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# The brahmin left, the merchant right and the bloc bourgeois

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# ABSTRACT

In a recent paper, Piketty argues that the vote for the left in France, the UK and the USA tends increasingly to be associated with a high education level whereas a traditional class- or income-based divide separated left from right individuals in the 1950s and 1960s. The current situation would be characterised by a dominance of 'elites' in left and right constituencies: financially rich elites vote for the right (merchant right), high-education elites vote for the left (brahmin left). Using ISSP data for 17 countries, this paper tests the influence of income and education inequalities on political leaning and a variety of policy preferences: the support for redistribution, for investment in public education, for globalisation and immigration. Results show that income levels are still relevant for the left-right divide, but the influence differs across education levels. Our findings also point to a certain convergence of opinion among the Brahmin left and the merchant right, which could lead to a new political divide beyond the left and the right, uniting a *bloc bourgeois*.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Political cleavage; redistribution; inequality; political economy

# Introduction

Changes in the structure of political divides in developed democracies have been the focus of many studies, not only in political science but also in political economy. The former literature often depicts the changes that took place in the recent decades in a two-dimensional space spanned by an economic cleavage that can be summed up as a distributive conflict, and a cultural cleavage based on the opposition between 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian' values.<sup>1</sup> The political economy literature on the other hand considers a multidimensional economic differentiation that concerns domestic issues such as income distribution or redistribution as well as international matters such as protection against foreign competition.<sup>2</sup> In this literature, the level of education or human capital plays a central role in the redefinition of the policy preferences of agents or social groups. Economic evolution,

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technological change or globalisation, affects low-skilled individuals and tends to increase the correlation between economic and cultural divides.<sup>3</sup>

In this spirit, Thomas Piketty (2018, 2019) argues that the class-based political divide has been deeply altered by the complete reversal of the educational cleavage. The traditional political divide was between a left that represented the low income and education level constituency, and a right with a social basis with a high-income and education level. But since the 1970s/1980s, the left has become the party of the highly educated. This has led to a multiple elite system composed of what Piketty calls the brahmin left and the merchant right, the latter representing the interests of the most prosperous fractions of the population. A simplification of the multidimensional political conflict could then be based on another two-dimensional space spanned by the traditional economic divide and the conflict over distribution/redistribution of income, and an educational divide based on the education level and a conflict over public investment in the education system. Piketty too parallels this second dimension to a divide over globalisation insofar as a high education level would be a protection against the adverse consequences of foreign competition in product or labour markets, the immigration issue representing a significant element in this divide.

The political conflict that used to split the left from the right would then become more complex because the two-dimensional representation delivers a potential partition between four groups that could be associated in coalitions or not. A binary divide could separate a united elite composed of the brahmin left and the merchant right from the popular classes. But a divided elite, between the brahmin left and the merchant right could face divided popular classes, between social and 'nativist' groups. A third possibility considered by Amable and Palombarini (2014) for France and Italy whose extension to other countries is discussed by Piketty (2019) is that a social coalition gathering the most skilled and affluent fraction of the population, the *bloc bourgeois*, would face divided popular classes and dominate the political competition.

The aim of this paper is to investigate from a political economy viewpoint the relevance of the brahmin left/merchant right distinction and the possibility of unification of the educated and high-income groups into a bloc bourgeois with the help of individual data in a cross-country comparative perspective. In this sense, whereas Piketty (2019) focussed on the long-term evolution in the structure of electorate using data from different national surveys, we use in this paper a unified survey database - different ISSP waves - for a pooled sample of 20 OECD countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) from 1985 to 2018. We do not limit our investigation to the voting pattern but extend the analysis to economic policy preferences and consider four main items: (1) political leaning using a variable of self-placement of individuals on a left-right scale; (2) the attitude towards redistribution using a variable on the role of government to reduce income differences between the rich and the poor; (3) the attitude towards public investment in education using a variable on the level of education spending by government; and (4) the opinion on globalisation using a variable on the effect of free trade and towards immigration using two variables on the effect of immigration on the economy and on jobs.

Using different models, we find contrasted results regarding the validation of the propositions derived from Piketty's framework. First, our results indicate that the separation between high and low education levels does not substitute to income level differences as a foundation for the left – right divide but complements it. Second, results also reveal that income levels are still relevant for the economic policy preferences (redistribution, investment in public education, globalisation/immigration), but the influence differs across education levels. These findings point to the possibility of considering a certain convergence of interests among highly educated and high-income social groups for the definition of a political strategy 'beyond the left and the right' actively looking for such a social base.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section briefly surveys the relevant literature and presents our conceptual framework and the subsequent testable propositions. The following section presents the data used in the estimations and the empirical strategy. The empirical results are then discussed followed by some robustness checks. Finally, a last section interpreting the results concludes.

# **Changing political divides**

# A 'new' cleavage

The questions raised by Piketty (2018, 2019) touch upon issues that have been widely discussed in the literature. The existence of a 'new cleavage' representing a 'second dimension' of political differentiation beyond the traditional left-right axis has been extensively researched (Ford & Jennings, 2020). The basis for this new dimension can be the opposition between materialist and postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1977, Inglehart, 1990, Inglehart, 1997), or libertarian/cosmopolitan versus authoritarian/nationalist/nativist views (Kistchelt, 1994; Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The change in values could be the consequence of economic prosperity or the rising access to higher education among younger generations (Duch & Taylor, 1993) fostering the reject of traditional hierarchies, the promotion of individual freedom and openness towards ethnic diversity (Kitschelt, 1994). For Oesch (2008a), cultural issues predominate over economic themes, in particular immigration which, in combination with the important cultural changes of the last decades, is perceived as a threat to the dominant culture and traditions by some members of the majority groups who, in reaction, push for a return to authoritarian values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

But the second dimension of political divide is also related to economic issues. Kriesi et al. (2008, 2012) have based it on an opposition between winners and losers of globalisation. Economic openness and the increased mobility of goods and people have increased the level of insecurity among those who lack mobile assets, feel the competitive pressure of cheaper labour, or work in sectors whose activity is threatened by international competition.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon creates a transnational cleavage with a focal point in the defence of the nation against external actors and influences (Hooghe & Marks, 2018).

There may be an interaction between economic and broad cultural aspects (Noury & Roland, 2020) insofar as the conflict between winners and losers of globalisation would be fought in cultural terms (Kriesi, 2010). Losers of globalisation are those who are in direct competition with immigrants in the labour market and

whose jobs are threatened by globalisation. They can therefore become more receptive to conservative, authoritarian, or nationalist messages, and express congruent political demands for protection or redistribution.

These trends impact the structure of political supply (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). The success of 'populist' parties is generally attributed to the emergence of the new cleavage and its consequences on the traditional parties, which have become more open both economically and culturally (Kriesi et al., 2008). The cultural dimension is predominant for Bornschier (2010), a consequence of the conservative cultural 'backlash' against the rise of multiculturalism in the last decades (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). But the economic structural aspects, globalisation and increasing labour market segmentation,<sup>5</sup> should not be overlooked. The growing precariousness among the workforce is found to benefit to new left parties (Marx, 2014) or to fuel non-participation to elections (Mayer, 2019). Oesch (2008b) finds that right-wing populist parties find disproportionate support among production workers and small business owners, the likely losers of globalisation. Changes are not limited to the right end of the political spectrum. Rodrik (2018) finds that if populism is mostly a right-wing phenomenon on Europe, it is mostly a left-wing one in Latin America.

Education is a common determinant to the various elements behind the new cleavage taken in its cultural as well as economic dimensions. Kriesi et al. (2012) argue that the open and cosmopolitan stance is a characteristic of highly educated people, who are on the winning side of globalisation whereas those unskilled or with lower education are on the losing side. Graduates also express stronger education-based identities and a group consciousness not too distinct from a class consciousness (Stubager, 2013). However, the question remains open whether the new divide cuts across or reproduces the traditional class divide. For Langsaether and Stubager (2019), the winners and losers of globalisation are the traditional winners and losers of modern capitalist societies, those who rank high on the class (income & wealth) and education hierarchies.

# A multi-elite party system

Piketty (2018, 2019) proposes an analysis of the transformation of the left/right political divide that takes up a large part of the themes discussed previously. The left/right divide reflected a traditional class- or income-based cleavage in the 1950s and 1960s, but it has partially and gradually turned into an 'identity-based conflict' thereafter. Two structural evolutions explain this change. First, the increased exposure to foreign competition, either directly through migrations or indirectly through foreign trade, has fostered a divide on the desirability of globalisation linked to the capacity to benefit or suffer from foreign competition. Increased international competition, which results from political choices and not from 'spontaneous' economic evolution, has made income redistribution more difficult to implement. This has shifted the main political debate on income standards from a national redistribution issue to a conflict over the limits to international opening, particularly regarding immigration. Second, the increasing level of education of the population has made it possible for those who succeeded in the so-called meritocratic competition to join the 'elite' groups; this opened a new dimension of inequality supplementing the old wealth-based dimension.

The capacity to face foreign competition being related to meritocratic success, the evolution of developed economies since the 1970s/1980s can be interpreted

with the help of two dimensions of inequality: financial and educational/social capital.<sup>6</sup> To each of these dimensions correspond two hierarchies and therefore two elite groups with a common interest in the pursuit of 'globalisation' and a divergence regarding the level of taxation and public expenditure. The meritocratic elite is favourable to public investment in education, whereas the financial capital-based elite would prefer low taxes and limited redistribution. Piketty calls these elite groups the 'brahmin left' and the 'merchant right' respectively and predicts the emergence of a multiple-elite party system. This evolution would explain changes in the party system of at least some developed economies, characterised notably by the growing disinterest of left parties for the demands of the population with low levels of both income and education.<sup>7</sup> This would feed into the growing disaffection of the popular classes for left parties, reinforcing the predominance of the interests of the brahmin groups in left party politics.<sup>8</sup>

Piketty (2018, 2019) provides empirical evidence of this evolution for France, the United States and the United Kingdom. Additional evidence has been found in this direction by Gethin (2018) for Canada and for Australia and by Kosse and Piketty (2019) for Germany and Sweden, where higher educated individuals in all countries increasingly have chosen the left since the 1960s. By contrast, the positive relationship between education and vote for the left is not verified in Japan (Gethin, 2018).

# Different possible coalitions

The political conflict is multidimensional, but for the sake of simplicity and following Piketty (2019: 913-932), two main dimensions can be considered: an economic dimension based on the income distribution/redistribution issue, and an education/ globalisation/immigration dimension. Crossing these two dimensions gives a possible partition of the political space into four groups. Piketty (2019) takes the example of France to describe these four possible groups: (i) internationalist-egalitarian; (ii) internationalist-inegalitarian; (iii) nativist-egalitarian; (iv) nativist-inegalitarian.<sup>9</sup> Two questions of different importance can be raised about this partition. First, the internationalist-nativist divide may be only partially linked to the education divide, which questions the relevance of the reduction of the political conflict to two dimensions only. Second and more importantly, the partition into four groups may be unstable. In the French 2017 presidential election for instance, the affluent part of the brahmin left joined the internationalist-inegalitarian and voted for Macron while the less affluent part voted for the left.

A possibility is that a complete realignment of the political divides could be possible, with a unification of high-education and high-income voters opposing 'globalists' (high-education and high-income voters) to 'nativists' (low-education and low-income voters), in conjunction with the growing disaffection of the popular classes for left parties.<sup>10</sup> Amable et al. (2012) and Amable & Palombarini (2014) analyse the demise of the traditional party system in France and Italy in terms of changing socio-political alliances related to the transformations of socio-economic models towards a more neoliberal variety of capitalism. These transformations affect the relative economic and political weight of the different social groups, which has positive or negative consequences for the success, or lack thereof, with which these groups can put forward their policy demands, in particular the demands that have income- or-power distribution consequences. This analysis leads to identify in the 1990s/2000s a breakup of the traditional

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social blocs that, until then, gathered different social groups unified around a certain expression of their policy demands: for instance, a left bloc opposing a right bloc. This breakup opened the way to a reshuffling of socio-political alliances. A particular restructuring was the unification of the high-skilled or well-off social groups belonging formerly to the traditional left and right blocs into a new social bloc, the *bloc bourgeois*. This bloc would gather social groups belonging both to what Thomas Piketty labels the brahmin left and the merchant right. These socio-political changes were accompanied by significant changes in the political supply in Italy as well as in France.

As mentioned before, a political strategy based on the support of this bloc bourgeois was electorally successful in France in 2017. A question can be raised if one supposes that what was observed in France and Italy can be valid for other countries too. Is the new social bloc stable or are divergences between the brahmin left and the merchant right likely to emerge and lead to a split between the two social groups? The conditions for such a stability will be the focus of the following empirical study.

# Testable propositions

Starting from the two-dimensional representation based on income and education levels adopted by Piketty (2018), we can derive four different social groups. Popular classes are characterised by low levels of income and education. Merchant right, or at least a fraction of them, have high incomes but not necessarily high education levels. Brahmin left, or at least a part of them, on the contrary have high education levels but not necessarily high incomes. Finally, the bloc bourgeois includes the more affluent and educated fractions of the merchant right and the brahmin left. These classes have heterogeneous preferences on four items: (1) politics (left vs right); (2) redistribution; (3) public investment in education; (4) globalisation/immigration. Table 1 summarises the predicted preferences of the social classes for each item.

The attitude towards immigration is derived from the education level. A high education level protects individuals from labour market competition from immigrants. The attitude towards redistribution is derived from the income status (the rich oppose redistribution).<sup>11</sup> Hostility towards public investment in education decreases with the education level. The attitude towards globalisation is in part driven by education, but also from the income level. The popular classes are hostile to globalisation because the losses they could incur from relocation and job loss far outweigh the benefits they could derive from cheap imported consumption goods. The threat of job loss is drastically diminished for the brahmin left, meaning that they are not in general hostile to globalisation. The same applies to the bloc bourgeois and the merchant right.

We can deduce different testable propositions from these preferences. Political leaning:

- P1: Support for the left should increase with the education level; this is one of the key hypotheses behind the existence of a brahmin left.
- P2: Support for the left should decrease with income, more steeply at low education levels; this would split apart the brahmin left from the merchant right and the less educated part of this latter group from popular classes.

Income		
Education	Low level of income	High level of income
	Popular classes	Less-educated part of the merchant right
	Waning support for the left	Support for the right
	Favourable to redistribution	Hostile to redistribution
Low level of education	Hostile to investment in education	Hostile to public investment in education
	Hostile to globalisation of business activities	Favourable to globalisation of business activities
	Hostile to immigration	Hostile to immigration
	Less affluent part of the brahmin left	Bloc bourgeois (high income and education level)
	Growing support for the left	Support centre-right politics
	Not hostile to redistribution	Hostile to redistribution
High level of education	Favourable to investment in education	Not hostile to investment in education
	Not hostile to globalisation of	Favourable to globalisation of
	business activities	business activities
	Not hostile to immigration	Not hostile to immigration

Table 1. Definition of classes' preferences.

- P2b: Support for the right should increase with the income level more steeply at low education levels.
- P3: Support for the right should decrease with the education level at highincome levels; this would favour the unification of the bloc bourgeois (brahmin left and educated merchant right).

Redistribution:

- R1: support for redistribution should decrease with income more at low than at high levels of education; this would explain the emergence of a brahmin left less concerned about inequalities.
- R2: support for redistribution should decrease with education at low levels of income and should be constant at high level of income; this would support the separation of the brahmin left from the popular classes.

Public investment in education:

- PI1: support for investment in education should increase with the education level more strongly for low income than high income; this would support the existence of the brahmin left.
- PI2: support for investment in education should decrease more strongly with income at low education levels than at high education levels. This would point at the possibility to unite the brahmin left and the merchant right in a bloc bourgeois.
- PI3: support for investment in education should increase more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals self-identified as right. This would support the existence of the brahmin left.

Globalisation:

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- G1: support for globalisation of business activities should increase with the education level at low-income levels and stay constant at high-income levels; this would point to the importance of the globalisation divide for the split between the popular classes and the brahmin left.
- G1b: the support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people.
- G2: support for globalisation of business activities should increase with income, more strongly at low education levels; this would separate the merchant right from other social groups.
- G2b: the support for globalisation should increase with the income level more strongly for left people than for right people; this would characterise the brahmin left.

Immigration:

- I1: support for immigration should increase with the education level at all income levels; this would unite the bloc bourgeois.
- I2: support for immigration should be constant with income at all education levels; this would support the existence of an education-based globalisation divide.

# Data and empirical strategy

The testable propositions defined above are brought to the data using different International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) surveys for a pooled sample of 20 OECD countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) from 1985 to 2018. The ISPP database is widely used to analyse the individual's attitudes towards a large number of topics, containing a rich information on social background, including earnings/income and education.

# **Dependent variables**

The first item considered is political leaning expressed on a left-right scale. We use the variable PARTY\_LR ('party voted for in last general election: left – right scale') present in 23 different ISSP waves (1985, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, and from 2008 to 2018) in 20 countries. This variable of selfplacement of individuals on a left-right scale has been preferred to a variable of identified party choice. It expresses the political leaning of the individual, which may differ from the actual ideological position of the party for which this individual votes because parties' positions can change over time, making it difficult to see whether the left has become the party of the educated or whether traditionally left parties have turned into the political representation of the high skilled. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the distribution of the PARTY\_LR variable. The share of left respondents (Far Left and Left) is about 33 percent of our sample whereas right respondents (Right and Far Right) account for about 31 percent of

	Observations	Percent
Far Left	10,650	3.42
Left	93,216	29.92
Centre	53,626	17.21
Right	89,378	28.69
Far Right	7,648	2.45
Other/No preference	57,037	18.31
Total	311,555	100

Table 2. Political self-placement descriptive statistics.

our sample. Finally, centre respondents are about 17 percent; the last category has been gathered in other and no preference (abstention) which accounts for 18.3 percent of our sample.

The second item reflects the attitude towards redistribution which is estimated using the following question: Is the governments' responsibility to reduce income differences between rich and poor? This variable is available in the module of 'Role of Government' (1985-1990-1996-2006-2016). A similar question is also available in the modules of 'Social Inequality' (1987-1992-1999-2009), 'Religion' (1991-1998) and 'Environment' in 2010 in 20 countries. Table 3 displays the distribution of the attitudes towards redistribution: around 27 percent of the respondents do not support redistribution whereas 66 percent is in favour of government intervention to reduce income inequality.

The third item is public investment in education. The first variable measures the support for education spending by government. This variable is provided in the 1985, 1990, 1996, 2006, 2016, 2017 and 2018 waves in 18 countries (missing for the Netherlands and Portugal). A a robustness check, we use a second variable that evaluates whether respondents consider just or unjust (right or wrong) that people with higher incomes can buy a better education for their children than people with lower incomes. This variable is available for 1999 and 2006 in 15 countries (missing Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Netherlands). Table 4 displays descriptive statistics for these two variables: we find that 65 percent of our sample are favourable to education spending by government (whereas a very small share of our sample declare to be against). In addition, descriptive statistics indicate that about 62.3 percent of the respondents consider unjust (or wrong) that richer people can buy education than poorer people (whereas about 20 percent find this situation just or right).

The final item is economic globalisation and immigration.<sup>12</sup> Four different variables are used to capture this dimension. In a first variable, support for free trade is measured by the share of respondents who agree with the statement that free trade leads to better products becoming available in their own countries. In a second variable related to globalisation used as a robustness check, support for large companies is measured by the share of people who disagree with the statement that large international companies are causing more and more damage to local businesses. These two variables are available only in 2003 and 2013 for 17 countries (missing for Australia, Italy and the Netherlands). Table 5 provides descriptive statistics and produce some contrasted results. First, we find that about 58 percent agree or strongly agree the statement that free trade allows to better products; second, it can be observed that a large majority (56 percent of our sample) do not support the action of large international companies (whereas about 19 percent appears in favour of large companies).

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	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	16,382	8.91
Disagree	33,151	18.02
Indifferent	12,658	6.88
Agree	63,690	34.63
Strongly agree	58,054	31.56
Total	183,935	100

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards public investment in education.

Education spending by government		Just or unjust that rich can buy education			
	Observations	Percent		Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	2,496	2.44	Very just	2,227	6.56
Disagree	2,897	2.84	Somewhat just	4,538	13.38
Indifferent	30,100	29.46	Neither just nor unjust	6,016	17.73
Agree	37,523	36.72	Somewhat unjust	9,986	29.44
Strongly agree	29,162	28.54	Very unjust	11,158	32.89
Total	102,178	100	Total	33,925	100

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards (economic) globalisation.

	Support for free trade		Support for large companies	
	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	871	2.73	871	2.73
Disagree	3,830	12.01	3,830	12.01
Indifferent	8,735	27.37	8,735	27.37
Agree	14,842	46.51	14,842	46.51
Strongly agree	3,632	11.38	3,632	11.38
Total	31,910	100	31,910	100

Two additional variables are used to assess the attitudes towards immigration. The support for immigration is first estimated by the share of respondents who agree the statement that immigrants are generally good for the economy of the respondents' country. Additionally, the support for immigration is then measured by the share of people who do not agree the statement that immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in the respondents' country. These variables are available for 1995, 2003 and 2013 in 19 countries (missing for the Netherlands). Table 6 displays descriptive statistics for attitudes towards immigration and gives some similar results for the two variables: we find that about 40-44 percent of the respondent agree and strongly agree that immigration is good for the economy and is not a threat for jobs, whereas about 30 percent of the respondents do not support immigration.

## Independent variables: Income and education

The preferences regarding these four different items can be explained by two major predictors: the income and education levels.

First, ISSP recovers individuals' earnings as well as post-tax family income. To make these income (country-specific) variables comparable across countries<sup>13</sup>, we compute income deciles at the country level for each available year. Figure 1a

	Immigration is good for the economy		Immigration-related job substitution	
	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	3,490	8.12	4,137	9.44
Disagree	8,837	20.55	9,589	21.88
Indifferent	13,312	30.96	10,662	24.33
Agree	14,974	34.82	13,970	31.88
Strongly agree	2,390	5.56	5,461	12.46
Total	43,003	100	43,819	100

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards (economic) immigration.



Figure 1. Descriptive statistics on income decile (mean income) and on the level of degree (repartition for each ISSP wave).

displays the evolution of the average value of post-tax family income by decile. Second, to compare the education level across countries, a general classification with 6 different categories is used following the traditional International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) classification:<sup>14</sup> (1) No formal qualification; (2) Lowest formal qualification; (3) Above lowest qualification; (4) Higher secondary qualification; (5) Above higher secondary level and (6) University degree completed. Figure 1b shows the distribution of education level for each ISSP wave. It can be noted that the share of respondents with no qualification or primary level of education (i.e. lowest and above lowest formal qualification) has decreased over time whereas the share of people with higher level of education (University degree completed) has increased – the share of individuals with secondary level of education (i.e. higher secondary qualification or above higher secondary level) has shown relative stagnation over time.

# **Empirical strategy**

We adopt a parsimonious model specification to stay as close as possible to that used in Piketty (2019). The main explanatory variables are income and education. The controls are gender, age, marital status and the presence of children in the household. Wealth and father's occupation are included in some of Piketty's specifications, but such variables are not present in the ISSP databases used here.

First, we run binary logit regressions of individuals' political leaning, and attitudes towards redistribution, public investment in education and globalisation/ immigration with pooled data. Controls are a dummy variable for male, age, age squared (to allow for concavity), and the presence of children and a variable reflecting the marital status. Income and education are interacted to test their combined effect:

$$Y_{it}^* = \alpha + \beta_D * D_{it} + \beta_I * I_{it} + \beta * D_{it} * I_{it} + \gamma * X_{it} + \eta_1 * Country + \eta_2 * Year + \varepsilon_{it}$$
(1)

with  $D_i$  and  $I_i$  respectively the degree and income decile of individual *i* in year *t*. *X* is a vector of individual socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, children, and marital status). Finally, *Country* and *Year* are respectively two vectors of country and year dummies, and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

An augmented model also considers the interaction between income and political leaning:

$$Y_{it}^{*} = \alpha + \beta_{D} * D_{it} + \beta_{I} * I_{it} + \theta_{P} * P_{it} + \beta * D_{it} * I_{it} + \theta * P_{it} * I_{it} + \gamma * X_{it} + \eta_{1} * Country$$
$$+ \eta_{2} * Year + \varepsilon_{it}$$

(2)

To check for robustness, we perform ordered logit regressions (see Appendix B, supplementary material) since all our variables to be explained encompass discrete choices that can be easily ordered by using the original measures (this provides a higher variation of information in the data).

## **Estimation results**

## **Political leaning**

We start by computing the impact of the education level on support for the left (estimated with model 1a) in order to test proposition P1. Figure 2 displays the marginal effect of the education level (highest degree) on the probability to place oneself to the left according to the income level (decile).<sup>15</sup> For all income levels, left support first declines with the education level and then increases with it after the higher secondary education level. The non-monotonous relationship between left leaning and education level only partly confirms proposition P1: support for the left increases with the education level controlling for income levels. This is valid above a certain education level. Below this level, one finds the more traditional support for the left being higher among low educated individuals.

Moving on to proposition P2, we compute the impact of the income level on left sympathies estimated with model (1). Figure 3 shows the marginal effect of income (decile) on the probability to place oneself to the left by education level. For most education levels, the probability to express left leaning decreases with income, which should come as no surprise. For relatively educated individuals, the decrease in left support is steeper above the seventh decile. For university graduates, left leaning even increases with income up to D5. Therefore, the proposition P2 that the support for the left should decrease with income but should also decrease more steeply at low education levels is partly validated.

Similarly, marginal effects of the education or income levels are finally computed to explain the support for the right as displayed in Figures 4 and 5. Figure 4



Sources: ISSP (1985, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, and 2008-2018) Figure 2. Marginal effect by income decile of the education level on support for the left.



Sources: ISSP (1985, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, and 2008-2018)

Figure 3. Marginal effect by education level of the income level on the support for the left.



Sources: ISSP (1985, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, and 2008-2018)

Figure 4. Marginal effect by education level of the income level on the support for the right.



Sources: ISSP (1985, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, and 2008-2018) Figure 5. Marginal effect by income decile of education level on the support for the right.

displays the marginal effect of the income level (decile) on the probability to place oneself to the right according to the education level. We find that the support for the right increases monotonically with income at all education levels. One can see that above the 5<sup>th</sup> income decile, the support of highly educated individuals increases faster than that of individuals with a low education level, which contradicts proposition P2b.

Figure 5 shows the marginal effects of the education levels on the probability to place oneself to the right according to the income level. According to proposition P3, we should observe a downward schedule at high-income levels. In fact, we find a similar shape at almost all income deciles: the support for the right strongly increases with the education level, invaliding proposition P3.

# Redistribution

The marginal effects of income levels obtained with the estimation of models (1) (left panel) and (2) (right panel) to explain the support for redistribution are displayed in Figure 6. Support for redistribution decreases with income at all education levels without noticeable differences (except among individuals with no education) in the steepness of the decline, contrary to proposition R1, which stated that because of an expected moderate support for redistribution from the brahmin left, the decrease of the support for redistribution should be less steep at high levels of education. This questions the fact that the whole brahmin left should be less concerned about inequality and thus less supportive of redistributive policies. A



Support for Redistribution

Figure 6. Marginal effect of income on the support for redistribution according to the education level (left panel) and according to the education level and political leaning (right panel).



Support for Redistribution

Figure 7. Marginal effect by income decile of education level on the support for redistribution.

difference appears when one splits the sample according to the political leaning: the decrease is somewhat steeper for individuals on the right end of the political spectrum, as could be expected.

Figure 7 displays the marginal effects of the education level on the support for redistribution estimated with model 1a. Support for redistribution strongly decreases for all income levels, especially for the lowest income deciles and for the highest income decile (D10) but the decrease is steeper for low-educated individuals. This suggests that the support for redistribution decreases with education at low level of income but also at high level of income, only partially validating proposition R2.

# Investment in public education

Figure 8 displays the marginal effects of the education level on the support for education spending. This support increases with the education level for all income deciles, and this more strongly for low income that high income as stated in proposition PI1<sup>16</sup>. Then, we find the support for education spending increases with education level for all ideological orientations, and this more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals self-identified as right, which confirms the specificity of the brahmin left.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the left-right cleavage still matters on education issues.

Marginal effects of the income level on the support for investment in public education estimated with models 1a and 1b are displayed in Figure 9. We look at the evidence that the support for investment in education should decrease with

#### Support for Education Spending



Sources: ISSP (1985, 1990, 1996, 2006, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Figure 8. Marginal effect of education on the support for investment in public education according to the income level (left panel) and according to political leaning (right panel).

#### Support for Education Spending



Sources: ISSP (1985, 1990, 1996, 2006, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Figure 9. Marginal effect of income on the support for investment in public education according to the education level (left panel) and according to political leaning (right panel).

income more strongly at low education levels than at high education levels (PI2). This seems to be the case when one considers the drop in the support for education spending for incomes above D6.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding PI3, the proposition that the support for investment in education should increase with the education level more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals self-identified as right is not verified. This mitigates the previous findings that confirmed the specificity of the brahmin left with respect to education issues. However, this specificity is still observable in the level of support.

# Globalisation

We use a variable focussed on the benefits of free trade to assess the degree of support for globalisation of business activities. Figure 10 displays the marginal effects of the education level on the support for free trade. We find that support for free trade varies little across education levels among low-income individuals. By contrast, support for free trade is increasing with the education level for incomes above D6, invalidating proposition G1.<sup>19</sup> This gives some support to the idea that a possible bloc bourgeois could be unified around the globalisation issue. But we find no support for proposition G1b according to which the support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people. We find that the support for globalisation slightly decreases with the



Sources: ISSP (2003, 2013)

Figure 10. Marginal effect of education on the support for globalisation according to the income level (left panel) and according to political leaning (right panel).

#### Support for free trade



#### Support for free trade

Figure 11. Marginal effect of income on the support for globalisation according to the education level (left panel) and according to political leaning (right panel).

education level for individuals self-identified as left or increases more slowly than for individuals self-identified as right.

Figure 11 which displays the marginal effects of the income level on the support for free trade according to the education level and to political leaning indicate that the support for free trade is volatile across income levels, especially for the lower educated people.<sup>20</sup> When we look at the interaction between education and political leaning, we find that the support for globalisation is higher and increases more strongly among right respondents, with some differences across education levels. This does not bring support to proposition G2b: right respondents, regardless of their education level, are more in favour of trade openness.

## Immigration

Opinions on immigrations are evaluated using two different questions on how individuals perceive the impact of immigration on the economy. The first question assesses the support for immigration by asking whether immigration is good for the economy while the second question relates to the impact of immigration on job substitution.

Figures 12a and 12b display the marginal effects of the education level on the support for immigration. We find that the support for immigration increases with the education level, with no substantial differences across income levels, which validates proposition I1. The education cleavage on immigration is present. Unsurprisingly, one can observe that left respondents are more in favour of

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Figure 12. Marginal effect of education on the support for immigration according to the income level (left panel) and according to political leaning (right panel).



Figure 13. Marginal effect of income on the support for immigration according to the education level (left panel) and according to political leaning (right panel).

immigration than others, but we cannot see any large differences across political orientations in the evolution of the support.

Figure 13a and 13b, which display the marginal effects of the income level respectively on the support for immigration according to the education level and to political leaning, indicate that the support for immigration increases with the income level, and this for all education levels. This invalidates proposition I2 and stresses the importance of the income divide, which is not erased by the educational cleavage. If we look at the interaction between education level and political leaning, we find that the level of education plays a determinant role to explain the differences in the attitudes towards immigration: the support for immigration increases more strongly among high-educated individuals (among left and right respondents).

## Conclusion and interpretation of the results

Our estimations produce some contrasted findings regarding the importance of the educational cleavage and the socioeconomic divides that would oppose different

Proposition		conclusion
P1	Support for the left should increase with the education level	Partly validated
P2	Support for the left should decrease with income, more steeply at low education levels	Partly validated
P2b	Support for the right should increase with the income level more steeply at low education levels	Not validated
Р3	Support for the right should decrease with the education level at high-income levels	Not validated
R1	Support for redistribution should decrease with income more at low than at high levels of education	Not validated
R2	Support for redistribution should decrease with education at low levels of income and should be constant at high level of income	Partly validated
PI1	Support for investment in education should increase with the education level more strongly for low income than high income	Validated
PI2	Support for investment in education should decrease more strongly with income at low education levels than at high education levels	Validated
PI3	Support for investment in education should increase more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals self- identified as right	Not validated
G1	Support for globalisation of business activities should increase with the education level at low-income levels and stay constant at high-income levels	Not validated
G1b	Support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people	Not validated
G2	support for globalisation of business activities should increase with income, more strongly at low education levels	Not validated
G2b	support for globalisation should increase with the income level more strongly for left people than for right people	Not validated
11	Support for immigration should increase with the education level at all income levels	Validated
12	Support for immigration should be constant with income at all education levels	Not validated

Table	e 7.	Results	' summary
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groups such as the brahmin left, the merchant right or the bloc bourgeois to popular classes. A summary of the results is presented in Table 7.

Both the education and income levels influence individuals' political leaning. Regarding the second influence, income, the link between an individual's financial situation and the support for the right is a well-established fact. A more original proposition made in Piketty (2018, 2019) concerns the existence of the brahmin left, i.e. of a left mostly detached from the popular classes. Propositions P1, P2, R1, PI1, PI3, G2b and I2 would contribute to validating the relevance of the brahmin left. Only three of these propositions validate or partly validate the specificity of a brahmin left (P1, P2, PI1). Above a certain education level, when controlling for income, support for the left increases with the education level, suggesting that the left may become the party of the skilled though not necessarily affluent individuals. However, left leaning is declining with education for the less educated individuals, implying that left support can also be found among the low educated. The left could thus become mostly the party of the educated because one part of its constituency, that with a low education level, is dwindling as the average education level of the population increases, a trend that, in reverse, reinforces the other part of the constituency. One sees also that left support decreases with income more steeply at high education levels, suggesting that that the left could have become the party of the middle-income skilled.

At the other side of the political spectrum, the income factor still plays an important role in the left-right divide and, symmetrically, right leaning is not reducible to a matter of the financial status. We find that the support for the right increases with the income level but more steeply at high education levels: this points to the right being the party of the rich and skilled. Finally, the support for the right decreases with the education level at high-income levels, suggesting that a high skill level tends to decrease the political distance among individuals. This supports the emergence of a bloc bourgeois aggregating the affluent or high skilled individuals.

Also, the interactions between income and education in the determination of the preferences regarding redistribution do not quite follow the lines of Piketty's argument (propositions R1 and R2). The support for redistribution decreases with income with no sizeable differences across education levels, and decreases with education at all income levels. This points to the importance of the income level in the determination of the attitude towards redistribution and supports the existence of an affluent fraction of the brahmin left less concerned about inequality. Therefore, the separation between the Brahmins and the Merchants may not be as clear-cut as one may think and both may find common interests a policy mediation uniting these two groups, which corresponds to a political strategy aiming for the support of the bloc bourgeois.

The support for investment in education increases with the education level more at low-income levels than at high-income levels (PI1). This could point in the direction of the constitution of a Brahmin left but there does not seem to be a significant difference between left and right individuals in this respect (PI3). In fact, even the empirical invalidation of proposition PI2 – the support for investment in education should decrease more strongly with income at low education levels than at high education levels – questions the separation between a Brahmin left and a merchant right in this respect and points to the possibility to unite educated groups in a bloc bourgeois. Results are, however, less robust when looking at the opinions on fighting inequality in the access to education.

The attitude towards the various aspects of globalisation also casts some doubt on this separation. Propositions G1 (support for globalisation should increase with the education level at low-income levels but not at high-income levels) and G2 (support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people) are not supported by the data. Then, income and education also play a central role in understanding the opinions on immigrations: we find that the support for immigration increases with income at all education levels, suggesting a unification of the bloc bourgeois. We find no evidence of the existence of an education-based globalisation divide as the support for immigration is also increasing with income. Left-leaning individuals are not likely to support more strongly globalisation - measured by attitudes either towards trade openness at the global level or towards immigration. One can derive two conclusions from these findings: first, some segments of the brahmin left and of the merchant right are probably united on these topics by at least one determinant: their common financial situation. Second, our findings question the possibility of a realignment of the political conflict opposing 'globalists' and 'nativists' as a substitute for a more traditional economic issue-based left-right divide. Piketty (2018) gives a central role to globalisation/immigration in the emergence of a multipleelite party system, mainly based on a gradual rise in the educational level. Political conflicts would therefore result from educational dispersion rather than from income dispersion. However, our findings point to the relevance of the financial situation in a series of divides, even taking into account differences in the education level.

To conclude, one finds mixed results of the existence of a brahmin left: first, the analysis of the support for left provides some evidence of its existence. Additional results analysing the attitudes towards redistribution, investment in education and globalisation are less clear. Our estimations may suggest some evidence of a separation of the brahmin left from the popular classes, which implies the emergence of a fraction of left voters less concerned about inequality: this fraction would be less likely to support redistribution and investment in public education. Another possibility is a sociopolitical alliance between the better-off part of the brahmin left and the high-educated fraction of the merchant right, united in a bloc bourgeois. Propositions P3, R2, PI2, G1 and I1 matter for the validation of this possibility. Three of these propositions (R2, PI2, I1) lead to conclude that there is a possibility of a bloc bourgeois. The economic policy issues crucial to the unification of at least part of the brahmin left and the merchant right would be redistribution, investment in education and immigration, but not the other globalisation issues. This has potential consequences for the political supply. The existence of a brahmin left distinct from a merchant right as well as the popular classes makes it possible for a 'new' left to emerge and compete with both traditional right and 'populist' parties. On the other hand, the possibility of a bloc bourgeois opens the way for a blurring of the opposition between left and right, conceivably in new or 'renovated' parties, competing with either a united or divided 'populist' opposition. The policy propositions would be articulated around the items mentioned above (redistribution, education, immigration).

By considering different economic issues, such as redistribution or protection against foreign competition, our results – specifically on the preferences on economic globalisation and immigration – also contribute to the field of international political economy. Scholarship in this area has focussed on the public opinion on immigration or globalisation in general as well as variation in policy regarding economic openness. In this respect, this paper can help to understand how preferences on international trade and migration can interact with more domestic preferences on redistribution, and more particularly to analyse changes in the structure of economic policy divides which will impact policy decisions.

Our findings also suggest that the limitation of the political/policy space to two dimensions is probably too constraining. A consideration of a wider range of policies would enrich substantially the analysis. Our findings would also need to be assessed with country-specific analyses, in order to account for differences in institutional contexts and other country specificities. This will be the topic of further research.

# Notes

- 1. Kitschelt (1994), Oesch (2008a, 2008b), Norris and Inglehart (2019).
- 2. Kriesi et al. (2006), Rodrik (2018).
- 3. Gennaioli and Tabellini (2018).
- 4. For instance, Autor et al. (2013) have studied the negative effects on jobs and wages in US industries and regions with higher exposure to Chinese import competition.

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- 5. Rovny and Rovny (2017) find that "outsiders" tend to vote more for "radical" parties, left or right depending on how the insider-outsider divide is operationalised.
- 6. It is not entirely clear whether the reference is Gary Becker's "human capital" or Pierre Bourdieu' "social capital".
- 7. Piketty (2019) implicitly develops the idea of an intergenerational loyalty for left parties to explain the emergence of the brahmin left: whereas a majority of voters in the 1950s/1960s had a low education level and voted for left parties, their children and their grandchildren in the 1980s/1990s who benefited from mass education continued to vote for those parties. In this sense, the shift from a traditional to a brahmin left would not be based on a specific political strategy to attract more educated voters.
- 8. Piketty (2019) points out the role played by increasing educational inequalities: education spending has become increasingly more concentrated among high-income households (and to a lesser degree among middle-income households) and has on average declined over time. Therefore, the marginalisation of the popular classes would contribute to increasing inequalities because the left has become increasingly indifferent to redistributive issues.
- 9. According to Piketty (2019), each of these groups was represented by a candidate in the French presidential election of 2017. The four candidates obtained comparable scores (20 to 24%) in the first round.
- Frank (2005, 2017) analyses the transformation of the party system in the United 10. States in the direction of an increasing opposition between low-income and loweducated voters (supporting the Republican Party) and high-income and higheducated voters (supporting the Democratic Party).
- Expectations regarding social mobility may play a role too: middle income highly-11. educated individuals may expect to climb up the income ladder and may have mixed feelings about redistribution.
- 12. The following variables used are all reflecting the economic dimension of globalisation and immigration, thereby excluding any cultural dimension.
- 13. When respondents are able to report/estimate amounts of income as exactly as possible, the income variable is referring to the average monthly gross level (before taxes and all other deductions). If this cannot be done, classes or brackets are used.
- Our classification refers to the 1997 ISCED Classification. 14.
- Supplementary tables are available to present the results of our regressions and the 15. estimated marginal effects.
- 16. As robustness checks, we use an alternative variable on the feeling of (in)justice that rich people can buy better education. The opinions on the equality of opportunity give, however, a slightly different picture (Figure A1 in the appendix). Regression results indicate that the probability to consider that it is unjust that rich can buy a better education increases from the lowest level of education to the medium level for almost all income deciles (except for D5 and D7), but to decrease and remain stable among highest educated individuals for all deciles (except for D6). The question mixes redistribution and education issues, which may explain the difference with the findings of the previous question. It confirms however the existence of a divide regarding education that could split apart the low educated from the other individuals.
- Here again, we find more nuanced results when explaining the opinions on the 17. equality of opportunity (Figure A2): while the probability to think that it is unjust that rich can buy education is decreased with the education level among right respondents, we find a positive relationship among left respondents.
- This result is weakly confirmed when one looks at the question on the possibility for 18. rich people to buy a better education (Figure A2).
- By contrast, we find that the support for large companies clearly increases with the 19. education level (Figure A3), especially for high income deciles, whereas proposition G1 stated that the increase in support should take place at lower income levels. This points to the importance of the education level in the globalisation divide and points to a possible community of interests among educated groups on such matters.

20. The support for large companies increases with income level, more strongly among high-educated individuals (Figure A4), which invalidates proposition G2. This points to a divide between the highly educated and the rest that would tend to unite the bloc bourgeois.

# **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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