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# Restructuring the West European Party Space in the Great Recession: continuity and change

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LUISS, April 21, 2016



**Question:** Did the Great Recession transform the structure of party competition in Western Europe?

- Six countries of North-Western Europe: A, CH, D, F, NL, UK
- Long-term perspective since the 1970s
- Has the Great Recession modified the long-term trends?



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## Overview

Long-term trends

Great Recession: expectations about its impact

Data and methods

Results:

- The structuring capacity of economic and new cultural issues
- The shifting party configurations

Conclusion



### Two waves of political mobilization since the 1970s

- **The rise of the New Left:** an expression of structural conflicts within European nation-states ('silent revolution'), driven by:
  - new middle class;
  - 'new politics' (Green and transformed Social-democratic parties)
- **The rise of the New Right:** an expression of structural conflicts linked to globalization, driven by:
  - losers of globalization
  - radical populist right (including transformed (liberal-) conservative parties)



### Two waves of political mobilization since the 1970s

- **Two waves focused on new cultural issues,**
  - from religious conflicts to conflicts between universalistic and traditionalist-communitarian positions (cultural liberalism, immigration, European integration)
  - became more important for party competition (decline of class conflict, convergence of major parties on economic issues)
- **Not necessarily zero-sum game** between economic-cultural issues
  - Convergence on economic issues: valence issues, but
  - Competition on valence issues remains intense



### Implications for party competition

- **Increase of overall party competition** as a result of split on the right between
  - centre-right (culturally and economically liberal) and
  - New Right (culturally conservative and economically liberal: 'winning formula')
- **Tripolar party systems** in a two-dimensional party space



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## Impact of the Great Recession

### Impact of the Great Recession

#### Expectations:

- structuring capacity of the two dimensions
- configurations



### Expectations: Structuring capacity of the two dimensions:

**Structuring capacity** (politicization) = salience \* polarization

- **Salience:**
  - Economic dimension (economic voting): mixed expectations
    - valence issue - economy always salient
    - crisis - cyclical economic punishment
    - but: crisis of limited proportions/rapid recovery
  - Cultural dimension (convergence theory): competition shifts to other issues - to new cultural issues
    - Left: cultural liberalism
    - Right: Euroscepticism, immigration





### Expectations: Politicization of the two dimensions:

- **Polarization:**
  - Economic dimension: mixed expectations
    - convergence theory: general acceptance of macro-economic austerity, but
    - ‘renewal of the left’: increasing polarization in terms of policies owned by the left (labor market and social policy)
    - leftward shift of New Right on economic dimension
  - New cultural issues: increasing polarization
    - rightward shift of the Centre-Right on the cultural dimension (European integration, immigration)



## Expectations: summary hypotheses:

### Structuring capacity:

- **H1:** economic issues: limited increase of politicization
- **H2:** new cultural issues: increased politicization
- **H3:** overall structuring capacity of the two types of issues: increased

### Configurations: Depending on the combination of strategies on the Right:

- **H4:** accentuation of the tri-polar (or polygon) party configuration (New Right shifts leftward)
- **H5:** bipolarization (New Right sticks to 'magic formula'/Centre Right polarizes)



**Data:**

- Core sentence analysis of newspaper articles in electoral campaigns
- 23 election campaigns in the six countries since 2000: 14 pre-crisis and 9 crisis elections
- Actor-issue relations
  - Actors: parties
  - Issues: 11 issue categories; economic (welfare, economic liberalism/austerity); new cultural (cultural liberalism, immigration, European integration)

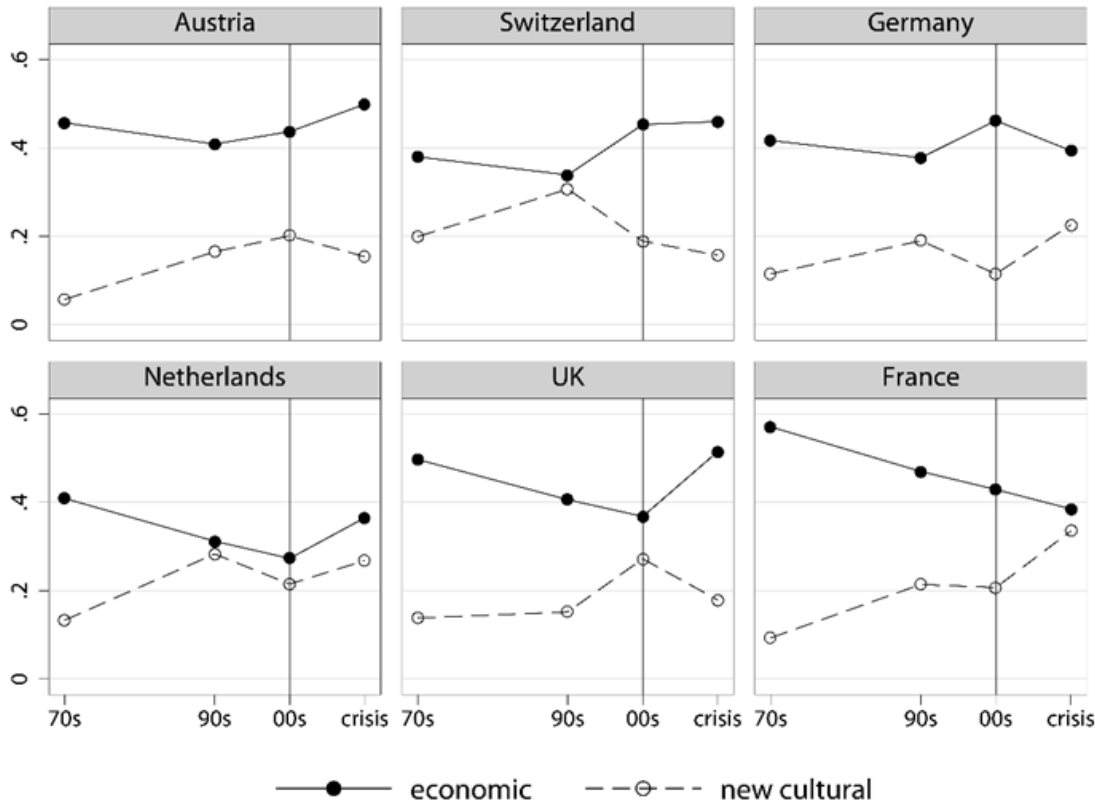


## **Measures and methods:**

- Measures:
  - Salience=share of core sentences on a given issue category
  - Polarization=weighted standard deviation of parties on issue
- MDS:
  - Weighted multidimensional scaling: a flexible method similar to factor analysis

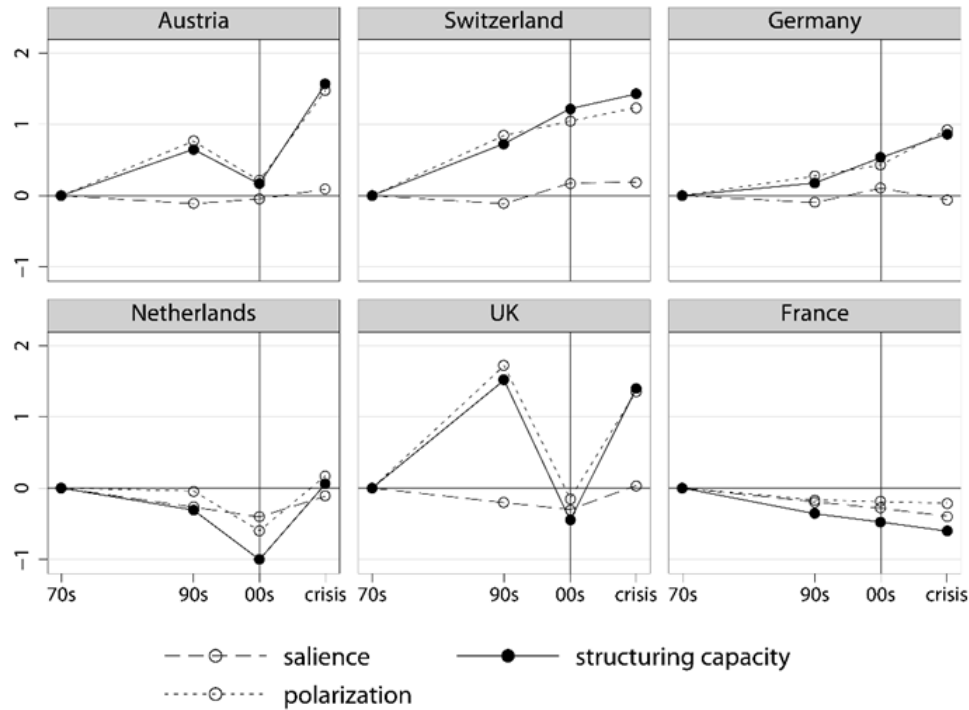


## Saliience of economic and new cultural issues



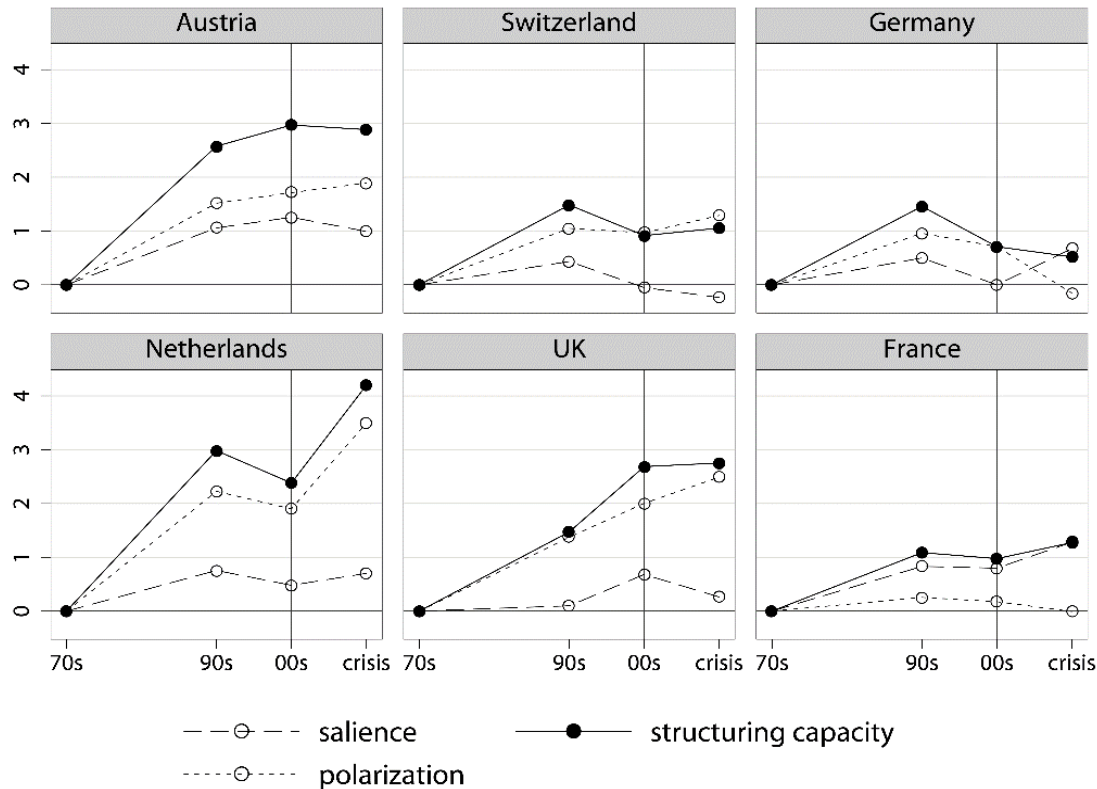


## Structuring capacity of economic issues





## Structuring capacity of new cultural issues





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## Results

### In sum:

(limited) increasing structuring by economic issues  
+stabilizing structuring by new cultural issue  
=increasing overall politicization to record levels





## **Switzerland**

- Bipolarization: SVP sticks to 'magic formula', centre-right moves to the right on cultural dimension
- increasing polarization on economic dimension: renewal of SP, but no trespassing of centre-right

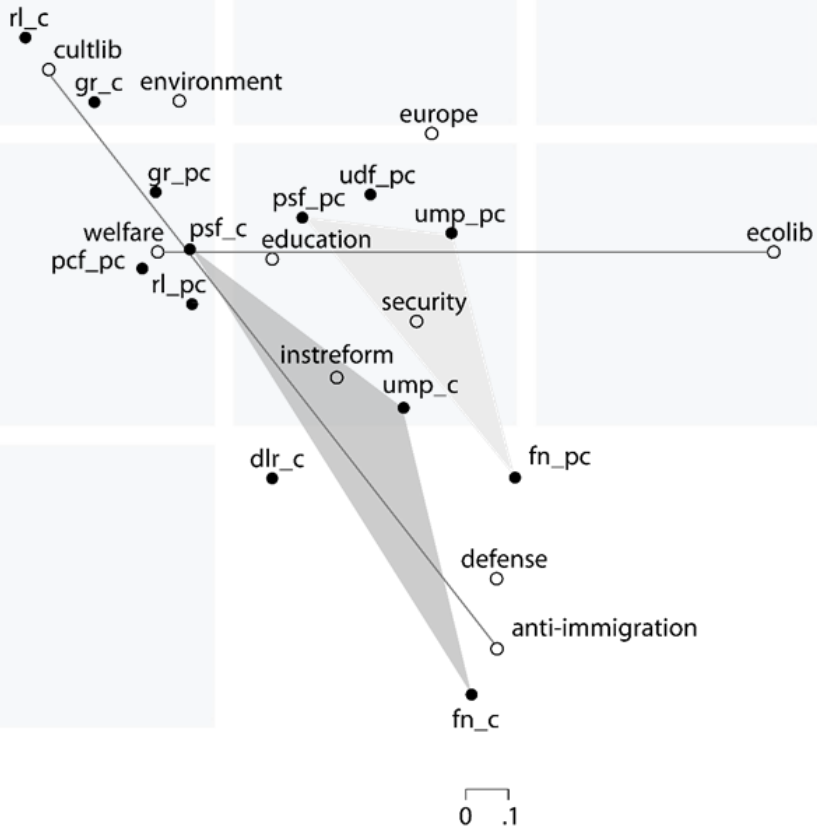


## Shifting configurations (pre-crisis (2000s) to crisis (2008-))

- **All configurations** are
  - two-dimensional, but more or less correlated (CH, A, F)
  - At least tripolar, with the New Right as one pole (shifting to the left), except in CH
- **Two patterns** (accentuation+increasing structuring):
  - D, F: leftward shift on economic dimension+greater polarization on cultural dimension
  - Other four: polarization on both dimensions
- **Two configurations per graph**: two polygons (pre- vs post-crisis)

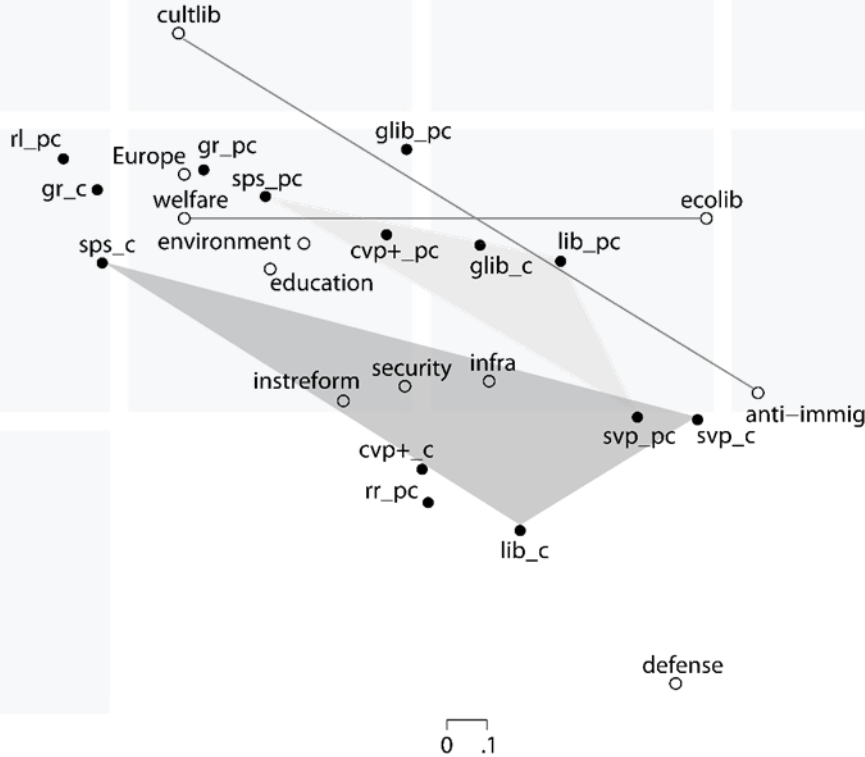


## The configuration of the partisan space: France





# The configuration of the partisan space: Switzerland





## Conclusion

- Continuity of long-term trends
  - Two dimensions (cultural dimension redefined)
  - Tripolar configurations (except for Switzerland)
- Reinvigoration of the economic dimension, except for France
  - Renewal of social democrats' agenda: shift to the left
  - Leftward shift of New Right
  - contradicts convergence hypothesis
- Unexpectedly: no increase in structuring capacity of the new cultural issues in the crisis, except for France
  - contradicts convergence hypothesis
  - But: refugees' crisis and security crisis



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**Thank you for your attention!**