

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024

**IDENTIFYING AND DEPLOYING THE
CONGLOMERATE OF RADICAL LEFT VOTERS**

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INTRODUCTION

In the run-up to the European elections, transform! europe proposes to mobilise the social sciences to contribute to the strategic debates driving the European radical left. We chose to focus on the following questions: Which segment of the electorate should the radical left address during these elections, and how? Which lines shape the European political space internally?

First of all, it should be remembered that the European elections have a specific character in the European electoral landscape, primarily because of a particularly (and almost uniformly) low turnout. In fact, of the 28 countries that voted in 2019, voter turnout only reached 60% in four of them¹ (Spain, Germany, Malta and Denmark), when the average rate is just over 50%². Although there was a significant increase in turnout at European level during these same elections (+7 points), the rate remains low, and has been on a constant downward trend since the first election of its kind in 1979. As in all elections, abstention does not affect different sections of the population in the same way. It is particularly prevalent among young people and those with lower levels of education, while there is an over-representation of urban, educated, and older voters. Abstention is also fuelled by a strong feeling of mistrust towards the European institutions: Clark (2014) establishes a correlation between abstention and doubts about the representativeness and real political weight of the European Parliament.

¹ This does not include countries where voting is obligatory, where turnout can be as high as 80%.

² Data from the European Parliament : <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en>

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Exploring the question of political cleavages in the context of the European elections is all the more necessary in view of another of their specific features: the theme it embeds, the «European issue», is not enough to structure the political debate. The «European issue» is a non-cleavage, in the sense that it is absorbed into pre-existing cleavages (Harmsen, 2005) such as the defence of the free market, nationalism, the fight for social rights, etc.

While this issue has been given greater prominence over the last twenty years, notably through the growing political weight of "euroscepticism", which led to the UK's exit from the EU, it does not represent a cleavage in itself: Harmsen (2005) shows how the established parties (social democrats, Christian democrats, etc.) deal with the European issue through a national prism, in line with their government balance; outsider parties, for their part, use the European issue essentially as an occasional point of support for a party positioning already marked by rejection of the "establishment", with which the EU is associated. The emergence of the European question has not, therefore, shaken up the structuring of political fields but has, on the contrary, been absorbed into them, just as it has into the party field and the forms of contestation. Similarly, neither do the recent issues that have saturated the public debate in themselves have the capacity to draw a new dividing line on which political offers can position themselves. Health measures in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic or the current war in Ukraine - to mention only the most salient ones - although representing central issues, cannot play this structuring role.

Yet the last twenty years have seen a flurry of announcements about the end of the left-right cleavage. In turn, we have witnessed its hypothetical replacement by the people versus the elites, or progressives versus illiberals, drawing blurred lines both sociologically (who?) and politically (what?). The work in this note, on the other hand, takes the opposite approach, highlighting the enduring nature of the left-right divide. So, it's not a question of its hypothetical replacement, but of the continuities and ruptures in the logics that underline it. How does the left-right cleavage still structure ideological groups in Europe? On what lasting basis does this cleavage rely?

Faced with the need to consider these central issues with a view to establishing a political strategy, this note proposes to document them by building on scientific literature, and to make a contribution to the debate. We will make our case in three steps. The first stage will be devoted to a review of the social groups that make up the strongholds of the left-wing electorate, in other words to review the sociological cleavages that shape the contours of this electorate. The second stage will look at the ideological cleavages that shape this constituency. Finally, the third stage will give us the opportunity to draw some strategic conclusions from the preliminary stages.

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transform! europe



WHO VOTES FOR THE LEFT?

**LEFT VOTING AND ELECTORATES
IN EUROPE**

THE SOCIAL BASIS OF THE RADICAL LEFT VOTERS

For effective strategies to improve the mobilization of the radical left's voter base, it is first crucial to thoroughly identify the current electorate: who goes to the polls on election day? Who should radical left parties address in the first place?

To answer these questions, we examine in this section the body of research that has specifically focused on identifying this diverse group. We explore factors such as social status, migration background, and gender, which all contribute to the social positioning of these voters.

Radical left-wing parties (RLP), i.e. parties to the left of the social democrats such as: communist parties, former communists or radical socialist parties are scarcely the subject of cross-national research. There is not much research work on the RLPs, both regarding their organizational evolution and their electoral support. Most of the existing research concerns the crises and transformations these parties underwent in the 1980s and 1990s, and sometimes how these parties performed. In this section, we draw on research focusing on individual social and economic background and attitudinal factors in the RLP vote. The working class formed the electorates of Communist parties in the past. The decline of these parties during the 1980s and 1990s was often attributed to the strong correlation between their electoral support and the social structure's transformation, with a heavy dependence of these parties on their working-class constituencies. Various academic accounts of this decline highlight the diminishing size of traditional working-class and agricultural worker groups, as well as the crises faced by highly unionized sectors like the mining and heavy industry. While empirical evidence is not consistently provided across different countries, these factors are often cited as key elements explaining the electoral crisis of Communist parties. However, is it correct to consider that radical left parties have lost this historical connection with the most exploited social groups?

Available research in electoral sociology allows us to answer this question. The works of Luis Ramiro and Raul Gomez are particularly enlightening in this regard as they analyse the voting for radical left parties through different ways of apprehending social position: employment status, socio-professional group, sector, and income.³

Activity status

Employment status plays a significant role in shaping support for radical left parties. Retired individuals and those who stay at home have shown less support for these parties, with the exception of the Czech case. On the other hand, radical left parties have been particularly

successful among students. These patterns have remained relatively stable both before and after the 2008 Great Recession. Radical left parties also attract support from the unemployed, who are often economically vulnerable. The performance of these parties among the unemployed has generally improved after the recession, with some exceptions. Comparatively, radical left parties tend to be more successful among the unemployed than among the employed. Overall, the unemployed and students form key constituencies for the radical left, demonstrating their ability to appeal to socially and economically marginalized groups.

Among students, radical left parties have consistently enjoyed notable success. This trend has remained consistent both before and after the 2008 Great Recession. The data analysed by Gomez and Ramiro, indicates that radical left parties have performed well among students in various countries. This support from students is not only limited to their numerical representation but also reflects an ideological and political alignment between the radical left and student interests and concerns. Overall, the success of radical left parties among students highlights the ability of the former to resonate with the latter and their ability to mobilize student support.

Socio-economic groups

The classification in four categories - white collars, manual workers, farmers, and self-employed voters - allows for cross-country and cross-time comparisons by Gomez and Ramiro. Despite the trend of decreased left-wing support among certain segments of the working class, the radical left still maintains a relatively strong presence among this group.

³ Raul Gomez, Luis Ramiro, *The social bases of radical left parties' support and its stabilization after the 2008 great recession. Report for Transform! and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2020.*

In many countries, the left outperforms right-wing and radical-right parties among the working class. Data show a dual reality, with some parties being most successful among the manual working class (e.g. the Czech KSCM, the Finnish VAS, the German Die Linke, the Dutch SP, the Greek KKE or the Portuguese PCP) and others finding greater support among white collar employees (e.g. the Danish EN, the Norwegian SV, the Portuguese BE and the Spanish IU).

Analysing the ratio of support between white collar and manual workers, it is evident that there is a comparable number of cases where support is substantially higher among each group. However, for parties that perform better among white-collar workers, the gap with the working class tend to be relatively tenuous, indicating the continuing importance of the working class for the radical left.

Finally, the group of social and cultural professionals consistently demonstrates an increased vote for radical left parties in all European countries. These groups generally experience significant economic devaluation, despite being often highly qualified.

Public/private sectors

Left-wing parties traditionally receive strong support from public sector workers compared to those in the private sector. The majority of radical left parties obtain higher support among public-sector employees. Exceptions are rare and the differences in support between public and private sectors are then generally small. This pattern remains consistent before and after 2008, with only a few exceptions. Overall, public-sector workers tend to favour left-wing parties due to their labour-market relationship with the state and shared preferences for welfare, redistribution, and state intervention.

Income

Most RL parties are more successful among lower-income individuals, with some exceptions in Ireland, Spain, and Portugal. Differences between the bottom-three income quintiles are generally small, indicating that radical left parties are

significantly more successful among low and middle-income families compared to those with higher incomes. After 2008, there were slight increases in support among the lower income quantiles in most countries, with some parties experiencing more abrupt changes, such as the Czech KSCM and the Danish SF. However, Iceland, Italy, and Ireland's Sinn Fein saw a relatively stronger increase in support among the top 40% of the population after the crisis. Overall, left-wing policies focus on income and wealth redistribution, appealing not only to the industrial working class but also to other sectors of the population benefiting from greater redistribution.

These elements help to challenge the notion that the radical left no longer represents the voice of the most marginalized individuals within the economic system. We do not observe a significant underrepresentation of the working class. Unemployed individuals and students form a significant electorate, as do those who experience economic devaluation, such as public-sector workers or individuals in socio-cultural professions.

Furthermore, to be fully understood, economic positioning indicators, need to be complemented by an analysis that takes into account race and gender as well, as these are also significant factors in determining one's position within economic power dynamics.

Gender

It is particularly interesting to analyse relations between gender and vote practices. Especially, the study of the voting in favour of radical left-wing parties from a gender perspective offers some interesting insights, particularly when looking at the work of Raul Gomez (2022). In the 20th century, we could see what political science calls a «gender gap» - a difference in the probability of voting between men and women - was to the detriment of the left. But this conservative voting pattern among women, which could be explained by various factors that no longer really exist, tends to disappear. Gomez (2022) concludes that there

is a gender balance within the radical left electorate, challenged by increased female voting in favour of the ecologist parties. Furthermore, by combining the gender and age dimensions, a left-vote pattern emerges. Indeed, the younger the cohorts studied, the more a gender gap is observed, in which women vote more for radical left-wing parties. We can hypothesize that this emerging electoral opportunity among women is conditioned by a consistent feminist political stand by these parties.

Racial discriminations

Finally, the racial dimension also plays a decisive role. Race must obviously be understood here not in its pseudo-biological sense, but as the process of essentializing real or supposed phenotypic or cultural traits (nationality, skin color, religion, etc.) which form the basis of a social relationship of domination by a majority group over minority groups (or racialised groups) (Brun and Cosquer, 2022). There are numerous quantitative research results showing the clear correlation between belonging to a racialised group and voting for left wing, mainly in North America but also in Europe (for example, Saggar et Heath, 1999). In the French research, the major quantitative survey called "Trajectoires et Origines" (TeO) by Simon and Tiberj (2012) showed that the feeling of not being recognised as «French» that is triggered by racial discriminations is correlated with left-wing voting. In the field of qualitative research, Druez (2023) provides a more detailed understanding of the link between racialised voters and their left-wing vote, with a perspective on the competition between the social-democratic left and the radical left. Druez shows how a majority of these voters prioritizes a socio-economic motive (injustices, salaries, etc.) rather than a racial one (discrimination). Nevertheless, among those who do, the most politicized (for example, with militant experience or a degree in social sciences) are those who vote most for the radical left, recognising in these political forces those who "fight the most" against racism. The survey conducted by the FOCAL research group, presented in the book *Votes Populaires* (2022),

analyses the vote of working-class groups in the 2017 French presidential election. Following a quantitative ethnography methodology ⁴, they analyse the vote based on the immigration background and the social position of the voter. They found a significantly strong vote in favour of the candidate J.L. Mélenchon (France Insoumise, radical left) among groups with an immigration background (particularly North African), which seems consistent with the candidate's anti-racist stance. Also, the higher the economic position of these voters (measured through income or through PCS / "profession and social category", a French statistical tool), the more they lean towards candidate E. Macron. The propensity to vote in favour of the radical left candidate therefore appears to be the result of political subjectivations linked to a history of racial discrimination that cannot be understood independently of the economic domination and indicates that an intersectional analysis of the vote is necessary. Consistent with the results obtained by Ramiro and Gomez, this work allows us to understand the social properties that encourage voting for the radical left among working-class groups, such as qualifications, working in the public sector, or coming from a migration background that is highly exposed to racism. These properties are all the more conducive to a stable vote for the radical left when the voter combines them.

⁴ Questionnaires passed *in situ* in the voting offices, in two French cities with a strong working class electorate.

This shows how the Left brings together very different segments of the population, making it the political constituency with socially the most heterogeneous electorate, combining certain privileged categories with categories occupying dominated positions in European societies. Around the sociological cores of both blue-collar workers with lower degrees and socio-cultural professions with higher degrees, it also performs in disparate social groups who share an experience of domination, such as young women or racialised people. These dominating features of the radical left electorate are in some cases in tension with the Green and Social Democrat electorates, which also recruit from the same population segments. However, this overview of the left's strongholds in society is incomplete without a specific survey of the power relations and the ideological divides to which they are attached. In fact, these categories of the population do not represent an "automatic" conglomerate for the radical left but shape a composite electorate which is linked to the positions defended by the left, by its positioning on the cleavage lines which are important to them. It is these dividing lines that we now need to explore.



IS THE LEFT/RIGHT AXIS STILL RELEVANT?

Considering the question of the permanence of the left-right divide and the different associated sociological groups leads to identify the ideological basis on which this dividing line is based. Attempting to understand the "why" that relates these social groups to the left therefore requires to consider what is politically contained in "the left".

A taxonomy widely used in political science to analyse political content structures the political arena in two dimensions, the combination of which illustrates the range of possible positions for a political force or voter. These two dimensions are, on the one hand, the economic dimension (wages, market regulation, labour, etc.) and, on the other, the cultural dimension (environment, gender equality, minority rights, etc.). Two things are worth noting at this stage. Firstly, the artificial nature of this division which primarily serves the needs of the analysis, as well as its unsatisfactory nature – for example, feminism or access to rights for minorities represent in fact a central economic issue. Secondly, what encompasses each of the two dimensions may vary according to the researchers who use this taxonomy.

Nevertheless, this taxonomy shows how the core of the left-wing electorate is located both in the anti-neoliberal pole in the economic dimension, and in the liberal pole in the cultural dimension (Gougu and Persico, 2017; Steiner, 2021). This first point allows to dispel the widespread topoi of opposing the social and the 'societal' dimensions, for two reasons. Firstly, even if we acknowledge this division –which we repeat is largely unsatisfactory –, it is clear that the core of the Left's positioning in these two dimensions is an articulation of the two. The second reason is that for example the environmental issue shows not only the link but also the interdependence of the two dimensions: while environmentalism can often be referred to as a «societal» issue, Gougu and Persico (2017) show how it functions as a driving force in the rejection of neoliberalism and its imperatives for economic growth, which represent a danger to the environment. To make the picture even more complex, Steiner (2021) observes that while the link between the two dimensions is the driving force behind the left-wing vote, the weight given to each of the two in motivating people to vote varies from generation to generation. He shows how young cohorts – those born in the 1980s and after – vote primarily on the basis of the cultural dimension, while older cohorts vote primarily on the basis of the economic dimension. What is more, while the right-left divide may be

perceived as reductive, it remains central to voters' political identification. National and European barometers provide an insight into the centrality of it. In France, in 2023, the left-right divide will continue to structure people's political identities and attitudes, with 80% of people saying that they stand by it⁵. At European level, the figure is even higher, with around 86% positioning themselves along the left-right scale⁶. The prevalence of the left-right cleavage remains evident even when we take a closer look at its decline. In the surveys, this decline in identification with the left concerns the word but not what it designates — the signified but not the signifier. A fairly well-founded hypothesis shows that European social democracy, compromised in neo-liberal policies when in power (Socialist Party in France with François Hollande, the Labour with Tony Blair in the UK), has permanently discredited the word «left», which they used to claim as their own. However, when we look at the values designated by this divide (equality, reduction of inequalities, etc.), identification remains very strong, sometimes by a large majority. Although this last point should be treated with caution, it may nuance the loss of identification with the left.

⁵ Data of june of 2023, from "Baromètre de la Confiance Politique" led by the CEVIPOF : <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/fr/content/le-barometre-de-la-confiance-politique.html>

⁶ European Value Survey 2020, "Placement on left-right scale".

At this stage, we can observe how political divisions, with regard to their content and framework, experience both consistent patterns and notable disruptions. While the Left remains strong in categories dominated by capitalist society, what it embraces has gone beyond the single opposition of «capital vs. labor» which dominated the twentieth century. As one of the consequences of transformations in European societies, profound changes in ideological and political cleavages have been observed. Far from disappearing, including when it comes to voter's self-identification, the right-left divide remains central. On the left, the ideological space is at the junction of hostility to neo-liberalism and the defence of minorities and the environment. More than their combination, it is their imbrication that structures the ideological positioning of left-wing voters. After attempting to scrutinise the sociological and ideological central core of the left, we now want to shed some light on a strategic question: How can the radical left expand this core electorate?

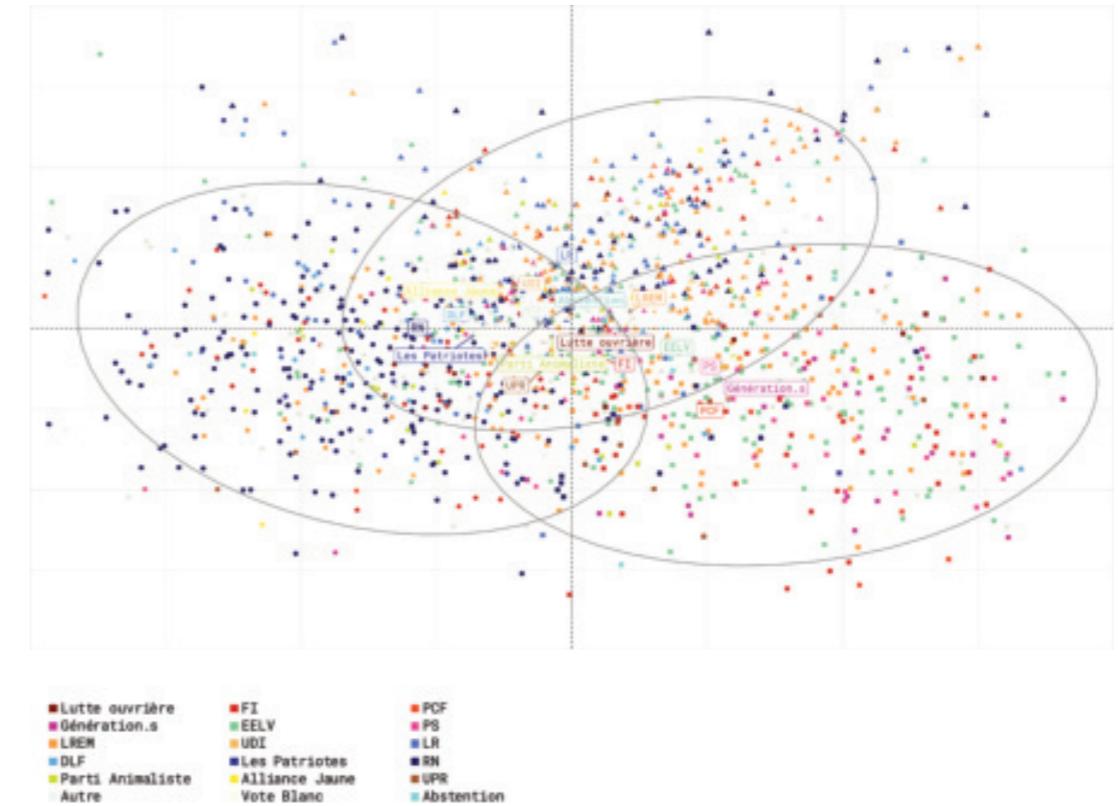
20

**SHARED VALUES:
CONSIDERING DEPLOYMENT
SPACES**

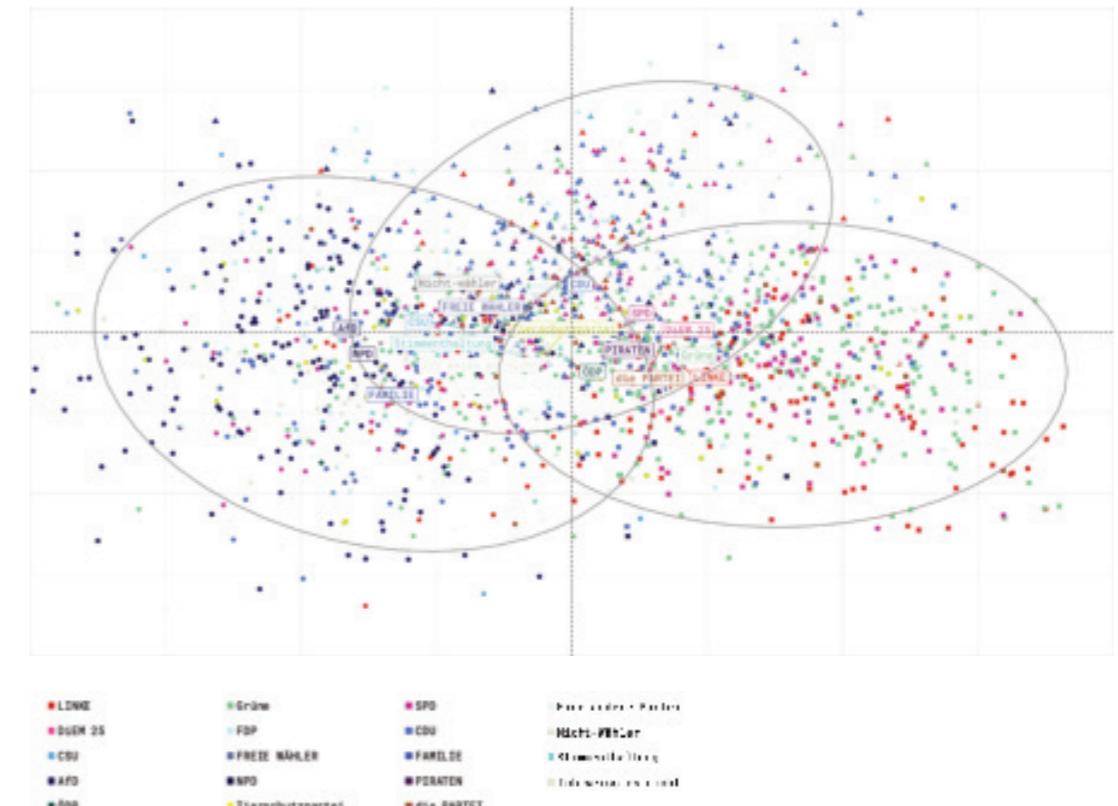
A TRIPARTITE POLITICAL FIELD

In order to analyse the deployment of the radical left and empirically extend the findings from the aforementioned literature, we use data from a survey conducted by transform! europe following the 2019 European elections in France, Spain, Greece, and Germany. The survey was conducted on a national sample of active individuals and voters. Through the implementation of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), we construct a map of the ideological groups that comprise the electorate of each of these countries. Within this map of different ideological spaces, we specifically focus on the left-wing space. In particular, we aim to study its ideological composition and identify the candidates these members vote for. By conducting a multivariate analysis of the respondents, we seek to determine whether the radical left «maximizes» support among voters who are ideologically aligned with the left-wing group, and when they do not vote for a radical left-wing party, we aim to identify the alternative candidates they vote for. Based on these findings, we will provide insights into strategic debates that are shaping the discourse of the European left.

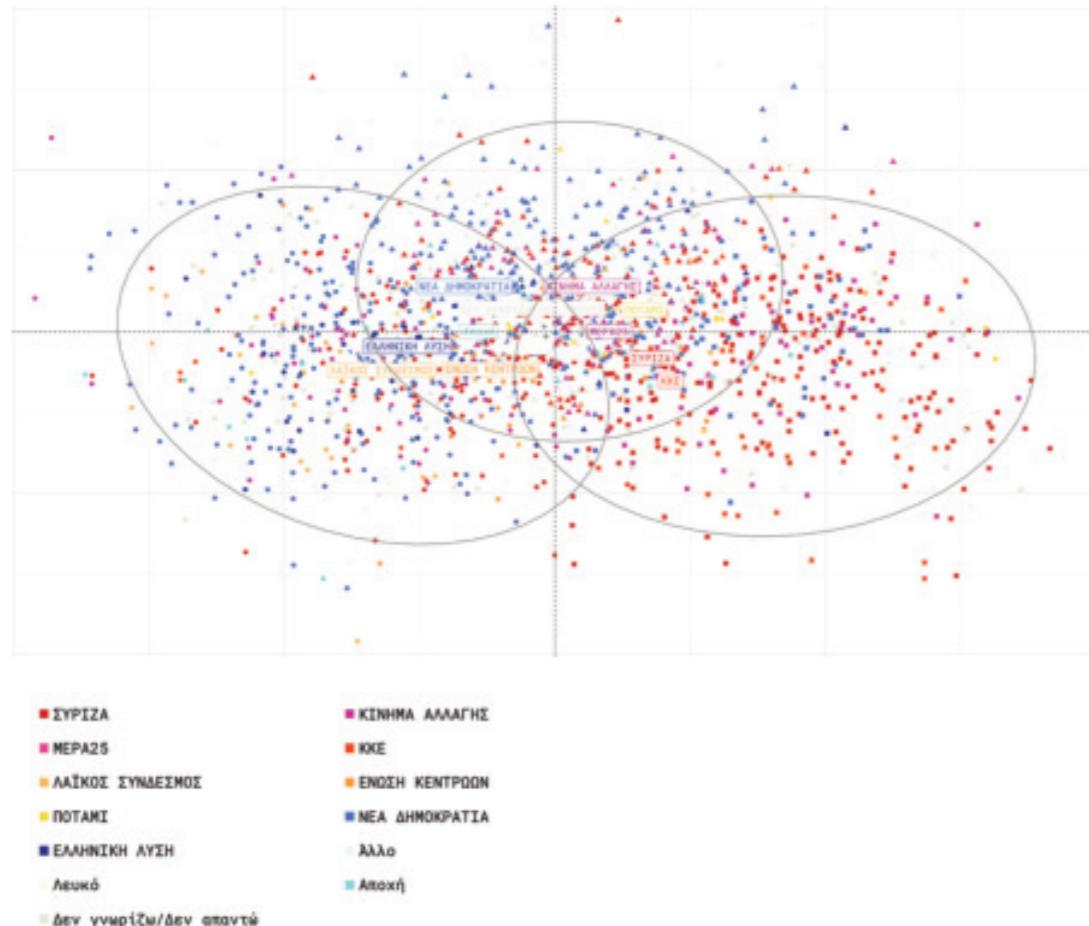
France



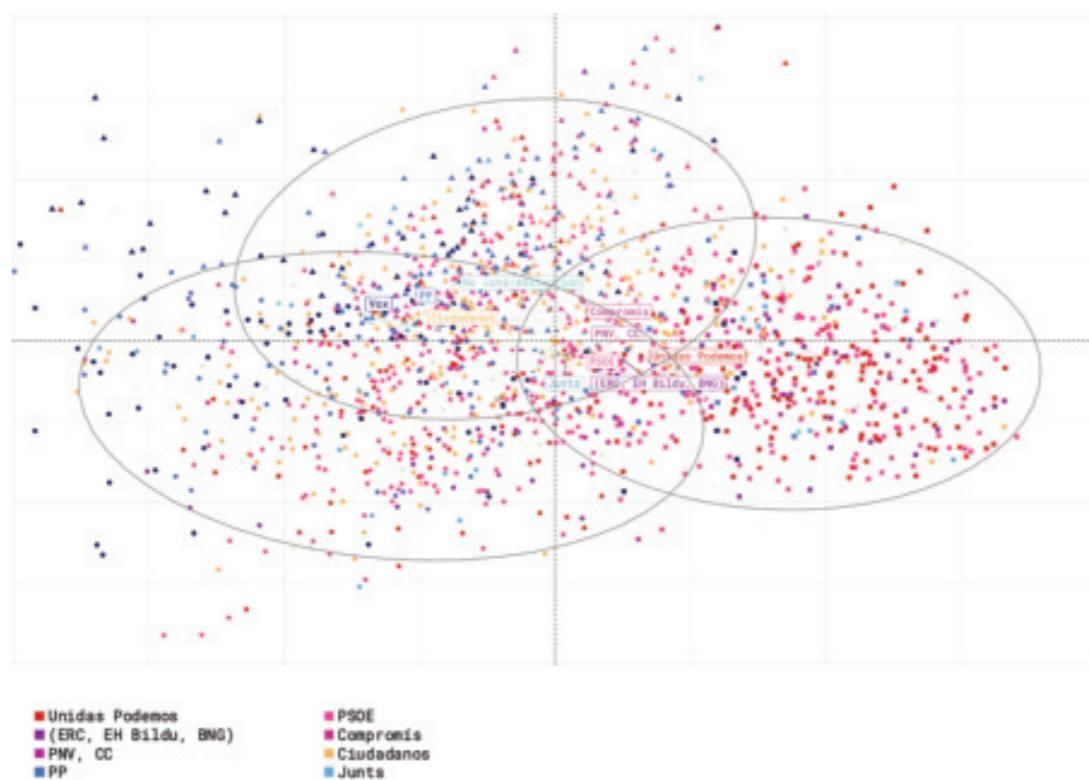
Germany



Greece



Spain



The first result we observe in the four countries we studied is an ideological tripartition of the electorate, with groups exhibiting common trends and relatively similar weights across the four countries. We find a relatively balanced tripartition, as the ideological groups carry approximately the same weight in the different countries where the survey was conducted.

Group 1, depicted on the left side of the graphs, corresponds to the nationalist and conservative ideological space. Participants in this group display strong nationalist sentiments (a high level of agreement with statements such as «All in all, immigrants are a threat to [country] culture» and «Many immigrants come to [country] just to take advantage of the Social Security system») and oppose LGBT rights (more than half of this group opposes same-sex marriage legislation). Economically, this group displays ultra-liberal dispositions: they strongly oppose tax increases and wealth redistribution, believe that layoffs should be facilitated, and argue that unemployed individuals who are not actively seeking employment should lose their unemployment benefits. It is noteworthy that respondents' ideological dispositions demonstrate a strong preference for a meritocratic system in which the state does not intervene significantly and solidarity systems are reduced. This finding challenges the notion, occasionally propagated in many countries, including France with Marine Le Pen, that the far right develops social proposals and opposes the capitalist system.

The central groups (Group 2) represent the centrist liberal bloc, largely characterised by pro-free-market attitudes such as facilitating layoffs or limiting state intervention. While this bloc increasingly presents itself as liberal on cultural issues as well, the participating respondents do not specifically align with this position and display divisions on these issues. They largely perceive immigrants as coming to the country to benefit from healthcare systems, see immigrants as a threat to their country, and are not entirely in favour of same-sex marriage. What sets them apart from other groups are their moderate and

non-extreme positions on most issues, except for strong support for European unification.

The third set of groups constitutes the ideological space of the left (Group 3). In this group, we find ideological dispositions in defence of the welfare state and solidarity systems: they strongly oppose facilitating layoffs or withdrawing benefits from unemployed individuals who are not actively seeking work. They favour greater state intervention, wealth redistribution, and tax increases. They also support welcoming migrants, do not perceive them as a threat, and are the group most supportive of LGBT rights. However, as a weakness that should not be overlooked in the context of the European elections, they consider European unification to have gone too far, surpassing even the nationalist conservative group in this regard. However, this left-wing Euroscepticism is more motivated by a rejection of the financial system advocated and supported by the European Union than by a fundamentally anti-European sentiment. We can reasonably hypothesize that a transnational project embodying values of social justice and equality would likely not encounter the same resistance from this group. Within this group, we also observe frequent voting practices more than in other groups and lower rates of blank votes.



LEFTWING VOTERS AND RADICAL LEFT OPTIONS

In the last European elections in 2019, the cumulative radical left vote share among individuals ideologically aligned with left-wing values was 15% in France (PCF, FI, LO), 18% in Germany (Die Linke), 49% in Greece (Syriza and KKE), and 26% in Spain (Unidas). Routinely challenged (except in Greece) by the traditional social democratic option or the Green party where it exists, the radical left holds significant potential for growth in this space. This doesn't seem to be the case in other ideological groups, where radical left parties never outperform their national scores. The main electoral opportunity for deployment appears to lie within an already convinced ideological space, highlighting that the primary competitive arena is against social democratic and green parties, and can be pursued with the ideological weapons that are its own.

France																			
	Latte ouverte	FI	PCF	Génération.s	EELV	Parti Animaliste	PS	UDI	UDI	LR	LR	DLF	Les Patriotes	M	Alliance jaune	Autre	Vote Blanc	Abstention	NSP
1	1,8	6,8	0,4	0,9	6,7	3,3	1,5	8,5	0,7	5,7	1,8	5,0	2,0	37,8	1,2	1,5	7,0	0,7	7,6
2	0,8	5,5	0,3	2,0	12,8	7,2	3,8	20,7	1,5	11,2	9,7	3,1	1,0	10,8	1,2	1,9	8,0	2,3	9,8
3	1,5	11,7	2,8	7,3	26,1	7,3	7,3	16,3	0,3	2,8	2,8	1,0	0,5	3,8	0,0	3,0	4,8	1,8	5,5

Spain																	
	Unidas Podemos	PSOE	ERC, EH Bildu, BNG	Compromís	PNV, CC	Ciudadanos	PP	IU	VOX	Otros	Blanco	No votado/Abstención	Nulo				
1	10,2	29,4	3,7	0,5	0,8	16,3	15,8	2,9	9,7	7,4	4,2	0,8	3,2				
2	6,1	25,5	3,6	3,0	0,6	20,2	37,6	1,7	7,9	3,6	3,6	1,1	5,3				
3	21,7	35,8	5,8	2,4	0,6	8,1	3,0	2,2	1,3	7,8	3,0	0,9	3,5				

Greece												
	ZYRFA	KKE	PASOK	MEPAP25	ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΟΙ	ΠΟΤΗΝΗ	ΝΕΑ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ	ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΛΟΓΩΝ	Άλλοι	Άνεργοι	Άποφ.	
1	14,9	2,7	4,0	6,7	3,2	0,6	33,4	5,2	9,0	2,6	1,9	
2	20,5	3,0	5,7	5,8	2,0	1,7	33,4	2,6	8,8	3,0	2,0	
3	40,4	9,4	4,4	9,0	0,4	1,4	13,2	0,8	9,4	2,0	0,8	

Germany																		
	Linke	Grüne	DDP	Demokratische Partei	SPD	DEM 25	FDP	Freie Wähler	CDU	CSU	AfD	MPD	PIRATEN	die PARTEI	Eine andere Partei	Stimmenthaltung	Ich weiß es nicht	Nicht-Wähler
1	5,2	10,4	0,6	3,0	8,9	0,1	5,5	2,6	14,1	2,1	25,6	1,3	0,1	1,5	5,2	4,2	8,0	0,6
2	7,0	16,8	0,3	1,7	11,6	0,5	7,8	1,7	26,2	1,5	6,3	0,2	0,8	1,7	3,6	2,7	6,6	1,0
3	17,5	33,8	0,7	3,8	16,5	0,5	2,7	1,0	10,0	0,6	1,4	0,0	1,0	3,6	1,8	0,9	3,8	0,0

III

HOW CAN THIS DEPLOYMENT BE ACHIEVED?

The review of research and the results of the transform! europe survey data analysis provide a strategic path. It involves acknowledging what the left represents within this tripartition and positioning oneself distinctively from the other groups. This can be done by developing proposals that oppose market logics, offering strong social policies not tied to merit-based considerations, and adopting a strong position on anti-productivist ecology, anti-racism, feminism, and LGBTQIA+ rights. To compete with the Green and social-democratic parties that currently hold leadership over this group, strategies of unity need to be considered.

This does not mean that the left cannot reach beyond its own boundaries, but it cannot do so without reclaiming its ideological markers and consolidating the heterogeneous conglomerate that comprises its electorate.

In recent years, the leitmotiv of «going after the votes of the far right» has flourished in various parts of Europe, based on the idea that part of this electorate, particularly those from the working classes, would be voters that the left should bring back into its fold, whose anger would fall on the wrong side of the political spectrum. The question then becomes ‘how’, and the advocates of this position argue for abandoning (or at least reducing) the defence of positions that are not strictly economic -- criticising the Left’s ‘societal’ failings, which would only appeal to a small section of the population (the educated and urban). This strategy calls for developing a more measured discourse on access to new rights for LGBTQ people, suspend a discourse favourable to the reception of migrants – or even take ambiguous positions on immigration and undertones of meritocratic discourse by criticising social benefits. To varying degrees and with varying degrees of justification, we have seen this strategic line embodied, for example, in political figures such as François Ruffin of LFI and Fabien Roussel of the PCF in France, or Sahra Wagenknecht of Die Linke in Germany. It is therefore not uninteresting to address these strategy proposals head on, based on the demonstration we made above. Firstly, the idea itself of a «lost electorate» which would have shifted to the far right has in fact little basis. In France, the notion of ‘leftist-leftism’ has been clearly deconstructed, notably in the work of Mayer (2002). It shows that the core of the far-right electorate, while it includes a strong popular component, is only made up of a very small minority of transfers from the radical left to the far right. Cervera-Marzal (2021) almost 20 years later, looking at LFI’s scores, notes the same lack of transversality between the radical left and far right electorates. This idea can nevertheless be questioned in a hypothetical scenario. This is what was done by Wagner et al (2023) in Germany, where they looked at the hypothetical electorate

that Sahra Wagenknecht would gather if she were to create a party, based on German voters with a positive opinion of the leader. They thus find that an electorate could form, mostly drawn from the AfD (far-right) electorate. This would seem to confirm that the far-right electorate is being «seduced» into adopting anti-immigration positions, and we might therefore believe that the theory mentioned above is being validated. However, two points need to be borne in mind. Firstly, this transfer is hypothetical. As Wagner et al (2023) point out, there are some reasons to doubt that Wagenknecht’s political proposal, which takes place in an area where the extreme right is strong and established, could turn voters away from the AfD – despite their sympathy. Secondly, there is the question of the «price to be paid» for this transfer. If the radical left were to embrace a political proposal capable of attracting an electorate with the values of the far-right ideological space (culturally, and in part economically), there is every reason to believe that a large part of the electorate base studied above, which would see its struggles cease to be defended (pro-immigration, feminism, LGBTQ+ struggles, etc.), would shift even more towards the social-democrat or green options.

The issue of which electorate we should address in the first place also raises the question of which segment of the electorate it is best not to go after. On the one hand, we find a segment with «left-authoritarian» positions, whom pro-immigration positions or positions in defence of what they describe as «societal» struggles would scare away — This is indeed what the work of Steiner et al (2023) seems to demonstrate. On the other hand, there is a much larger segment, the composite group we described in part 1, which would shift towards social democratic or green options. Political strategy must therefore be considered in relation to these issues. The potential deployment of the radical left electoral base, within the same ideological space, towards voters who share the same positions but are drifting towards competing political offers, seems to be the most accessible.

Z O S T E R N O

This note therefore identified three major questions concerning the socio-political cleavages in Europe. The first was the loss of the historical link between the radical left and the working classes. We observe a transformed and heterogeneous electorate built around the socio-cultural professions and low-educated workers, and a composite set of social groups who share an experience of domination, such as women, LGBTQ and racialised people. In the context of contemporary capitalism, subordinate subjects have evolved and become diverse. Secondly, we wondered if the left as a political subject was still central and shaping the political field. It appears that the right/left axis remains and is structured for the left by the imbrication of a refusal of neo-liberal policies on the economic dimension, with the defence of strong 'cultural openness', as reflected in the defence of women's and LGBTQ rights, a pro-immigration policy, and the central consideration of ecological issues. We insisted on the imbricated dimension of these two elements, one feeding the other, and vice versa. Finally, we looked at the possible expansion of the radical left electorate. We highlighted the main area of deployment on which the radical left can rely, returning to a prominent debate of the recent years within the left around the «reconquest» of part of the far-right electorate. The results of our survey, with reference to the political science literature on these issues, show that a whole segment of the ideological space of the radical left is being challenged by social-democratic and green political options. It is reasonable to believe that this electorate represents a sufficiently important issue to continue and amplify efforts to address it specifically, rather than embarking on a hypothetical recovery of voters lost to the far right.

Contrary to what is widely believed, sometimes even on the left, the radical left does not cut itself off from oppressed groups. Its social bases resonate with the struggles it leads and with which it identifies and is identified in return as a resource in the frame of these struggles.

Summary of the results:

- The electorate of the radical left is shifting and heterogeneous.
- There is no loss of connection between the radical left and the working class; rather, there is a transformation and diversification of precarity issues.
- In addition to economic dominance, there are also gender and race-based dominations.
- The radical left also finds support among economically stable profiles, such as public-sector workers, socio-cultural workers, and other non-market sectors.
- The left-right divide persists, structured by both the economic and cultural axes, with interrelation between these two axes.
- The left-wing space has not disappeared; it aggregates, alongside the liberal and nationalist blocs, about one-third of the electorate.
- Within this space, the radical left struggles to embody the leading position, challenged by social democratic and green options.
- The expansion space lies within this proximity space, which the radical left can win by acknowledging what it represents within this tripartition and the dual dimension (cultural and economic) of the left-right divide.



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