# Historical Political Cleavages and Post-Crisis Transformations in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, 1953-2020

Luis Bauluz
Amory Gethin
Clara Martínez-Toledano
Marc Morgan

# Historical Political Cleavages and Post-Crisis Transformations
# in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, 1953-2020[*]

Luis Bauluz

Amory Gethin

Clara Martínez-Toledano

Marc Morgan

## Abstract

This paper combines post-electoral surveys to analyze the transformation of the structure of political cleavages in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland over the last decades. Although all four countries were late industrializers and were heavily impacted by the 2008 global recession, leading to a profound reconfiguration and transformation of their party systems, socioeconomic cleavages have not followed the exact same patterns. We document a progressive decline of class cleavages in Italy and Spain and an exacerbation of class divisions in Portugal and Ireland over the last decade. In Italy and Spain, despite their strong religious and regional divisions, we find growing support for social democratic, socialist, and affiliated parties among highest-educated voters, while top-income earners have remained more supportive of conservative forces, leading to the emergence of "multi-elite party systems" comparable to that found in other Western democracies. Portugal and Ireland have instead remained with their "single-elite party systems", marked by the polarization of mainstream parties after the onset of the financial crisis in Portugal, the rise of *Sinn Féin* supported by low-income and lower-educated voters in Ireland, and the exceptional absence of strong far-right parties capturing the lower classes in both countries.

## 1. Introduction

This paper studies the changing relationship between party choice and socioeconomic conflicts in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland over the last decades. The focus on these four countries is particularly useful to understand the sources of political change in advanced democracies, as they all share a history of late industrialization and all were impacted to a similar degree by the aftermath of the 2008 global recession. The post-crisis austerity policies imposed by international organizations in cooperation with domestic political parties, in exchange for financial aid, gave the impression that national elections had no room to change domestic policy. This led to the emergence of new challenger parties, which have profoundly transformed their party systems. Despite these similarities, socioeconomic cleavages have not followed the same patterns in the four countries. This is largely due to each country's specific political history.

For this study we use post-electoral surveys covering all national elections held in each country between 1953, the earliest country-year election in Italy, and 2020, the latest country-year election in Ireland. We find a distinct pattern between Italy and Spain on the one hand, and Portugal and Ireland on the other. Class cleavages have progressively disappeared in Italy and Spain. The emergence of new anti-elite challenger parties (e.g., *Podemos* in Spain, *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy), liberal parties (e.g., *Ciudadanos* in Spain), and right-nationalist anti-immigration parties (e.g., *Lega* in Italy, *VOX* in Spain) led to a shift in the vote from traditional parties to these new parties among the young, and a disproportionate increase in the vote share of the "new left" among the highest educated. In contrast, class divisions in Portugal widened after the 2008 global financial crisis when the two mainstream parties (*Partido Socialista* and *Partido Social Democrata*) returned to more polarized ideological positions. Ireland also saw a rise in class divides after the recession with the emergence of a "workers" party, *Sinn Féin*, focused on redistributive issues and public services, which captured the vote of underprivileged citizens, previously attached to mainstream parties.

2

Many Western democracies have witnessed the emergence of "multi-elite party systems" in the past decades, in which highest-educated voters have become increasingly likely to vote for the historical "left" (the "Brahmin left"), while top-income voters have remained more faithful to the historical "right" (the "merchant right") (Piketty, 2018). In Italy, the trends have been relatively similar, more so than in the three other countries studied here. The "merchant right" is, however, weaker in comparative perspective, due most likely to the exceptional strength of historical religious cleavages and to the salient decoupling of class and Catholicism. That is, some voters might be drawn to the policy of one party on class lines, but resistant to that same party on religious lines. Spain is also approaching a multi-elite party system, but it has not fully reached it yet. This delay is likely due to its recent authoritarian past, which prevented the emergence of a strong far-right party capturing the vote of low-income and lower-educated voters. Instead, the only successful Spanish far-right formation, *VOX*, emerged in 2013 as a nationalist reaction to the Catalan independence movement while endorsing neoliberal economic policies, and thus not (at least until now) on the back of the lower-educated or low-income voters feeling left behind. The nationalist vote in the regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country has also weakened Spain's transition towards a multi-elite party system, as regional parties tend to prioritize ethnolinguistic conflicts over social class issues, while left-wing nationalist parties disproportionately attract the highest-income and highest-educated voters.

Portugal and Ireland are unique case studies in that they have not shown any sign of a transition to a "multi-elite party system". The Portuguese "exceptionalism" has been mainly driven by the absence of strong political conflicts over value-based issues; the weak polarization among mainstream parties, which has helped the traditional left to retain a large share of the low-income and low-educated electorate and prevented the emergence of a strong far-right party; the persistent importance of the class-based communist vote; and the incapacity of the Left Bloc (*Bloco de Esquerda*) to become strong enough among the highest educated to revert the educational cleavage. In Ireland, the persistent historical civil war cleavage and the strength of Catholicism largely explain why political cleavages did not

revolve around a clear left-right axis, as well as the absence of a significant "Brahmin left". The recent electoral success of the pro-worker *Sinn Féin* party has also prevented the emergence of a strong far-right party capturing the lower-educated and low-income vote, reinforcing the "single-elite party system".

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We present the four case studies separately, beginning with Italy (Section 2), then Spain (Section 3), Portugal (Section 4), and finally Ireland (Section 5). Each case study begins with a brief historical description of the party system, before delving into the empirical analysis of voting dynamics across socioeconomic characteristics that explain the main patterns we observe. Section 6 concludes.

## 2. Italy

### 2.1 Political Dynamics since the Second World War

Democracy was re-established in Italy after the war in 1946. Two years later the new Constitution initiated the First Republic. Until the 1990s, the electoral system operated under proportional representation (PR), with very low thresholds. This formula resulted in a highly fractioned party system, yet it did not prevent one single party, the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), from being in office during this period (Heath and Bellucci 2013). Since the 1990s, Italy reformed its electoral system four consecutive times, more than any other Western European country (Karremans, Malet, and Morisi 2019; Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018). These reforms had a profound effect on the structure of party competition.

The first reform was approved by referendum in 1993, following numerous corruption scandals linked to the political establishment, which caused popular dissatisfaction with the political system and a growing demand for institutional changes. This initiated what has been popularly known as the "Second Republic", although the Constitution was not modified. This reform changed the PR formula to one in which three quarters of the Chamber of Deputies

4

seats were based on a first-past-the-post system while the remaining quarter remained proportional. This reform incentivized pre-electoral alliances on the left and right of the political spectrum, consolidating a bipartisan party system. Since 2005, three reforms have modified the balance between proportional and majoritarian formulas, but the strong incentive to reach pre-electoral coalitions remained in place. Yet, they have not prevented the emergence of challenger parties, such as the Five Stars Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, M5S) in the last decade.

The history of the postwar Italian party system can thus be decomposed into three periods: 1946-1993, 1993-2013, and 2013-2020 (Figure 1). The first period goes from the re-establishment of democracy in 1946 until the early 1990s. During this period, the main party on the right was the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), while the main party on the left was the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI). Initially, the PCI was under the influence of the USSR, but during the 1970s it broke with Soviet Orthodoxy, initiating what was known as "Eurocommunism". Smaller parties coexisted both on the left and the right, such as the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement or the Italian Socialist Party (Pasquino 2009). The consolidation of the PCI as the main left-wing party largely shaped the establishment of two blocs following a communist–anticommunist logic. The consequence was that the DC led the government throughout the whole period, as smaller formations would ally with the DC to prevent a government of the PCI.[1]

The 1980s to the early 1990s were a transformative period. On the one hand, the PCI suffered a crisis of identity, especially upon the fall of the internationalist communist bloc between 1989 and 1991. On the other, numerous cases of corruption within the DC generated a crisis

---

[1] The PCI exceptionally supported the DC governments between 1976 and 1980, an agreement known as the "Historic Compromise".

of political disaffection. The approval of the new electoral law in 1993 incentivized the establishment of a two-party system, with two main coalitions, one on the left and one on the right. The PCI split into the Democratic Party of the Left (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*, PDS) – which became the main party in the center-left coalition, "The Olive Tree" – and the Communist Refoundation Party (*Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, PRC). The PDS then gradually merged with smaller parties, eventually leading in 2007 to the creation of today's main left-wing party, the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD), which still excludes the smaller PRC. The DC was dissolved in 1994. Some of its members who opposed the party's transformation into the liberal Italian People's Party (*Partito Popolare Italiano*, PPI) founded the Christian Democratic Centre (*Centro Cristiano Democratico*, CCD) in 1994 and the United Christian Democrats (*Cristiani Democratici Uniti*, CDU) in 1995. The latter two parties merged in 2001, and together with the newly founded European Democracy, formed the Union of Christian and Centre Democrats (*Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e Democratici di Centro*, UDC). Despite these evolutions, the main right-wing party after the DC has been *Forza Italia*, founded in 1994 and led by media owner Silvio Berlusconi.

The 2010s led to another complete reconfiguration of the Italian party system. In a context of popular disaffection with the political class, partly influenced by the enduring economic impact of the Great Recession and the austerity measures adopted by Italy to escape the sovereign debt crisis, two challenger parties obtained important support in the 2013 general elections: the center-liberal formation Civic Choice (*Scelta Civica*, SC), with close to 11 percent of the popular vote, and the anti-establishment Five Stars Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, M5S), which obtained a 26 percent vote share. These two parties ran separately from the existing center-right and center-left coalitions. For the first time since 1993, the government was led by the PD, with the support of Berlusconi's party and other smaller formations (including SC), given the M5S's refusal to facilitate government formation.

The 2018 elections culminated the transformation of the Italian party system. On the one hand, the M5S won the elections with 33 percent of the popular vote. On the other hand, the

far-right regionalist Northern League (*Lega Nord*, LN) became the most voted party within the right-wing coalition, with 17 percent of the popular vote, surpassing *Forza Italia*. For the first time since the re-establishment of democracy, the government was not led by a mainstream party. Instead, an agreement was reached between the M5S and the LN. This alliance, however, proved unstable. After one year, tensions between the two parties led to the formation of a new government between the M5S and the PD.

*2.2 The Emergence of a Weak Multi-Elite Party System*

In what follows, we explore the changing relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and left-right voting behavior in Italy between the 1953 and 2018 general elections. For the elections in 1953 and 1958 we use the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) survey, while for the elections from 1968 onwards we use the Italian National Election Studies (ITANES) survey.[2]

We start by analyzing the evolution of the income and education cleavages. Figure 2 shows that these two cleavages, and in particular the income divide, have not been strong in Italy since the 1960s in comparison to other Western European countries (Gethin, Martínez-Toledano, and Piketty 2019). However, the trends reveal a pattern similar to that of other Western European countries. The highest educated have become gradually more supportive of social democratic, socialist, and communist parties, while the income cleavage has remained essentially flat, with top-income earners voting slightly more for conservative and Christian democratic parties. The upward shift in the education gradient mainly happened between the

---

[2] We group Italian parties into a left-wing and a right-wing bloc, following Heath and Bellucci (2013) for the period covering the First Republic, and on Karremans et al. (2019) for the years since 1993. See appendix Table AC1 for more details on data sources.

1970s and 1980s, which coincides with the period in which the relationship between the PCI and the Soviet Union gradually fell apart, as the party moved away from Soviet obedience and Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy toward Eurocommunism and the Socialist International on issues such as national sovereignty, socialist democracy and the freedom of culture (Fouskas 2018). The exclusion of the M5S from the left exacerbates the relative difference in the left-wing vote among the highest-educated, indicating that the new challenger party does not attract a disproportionate share of the highest educated.

The weak education and income gradients are largely related to the absence of a strong relationship between social class and partisanship, which is also common to the rest of Southern European countries (Günther and Montero 2000). In Italy, the weakness of this relationship is most likely reinforced by the decoupling of class and religion. Voters might be drawn to the policy of one party on class lines, but resistant to that same party on religious lines (e.g., the case of working-class Catholics) (Mackie, Mannheimer, and Sani 1992). The religious cleavage is particularly strong in the Italian context. During the First Republic, the Christian Democrats, with direct links with the Catholic Church, obtained the majority of votes from practicing Catholics.[3] In fact, the religious cleavage also explains why the education and income cleavages were not very strong, as the DC competed with the Communists for the low-income and low-educated Catholic electorate.[4] The Second Republic entailed the disappearance of the DC and marked the beginning of the "Catholic diaspora", that is, the decline in the association between practicing Catholicism and voting for the right (Karremans et al. 2019). The decline in the religious cleavage came together with the weakening of the class cleavage, due largely to the breakup of the PCI into separate parties. However, the association of Catholicism and religiosity with voting for the right is still

[3] See appendix Figures AB6 and AB7.

[4] See appendix Figures AC21 and AC22.

positive and much stronger than class voting, which has weakened in recent years (Heath and Bellucci 2013).

*2.3 The 2010s: The Beginning of a New Era?*

The 2013 and 2018 general elections heralded the definitive transformation of Italy's party system. Table 1 shows the structure of political cleavages in the 2018 elections. Socialists and social democrats have become the dominant parties among higher-educated, low-income individuals, while the traditional right and the LN obtain a more important share of votes from high-income, lower-educated voters. This configuration closely resembles that found in other Western European countries (Gethin, Martínez-Toledano, and Piketty 2019). The M5S stands out in this context as a more hybrid party, making its best scores among both middle-educated and high-income voters.

Interestingly, the LN concentrates its votes within the lowest-educated and top-income electorate, a similar voter profile to the far-right formation *VOX* in Spain (see below). This makes the LN distinct from most far-right formations in Europe, which tend to obtain their largest support not only from lower-educated but also from low-income voters. This distinct pattern can be related to its regionalist history, as the party attracts its strongest support within the richer Northern regions of Italy. Meanwhile, the M5S became the most voted force in the South and the Islands, both regions historically under the influence of traditional-right parties. Therefore, while regional divides do not seem to have altered the emergence of a multi-elite party system in Italy overall, the rise of new parties has produced a relatively unique settlement in comparative perspective.

**3. Spain**

*3.1 From Francoism to Democracy*

9

The Spanish transition to democracy was triggered by the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, which ended nearly four decades of dictatorship. The 1978 Constitution defined Spain as a parliamentary monarchy with high levels of political decentralization. Due to the fragility of the previous democratic experience of 1930-1936, Spain's new institutional design was thought to provide stability, while attempting to accommodate the expected territorial conflict from regions that already had an autonomous status prior to the dictatorship (Vidal and Sánchez-Vítores 2019).

The Spanish electoral system follows a PR formula. However, the small size of most constituencies acts as a corrective element favoring government formation, turning the formally proportional system into an almost majoritarian one (Del Pino and Colino 2010). The main beneficiaries of this system are mainstream national parties. Regional parties have generally acted as facilitators of government formation at the national level, whenever electoral results do not grant a majority for the most voted national party in Congress. Another important feature of the Spanish political system is its high level of decentralization. While Spain is not defined as a federal state, regional governments (of the "Autonomous Communities") exert in practice substantial prerogatives both in terms of legislation and competencies (Moreno 1997).

The history of the Spanish political system since the end of the dictatorship can be decomposed into two periods (Figure 3). The first period is characterized by the formation of a two-party system and substantial government stability. The second period starts in 2014, following the aftermath of the Great Recession and the intensification of the independentist challenge in Catalonia, both of which led to a radical fragmentation and reconfiguration of the party system.

The first two democratic elections (in 1977 and 1979) were dominated by four main parties: the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) and the Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de España*, PCE) on the left, and the Union of the Democratic Centre

(*Unión de Centro Democrático*, UCD) and the People's Alliance (*Alianza Popular*, AP) on the right. The Communist Party was the main opposition party during Franco's regime, while the UCD incorporated opponents but also reformist sectors of Francoism (Hopkin 1999). The PSOE progressively moderated its political position, renouncing Marxist ideology in 1979, following its underperformance in the elections of 1977 and 1979, which were won by the UCD.

The 1982 elections redefined the political system in Spain. Following a failed *coup d'état* led by Francoist military officials, the UCD collapsed and was quickly replaced by the AP, later renamed as the People's Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), as the main party on the right. The PSOE obtained the best results ever achieved by a single party during democracy, with close to 50 percent of the popular vote. The PSOE and PP have alternated in power since then. The PCE and its successor the United Left (*Izquierda Unida*, IU) were relegated to a minor position, generally below 10 percent of the popular vote. Regionalist-nationalist parties consolidated a significant position in their constituencies, and often had a pivotal role facilitating the formation of governments and the approval of government budgets.

The Financial Crisis of 2008 and the subsequent European debt crisis led to a dramatic change in the party system (Vidal and Sánchez-Vítores 2019; Lisi, Llamazares, and Tsakatika 2019; Orriols and Cordero 2016). Economic issues, together with corruption and political regeneration, gained prominence in the political debate. Since the 2014 European Parliament elections and the subsequent 2015 general elections, three new parties have consolidated a key position in Spanish politics. The first party to emerge was *Podemos*, a left-wing party focused on economic redistribution and political regeneration.[5] *Ciudadanos*, a center-liberal

---

[5] *Podemos* has subsequently allied with several parties, including communists, greens, and several regional movements.

party originally from Catalonia, expanded to the rest of Spain by addressing demands for political renewal and defiance towards Catalan independentism (Rodríguez and Barrio 2016). In the general elections of April 2019, *VOX*, a far-right party of nationalist, conservative, and neo-liberal ideology entered the Spanish Parliament for the first time. The appearance of these three challenger parties has led to a multipolar system with fragile parliamentary majorities. After the inability to constitute a government forged new elections in November 2019, the PSOE and *Podemos* finally agreed to form the first coalition government since the end of the dictatorship.

*3.2 Class, Religion, and the Path towards a Multi-Elite Party System*

We explore the changing relationship between party choice and socio-demographic characteristics using post-electoral surveys of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) for all general elections held between 1979 and 2019.[6]

In line with most Western democracies, right-wing parties tend to obtain significantly more votes from top-income earners across the whole period, with no strong trend (Figure 4). In contrast, while the 1980s saw the most educated individuals voting more systematically for right-wing parties, today the bias towards the right still exists but it has been considerably reduced. Therefore, we can say that Spain is approaching a multi-elite party system, without having fully reached it yet.

Spain's delay in reaching a multi-elite party system is likely linked to its tumultuous historical past. The civil war (1936-1939) that culminated in Franco's dictatorship was fought over intense socio-economic cleavages, which would inevitably be imprinted into partisanship.

---

[6] See appendix Table BE1 for more details on data sources.

12

However, these political divisions weakened during the re-democratization process in fear of democratic instability. The class vote only intensified in 1982 as a consequence of the PSOE's breakthrough, as well as the displacement of the catch-all UCD by the AP, as the largest party on the center-right among middle-class and upper-class voters. At the same time, the Communist Party lost much of its moderate middle-class electorate to a more homogeneous working-class constituency (Günther and Montero 2000). Nevertheless, class polarization weakened again from the 1990s, due to the success of the PP at broadening its electorate, as well as to the integration of the Communist Party into the IU electoral coalition, which transformed its base of support to include young, higher-educated voters, pushing the education gradient upwards (Montero and Torcal 1994).

Similar to Italy, Spain has a strong religious cleavage. Catholic voters tend to vote less for left-wing parties, with these being associated to the secular republican experience of the 1930s (Requena and De Revenga 2005).[7] Religious polarization has weakened over time due to the increase in the number of voters with no religious affiliation, which rose from around 10 percent in the late 1970s to almost 30 percent in the late 2010s.[8] This secularization process is mainly the result of demographic changes, as younger generations have progressively become less religious (Orriols 2013).

*3.3 Regional Identities and the Catalan Pro-independence Movement*

One of the most salient political conflicts in Spain revolves around regional identity. The Basque Country and Catalonia have been traditionally the regions in which nationalist tensions are most visible. Regional-nationalist parties tend to prioritize ethno-linguistic

---

[7] See also appendix Figure BB7.

[8] See appendix Table BE2.

conflicts over social class issues in their regions, which have a higher income per capita than the Spanish average.[9] Hence, the left-wing regional-nationalist vote is more represented among Spanish top-income earners than among middle-income and low-income voters, so that the income gradient at the national level becomes more negative when excluding them from the analysis.[10] As the education gradient remains unchanged when including regional-nationalists or not, their exclusion generates a larger distance between the income and education gradients, a pattern which is closer to the one observed in most Western democracies. The regional-nationalist vote has thus hindered the development of a multi-elite party system in Spain.

Catalonia in particular has been at the center of Spanish political conflict in recent years, due to the intensification of the pro-independence movement.[11] The peak in the conflict happened during the attempt to celebrate a referendum of independence in 2017, which was not authorized by the Spanish Constitutional Court. The conflict did not only increase the divisions inside Catalonia, but also produced a strong backlash in the rest of Spain.

Figure 5 explores the difference in support for regional-nationalist parties by income and education level in Catalonia. The regional-nationalist vote is persistently associated with

---

[9] Instituto Nacional de Estadística, *Contabilidad Regional de España* (INE, 2019).

[10] See appendix Figure BC52.

[11] The history of the Basque Country since the re-establishment of democracy has also been strongly influenced by the ethno-regionalist conflict, including the use of violence by the radical-left terrorist organization ETA in its attempt to obtain independence (ETA ceased its armed activity in 2011, and dissolved permanently in 2018). See Strijbis and Leonisio (2012).

higher income and more educated voters, even after controlling for a large set of controls.[12] These tendencies are consistent with the idea of Catalan elites wanting full fiscal autonomy – at least as much as the rich regions of the Basque Country and Navarre – rather than having to redistribute their taxes and spending through the central government. Yet, economic factors are not exclusive in explaining the strong regional-nationalist vote. Cultural and identity channels are important (Ansolabehere and Puy 2020; Clua i Fainé 2014), as are age and rural-urban location, with voters from rural areas and older generations showing higher support for regional-nationalist parties.[13]

*3.4 The Enlargement of the Party System*

Following the Great Recession, the two-party system that existed since the re-establishment of democracy experienced a profound transformation. The emergence of new parties has led to a shift in the vote from traditional parties (PP, PSOE and IU) to new parties (*VOX, Ciudadanos* and *Podemos*) within each ideological block, not to a complete re-configuration of voting preferences (Lancaster 2017; Simón 2020).

Table 2 shows the composition of the Spanish party system along different socio-economic dimensions in the last two elections held in 2019. *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* show a relatively similar profile: they obtain their best results among higher-educated, higher-income, young,

---

[12] The same income gradient is obtained using Catalan surveys from the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, even after controlling by family, region of origin and region of birth: see Vidal and Gil (2019). The regional-nationalist income gradient in Catalonia is lower in the 2010s than the average of the 1980s-2000s, indicating that the recent pro-independence movement has also attracted the nationalist vote from other sectors of the population. See della Porta and Portos (2020).

[13] See appendix Figures BD22 and BD25.

and urban voters. In contrast, *VOX* is over-represented among voters with a secondary degree and although it obtains important support from young top-income earners, it also collects a significant share of votes from bottom income earners. This could signal its potential capacity to penetrate the least favored groups in the future.

Overall, the new party system of Spain resembles that of other Western European countries, where traditional parties coexist with a consolidated radical left (*Podemos*), a center-liberal party (*Ciudadanos*), and a far-right party (*VOX*). The most notable difference is that *VOX* is not currently dominant among low-income and lower-educated voters. This difference might come from the fact that the far-right arose in Spain endorsing neoliberal policies and as a nationalist reaction to the Catalan independence movement and hence, not on the back of the lower educated or low income feeling left-behind (Grau Creus 2019).[14] Furthermore, while *Podemos* fits particularly well the "Brahmin Left" model, the PSOE still maintains important support among the traditional working class, i.e., older low-income earners and the lowest educated. This has further delayed the emergence of a multi-elite party system in Spain.

## 4. Portugal

*4.1 From Salazarism to Democracy*

The Portuguese transition to democracy started in 1974 with a bloodless military coup that put an end to nearly five decades of dictatorship. In 1976, a new constitution was approved, defining Portugal as a semi-presidential system, with extensive powers for the president, which were however significantly reduced in the 1982 amendment of the Constitution (Costa, Costa, and Magalhães 2012). The Portuguese electoral system rests on a PR formula, whose

---

[14] The ideology of *VOX* is different from most European far-right political formations today. See Golder (2016).

exact configuration limits the capacity of small parties to be elected, as it uses the closed-list D'Hondt formula, which generates a strong bias in favor of large parties.

The history of the Portuguese party system since re-democratization can be decomposed into three periods: 1973-1987, 1987-2015, and 2015-2019 (Figure 6). In the first period, Portugal was characterized by a multi-party configuration and short-lived governments, with four parties obtaining significant support. The main political formations, with the exception of the Communist Party, were created right before or after the 1974 Revolution.[15] On the right of the spectrum, two main parties emerged: the liberal Social Democratic Party (*Partido Social Democrata*, PSD), and the Christian-democratic Center Democratic Party (*Centro Democrático e Social*, CDS).[16] On the left, two parties coexisted: the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista*, PS), and the Portuguese Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Português*, PCP). The PS and the PSD became the two dominant parties. Both led government formations during this period, either from a minority position with external support in the parliament, or in coalitions.

The 1987 legislative elections initiated a second period in the party system of Portugal, which consolidated a two-party system. On the left, the PS became hegemonic, while the PCP lost electoral support, from a maximum of nearly 20 percent in the mid-1980s to below 10 percent in the early 1990s. On the right, the PSD consolidated as the predominant party on the right, while the CDS remained in a minor position, with less than 10 percent of the popular vote. From 1987 onwards, government formation was more stable than in the preceding years, with most governments lasting the complete four-year mandate allocated by the Constitution. In

---

[15] The Portuguese Communist Party was created in 1921 and strongly opposed Salazar's dictatorship. Since the 1980s, the PCP has created alliances with the Greens and other small left-wing formations. See Freire (2005).

[16] The CDS later evolved into the Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (CDS-PP).

the absence of single-party majorities in the parliament, the PSD found its natural ally in the CDS. The PS drew on the support of the center-right when forming minority governments. Hence, this period was marked by a *"cordon sanitaire"* to the radical left, and a tendency for mainstream parties to compete for the political center (Ferreira da Silva and Mendes 2019). During this period a new party also emerged, the Left Bloc (*Bloco de Esquerda*, BE), which was formed in 1999 by the merger of old radical-left parties. The new party gradually augmented its electoral support until reaching 10 percent of the popular vote in 2015.

The third period in the Portuguese party system started in 2015. It did not imply a rupture with the preceding two-party system, but rather a reconfiguration of the positioning of the two main parties, the PS and the PSD, both of which adopted more polarized ideological positions regarding the post-recession austerity measures brought about by the "troika" (the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund) (Ferreira da Silva and Mendes 2019). The PSD proposed to go beyond the troika and reduce the role of the state in the society by revising the welfare model (Fernandes 2011). The PS instead focused on alleviating the impact of the troika-sponsored measures, while keeping a pro-European orientation in complying with the EU's fiscal rules (Fernandes 2016). This experience is different from the one observed in other Southern European countries like Spain and Italy, where the emergence of challenger parties since the Great Recession has led to a new multi-party system. The absence of such a transformation in Portugal has been related to the fact that the 2008 crisis did not mark a significant break with past economic trends, in contrast to its neighbors: its economy was stagnant prior to the 2008 crisis and voters were already familiarized with the past austerity measures that had been implemented by the two mainstream parties (Ferreira da Silva and Mendes 2019).

The shift of the PS towards the left culminated in the two new scenarios following the elections of 2015 and 2019, where the PS governed in minority with external support, for the first time, from the two main radical-left formations – the Left Bloc and the Communists. This alliance put an end to the historical position of the two mainstream parties, which had always

excluded the radical left from any government agreement, similarly to the situation in Spain until 2019.

*4.2 A Stable Single-Elite Party System*

We analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of left-wing and right-wing voters using post-electoral surveys covering all Portuguese legislative elections held between 1975 and 2019. For the elections between 1975 and 1979, we use the *Evolução das Atitudes e Comportamentos Políticos dos Portugueses* survey; for the elections between 1983 and 1991, we use the Continuity and Change in the Portuguese Party System (ESEO) survey; for the elections between 1995 and 2015 we use the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey; and for the 2019 election we use the Portuguese Election Study survey.[17]

In contrast to Italy and Spain, Portugal is characterized by a relatively stable "single-elite party system": both highest-educated and top-income voters have shown much higher support for right-wing parties (Figure 7).[18] This makes Portugal quite exceptional in the Western European political landscape, where there has been a profound transformation of the educational cleavage, with more educated individuals becoming more supportive of left-wing political parties.

This singular evolution of the education gradient in Portugal – following a decreasing trend since 1990 – can be attributed to four main factors. First, the two mainstream parties, the PS and the PSD, did not emerge out of grassroot class-based cleavages and were created right

---

[17] See appendix Table CC1 for more details on data sources.

[18] However, the education and income gradients are less negative before controls: see appendix Figures CB18 and CB19.

before or after the 1974 revolution (Alexandre, Zartaloudis, and Papadopoulos 2015). As they did not fear the emergence of a strong right-wing party after the experience of the dictatorship, they opted to follow a "catch-all strategy" and lacked a well-defined ideological position to broaden its electorate (Ferreira da Silva and Mendes 2019). This explains why Portugal's education gradient became stronger in recent years, when the two mainstream parties turned to more polarized ideological positions.

Second, although party polarization was very weak among the two mainstream parties until the 2000s, the Communist Party did adopt a mass-based model anchored on a pronounced class cleavage and articulated through institutionalized ties to the largest labor union (Ferreira da Silva and Mendes 2019). It was the only party with a well-defined left-wing ideology that showed significant levels of organization. Hence, thanks to its alliance with green movements, it managed to keep a significant vote share, with ample support from working-class voters, which contributed to the stability of the education and income gradients.[19] This contrasts with the majority of Western democracies, whose communist parties have lost importance over time or have transformed into more moderate, transversal formations.

Third, Portugal does not completely escape the trends in income and education cleavages observed in other Western European countries. The predominance of the left among the lowest-educated and low-income earners is mostly the result of the popularity of the traditional left (i.e., the socialists and communists) within these groups of voters. In contrast, the Left Bloc seems to attract highest-educated voters and top-income earners, in line with the voting profile of *Podemos* in Spain. However, the difference is that this "Brahmin Left" is still far from attracting a sufficient vote share, even from the highest-educated cohorts, to generate a similar realignment of voting preferences observed in other European countries.

---

[19] See appendix Figures CC11 and CC12.

Finally, political conflicts over sociocultural values have remained weak (Gethin 2018, chapter 8). The country has no center-periphery tensions, immigration is not a salient issue, and Eurosceptic sentiments are also not widespread. Hence, the stability of the income and education gradient is also related to the fact that the main contemporary division has been around the domestic management of the economy.

*4.3 Class, Religion, and Other Socio-Economic Cleavages*

Consistent with a weak polarization among mainstream parties until the 1990s and their turn towards more extreme positions since the 2010s, "subjective" class cleavages (measured from individuals' identification to specific social classes) seem to have risen in recent years after a period of decline (Figure 8). It should be noted, however, that this rise is not robust to controlling for income and education, revealing that it is precisely the growing impact of these two variables on the vote that explains the comeback of class voting. The strength of the traditional left among the low-educated and low-income electorate is also related to age, region, and country of origin. The young initially voted more for the left, but this has changed in the last two elections (Table 3).[20] This reversal is different from what we find in other Southern European countries, where the young have consistently shown higher support for left-wing formations.

In contrast to Italy and Spain, Table 3 shows that Portugal does not have a strong regional conflict, although some differences exist. The most notable is the high support for the left in urban locations (as in other Western European countries) and a concentration of the left vote

---

[20] See also appendix Figure CB15, CC5, and CC14.

in the capital city of Lisbon and of the traditional left vote in the Alentejo region.[21] The latter is a highly industrialized area with high degrees of worker mobilization around left parties. Moreover, the support for the traditional left is also very remarkable among voters from ex-colonies, with nearly 60% of voters born in Brazil supporting the PS.

## 5. Ireland

### 5.1 The Irish Party System since Independence

The Irish political landscape owes its particular shape and color to the struggles for its independence from the United Kingdom and to its late but rapid socio-economic development. The struggle for independence had its strongest expression in *Sinn Féin* – Ireland's oldest existing political party, founded in 1905. The Labour Party, gathering the trade union movement, opted for a more pragmatic approach to the model of state when founded in 1912 in a context more favorable to "Home Rule" (self-government within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland). The First World War, and especially the Easter Rising rebellion of 1916, marked a turning point for Irish radical republicanism. This was expressed in *Sinn Féin*'s sweeping 1918 general election victory, followed by its declaration of the republic and formation of a sovereign parliament in Dublin. This state of affairs motivated a series of seismic events from the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), to the partition of Ireland into North and South, the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) and the Irish Free State that it established, and to the Irish Civil War that it caused (1922-1923) (Ferriter 2004).

The civil war thus became the foundational political cleavage in 20th century Ireland, as it opposed a pro-Anglo-Irish-Treaty faction (the Labour Party and some *Sinn Féin* members of

---

[21] See also appendix Figure CB9.

parliament (MPs)) and an anti-Treaty faction (the other members and supporters of *Sinn Féin*). The anti-Treaty side of *Sinn Féin* was itself split between abstentionists (elected MPs refusing to take their seats in parliament) and non-abstentionists. After the war ended with victory for the pro-Treaty government, the pro-Treaty Sinn Féin MPs went on to form a new party in 1923, which eventually became *Fine Gael* in 1933. The non-abstentionist faction of *Sinn Féin* broke away from the party to form *Fianna Fáil* in 1926. The *Sinn Féin* that remained maintained the policy of abstentionism up until the 1987 general election. Thus, for most of the 20th century, the party effectively excluded itself from Irish electoral politics (see Figure 9), preferring to fight for a united Ireland (north and south) outside the constitutional fold. It would only be from 2002 onwards when Sinn Féin's parliamentary pragmatism began to bear fruits (Whiting 2016).

At the 1932 election, *Fianna Fáil* became the largest party in Ireland, followed by *Fine Gael*'s predecessor, the pro-Treaty *Cumann na nGaedheal*, which dominated government during the previous decade. From 1932 to 2011, *Fianna Fáil* topped every election without interruption, often forming minority governments with parliamentary support of either the Labour Party or independent deputies, and later forming coalition governments with the liberal Progressive Democrats (PDs) – formed in 1985, mainly by politicians from *Fianna Fáil*, but also some from *Fine Gael*, and dissolved in 2009 – and the Green Party (formed in 1981). Since 2011, *Fine Gael* has shared government twice, once with the Labour Party, and once with independent MPs in a minority government. The 2020 election proved to be historic, as it led to the first ever governmental coalition between *Fianna Fáil* and *Fine Gael* (along with the Greens), after the surge in support for *Sinn Féin* produced a hung parliament.

The ideological differences between parties in Ireland have been relatively narrow as compared to other countries, explaining the wide consensus on many issues (Mair 1992). This can be partly attributed to the legacy of the civil war on degrees of nationalism, and to the role of religion. *Fine Gael* originated as the pro-Commonwealth, conservative-Protestant, "Home Rule" party, favoring free market economic policies. *Fianna Fáil* is often ascribed the

"catch-all" label, highly pragmatic and overtly ambiguous. It was initially anti-Commonwealth, more constitutionally republican and conservative-Catholic, supporting industrial protectionism, social housing, and more ample social benefits. Consensus has also been facilitated by Ireland's unique proportional representation single-transferable vote (PR-STV) system, which allows voters to rank candidates in their constituency in order of preference on the ballot. These preferences then determine vote transfers between candidates vying for a seat. This system encourages candidate-based voting, as well as cross-party preference voting, facilitating bipartisan parliamentary agreements for government (Gallagher 2005).

The policy differences between both parties reduced over time to ones over degrees of nationalism and social liberties, with *Fianna Fáil* leading on the former and *Fine Gael* leading on the latter. In the economic sphere, there has been less to choose between them, especially since the 1990s, with *Fianna Fáil* favoring slightly more active government, and leaning on its historical proximity to the working class, particularly among the rural and elderly populations. This convergence facilitated the 2020 coalition deal between the two historically hegemonic parties.[22]

*Sinn Féin*'s recent growth on the left of the political spectrum contrasts with their decades-long time spent on the fringes of parliamentary politics. They have sought to fill the void left by *Fianna Fáil*'s drift to the center-right, focusing on economic issues and attracting many protest votes, especially after the financial crisis of 2008 laid bare the regulatory errors of previous *Fianna Fáil* governments, and the austerity drive of the subsequent *Fine Gael-*

---

[22] Today, expert survey respondents and electoral survey respondents both coincide in placing *Fianna Fáil* and *Fine Gael* on the right of the political spectrum, with *Fine Gael* being a few points more to the right. See Müller and Regan (2020).

Labour governments (Marsh, Farrell, and Reidy 2018). Their growing popularity has partly been facilitated by their self-exclusion from Irish parliamentary politics for 60 years and their blank historical record in government, as well as by the lack of historical memory of younger generations for their past associations with republican violence. One can contrast this experience with Ireland's second oldest party and principal parliamentary force on the left, the Labour Party. By eschewing from the outset the nationalist debate dividing *Fianna Fáil* and *Fine Gael*, the Labour Party remained a compromise party for much of its existence, supporting coalitions with each of the main parties (Ferriter 2004).

An important factor explaining the Labour Party's (and more generally the left's) difficulty in occupying a significant space in Irish parliamentary politics was the influence of religion, and particularly the Catholic Church. Ireland's population is overwhelmingly Catholic: by the 1990s it still comprised 90 percent of the population. Secularization happened late, but very quickly from then on: the share of voters attending church monthly or more declined from 80 percent in the 1990s to 28 percent by 2020.[23] Centuries of English colonial rule brought about a Catholic-Protestant cleavage, which tilted in favor of Catholicism after Irish independence. The Church supported Home Rule, the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and subsequently, with the rise of *Fianna Fáil*, a form of nationalism that did not disrupt existing distributions of wealth or traditional family values. Secular republicanism, especially from a socialist (or social democratic) perspective, had little chance of making ground. Therefore, a clear left-right partisan split, coupling economic and social issues, could not be observed with the same clarity in Irish politics as compared to other countries, at least until very recently. The divisions historically hinged upon varying degrees of social conservativism and economic

---

[23] See appendix Table DA2. This shift was fueled by revelations in the 1990s about the Church's management of publicly-funded services in health and education, particularly child-sex abuse.

protectionism in a context of nation-building and entrenched civil-war family politics (Ferriter 2004).

## 5.2 The Absence of a Multi-Elite Party System in Ireland

We analyze long-term electoral dynamics in Ireland by combining a number of political attitudes surveys for all general elections between 1973 and 2020. For the elections between 1973 and 1997 we use the Eurobarometers surveys; for the elections between 2002 and 2016 we use the European Social Surveys; and for the 2020 election we use the UCD Online Election Poll.[24]

Figure 10 depicts the relative vote for *Fianna Fáil*, *Sinn Féin*, the Labour Party, the Greens, and other left groupings among the highest-educated and top-income voters since the 1970s. High-income voters are not less likely to vote for *Fine Gael* and other right-wing parties today than they were in the past. There was some convergence in the voting patterns of these voters in the early 2000s, but the 2020 election returned the trend: top-income voters were biased against *Fianna Fáil* and the left by 11 percentage points, the highest it has ever been. This stands in contrast to what we observe in most Western countries (Gethin, Martínez-Toledano, and Piketty 2019), in which the income gradient has remained stable or has decreased in the long run. Even more distinct with the trends in other democracies has been the lack of a complete reversal in the education cleavage in Ireland: while highest-educated voters have become relatively more likely to vote for *Fianna Fáil* and the left over time, the gradient has remained significantly negative. Crucially, while in other countries new parties on the left have attracted highly-educated voters, in Ireland we see the reverse phenomenon: the

---

[24] See appendix Table DA1 for more details on data sources.

26

emergence of a new left party, *Sinn Féin*, forging a clear left-right class cleavage that was not present historically.

The reason why we place *Fianna Fáil* alongside the left is mainly practical, as left-wing parties do not otherwise make up enough votes to constitute a critical bloc, especially before the Great Recession. If we place *Fianna Fáil* alongside the right, class-based cleavages shrink, with the exception of the income cleavage in 2020, owing to the rise of *Sinn Féin*.[25] This is because *Fianna Fáil* was historically dominant among the lower-educated and lower-income electorates. The magnitude of *Sinn Féin*'s appeal to these classes in 2020 is comparable to *Fianna Fáil*'s in prior years.[26] The Labour vote is ironically the least one determined by socio-economic class.[27] Moreover, previous research has found that voters from both *Fianna Fáil* and *Sinn Féin* share relatively similar "populist" attitudes towards elites and national identity (Reidy and Suiter 2017).

Thus, Irish politics has not fully transformed into a multi-elite party system. Class has recently become more salient for left-right voting. What has changed in 2020 is who is uniting the disadvantaged classes, compared to previous elections. Table 4 puts the spotlight on the historic 2020 election. *Sinn Féin* scored higher among primary-educated and lower-income voters, while *Fianna Fáil* captured more of the middle groups in both categories. Labour, and especially the Greens, seemed to be tilted more heavily towards the middle and upper classes in these respects. If anything, the "Brahmin left" is present in these parties, most notably in

---

[25] See appendix Figures DC15.

[26] See appendix Figures DD36 and DD37.

[27] In appendix Figures DD1 to DD27 we present the detailed structure of the vote for *Fianna Fáil*, *Fine Gael, Sinn Féin*, and the Labour Party.

the Green Party, but it is currently marginal in the aggregate.[28] Religion and age seem to distinguish left and right somewhat better: parties to the left of *Fianna Fáil* are supported more by non-religious and relatively younger cohorts, similar to other western democracies.[29] *Fine Gael* voters have been historically more rural than urban, with *Fianna Fáil*'s voters only slightly more rural, and Labour having a very large urban bias.[30] We also find evidence that *Sinn Féin* appeared to be urban biased, but increased their support relatively more in rural areas between 2002 and 2016, as they captured votes from the mainstream parties, especially *Fianna Fáil*.[31]

These changes all occurred relatively quickly as a product of the destabilizing force of the "Celtic Tiger" economic boom and bust on mainstream politics. The emergence of a "workers" party (*Sinn Féin*) in this context seems to have provided a bulwark against the transition to a multi-elite party system in Ireland. The severity of the 2008 financial crisis and post-crisis austerity for its economic model can explain why the poorer and lesser-educated parts of the electorate have increasingly supported pro-redistribution parties. The large imbalances of the Irish growth model – which produced the fastest economic expansion among OECD countries since the 1980s – in favor of the well-off, highly-educated and

---

[28] This is despite Ireland having one of the most highly-educated populations in the world. According to the surveys we study, Ireland went from having 5% of the electorate with a tertiary degree in the 1973-77 to over 50% in 2020. The growth has been largest in the transition from the 1990s to the 2000s.

[29] The magnitude of the religious division has waned over time for the different parties. See appendix Figure DC13.

[30] See appendix Figures DD9, DD18, and DD27.

[31] Authors' computations using Comparative Study of Electoral Systems data. Results are available upon request.

mobile classes demands an active government to constantly redistribute the proceeds of a rapidly expanding economy. This is reflected in the data: while Ireland carries a very high level of market income inequality, it has the most redistributive welfare state in terms of reducing income differentials via taxes and transfers among rich countries (Cause, Browne and Vindics, 2019). Despite this, income growth (after redistribution) has overwhelmingly benefited the top of the distribution a decade on since the economic crisis.[32] The novel focus of *Sinn Féin* on redistribution, housing and public services, coupled with its strong cultural nationalism, may also explain the absence of an extreme-right party in Ireland, compared to other countries (O'Malley 2008). In addition, immigration, globalization or the EU are currently not salient issues of contention, probably owing to Ireland's own emigrant history and open economic model.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the changing relationship between party choice and socioeconomic conflicts in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland over the course of the last seven decades using post-electoral surveys. Even though all four countries were late industrializers and were impacted to a similar degree by the aftermath of the 2008 global recession, socioeconomic cleavages have not followed the same patterns. In Italy and Spain, we have documented strong and persistent regional and religious class cleavages, and in line with most Western democracies, a gradual decline of class cleavages. In contrast, in Portugal and Ireland we have found an exacerbation of class cleavages over the last decade due largely to the polarization of mainstream parties after the onset of the financial crisis in Portugal, the growing support of *Sinn Féin* among the low-income and low-education classes in Ireland, and the exceptional inexistence of strong far-right parties supported by the lower classes in both countries. Taken together, these

---

[32] See appendix Figure DD35.

results imply that to understand the structure of political cleavages one needs to analyze the political history of each country. Indeed, class-based voting should not be taken for granted – its strength depends on factors other than class itself, such as religion and cultural values, as well as the positioning and evolution of political parties. We leave it to future research to better understand the drivers and evolution of political cleavages in new and old democracies, including those studied in this paper.

**References**

A. Alexandre, S. Zartaloudis, and Y. Papadopoulos, "How Party Linkages Shape Austerity Politics: Clientelism and Fiscal Adjustment in Greece and Portugal During the Eurozone Crisis," *Journal of European Public Policy* 22, no. 3 (2015): 315-334.

S. Ansolabehere and M. S. Puy, "Separatism and Identity: A comparative analysis of the Basque and Catalan cases" (Working Paper, 2020).

O. Causa, J. Browne and A. Vindics, "Income redistribution across OECD countries: Main findings and policy implications", *OECD Economic Policy Papers*, n° 23, (Éditions OCDE, 2019).

A. Chiaramonte and R. D'Alimonte, "The New Italian Electoral System and its Effects on Strategic Coordination and Disproportionality," Italian Political Science 13, no. 1 (2018): 8-18.

M. Clua i Fainé, "Identidad y Política en Cataluña: El Auge del Independentismo en el Nacionalismo Catalán Actual," *Quaderns-e de l'Institut Català d'Antropologia* 19, no. 2 (2014): 79-99.

M. Costa, A. Costa, and P. Magalhães, "The Political Institutions of Portuguese Democracies," in *Portugal in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Sebastián Royo (Lexington Books, 2012): 23-48.

E. Del Pino and C. Colino, "National and Subnational Democracy in Spain: History, Models and Challenges," (Working Paper, 2010).

D. della Porta and M. Portos, "A Bourgeois Story? The Class Basis of Catalan Independentism," *Territory, Politics, Governance* (2020): 1–21.

J. M. Fernandes, "The 2011 Portuguese Election: Looking for a Way Out," *West European Politics* 34, no. 6 (2011): 1296-1303.

J. M. Fernandes, "The Seeds for Party System Change? The 2015 Portuguese General Election," *West European Politics* 39, no. 4 (2016): 890-900.

F. Ferreira da Silva and M. S. Mendes, "Portugal–A Tale of Apparent Stability and Surreptitious Transformation," in *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis*, ed. S. Hutter and H. Kriesi (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

D. Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (Profile Books, 2004).

A. Freire, "Party System Change in Portugal, 1974-2005: The Role of Social, Political and Ideological Factors," *Portuguese Journal of Social Science* 4, no. 2 (2005): 81-100.

V. Fouskas, *Italy, Europe, the Left: The Transformation of Italian Communism and the European Imperative* (Routledge, 2018).

M. Gallagher, "Ireland: The Discreet Charm of PR-STV," in *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, ed. M. Gallagher and P. Mitchell (Oxford University Press, 2005): 511-532.

A. Gethin, "Cleavage Structures and Distributive Politics" (Paris School of Economics, 2018).

A. Gethin, C. Martínez-Toledano, and T. Piketty, "Political Cleavages and Inequality: Evidence from Electoral Democracies, 1950-2018" (Preliminary results, 2019: http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/GethinMartinezPiketty2019Slides.pdf).

M. Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 477-497.

M. Grau Creus, "Checkmate to the Spanish Decentralization? The Decline of Public Support for Spain's Autonomous Communities," in *Identities, Trust, and Cohesion in Federal Systems: Public Perspectives*, ed. J. Jedwab and J. Kincaid (McGill-Queen University Press, 2019): 57.

R. Günther and J. R. Montero, "The Anchors of Partisanship: A Comparative Analysis of Voting Behaviour in Four Southern European Countries" (Working Paper, 2000).

O. Heath and P. Bellucci, "Class and Religious Voting in Italy," in *Political Choice Matters: Explaining the Strength of Class and Religious Cleavages in Cross-National Perspective*, ed. G. Evans and N. D. de Graaf (Oxford University Press, 2013).

J. Hopkin, *Party Formation and Democratic Transition in Spain: The Creation and Collapse of the Union of the Democratic Centre* (Springer, 1999).

J. Karremans, G. Malet, and D. Morisi, "Italy–The End of Bipolarism: Restructuration in an Unstable Party System," in *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis*, ed. S. Hutter and H. Kriesi (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

T. D. Lancaster, "The Spanish General Elections of 2015 and 2016: A New Stage in Democratic Politics?," *West European Politics* 40, no. 4 (2017): 919-937.

M. Lisi, I. Llamazares, and M. Tsakatika. "Economic Crisis and the Variety of Populist Response: Evidence from Greece, Portugal and Spain," *West European Politics* 42, no. 6 (2019): 1284– 1309.

T. Mackie, M. Mannheimer, and G. Sani, "Italy," in *Electoral Change: Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries*, ed. M. Franklin, T. Mackie, H. Valen *et al.*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992): 238-254.

P. Mair, "Explaining the Absence of Class Politics in Ireland," in *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland*, ed. J. H. Goldthorpe and C. T. Whelan (Oxford University Press, 1992): 383-410.

M. Marsh, D. M. Farrell, and T. Reidy (eds.), *The Post-Crisis Irish Voter: Voting Behaviour in the Irish 2016 General Election* (Manchester University Press, 2018).

J. R. Montero and M. Torcal, "Value Change, Generational Replacement and Politics in Spain" (Working Paper, 1994).

L. Moreno, "Federalization and Ethnoterritorial Concurrence in Spain," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 27, no. 4 (1997): 65-84.

S. Müller and A. Regan, "The Compass of Irish Politics is Moving to the Left". (Unpublished Manuscript: University College Dublin, 2020).

L. Orriols, "Social Class, Religiosity, and Vote Choice in Spain, 1979–2008," in *Political Choice Matters: Explaining the Strength of Class and Religious Cleavages in Cross-National Perspective*, ed. G. Evans and N. D. de Graaf (Oxford University Press, 2013).

L. Orriols and G. Cordero, "The Breakdown of the Spanish Two-party System: the Upsurge of Podemos and Ciudadanos in the 2015 General Election," *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 4 (2016): 469–492.

G. Pasquino, "Political History in Italy," *Journal of Policy History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 282-297.

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

T. Reidy and J. Suiter, "Who is the Populist Irish Voter?," *Journal of the Statistical & Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 56, no. 1 (2017): 117-131.

M. Requena and D. de Revenga, "Religión y Sociedad: la Secularización de la Sociedad Española," in *Tres Décadas de Cambio Social en España*, ed. M. Requena, D. de Revenga, and J. J. González Rodríguez (Alianza, 2005): 319-344.

J. Rodríguez and A. Barrio, "Going National: Ciudadanos from Catalonia to Spain," *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 4 (2016): 587-607.

P. Simón, "The Multiple Spanish Elections of April and May 2019: The Impact of Territorial and Left-right Polarisation," *South European Society and Politics* 25, no. 1 (2020): 1-34.

O. Strijbis and R. Leonisio, "Political Cleavages in the Basque Country: Meaning and Salience," *Regional & Federal Studies* 22, no. 5 (2012): 595-611.

G. Vidal and C. Gil, "¿La Pela Es la Pela? Renta, Clase Social y Secesionismo," *Agenda Pública*, http://agendapublica.elpais.com/la-pela-es-la-pela-renta-clase-social-y-secesionismo/, December 22 2019 (accessed October 5 2020).

G. Vidal and I. Sánchez-Vítores, "Spain–Out with the Old: The Restructuring of Spanish Politics," in *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis*, ed. S. Hutter and H. Kriesi (Cambridge University Press, 2019): 75-94.

S. Whiting, "Mainstream Revolutionaries: Sinn Féin as a 'Normal' Political Party?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 3 (2016): 541–560.
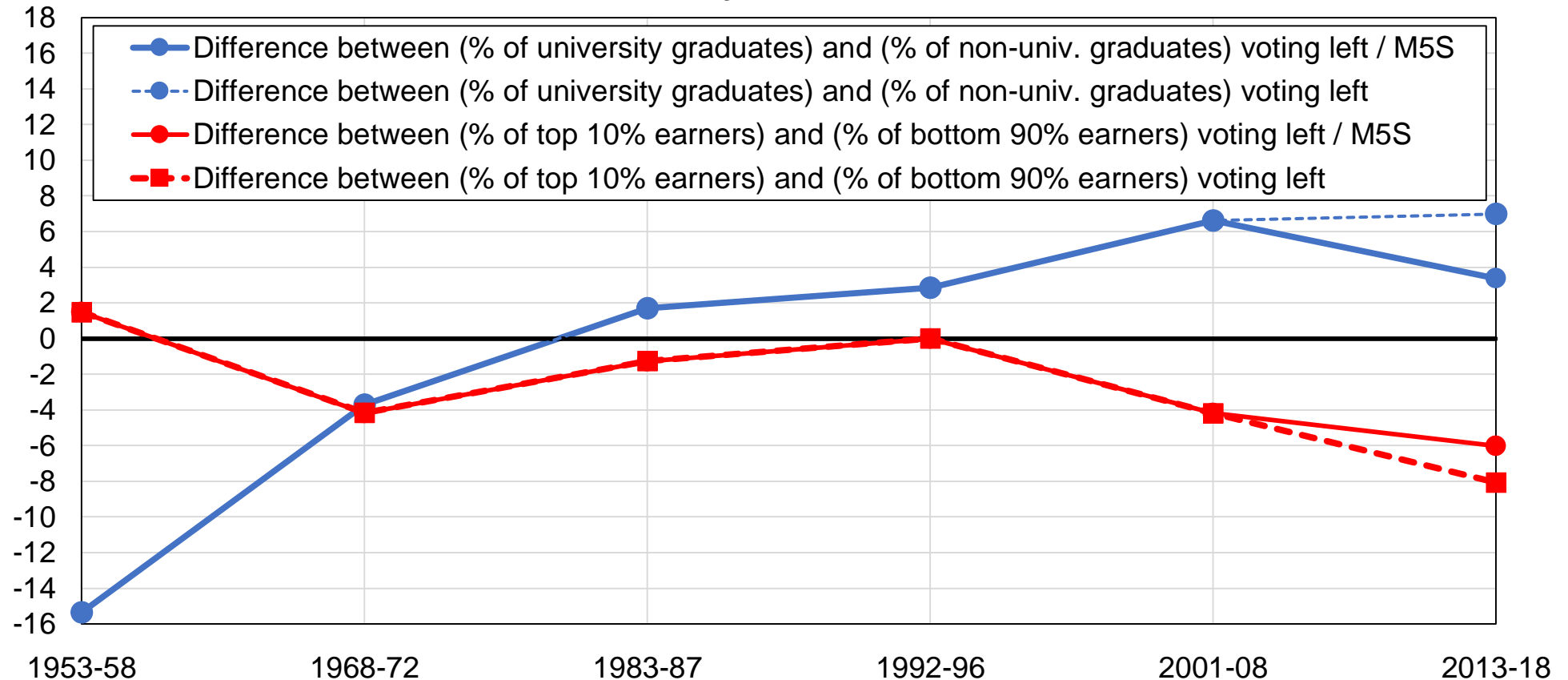
# Figure 1 - Election results in Italy, 1948-2018
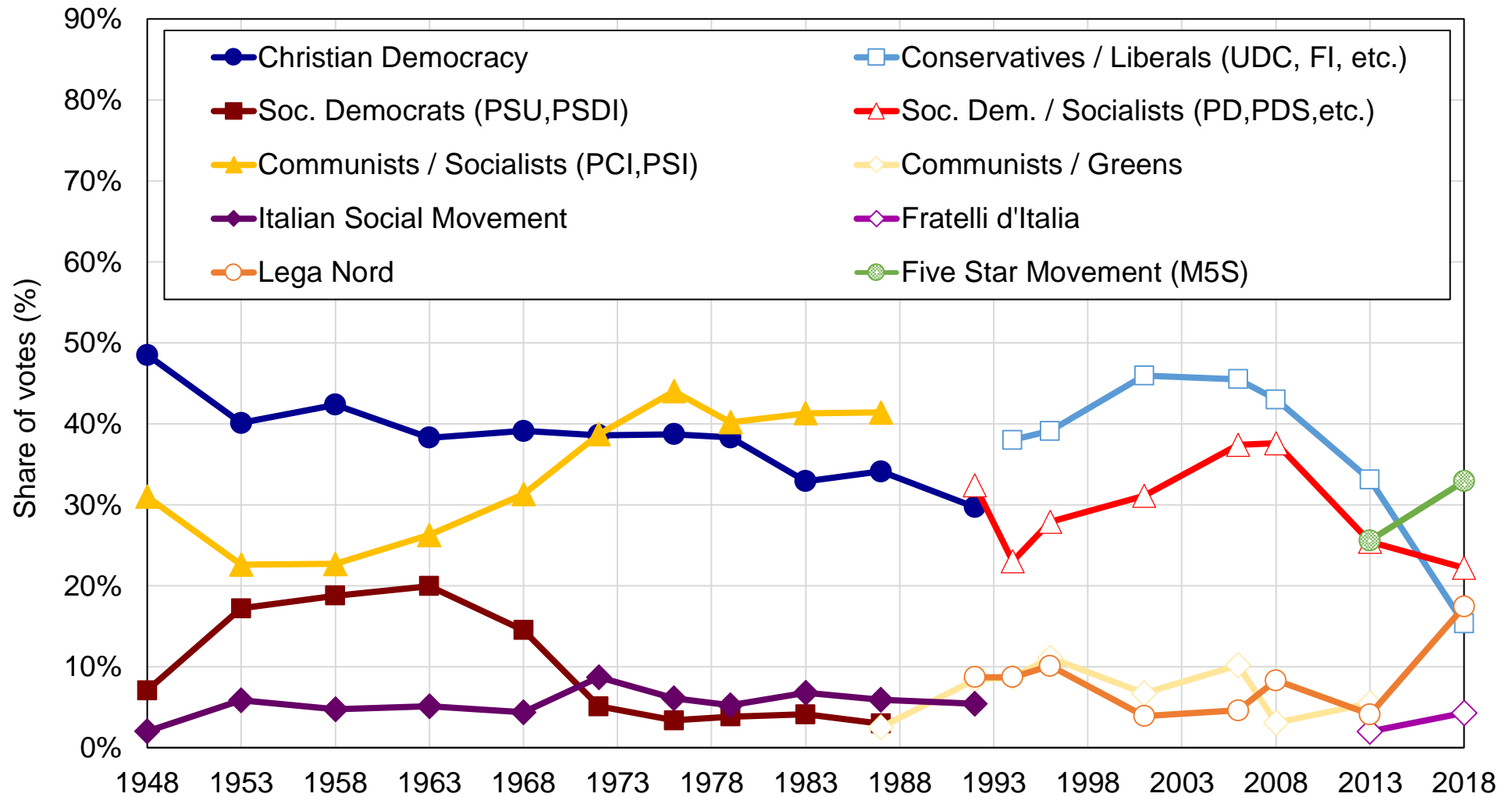


**Source**: authors' computations using official election results.
**Note**: the figure shows the share of votes received by selected political parties or groups of parties in general elections held in Italy between 1948 and 2018. The Five Star Movement received 33% of votes in 2018.

**Figure 2 - The emergence of a multi-elite party system in Italy, 1953-2018**

Legend:
- Difference between (% of university graduates) and (% of non-univ. graduates) voting left / M5S
- Difference between (% of university graduates) and (% of non-univ. graduates) voting left
- Difference between (% of top 10% earners) and (% of bottom 90% earners) voting left / M5S
- Difference between (% of top 10% earners) and (% of bottom 90% earners) voting left

**Source**: authors' computations using Italian electoral surveys.
**Note**: the figure shows the relative support of university graduates and top-income earners for social democratic / socialist / communist / green parties / the M5S. In the 1950s-1960s, highest-educated and top-income voters were less likely to vote for left-wing parties than low-income and lower-educated voters. The left-wing vote has gradually become associated with higher-educated voters, giving rise to a "multi-elite party system". Estimates control for income/education, age, gender, religion, church attendance, employment status, marital status, union membership, location, and region.

## Table 1 - The structure of political cleavages in Italy, 2018

| | Share of votes received (%) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Socialists / Soc. Democrats | Five Star Movement | Conservatives / Liberals | Lega | Fratelli d'Italia |
| **Education** | | | | | |
| Primary | 16% | 33% | 19% | 29% | 1% |
| Secondary | 24% | 38% | 7% | 22% | 5% |
| Tertiary | 34% | 30% | 10% | 14% | 7% |
| **Income** | | | | | |
| Bottom 50% | 33% | 31% | 9% | 18% | 5% |
| Middle 40% | 24% | 38% | 8% | 20% | 6% |
| Top 10% | 12% | 42% | 12% | 28% | 4% |
| **Age** | | | | | |
| 20-39 | 24% | 38% | 9% | 21% | 5% |
| 40-59 | 32% | 37% | 5% | 14% | 4% |
| 60+ | 26% | 37% | 8% | 19% | 5% |
| **Religion** | | | | | |
| No religion | 33% | 36% | 7% | 16% | 3% |
| Catholic | 23% | 34% | 8% | 25% | 8% |
| Other | 20% | 45% | 7% | 17% | 10% |
| **Region** | | | | | |
| North | 30% | 24% | 9% | 29% | 4% |
| Center | 28% | 33% | 9% | 18% | 7% |
| South | 23% | 51% | 8% | 8% | 6% |
| Islands | 22% | 51% | 11% | 8% | 6% |

**Source**: authors' computations using Italian electoral surveys.

**Note**: the table shows the share of votes received by the main Italian political parties by selected individual characteristics in 2018. 16% of primary-educated voters voted social democratic / socialist, compared to 34% of tertiary-educated voters.
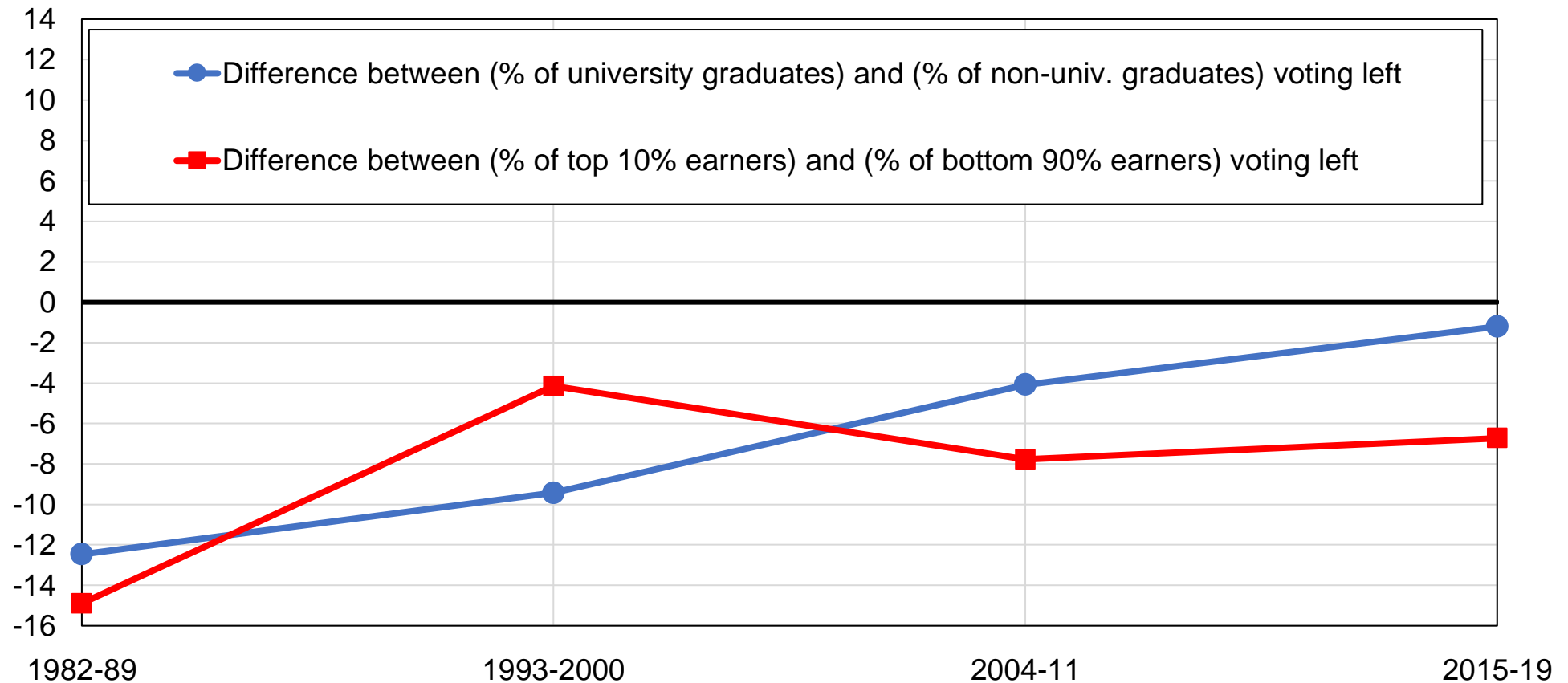
# Figure 3 - Election results in Spain, 1977-2019
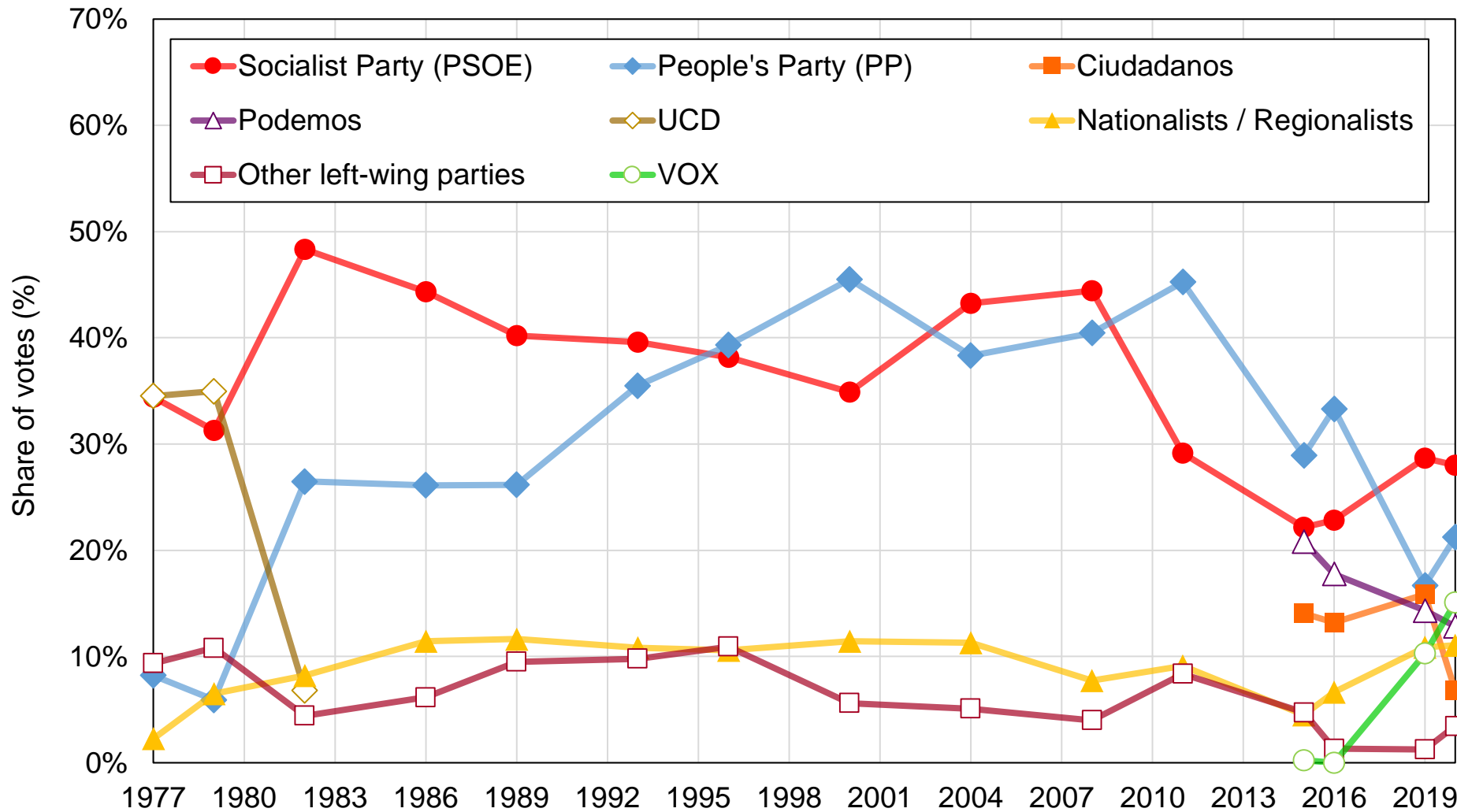


**Source**: authors' computations using official election results.

**Note**: the figure shows the share of votes received by selected political parties or groups of parties in general elections held in Spain between 1977 and 2019 (November 2019 elections represented as 2020). The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) received 28% of votes in 2020.

# Figure 4 - Towards a multi-elite party system in Spain, 1982-2019



Legend:
- Difference between (% of university graduates) and (% of non-univ. graduates) voting left
- Difference between (% of top 10% earners) and (% of bottom 90% earners) voting left

**Source**: authors' computations using Spanish electoral surveys.

**Note**: the figure shows the relative support of university graduates and top-income earners for left-wing parties. In the 1980s, highest-educated and top-income voters were less likely to vote for left-wing parties than low-income and lower-educated voters. The left-wing vote has become increasingly associated with higher-educated voters, leading Spain to come closer to becoming a "multi-elite party system". Estimates control for income/education, age, gender, employment status, marital status, religion, region, church attendance, sector of employment, type of employment, union membership, subjective soccial class, and location.

# Figure 5 - Nationalist vote, education, and income
## in Catalonia, Spain, 1982-2019
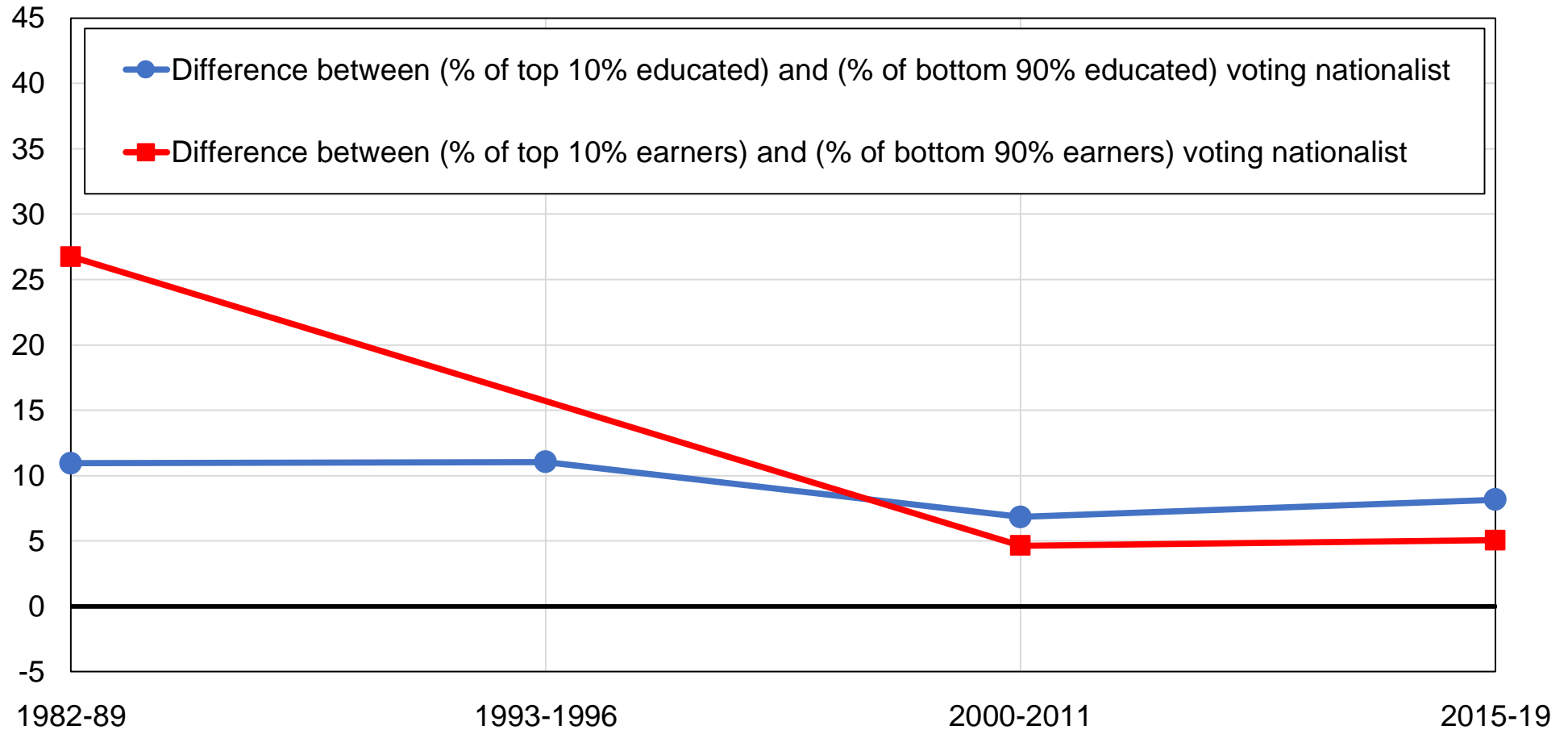


**Source**: authors' computations using Spanish electoral surveys.
**Note**: the figure shows the relative support of highest-educated and top-income voters for nationalist parties in Catalonia, after controlling for income/education, age, gender, employment status, marital status, religion, church attendance, type of employment, sector of employment, union membership, subjective social class, and location. During the 2015-2019 period, highest-educated voters were more likely to vote for nationalist parties by 8 percentage points on average.
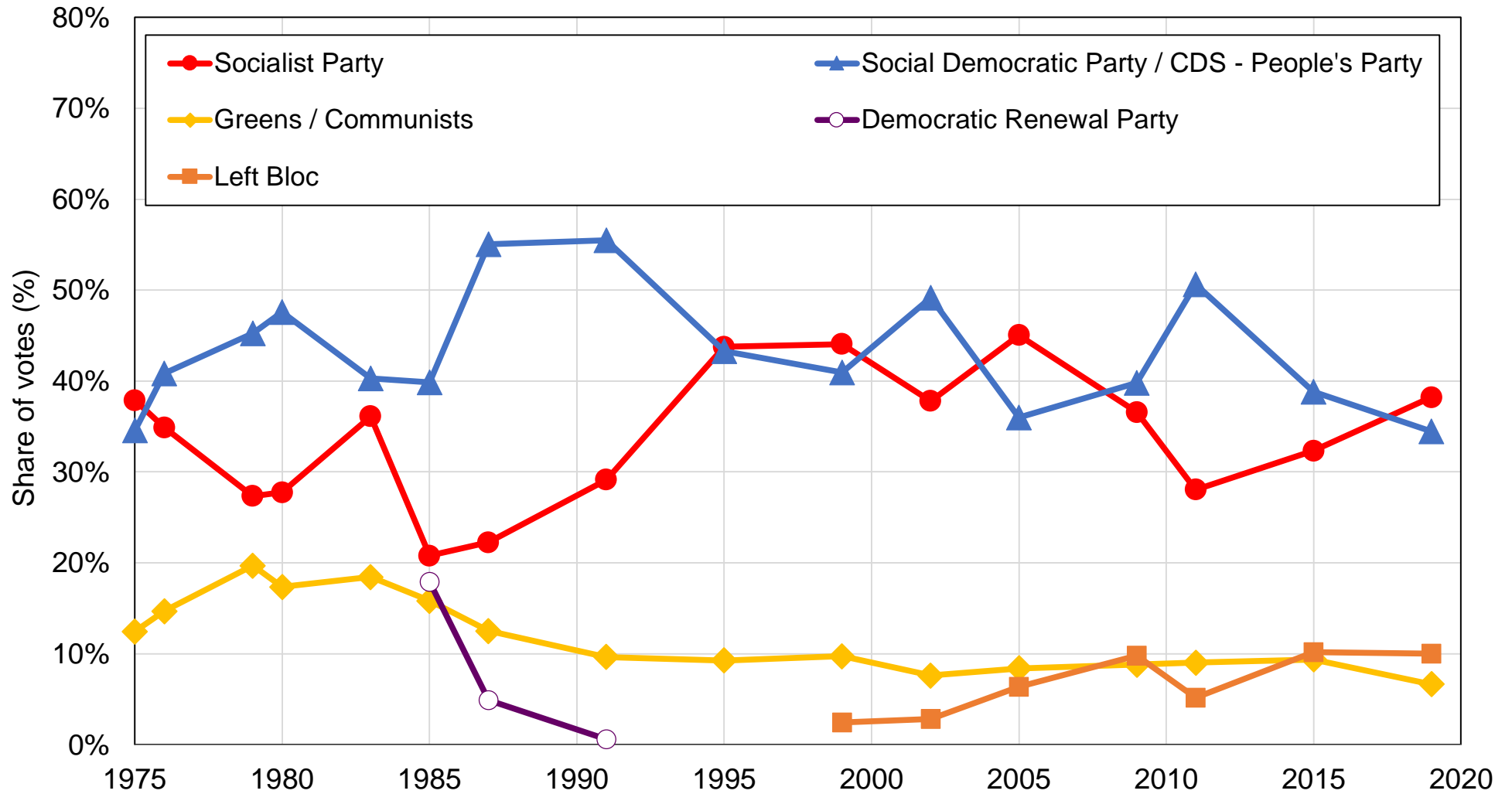
| | Share of votes received (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Podemos | PSOE | Ciudadanos | PP | VOX | Nationalist parties |
| **Education** | | | | | | |
| Primary | 7% | 38% | 7% | 32% | 5% | 8% |
| Secondary | 16% | 27% | 11% | 16% | 16% | 10% |
| Tertiary | 20% | 22% | 15% | 17% | 9% | 12% |
| Postgraduate | 18% | 20% | 21% | 17% | 5% | 19% |
| **Income** | | | | | | |
| Bottom 50% | 13% | 35% | 9% | 23% | 11% | 6% |
| Middle 40% | 17% | 26% | 13% | 15% | 14% | 10% |
| Top 10% | 15% | 20% | 14% | 16% | 15% | 17% |
| **Age** | | | | | | |
| 20-39 | 23% | 21% | 14% | 11% | 17% | 8% |
| 40-59 | 15% | 28% | 13% | 16% | 13% | 11% |
| 60+ | 7% | 35% | 7% | 31% | 7% | 11% |
| **Location** | | | | | | |
| Urban areas | 15% | 28% | 12% | 18% | 13% | 10% |
| Rural areas | 6% | 30% | 8% | 28% | 10% | 13% |
| **Religion** | | | | | | |
| Catholic | 6% | 30% | 13% | 26% | 15% | 7% |
| Other | 17% | 39% | 9% | 10% | 9% | 11% |
| No religion | 35% | 24% | 8% | 4% | 7% | 17% |

**Table 2 - The structure of political cleavages in Spain, 2019**

**Source:** authors' computations using Spanish electoral surveys.

**Note:** the table shows the average share of votes received by the main Spanish political parties by selected individual characteristics during the two elections held in 2019. 7% of primary-educated voters supported Podemos, compared to 18% of voters with postgraduate degrees.

# Figure 6 - Election results in Portugal, 1975-2019



**Source**: authors' computations using official election results.
**Note**: the figure shows the share of votes received by selected political parties or groups of parties in legislative elections held in Portugal between 1975 and 2019. The Socialist Party received 38% of votes in 2019.
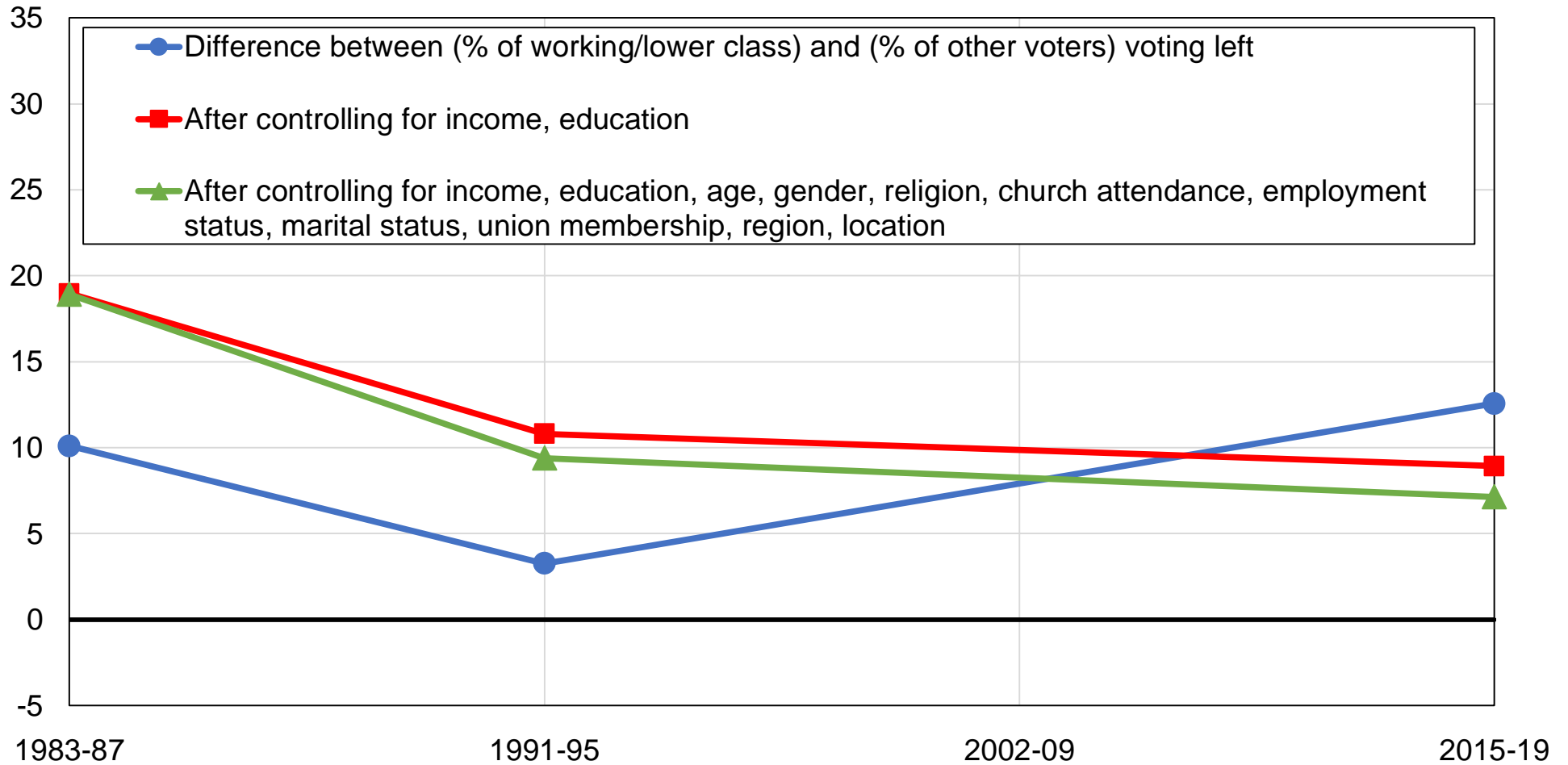
# Figure 7 - The absence of multi-elite party system in Portugal, 1983-2019
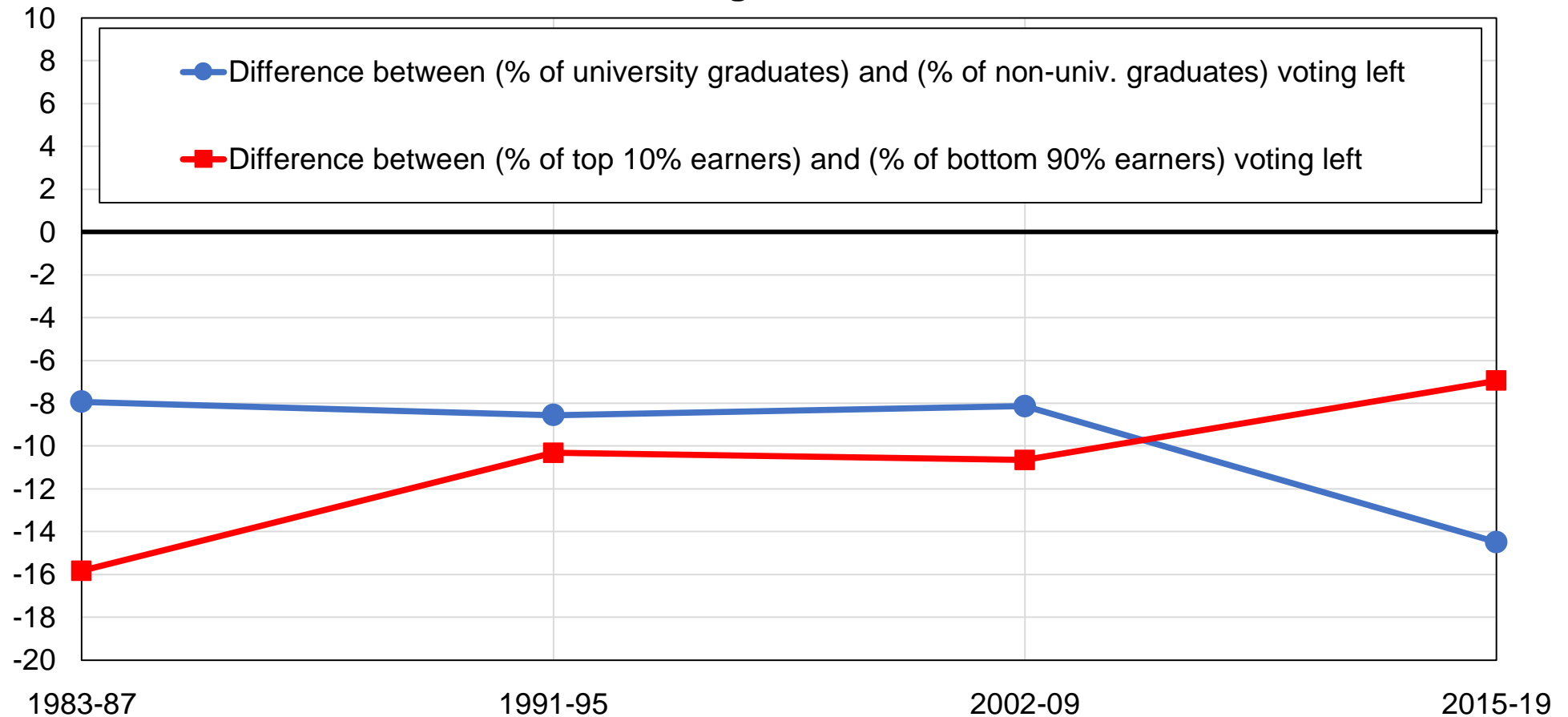


**Source**: authors' computations using Portuguese electoral surveys.
**Note**: the figure shows the relative support of university graduates and top-income voters for socialists / communists / greens / the Left Bloc. Both highest-educated and top-income voters have remained significantly less likely to vote for left-wing parties throughout the period considered. In contrast to the majority of Western democracies, Portugal has therefore not become a "multi-elite party system". Estimates control for income/education, age, gender, religion, church attendance, employment status, subjective social class, union membership, region, and location.

# Figure 8 - Class voting in Portugal, 1983-2019



**Source**: authors' computations using Portuguese electoral surveys.
**Note**: the figure shows the difference between the share of voters identifying with the "working class" or the "lower class" and the share of voters identifying with the "middle class" or with "no class" voting for socialists / communists / greens / the Left Bloc, before and after controls. During the 2015-2019 period, self-identified working-class voters were more likely to vote for left-wing parties by 13 percentage points.
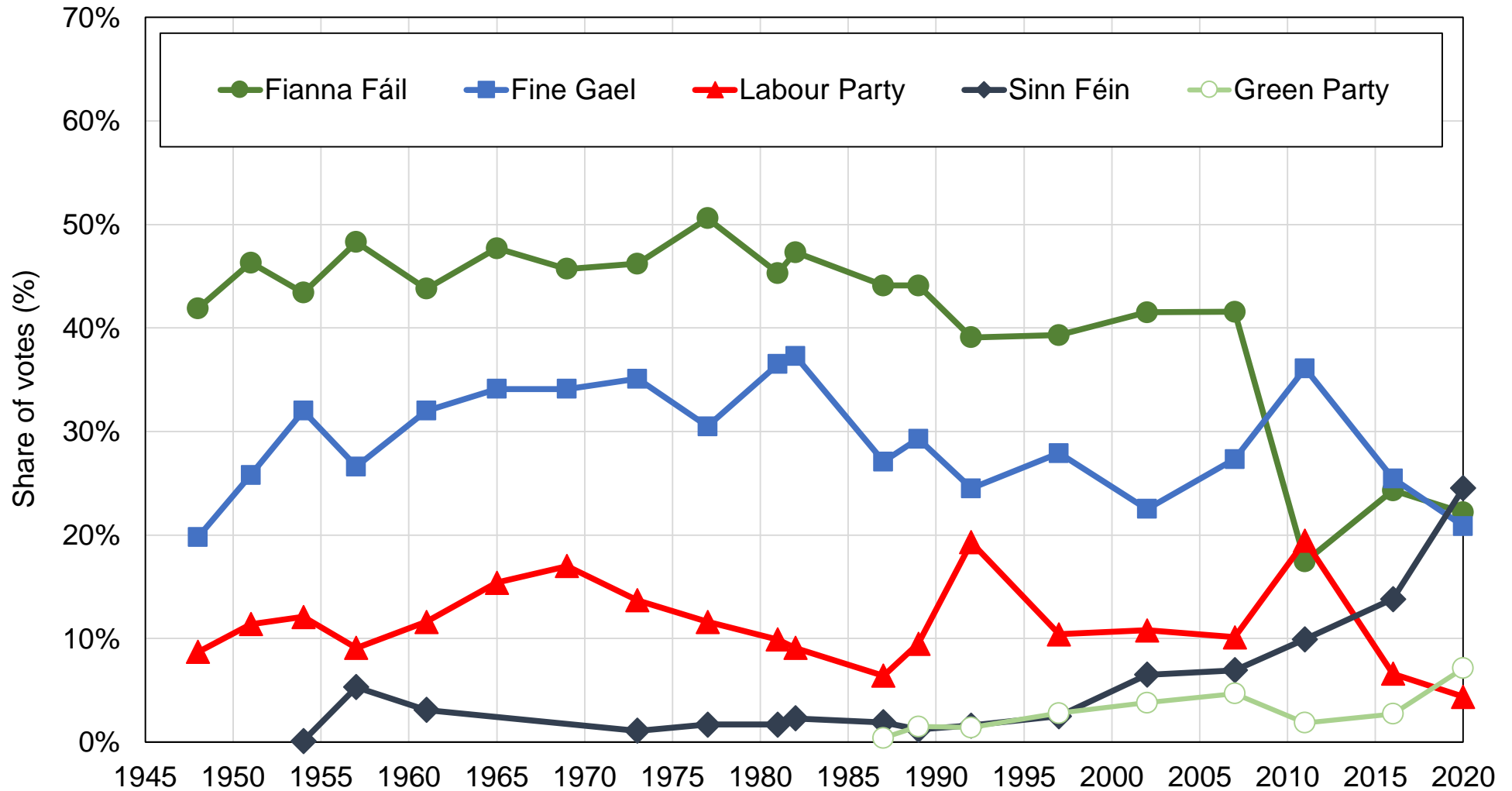
| | Share of votes received (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table 3 - The structure of political cleavages in Portugal, 2015-2019** | | | | |
| | Left Bloc | Socialist Party | Greens / Communists | Social Democratic Party / Social Democratic Center-People's Party |
| **Education** | | | | |
| Primary | 5% | 43% | 11% | 39% |
| Secondary | 13% | 37% | 9% | 37% |
| Tertiary | 14% | 24% | 6% | 52% |
| **Income** | | | | |
| Bottom 50% | 8% | 43% | 10% | 37% |
| Middle 40% | 9% | 35% | 10% | 41% |
| Top 10% | 15% | 24% | 6% | 54% |
| **Religion** | | | | |
| No religion | 24% | 32% | 17% | 23% |
| Catholic | 9% | 37% | 9% | 42% |
| Other | 15% | 42% | 7% | 34% |
| **Age** | | | | |
| 20-39 | 15% | 31% | 6% | 43% |
| 49-59 | 12% | 35% | 10% | 39% |
| 60+ | 6% | 43% | 11% | 39% |
| **Country of birth** | | | | |
| Portugal | 10% | 37% | 10% | 40% |
| Brazil | 10% | 59% | 0% | 30% |
| Other ex-colony | 9% | 31% | 12% | 48% |
| **Region** | | | | |
| North | 10% | 38% | 5% | 42% |
| Center | 8% | 29% | 5% | 57% |
| Lisbon | 12% | 40% | 16% | 29% |
| Alentejo | 7% | 54% | 23% | 12% |
| Algarve | 15% | 36% | 11% | 36% |

# Figure 9 - Election results in Ireland, 1948-2020



**Source**: authors' computations using official election results.
**Note**: the figure shows the share of votes received by selected political parties or groups of parties in general elections held in Ireland between 1948 and 2020. The Sinn Féin received 25% of votes in 2020.

# Figure 10 - The absence of multi-elite party system in Ireland, 1973-2020
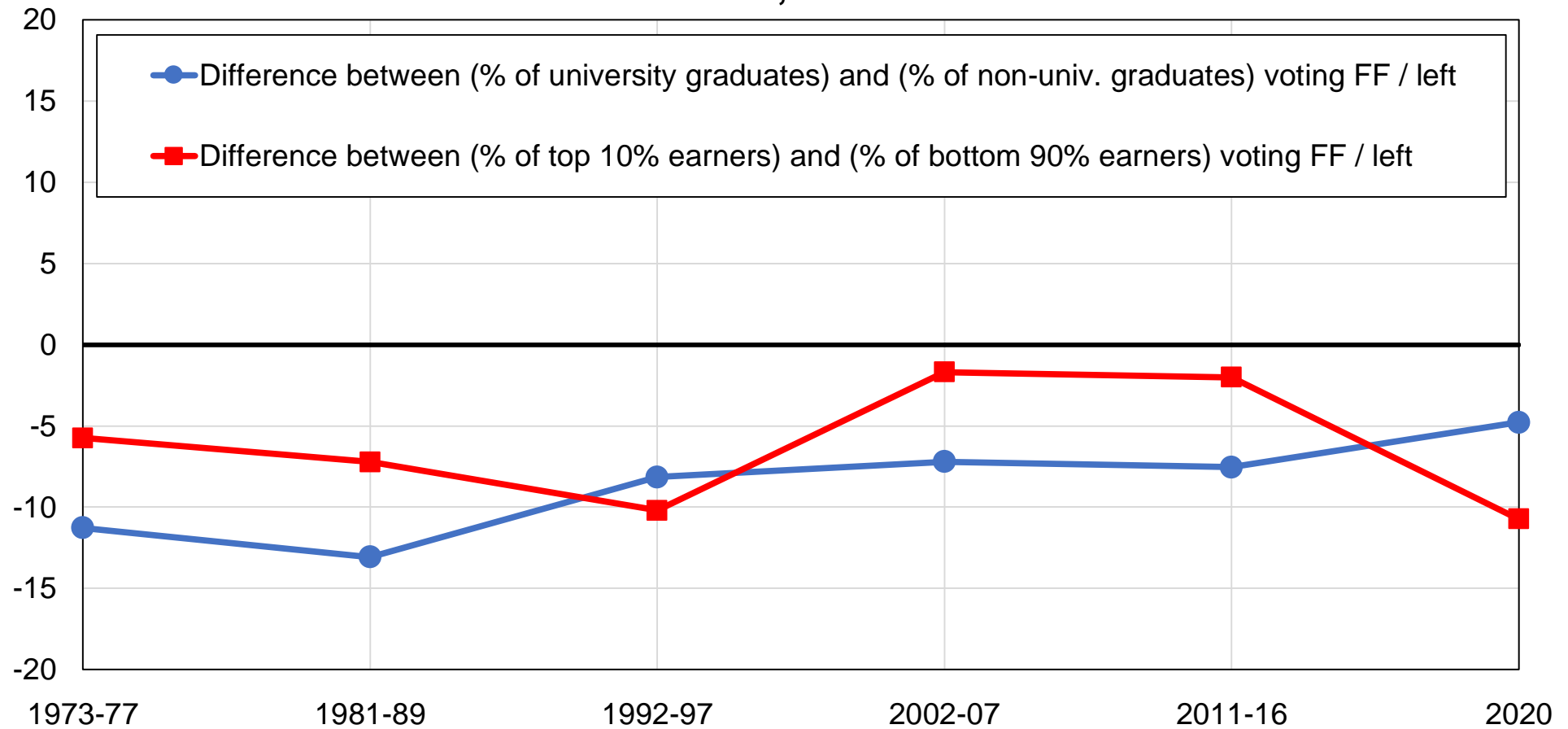


**Source**: authors' computations using Irish political attitudes surveys.

**Note**: the figure shows the relative support of university graduates and top-income voters for Fianna Fáil (FF) and left-wing parties (Labour / Green / Other left). Both highest-educated and top-income voters have remained significantly less likely to vote FF / left throughout the period considered. In contrast to the majority of Western democracies, Ireland has therefore not become a "multi-elite party system". Estimates control for income/education, age, gender, employment status, marital status, religion, and church attendance.

## Table 4 - The structure of political cleavages in Ireland, 2020

| | Share of votes received (%) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sinn Féin | Labour Party | Green Party | Fianna Fáil | Fine Gael |
| **Education** | | | | | |
| Primary | 43% | 4% | 1% | 23% | 13% |
| Secondary | 27% | 4% | 7% | 24% | 19% |
| Tertiary | 20% | 5% | 8% | 21% | 24% |
| **Income** | | | | | |
| Bottom 50% | 30% | 4% | 5% | 21% | 17% |
| Middle 40% | 20% | 5% | 8% | 25% | 22% |
| Top 10% | 16% | 4% | 8% | 22% | 33% |
| **Religion** | | | | | |
| No religion | 29% | 5% | 16% | 12% | 15% |
| Catholic | 23% | 4% | 3% | 28% | 22% |
| Protestant | 16% | 8% | 7% | 13% | 40% |
| **Age** | | | | | |
| 20-39 | 27% | 5% | 14% | 16% | 18% |
| 40-59 | 26% | 4% | 5% | 21% | 20% |
| 60+ | 20% | 5% | 4% | 30% | 24% |

**Source:** authors' computations using Irish political attitudes surveys.

**Note:** the table shows the share of votes received by the main Irish political parties by selected individual characteristics in 2020. 43% of primary-educated voters supported Sinn Féin during this election, compared to 20% of university graduates.