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The Welfare State and the Politics  
on the Left

Matteo Boldrini,  
Mattia Collini  
and  
Sorina Soare



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## Abstract

The welfare state has been a topic of increased political debate. In this context, this analysis aims to identify the existence of potential patterns in the stressful situation to which mainstream centre-left parties have been subject since 2008. The analysis builds on a new dataset covering 252 parties from 30 countries, the 27 European Union Member States, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Switzerland. The main results show that it is difficult to provide a general overview of how the Great Recession impacted the electoral performance of the mainstream centre-left. Indeed, the statistical analysis shows important variance across welfare models, indicating that the context shapes the dynamics of the party competition. Moreover, results indicate that the competition on pro-welfare platforms from both the left and the right of the political spectrum varies importantly with different patterns and formulas across the five welfare types.

## Keywords

welfare, elections, Great Recession, center left, challenger parties

## Authors

Matteo Boldrini is a postdoctoral researcher at Luiss Guido Carli University in Rome. He received his PhD in Social and Political Change from the University of Florence in co-tutorship with the University of Paris 1 - Pantheon Sorbonne. His main research interests are related to the political class, political professionalism, localness and political careers, both at the national and local levels. E-mail: [mboldrini@luiss.it](mailto:mboldrini@luiss.it)

Mattia Collini is a postdoctoral research fellow and a Teaching Assistant at the School of Political Science "Cesare Alfieri" of the University of Florence. His research interests are parties and party systems in Central and Eastern Europe, electoral systems, party competition in comparative perspective, with a focus on electoral volatility and political orientation, and migration policies. E-mail: [mattia.collini@unifi.it](mailto:mattia.collini@unifi.it)

Sorina Soare is a Lecturer in Political Science at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Florence. She works in the area of post-communist comparative politics; her main research interests are political parties and party systems, populism, and social activism. E-mail: [sorinacristina.soare@unifi.it](mailto:sorinacristina.soare@unifi.it)

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## Introduction

Over the last decades, the welfare state has been a topic of increased political debate. The extension of social rights in the first half of the twentieth century was celebrated as part of the alignment of market capitalism with liberal democracy. The Polanyian concept of social embeddedness of economic structure (Polanyi 1944, ed. 2001) marked this specific understanding of the economy as absorbed in social relations, and the establishment of the post-Second World War welfare state was seen as a major part of the new democratic citizenship that included the social rights to the earlier granted civil and political rights (Marshall 1950). The retrenchment of the welfare launched in the 1970s has opened a new phase: the initial optimistic view on the possibility to promote a capitalist economy - while simultaneously defending the interests of all citizens - was cut short in a context of post-industrial economic, demographic, and cultural changes. New political agendas emerged and emphasized the need to prioritize maximizing economic growth and, implicitly, to adjust the expenditures for welfare programs accordingly. In this vein, different parties gained visibility with platforms that equated the welfare expenditure with a burden for taxpayers either because too generous for individuals not motivated to economically contribute to the system or because too permissive in terms of abuses and frauds from various categories. Overall, social rights were criticized on the ground that part of the people saw them as entitlements without respecting the fundamental contribution principle. However not all political systems reacted the same.

On this ground, the literature documented growing divergences in welfare states. It is the case of the seminal analysis Esping Andersen (1990) provided in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, which identified the Nordic welfare systems characterized by generous provisions, the continental welfare systems aligned with conservative assumptions about society, and a preferential focus on family, and the liberal Anglo-American system in which the welfare policies were focused on income support and, in general, less generous than in the previous two cases. At the same time, Mediterranean and post-communist welfare systems were debated in the literature as additional models of welfare.

A new phase in the way welfare policies were framed came with the austerity programs that followed the post-2008 Great Recession. In a context of financial meltdown and economic recession, the welfare state was directly targeted as part of the needed renewed vision of democratic citizenship, including controlled social rights. The welfare

expenditures were traditionally connected to the growth of dividends; the recession squeezed the nation's wealth, and different national and international actors vocally required cuts on one of the most evident suspects, welfare. Although no uniform reactions were identified across Europe, the politics of austerity marked the political agendas in line with increased criticisms targeting a vaguely defined category of individuals/groups who abuse welfare benefits. A new distinction between natives and non-natives replaced the previous dyad that isolated the deserving benefits from the non-deserving ones. Welfare spending became a topic of hot political debates, although once again not in a uniform manner. More specifically, less than criticizing broad policies like health or education which benefited wide categories of citizens, different political actors argued for tailored cuts to welfare spending, explicitly pointing to distinct types of minorities that abused the system.

The interaction between party politics and restrained economic conditions is not a new argument (Giuliani and Massari 2019; Plescia and Kritzing 2017). The literature agrees that the Great Recession has affected domestic politics at different levels: the impact on wealth and growth was directly connected to changes in the mechanisms of distribution. Across Europe, parties in government got entrapped between being responsive to their voters (and easing the social costs) and being responsible towards their international/European partners (and carrying out institutional commitments and complying with the rigid benchmarks of fiscal retrenchment) (Sottilota and Morlino 2020; Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino 2020; Hutter and Kriesi 2019; Clements et al. 2018; Bosco and Verney 2012). Socio-economic indicators rapidly pinpointed increased levels of unemployment and inequalities. Contextually, anti-establishment feelings, Euroscepticism, and xenophobia became stronger, and different scholars reported a notable increase in the vote shares of challenger parties on both sides of the political establishment (Zulianello 2019). With few exceptions, mainstream centre-left parties crumbled at polls (Polacko 2022; Benedetto et al. 2020, Delwit 2021).

In this context, the puzzle to which the analysis refers concerns the existence of potential patterns in the stressful situation to which mainstream centre-left parties have been subject since 2008. We deal with this from the perspective of a dataset covering 252 parties from 30 countries, the 27 European Union Member States, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Switzerland. This dataset puts together electoral data (Parlgov database and national electoral commissions) from 131 legislative elections covering a period of 19 years,

starting from the latest pre-crisis election (the 2002 Irish general election) until the February 2020 Slovak elections (March 2022) and economic variables aiming to measure welfare expenses (i.e. social spending, employment benefits, etc.) based on Eurostat and OECD databases. The analysis assumes that social expenditures are a major issue for party competition and voting behaviour (McManus 2019). More specifically, we assume stressed economic conditions constrain parties in government to counterbalance the negative effects of the crisis, albeit in complex and varied ways. Social expenditures can be equated to strategic lenses able to provide a more fine-grained analysis of the way parties (and for the interest of this research left parties) relate to the existing system of the welfare state.

In line with the original Esping-Andersen thesis (1990) and its follow-up studies, we clustered the 30 countries by type of welfare state. Esping-Andersen's (1990) original distinction was integrated with the Mediterranean and the post-communist ones. We acknowledge that these groupings are ideal types that do not cancel relevant nuances and differences (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011). In each of the groupings, countries correspond to different degrees to the ideal type and these differences fluctuate over time. The grouping we made derived from secondary literature (case studies and comparative analyses) are meant to be deliberate simplifications allowing us to approximate common trends in terms of welfare systems. They are an attempt to fine-tune the macro-level analysis and introduce a medium-level focus by partitioning countries with similar welfare systems into homogenous clusters. Digging into these clusters allows us to reveal how profoundly interconnected welfare-related expenditures and party politics are and how the mainstream centre-left adjusted to the pressures the Great Recession put on social spending. The literature acknowledges that the worsening of macro-economic in the context of the Great Recession made investments in social expenditure seen as particularly problematic for the left since it threw into question many of its ideological strongholds including labour market regulation, investments in pension benefits, and low retirement age, etc. Across Europe, governments were induced to adopt sound budgetary practices equated to restrained spending and low deficits; countries such as Greece, Ireland, Italy Portugal, and Spain started pushing through austerity packages, coupled with welfare retrenchment which limited the space to implement programs focused on equality and equity (Armingeon et al. 2016).

The research questions that guide us are: To what extent does the welfare type affect the mainstream centre-left electoral support? And do changes in welfare policies, considered

with regard to evolutions in terms of social expenditures, can be considered a relevant variable for explaining electoral shifts from mainstream centre left parties to other parties on the left (radical left and greens) or contenders on the right that endorse forms of welfare chauvinism (radical-right populist parties)? All in all, the rationale for this inquiry quest is that the Great Recession can be used as a relevant "stress test" for clarifying the boundaries between centre-left parties and welfare policies in the attempt to assess if the Great Recession's aftermath signals a new opportunity to reposition centre left parties as relevant political actors or, on the contrary, mainstream centre left parties are becoming a crisis casualty in the cascade of political changes that derived from the Great Recession. Before the crisis, despite changes and amendments (Beramendi et al. 2015), the changes in terms of social expenditures did not alter the characteristic features of the welfare states (Palier and Martin 2008).

The rest of the article is organized as follows. The first part draws on previous research to discuss the relationship between welfare policies and left parties and develops a theoretical hypothesis. Subsequently, the dataset sources and analytical procedures are explained. In the third part, the model results are presented, and key findings are discussed. The last section concludes the analysis and identifies a follow-up agenda.

## **Literature review**

In line with Tufte's seminal analysis (1978), different scholars agreed on the relevance of partisan influence on public spending and recognized that left-wing parties justify spending more on social programs than their right-wing counterparts in line with their specific ideology (e.g. just income distribution and the regulation of the economy in the general interest). Moreover, there is a consensual assessment in the literature that traditional left parties played a key role in the expansion of the welfare state in line with an ideological commitment to social change and social justice (Esping-Andersen 1985; Iversen and Cusack 2000). In the post-WWII period, the so-called mainstream centre left (social democrats, socialist, labour parties) abandoned the original revolutionary profile and became regular participants in government, with an agenda overwhelmingly focused on redistribution and reducing economic inequalities, and on the regulation of the economy in the general interest. On this ground, the electoral performance of these traditional left parties peaked in the 60s and 70s (Benedetto et al. 2020) and left-wing parties (in single-party governments (e.g.

Sweden, the UK) or alliance with Christian democrats and liberal parties (e.g. Germany)) focused their political energies on developing, implementing and broadening a functional welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1985, Huber and Stephens 2001). Starting with the 1970s, the structural environment of advanced capitalist democracies has undergone deep changes, echoing a process of deindustrialization, accompanied by tertiarization of the employment structure, and important demographic developments. The expansion of the public sector altered the equilibrium within the traditional basis of left-wing voters, echoing the increasing weight of the public sector employees and the middle-class (Oesch 2006). In this context, the literature on the distinction between consumption and investment-oriented policies (Bonoli and Natali 2012; Hemerijck 2013) together with the research on insider-outsider division (Häusermann 2010; Schwander and Häusermann 2013) pinpointed a growing income polarisation and tensions among the left-wing voters.

The renewed structural environment of advanced capitalist democracies openly challenged the left parties' political agendas of social policies. Globalization left little room for an expansive welfare state and the economic integration of goods and financial markets diminished the power of national authorities and implicitly the partisan influence on public spending (Garrett and Mitchell 2001). Intertwined processes of individualization, secularization and sophistication of voters altered traditional group loyalties and deeply eroded the linkages between the left and their original social constituencies. Consequently, the literature chronicled the transformation of the Western centre left parties into middle-class parties (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015) and, more recently, into parties of Brahmini (Piketty 2020). Although the extension of these changes remains to be assessed (Emanuele 2023), there is increased evidence that there is a changing demography of the left voters in particular with regard to gender, education, age and, more recently, attitudes toward immigration (Hutter and Kriesi 2019).

Based on the above, with our first hypothesis we aim to test is that the worsening of the macro-economic conditions under the Great Recession negatively influences the electoral results of the left bloc parties. The rationale behind this hypothesis is straightforward. Although we acknowledge that parties across the political spectrum have increasingly addressed social expenditures as a priority over the last decades, mainstream centre-left parties continued to be primarily associated with issues relating to social justice and solidarity. The post-Greek debt crisis forced governments to reinforce public austerity,

which translated into increased labour market deregulation, freezing of pension benefits and an accentuated retrenchment in social transfers and services. In general, the worsening of macro-economic made investments in social expenditure seen as particularly problematic for the left since it threw into question its social-focused ideological strongholds. Although the weight of the sovereign crises threatened the viability of all European economies, the levels of contraction of the economy and in particular the extension of the cuts in social expenditure vary across cases (Hutter and Kriesi 2019). To wit the macro-economic impact of the Great Recession has been less severe in Germany, with unemployment temporarily falling between 2008 and 2009 and increasing slowly thereafter (Sachweh and Sthamer 2019).

Additional arguments in favour of the first hypothesis are connected to a so-called blame issue. The Great Recession has been considered the result of the excessive liberalization of the financial system. Depicted as part of the mainstream, the centre-left is associated with a position of support for the neoliberal ideas that generated the crisis (Häusermann and Palier 2008). To support this assumption, we remind of the activation of third-way-inspired policies in Sweden or the Danish flexicurity reforms. On this ground, we complement the first hypothesis with an expectation aiming to assess if centre-left parties in government are more penalized by the Great Recession since seen as co-responsible for the crisis and as promoters/managers of austerity packages afterward. This expectation is endorsed by the electoral defeat experienced by representatives of the center-left forced to accept austerity measures to secure external financial assistance in different cases. It is the case of PASOK in Greece, PS in Portugal, PSOE in Spain and MSzP in Hungary. This is coherent with Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu (2019) who pointed out that in times of crisis, opposition parties are more successful in shaping voters' perceptions about the economy than government parties which tend to be held responsible for the present conditions. Moreover, opposition parties tend to blame the existing government for the present state of the economy or the handling of the crisis.

H<sub>1</sub>: The worse the macro-economic context conditions, the lower the results of the mainstream left parties.

H<sub>1</sub> bis: The electoral results are lower for centre-left parties in government than for the left in opposition.

The first hypotheses provide the ground for further testing a connection between the electoral dynamics of the left and the specific location in one of the five clusters of welfare states. Different scholars assessed whether welfare retrenchment is most likely to take place in the most generous welfare states (Nordic and Continental clusters). In the Nordic case, the state maintained a key role in promoting equality and cohesion through a redistributive social security system. Equated to the most advanced welfare states and a tradition of strong union influence on economic policies, the countries belonging to this cluster are characterised by a large public sector and strong public finances. Although the countries in the continental cluster are traditionally less interested in reducing inequalities, the welfare provisions remain generous and the potential changes in the government agenda are supposed to be relevant in terms of how to prioritize resources. In both cases, mainstream centre-left parties have been regularly in coalition governments sharing a positive vision of a welfare state (Manow et al. 2018). In the remaining three clusters, state provisions of welfare are modest and, importantly, recipients tend to be stigmatised. The liberal cluster can be considered as less vulnerable to external economic shocks since by notion of the market is prevalent here, there is a low level of spending on social protection and a high level of inequality (Ferragina, and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011). Squeezed in the middle, the Mediterranean welfare model shares commonalities with the Continental welfare regime and integrates several characteristics from the Northern European universalistic type (Marí-Klose and Moreno-Fuentes 2013). However, the system of social assistance remains weak with low levels of protection, partially counterbalanced by practices of clientelism and family networks (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser). Across the post-communist region, labour flexibility guided the market reforms in the 1990s with limited social security measures. Although these reforms have led to a considerable variance in terms of social policy outcomes (Cerami and Vanhuyse 2009), the post-communist countries were in a vulnerable socio-economic situation already prior to the Great Recession due to contextual challenges (i.e. changing demographics, shortage of labour force and increased emigration and brain drain) and structural failures to undertake social reforms (Aidukaite 2011). Also note that across the region, they chronicled the weakness of trade unions and a general political attitude in favour of business. This unbalance affected the capacity to protracted social struggles, and more in general to the recognition and development of social rights (Bernaciak 2015). Overall, it is reasonable to expect that it is mainly in the Nordic and

Continental cluster that mainstream parties' left parties are caught between Scylla and Charybdis: between being responsive to electorates are unwilling to abide by the (mild) austerity measures, and responsible to EU pressures for deficit reduction. Our reasoning is supported by the literature on the demand side. Under economic stressful situations, the risks of social downturn mobilise voters particularly fond of traditional social benefits that might alleviate the risks of material hardship and, more in general, the negative effects on their standard of living.

H2: The major losses of the mainstream centre left are in the Nordic and Continental clusters, while the most limited losses are to be registered in the residual system of social protection.

While there is a consensual assessment in the literature that traditional left parties (social-democrats, socialists, labor) played an important role in the expansion of the welfare state in line with their core ideological commitment to social change and social justice, the most recent literature shows not only that the left-right divisions over welfare diminish (Mcmanus 2023) but also that there is a diffused dissatisfaction with mainstream politics. On this ground, the electoral support for parties competing on the left of the mainstream centre-left has been increasing. By 2012, different parties have been included in national coalitions (i.e., the Socialist People's Party in Denmark, the Left Alliance in Finland, the Socialist Left Party in Norway) or even formed single party governments such as in Cyprus (i.e., the Progressive Party of Working People, Akel). Despite different origins and policy goals, this constellation of radical-left parties shares a critical view on capitalism and converges into challenging the agenda of the mainstream centre-left on economic issues explicitly dealing with equality, labour rights and, more in general, welfare (March and Rommerskirchen 2015, Williams and Ishiyama 2018). As such, these parties vocally opposed public spending cuts and, more in general, the post-recession retrenchment of welfare.

With prevalent attention to environmental and post-materialist issues, green parties represent an additional challenge to the mainstream centre left in line with the harsh denunciation of the incapacity to be responsive to the citizens' demands and needs (van Haute 2016). Although green parties traditionally avoided an explicit location along the left-right dimension (Price-Thomas 2016), over the last decades part of them started to militate

against anti-growth economics. To wit, the German or the Swedish Greens progressively softened their single-issue environmental stance, broadened their policy agenda on welfare and economic issues, and eventually they joined Social Democrat-led governments.

In parallel, an increasing number of researchers have documented that the increased flows of migrants have produced supplementary demands on the European welfare systems. On this ground, different political entrepreneurs and parties increasingly voiced in favour of privileged access to welfare benefits for the natives of a country only (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018). The literature showed that different radical right parties abandoned/finetuned the original neo-liberal economic positions calling for the dismantling of the welfare state (Kitschelt and McGann 1995, 19-20) and shifted towards a social market economy, like the positions defended by the post-industrial social-democrats or Christian democratic parties (de Lange 2007). In the context of the Great Recession, with different origins and intensities, a welfare chauvinist platform has increasingly denounced mainstream parties and, in particular, left parties for their support to reforms limiting social expenditures and the pool of native beneficiaries of welfare entitlements. Filtered by the need to defend the community of natives, the efficiency of social protection and the quality of welfare investment occupies a key role in these parties' agendas, although with a specific register of policies that prioritizes consumption with short-term economic returns to voters over social investment (Enggist and Pinggera 2022).

Considering the most recent diffusion of challengers of how mainstream parties and left-wing parties in particular managed welfare, this hypothesis assumes that the Great Recession impacted more negatively on the centre-left group of parties than on its challengers. The rationale behind this is connected to the progressive adaptation of key ideological principles of the electable lefts to the so-called neoliberal convergence, while the Great Recession created a window of opportunity for those parties that maintained welfare concerns at the forefront of the policy agenda.

Hypothesis 3: The Great Recession has impacted more negatively on the centre left parties than its challengers on the right and the left.

## Data and method

The analysis combines electoral data in 30 European democracies with a list of economic, social and political variables (see Annex) covering a period of 19 years. Using electoral data from a period that goes from the first elections before the beginning of the Great Recession to the February 2020 Slovak elections. The chronological dimension has been voluntarily adjusted to exclude elections under Covid 19 pandemic. This choice is justified by the impact the management of the pandemic had in terms of the budget allocated to social spending in most European countries in the short term. In this section we examine the determinants of the traditional left electoral performance in the context of the harshest economic downturn since the 1930s. Our primary goal is to assess the importance of welfare expenditures as an explanation of changes in the electoral strength of the mainstream centre -left parties over two decades. The longitudinal extension allows us to increase the precision of our observations and reinforce the generalisability of the findings. The dataset covers 252 parties above 1% of the votes, with some exceptions applied wherever appropriate. The choice has been made to increase the coverage of the research to all parties that had a presence in the various legislatures, given that the key variable here is political orientation. We further classified the parties as mainstream centre-left, radical left, greens and Welfare Chauvinist according to data coming from ParlGov and CHES, cross-referenced with their supranational affiliation, existing literature and experts' opinions. In total we have 131 elections, 78 centre-left parties, 55 left parties, 35 Greens and 86 welfare chauvinist parties.

The dependent variable in this analysis is the vote share of the mainstream centre-left parties.

In the following part, we test the effect of welfare type on the electoral support of the parties of interest, according to Esping-Andersen's (1990) types and successive amendments (see Annex).

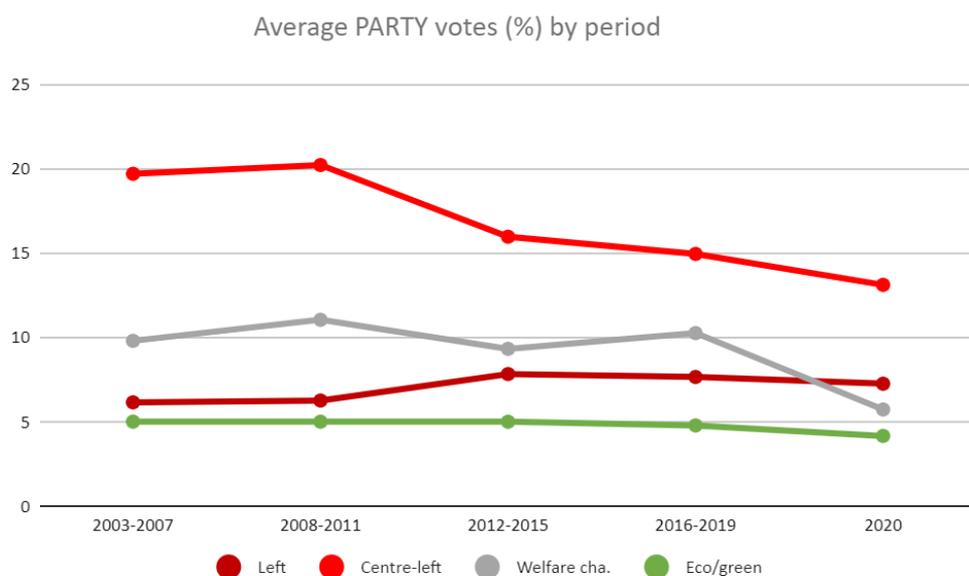
The empirical testing is organized into two phases. First, there is the analysis of the relationship between the centre-left parties' votes and macroeconomic variables at an aggregate level and by the welfare model. Then we use multivariate models (ordinary least squares regression), including the main effects presented and control and systemic explanations. Our independent variables are based on a group of macroeconomic data (calculated as the average value during the period between two elections) as approximate common trends in terms of welfare systems (i.e. GDP growth, unemployment, GINI index,

social Expenditure on GDP (%), pensions expenditure on GDP (%), and healthcare expenditure on GDP (%)). Note that the relatively limited number of independent and control variables allows us to focus on some of the most relevant ones while reducing the risks of multicollinearity, inherent to several items of public expenditures.

### Findings and (intermediate) discussion

Before turning to the results of the multivariable analysis, the starting point of our empirical analysis is to present an overall picture of the evolution of the average share of votes by party, distinguished by periods of four years starting from the pre-crisis period (Figure 1). The data shows a slight increase in the share of votes for the mainstream centre-left (+0,52) during the period that corresponds to the Great Recession (2008-2011), followed by a decline of 4.25 in the following four years, a decline maintained until the most recent period of observation (table 1). Interestingly, in our sample the greens and the welfare chauvinists registered a decline too, although on average less marked than the parties of the traditional centre-left, which is in line with hypothesis 3. It is only the (left) that followed an upward evolution in the post 2012, prevalently explained by outliers such as Podemos e Syriza.

Fig 1: Average share of party votes (%) between 2002 and 2020



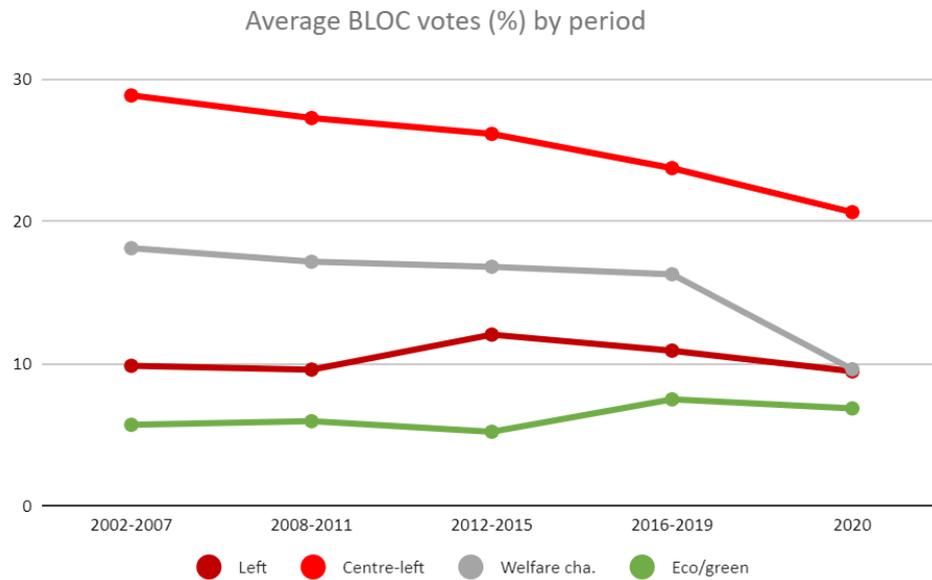
Sources: our elaboration based on ParlGov and national electoral data

To evaluate the solidity of the descriptive statistical analysis, we further grouped the individual units of observation (political parties) into four main aggregates (Figure 1 bis). We have identified:

- The centre-left bloc grouping traditional mainstream left parties (i.e., social-democrats, socialists, and labour) that accept the constraints of economic internationalisation and adapted their programs to the requirements of price stability.
- The radical left bloc grouping parties that criticise the underlying socio-economic structures, values and practices and militate for extensive social policies and protective employment relations systems.
- The group of welfare-chauvinist parties integrates parties that militate in favour of welfare benefits restricted to the natives of a country as opposed to immigrants or other categories of non-natives.
- The group of the green parties puts together parties that lay prevalently emphasis on environmental and post-materialist issues, in several cases grafted by explicit social grievances.

We are aware that this type of aggregation penalizes the accuracy in terms of in-depth precision, but we consider that it strengthens the potential of extending conclusions beyond the sample of inquiry and reinforces the robustness of the statistical analysis. The figure 1 bis shows that the data on party blocs is coherent with the data on individual parties when it comes to the traditional left: the Great Recession does not have an immediate negative effect on the electoral performance of the traditional left; the fall in support for the centre-left bloc starts in the aftermath of the Great Recession, with a marked drop in the last 5 years covered by our analysis. This provides partial support for hypothesis 1. If we exclude the 2020 elections (limited in number and geographic coverage), the welfare chauvinist bloc registers a slight decline too and this goes against hypothesis 3. The left and the green bloc follow a distinct evolution, with positive differences between the pre-Recession elections and the most recent results.

Fig 1bis: Average votes (%) by bloc between 2002 and 2020



Sources: our elaboration based on ParlGov and national electoral data

By looking at the disaggregated data by the model of welfare, the landscape gets slightly more complex (table 1).

If we exclude the most recent period due to the limited number of elections covered, the data shows that the mainstream centre left bloc register particularly consistent losses in the continental and the Mediterranean welfare model with almost ten percentual points. Note that while in the Continental model there is a visible upgoing trend regarding the Greens bloc, slightly less for the welfare chauvinists, the radical left bloc registers a decrease of 1.36 that comes after a successful mobilisation immediately after the Great Recession until 2011. In the Continental context, the green bloc progressively abandoned the strong anti-establishment critique of the 1980s and 1990s. In parallel with a commitment to their founding principles of Environmental protection, they grafted their agenda with strong European allegiance, including support for a transatlantic relationship as in the case of the German Greens, and, most notably, policies in favour of a strong state and more spending. Socially expensive programs made them a direct competitor of the traditional left. In terms of social justice, the Greens clash with the welfare chauvinists' traditionalist agendas, and endorse policies focused on the fight against xenophobia and racism, as well as on gender

justice. Given their ideological affinity with the centre-left bloc, Green parties have been invited to join a governmental coalition (see France), their government participation remains strongly dependent on country-specific factors and occasionally negatively impacted their electoral performance (see the electoral results after the participation to cabinets Ayrault 1 and 2). Regarding the radical left, across the region the bloc endorsed a recognizable position concerning crisis management and expressed solidarity for the SYRIZA government, while harshly criticizing mainstream politics (including the left agendas) for having blindly accepted austerity measures. Initially they took advantage of the presence within trade unions and social movements, however their parliamentary presence remained diversified. While some parties like La France Insoumise or the Belgian Communist Party of Labour had seen their momentum, others like the German Die Linke entered a negative phase. Finally, across the region the welfare chauvinists have progressively emerged as a third pole with an agenda gravitating at the center of the economic dimension and welfare stances that prioritize consumptive policies such as old age pensions or healthcare over social investment (Enggist and Pinggera 2022).

The vibrance of the welfare chauvinist platforms is higher in the Nordic cluster, where most of the countries have a longstanding immigration tradition and foreigners have been representing an important percentage of the population, in particular non-EU nationals. The diffusion of these nativist platforms spread in parallel with the destabilising effects of the Great Recession and a general trend toward slowing down welfare investments. Not surprisingly, welfare chauvinist parties were among the fastest-growing political forces in the immediately post-crisis elections (+4.23) with programs that put together a nativist vision of the economy and a national preference in terms of citizenship and welfare benefits (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2017). Most of these parties targeted the so-called equality- and need-based social program, less than social insurance benefits in general (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2018). This is in line with the most recent literature that demonstrates that these parties tend to prioritize consumptive social policies such as old age pensions, unemployment benefits, or healthcare, aspects on which they seek to favour natives over non-natives (Enggist and Pinggera 2022). The average share of votes of the Nordic welfare chauvinist bloc follows a positive evolution across the period under scrutiny, which is consistent with the literature in terms of targeted contestations promoted by welfare chauvinist parties, particularly on pension and unemployment benefits.

Table 1: Average share of bloc votes (%) between 2002 and 2020 disaggregated by model of welfare

NORDIC - Average BLOC votes by period					
	2002- 2007	2008- 2011	2012- 2015	2016- 2019	2020
Left	9.95	9.25	7.23	7.88	12.30
Centre-left	28.70	27.43	26.00	24.83	26.30
Welfare cha.	10.75	14.98	16.95	16.03	11.70
Eco/green	6.85	7.30	5.58	7.45	3.90

CONTINENTAL - Average BLOC votes by period					
	2002- 2007	2008- 2011	2012- 2015	2016- 2019	2020
Left	7.80	7.35	6.91	6.44	7.35
Centre-left	26.40	20.76	24.49	16.83	16.70
Welfare cha.	14.60	15.38	16.60	16.13	14.25
Eco/green	8.39	10.42	8.15	11.66	10.50

MEDITERRANEAN - Average BLOC votes by period					
	2002- 2007	2008- 2011	2012- 2015	2016- 2019	2020
Left	14.50	17.14	27.73	20.60	15.57
Centre-left	36.77	30.26	24.94	27.19	34.42
Welfare cha.	4.50	1.10	11.98	10.76	8.39
Eco/green	1.63	2.35	2.15	3.25	2.89

POST-COMMUNIST - Average BLOC votes by period					
	2002- 2007	2008- 2011	2012- 2015	2016- 2019	2020
Left	7.60	3.56	4.23	6.63	3.76
Centre-left	28.91	29.43	27.26	24.65	17.45
Welfare cha.	28.14	23.15	19.74	22.16	8.48
Eco/green	5.47	3.73	2.88	7.30	9.26

ANGLO-SAXON - Average BLOC votes by period					
	2002- 2007	2008- 2011	2012- 2015	2016- 2019	2020
Left	6.50	12.10		17.90	27.10
Centre-left	18.90	25.10	35.20	29.57	7.30
Welfare cha.	2.20	3.10	12.70	1.90	7.10
Eco/green	2.93	1.45	3.80	2.33	

Source: our elaboration based on ParlGov

Interestingly, the Nordic cluster is characterised by the relative stability of the mainstream centre left bloc, with a limited loss of preferences (-2.40). This can be explained by the fact that the Nordic countries had specific social stabilizers able to control the most acute effects of the Great Recession. Overall, the Northern high-tax, high-spend economies remained efficient both in terms of social protection and in terms of social investment. Although the countries remained untouched by the Great Recession and maintained low levels of unemployment and immigration, the literature illustrated that welfare chauvinist parties increased their impact on national politics on the ground that social entitlements cannot be shared with outsiders. Also note the Nordic countries progressively and with different intensities distanced from liberal immigration policies, as illustrated by the Swedish post-2015 turn under social democratic leadership. While Denmark adopted a restrictive immigration policy in the early 2000s, under the leadership of Mette Frederiksen, the Social

Democratic continued this restrictive approach, with one of the most restrictive immigration policies in Europe. Norway's Labor Party has increasingly followed the Danish path. This turnaround operation regarding immigration and social benefits for immigrants limited the space of manoeuvre for alternative welfare chauvinist platforms. Significantly, radical left alternatives remained located for the most part in the fringe politics, with a slight increase in the early phase of the Great recession, a relative stability afterwards. Across this cluster Green parties with progressist social agendas increased their electoral success and even got involved in government (i.e., Sweden, Finland). Our data confirm these previous researches and identifies an increase of 0.45 of the green bloc in the early days of the crisis and the post 2016 period.

In the Mediterranean space, the losses of the centre-left are compensated by a slight increase in terms of preferences for welfare chauvinist parties, initially led by the Italian and Greek cases, and more recently extended to Spain and Portugal also. Although territorially circumscribed, a slight increase is located at the level of the average vote share of the Greens. The average share of votes is prevalently linked to the Portuguese case where the Left Bloc (BE), Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Greens (PEV) provided their endorsement to a Socialist minority government in 2015 and 2019. It is, however, the cluster where the radical left bloc performs the best, as previously noted connected exclusively to the electoral performance of Syriza and Podemos. The weakened centre-left and the increase of the radical left echoes the liabilities of the traditional system of social assistance, with low levels of protection for citizens not covered by employment-related schemes and increased polarization between some categories of well-protected beneficiaries - white-collar workers, public employees, etc. - and a large group of vulnerable workers. The Great Recession affected most visibly Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, all countries having implemented tough austerity as a panacea for all economic and financial ills. With differences in terms of intensity, national governments implemented programs aimed at labour market deregulation, increased retirement age, and promoted retrenchments in social transfers and services together with cuts in salaries and pension benefits (Andersen et al. 2012). In this context, anti-austerity and anti-corruption movements multiplied altering the dynamics of the party competition (Bosco and Verney 2012). Across the political spectrum, new political players increasingly voiced the narrative of the welfare paradise and successfully mobilized their followers pitted against national elites, EU institution, immigration, etc. It is the case of

Syriza, Podemos, and M5S, but also most recently, the Spanish Vox and Portuguese Chenga. Despite being located on opposite positions on the political spectrum, both the radical left and the welfare chauvinists share an opposition to globalisation and endorse social mechanisms to compensate for economic marginalisation and impoverishment.

The post-communist cluster identifies a relative stability of the centre-left; behind the apparent calm, there is however a heterogenous electoral arena. Outliers like relevant centre-left parties in Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia hide the weakness of the Polish and Hungarian counterparts, with most of the mainstream left squeezed between a vibrant mainstream centre-right and a galaxy of welfare chauvinists and, occasionally, by Green parties, less often by the radical left. Note also that the standard deviation by the welfare model indicates that the share of votes for the centre left is spread out over a broad range of values, in the Mediterranean, the Continental, and the post-communist models. In the attempt to explain these evolutions, the literature converges into assessing that after three decades, standard social indicators such as minimum wage, expenditures on social protection, life satisfaction, poverty, deprivation, income inequality, unemployment and mortality continue lagging behind older European Democracies (Aidukaite 2011). Under the pressures of international agencies and the EU, liberal reforms have been encouraged finetuned with the principles of the 'Washington consensus'. Overall, these countries were in a vulnerable socio-economic situation already prior to the Great Recession due to contextual challenges (i.e., changing demographics, shortage of labor force, and increased emigration and brain drain) and structural failures to undertake social reforms (Aidukaite 2011). It was not a surprise the fact that the Great Recession hit these economies very hard, with immediate negative effects on their already vulnerable social indicators (Aidukaite 2011). As in the Mediterranean context, unpopular measures (i.e., cuts in civil servant salaries, pension benefit freezes, tax hikes) fed social tensions and public discontent. The populist radical right and far right parties multiplied in these political arenas voicing against the social retrenchment predicted by most of the mainstream narrative fine-tuned with EU management of the economic crisis. With few exceptions (Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic and, more recently, Poland), green parties and radical left ones remained peripheral actors, with limited capacity to influence party dynamics and agendas.

Due to the peculiarity of the electoral system and the features of the party systems in Ireland, and the UK, the liberal model remains stable until the 2016-2019 period. The

apparent stability of the UK and Ireland may also be explained by the openness of mainstream centre left parties towards flexible and neoliberal labour and welfare policies. In Ireland this is balanced by the presence of a sizeable radical left that campaign for traditional leftist welfare policies, while in the UK, the main competitors for traditional centre-left parties are the regional party SNP on the progressive side and the welfare chauvinist UKIP. Note that the last column considers exclusively the average votes of the centre left in the February 2020 Irish general elections. Note that both UK and Ireland experienced immigration flows for a long time.

In Table 2 we aim to estimate the impact over the last two decades with key variables linked to: GDP growth, the Gini Index, the unemployment rate, the average social benefits expenditure as a percentage of GDP, and electoral turnout. In our tests we considered the Nordic model as the base model, given its traditionally more generous welfare and a stronghold for left and centre-left parties in Europe. The welfare model is negative and statistically significant for the centre-left bloc and the greens in the continental, post-communist and Anglo-Saxon clusters, as well as for the welfare chauvinist bloc in the Anglo-Saxon model. This statistically relevant negative relationship between the welfare model and support for the blocs on the left support our initial assumptions that the welfare context shapes the dynamics of the party competition. These data also indicate that the competition on pro-welfare platforms on the left varies importantly with different patterns and formulas across the five welfare types. The limited number of observations does not allow us to provide a solid explanation for the negative correlation with regard to the welfare chauvinist bloc in the Anglo-Saxon cluster, most probably connected to the specificities of the electoral system and, in the British case, the Conservative Party's effective adjustment to mobilise the bulk of Leave voters in the Brexit context (Hayton 2021). Overall, the data partially confirm hypothesis 2 regarding a negative performance of the mainstream centre left in the Nordic and Continental cluster, although there is a negative performance in a residual system of social protection such as the Mediterranean one.

Moreover, to test hypotheses 1, 1 bis, and 2, we added a government/opposition dummy, including a political variable dealing with the turnout on the ground that previous research has shown that the centre left performs better when turnout is high. In this test, the correlation coefficient is not significant for GDP, showing that it is no relationship between economic growth and the electoral performance of the parties, including the mainstream

centre-left. The coefficient for GINI is negative and statistically significant for the radical left parties. Looking at the other socio-economic variable, we can see that as the GINI increases, hence inequality increases, the radical left parties tend to have lower electoral performances. This is a counterintuitive result; it shows that the more unequal societies are, the less favourable the electoral competition is for the radical left bloc. Interestingly, the GINI index does not appear to be statistically related to either the vote share of the mainstream left bloc or the welfare chauvinists. The coefficient for unemployment is significant and positive for the radical left bloc, indicating that less than in situations of inequality, the radical left performs better when unemployment is high. Interestingly, the coefficient of unemployment is significant and negative for the mainstream centre-left, indicating that the higher the unemployment, the more penalised the mainstream centre-parties are at the polls. Finally, when it comes to the welfare chauvinist bloc, their votes share is positively and significantly correlated to social spending. These parties perform better in contexts characterised by higher levels of social expenditure. The dummy G/O (GOt<sub>1</sub>) has a positive and significant coefficient. If we look at the full complete data, it is reasonable to expect that the ruling parties before the elections, regardless of the electoral result, will still be among the most-voted parties after the election. In other words, there is no major electoral turmoil, and hence a radical party regeneration in the aftermath of the election. Also note that, within our sample, the radical left is the one that benefits the most.

Table 2: Economic determinants of votes for the radical left, centre-left, welfare chauvinist and green parties in Europe (2002-2020)

VARIABLES	Left	Centre-left	Welfare Ch.	Green
Continental	1.097 (1.41)	- (2.20) 10.857** *	-1.473 (2.24)	0.843 (0.96)
Mediterranean	4.804*	-4.508	-2.688	- 5.457***

	(2.44)	(3.77)	(2.96)	(1.12)
Post-Comm	-1.160	-9.963**	5.585	-
				4.769***
	(2.78)	(4.05)	(4.74)	(1.53)
Anglo-Saxon	0.512	-9.462**	-5.346*	-
				5.059**
				*
	(2.52)	(4.32)	(2.94)	(1.15)
Turnout	0.009	0.060	0.055	-0.010
	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.03)
GDP	-0.104	-0.561	-0.112	0.060
	(0.27)	(0.41)	(0.21)	(0.15)
SocialBenefitsGDP	-0.286	-0.459	0.526*	-0.172*
	(0.22)	(0.34)	(0.28)	(0.10)
GINI	-	-0.093	-0.033	0.079
	0.585**			
	(0.23)	(0.34)	(0.20)	(0.10)
Unempl	0.389*	-0.707**	-0.216	-0.013
	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.17)	(0.08)
GOt1	9.824*	6.133***	6.548***	0.293
	**			
	(3.33)	(1.78)	(2.50)	(1.12)
Constant	24.308*	39.773**	-5.251	9.489*
	(12.96)	(18.03)	(14.65)	(5.46)
Observations	131	197	193	89
R-squared	0.332	0.172	0.154	0.482

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The substantial significance of each welfare model is a justification for further regression models by each of the welfare types.

In the Nordic model (table 3), the welfare chauvinists are negatively correlated to the GDP trend (the worse the economic conditions, the more they grow) and positively influenced by the presence in government, a variable that is not statistically relevant for the other parties. While the Greens are negatively influenced by the turnout, the level of participation in the elections is not statistically related to the electoral performance of the other parties under scrutiny.

Table 3. Economic determinants of votes for the radical left, centre-left, welfare chauvinist and green parties in the Nordic Welfare system (2002-2020).

NORDIC				
VARIABLES	Left	Centre-left	Welfare Ch.	Green
GDP	0.847 (0.70)	0.830 (1.37)	-3.412* (1.64)	-0.026 (0.50)
SocialBenefitsGDP	0.049 (0.21)	-0.049 (0.48)	-1.243 (0.74)	0.418 (0.29)
GINI	0.139 (0.53)	-0.607 (0.85)	1.328 (1.10)	0.156 (0.44)
Unempl	0.584 (0.39)	-0.978 (0.85)	-0.409 (1.03)	0.659 (0.39)
Turnout	- 0.020 (0.08)	0.333 (0.18)	0.226 (0.29)	-0.243** (0.09)
GOt1	0.686 (1.13)	4.122 (2.27)	7.962* (3.73)	-1.937 (1.13)
Constant	- 2.164 (8.62)	20.052 (18.78)	1.874 (36.25)	5.496 (9.86)
Observations	23	16	19	15

R-squared	0.188	0.599	0.386	0.661
Robust standard errors in parentheses				
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

As in the previous regression, our variables do not explain the electoral performance of the mainstream centre left bloc in the continental model (table 4). In opposition to the general trend, in this cluster the welfare chauvinists' electoral results are negatively correlated to unemployment: the higher the employment, the lower their results. The same applies to the green family. Interestingly, the dummy Government/opposition is negatively correlated to the radical left vote share, indicating that being in government penalises significantly this family.

Table 4. Economic determinants of votes for the radical left, centre-left, welfare chauvinist and green parties in the Continental Welfare system (2002-2020)

CONTINENTAL				
VARIABLES	Left	Centre- left	Welfare Ch.	Green
GDP	-0.518 (0.73)	-1.856 (1.28)	0.488 (0.84)	0.534 (0.43)
SocialBenefitsGDP	0.103 (0.60)	-1.235 (0.83)	0.600 (0.67)	0.094 (0.28)
GINI	0.137 (0.58)	-0.316 (1.51)	0.636 (0.85)	0.554 (0.37)
Unempl	0.332 (0.51)	-1.355 (1.29)	-1.387* (0.74)	- (0.45) 0.801*
Turnout	0.044 (0.09)	-0.099 (0.15)	-0.004 (0.13)	0.028 (0.05)

GOt1	-	4.068	7.333*	2.168
	3.585*			
	(1.97)	(3.75)	(3.94)	(2.07)
Constant	-6.038	75.790	-16.183	-8.916
	(34.04)	(61.91)	(44.14)	(17.05)
Observations	33	36	39	32
R-squared	0.115	0.259	0.228	0.358

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

In the Mediterranean model (table 5), it is only the GINI index that has a statistically significant coefficient regarding the centre left. According to our data, the centre-left is rewarded in situations characterized by a growth in inequality (the centre-left performs better when the Gini index increases). Despite the weaknesses of the welfare system, counterintuitively, the radical left is penalized by the growth of social spending, while it is favoured by high unemployment. Furthermore, having been in government rewards them in successive elections. The coefficient for our dummy is positive and significant for the mainstream centre-left also, although to a lower extent. In this model, it is the turnout that is positively and significantly correlated to welfare chauvinists.

Table 5. Economic determinants of votes for the radical left, centre-left, welfare chauvinist and green parties in the Mediterranean Welfare System (2002-2022)

MEDITERRANEAN				
VARIABLES	Left	Centre-left	Welfare Ch.	Green
GDP	-0.623	1.135	0.410	-0.255
	(0.68)	(0.89)	(0.35)	(0.16)
SocialBenefitsGDP	-1.125*	-1.404	0.778	-0.157
	(0.60)	(0.95)	(0.46)	(0.16)

GINI	-0.289 (0.63)	3.072* (1.63)	0.170 (0.55)	-0.101 (0.31)
Unempl	0.466* (0.26)	-0.436 (0.45)	0.092 (0.19)	-0.042 (0.07)
Turnout	-0.027 (0.13)	0.282 (0.33)	0.177* (0.10)	-0.023 (0.04)
GOt1	16.481*** (5.18)	9.556* (4.79)	-3.078 (3.41)	
Constant	39.692 (39.06)	-66.555 (74.59)	-31.553* (17.85)	11.174 (12.01)
Observations	50	52	28	15
R-squared	0.522	0.320	0.232	0.332

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Regarding the post-communist cluster (table 6), the results are quite puzzling. The radical left grows as unemployment decreases. On the contrary, the centre-left is rewarded by a worsening of economic conditions (it decreases as the GDP increases) and by an increase in inequalities (it has better electoral results when the Gini index decreases). Interestingly, the vote share of the centre left is negatively correlated to expenditures for social benefits, while the correlation is significant and positive for the welfare chauvinists.

Table 6. Economic determinants of votes for the radical left, centre-left, welfare chauvinist and green parties in the Post-Communist Welfare System (2002-2022)

POSTCOMMUNIST				
VARIABLES	Left	Centre- left	Welfare Ch.	Green
GDP	-0.079 (0.29)	-1.050** (0.40)	0.142 (0.28)	0.225 (0.32)

SocialBenefitsGDP	-0.048 (0.59)	-1.267* (0.64)	1.497*** (0.53)	0.384 (0.45)
GINI	-0.432 (0.38)	-0.760* (0.43)	0.422 (0.29)	0.274 (0.36)
Unempl	- 0.540*	0.263 (0.44)	-0.282 (0.26)	-0.015 (0.34)
Turnout	0.228 (0.18)	-0.016 (0.19)	0.237 (0.15)	0.111 (0.12)
GOt1	0.109 (2.41)	4.891* (2.56)	8.219** (3.77)	
Constant	12.192 (30.45)	61.145** (26.45)	-41.261* (22.48)	-18.711 (20.37)
Observations	17	78	103	19
R-squared	0.718	0.135	0.202	0.086

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The liberal model is the most difficult to assess, the limited number of cases limits the findings (table 7). The data shows that the centre-left is positively influenced by being in government. The welfare chauvinists are penalized by high levels of participation. The vote share of the Greens is favoured by a decrease in terms of inequality, unemployment, and a GDP contraction. Furthermore, they are penalized by the increase in social spending and by being in opposition.

Table 7. Economic determinants of votes for left, centre-left, welfare chauvinist and green parties in the Anglo-Saxon Welfare System (2002-2020)

ANGLOSAXON				
VARIABLES	Left	Centre-left	Welfare Ch.	Green

GINI	1.220	-3.509	-0.287	-1.492*
	(1.70)	(5.72)	(1.89)	(0.35)
Unempl	0.004	-3.147		-0.602*
	(0.53)	(2.34)		(0.15)
Turnout	-	0.223	-1.474**	-0.282
	0.452	(0.78)	(3.45)	(0.10)
GDP		-2.733	-1.096	-
		(5.81)	(0.72)	1.525**
SocialBenefitsGDP		0.099	2.857	-
		(2.00)	(1.49)	0.557**
GOt1		18.195**		-
		(7.34)		5.762**
Unempl			-	
Constant	-	136.801	39.710	90.685*
	1.211	(2.66)	(446.36)	(108.71)
Observations	8	15	6	9
R-squared	0.081	0.331	0.992	0.856
Robust standard errors in parentheses				
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

At the current stage, the data allows us to confirm the macro-economic impact on the results of the mainstream left parties although with different nuances across the different tests. The H1 bis is invalidated, having been in government does not equal a major penalty. Regarding the vulnerability of the mainstream centre-left in the Nordic and Continental clusters, the data on party blocs support our initial interpretation. The same

applies to H3, although with nuances. The analysis also highlights how, with some limited exceptions, it is not possible to identify a unique pattern of influence of socio-economic variables on the electoral performance of the mainstream centre-left parties. Indeed, only unemployment has some statistical significance. The relation with the radical left electoral performance is slightly more solid, the data shows a positive correlation with both unemployment and inequality. Overall, the current stage of elaboration of our dataset pinpoints towards the relevance of contextual factors, linked to a specific welfare model. Across the different models, the mainstream centre-left appears to be influenced in different ways by the same variables. This is an element that does not concern the distinction between East and West Europe in line with divergent historical and political paths; it can be identified in geographically and substantially similar political and welfare systems, such as the Continental and the Nordic ones. For the time being, the only conclusion we can formulate is that the relation between social spending and mainstream centre-left parties does not seem to evolve in the same way in all systems, nor to follow the same directions.

### **Concluding remarks**

This analysis aimed to identify patterns in the stressful situation to which mainstream centre left parties have been subject since 2008. It uses a new dataset covering 131 legislative elections from 2002 to February 2020. The analysis shows that to grasp the current problems and challenges of the centre-left it makes sense to situate the different parties in the specific welfare model. As such, the analysis makes two contributions to the existing literature. The first contribution is descriptive and concerns the updated electoral dynamics of the left. The new dataset allows a precise evaluation of the electoral changes in terms of the vote share over time and across countries. From an analytical perspective, the analysis contributes to both party politics literature and welfare state literature by identifying the variables that influence the developments in terms of electoral strength in the context of the worst economic shock in decades. Contrary to previous research that studied the change in welfare policies (dependent variable) in relation to the electoral success of radical left and centre left wing parties (independent variable), our research aims to look at the correlation between changes in the welfare systems (independent variable) and the electoral strength of parties on the left of the political spectrum (dependent variable). The main results show that it is difficult to provide a general overview of how the Great Recession impacted the electoral

performance of the mainstream centre-left; our statistical analysis shows important variance across welfare models, indicating that the context shapes the dynamics of the party competition. Based on our preliminary analysis, theory development and empirical research should consider mainstream centre-left votes as a component of the features of the specific welfare type rather than general economic indicators (including social spending). Finally, results indicate that the competition on pro-welfare platforms from both the left and the right of the political spectrum varies importantly with different patterns and formulas across the five welfare types.

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**Annex 1: Number of elections and parties covered**

	Elections	Parties	Minyear	Maxyear
Austria	5	7	2006	2019
Belgium	4	10	2007	2019
Bulgaria	8	13	2005	2021
Croatia	5	8	2007	2020
Cyprus	4	7	2006	2021
Czech Republic	5	9	2006	2021
Denmark	4	7	2007	2019
Estonia	4	4	2007	2019
Finland	4	5	2007	2019
France	3	11	2007	2017
Germany	5	5	2005	2021
Greece	7	14	2007	2019
Hungary	4	7	2006	2018
Ireland	5	5	2002	2020
Italy	4	14	2006	2018
Latvia	5	10	2006	2018
Lithuania	4	10	2008	2020
Luxembourg	4	5	2004	2018
Malta	5	3	2003	2022
Netherlands	5	9	2006	2021
Norway	5	5	2005	2021
Poland	5	13	2005	2019
Portugal	6	7	2005	2022
Romania	5	9	2004	2020
Slovakia	5	11	2006	2020
Slovenia	5	11	2004	2018
Spain	6	10	2004	2019
Sweden	4	5	2006	2018

Switzerland	4	6	2007	2019
United Kingdom	5	5	2005	2019

### Countries with the welfare system

Continental	Nordic	Mediterranean	East-European	Anglo-Saxon
Austria	Denmark	Cyprus	Bulgaria	United Kingdom
Belgium	Finland	Greece	Croatia	Ireland
France	Norway	Italy	Czech Republic	
Germany	Sweden	Malta	Estonia	
Luxembourg		Portugal	Hungary	
Netherlands		Spain	Latvia	
Switzerland			Lithuania	
			Poland	
			Romania	
			Slovakia	
			Slovenia	

NORDIC					
Parties	Obs.	Avg	SD	Min	Max
Centre-left	16	32.96	4.39	25.00	40.40
Far-left	16	7.19	1.85	2.20	10.00
Welfare cha.	16	14.35	6.23	2.90	22.90
CONTINENTAL					
Parties	Obs.	Avg	SD	Min	Max
Centre-left	25	30.49	8.76	7.80	46.40
Far-left	21	8.15	6.79	0.00	23.00
Welfare cha.	25	15.18	10.11	0.00	31.80
MEDITERRANEAN					
Parties	Obs.	Avg	SD	Min	Max

Centre-left	27	35.17	12.56	10.70	56.60
Far-left	23	14.47	8.50	3.20	32.70
Welfare cha.	11	11.41	7.18	1.10	22.20
POST-COMMUNIST					
Parties	Obs.	Avg	SD	Min	Max
Centre-left	46	29.73	10.93	7.60	50.01
Far-left	23	4.39	4.30	0.00	14.90
Welfare cha.	38	18.46	19.97	0.00	69.40
ANGLO-SAXON					
Parties	Obs.	Avg	SD	Min	Max
Centre-left	7	28.79	12.68	12.30	44.60
Far-left	3	12.30	5.50	6.90	17.90
Welfare cha.	4	4.95	5.20	1.80	12.70

## **Annex 2: Description of the variables**

**Radical left vote share:** Vote share in the election of parties that criticise the underlying socio-economic structures, values and practices and militate for extensive social policies and protective employment relations systems. We allocated parties to this bloc via L/R ParlGov, complemented by their European and international party membership and secondary.

**Greens vote share:** Vote share in the election of parties with a platform of environmental protection, in several cases expanded towards welfare and economic issues. We allocated parties to this bloc via L/R ParlGov, complemented by their European and international party membership and secondary literature.

**Welfare chauvinist vote share:** Vote share in the election of parties that militate in favour of welfare benefits restricted to the natives of a country as opposed to immigrants or other categories of foreigners. This category includes radical right populist parties as well as other party families supportive of restricted access to welfare services<sup>1</sup>. We allocated parties to this bloc via L/R ParlGov, complemented by secondary literature.

**GDP Growth:** Average GDP growth in the five years before the elections, based on Eurostat data.

**Gini Index:** Indicator measuring the levels of income inequality, operationalized as the average Gini Index in the five years before the elections, based on Eurostat data

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<sup>1</sup> This group does not fully overlap with the populist family. To wit, in the Bulgarian case, we have excluded from our sample parties such as the National Movement Simeon the Second (NDSV) and the party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), both promoters of anti-establishment and sometimes ethnocentric platforms, associated by different scholars to genuine manifestation of populism. However, these parties' programmes do not primarily lay emphasis on the need to restrict welfare benefits to groups of natives. The chauvinist interpretation, central for our argument, is a privileged line of mobilisation for Bulgarian parties such as Ataka, Volya, NSFB, and VRMO. In their case, the affiliation to the community of Bulgarians are based compulsorily based on national/ethnic and cultural aspects. In cases such as the Belgian one, the group of welfare chauvinists included in our dataset mentions not only the usual suspects of Vlaams Belang but also the New Flemish Alliance (NVA) and the People's party (PP). Similarly, in Austria, we excluded from our sample Dr. Martin's List — For Democracy, Control, Justice, promotor of anti-establishment discourse. The program of the List is however focused on transparency with a liberal economic agenda.

Unemployment rate: Average unemployment rate in the five years before the elections, based on Eurostat data

SocialBenefitsGDP: The average social benefits expenditure as a percentage of GDP in the five years before the elections, based on Eurostat data. Social benefits are current transfers received by households intended to provide for the needs that arise from certain events or circumstances, for example, sickness, unemployment, retirement, housing, education, or family circumstances.

Government/Opposition at t-1: Coded 0 if the party at the time before the election is in opposition, 1 if the party is in government, based on ParlGov and WhoGoverns.

Turnout: Electoral turnout at the elections, based on the IDEA turnout database.