A cleavage basis of the Green vote? Twelve European countries compared

(Draft version)

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1. Introduction

Since their origin in the 1970s and upswing in the 1980s, Green parties have been understood as standing somewhat apart or even outside of cleavage politics. Moreover, the appearance of Green parties was interpreted as a consequence as well as a further threat to already weakening traditional structural alignments within European electorates. Voting for Greens was explained, therefore, as primarily issue- or value-based, and sometimes simply in terms of political protest. New Politics, so the dominant view in the literature, was interpreted as having nothing to do with a structural perspective of party and electoral politics. If a social basis for Green voting existed, than it was interpreted as being rooted just in age, especially the younger voters, or generation, especially those born in the “boom years” of the 1950s and 1960s. Sometimes gender was also seen as a potential explanation because in many countries women voted for Green parties above average.

With respect to the German case, however, especially Müller (1999) demonstrated that voting for a Green party is also based on membership in social classes if the exploration uses a more sophisticated categorization following the improved Erikson-Goldthorpe class scheme as suggested by Kriesi (1989; 1998) and Müller (1998; 1999; 2000). Additionally, other studies stressed the importance of sector employment and found the Green voters primarily as employees of the state (Knutsen 2005).

The paper at hand takes Müller’s as well as Knutsen’s findings as starting point but carries on the research concerning three dimensions: First, it goes beyond the extensively analysed German case and takes a still missing comparative perspective as regards the structural basis of Green voting in twelve European countries: Austria (A), Belgium (B), Great Britain (GB), Finland (SF), France (F), Germany (D), Ireland (IRL), Italy (I), Luxembourg (LUX), the Netherlands (NL), Sweden (S), and Switzerland (CH). Second, this paper is not restricted to the class cleavage but includes considerations and empirical results with regard to the religious conflict, the second traditional division in European societies. The structural basis of Green voting will be compared at two points in time: first around 1990, when Greens were

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1 This paper is part of the author’s Habilitation project that compares the programmatic and electoral development of European Green parties with a special focus on the consequences of globalization. For the general argument see Kriesi et al. (2006), for the case of the German Greens see Dolezal (2006). The paper at hand, however, does not concentrate on this special question.

2 O’Neill (1997), who provided the most recent comprehensive study on Green parties, does not systematically deal with these questions.
still a “new force” in European party systems, then around 2005, when most Green parties were already established political actors. Third, this exploration is not confined to exploring the structural side but includes agency, i.e. the parties’ programmatic positions, as well. With this perspective, it should be able to explain (potential) variations in the parties’ structure of support between the explored countries. The analysis, therefore, tries to link the supply side of party competition, based on results of two major expert surveys, with the demand side of electoral politics.

The paper’s structure closely follows the above mentioned research questions: First, it discusses the theoretical connection between Green voting and social cleavages as stated by the literature. After a short introduction of the Green parties under investigation (part 3), part 4 explains what data and what methods were used for the quantitative analyses and shortly reports the results. Finally, part 5 connects the demand-side analysis with the programmatic profile of the Green parties. Especially this last part, however, has to be read as a very preliminary exploration that is open for suggestions.

2. Social cleavages and voting for green parties

Social cleavages, defined as stable and politicised divisions within a society that align certain social groups with political parties who defend their interests and values, were traditionally seen as basis for democratic politics leading first to the mobilization of conflicts and the formation of parties and then to stabilization of party systems (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). But since the 1970s and 1980s, such traditional approaches to understand electoral and party politics have been vehemently criticised: the decreasing significance of group boundaries in more open societies, cognitive mobilization, a rising importance of values as explanation for voting behaviour, and different approaches of “rational” voting (issue-voting and retrospective voting) questioned the ongoing importance of societal divisions for electoral politics. However, it seems that since the mid 1990s political science has experienced a kind of “counter movement” that especially tries to bring class, perhaps the most important societal division in modern democracies, back into consideration again. This development has been set off not least by improved classifications of social classes that broke the deadlock of the classic dichotomous approach following Marx as well as by more sophisticated statistical methods (Evans 2000; Brettschneider et al. 2002).
For a long time, especially Green parties have been understood not only as standing outside of cleavages, their existence has also been interpreted as an indicator of the overall decline of cleavage politics throughout Europe. Indeed, as a new political force in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Greens’ appearance on the political scene did not support a stabilization thesis based on social cleavages and “frozen” party systems. The Green leaders’ self-description as standing outside of traditional political divisions – e.g. “beyond left and right” – and their emphasis on issues and values that might be important for the survival of mankind let the recourse to traditional voter alignments seem old fashioned.

A more sceptical view, however, understands the Greens as normal parties, meaning that the same questions have to be asked as in the case of more traditional party families: Is there a social basis for the voting for Green parties? Can demographic variables explain the preference for these parties leaving values, e.g. Inglehart’s (1977) post materialism, specific issues, e.g. opposition to nuclear energy and support for women’s rights, or political protest aside? Are the structural characteristics that differentiate Green voters from other party voters the same throughout Western Europe? At first sight such questions might seem naïve, but theories of partisan dealignment vehemently stress the declining or even disappearing social basis for voting behaviour and especially with respect to Green parties.

Summarizing the available literature on Green voters, which is heavily influenced by the most prominent German case, the results with respect to the above mentioned questions are mixed. In the 1980s, Poguntke was perhaps the first to summarize the then available studies on the voters of European Green parties and concluded that they are supporters of post materialism, young, highly educated, belong to the new middle class, live in urban centres, and are overwhelmingly left-wing oriented (Poguntke 1987a; 1987b). Reviewing the literature 15 years later, Müller-Rommel (2002) sees this voter group again as well-educated and young, belonging to the middle class, and working in white-collar service sectors of the economy or the state bureaucracy. But in general, such variables expressing social characteristics or group memberships are estimated as being rather irrelevant to understanding these voters’ behaviour: “[W]ith the possible exception of age, the socio-demographic variables are no strong predictor for Green Party success” (Müller-Rommel 2002, 124). Such an interpretation

3 When looking at variables measuring basic attitudes like system acceptance and trust in institutions, some preliminary results of the author’s Habilitation project (see footnote 1) indicate that Green voters, once in quite strong opposition to political institutions and prevailing styles of political elites in general, are now without doubt integrated in “the system” and position themself near the median voter. Protest, therefore, no longer seems to be a reliable basis upon which Green politicians can build their electoral strategy.
was also backed by Franklin and Rüdig who summarized their findings based on a survey of the 1989 European elections as follows: „The socioeconomic basis of Green voting appears to be too heterogeneous to suggest a stable social basis for Green voting, and our analysis clearly rejects any notion that the Green parties represent a narrowly defined social group.” (Franklin and Rüdig 1995, 423). Lacking a distinctive social basis – at least according to these authors’ interpretations –, Green voters therefore seem to rely on a strict rational voting behaviour, including the retrospective evaluation of the Green parties’ policies and the Green elites’ behaviour (Müller-Rommel 2002, 124). To get a clearer overview of the literature and to provide a theoretical basis for formulating some hypotheses for the empirical part of this paper, the following section discusses the literature on Green voters with respect to the following social-demographic characteristics: social class, religion, type of residence (urban versus rural), age and generation, gender, and education.

Social class

There is a widespread consensus in the literature on voting behaviour that Green parties are primarily supported by the new middle class, especially by employees in white-collar service sectors of the economy and the state bureaucracy (Poguntke 1987a; 1987b; Müller-Rommel 2002). Green voters, therefore, are clearly different both from manual workers and from the old middle class, the two core groups of the traditional socio-economic divide.

When looking at the class basis of the Green vote in more detail, two aspects have to be dealt with. First, it is possible as well as necessary to further differentiate the new middle class than is often the case in the literature (see for example Nieuwbeerta and Manza 2002). Within the middle class, sharp conflicts can be found, among others, concerning the role of the market and the virtues of hierarchy. Following the work especially by Müller (1998; 1999; 2000) and Kriesi (1993; 1998), we can differentiate three groups within the (higher) strata of Goldthorpe’s service class: social cultural specialists, technical experts, and managers.4 Goldthorpe, on the contrary, does not differentiate them and in general expects a conservative political orientation of the service class which clearly contradicts the above mentioned findings concerning the social characteristics of Green voters. Whereas managers are part of the hierarchical structure of their company and orient themselves primarily with respect to their firm, social cultural specialists and technical experts are more oriented towards their

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4 In the German literature, Müller (2000) calls these three classes “administrative Dienstklasse”, “Experten-Dienstklasse”, and “Dienstklasse der sozialen Dienste”.
profession – and the former especially towards their clients. We therefore expect especially the social cultural specialists to have a very pronounced leaning to left libertarian values and towards Green parties when expressing their party choice (see Müller 2000, 790; Roller 2000, 95). They clearly take more libertarian views than managers as they are more independent, have command over their work environment, and communicate directly with their clients (Kitschelt and Rehm 2004, 8). These are experiences that enhance their acceptance of diversity and often lead to more cosmopolitan orientations. Their ideological position in the sphere of the economy, however, can not be theoretically derived as clear cut as their support for culturally libertarian views. From a theoretical perspective, this group might be rather neutral – or centrist – but all available empirical results show that they belong to the left and are quite in favour of redistribution (Kitschelt and Rehm 2004, 10).

The second possible differentiation refers to the division between employees of the state and of the private sector. Unfortunately, this divide is not always measured coherently in available surveys and is therefore not dealt with in the empirical part of this paper. In one of the few available comparative analyses, Knutsen (2001) was able to show that Green voters – back around 1990 – were employed by the state above the average especially in Germany as well as in the Netherlands, but not in other countries.

A further substantial and methodological question refers to the party choice of those outside the workforce. In general, there are four groups within this very important part of the electorate that includes about a half of the voters: housewives (and the small group of housemen), pensioners, the unemployed, and students. Traditional approaches in the exploration of social classes and their impact on political behaviour are based on the respondent’s household as the fundamental unit of analysis, so the non-employed are classified according to the head of households’ – or partner’s – occupation (e.g. Goldthorpe). In our view, however, it is more appropriate to consider the individual voter’s work experience as basis for the analysis. Therefore we build a category for each type of non-employed persons within the social class variable, indicating that it is primarily the individual and current – as regards pensioners and the unemployed – positions of voters that are important (see also Nas 1993). Retired voters, but especially the unemployed, might also be categorized according to their former occupation – stressing a more long term and structural perspective. However, this information is not always available in the surveys and, as Knutsen (2006, 31) states “one can also question the theoretical relevance of including the former class
of pensioners in the class variable, given that it is the present class structure that should be examined”.

Considering the party choice of the unemployed especially in the literature on the German case, the Greens were sometimes interpreted as a special kind of party for highly educated but jobless voters. Alber, for example, assessed them as a “party of the frustrated academic plebeians” (Alber 1989, 205; see also Bürklin 1987). Both authors consequentially concluded that the (German) Greens were a short time phenomenon that would quickly disappear from the political scene when the job perspectives of academics were to become better again. This interpretation proved to be completely wrong, even in Germany, where it is now the higher employees and civil servants in the service sector and public administration who vote for the Greens, as opposed to especially workers and pensioners (Hoffmann 1999). Moreover, the German Greens now compete with the liberal FDP for the wealthiest voters.

Based on these considerations, the empirical analysis will include the following classes or occupational positions: farmers, self-employed (in non-professional occupations), workers, routine non-manual employees, managers, technical experts, social-cultural specialists, pensioners, housewives, the unemployed, and students. Regarding the groups within the workforce, we especially expect the social-cultural specialists to be strong supporters of the Greens. Out of their cultural position we primarily assume the workers to be opposed; as long as the Greens stress left-wing policies regarding the economy, this should also be the case for the self-employed.

Religion

Most of the literature on societal divisions as basis for party systems and party choice in western democracies focuses exclusively on social class. But such analyses miss an important point because in several countries religious divides are at least as important for the structure of party and electoral politics as the class conflict (Rose and Urwin 1969). In general, there are two approaches for exploring the religious cleavage: the traditional way is based on voters’ membership in religious groups and focuses, within a European perspective, primarily on the conflict between Catholics and Protestants. The second approach exclusively concentrates on the conflict between religious voters of any (Christian) confession and the rapidly increasing secular population. This latter approach is not as clear cut as the group-
membership approach, where the structural component is clearly stronger. But values, the basis of the second approach, are also “rooted in institutional forces” (Knutsen 1995, 464). Moreover, being involved in a religious community’s life can be understood as a kind of pseudo-group membership opposed to the secular part of the population. Such an involvement can easily be operationalized by the frequency of church-going, which is also a perfect variable for measuring the strength of religious beliefs in general (Jagodzinski and Dobbelaeere 1994). As there is no historical connection between Green parties and a particular Christian confession, there is no theoretical reason to explore the religious cleavage according to the traditional approach. Thus, the analysis concentrates on the division between religious and secular voters, a conflict that has also become more important than the old struggle between the confessions in most European societies.

What is the theoretical expectation one might formulate with regard to the Green voters? In general, Greens have to be interpreted as a left-wing force and a therefore genuine secular party. Most of their programme, especially concerning cultural issues, is directed against traditional moral and religious values. However, the Greens’ core-issue, the protection of the environment, might also be interpreted as a religious duty. Nevertheless, we expect the Green voters in the secular camp. There is not much literature on the religious versus secular basis of voting for Green parties. In his comparative explorations, Knutsen (2004, 98; 1995, 469) does find these voters as being generally “disengaged”, as people who do not attend religious services. Similar conclusions were drawn for Germany (Schmitt-Beck 1994, 53), a country where voting behaviour is heavily influenced by the religious versus secular division and the voters of the Union parties and the Greens are situated on opposing sides of this conflict (Wolf 1996, 731).

**Urban versus rural**

The conflict between city dwellers and those who live in the rural area is one of the classic cleavages in European societies, combining economic as well as cultural divisions as the big cities represent the service industry and a more modern and secular society. In general, left wing parties do better in Europe’s urban agglomerations where the roots of the Green parties, the New Social Movements of the 1970s and 1980s also had their strongholds (for the Dutch example see Kriesi 1993). Looking at the Green parties’ electoral performance in several countries, their best results are achieved without doubt in big cities. In Austria, for example,
in 2006 the Greens were the strongest party in three of 2380 communes and Viennese boroughs and all three were in the capital. For the Green parties throughout Europe we therefore also expect more support from city dwellers at the individual level.

**Age and generation**

In the literature on Green voting a wide spread consensus exists that Green parties are supported by young voters above average (Poguntke 1987a; 1987b; Franklin and Rüdig 1992; Müller-Rommel 2002, 124). This voter group, so the dominant view in the field, has more libertarian values (e.g. Kitschelt and Rehm 2004, 11), which closely corresponds to the Greens’ programme; and young voters also express some kind of political protest as indicated by the appearance of a new political force. However, when exploring the age-factor in more detail, this broad consensus disappears. Considering especially the German case, there has been a fierce debate on the reason for this general finding and its potential consequences for the Greens.

Three combating hypotheses have been postulated: The hypothesis of a protest generation stresses the importance of the particular generation of 1968 for the Green party, which might in the long run – when these voters drop out of the electorate – lead to the party’s extinction. A second, more general hypothesis of generational change refers to the influential work of Inglehart and postulates that all new generations – as long as Western Europe remains a stable and wealthy region – might be potential Green voters, which is good news for the Greens. The third account, finally, stresses the individual voters’ life cycle and argues that Green voters will abandon this party when becoming older (see Klein and Falter 2003, 144–160).

According to Klein and Falter (2003, 160), the protest generation hypothesis is the best explanation for the German case. But in a comparative perspective, as given in the paper at hand, this account is difficult to follow as the definition of political generations is heavily influenced by national idiosyncrasies. Additionally, it is also not so clear whether this hypothesis even perfectly works for the German case. Nevertheless, many authors have

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5 When correlating the communes’ size, based on the number of eligible voters, with the parties’ strength, the Greens’ coefficient is +0,31, the Christian-democrats’ (ÖVP) -0,23 and the Social-democrats’ (SPÖ) +0,11. The two right-wing populist parties’ values are +0,13 for the FPÖ and +0,01 for the recently founded BZÖ that has its stronghold in the more rural southern state of Carinthia. Based on the population density of the 299 electoral districts, the German data for the most recent election of 2005 are even more extreme: Greens (+0,62), SPD (+0,2), CDU (-0,14), CSU (-0,1), FDP (-0,06), and Left Party (0,03).

6 Klein und Falter (2003, 156) cite a model of German political generations developed by Fogt (1982). When analysing the vote for the German Greens based on data from the ESS, the results do not indicate the postulated
stated a “greying” of Green voters in Germany (Bürklin and Dalton 1994) or have asserted an “ageing generation party” (Hoffmann 1999). The basic question, therefore, is whether Green parties are still supported as strongly by young voters as they were in earlier stages of their history; in Germany as well as in the other countries explored.

Gender

When women were given the right to vote in many countries after World War I, they first tended to support conservative parties. This traditional gender-gap lasted until the 1960s and was explained as a consequence of women’s stronger private orientation resulting from family-responsibilities and their stronger attachment to the church (Knutsen 2004, 198–200; Togeby 1994, 215). Since the 1980s there has been much talk about a new gender-gap, with women now supporting the moderate left above the average – including the Greens (Knutsen 2004, 205). This pro-Green orientation of female voters, however, seems to be a phenomenon that started only in the 1990s because, at least in Germany – according to Hoffmann (1999, 143) –, women voters were originally underrepresented in the Green electorate and had first to be won with specific programmatic appeals. After this initial phase, when the German Greens were perhaps seen as too extremist, women voters now are without doubt overrepresented, especially the younger ones (Schmitt-Beck 1994, 55).

Several theories have been postulated that explain whether and why women might vote differently than men. According to Togeby (1994, 215–218), we can distinguish three different explanations: socialization theories stress the importance of gender-differences in the child education within the family; structural explanations refer to differences in income, education, and occupation; situational explanations, finally, stress the differences based on the current life of women – e.g. the division between working women and housewives. Based on data for Denmark, Togeby (1994, 228) is able to show that housewives and mothers who stay at home express more traditional values than those women who are part of the workforce. On decrease in the support for the Greens among the youngest generation. According to this survey, 5.9 percent of the members of the “pre-war generation” (those born before 1921) voted for the Greens, 3.7 percent of the “war generation” (1922–1934), 8.3 percent of the “Adenauer-generation” (1935–1945), 11.4 percent of the “APO-generation” (“extra-parliamentary opposition”; 1946–1953), 18.7 percent of the “new social movement-generation” (1954–1971), and, finally, 19.1 percent of the “Wende”-generation whose political experience, according to Fogt, was formed by the building of the conservative led government under Helmut Kohl in 1982. Following the argument of Klein and Falter, the latter group’s support for the Greens should be lower.

7 See also the intense debate between Klein and Arzheimer (1997; 1998) and Kohler (1998) – a debate, however, that related more to the differences resulting from choosing the presumably perfect dependent variable: vote-intention versus party-sympathy.
the other hand it has been stated that female voters tend to support left-wing parties because women might be more dependent on the welfare state in order to support their families. In addition, women in general might have cultural values that are more liberal and share attitudes in favour of peace, the protection of the environment, and social care (Knutsen 2004, 198–200). In general, we therefore expect the women voters to be overrepresented in the Greens’ electorate; but perhaps not the housewives.

Education

There has also been a widespread consensus in the literature on the relation of education and voting for Green parties, stating that higher education is one of the strongest factors for explaining the vote (e.g. Poguntke 1987a; 1987b). Franklin and Rüdig (1992, 129), however, vehemently criticised this view as “these stereotypical attributes of greenness closely apply to the German and Dutch Greens only”. Their analysis indeed showed some variance between the countries, the then ten EC-members explored. Higher education was an indicator for the Green vote in all countries, but, for example, its impact was not very high in France and Britain. Knutsen (2004, 171–172; 2002, 326–327) also finds strong support for the Greens from the higher educated in all countries explored except – again – France, where the association of education and party choice in general is comparatively low (Knutsen 2002, 335).

When trying to explain the link between (higher) education and party choice one can differentiate two versions of this connection (see Knutsen 2002; 2004, 159–197). In the old connection, higher education equalled higher social class and was therefore combined with liberal or conservative attitudes and party choices. The new version is based on the consequences of the student protests of the 1960s and sees the younger cohorts of the higher educated as culturally more open and less clearly rooted in the societies’ class structure. Such a connection of higher education and libertarian views is also stressed by Kitschelt and Rehm (2004, 11). Already Lipset (1981), however, laid particular emphasis on the distinction between economic and “noneconomic liberalism” and saw higher education as an especially important explanation for the latter.
3. Green parties in twelve countries

Since the late 1970s, Green parties have emerged in all western democracies and constitute – together with the populist right – one of the two important new political forces in party politics. Many Green parties have been represented in national parliaments since the late 1980s and – starting in the mid 1990s – some of them, most prominently the German Greens, have also been part of national governments (see Müller-Rommel and Poguntke 2002). From a comparative perspective, it is almost undisputed that a Green party family exists – despite the several problems defining any party family (see Mair and Mudde 1998). Sometimes this political family is called the “ecological” part of the broader “new politics” family within the even broader camp of the political left (see Budge et al. 2004). But especially the international and transnational cooperation (in the EU) has led to a clearer group boundary, making it quite unproblematic to speak of a Green party family.

Some parts of this family, however, are sometimes categorized differently. Contrary to our classification (see table 1), Knutsen (2002), for example, defines the Italian “Partito Radicale” as a Green party but puts the Dutch “GroenLinks” in the camp of left socialists. For the paper at hand, we have selected several relevant Green parties in countries with a more or less stable green history, thus leaving especially Norway and Denmark aside. Discussing the membership of individual parties in certain party families is an important question but one should keep in mind that both election surveys and scores of parties’ positions (see below) do not always differentiate between different Green parties. All further analyses therefore will be based on only one Green party in each country – leaving some programmatic differentiations aside, which were quite important for example in Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and France until the early 1990s. More recent developments, however, indicate a process of consolidation resulting in a stable and hegemonic Green party in each country – with the potential exception of the Netherlands where the newly founded “Partij voor de Dieren” (Party for the Animals) succeeded in winning votes in the last national election and might challenge the established force. In the analyses below, this new party is not included in the Green family.

8 Also in Switzerland, a second Green party (“Grünliberale Partei”; green-liberal party) recently emerged. In this case the party has a programme that is especially liberal in the economic sphere.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>country</th>
<th>current name of party</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>most recent national election result (% votes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Wallonia</td>
<td>Ecolo</td>
<td>2003: 3.1&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>Groen! (formerly Agalev)</td>
<td>2003: 2.5&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Vihreät De Grüne</td>
<td>Green League</td>
<td>2007: 8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Les Verts</td>
<td>Les Verts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Bündnis 90/Die Grünen</td>
<td>Alliance 90/The Greens</td>
<td>2005: 8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Green party</td>
<td></td>
<td>2002: 3.8&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Federazione dei Verdi</td>
<td>Federation of the Greens</td>
<td>2006: 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>Déi Gréng</td>
<td>The Greens</td>
<td>2004: 11.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>GroenLinks</td>
<td>GroenLinks</td>
<td>2006: 4.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Miljöpartiet de gröna</td>
<td>Environment party of the Greens</td>
<td>2006: 5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Grüne Partei der Schweiz</td>
<td>Green party of Switzerland</td>
<td>2003: 7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United</td>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td>Green party</td>
<td>2005: 1.0&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Scottish Green party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: official election results
Notes: <sup>1</sup>national percentage; <sup>2</sup>percentages of votes in the first round of the parliamentary election; <sup>3</sup>percentages of first preferences.
4. Data, methods, and empirical results

Exploring the electoral support for small parties with a multivariate design is difficult, as we need enough cases to perform such calculations. It is therefore not easy to find surveys that allow for answering the research questions mentioned above. In order to compare the Green voters in twelve countries and two points in time, first around 1990 when Green parties were present for some years but often not seen as established force, and then around 2005, when Green parties were established in most European countries, a wide range of available surveys had to be consulted. For 1990 the cumulative data set of the Eurobarometer Surveys (the “Mannheim File”) was selected and all rounds of the Eurobarometer conducted from 1989 to 1991 were used for the analysis of the then EC-members. Data from the World Values Survey (WVS; Wave 2) were taken for Switzerland and Sweden.\(^9\) Because the Finnish data within this wave of the WVS are problematic, as almost all respondents are coded as farmers,\(^10\) the Finnish Voter Barometer 1990 was selected instead. The analysis of Austria, finally, is based on a national survey conducted by the market institute IFES because the results of the WVS, especially the data on education and occupation seem problematic. Unfortunately, the IFES survey does not include a question concerning religious affiliation or behaviour. For 2005, the second point in time, the selection of data was much easier since all countries are part of the European Social Survey. In order to increase the number of cases, both rounds so far conducted were used.

The dependent variable of the demand side analysis is always voting for the Green party or parties, coded as 1, compared to voting for other parties (coded as 0). In the Eurobarometer and Finnish Voter Barometer the party variable asked for the (national) vote intention, in the World Values Survey for Sweden and Switzerland it is party sympathy. In the European Social Survey and in the IFES-poll for Austria 1990 the variable used is a recall question with respect to the last national election. Without doubt such a mix of voting recall, vote intention, and especially party sympathy is not a perfect solution, but using only surveys with questions

\(^9\) Switzerland and Sweden are included in the WVS 1990 but the coding of occupation was done in an idiosyncratic way that is unfortunately not completely explained in the available codebook. Because the results for Sweden are difficult to interpret this variable is not included in the analysis below. Later versions of this paper will be based on results of the Swedish election study.

\(^10\) 534 out of 588 respondents in the survey (variable 221 occupation) are coded as “10 farmer”; the 54 remaining cases are defined as missing. Source: WVS-Wave 2 distributed by the “Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, Universität zu Köln”.
about the respondent’s current national vote intention – perhaps the best variable for this purpose – would minimize the number of cases and countries considerably. Considering the use of statistical models, we decided to choose a simple binary one because in a multinomial logistic regression it is not clear which party (or party family) should be used as reference category. The amorphous mass of non-voters does not seem appropriate for this purpose, so Green voters are always compared with voters of all other parties.

The independent variables are age, gender, education, type of residence (i.e. the degree of urbanization), religiosity, and social class. The respondents’ age is measured metrically starting with a minimum of 18 years, thus concentrating the study on (potential) voters only. Considering the gender effect, male voters are used as reference category. Education comprises three groups that correspond (roughly) to primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. In those cases where the school leaving age is asked for, as for example in the Eurobarometer, the crucial breaks are 15 years, 16 to 19 years, and 20 years or higher. The type of residence indicates the degree of urbanization and is measured with three categories: villages below 5000 inhabitants, small and medium towns, and towns with at least 100,000 inhabitants. As explained above, in this study the religious dimension is defined as conflict between religious people and the secular, therefore church-going frequency was used with a four scale variable: each week, about each month, once a year, never. In the Eurobarometer this question was asked only to members of a church, non-members were therefore coded as never attending religious services as proposed by Knutsen (2004, 87). Social class, finally, is the most difficult variable to operationalize. If available, we always try to distinguish between farmers, self-employed in non professional occupations, workers, routine non-manual workers (who serve as the reference category), managers, technical experts, and social-cultural specialists. Because it is not always easy to differentiate between unskilled and skilled workers, they are put together in one group. As discussed above, the crucial question, however, is what to do with non labour-force participants who make up about a half of the voting age population. Contrary to many studies, we do not categorize them according to the head of household’s or partner’s employment because we want to stress the importance of

11 In Finland the category of big towns starts with 80,000 inhabitants.
12 In the Finnish survey for 1990 frequency of church going was unfortunately not asked for. As a proxy we use a question that asked whether it is important that religious and moral questions are discussed during the electoral campaign. In the Austrian survey no such proxy variable is available.
13 When there are not enough farmers in the survey, as indicated by large standard errors in the logistic regression, we add them to the category of the self-employed.
14 Routine-non manual workers are a group of voters that is not closely aligned with any particular party or political orientation and is therefore a meaningful choice when looking for a reference category in such an exploration.
experiences connected to the workplace. Therefore, we built four more categories: one for retired people, one for housewives/housemen, one for students, and one for the unemployed.

Table 2 and 3 report the results of the logistic regressions considering the social structure of Green voters around 1990 and 2005. All significant estimates of the odds ratios, based on the 5% level of error, are set in bold, but it has to be kept in mind that the numbers of cases vary.

Looking first at the results of 1990, when Green parties were no longer a new force in party politics but still not an established actor, the data indicate first that Greens were strongly supported by young voters as well as by women in all countries explored. Also higher education proved to be a good indicator as can be seen in the tables where only the Green voters in Switzerland and Sweden did not share this profile. Considering religious behaviour and its impact for party choice, Green voters were secular throughout Europe but less so in Scandinavia. The type of residence, finally, shows larger differences between the countries explored as especially the Austrian and Finnish Greens were supported by urban voters. In several countries, however, this variable is not a good predictor in a multivariate model.

Considering social class, which is the variable that this paper is primarily dedicated to, there are large differences between the twelve countries. Looking first at the category of the unemployed, it is clear that the related hypothesis of political protest does not suit many countries; a high – and significant – value is only reported for the Netherlands. Even students are not always overrepresented in the Green electorate when education is controlled for. Two additional groups outside the labour force – the retired and housewives – are opposed to the Greens in most countries. Looking finally at those voters who are actually part of the labour force, the data indicate that both groups of the traditional economic conflict – workers and the self-employed plus farmers – are underrepresented in the Green electorate. This is also the case for the managers. Only those white collar workers summarized as professionals who have more independence in their job are overrepresented in some countries. Social-cultural specialists are part of this group, but due to the categories of the available variables, unfortunately no further differentiation is possible. Considering the theoretical propositions discussed above, the empirical results are not overwhelming, the estimates with respect to the professionals are strong only in Austria, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

Coming now to the most recent data, the general impression is quite the same as for 1990 but the demographic variables have lost some of their predictive power. Green voters are no
longer especially young and the gender differences appear to have become smaller. Education, on the contrary, has remained a strong indicator. Looking finally at the social classes, where we are now able to explore the voters in more detail thanks to better surveys, two groups are especially strong supporters of Green parties in most countries: students and social cultural specialists, as expected.

Despite some differences between the countries, the overall predictive power of the variables is stronger than often indicated by the literature – and for example stronger than reported by similar analyses for right-wing populist parties (e.g. Norris 2005, 129–148). Regarding only the most recent data, the social structural basis for Green voting is especially pronounced in Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Finland. But even a case like Ireland, which is often considered as an outlier when exploring cleavage politics, fits into the overall pattern and the results presented here confirm similar explorations (see Laver 2004, 197–199).
Table 2: The social structure of green voters around 1990 (odds ratios of multivariate logistic regressions)

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
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<td>1.78</td>
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<td>0.88</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>{0.40}</td>
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<td>0.89</td>
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<td>0.89</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.76</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<td>(704)</td>
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Significant values (p < 0.05) are set in bold.
— (not available as explained in the text)
### Table 3: The social structure of green voters around 2005 (odds ratios of multivariate logistic regressions)

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<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.56</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.73</td>
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Nagelkerke's $R^2$  

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<td>0.09</td>
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5. Parties’ positions and cleavage voting: linking agency with structure

Most of the literature on the social structural basis of party choice does not try to explain differences between countries. In those cases where reasons for observed differences between countries (or parties) are given, the causal explanations are usually derived from macrosociological developments such as economic indicators in the case of the class cleavage. But a more promising approach, especially when defining a comparative exploration of European countries as a most similar systems design, might be to link the structural side, the demand side of party competition, with the supply side of electoral politics: the parties’ programmatic positions. This “top-down” (Evans 2000) or voluntaristic perspective is based on the idea that party elites do have some influence on the structure of their voters, a perspective that is closely linked to strategic decisions of parties in general. The importance of political factors in the analysis of structural voting behaviour was already accentuated by Sartori (1969) and turned out to be a useful concept especially regarding the exploration of Social-democratic parties (Kitschelt 1994). Evans et al., among others, place some emphasis on this idea: “The future strength of class voting therefore depends more upon party strategy and electoral appeals than upon secular trends in society.” (Evans et al. 1999, 100). But also the appearance of new parties, i.e. an important change in the political supply that voters are confronted with on election day, might be linked with sociological analyses of voting behaviour as was demonstrated with respect to the Dutch case (De Graaf et al. 2001). However, in a review article on class voting Evans questions such expectations and interprets the link of class voting and party positions still as “an area of conjecture” (Evans 2000, 411).

The following section presents some tentative considerations on the link of the Green parties’ programmatic offer concerning both economic and cultural issues and the demographic structure of their voters. As in the demand analyses above, this link will be explored as a comparison across countries over two points in time. But because of missing data, the number of countries had to be reduced to some degree.

There are several strategies to analyse the programmatic positions of parties in a comparative way that is suitable for quantitative analyses (for an overview see Laver 200115). The following exploration is based on results from two major expert surveys conducted by Laver and Hunt (1992) and Benoit and Laver (2006). Not all Green parties analysed in this paper are

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15 See also the recent articles in Electoral Studies (Vol. 26, Issue 1).
included in these surveys: for 1990 no data are available for Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, but for 2005 only the (not relevant) British Greens are missing. In order to facilitate the comparison of the programmatic positions, a two-dimensional configuration of the national political spaces based on a left-right economic dimension and a cultural dimension is assumed (see Kriesi et al. 2006). Both expert surveys include an item that measures the parties’ position on “taxes versus spending” and their stances towards social policies like abortion and homosexuality. Scales were recoded so that high values indicate an economic right position and a cultural progressive stance respectively. Since directly comparing the parties’ positions on the 20-point scales of the surveys does not seem to be an appropriate strategy, as their absolute positions might be interpreted differently between the countries, the focus of this analysis is on the Greens’ relative position to their opponents. Therefore, the Green parties’ distance from the political centre was calculated, defined as the distance from the mean position of all parties in the survey weighted by their strength at the national election closest to 1990 and 2005 respectively. Table 4 reports these relative positions on both dimensions and the Greens’ overall distance from the centre calculated as Euclidian distance where both dimensions are treated as similarly important.

Comparing the Greens’ (relative) positions, it is obvious that they take in an economic left stance and a culturally progressive one throughout Europe: both in 1990 and in 2005, the values of all economic positions are negative, indicating that they are to the left of the political centre, whereas all cultural positions have positive signs, indicating a progressive or libertarian programme. In 1990, the mean difference from the centre was larger on the cultural line of conflict than on the economic one: 5.8 versus 3.6 in absolute values. In 2005, the cultural position was again relatively further away from the centre but the difference to the radicalism of the economic one decreased somewhat (6.9 and 5.3). Looking at the change from 1990 to 2005, one result is especially interesting and contradicts most general impressions of the Green parties’ development: their overall distance from the party systems’ centre increased from 6.9 in 1990 to 8.9 in 2005.16 Especially the Belgian and the French Greens are estimated as more polarising forces in 2005, and only the German Greens moved closer to the centre – above all on the economic dimension where they have now arrived almost in the party system’s core; at least according to the country experts’ estimates.

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16 When calculating the average distance in 2005 only for those parties that were also in the survey for 1990, the result does not change (mean: 8.8).
Table 4: Green parties’ economic and cultural positions relative to party systems’ centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Source: calculations based on the data collected by Laver and Hunt (1992) and Benoit and Laver (2006).

Variables: economic position: “increase services versus cut taxes”; cultural position: “pro/anti permissive social policy”.

Note: ¹The Belgian data correspond to the weighted arithmetic means of the Walloon and Flemish Greens’ positions.
In general, both the structural basis of Green votes (Tables 2 and 3) and the parties’ programmatic positions (Table 4) are quite similar when looking at the countries explored. Linking those two sides of party competition, the economic position of Green parties should have some influence on the structural basis of their voters as regards their social class, whereas the cultural position might influence the voters’ support with respect to the religious cleavage. A Green party that is clear to the economic left might theoretically be supported also by workers, but this social group does not align with Green parties because they are seen as far too progressive in cultural terms. So it is more promising to look at the voting behavior of the – better educated – self-employed. The further the party is to the left, the less support it should get from this group. Greens who are especially strong supporters of culturally liberal positions might be attractive for the secular voters only. These correlations are represented as scatter plots in Figure 1, showing the position of the individual countries, i.e. the Green parties’, with respect to their programmatic supply on the x-axis and their supporters’ demographic structure on the y-axis, based on the results of the multivariate analyses reported above. With this quite simple approach – for a more sophisticated one see Elff (2002; 2004) – we obtain information about the direction as well as the strength of the association and we can see if there are outliers. Looking first at the positive and negative signs of the correlations, we see that all show in the postulated direction. Regarding the economy, the more a Green party is to the left the less it gets support from the self-employed. As far as the cultural dimension is concerned, the graph indicates the postulated negative correlation between the support by religious voters and a particular progressive party stance. To get an impression of these models’ strength, the values of the R-Squares are reported as well.

With the help of this approach it is possible to account for some differences in the social structural basis of Green voting in the countries explored. Taking the parties’ positions as starting point – or independent variable –, the Greens seem to have some influence on the structure of their followers. But one should keep in mind that every case has a tremendous influence in such a model. Looking for example at the economic conflict dimension in 2005, especially Finland has to be regarded as an outlier, thus forcefully disturbing the analysis.
Figure 1: Relation of party agency and structure of support

Economic dimension 1990

Correlation (Pearson): 0.33
R²: 0.11

Economic dimension 2005

Correlation (Pearson): 0.47
R²: 0.22

Cultural dimension 1990

Correlation (Pearson): -0.54
R²: 0.29

Cultural dimension 2005

Correlation (Pearson): -0.31
R²: 0.10
6. Conclusion

Despite some strong predictions in the literature on party and electoral politics, social characteristics of voters may have become less important than in the heydays of stable politics in the 1950s and 1960s but they have not become irrelevant, on the contrary. Exploring the Green parties in this respect might serve as a crucial case study, as it is especially this party family whom many authors have accredited to stand completely outside of cleavage politics and to be a harbinger of its complete disappearance.

When looking at the social characteristics of Green voters in twelve European countries, the results reported in this paper showed that Green parties are supported by young, highly educated and secular voters, above the average by women – excluding housewives –, and also by a specific group within the new middle class: the social cultural specialists. In general, the results are more or less similar in the countries explored, indicating that a Green party family also exists when using their voters’ characteristics as an element of its definition.

In a second step of the analysis, the social characteristics of Green voters were linked to the parties’ programmatic appeals. It was assumed that the economic position might have some influence on the support by the self-employed, whereas the cultural stance might have an effect on the voter support considering the religious cleavage. Both arguments were partially confirmed by the empirical analyses presented, but as these were based on the aggregated data for the parties explored, they are strongly affected by (potential) outliers. In a further step of this exploration, the part on the link between structure and agency might be based on an analysis on the individual level of voters, following the example suggested by Elff (2002; 2004). Regarding the demand side of the exploration, so far no interaction terms between the independent variables have been defined, which has also to be considered.
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