



# The lasting impact of adolescence on left-right identification: Cohort replacement and intracohort change in associations with issue attitudes



Roderik Rekker

Department of Youth & Family, Utrecht University, P.O. Box 80.140, 3508, TC, Utrecht, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 25 March 2015

Received in revised form

17 June 2016

Accepted 22 June 2016

Available online 12 August 2016

### Keywords:

Left-right identification

Issue attitudes

Immigration

Cohort replacement

Generational replacement

Intracohort change

## ABSTRACT

This study examined how the ideological correlates of left-right identification in the Netherlands changed between 1980 and 2008, and whether these changes were driven by cohort replacement. Analyses on repeated cross-sectional data revealed an increasing association with immigration and a decreasing association with redistribution, secularism, and civil liberties. Cohort differences were found for cultural attitudes: Secularism was most important for voters who were adolescent between 1917 and 1960, while civil liberties were most important for the 1960–1980 cohort and immigration was relatively important for the 1980–2008 cohort. Consequently, over-time changes in the importance of cultural issues, but not redistribution, were partly driven by cohort replacement. This indicates that the left-right distinction is partly shaped by circumstances during voters' adolescent years.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

People commonly think about politics in terms of 'left' and 'right'. For many voters, this distinction lies at the core of how they identify with politics (Freire, 2006). Not surprisingly, left-right identification is strongly associated with almost every aspect of political behavior (e.g., Knutsen, 1997). It is, for example, the strongest long-term correlate of voting behavior in many West European countries (e.g., Tillie and Fennema, 1998; Van der Brug et al., 2000; Van der Brug, 2010). But what does it mean to be left or right? The left-right distinction traditionally placed economic redistribution and cultural progressiveness against the free market and traditional values (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976). However, its meaning has become more multifaceted in Western Europe due to the rise of new cultural issues (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). In recent decades, left-right identification has become decreasingly associated with attitudes on redistribution and increasingly linked to views on immigration (De Vries et al., 2013).

But what drives these changes in the ideological meaning of the left-right distinction? A parsimonious explanation is that voters

change their definition of left and right due to political developments such as the rise of anti-immigrant parties (De Vries et al., 2013). However, this account is controversial from a political socialization perspective. An extensive body of literature proposes that voters acquire political orientations early in life that persist throughout their adult lifespan (e.g., Krosnick and Alwin, 1989; Sears and Funk, 1999). It contradicts this view that voters would substantially change their interpretation of left and right as an adult. As such, the socialization perspective proposes that over-time changes occur primarily through the replacement of existing voters by new generations that are shaped by the political environment during their early life (e.g., Hooghe, 2004; Mannheim, 1964; Ryder, 1965; Tilley, 2005). Indeed, many studies have demonstrated how generational replacement can bring about political change (e.g., Bhatti and Hansen, 2012; Kroh, 2014; Neundorff and Niemi, 2014; Van der Brug and Kritzing, 2012). However, it has not yet been examined if generational replacement is also responsible for the changing ideological correlates left-right identification in Western Europe.

Using 20 waves of repeated cross-sectional data, the present study therefore examined how the associations between issue attitudes and left-right identification in the Netherlands have changed between 1980 and 2008, and whether these changes were due to *cohort replacement* or *intracohort change*. Cohort

E-mail address: [r.rekker@uva.nl](mailto:r.rekker@uva.nl).

replacement means that change is driven by the replacement of voters by new generations, whereas intracohort change implies that voters change their views over time. Specifically, this study investigated these mechanisms in the associations of left-right identification with attitudes on redistribution, secularism, civil liberties, and immigration.

Associations between issue attitudes and left-right identification are important because the left-right dimension is believed to be an 'ideological super issue' (Pierce, 1999) that largely summarizes the impact of ideology on political behaviors such as voting (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002; Van der Brug et al., 2000). Disentangling cohort replacement and intracohort change is relevant because it may indicate how reversible over-time changes in the left-right distinction are. If the meaning of left and right has changed due to intracohort change, this would merely constitute a time trend that could be reversed. Contrarily, these changes may be more permanent if they are driven by cohort replacement, in which case they will likely persist until future generations come of age.

The Netherlands constitutes a particularly interesting case with regard to the changing importance of political issues. Until the 1960s, Dutch politics was characterized by strong alignments based on social class and religion (Lijphart, 1968). This 'pillarisation' has since then declined at a rapid pace. Since the 1980s, Dutch politics has been characterized by a strong mobilization of anti-immigrant issues (Adams et al., 2012; Pellikaan et al., 2007). The Netherlands therefore constitutes one of the clearest examples of both the decline of traditional political alignments and the rise of new cultural issues. Furthermore, exceptionally suitable data was available for the Netherlands. De Vries, Hakhverdian, and Lancee (2013) used this data to demonstrate that the association of left-right identification with redistribution attitudes has weakened between 1980 and 2006, while its association with immigration attitudes has strengthened. Using the same data, the present study aimed to disentangle to what extent these changes were driven by cohort replacement. Furthermore, the present study added issue attitudes on secularism and civil liberties.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

### 2.1. The changing meaning of left and right

Following the theoretical framework of Inglehart and Klingemann (1976), left-right identification can be decomposed into three components: a social component, a partisan component, and a value component. For example, a voter who identifies as rightist is more likely to belong to a higher social class (social component), support rightist parties (partisan component), and have rightist views on political issues (value component). The value component of the left-right distinction can in turn be decomposed into an economic and a cultural dimension (Kriesi et al., 2008; Rekker, 2015; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). The economic dimension relates to attitudes on issues like social inequality, taxes, or social welfare. The cultural dimension captures attitudes on issues like the role of religion, law and order, and immigration. Making yet another decomposition, the cultural dimension consists of three types of issues: the cleavage between church and state (e.g., Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), the value conflict between libertarianism and authoritarianism (e.g., Inglehart, 1977; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995), and the controversy of integration versus demarcation in response to globalization (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2008).

Though it is clear that a variety of issues together define what it means to be left or right, not all issues are equally important (e.g., Freire, 2008). What issues predominate the left-right distinction can furthermore differ from one period to the next (e.g., Knutsen, 1995; Kitschelt and Hellemans, 1990; Tilley et al., 2008; Van Elsas and Van

der Brug, 2014). Over the years, new issues found their way onto the political agenda, whereas others became less significant. The clearest example of the rise of a new issue in recent West European history is probably the issue of immigration. The Netherlands began to witness a significant immigration of foreign laborers in the 1960s. At first, this development was almost absent from the political debate (Thrändhardt, 2000). However, this began to change when the first anti-immigrant parties in the Netherlands were formed during the 1980s (Mudde and Holsteyn, 2000). The first electoral breakthrough of an anti-immigrant party came in 2002, when the 'Fortuyn revolution' established immigration as a prominent issue on the Dutch political agenda (Pellikaan et al., 2007).

De Vries and colleagues (2013) theorized that the rise of a new issue will be accompanied by a gradual integration of that issue into the existing left-right divide. Both voters and parties may attempt to connect the new issue to other topics, thereby integrating it into their existing ideological framework. De Vries and colleagues (2013) labeled this mechanism as *issue bundling*. Using the same dataset as the present study, De Vries and colleagues (2013) provided support for this principle by demonstrating that the association between attitudes on immigration and left-right identification in the Netherlands increased substantially between 1980 and 2006.

Since the space on the political agenda is inherently limited, De Vries and colleagues (2013) furthermore reasoned that the rise of a new issue will come at the expense of existing issues. Consequently, the left-right distinction may lose some of its existing ideological meaning as new issues arise. De Vries and colleagues (2013) labeled this process as *issue crowding out*. Demonstrating this mechanism, De Vries and colleagues (2013) found that the association of left-right identification with redistribution attitudes weakened during the same period that its association with immigration attitudes strengthened. The present study aimed to reproduce this finding, while adding the issues of secularism and civil liberties. If new cultural issues like immigration can arise at the expense of economic issues like redistribution, it seems plausible that they can also arise at the expense of existing cultural issues like secularism or civil liberties. This study's first hypothesis was therefore:

**H1.** The association of left-right identification with issue attitudes on immigration will have strengthened (H1a) between 1980 and 2008, while its association with attitudes on redistribution, secularism, and civil liberties will have weakened (H2b).

### 2.2. Impressionable years and historical periods

#### 2.2.1. Adolescence as a formative phase

The idea that voters would substantially change their left-right identification as an adult is controversial from the perspective of political socialization. An extensive body of literature proposes that voters form persistent political orientations early in life, particularly during adolescence (e.g., Boonen et al., 2014; Hooghe et al., 2013; Hooghe and Wilkenfeld, 2008; Markus, 1979; Sears and Funk, 1999). As an adolescent, voters adopt attitudes on many political issues that they previously had no opinion on (e.g., Sears and Valentino, 1997). As they grow older, adolescents become less likely to change these attitudes (e.g., Rekker et al., 2015). Longitudinal studies on adolescents have investigated this increasing persistence by calculating correlation coefficients between respondents' initial attitudes and their attitudes numerous years later. For example, a longitudinal study on Dutch adolescents revealed that the 6-year persistence of left-right identification increased from 0.21 at age 13.5 to 0.59 at age 23 (Rekker et al., 2014a). The persistence of redistribution attitudes meanwhile increased from 0.13 at age 13.5 to 0.57 at age 23, while the persistence of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1051655>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1051655>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)