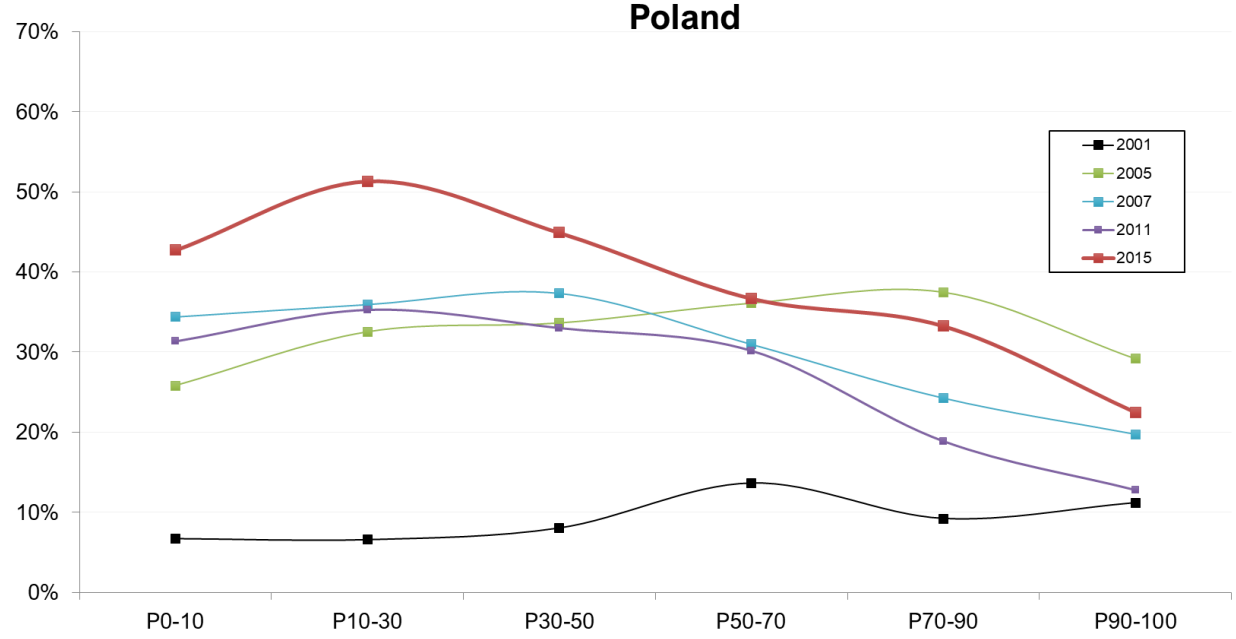
Data source: Czech Post-election surveys
Note: Estimated among voters

Figure A4b: Voting for Fidesz by income groups in Hungary



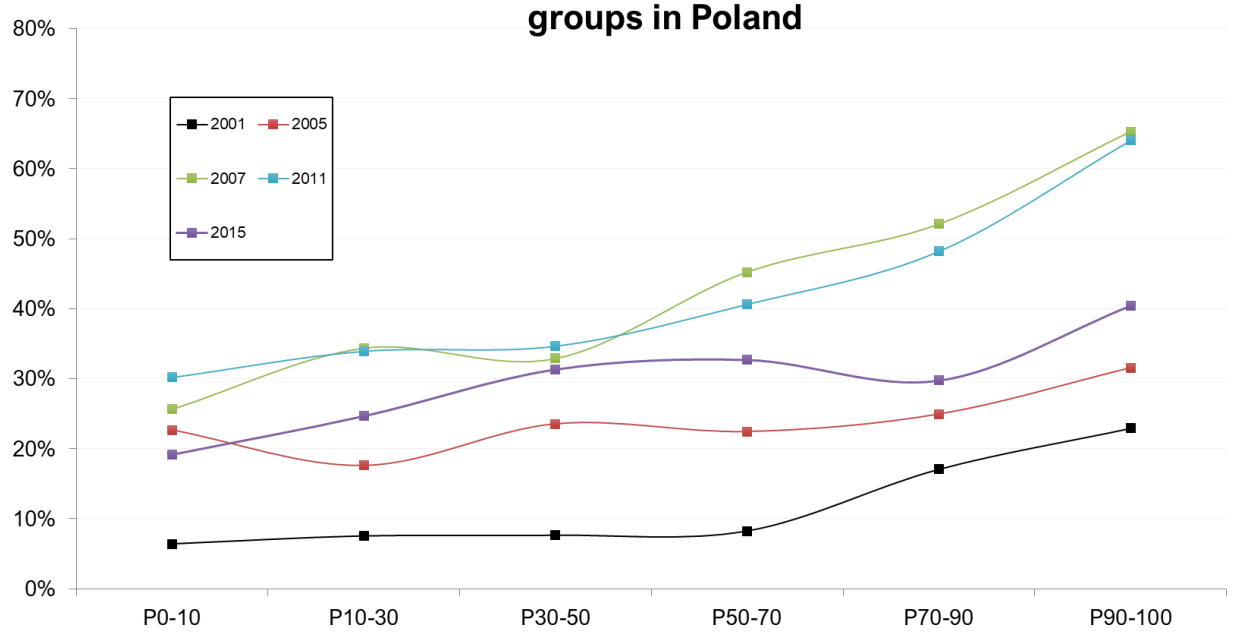
Data source: Hungarian post-election surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years.
Note: Votes in 2002 are for Fidesz and MDF.

Figure A4c: Voting for Law and Justice by income groups in Poland



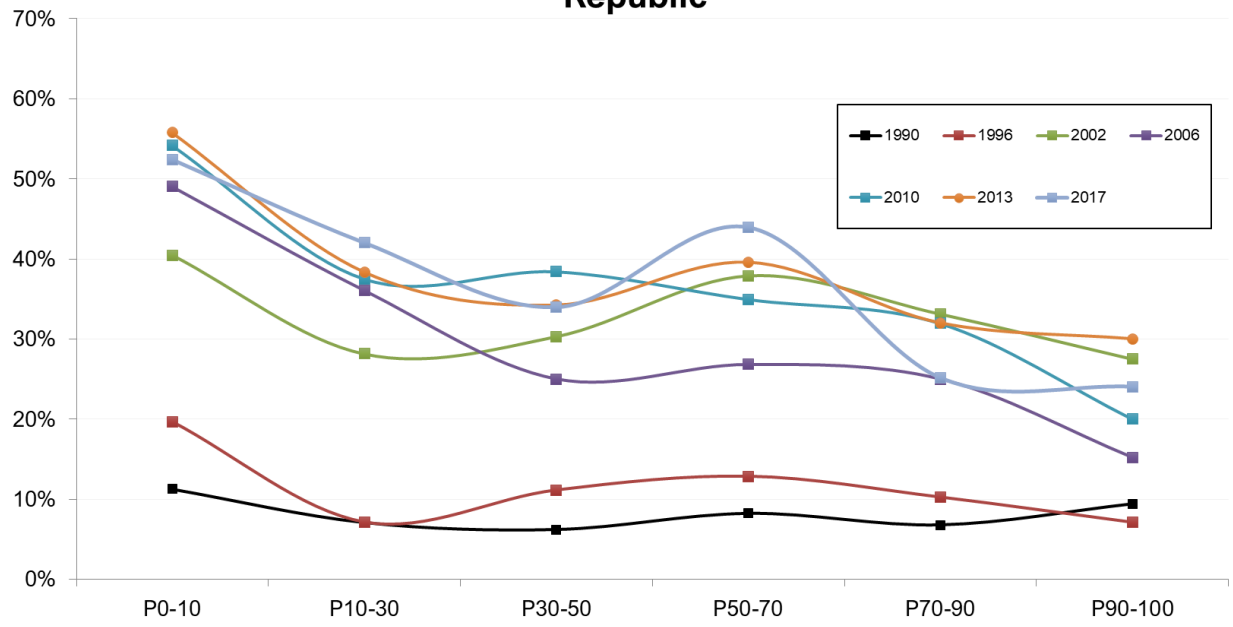
Data source: CSES (2001, 2005 only) and ESS

Figure A4d: Voting for Civic Platform parties by income groups in Poland



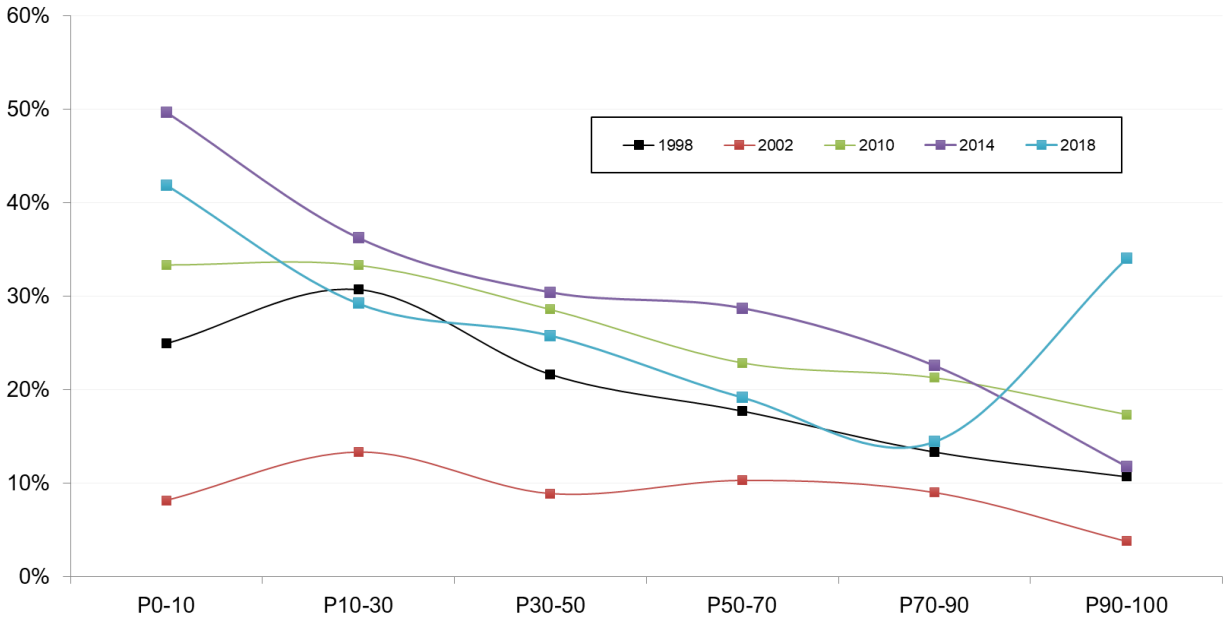
Data source: CSES (2001, 2005 only) and ESS
Note: In 2015, the vote for the party .N is included in the Civic Platform share.

Figure A5a: Abstention by income groups in the Czech Republic



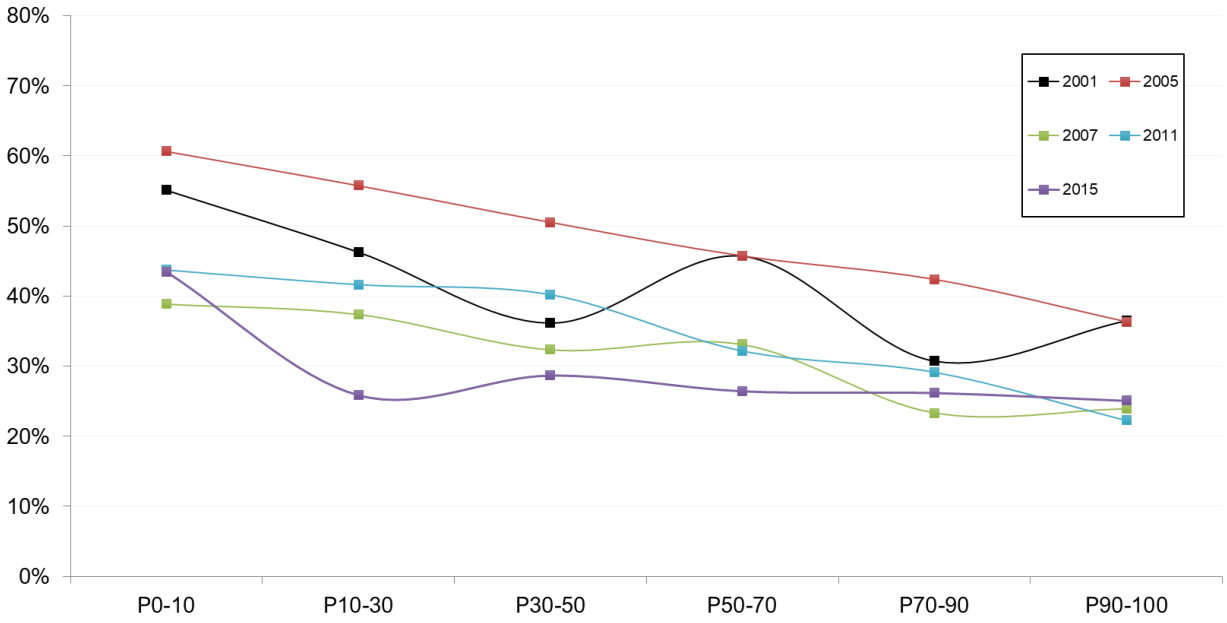
Data source: Czech Post-election surveys

Figure A5b: Abstention by income groups in Hungary



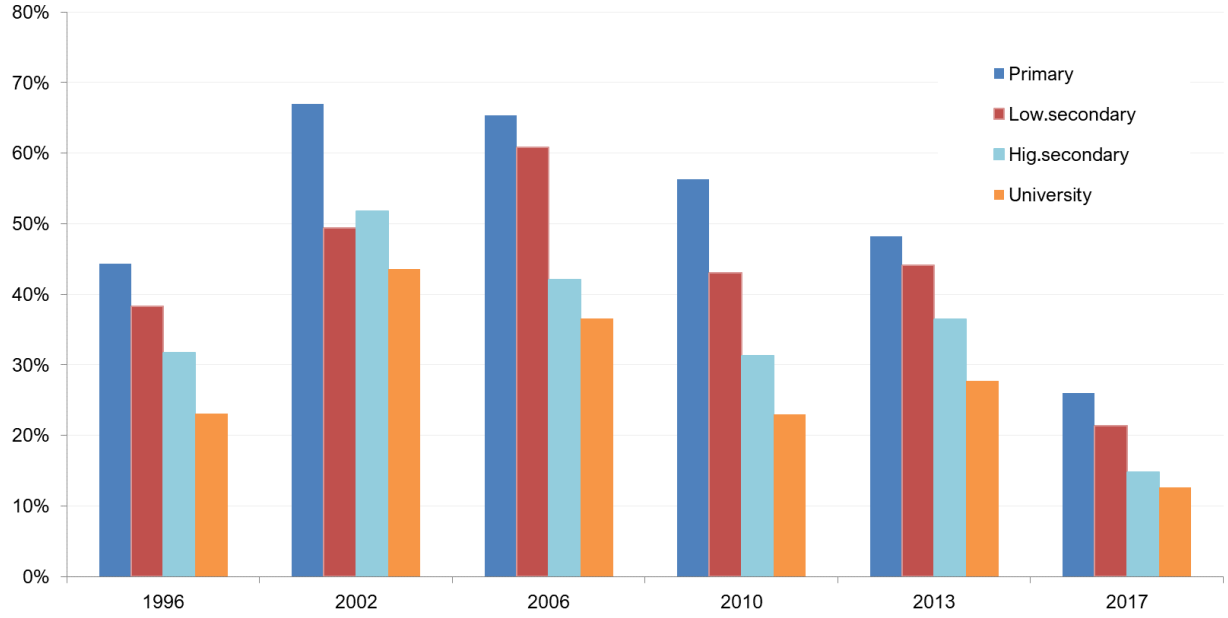
Data source: Hungarian post-election surveys for 1998 and 2002, ESS for all other years.

Figure A5c: Abstention by income groups in Poland



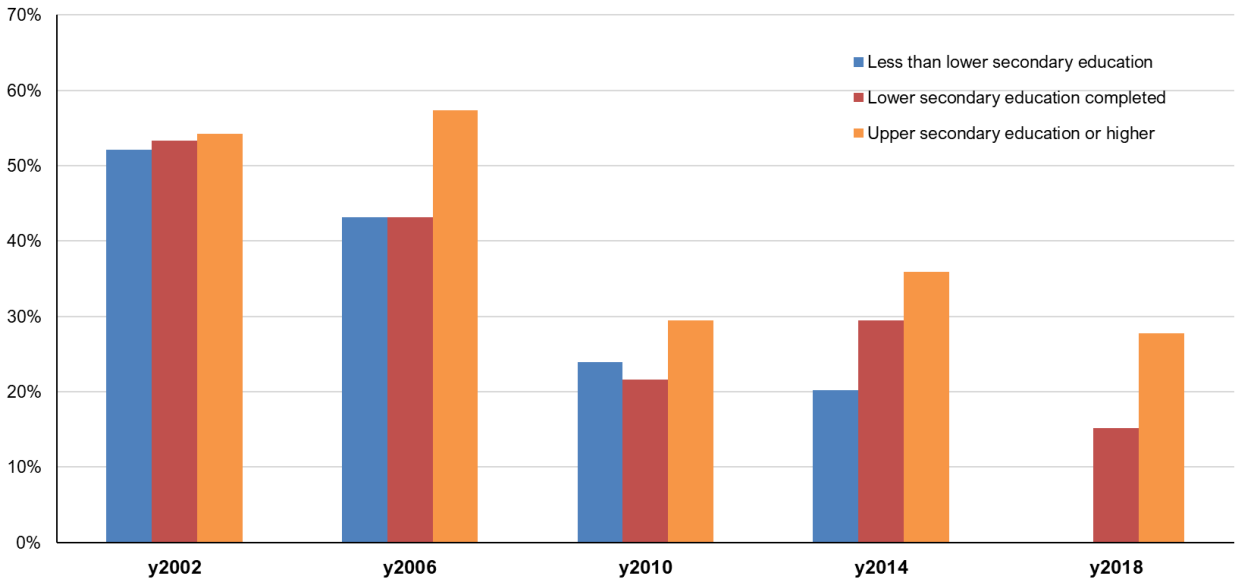
Data source: CSES (2001, 2005 only) and ESS

Figure A6a: Voting for Left (CSSD-KSCM-SZ) by educational attainment in the Czech R.



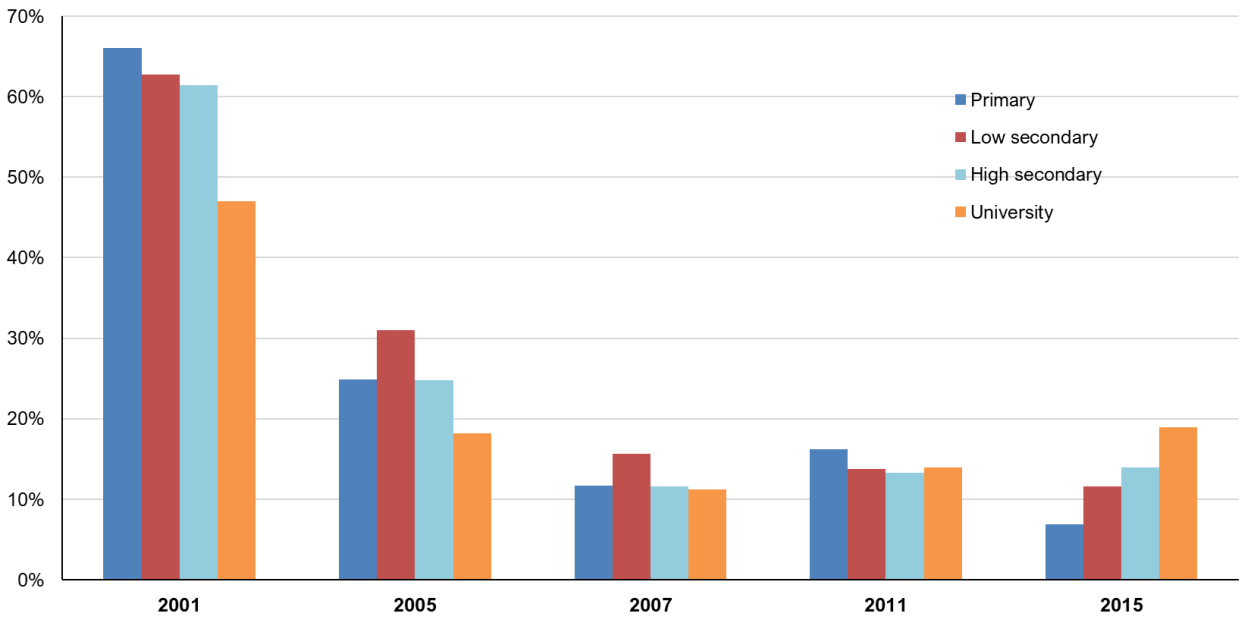
Data source: Czech Post-election surveys
Note: Estimated among voters

Figure A6b: Voting for Left by educational attainment in Hungary



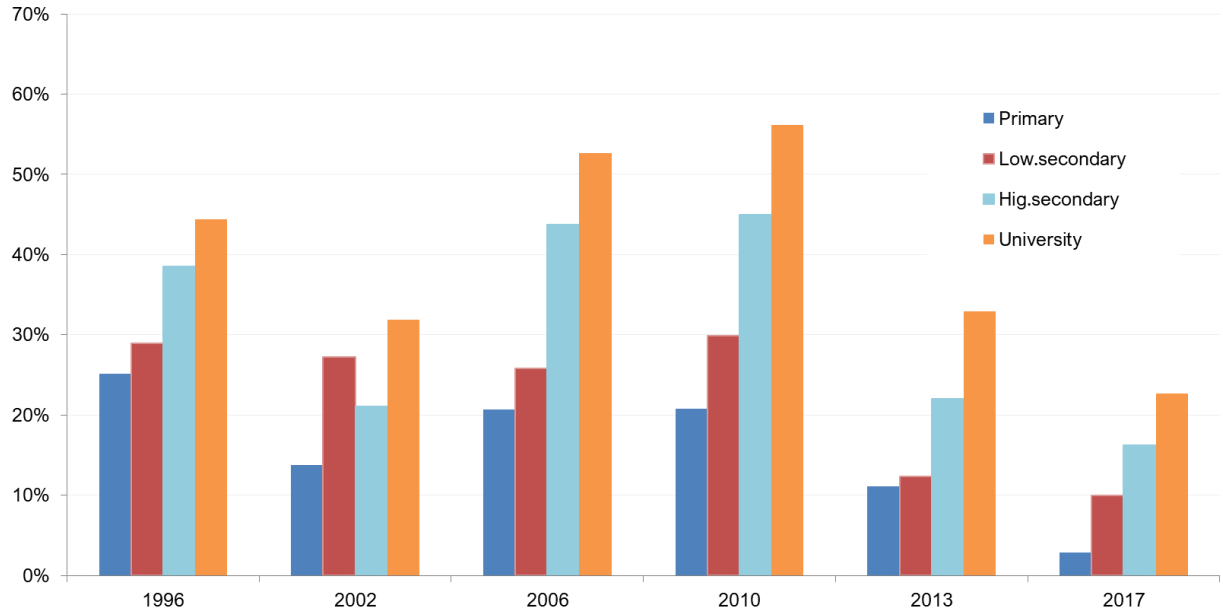
Data source: CSES for 2002, ESS for all other years.
Note: Votes for the Left in 1998 and 2002 comprise votes for MSZP, SZDSZ and MPP, in 2010 they comprise votes for MSZP, SZDSZ, LMP, MSZDP and MPP, and in 2018 votes for MPP, LMP, DK, Együtt, Momentum and Párbeszéd.

Figure A6c: Voting for Left by educational attainment in Poland



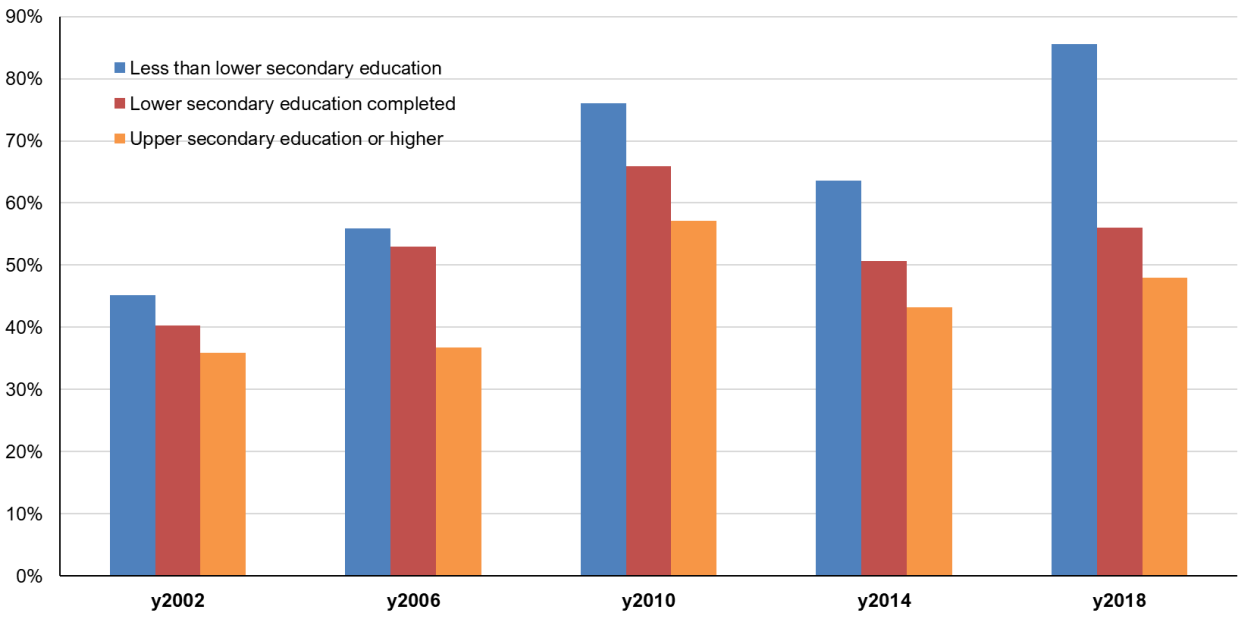
Data source: CSES for 2001 and 2005, ESS for all other years.
Note: Votes for the Left are for parties described as 'Left' in Fig. 1c.

Figure 7a: Voting for Right (ODS-Top09) by educational attainment in the Czech R.



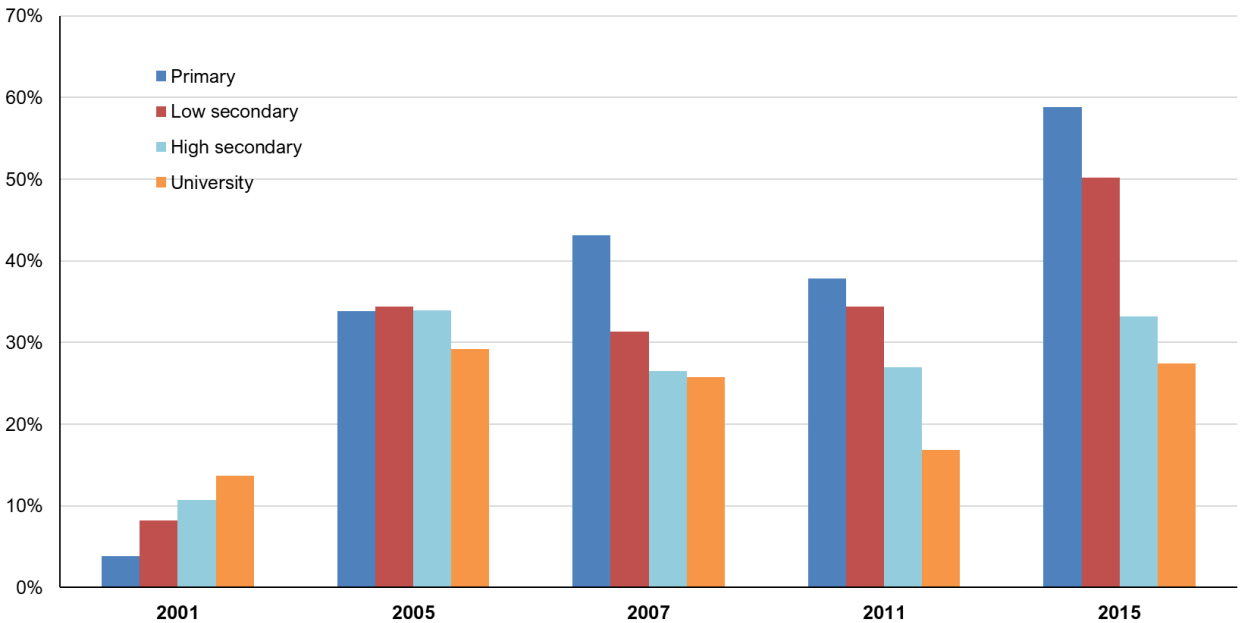
Data source: Czech Post-election surveys
Note: Estimated among voters

Figure A7b: Voting for Fidesz by Educational Attainment



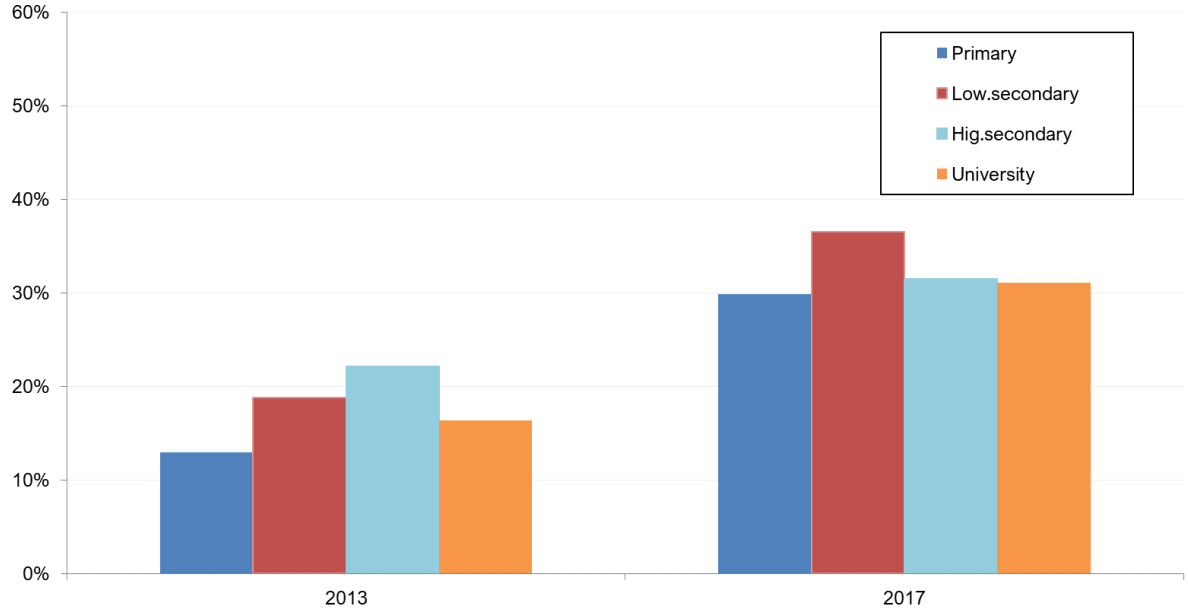
Data source: CSES for 2002, ESS for all other years.

Figure A7c: Voting for Law and Justice by educational attainment



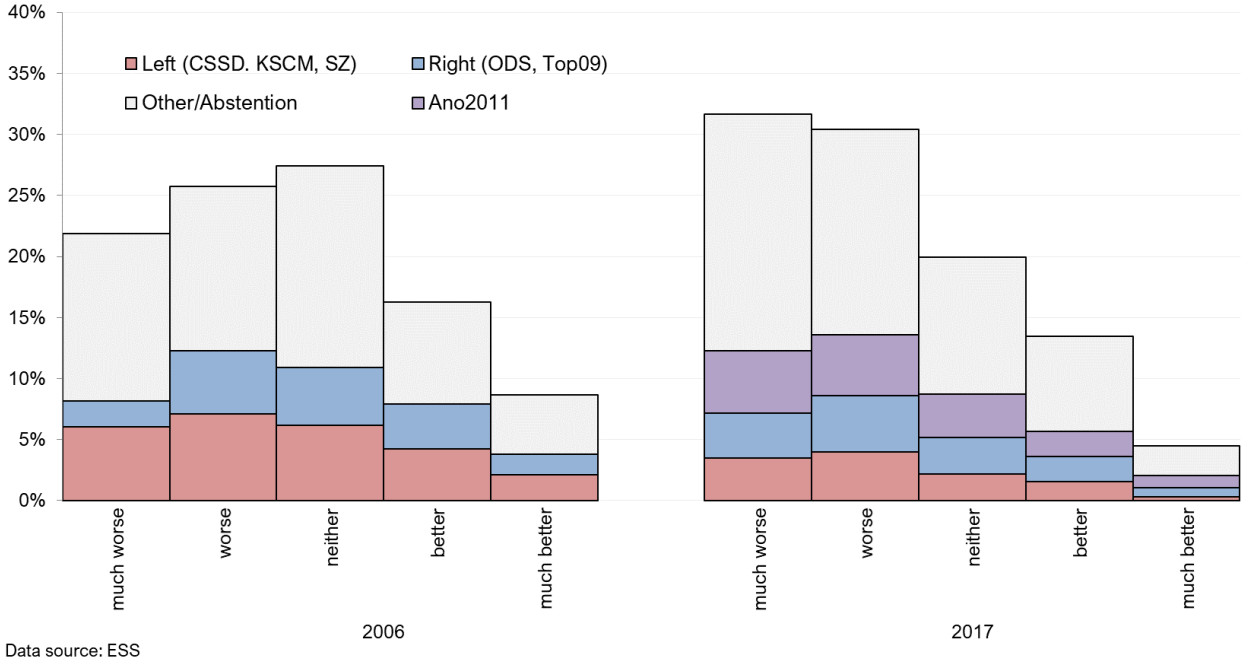
Data source: CSES for 2001 and 2005, ESS for all other years

Figure A7d: Voting for ANO2011 by educational attainment in the Czech R.



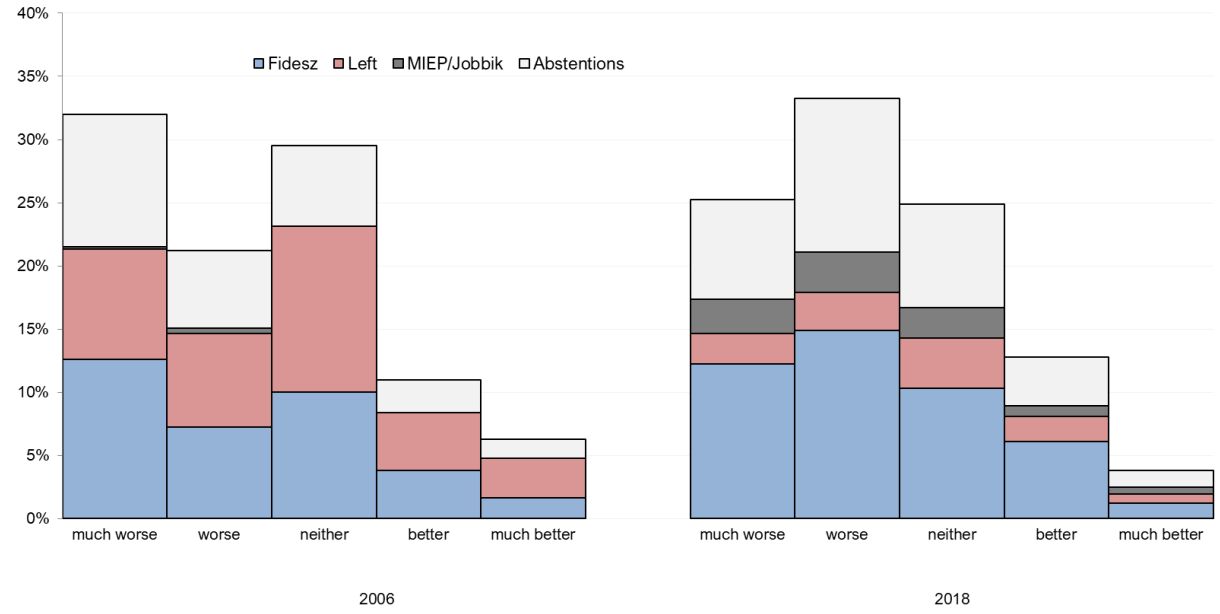
Data source: Czech Post-election surveys
Note: Estimated among voters

Figure 8a. Czech R.:
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live?



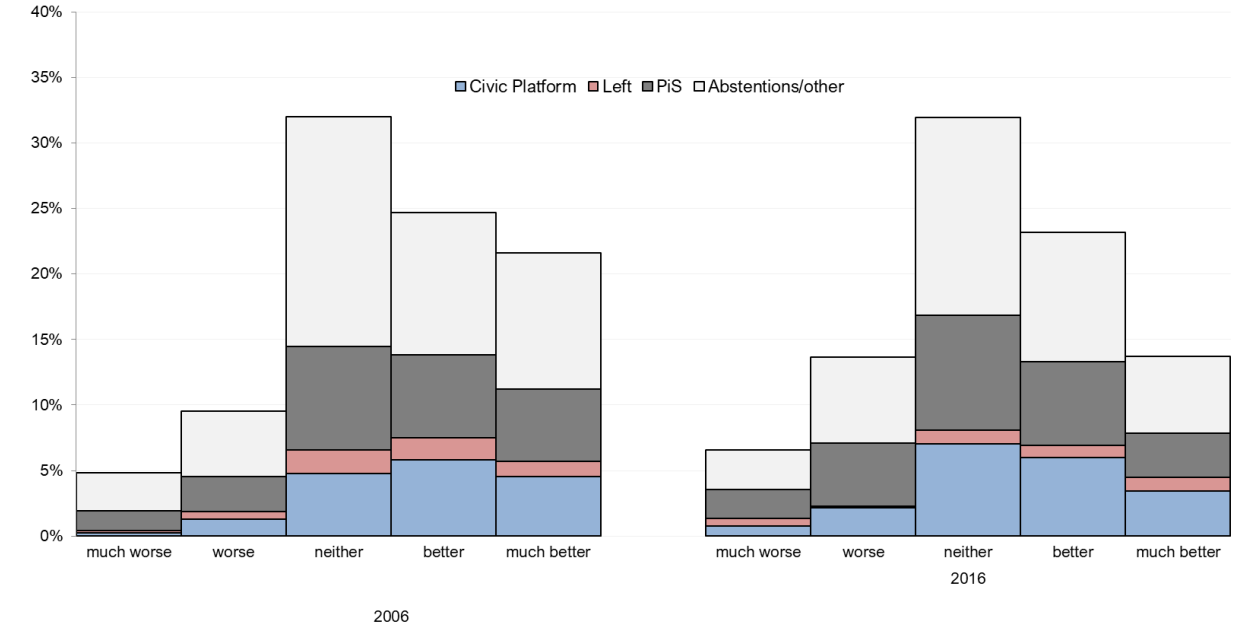
Data source: ESS

Figure 8b. Hungary:
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live?



Data source: ESS.
Note: Votes for Left in 2006 comprise votes for MSZP, SZDSZ and MPP, and in 2018 votes for MPP, LMP, DK, Együtt, Momentum and Párbeszéd.

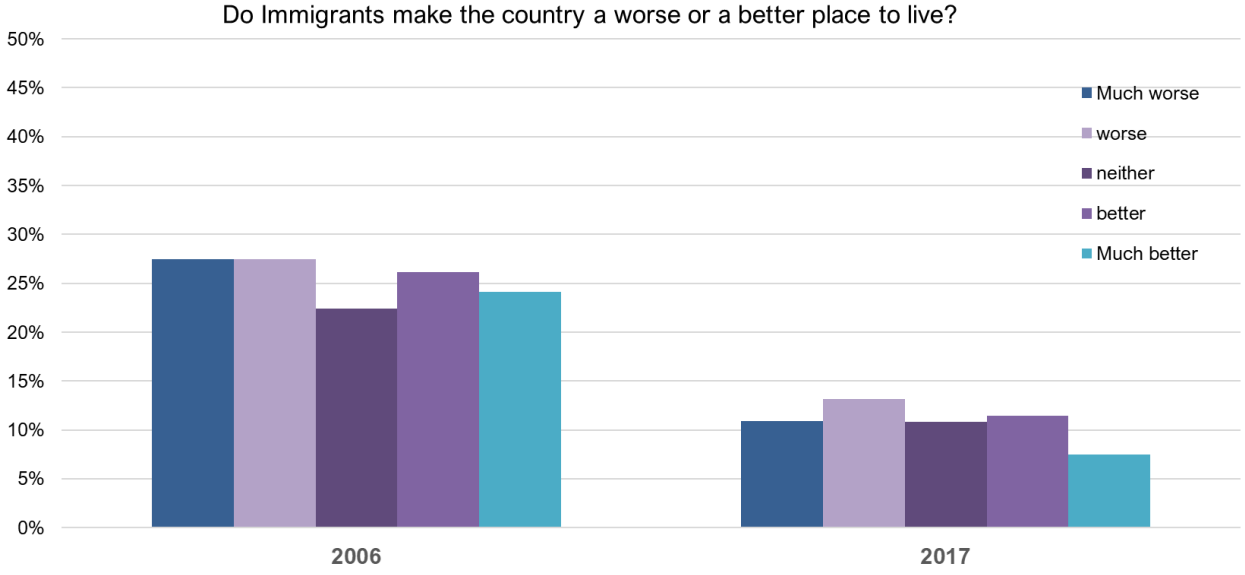
Figure 8c. Poland:
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live?



Data source: ESS

Figure A9a: CzechR: Voting for Left by Attitudes towards Immigration

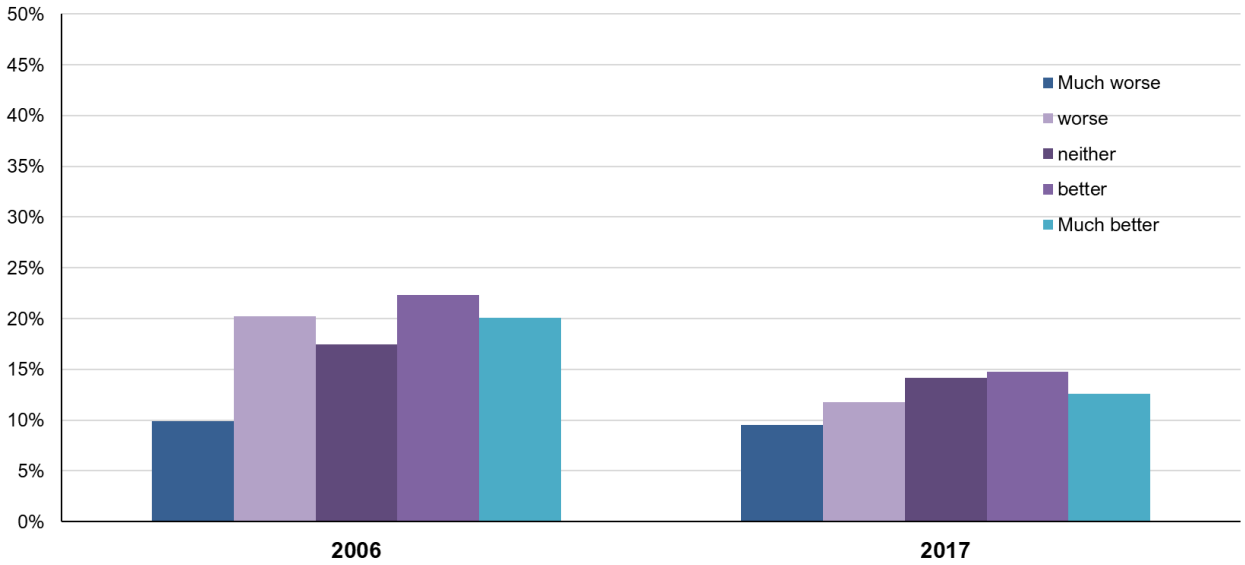
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.
Note: Votes comprise CSSD, KSCM and SZ

Figure A9b: CzechR: Voting for Right by Attitudes towards Immigration

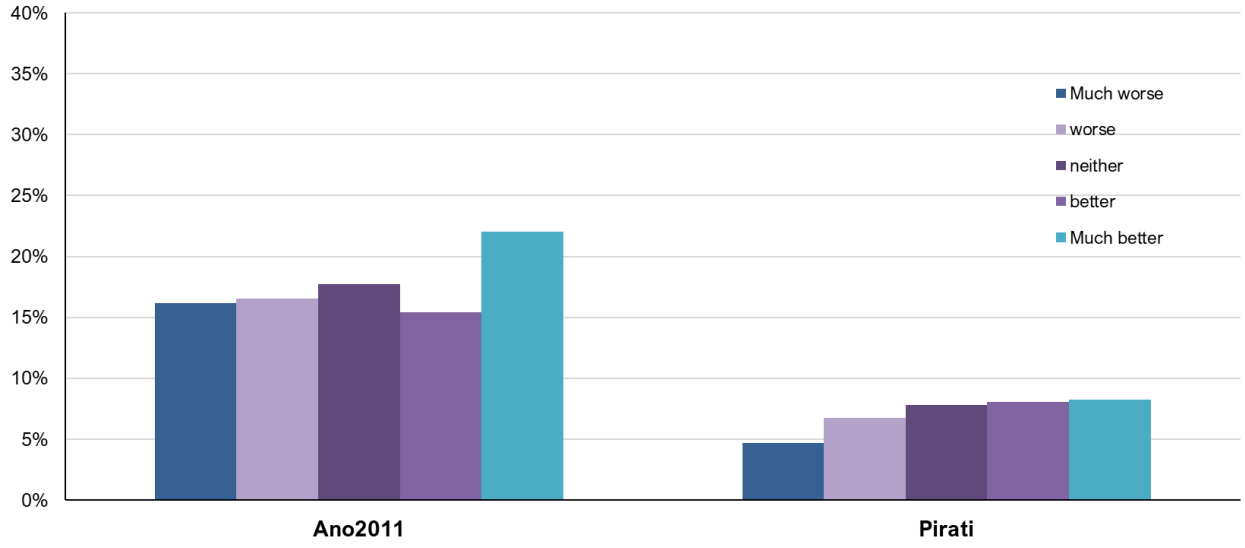
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.
Note: Votes comprise ODS and Top09

Figure A9c: CzechR: Voting for ANO and Pirati by Attitudes towards Immigration

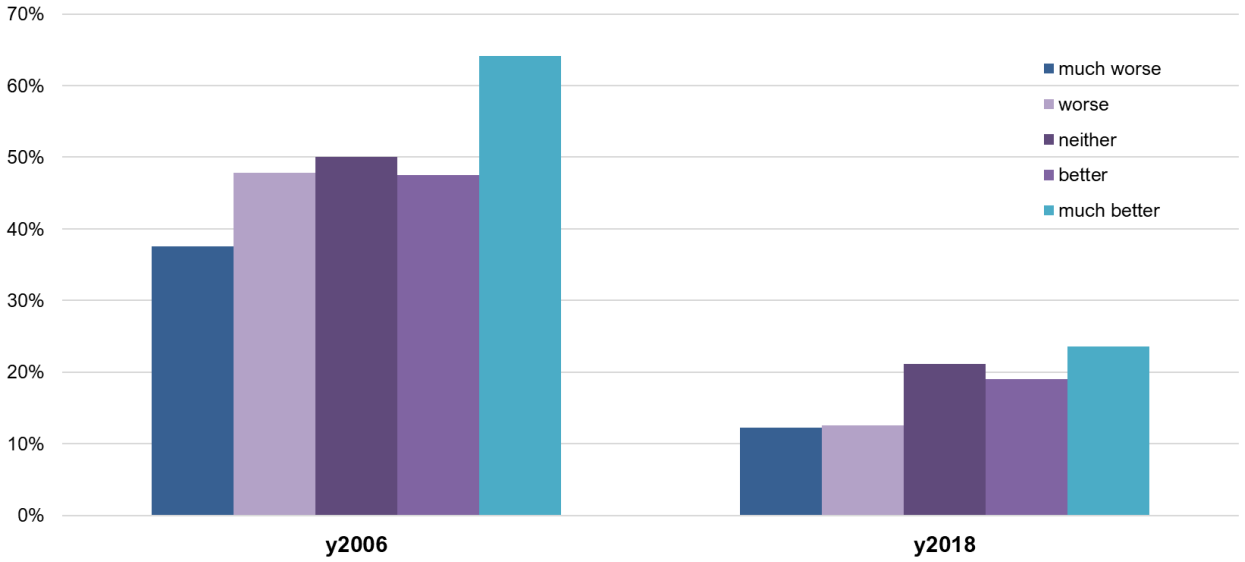
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.
Note: 2017

Figure A9d: Hungary: Voting for Left by Attitudes towards Immigration

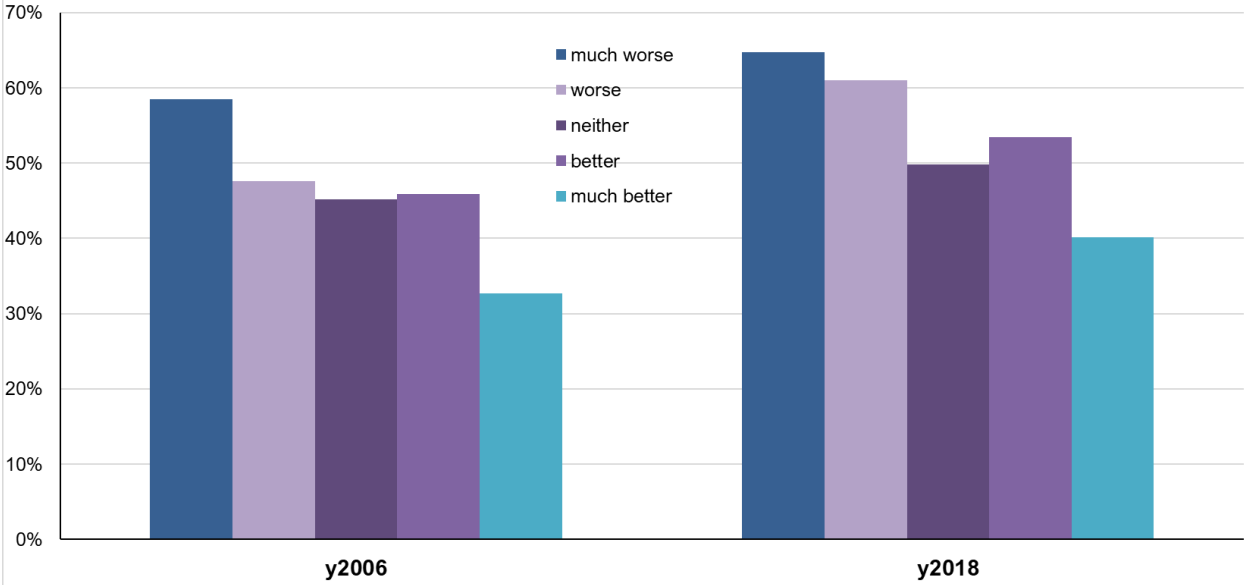
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.
Note: Votes in 2006 comprise votes for MSZP, SZDSZ and MPP, and in 2018 votes for MPP, LMP, DK, Együtt, Momentum and Párbeszéd.

Figure A9e: Hungary: Voting for Fideszt by Attitudes towards Immigration

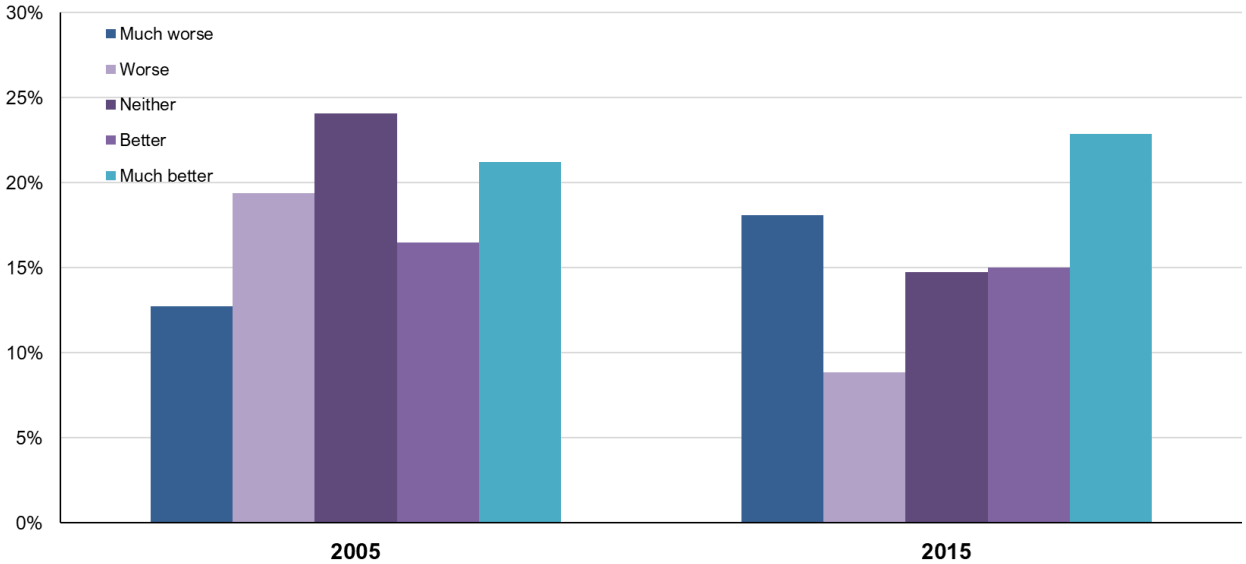
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.

Figure A9f: Poland: Voting for Left by Attitudes towards Immigration

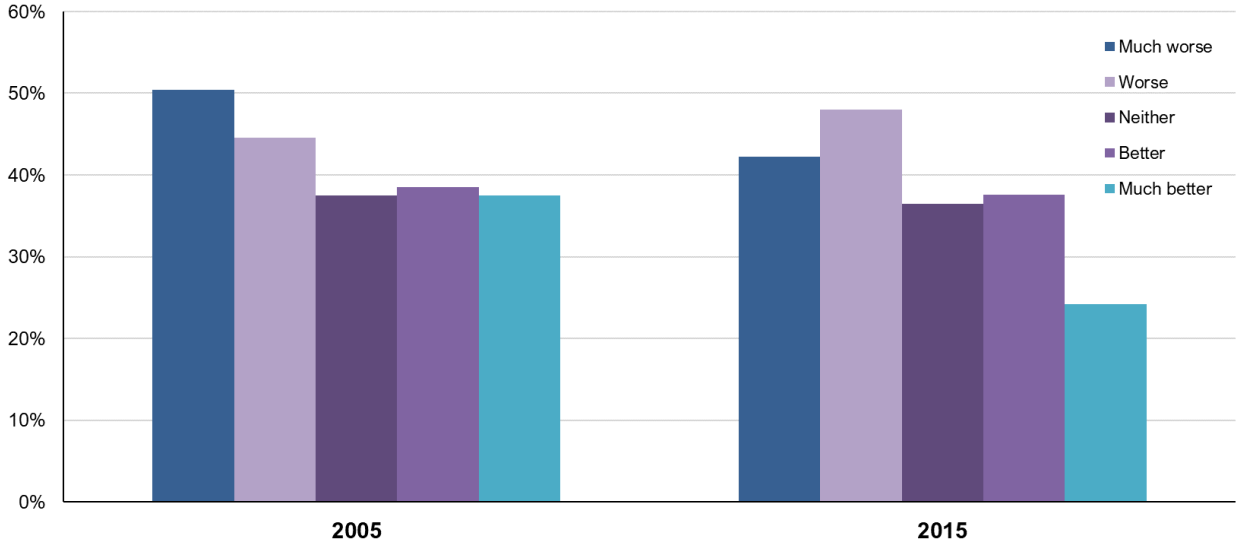
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.
Note: Votes for the Left in 2005 and 2015 consist of voting for the parties classified as left in Fig.1c.

Figure A9g: Poland: Voting for Law and Justice by Attitudes towards Immigration

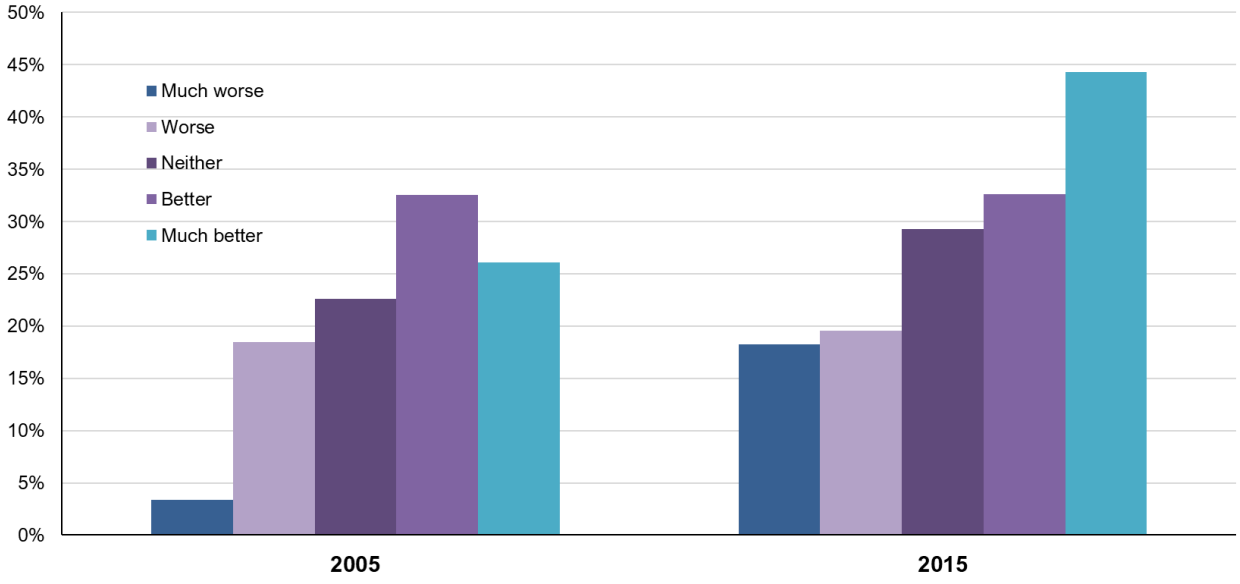
Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.

Figure A9h: Poland: Voting for Civic Platformby Attitudes towards Immigration

Do Immigrants make the country a worse or a better place to live?



Data source: ESS.