Political Parties and Social Groups: New Perspectives and Data on Group and Policy Appeals

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Abstract: This article contributes to the literature on party appeals to social groups by introducing a new dataset on group and policy appeals in Scandinavia (2009–2015). In addition to coding to what social groups parties appeal, we collected information on what policies parties offer for the groups they mention and what goals and instruments they specify for such policies. The latter advance makes it possible to present new insights on the extent to which group appeals are actually substantial and meaningful. We find that left, centre, and right parties appeal to broad demographic categories rather than class. There are almost no appeals to the middle class, although the frequent reference to a category 'all' can be interpreted as a functional equivalent for middle class appeals. Finally, parties clearly still make substantial policy proposals and address concrete policy problems, but with only small differences in such appeals across the left-right spectrum.

Key words: group appeals, policy appeals, realignment, parties, universal welfare state

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1. Introduction

Recent research finds that political parties, in spite of the waning of the political relevance of social class and religion, continue to appeal to social groups to sustain, increase or regain electoral support. Thau's (2018, 2019) content analysis of party programs reports that political parties in the United Kingdom and Denmark never stopped addressing social groups, but replaced class appeals with appeals to 'non-economic groups' (as opposed to 'economic groups'). Hersh and Schaffner's (2013) and Holman et al. (2015)'s experiments show the potential electoral benefits and pitfalls when political parties become very (perhaps overly) specific in to which groups they appeal (as in 'micro-targeting' and 'identity-based appeals', respectively). Relatedly, Abou-Chadi and Wagner's (2019) analysis of broad party manifesto data and electoral outcomes demonstrates that left political parties can benefit electorally from specific policy appeals (like 'social investment') that are attractive to very well-defined social groups, but also that such proposals may put off their traditional working-class voters.

We contribute to this literature by presenting a new dataset on party-political appeals in Scandinavia. The dataset contains comprehensive information on group and policy appeals at a much greater level of detail than the Comparative Manifesto Data indices offer. This allows us to identify empirically and specify more precisely a) which groups political parties actually appeal to, b) to what extent parties indeed target well-defined social groups with their broad policy appeals, and c) what targeted policy packages parties offer with such policy appeals. With the new data we can also shed light on a so far neglected issue, namely the extent to which group appeals are substantial and meaningful. Substantial and meaningful appeals are appeals to social groups that – in addition to mentioning a specific social group – spell out the policy goal(s) for the specified social group and cite the policy instruments to reach the goal(s).

The dataset contains detailed information on 595 Scandinavian party appeals to social groups, the explicit aims or goals of the policies that parties describe, and the measures and means (instruments) parties mention for reaching these goals.

We organize our discussion of the various theoretical perspectives on parties and social groups and our presentation of the dataset around three guiding questions:

- which groups do parties explicitly appeal to?
- how substantial and meaningful are these appeals?
- to what extent do parties differ in their (meaningful) appeals?

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we present a stylized review of the relevant approaches and theories. We distinguish seven analytically different models that we order according to how specific they theorize parties' group appeals to be. The theoretical spectrum ranges from the realignment/constrained partisan model (conjecturing very specific group appeals; Beramendi et al., 2015; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015) to the cartel-party model (postulating no group appeals whatsoever; e.g., Mair, 2013). In Section 3, we justify why we concentrate our data gathering efforts on Scandinavian political parties. Crucial for our purposes is that the two models at both ends of the theoretical spectrum just mentioned single out Scandinavia as the most likely case for their contradictory propositions to be, or to come, true. This methodological choice makes it necessary to zoom in on the uniqueness of Scandinavian politics, in particular the role of the universal welfare state and the pivotal role of one particular social group, namely the middle-class, in generating robust support for universalism. In the period we cover (2009–2015, see below), voters in Sweden, Norway and Denmark consistently ranked topics related to the welfare state (e.g., "welfare", healthcare, elderly care, education) as the most important political issues (Sweden: Oscarsson and Holmberg 2016: 177; Norway: Karlsen 2015: 36; Denmark: Stubager et al.

2016: 20). In Section 3, we also offer arguments why political parties might need to adjust their appeals to social groups in their response to the challenge that middle-class voters might not indefinitely maintain their historical backing of the universal welfare state.

The theoretical considerations of the literature, our considerations on case selection and our take on Scandinavian politics then form the background of our exploratory and descriptive data presentation in Section 4. We present our method, data and findings, mapping which social groups parties in Scandinavia appeal to and listing whether these appeals are accompanied by a specification of policy goals and instruments. Because of the exploratory nature of our study, we allowed for a certain empirically oriented openness and broadness in the coding of groups and the content of appeals. Anticipating our presentation below, we find that political parties still appeal, and very often in a substantial and meaningful way, to social groups, but not quite in the way political science theories of political parties would lead us to expect. The concluding Section 5 reviews these findings and considers the issue of generalizability.

2. Theories on political parties and social group appeals

The literature on political parties has provided a wide range of theoretically informed, but often contradictory, propositions on political parties and group appeals. To organize our review of the relevant theoretical perspectives, we first selected approaches that could offer us an indication about how parties appeal to social groups. Our selection criterion was the following: does this theoretical perspective have something to say about how parties appeal to social groups or not? We found that no less than seven theoretical approaches can be

argued to make more or less definite statements about social-group targeting.[1] To reduce complexity and ease the presentation of the various perspectives, we then ordered the approaches according to how specific they theorize parties' group appeals to be (guiding question 1), adding information on how meaningful and substantial the theory expects such appeals to be (guiding question 2) and summarizing the extent to which parties are expected to differ in their (meaningful) appeals (guiding question 3). We present a stylized review of the various theoretical approaches in the order as visualized in Table 1.

1. The Constrained Partisan Perspective (Beramendi *et al.,* 2015) posits that the social structure and the associated distribution of policy preferences are very complex and cannot be captured by any simple one- or two-dimensional (e.g., economic left-right and value-oriented) representation of electoral politics. Divisions of economic sectors, occupations and skills are politically relevant because they affect policy preferences of four explicitly identified groups: sociocultural professionals, business-finance professionals, low-skilled workers and the petty bourgeoisie. Parties can only respond to their preferences in a constrained manner due to existing policy legacies and the feedback effects of the institutional set-up in which they operate. Moreover, coalition opportunities depend on the relative size of the electoral groups. This perspective would lead us to expect electoral manifestos to refer explicitly to such groups or offer policy packages that provide the glue for an electoral coalition between groups (e.g., social investment to forge a coalition between sociocultural professionals and business-finance professionals). The Constrained

[1] To avoid confusion, we wish to explain why we do not draw on pledge research. Appeals are conceptually different from pledges, although there are party statements that fall into both categories. An appeal mentions a group. It does not need to include an aim or an instrument, but can do so. It can even be retrospective. By contrast, the standard definitions (Royed, 1996: 79; Thomson *et al*., 2012: 12; Naurin, 2014: 1051) that also inform the Comparative Party Pledge Project define a pledge as a future-oriented commitment to take action, to refrain from doing something or to achieve an outcome, sometimes at a certain time. A pledge can refer to a group, but does not need to do so. By contrast, for a group appeal, neither future orientation nor testability is a necessary feature.

Table 1. Theories of political parties and social group appeals, arranged according to specificity of group appeals

	Group appeals: How specific? Which groups?	**Policy appeals: Are aims and/or instruments specified?**	**Convergence on groups and/or policies?**
Theoretical approach			
1. Realignment/Constrained Partisanship Perspective	Very specific Sociocultural professionals, business-finance professionals, low-skilled workers; petty bourgeoisie	Yes, concrete policy packages to forge coalitions between groups	No
2. Power Resources Model	Specific Socio-economic class: workers/labour; affluent/bourgeoisie	Yes, concrete with clear class gradient in proposed policies	No
3. Winners & Losers of Globalization Perspective	Somewhat specific Groups at the intersection of economic and cultural issues positively and negatively affected by globalization	Yes, concrete policies for both losers and winners of globalization	No, divergence due to new cleavage
4. Median Voter Model	Somewhat unspecific in terms of groups other than 'median voters', but sometimes implying 'middle class'	Yes, but shifting towards the median	Yes, policy convergence towards median voter's preferences
5. Catch-all Party Model	Somewhat unspecific cross class appeal, targeting all groups	No concrete policies, low ideological penetration, broad appeals	Yes, in the sense of diffuse group and policy appeals
6. Responsible Party Model	Unspecific	Concrete policy proposals for different groups in party platforms	Yes, with respect to group appeals; no with respect to policies
7. Cartel Party Model	Very unspecific	No meaningful party competition via distinctive aims/instruments in manifestos	Yes

Partisan Perspective typically expects parties to realign, bringing together very specific groups in hybrid electoral coalitions (e.g., Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

2. The Power Resources Model modernizes the largely outdated traditional class-cleavage approach as pioneered by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). According to this model, political parties still appeal to social groups, although they can no longer be considered to be direct representatives of major social groups. The long-term and stable structuring of electorates has gradually given way to different forms of voter-party linkages and party competition. The consequence is dramatically higher levels of electoral volatility and party-system de-

institutionalization (Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2017). Yet, the Power Resources Model holds that economic class still drives individual preference formation, party allegiance and the policy outputs of governments (e.g., Korpi and Palme, 2003). According to the model, we should still find a left-right gradient in group and policy appeals, with left parties catering to the economically disadvantaged, right parties appealing to affluent groups.

3. The Winners & Losers of Globalization Perspective (Kriesi *et al.* 2008: 154-182; 2012) posits that globalization has produced a new socio-structural conflict between 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization. Parties, in particular right-wing populist ones, have adjusted to this by downplaying economic issues in favour of issues along the cultural dimension, stressing anti-immigration and anti-European integration. (Social) policy proposals should reflect this new conflict dimension and address social groups that are (positively or negatively) affected by globalization.

4. The Median Voter Model posits that all parties appeal to the same segments of society (Downs, 1957; Grofman, 2004). Assuming a unimodal preference distribution, the model predicts that (two) parties converge towards the position of the median voter and that there are strong incentives for parties to appeal to middle-class voters. The model's assumptions regarding the structure of party competition are less fitting in multiparty systems than in two-party systems (see Iversen and Goplerud, 2018), but given the pivotal role of middle-class politics in both such systems, it is hard to imagine that parties do not appeal to the middle-class voter at all. Therefore, the model would lead us to expect that middle-class appeals still play a role despite the declining relevance of the traditional cleavage structure and the waning of the mass political party that represents social groups.

5. Slightly different yet related to the expectation of middle-class appeals in party programs is the Catch-all Model, according to which parties try to appeal to all groups in society

simultaneously (Kirchheimer, 1965; Krouwel, 2003). Kirchheimer saw the gradual programmatic approximation of the German and Austrian social-democratic and conservative parties after the Second World War as an example of the (dealignment-induced) trend of milieu-specific mass integration and membership parties turning into catch-all parties. As a cross-class vote-maximization strategy, catch-all parties trade 'ideological penetration' for 'quick electoral success' (Kirchheimer, 1965: 27). The implication is that parties include very broad and uncontroversial appeals in their manifestos without being specific, leading to largely de-ideologized competition.

6. The responsible party model (Klingemann *et al.,* 1994) holds that the main role of parties is not to represent social groups, but to produce clear political visions and policy proposals in party manifestos. These 'party platforms' are presented to voters at elections, and the electorate then decides which party (or coalitions of parties) gets the opportunity to execute its platform. At subsequent elections, voters are assumed to evaluate the party's past performance and appraise the party's new vision and policy proposals for the future. Parties should be responsive to voters' policy preferences if they are interested in winning elections and governing based on their platform. The model is agnostic about the specific policy contents and group–party links, but assumes that clear and different proposals are a prerequisite for appealing to the electorate. Hence, this model would lead us to expect that to the extent that parties appeal to groups at all, they do so in an unspecific and indirect way. In their manifestos, parties make different policy proposals that leave it to the groups themselves to infer whether they will benefit or lose from these proposals.

7. We conclude our review with the Cartel Party Model, which posits that any link between social groups and political parties has been severed (Katz and Mair, 1995, 2009). Modern political parties have evolved from mass social representation organizations, via responsive

and representative parties mediating between citizens and the state, to so-called cartel parties characterized by 'the interpenetration of party and state and by a tendency towards inter-party collusion' (Katz and Mair, 2009: 755). Self-referential cartel parties are not interested in offering policy instruments, solutions or substantial competition. As Mair (2013: 1) put it: 'The age of party democracy has passed. Although the parties themselves remain, they have become so disconnected from the wider society, and pursue a form of competition that is so lacking in meaning, that they no longer seem capable of sustaining democracy in its present form'. In sum, the model leads us to expect that party manifestos hardly differ and contain very few, if any, references to specific social groups. Parties remain diffuse and put little, if any, emphasis on concrete policy proposals or solutions to practical problems.

Admittedly, our stylized review of the various approaches to how political parties appeal to social groups does not do justice to the richness and sophistication of the theoretical frameworks. We also readily concede that we neglect implications that the theories point to that do not concern group appeals. The justification of our procedure is that it was meant to give us some indication of how theories expect parties to appeal to social groups (or not) and how they do so. This information then guides the presentation of our dataset on group and policy appeals. Before we present our dataset, we need to explain and justify why we focus on political parties in Scandinavia and on welfare state issues.

3. Why Scandinavian Political Parties and Why Welfare State Issues?

We concentrate our data gathering efforts on Scandinavian political parties, because the two opposite theoretical accounts of party appeals – the constrained party model and the cartel-

party theory (Table 1; see Section 2) – single out Scandinavia as the most likely case for their contradictory propositions to be, or to come, true.

The Cartel Party Model posits that if anywhere, it is in Scandinavia that cartelization is most likely to occur. Due to the interwovenness between political parties and the state in Scandinavia, the disconnection between parties and social groups should have advanced furthest here (Katz and Mair, 1995: 17; see Lindvall and Rothstein, 2006: 61 and Hagevi and Enroth, 2018: 17 on Sweden). This is because 'a tradition of inter-party cooperation combines with a contemporary abundance of state support for parties, and with a privileging of party in relation to patronage appointments, offices and so on' (Katz and Mair, 1995: 17).

Interestingly, the constrained partisanship literature (Beramendi *et al.*, 2015: 33-35) also singles out the Scandinavian political systems as most likely to have developed new, politically relevant occupational groups, such as sociocultural professionals, to which political parties increasingly appeal and with the support of whom they seek new political realignments. Sociocultural professionals have replaced the working class and its organizations as the core electoral constituency of social democracy in Scandinavia. However, all parties that wish to compete need to cater to this group and seek alignment between these – mostly state-affiliated – professionals, organized labour and business. Scandinavia is thus, from this perspective, an optimal case for scrutinizing claims about whether parties (still) appeal to social groups in a meaningful way, but with an entirely opposite expectation from the one formulated in the cartelization model.

Accepting Scandinavia as a most likely case begs the question of what is special about Scandinavian politics and Scandinavian political parties. The answer is the universal welfare state, whose political viability depends on the support of voters of various social and economic backgrounds and a broad coalition of political parties across the political spectrum

(Hedegaard, 2015). In comparison to other types of welfare states, the broad adhesion to universalism, including among middle-class voters, stands out in Scandinavia (see Jensen and van Kersbergen, 2017).

The inclusion of middle-class voters in universal and redistributive social policy programs implied that they could benefit too. Material self-interest goes a long way in explaining this social group's support for the welfare state, whereas the electoral weight and pivotal significance of middle-class voters prompted political actors from left to right to be very attentive and responsive to its wishes. Moreover, middles-class voters demanded expansion of the welfare state, not just quantitatively, but above all qualitatively. Finally, once in place, the state with its massive service-delivering public sector became the largest provider of – typically professional, bureaucratic middle-class – jobs. In other words, an inclusive, universal welfare state required high-quality and extensive provisions and good middle-class jobs, lest the market and the private sector become the most attractive place to seek an alternative to universal provisions (and high taxes) and public sector jobs (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The socially and politically inclusive universal welfare state had an unintended effect: the generosity and high quality of the provisions – demanded by the middle class in return for support for the welfare state – extended, by implication of universalism, to less fortunate social groups. The combination of universalism, particularly in pensions and healthcare, and the considerable size of the public social budget produced the 'paradox of redistribution': the big and generous welfare states that also provide for the non-needy middle-class voters are more redistributive than those that spend public money exclusively on the underprivileged (Korpi and Palme, 1998). Hence, political parties operating in the universal welfare state context have tended to appeal broadly and non-exclusively to social groups. It

is also for these reasons that a (comparatively speaking) large majority of voters (70 to 80 per cent) in Scandinavia identify with the 'middle class' (Kevins *et al.*, 2019: Figure 1, p. 27).

Despite massive support for the universal welfare state, there is no guarantee that middle-class voters will continue to back it. Changing preferences for social policy and redistribution among middle-class voters may have important repercussions for the political sustainability of the universal welfare state. We list three main arguments that support the expectation that middle-class voters may change their attitude to the universal welfare state, forcing parties to adjust their appeals to social groups (Jensen and van Kersbergen, 2017).

First, there has always been the risk that the quality of public provision does not live up to middle-class standards and expectations. There has always been the supposition that the private sector might offer a better deal. This is likely to reinforce voter demands to allow private solutions and to reduce taxes to make these affordable. In line with Beramendi *et al.* (2015), there is an increasing risk that middle-class voters are willing to abandon universalism. Political parties, if they appeal to social groups at all, should respond to, or at least anticipate, such a change by altering their group appeals.

Second, to the extent that middle-class voters express preferences for lower taxes and private provision, a new window of opportunity opens up for centre-right parties. Such parties may now wish to stress a political program to reallocate public means away from programs that are less important to middle-class voters (e.g., social assistance) or are better handled privately (e.g., private unemployment insurance). Parties should attune their appeals to such new circumstances.

Third, and ironically, the inclusive, collective solutions offered by the universal welfare state increasingly clash with the kind of services and provisions demanded by much

more individually oriented and emancipated citizens. With major risks collectively and comprehensively covered, people demand more individual 'choice' and private solutions, beyond, instead of, or in addition to those already provided by the universal welfare state. Hence, one can expect increasing demands for private healthcare, private education, individual care provisions, or private unemployment insurance, and parties should adapt by adjusting their appeals.

This explains why we focus our explorative data effort on Scandinavian political parties and why we limited the coding (broadly conceived, see Table 3) to welfare state-related issues. With our choice to code welfare policy statements in party manifestos in Denmark, Norway and Sweden as most likely cases, we gain a double methodological advantage: the setup allows us to offer, on the one hand, a preliminary assessment of rival theoretical claims and, on the other hand, a reasonable evaluation of the extent to which our empirical findings are likely to travel beyond the Scandinavian context.

4. Analysis and results

We constructed a dataset that covers elections in the period from 2009 to 2015 and codes welfare policy statements by all parties represented in the parliaments of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. More specifically, we cover the elections in Norway 2009 and 2013 and in Sweden 2010 and 2014. As we explain below, we had to use principle programs for the Danish parties. This gives us 33 party-year observations. To address our three guiding questions (1. which groups do parties explicitly appeal to, 2. how substantial and meaningful are the appeals; 3. to what extent do parties converge or differ regarding questions 1 and 2), we classified statements on three items:

1) To which social groups are parties appealing? For instance, do parties mention specific groups as (deserving) recipients of welfare? In line with our explorative task to map parties' appeals, we use a deliberately broad conception of social groups, which can entail demographic, ethnic or economic aspects. For instance, we have a category for parents as workers, for families, and for workers. The worker category only entails appeals to workers primarily as an economic and professional group, whereas the family category is strictly family-related. The category 'parents as workers' is at the intersection of both dimensions, often dealing with the reconciliation of work and family, including the obstacles women face. 2) What measures and means (instruments) do parties specify in their policy proposals? For instance, do parties advocate that more or fewer conditions and obligations be attached to social rights and program benefits (for instance, means testing)? 3) What are the explicit aims/goals of the policies proposed?

Table 2 lists all parties studied by country. We coded their party manifestos according to the three aspects described above: group mentioned, instrument indicated and aim/goal formulated. We chose manifestos because they are comparable, comprehensive and carefully crafted textual outputs of parties as collective actors and provide the blueprint for the communication in campaigns and for policy choices (Bischof and Senninger, 2017: 6).[2]

[2] Danish parties are exceptional because they do not publish electoral manifestos that are similar or comparable to what the parties in Sweden and Norway produce. We have tried to solve this problem by specifically looking at *Socialdemokratiet*: 'Princippprogram Hånden på hjertet', 2011; *Venstre*: 'Princippprogram Fremtid i frihed og fællesskab', 2006; *Dansk Folkeparti*: 'Dansk folkeparti Princippprogram', October 2002, 'Dansk Folkeparti – Arbejdsprogram', September 2009, and several brochures that can be found on the webpage https://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/; *Socialistisk Folkeparti*: 'Princippprogram', 2012; *Enhedslisten*: 'Enhedslistens princippprogram', 2014; *Liberal Alliance*: 'Princippprogram' and 'Arbejdsprogram' (not dated;

To stay true to our exploratory ambition, we did not rely on pre-defined Manifesto categories and unitized quasi-sentences from the Comparative Manifesto Project (MARPOR, Volkens *et al*., 2018). We also considered using MARPOR categories devoted to groups (such as 'labour groups'), but found that they exhibited very low frequencies and included only a few groups. We first marked whole sentences or quasi-sentences (i.e., parts of sentences) as code-lines for the three categories and then systematically placed them in one of the categories. This resulted in country/party overview tables, which we used to write country and party summaries. We then translated these data into English and merged them into a general overview of all countries and all parties, resulting in a 31-page source table (with over 8000 words and 595 appeals) for the analyses presented below.

Table 2: Political Parties Covered in the Dataset

Denmark	Label	Norway	Label	Sweden	Label
Socialdemokratiet	left	Arbeiderpartiet	left	Socialdemokraterna	left
Venstre	centre	Høyre	right	Centerpartiet	centre
Dansk Folkeparti	right	Fremskrittspartiet	right	Folkpartiet	centre
Enhedslisten	left	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	left	Nya Moderaterna	right
Liberal Alliance	centre	Kristelig folkeparti	centre	Sverigedemokraterna	right
Radikale Venstre	centre	Senterpartiet	centre	Vänsterpartiet	left
Socialistisk Folkeparti	left				
Konservative Folkeparti	right				
Alternativet	left				

To streamline the data and get an overall impression of how parties in Scandinavia appeal to groups, which instruments they indicate and what goals they specify, we used the source table to create a summary table, identifying synonyms that allowed us to reclassify all group

accessed 18 October 2016 at https://www.liberalalliance.dk/); *Det Konservative Folkeparti*: 'Giv ansvaret tilbage: Det Konservative Folkepartis partiprogam', September 2012; *Alternativet*: 'Partiprogram' (not dated; accessed 14 May 2016); *Det Radikale Venstre*: 'Det Radikale Venstres Principprogram', February 1997.

mentions into fewer and broader categories. These are the 14 groups (13 + a residual category) we identified: all, elderly, (labour) immigrants, the weak/needy, families, students, working parents, the strong/healthy, youth, workers, social benefit recipients, self-employed, teachers, and a residual category. The resulting table is still too long to report in the text (12 pages; online appendix), but in Table 3 we report a very condensed version, primarily to give examples of which synonyms went into the broader group categories, what kind of instruments are mentioned, and which goals are specified. Table 3 gives a summary overview of the (near-) synonyms and related groups we collapsed into the final 14 group categories after the three-stage reduction of the initial 595 group appeals. All steps were performed by experts based on raw data collection by student assistants.

We first discuss some general results and insights gained from this exercise and then look at the results from the perspectives of the approaches discussed in Section 2. We learned two main things. First, at the level of group mentioning, the category 'all' seemed to be by far the largest (confirmed below). With regard to the instruments and goals that parties formulate when they refer to 'all', we noticed that most references are to the universalist features of the Scandinavian welfare state: education and healthcare, and what we might summarize as an 'inclusive labour market' (e.g., full employment, work for all, etc.). One tentative conclusion is that – given the broad middle-class nature of Scandinavian society we allude to in Section 3 – referring to 'all' de facto means referring to the middle class.

Second, we noticed that parties sometimes refer to groups but do not specify a particular instrument or goal, implying that some mentions of groups are uncommitted or unsubstantiated. For example, it makes a difference whether a party merely states the importance of entrepreneurs and the self-employed or whether it also specifies as an

Table 3: Group Appeals, Policy Instruments and Aims: Short Summary of the Online Appendix

Level 1 (groups/mention)	Level 2 (instrument)	Level 3 (aim)
All • everyone, regardless of … • citizens • all residents	• progressive taxation • education and work • lower taxes • free education	• equal possibilities and solidarity • flexible labour market • lifelong education • work for all
Elderly • elderly over X years • pensioners	• flexible retirement age • support • housing, better health services	• more elderly volunteering • work longer • live home as long as wanted
(Labor) immigrants • minorities • foreign workers	• get access to work • language training	• contribute to society • open society • equality
The weak/the needy • the vulnerable • mentally ill, the disabled	• personal responsibility • social benefits • support • access to healthcare	• contribute to society • support • reduce social differences
Families • next of kin • families with … (e.g., children)	• freedom organize family life • balance between work and family • affordable daycare	• good framework for family life • full daycare coverage
Students • students with children • students between X and Y years	• include individual skills • education tailored for the individual • free choice between public or private	• education of high quality • develop skills • personal development
Parents (as workers) • families who work • parents with small children	• flexible work hours • flexible maternity leave • possible to combine work and family	• be with their children • freedom of choice • combine family and work • gender equality
The strong and healthy • those with high(est) income	• higher taxes, contribution by ability	• fair tax system
Youth • children • children in school	• economic support to education • help with homework	• education for all • equal opportunity
Workers • employees • public employees • part-time workers • skilled workers	• wages reflect efforts • shorter working time • right to full-time work	• as many as possible in work • better wages and life conditions • flexible working hours • pay to work • right to full-time job • equal pay for equal work
People on social benefits • unemployed • recipients of social benefits	• public safety net • lower tax on work income • (duty to be in) activity • combine welfare and work	• pay to work • everyone should contribute • work for all
Self-employed workers • companies and self-employed • companies	• lower taxes, easier legislation, education promoting self-employment • social responsibility	• create economic growth • make it easier to be self-employed
Teachers	• education	• better teachers

• researchers • young researchers	• invest in young researchers • lower starting salaries	• effective studies should be rewarded
Rest category • Users of public services • those without equity • both parts in labour market	• public services consist of good basic services • higher taxes • create own terms	• equality • reduce housing prices • flexible labour market • increased employment

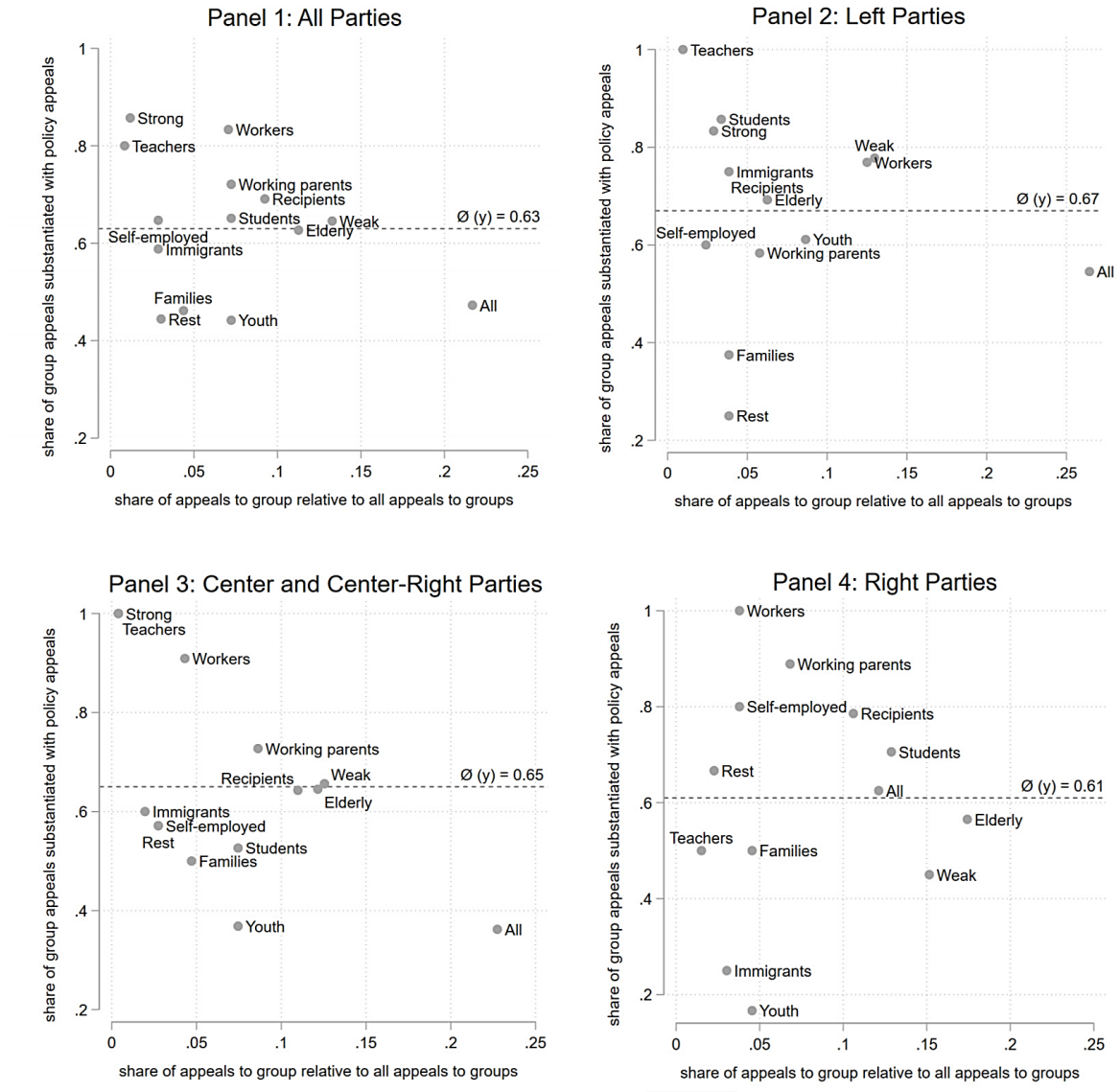
instrument that business taxes must be lowered to encourage and support innovation and entrepreneurship. Since this could be regarded as a partial confirmation of the idea that party competition is shallow and devoid of meaning, we used this information to examine how substantiated appeals to groups are and whether party families differ in this aspect. We found 595 appeals to groups, which we coded into the 14 overall categories listed above. If both a policy instrument *and* a goal were specified, we coded the appeal as substantial. This allows us to plot the appeals to groups against how substantial those appeals are and draw a distinction between mere group appeals and policy appeals.

We divided parties according to the left-centre-right trichotomy, using the established party-family codes from the Comparative Manifesto Project (MARPOR, Volkens *et al*. 2018). Ecological, socialist and social-democratic parties are aggregated as left parties; agrarian, Christian-democratic, centre and liberal parties form the centre; conservative and right-wing populist parties are aggregated as right parties hereafter. The results for all parties irrespective of party label are shown in Panel 1 of Figure 1; the results for left, centre and right parties are shown in Panels 2-4, respectively.

Which groups do parties explicitly appeal to?

The x-axis in Figure 1 shows the appeals to each group as a (%) share of all the (595) group appeals we found. Panel 1 summarizes the results and allows us to compare them with the specific results in Panel 2-4 for left, centre, and right parties. A key finding that emerges from the figure is that references to all are more frequent than references to any specific

Figure 1: Group appeals



group, although there is a clear left right gradient. Appeals to all are dominant among left (26%) and centre (23%) parties, but right parties use such universalist language much less (12%).

Another key finding is the lower salience of references to specific socio-economic status groups when compared to the prominence of life-course and demographic group definitions. Almost every party strongly stresses the particular deservingness of the young and the (frail) elderly, while the most mentioned unambiguously economic category are recipients (of transfers/help). Since the prominence of demography over economic status is

one of our main findings and echoes the findings of Thau (2018, 2019), we wanted to ensure that this result was not an artefact of how we collapsed or labelled the groups. A year after the analysis, we recoded all group appeals according to whether they concerned economic groups, life-cycle groups, or both. We did so without being aware in which of the 14 groups an appeal was categorized. The result was that 49% of the appeals concerned life-course groups, 23% addressed economic groups and the remaining 28% had some elements of both (this mostly pertains to the all category). If we break this down by left, centre and right partisanship, we find that appeals to demographic groups dominate all three categories. However, the dominance is less strong for left parties (40% demographic vs. 28% economic) compared to centre (49% vs. 17%) and right (55% vs. 22%) – in line with findings of Evans and Tilley (2017, Chapter 6). Even upon reconsidering the way we collapsed the group categories to 14, the possible alternatives are within (rather than across) the demographic groups. For instance, the category the weak may be disaggregated further, and appeals to people with (or relatives of people with) dementia may also speak to the category the elderly. If 'weak' simply meant 'poor', this could undermine the conclusion. However, we have a separate group labelled the poor. Vice versa, one could aggregate the categories further. Yet the plausible combinations – such as combining families and youth – do not alter the impression of a dominance of life-cycle over economic group appeals.

If we zoom in on the party differences in the appeals to economic groups that we did find, the picture is mixed. We find few direct appeals to classes or economic groups in the sense that social cleavage or power resources theory leads us to expect. One notable exception is that the left parties are more inclined to appeal to workers than centre-right parties. However, these differences are often driven by more outspoken smaller parties that single out and advocate policies to support more specific economic groups. Examples are the

Swedish Left Party, which wants to improve insurance for unemployed people (2010) and aims at 'strengthening the position of the working class' (2013), or the Swedish Centre Party, which repeatedly refers to entrepreneurs as a pivotal group and suggests lowering business taxes (2013). Otherwise, we find many appeals to the weak and vulnerable in general, but they are not limited to the left side of the party spectrum, as Panel 4 of Figure 1 shows. In all three countries, right and centre-right parties appeal especially to people with low incomes, the vulnerable, and the unemployed.

We did not find explicit references to the middle class either – and even references to the middle of society more broadly were rare. For instance, the Left Party in Sweden (2013) promises 'welfare for all' (Välfärd för alla) but especially emphasizes that the middle class should benefit from welfare. Instead, the more general notion that the welfare state should benefit all can be found in most party programs, as reflected in the clear dominance of the 'all' category among left and centre parties in Panels 2 and 3 (this is less true for right parties). Virtually all parties combined this idea with the demand that it must 'pay to work'. For all but the socialist left parties – which focus on increasing wages – this means that social rights come with the obligation to work and that benefit schemes should not create disincentives to work and to 'contribute'. Again, our interpretation of these findings is that 'all' de facto means middle class in Scandinavian society.

Surprisingly, references to migrants make up less than 5% of all direct appeals to groups – and as Panels 2-4 show, this is true irrespective of partisanship.

In sum, our answers to guiding question 1 suggest that left, centre, and right parties appeal to broad demographic categories rather than class. The next section discusses to what extent the appeals are substantial and meaningful.

How substantial and meaningful are these appeals?

The following results are based on the data from our extensive results tables of policy goals and instruments (see online appendix; Table 3 presents the summary). The y-axis in the figures indicates the percentage share of appeals substantiated with policy instruments and policy goals. On average, parties substantiate 63% of their appeals to social groups with instruments and goals. There is a slight left-right gradient in the extent to which group appeals are substantiated with policy appeals. While left parties mention aims and instruments in 67% of the cases and centre parties in 65%, this is only the case for 61% of the appeals by right parties. The differences are more pronounced for specific groups that right parties often appeal to. For instance, in terms of relative importance, right parties prioritize appeals to the weak and the elderly, while such appeals are less pronounced among left parties. However, the appeals of right parties to both groups are less often substantiated with policy appeals (i.e., policy aims and instruments).

There is, however, one important exception from this left-right gradient in the concreteness of policy-appeals: When discussing guiding question 1, we pointed out that appeals to 'all' are dominant among left and centre parties, whereas right parties are less universalist. However, those fewer appeals to 'all' by right parties are more specific (>60%) than the appeals of left parties (50%) and in particular compared to the appeals of centre parties (<40%). Notwithstanding this exception, the left-right gradient suggests that group appeals by parties characterized as populist right are less often combined with concrete policy ideas. Given that three out of five right parties we look at are right-wing populist parties, this lower degree of substantiated appeals matches findings about the (electorally successful) very simple language of populists (Bischof and Senninger, 2017).

In terms of the actually proposed policy measures and aims, based on a close reading of our results in Table 3 and the underlying original (not condensed and translated) results tables, we still find concrete proposals and positions. In particular, there are four positions that are shared so widely across parties that one can speak of a welfare state consensus. This is particularly true if we look at the mainstream parties. Most notably, and in line with the findings of recent studies (collected in Edling 2019), Scandinavian centre-right parties are hard to distinguish from their social-democratic competitors with regard to welfare state rhetoric. In line with the implications of the catch-all proposition, we can decipher four statements around which parties converge: First, virtually all parties promise to make work pay (again), often in tandem with calls for activation or warnings against overly generous schemes. Improving the wage level is a less common aim. A second very popular and consensual aspect that parties address is customized healthcare, i.e., the right (or freedom) to choose between (state-financed) market solutions and classic public options. Third, Scandinavian parties across the ideological spectrum stress the importance of education and lifelong learning to prepare people for the knowledge economy. More specifically, when we recoded all appeals according to whether they conform to the idea of social investment, we found that almost half of the appeals have a social investment focus (although the three right-wing populist parties we looked at devoted only every third appeal to social investment). Finally, a fourth aspect around which most of the party programs revolve concerns (the creation of) better jobs. Overall, this welfare-state consensus interpretation is in line with other findings and claims about the strong homogeneity of party rhetoric in Scandinavia in general (Groß and Rotholz, 2003 for Norway, Edling 2019 for the Nordic countries, Horn and van Kersbergen 2019 for social investment).

Based on Kriesi et al., we argued that parties, in particular right-wing populist parties, should adjust by downplaying economic issues in favour of cultural issues, stressing anti-immigration, anti-European integration and welfare chauvinism sentiments. The data we collected on the level of direct mentions of groups, policy measures and policy aims confirm this for the Danish People's Party, the Norwegian Progress Party and the Sweden Democrats. For example, the Sweden Democrats (2010) want to make provision of healthcare and care more generous and accessible but demand that free medical and dental care for illegal immigrants be cancelled. The party claims that there is a 'contradiction between welfare and multiculturalism', and that national values must be preserved in order to defend the welfare state. Immigrants must thus be excluded from welfare benefits (2013). As of now, we cannot say whether there is contagion from the (populist) right to (non-populist) centre-right parties. Some parties – for instance Liberal Alliance (DK), Socialist Venstre (N), Arbeiderpartiet (N) and the Moderate Party (SWE) – appeal to migrants specifically. In Norway and Sweden, the adaption of positions from the populist right is a more recent phenomenon than in Denmark, where a shift from 'welfare nationalism' to a 'culturalization' of the integration debate started as early as the 1990s (Petersen and Jønsson, 2012: 97-99, 123-142) and where Venstre and the Social Democrats increasingly cater to the Danish People's Party. Still, results in Figure 1 show that direct references to migrants are rare (<5%) for all party groups and less often substantiated with policy appeals than other appeals.

In sum, the general finding is that parties still make substantial policy proposals and still address concrete policy problems, although there are also indications that the way parties address these challenges are not so different across the left-right spectrum.

Overall – with regard to the two approaches that mark the extremes in Table 1 – we find only partial support for the constrained partisanship model and very limited support for cartelization (again, at least with regard to the implications for group appeals we focus on here). We found little evidence that directly supports the constrained party model, according to which we should either find appeals to specific groups like sociocultural professionals, business-finance professionals, low-skilled workers or the petty bourgeoisie, or policy packages that help forge electoral coalitions between the parties that represent them. We find references that are in line with the social investment focus that both the sociocultural professionals and the business-finance professions favour. However, these groups are not explicitly mentioned, and the Scandinavian parties do not differ in their declared support for lifelong learning and education to master the knowledge economy or for policy measures that help reconcile work and family life. Importantly, this does not mean that party competition has become meaningless. By contrast, the majority of the group appeals by parties is substantiated with aims and policy instruments. Likewise, a closer reading of our result tables indicates that parties still try to address societal problems.

5. Conclusion

We contribute to the literature on party appeals to social groups by introducing a new dataset on party-political appeals in Scandinavia in the period 2009–2015. In addition to coding to what social groups parties appeal, we collected information on what policies parties offer for the groups they mention and what goals and instruments they specify for such policies. The latter addition makes it possible to present new insights on the extent to which policy/group appeals are actually substantial and meaningful.

Our discussion of the relevant theories and the presentation of the data is structured by three guiding questions: 1) which groups do parties explicitly appeal to; 2) how substantial and meaningful are these appeals, and 3) to what extent do parties differ in their (meaningful) appeals? Against the background of seven theoretical perspectives on party-group linkages that we found to be relevant and our take on parties and middle-class support in the Scandinavian universal welfare state we find the following.

First, there are very few appeals to class in general and to the middle class in particular. Instead, we find many appeals to demographically defined groups, a finding that is in line with evidence on the UK as presented by Evans and Tilley (2017) and Thau (2019).

Second, and different from recent findings in the literature, we observe frequent appeals to a category we label 'all' (in line with what Thau 2018: 183 finds for the Danish Social Democrats). Combining the information on the appeals to 'all' with our new data on instruments and aims that parties specify, we conclude that references to 'all' almost exclusively concern the characteristics of the universal welfare state: education, healthcare and the inclusive labour market. We infer from this that – given the broad middle-class nature of Scandinavian society – referring to 'all' is, for all intents and purposes, the functional equivalent of a middle-class appeal.

Third, and specifically relevant for Scandinavia, we find that there is (still) a remarkably broad welfare state consensus among left and right parties. This consensus concerns four policy statements that most parties make: customize healthcare by allowing more individual choices; make work pay; prepare people for lifelong learning; provide better jobs.

The conclusion is that there is only modest evidence for the two extremes of the seven relevant theories we discussed. First, we did not find evidence for the complex

realignment and adjustment strategies emphasized in the constrained party model. Because Scandinavia is a most likely case for this theory, it is unlikely that we will find such complex realignment and adjustment strategies elsewhere. Second, because the majority of the appeals to groups we coded are also substantiated with policy instruments and goals, our data do not support the cartelization proposition either. Because this theory also singled out Scandinavia as the most likely case and we did not find party competition to be shallow and completely devoid of meaning here, it is unlikely that this is the case elsewhere.

The general conclusion, which is broadly relevant beyond the Scandinavian context, is that there is no clear evidence for the specific group orientation of parties that the constrained partisanship literature conjectures nor much support for the cartelization literature's supposition that party competition has become entirely empty. While the complexities of coding and summarizing group appeals forced us to focus on new data, future studies should assess whether this conclusion and our specific findings, such as the dominance of demographic groups and frequent appeals to all, also apply to earlier periods.

Acknowledgements:

We want to thank all the participants of the comparative politics section and the members of the Work in Progress talks of the Democracy unit at the Social Science Research Center Berlin/WZB for instructive feedback. Michael Baggesen Klitgaard provided particularly helpful comments on the very first draft for this paper at the Danish Political Science Association Annual Meeting in 2016.

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