“It’s the economy, stupid” – But what kind of economy?

Inauguraldissetation

zur Erlangung des Akademischen Grades

eines Dr. phil.,

vorgelegt dem Fachbereich 02 – Sozialwissenschaften, Median und Sport

Der Johannes Gutenberg- Universität

Mainz

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Živković Slaven

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much joy, that I can’t put into words, and every minute spent with him means a whole world to me.

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Abstract

An abundance of the literature shows that the economy always mattered for election outcomes and voters' political behaviour. The effect is multifaceted, as mushrooming literature points to the importance of different dimensions of the economic vote – valence, positional, and patrimony. The three dimensions have so far been mostly explored in relatively self-contained pieces of literature. In this research, I take a step further and ponder the importance of the interplay of two economic vote dimensions (valence and positional) on vote choice and voters' political interests.

To test the interplay between economic vote dimensions and their effect on voting behaviour and political interests, I take redistribution preferences as a positional economic issue and the rise of income inequality as a valence economic condition. I analyse the effect of these predictors on vote choice in times after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, given that these topics gained salience in the mentioned period. So, the overall research question of this project is - Have people who wanted more redistribution punished incumbents who were in office during the rise of economic inequality?

Analysis of a Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset, comprising 50 election studies, from 31 countries, in 10 years, reveal that redistribution preferences matter for vote choice. However, its effect is moderated by rising levels of inequality, the party's ideological leanings, and incumbency status. When inequality is higher, voters who want more redistribution often opt for left-wing parties in opposition. Additionally, voters, more often than not, cast a vote which aligns their redistribution preferences with party stances on the issue. The effect is further amplified in countries with a higher rise in income inequality.

These findings open new avenues of research in economic voting and suggest that the interplay of economic vote dimensions should also be considered when estimating the economy's effect on vote choice.

Keywords: redistribution, inequality, positional economic voting, GFC, CSES

Abstrakt

Eine Fülle von bisherigen Forschungsergebnissen zeigt, dass die wirtschaftliche Lage stets von Bedeutung für Wahlergebnisse und das politische Verhalten der Wählenden gewesen ist. Dieser Effekt ist vielseitig, wie die wachsende Literatur zeigt, welche auf die Bedeutung verschiedener Dimensionen des wirtschaftlich-motivierten Wahlverhaltens hindeutet: „valence“, „positional“ und „patrimonial voting“. Diese drei Dimensionen wurden bisher meist in relativ eigenständigen Literatursträngen untersucht. In dieser Forschungsarbeit gehe ich einen Schritt weiter und prüfe, welche Bedeutung das Zusammenspiel zweier dieser Dimensionen (Valenz und Issue-Positionen) für die Wahlentscheidung und die politischen Interessen des Elektorats hat.

Um die Wechselwirkung zwischen den Dimensionen wirtschaftsbezogenen Wählens und deren Effekt auf Wahlverhalten und politische Interessen zu testen, konzentriere ich mich auf Umverteilungspräferenzen als positionelle ökonomische Issue und den Anstieg der Einkommensungleichheit als valenzökonomische Bedingung. Ich analysiere die Wirkung dieser Prädiktoren auf die Wahlentscheidung in Zeiten nach der globalen Finanzkrise von 2008, da diese Themen im genannten Zeitraum an Bedeutung gewonnen haben. Die übergeordnete Forschungsfrage dieser Arbeit lautet also: Haben Bevölkerungsteile, die mehr Umverteilung befürworteten, Amtsinhaber abgestraft, die während eines Anstiegs der wirtschaftlichen Ungleichheit im Amt waren?

Auf Daten der Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) gestützte Analysen, die 50 Wahlstudien aus 31 Ländern über einen Zeitraum von 10 Jahren umfassen, zeigen, dass Umverteilungspräferenzen für die Wahlentscheidung von Bedeutung sind. Ihr Effekt wird jedoch durch steigende Grade von Ungleichheit, den ideologischen Ausrichtungen einer Partei und dem Amtsinhaber-Status moderiert. Bei höherer wirtschaftlicher Ungleichheit entscheiden sich Wählende mit einer Präferenz für mehr Umverteilung oft für linke Oppositionsparteien. Des Weiteren geben Wählerinnen und Wähler in der Regel ihre Stimme einer Partei, deren Haltung zu Umverteilungsfragen mit ihren eigenen Präferenzen übereinstimmt. In Ländern mit einem stärkeren Anstieg der Einkommensungleichheit zeigt sich dieser Effekt noch verstärkt. Diese Erkenntnisse eröffnen neue Forschungsmöglichkeiten zum Economic Voting und legen nahe, dass die Wechselwirkung zwischen den Dimensionen wirtschaftsbezogenen Wählens ebenfalls bei der Ermittlung des Einflusses wirtschaftlicher Faktoren auf die Wahlentscheidung berücksichtigt werden sollte.

Schlüsselwörter: Umverteilung, Ungleichheit, Positional Economic Voting, GFC, CSES

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1. Introduction

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007-2008 caused significant changes in the economy, and prompted a wide debate on the new economic consensus. The GFC led to the Great Recession, which was the most severe global recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Various social/political actors recognized that a problem in the economy exists, and that something should be done to address it. Some argued for traditional neo-liberal solutions to the problem. However, there was a growing demand, supported by a loud group of protestors and dissatisfied citizens around the world, for change. This group advocated for the return to Keynesianism, a macroeconomic theory which is based on more state intervention and increased government expenditure.

Shortly after the GFC, the Occupy Wall Street Movement made worldwide headlines. This US based movement, which soon gave rise to the broader Occupy Movement in many countries across the globe, strongly protested against rising economic inequality. The Occupy Movement made many aware of the major economic disparities that exist in all modern societies. Additionally, they pointed out the very negative trend of rising income inequality, and the potential effects that this inequality might have on the economy, but also beyond it on politics, peoples' lives, the educational system and many other areas. Rising income inequality, despite being present for decades, became an important topic overnight, and discussions on how it should be addressed started. Again, there was a widespread expectation that national governments should do something with respect to that problem.

Both of these events showed that citizens have expectations that countries will act. They wanted governments to get involved in the economy more often, not only when they have to rescue major banks. Some demanded an increase in government expenditure, and a fairer redistribution of income across society. At the same time, the GFC and the period after it brought many other challenges to the forefront of global political debates, such as identity politics, environment issues, immigration, and many others. So, my research questions are - (1) was the demand for more redistributive policies strong enough to affect vote choice? (2) Have people who wanted more redistribution punished incumbents who were in office during the rise of economic inequality? (3) Was the electoral punishment equal when it came to left-wing and right-wing governments? (4) Are those who want more redistribution voting for parties/candidates who advocate for redistributive policies?

To provide answers to these questions, in this thesis I test the effect of a positional economic issue – preferences for redistribution on the support for incumbents. In the thesis, I explore the direct effect of preferences for redistribution on votes for incumbents (conditional on those incumbents' ideological leanings). Additionally, I analyse income inequality as a moderator in the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice. Lastly, I take those who want more redistribution, and test if they are voting *correctly*, that is in line with what we would expect based on their position on this particular economic issue. These three empirical steps should help us better understand the relationship between redistribution preferences and voting in the times after the Global Financial Crisis. This research is a comparative study which makes use of cross-sectional survey data, but also aggregate economic indicators.

In this thesis, I depart from previous research in several ways. First, I explore whether there is a link between economic policy preferences and the performance evaluations of incumbents. To do that, I analyse how taking a position on the positional economic issue (redistribution preferences) affect voters' likelihood to support incumbents. Second, I disentangle the relationship between two dimensions of the economic vote – valence and positional through their interplay. For that, I take income inequality as the valence condition, and the moderator in the relationship between redistribution preferences (as an economic positional issue) and vote choice. I test how changing levels of income inequality affect the relationship between redistribution preferences and voting for incumbents. This is a novel approach, as I am moving from general economic performance (whether measured by aggregate data or individual level perceptions) as a valence issue that dominates economic voting literature, towards other economic indicators which can also be treated as issues of valence, such as income inequality. Previous findings strongly relied on one or two economic indicators (GDP and unemployment), and have not taken into account other aspects of economy. I move past that, and take into account distribution of wealth in the society, both actual distribution (aggregate indicators) and preferences for redistribution (individual-level indicators). Lastly, I make the first comparative exploration of the link between redistribution preferences and vote choice, and test whether the levels of correct vote (based on redistribution policies) are influenced by rising levels of income inequality.

The main findings provide evidence that redistribution matters for vote choice. Matching my expectations, voters who want more redistribution were more likely to punish incumbents who then support them. However, not all incumbents suffered the same scope of punishment, nor all the opposition gained same benefits. By distinguishing parties on two criteria, incumbency status and parties' ideology, I find evidence showing that the punishment effect is particularly pronounced for right-wing incumbents, while biggest gains went to left-wing opposition. These effects are further strengthened by the moderating effect of rising income inequality. Where rise of inequality is higher, the stronger the punishment is for incumbents (particularly right-wing incumbents) and gains for opposition (particularly left-wing opposition). This moderating effect proved to be particularly useful in explaining the dynamics of support once incumbents and opposition parties are accounted for. The higher the income inequality, the more likely voters who want more redistribution are to support left-wing opposition groups. This is correct for both countries with right-wing incumbents and countries with left-wing incumbents. The finding provide evidence that positional voters take both ideology but also incumbency status into account, showing that the valence and positional mechanisms of vote choice should not be examined in self-contained literatures. Lastly, I find that across the countries in my sample, on average 75% of voters (based on the preferences for redistributive policies) do vote correctly. Further, the more inequality there is, the more political options are polarized on the issue, making them more distinct and thus creating the political circumstances in which voters can more easily recognize which option is correct for them. In that respect, rising income inequality can be normatively helpful and desirable.

1.1. The research problem

Protests about economy and economic issues became very crowded everywhere around the world, even in countries which belong to the group of richest. One thing was common, for many widely different places – citizens were not happy with decisions made to fix the economy after GFC.

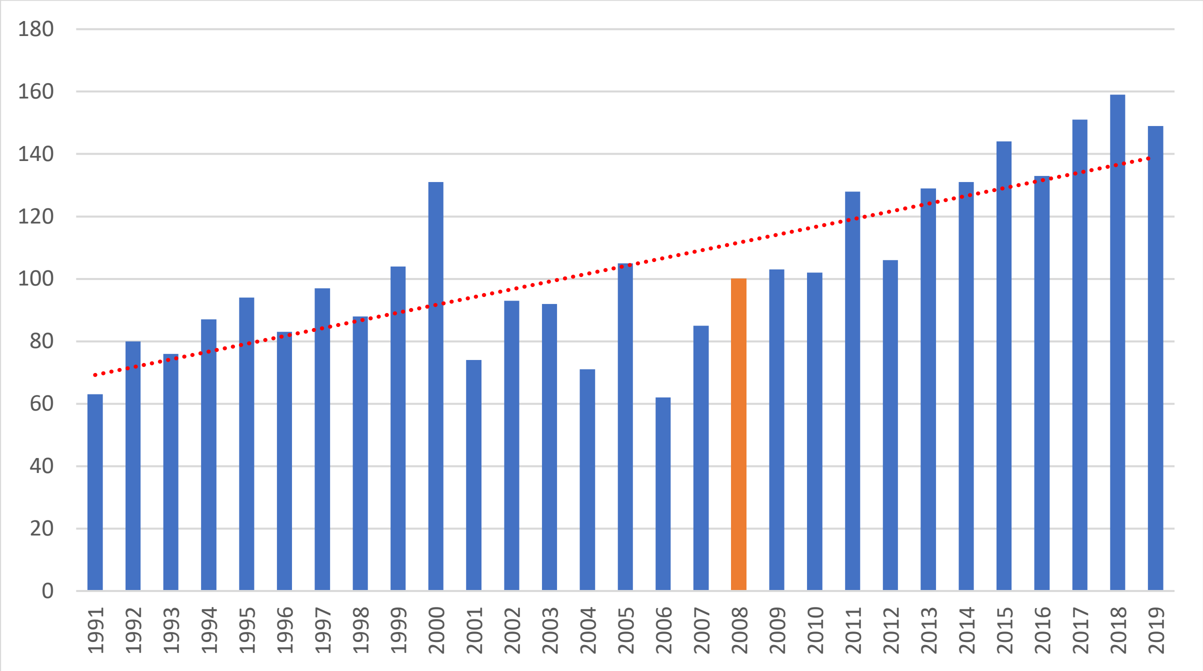
Italy, October 2012. More than 100,000 protestors are on the streets across the whole country during the so-called "No-Monti Day," protesting against the new austerity and tax policies, imposed by the Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti. Most of the protestors are carrying signs reading "Cuts, only cuts" and are marching to denounce a series of structural reforms and new policies proposed by the government. Italy's unemployment rate at the time stood at 10.7%, but was significantly higher among younger people, as was often highlighted by various politicians and pundits. The protestors lament that the Italian government is not addressing these issues correctly and is failing to implement appropriate policies to tackle the problem.

The United Kingdom, October 2014. Tens of thousands of protestors are marching through central London, and many others are protesting in their home cities (with large protests in Glasgow and Belfast, to name a few), in an attempt to fight for a pay rise. The protestors are strongly opposing several Conservative-Liberal coalition government's policies, which in their view, are designed to *"rescue banks and not people"* (Johnston, 2014). They are joined by doctors and hospital workers who earlier that month started a protest in response to the government's choice to implement a 1% pay rise for all NHS (National Health Service) staff. This is not the first time this government, led by David Cameron, has faced nationwide protests. Tensions and dissatisfaction with earlier governments decision also contributed to these increasingly massive rallies.

Hungary, December 2018. Thousands of Hungarians are marching through Budapest on a sub-zero temperature night, mainly shouting "Vik-ta-tor" (an amalgamation of Viktor and dictator), one of the main chants of the protest, directly aimed at Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Orban is, without a doubt, the leading political figure in the country. The so-called "slave law" sparked the protests. The "slave law" is one of the new laws which will allow employers to demand up to 400 hours of overtime annually (increase from 250 hours) and will enable employers to delay overtime payments for up to three years. The new policy had little support among Hungarians, with some polls showing that 80% of citizens are against it (John & Keleti, 2018). However, Orban's government insisted that this new policy is in the "best interest of Hungarian workers," allowing them to work and earn more.

Economic dislocation caused the citizens' protests. Decisions made by governments, whether these eventually became laws or not, provoked reactions from citizens. It seems like there is no other area where this is as visible as in the economy. According to Mass Mobilization Protest data, almost one-third of all protests worldwide in the last decade (since 2010) had economic issues as the primary demand made by protestors (Clark & Regan, 2016). Among these, most frequently, citizens tend to protest because of a labour wage dispute, price increases, or tax policy.

Figure 1: Number of protests with economic issues as primary demand by protestors (source: Mass Mobilization Protest data)[1]



The conventional wisdom states that everyone wants to enjoy the benefits of living in a country with prosperous economic conditions. After all, there is a high correlation between a country's economic well-being and its citizens' life satisfaction (Radcliff, 2001). Even though citizens have a joint goal (a good economy), that does not mean that they will agree on the means used to achieve that goal. As can be seen from some of the examples above, different policies led different groups to take to the streets. Data shows that after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) the number of protests about economic conditions across the whole world increased. Citizens around the world where not happy with certain policies aimed at fixing the economy. The GFC caused many to ponder questions about the economy – how can we solve our growing economic problems? How should the new economic compromise look?

It is not the first time that a major economic crisis has changed the nature of the economy worldwide. Back in the 1970s, after the breakdown of the post-war world economic order, and after the failure of the Bretton Woods system, neoliberalism emerged triumphant as the new dominant economic worldview (Harvey, 2007). The rise of neoliberalism was further accelerated by the meltdown of the Soviet Union, and the many failures of economic alternatives in poor and developing countries in the 1990s. Two symbols of the neoliberalism

[1] The data is presented up to 2019, because in 2020 the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and mass gatherings were limited or forbidden in many countries around the world.

rise, Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Regan in the United States were celebrated as those who defeated the so-called "Keynesian compromise." It did not take more than one generation for neoliberalism to become deeply integrated in all aspects of life and critically important for the national and global economy (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005).

Much like after the fall of Bretton Woods system, and the economic crisis of 1970s, the Global Financial Crisis sparked a new wave of discussions about the economic compromise in society. Some argued that the "golden era" of neoliberalism was over (Patomäki, 2009). However, neoliberalism proved to be more resilient than many had thought back in 2008 and 2009. All actors agreed that a problem with the economy exists, and it should be solved. Debates started (and is still ongoing), with some groups advocating for solving the problem using a neoliberal agenda, while others advocated for the return of Keynesian economics, or more specifically *Green Keynesianism* (Goldstein & Tyfield, 2018). This policy would mean more state intervention in the economy, followed by privately developed green technologies.

The green Keynesianism appeal started with the GFC, but was further strengthened thanks to the solutions to the bad economic conditions proposed by various governments. Some citizens were against these proposed policy solutions, like cuts to public expenditure and budgetary restraints, or keeping the interest rates and national debt low, or state intervention only in limited circumstances, such as when saving major banks. In contrast, many advocated for increased public expenditure, more pronounced state intervention in different fields and a more equitable redistribution of resources.

Demand for redistribution was particularly vocal, as redistribution has traditionally been seen as a solution to those problems associated with economic inequality. The increasing interest in the topic of economic inequality is also a novelty brought about by the events around the Global Financial Crisis. The American movement Occupy Wall Street put the "inequality problem" at the centre of their mass protests. The movement grew into the global Occupy movement, and interest in economic inequality has risen to the levels unseen before. Much like the levels of income inequality, as shown by data (Milanovic & Roemer, 2016; Scheve & Stasavage, 2017). Inequality has now reached the forefront of political debate. With the rising discrepancies between the rich and the poor, issues like state intervention and redistribution have significantly increased in salience (Attewell, 2021).

Whether it was about inequality or other economic problems/concerns, one thing is certain - people have demanded new economic policies, and they expressed their demands in street protests, but also in voting boots. Studies following the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), showed that taking positions on economic policies have become important factors which influences vote choice (Talving, 2017). Since requests for policy reforms are directed toward governments, they are the actors that should see (punishment) benefits when they (fail to) adopt policies in accordance with citizens' desires. This prompted researchers to suggest we may be witnessing a shift from performance-oriented towards policy-oriented economic voting. Voters are more and more reliant on policy-oriented economic assessments when deciding whether to punish or reward incumbents (Malet & Kriesi, 2020).

We know that, even though it has a huge impact during *normal times*, the economy has an even more substantial effect on vote choice during periods of crisis (Giuliani, 2019; Lewis-Beck & Costa Lobo, 2017). And just after the world started slowly to move on from the Global Financial Crisis, we are on the brink of the new global economic crisis, as the consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak or the Russian invasion on Ukraine, and the rise of inflation around the world.

For researchers who are studying voting behaviour, the economy has consistently been one of "the fundamental" predictors of the vote. Scholarly work regarding the relationship between economics and elections is among the most voluminous when it comes to theories of voting behaviour, explaining election outcomes, forecasting elections, and other topics that surround the political system and political behaviour (Campbell et al., 1960; Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020; Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Okolikj & Quinlan, 2016). Most of the work relates to the long tradition of economic voting, highlighted in performance-models, where voters would reward government when the economy is doing well and *throw the rascals out* when the economy is not doing well. The evaluations would come either from individuals' perceptions of the economy or aggregate measures. A wealth of literature has established this link in the empirical world, irrespective of using perceptions of the economy on the part of individuals (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013a; Gomez & Wilson, 2001; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Stevenson & Duch, 2013), or *objective* measures of the economy through aggregate data (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Nadeau & Lewis-Beck, 2001; Radcliff, 1988). Jointly, researchers follow the famous claim that “elections are a referendum on the economy” (Duch & Stevenson, 2008)[2].

For now, scholars have mainly been investigating several types of links between the economy and voting. The first, which has a long tradition, is assessing the economy as a so-called “valence perspective.“ This has dominated economic voting theories since their *birth* (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013; Fiorina, 1981; Holbrook & Garand, 1996; Lewis-Beck, 1990; Nezi, 2012). The term “valence issue” dates back to Stokes (1963), who used it to describe “those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate” (Stokes, 1963, p. 373). The question of whether the government has done a good job, which should be analysed through the lenses of the state of the economy, has received scholarly attention from the beginning of studies trying to explain voting behaviour. Some of the pioneer and classic works in the discipline (Campbell et al., 1960; Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1981) emerged in the period when explaining voting behaviour was still in its infancy.

After decades of testing the mechanism between general economic conditions and government support in various countries, contexts, and at different times, in recent years scholars have turned their attention to alternative economic motivations: patrimony and positional economic voting (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). Patrimony is the dimension that involves not just the way that individuals perceive and evaluate the state of the economy or economic prospects, but what assets (s)he holds and how that serves as a predictor of her/his voting behaviour (Nedeau et al. 2009). Positional economics, as a dimension of economic voting, assumes that voters’ positions on economic policy issues shape their vote. The parties represent different economic worldviews, and voters choose from among a set of alternatives (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011; Lewis-Beck et al. 2013). Consequently, performance considerations are moot and instead, it is all about the economic policies advanced by each party.

Thus, the other link establishes a connection between voters’ preferences and parties’ stances, with the logic being that voters will support those parties with whom they share preferences.

[2] Here it is also important to acknowledge that there are some critics of this approach, who would argue that the link between economic perceptions and voting is distorted because of partisanship and previous political predispositions (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Wlezien et al., 1997). Previous research shows that even when all of these *distortions* are included, the strong effect of the economy persists (Okolikj & Quinlan, 2016). However, it is important to keep endogeneity issue in mind when interpreting all the results on the relationship between the economy and vote choice.

This line of thinking about voter-party linkages goes back to Downs (1957). Issue voting studies have a very long tradition in the voting behaviour literature (Ansolabehere et al. 2008; Carmines & Stimson, 1980; Downs, 1957; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989), and positional economic voting is an emerging strand of the economic voting theory. More voters are nowadays policy-oriented, and the economy is becoming an increasingly positional issue (Lewis-Beck & Costa Lobo, 2017). This strand establishes a link between leftist (rightist) preferences and votes for left (right) parties, irrespective of whether these parties are in office or not. The ideological distinction of the parties is something that has been recognized in the literature, and something parties often campaign on, especially when talking about the economy.

That is why I argue that taking both dimensions into account is important in trying to correctly model the full scope of the economy (economic performance and economic issues) when explaining vote choice. We need to take these two considerations into account as that is something voters have at their disposal, too. They have much more information about the various political parties than just their ideology. This is particularly true for parties that are or were in office. While in office, the way they behaved provides voters with significant amounts of information about the party, most importantly in terms of its capability and ideological consistency.

1.1.1. Policy preferences and government performance evaluations

In this thesis, I argue that the accountability mechanism goes beyond perceptions of the general state of economy, or economic performance indicators (Goubin et al., 2020). This thesis tests whether and under what circumstances citizens' policy preferences influence their support for incumbents and the opposition. Since governments are those who are in charge of the policy-making process in the country, it seems plausible that when citizens are (not) happy with how they lead the process they should (punish) reward them on election day. From previous research, we know that incumbents are usually evaluated on the basis of the policies they adopt, rather than the policies they advocate for (Clarke et al. 2009).

While the dominant evidence from economic voting theory shows that a typical economic voter is retrospective (Clarke et al., 2009; Fiorina, 1981), the view has become contested in more recent times. Hellwig (2012) notes that if elections are to work as accountability mechanisms, which is at the core of economic voting theory (Hicks et al., 2016), then voters must assess the past performance of incumbents, but also select among the various policy alternatives for the future.

When voters are evaluating the work of governments based on policy (retrospective voting), or when they use policy preferences to choose a new government (prospective voting), we are almost always in the area of positional voting, as not many policies, particularly of those related to the economy, are valence issues. Positional economic issues inevitably have an ideological or polarizing component. Thus, in line with previous research, I do not expect all governments to be treated equally for all the positional economic issues. In particular, the accountability mechanism will be different for left-wing and for right-wing incumbents, depending on the issue at stake and the voters' positions. Additionally, this mechanism will be strongly influenced by the political offer in the country. Thus, how opposition parties place themselves on the given issue, will also influence voters and their decision to cast a vote based on a positional economic issue.

In this thesis, I explore the effect redistribution preferences have on vote choice, particularly in relation to voting for outgoing incumbents and opposition in the country. This follows on from the previous research on the relationship between unemployment (which was treated as a positional economic issue) and the vote. "…we find some evidence for economic policy voting. However, it exists in a form conditioned by incumbency. According to varied tests, left incumbents actually experience a net electoral cost, if the unemployment rate climbs under their regime. Incumbency, then, serves to break any natural economic policy advantage that might accrue to the left due to unemployment" (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013b, p. 55).

In line with their argument about unemployment, I also argue that preferences for redistribution, as a measure to fight inequality, have never existed as a positional economic issue along the left-right scale and support for incumbents. This is despite the fact that there is growing evidence claiming that (a) the welfare state is bigger and more generous when the support for these policies is higher (Brooks & Manza, 2006), and (b) opinion cleavage over social policies is something that should be further investigated (Rehm et al., 2012). The link between voting for incumbents/opposition and preferences for redistribution, as positional economic issues has been neglected and is almost entirely absent from the literature about economic voting. Rather than investigating whether and to what extent preferences for redistribution are linked with a vote for left parties[3], I test how these preferences affect incumbent support, as well as differences in the effect depending on the ideological position of the incumbent. This approach takes into account the finding of Dassoneville and Lewis-Beck (2013b) that the effect of unemployment is conditioned by incumbency.

1.1.2. Moderating role of rising income inequality as a valence condition

"We are the 99%"

The Occupy Wall Street Movement

Citizen requests for more redistribution, and generally for more state intervention, came as a response to the Global Financial Crisis. One of the movements stimulated by the economic mess caused by the GFC is the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) Movement. OWS, formed in the United States, quickly became a broader Occupy Movement, present in many countries and in different forms worldwide. OWS made most of their headlines with their famous slogan "*We are the 99%*" meaning that 99% of citizens are paying for the mistakes in the economy of the 1%. The OWS Movement brought income and wealth inequality to the centre of attention of political life in the United States. The salience of the inequality issue quickly spread to other countries through the Occupy Movement. These movements wanted to motivate people to raise their voices and show that the 99% is standing together and united against the tiny minority within the class of the super -rich. They demanded policies which were supposed to deal with the problem of rising income and wealth inequality.

Redistribution is widely perceived as the most influential policy in combating rising income inequality. Citizen demands for more redistributive policies, as previous research shows, is usually connected with their view on income inequality and their dissatisfaction with rising levels of inequality (Bobzien, 2019; Causa & Hermansen, 2017).

At the time when an issue of income inequality is salient, given that no political actor advocates for more income inequality[4], I argue that it is important to move from traditional valence issues (performance indicators such as perceptions of the general economy or aggregate economic

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[3] The traditional approach of scholars tackling positional economic issues would be to have a dependent variable that makes a distinction between left and right, and to examine how taking positions on economic issue affect voting for left or right parties.
[4] Historically, some governments (e.g., Margaret Thatcher's government) presented rising income inequality as a necessary incentive for increased productivity, indirectly arguing that it is a somewhat desirable phenomenon. However, no such claims were made by relevant political parties or political actors post GFC.

measures) and explore different valence perspectives. My contribution is in the vein of studies that wish to go beyond mere valence conceptions of economic voting. Instead, the gap is to build on the interplay between different dimensions of economic voting, which has been explored much less extensively. For that I take income inequality as a valence macro condition over which there is a consensus in society.[5]

However, I contend that the connection between inequality and redistribution preferences should be neglected. It is more important to disentangle the relationship between the two, the interplay between these two dimensions of the economic vote, and their effect on voting for incumbents. Thus, I take rising income inequality as the valence macro condition (since no-one wants income inequality to be even greater than it is now) and test how this valence condition affects the base relationship between redistribution preferences and the vote.

Studying the interplay between valence and positional economics is important, because differences in views on valence issue(s) should also affect how people see the salient positional issue.

To illustrate with an example. Let us say there is Voter A, one who perceives the economy to be doing well and progressing (a valence issue). This voter might be more likely to support the expansion of the military budget (a positional issue) as she thinks things are going well, and there are enough resources to increase military spending. On the other hand, Voter B thinks that the economy is not progressing well. She is more cautious since resources are scarce and she feels that other things (e.g., social benefits) might be more important than increasing the military budget. Voters A and B have the same ideological leanings, but their stance on valence issues influences the different perspectives they have on various positional issues. Could it be that we are missing certain links when exploring these two dimensions of economic voting unrelatedly?

The two dimensions reflect two schools of studies of voting behaviour. Valence models, or incumbency-oriented hypotheses, put voters in a position of a vengeful/rewarding God, one who evaluates the performance of the government and based on that punishes or rewards it in the voting booth. On the other hand, positional economic voting assumes that citizens take

[5] Later I provide previous research findings and empirical evidence to support this claim.

parties' positions on issues she cares about into consideration. Leftist (rightist) voters are expected to vote for parties who advocate for leftist (rightist) economic policies.

In the first view, using valence models, ideology does not play much of a role, and citizens decide only based on the performance of the incumbents. The second view, the positional economic dimension, virtually excludes performance evaluation from the equation and places a strong emphasis on ideology. Citizens vote based on their ideological closeness with the parties on specific economic issues.

These two logics also corresponds to the distinction between prospective and retrospective voting (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007). Under retrospective voting logic, elections are a matter of sanctioning or rewarding incumbents. Following this logic, voter estimates if a government did what (s)he holds important (e.g., decreased unemployment, increased salaries…) and based on that vote for (reward) or against (sanction) governing parties. By contrast, prospective voting is more about selecting parties to govern in line with voters' ideological preferences. According to this line of thinking, voters hold certain issues important, and want to see adoption of certain policies to tackle these issues. Thus, they choose parties which are, in their view, most likely to adopt these policies in future.

However, the two schools of thought do not seem to speak to each other. Furthermore, this logic, that there is one group of incumbency-oriented voters irrespective of ideology, and a separate group who cares about ideology irrespective of government performance, does not seem like a good manifestation of the electorate. It seems more likely that voters take both of these inputs into consideration when deciding whom to give their vote. Following Sanchez-Cuenca, I assume voters vote out of ideological considerations, but they also take into account the performance of incumbent governments (2007).

The link between these two perspectives gains importance in multiparty systems. Downs (1957) logic, which stipulated all the issues and ideological voting studies, comes from a US two-party system, where left-leaning voters are, to some extent, left without options. If they want to vote based on the issue and ideology, they can only cast a vote for the Democrats. The same goes for right-leaning voters and their loyalty to the Republican party. However, in multiparty systems, which are by now found in almost all European countries, voters can punish a party they previously voted for or the incumbent party and still stay ideologically coherent, as there usually is more than one left, right, or centre option. So, the accountability mechanism will function differently than it does in two-party systems, as voters are allowed to punish a party, and still take policy considerations and ideological positions into the voting equation.

That is why I argue that taking both dimensions into account is important in trying to correctly model the full scope of the economy (economic performance and economic issues) when explaining vote choice. We need to take these two considerations into account as that is something voters have at their disposal, too. They have much more information about the various political parties than just their ideology. This is particularly true for parties that are or were in office. While in office, the way they behaved provides voters with significant amounts of information about the party, most importantly in terms of its capability and ideological consistency.

1.1.3. Income inequality and preferences for redistribution as economic issues

Additionally, this thesis aims to expand the analysed issues and move away from general economic performance as a dominant valence issue in the economic voting literature towards other issues/conditions, which can (and we might argue, should) also be treated as issues of valence. Previous research on economic voting, particularly using the valence model, was built on a simplistic assumption that all voters "utilize the same aggregate measure of economic performance to form evaluations of how well the incumbent is managing the economy in their interest" (Linn & Nagler, 2017, p. 590). Here, I make the argument that income inequality is also a valence condition, but policies to tackle the problems of rising income inequality are positional issues. This diverges from a wealth of literature on valence issues. While I make my argument on why I opted for income inequality to be treated as a valence issue below, here I briefly elaborate on my decision to take this ongoing problem as the focus of this thesis when it comes to economic issues.

Over the past decade, income inequality around the world has reached previously unseen levels (Juhn et al., 1993; Milanovic, 2012; Scheve & Stasavage, 2017). This led both politicians and scholars to call for action against rising income inequality and seek to prevent the harmful effects caused by disparities in politics, education, and other institutions (Yahng, 2019). Rising income inequality also had an effect on populism, as more and more populist manifestos0 around the world have begun to use the rise in income inequality to grab a few more votes. Since the means for reducing income inequality is an issue that is widely contested between left- and right-wing ideologies, populists from both sides of the ideological division have used it to attract voters. Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Marine Le Pen, and the 'Leave' Brexit campaign are just some of the examples that come to mind.

Those two events, (a) the rise in income inequality by all objective indicators, and (b) the prominent place it had in the agenda of populist political options, increased the salience of the issue. As is known from issue saliency theory, the most salient issue has the most potential to be influential in voters' minds, and thus influence vote choice (Ansolabehere et al., 2008; Bélanger & Meguid, 2008).

Research on inequality is, by any reckoning, not a new topic. There is a wealth of research on income inequality, but not much has been investigated with respect to the connections between income inequality and vote choice. These studies are in their infancy, and generally, there is a lack of comparative research on the topic. Some recent scholarly work has started addressing this issue, as income inequality has become a rather popular topic in political science research (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020; Goubin et al., 2020; Linn & Nagler, 2017; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015). This project moves a step further, by, on the one hand, exploring the effect of inequality on vote choice and support for the incumbent government in a comparative study. On the other hand, it moves further still by exploring the policies for combating income inequality and how the levels of income inequality modify that relationship. As this economic issue is hugely contested among parties coming from opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, it has a potential to influence vote choice.

At the beginning of the Global Financial Crisis, Kaltethaler and a group of authors (2008) noted that Europe was about to go through a process of significant economic transformation, where the issue of how income was to be distributed in society would become increasingly salient. With the new economic crisis in which Europe is about to enter, according to many pundits, and new transformations of the economy, the issue of income redistribution will gain new importance.

I argue that voters who want more redistribution, as a measure to fight inequality, are unhappy with governments who are in office during the rise of inequality. Connecting inequality and preferences for redistribution to vote choice is a growing trend in the literature (Bobzien, 2019; Pontusson & Rueda, 2010; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015). This thesis contributes to the ongoing debates by providing a comparative examination of the issue.

1.2. Why do we care?

"A key characteristic of democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of the people" (Dahl, 1973, p. 1)

The thesis tackles two important aspects that have relevance for research, practical implications and connections to the ongoing developments in the real world. These are the normative implications of the whole study, even though this is not a normative thesis in its nature. The first one relates to voting on policy, or more specifically in this case, voting on economic policy. The second is about the devastating effects income inequality could have on various aspects of life in society. Both of these implications relate strongly to the state and health of democracy in a country.

One of the core postulates of democratic theory is that governments are supposed to represent the policy preferences of their citizens (Dahl, 1989). The most common way for citizens to express their policy preferences is through the act of voting. According to numerous voting behaviour theories, on election day, citizens vote for those parties that have policy preferences similar to their own (Downs, 1957; Enelow & Hinich, 1984; Krosnick, 1988). Elected governments should represent those citizens, and when they fail to do so, the citizens will punish them at the time of the next election at the latest (Przeworski et al., 1999).

That is why governments fear citizens, as they are the ones who decide on their fate and keep them accountable. With the assumption that elections are freely contested, governments have an extremely strong incentive to follow peoples' preferences. That way, they will have the best chances to win more votes (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). This should bear even more importance in European countries, as previous research has showed that policy representation is negatively correlated with power concentration (Persson & Tabellini, 2004). However, in Europe, power is rarely concentrated, and most governments are comprised of (sometimes fairly large) coalitions.

The relationship between policy (issue) voting, government responsiveness, and government accountability, should be most clearly visible in the context of economic policies. As argued above, economic policies often spark protests and citizens' dissatisfaction. Additionally, among other topics, the economy is the one in which voters are usually well-informed, and their knowledge about the economy grows during the election campaign (Paldam & Nannestad, 2000).An abundance of research has found evidence that the economy matters for elections (including, to name only a few studies, Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Gomez & Wilson, 2001; Lewis-Beck et al., 2013; Radcliff, 1988). Citizens rely on economic indicators to evaluate the work of governments. While previous research focused on general economic indicators (such as GDP, the unemployment rate, inflation, or the subjective perception of the general state of the economy), more recent trends have acknowledged that economic policy positions and the implementation of certain policies could provide a lot of information about incumbents. That can be explained by the fact that policymaking is costly. It can provide evidence to voters that their preferred parties are not consistent with voters' perceptions of the positions of government parties (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008).

Party strategies always focus on those issues and policies that show them in the best possible light. From the classical work of Budge and Farlie (1983) we know that parties are constantly trying to emphasize certain issue dimensions rather than shifting position on those issues. So, parties are not just competing on ideological positions, but also on the "selective emphasis on issues" (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008).

All types of governments place emphasis on the issues that are important to voters. From previous research, we know that the government is particularly responsive to issue which are perceived by citizens as undesirable (Rodrik & Zeckhauser, 1988). Citizens are generally very sensitive to any rise in income inequality, particularly those holding leftist values, but the effect is also present for those on the right (Anderson & Singer, 2008). When the inequality in society is high, citizens' social justice preferences are infringed upon, making them want more just society (Goubin et al., 2020). That is one of the reasons why it is worth testing the effects that rising income inequality can have on governments. However, the actual battleground for the parties from different ideological positions, are policies which are designed to fight income inequality. Thus, the battle for voters over these policies, in combination with the contextual factors (such as the level of income inequality), is the focus of this project.

The other reason lies in the fact that the world has seen a steady rise in inequality over the previous decades (Juhn et al. 1993; Milanovic, 2012; Trump, 2018). Evidence suggests that we are witnessing a period where some countries, such as the US, are at historically high levels of inequality (Piketty & Saez, 2014). Many scholars from the field have noticed that with rising economic growth, there is a growing chance that inequality in societies will rise as well (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2002; Kuznets, 1955; Meltzer & Richard, 1981). Additionally, there is evidence to support what in recent years have become more present voices in scholarly debates, claiming that inequality breeds itself (Lind, 2005), meaning that once it is on the rise, it tends to continue rising.

The problem is in the consequences that any rise of income inequality can have for a society. Ongoing research over the last couple of years, perhaps as much as over the last decade, has mainly focused on how inequality influences attitudes or changes in attitudes. We know by now that inequality negatively influences citizen perceptions of the state of democracy (Scheve & Stasavage, 2017). Moreover, when income inequality is accounted for, it tends to wipe out the positive connection between electoral fairness and satisfaction with democracy (Donovan & Karp, 2017). It can also affect elections in different ways. Han and Chang (2016) showed that the higher the income inequality is, the wider the gap in satisfaction with democracy between the electoral winners and losers will be. Here we see that the mediating effect of income inequality can be stronger than other institutional effects.

Additionally, we know that citizen engagement, both social and political, is negatively correlated with a rise in income inequality. Research shows that in countries where inequality is high, it coordinates with lower levels of trust and political efficacy in the country and, accordingly, with higher levels of both a general suspicion of others and political apathy (Loveless, 2013a). Loveless goes further, strengthening this link by showing that this troubling effect of inequality on these attitudes and democratic culture is neither contingent on an individual's income nor related to national-level economic indicators (2013a). As these are core constitutes of a healthy democracy, this shows many causes for concern with respect to the rise in income inequality.

Other, unwanted consequences of income inequality include the negative effect it can have on voter participation and general citizen engagement in the country's political life (Desai et al. 2003). Even at a regional level, citizen participation tends to be lower in those regions which have higher inequality (Mahler, 2002). Related to turnout, we also know that with higher income inequality, there is a more significant income bias in turnout (Avery, 2015).

Reviewing the literature on income inequality, Osberg and Smeeding (2006) concluded that more inequality does not produce anything good, most especially not for the economy or for social prosperity.

1.3. Literature gaps

The total amount of scholarly work on the relationship between elections and economics, when printed, would probably produce a small mountain of papers. Economic voting is undoubtedly one of the most potent theories of voting behaviour. Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier estimated in 2000 that there are more than 300 articles and books on the relationship between the economy and elections (2000). More than twenty years have passed since then, and there is no doubt that scholarly work on the topic has significantly expanded over that period. However, in their recent review on economic voting, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2018) conclude that "considerable research on the relationship between the economy and election lies before us."

Summarizing this vast amount of literature, and following the already mentioned review by Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2018), I also highlight key findings which scholars discovered by investigating the relationship between elections and economics:

- The same, positive and robust coefficient for the relationship between elections and economics is found using both aggregate and individual-level data (Stubager et al., 2013);
- Sociotropic economic voting (using perceptions of the national economy or government performance) have a stronger influence on the vote than egotropic economic voting (looking at your own "pocket" / personal financial situation) (C. J. Anderson, 2000);
- The lower the clarity of government responsibility, the lower the impact of the economic vote (Duch & Stevenson, 2008);
- The two most important macroeconomic predictors of electoral outcomes are unemployment and growth (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Powell & Whitten, 1993);
- The economy is becoming increasingly positional (Lewis-Beck & Costa Lobo, 2017) and scholars ought to explore these new dimensions of the economic vote (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011).

The most important and widely tested findings on the relationship between elections and the economy have come from treating the economy as a "valence issue." The incumbency-oriented hypothesis has hugely dominated research in the area (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013b). More recently, two new "dimensions" of economic voting have started gaining attention – positional economic voting and patrimony (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). Of these two dimensions, in this thesis, following the previous findings, I would argue that economic voting, in times of extraordinary economic conditions, can better be conceptualized through positional issues (Fraile & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Nezi & Katsanidou, 2014). Voters are more and more in disagreement over government economic policy ends and means (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020).

Reviewing the literature, I noticed four main gaps, which this thesis aims to fill.

The first one is briefly mentioned above. As highlighted in some of the examples, citizens are protesting over economic policies, with the target of these protests being the government. However, positional economic voting, while focusing on policy, mainly showed that these policies matter and that voters who have leftist (rightist) preferences tend to vote for leftist (rightist) parties. I explore whether there is a link between policy preferences and government performance evaluation (conditional on government ideological leanings). Hellwig noticed that "empirical assessments of electoral accountability, however, tend not to entertain the possibility that voters' decisions to reward or punish the political incumbent might be affected by the position taking of their representatives" (Hellwig, 2012).

Second, growing literature in the field of economic voting showed that all dimensions matter for vote choice. However, we know little about the interplay between valence and positional dimensions of the economic vote. Does one dimension affect the other? Lewis-Beck et al. (2013) showed that patrimony through the positional dimension affects the vote. We lack the answer to the question - what is the role of the interplay between positional economics and valence on vote choice? Some important connections between the economy and the vote might be missed without examining the interplay between different dimensions of the economic vote. Stokes noted that "it is, of course, true that position-issues lurk behind many valence-issues" (1963, p. 373). Clearly, there is a gap, since it is highly plausible that in minds of some voters both position on an issue and incumbency status can play an important role in their voting decisions. This part is left unexplained if the interplay between valence and positional dimensions of economic vote is not explored.

Third, in order to try to find potential answers to the set research questions, this project could potentially help us better understand the changing nature of the economic vote in the modern world, which has experienced global economic turmoil in recent times and which appears to be on the verge of a new economic crisis caused by COVID-19 outbreak and Russia's invasion on Ukraine. Additionally, I will tend to dig deeper into the relationship between the economy and political attitudes, looking at these not just through the lenses of the incumbency-oriented hypothesis, but from the perspective of positional economic voting. Furthermore, in the project, I plan to analyse if those who take clear positions on economic issues vote *correctly* (Lau et al., 2014). The question should gain more attention from scholars, as it is important to establish if there is a connection between positions on economic issues and voting for incumbents, and if voters when they are punishing left (right) incumbents stay ideological coherent and vote for the appropriate left (right) opposition, or not.

Fourth, the thesis breaks new frontiers in the study of comparative correct voting. The novelties in this really relate to the way I estimate the correct vote measure, but also to contextual factors explaining cross-national variation in the levels of correct vote. So far, comparative explorations of correct vote relied too much on too general survey instruments, mainly relying on things which are *available in all countries in the sample*. This is significantly different from country-level explorations of correct vote, which would use wide array of survey instruments. These instruments would mainly be voters' positions on different issues. I depart from previous studies on correct vote and follow the logic from national-level studies. Most notably, I use redistribution preferences as a key ingredient for measuring the correct vote in the comparative exploration of the topic. Further, I use for the first time (to the best of my knowledge) the rise in income inequality as a predictor of correct vote, arguing that the greater the rise of inequality, the more likely it is that voters will cast a correct vote.

1.4. Thesis outline

In the following, I briefly present the sections of this thesis.

In the next section I present the theory behind this thesis, and show the mechanisms which connect positional economic voting with the government performance evaluation, conditional on the incumbent ideology. In that mechanism, I also incorporate inequality backlash theory which backs up the assumption that citizens will react to rising income inequality and correct vote theory, estimating if those who (do not) want redistribution are casting vote in line with their issue preferences (*correct vote*).

Since the relationship between redistribution preferences and voting for incumbents rests on certain assumptions, in the third chapter, I present the findings of previous research which shows that these assumptions likely hold. That section supports the claims that citizens are aware of rising inequality, and that they react to a negative inequality trend. After that, I present various policies for fighting income inequality, and present evidence that citizens mainly want more redistribution, as the means to fight income inequality. Finally, I dig into the discussion on the relationship between income inequality and incumbent governments, and I demonstrate previous research evidence that citizens indeed hold incumbents accountable for rises in income inequality.

In the fourth section, I explore the direct effect of preferences for redistribution as a positional economic issue on the vote for incumbents. First, using the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release (2018) and Module 5 Third Advance Release (2021), I test the relationship at the individual level. I explore the relationship between the positional economic issue and the likelihood of the respondents to vote for outgoing incumbent, using cross-sectional data. In this segment, I disentangle the governments on the left-wing and the right-wing, based on the party of the prime minister, to test if the accountability mechanisms work identically for governments coming from different ideological worldviews.

In the fifth section, I test the moderating role of changing levels of income inequality on the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice. I take changes in income inequality as a valence macro condition, while redistribution preferences are a positional economic issue. The link between the two is long established in literature, and by now we know that preferences for redistribution are greater when income inequality is greater (Bobzien, 2019; Borck, 2007). I test the mechanism at the individual level, using the CSES Module 4 (2018) and Module 5 (2021) datasets. This section expands the mechanism further, by adding opposition parties (which are also distinct by their ideology) into the nominal dependent variable, and testing whether rising inequality makes voters who want more redistribution more likely to support the left-wing opposition when left-wing or right-wing incumbents are in power.

The sixth section introduces the notion of correct vote based on redistribution preferences. Additionally, I introduce rise in income inequality as the predictor of correct-vote levels cross-nationally. To achieve this, I use the CSES Module 4 (2018) and Module 5 (2021) datasets and to that add the Manifesto Project Database (2021) and Chapel Hill Expert Survey trend file (Jolly et al., 2022). By doing that, I take estimates of party positions on redistribution issues from two sources and two perspectives on how to evaluate where the parties stand on the issue, by looking at their manifestos and by asking experts (J. A. J. Evans, 2009). The cross-national variation in levels of correct vote is then explained by using novel a predictor in the correct vote theory – the rise in income inequality.

The final section summarizes the key findings of the previous empirical chapters. It aims to place the obtained results within the broader scope of scholarly work on economic voting, especially with a focus on the policy effect on the reward-punishment mechanism. The limitations to this research design, a critique of the adopted theoretical perspective, the applicability of these research findings in other contexts, and avenues for future research, are also discussed in this section.

2. Theory

From the 1940s up to the present, three principal theoretical approaches have provided most of the answers and explanations to the question - why people vote the way they do? These approaches are most often named in the literature as the sociological theoretical framework, the socio-psychological framework, and the rationality theoretical framework. All three perspectives have produced a large volume of scholarly output and the mechanisms underlying each are still the subject of much academic debate. The former two theoretical frameworks (the sociological and socio-psychological) gained more attention in the earlier years, when it comes to studies of voting behaviour.

The oldest framework – the sociological tradition of voting behaviour research - focused on the *role of society* and the effects of social groups and social contexts on individual vote choice. This tradition dates back to the 1940s and the works of Paul Lazarsfeld and Bernard Berelson (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). Since these were mainly sociologists conducting political science research, it is not surprising that social groups featured prominently in their analysis. According to this perspective, belonging to certain social groups, such as class, gender, race or ethnicity, significantly influences political preferences. These groups share similar experiences and social influences, and have similar material interests. It is assumed this translates into individuals sharing similar policy and political preferences. On the supply side, these voters are targeted by political parties as members of these groups (Rossi, 1959), and political parties have a long tradition of campaigning for the support of various social groups at large (Hill & Leighley, 1996) – for example socialist parties mobilizing the working class.

The development of nationally representative surveys of the population led to a *revolution* in political science research. Socio-psychological models, or "motivational" explanations of voting behaviour became *en vogue*, replacing the previous emphasis on social group and social contexts. Instead, partisanship (or party identification) - the concept most famously developed at the University of Michigan, mainly in the book *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), became the central anchor to the way in which we view political behaviour. Campbell and the other authors define party identification as "an individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment… the political party serves as the group which the individual may develop an identification, positive or negative, of some degree of intensity" (Campbell et al., 1960, pp. 121–122). After the publication of *The American Voter*, party identification became a key explanatory variable in all models of political behaviour. A wealth of literature argued that party identification is developed in early socialization, through the influence of family or other primary groups, that it is normally very stable, and tends to be strengthened over the lifecycle because of repeated participation and electoral processes (Converse, 1969; Jennings & Niemi, 1975; Miller, 1991). Later studies questioned the persistence of partisanship in the socio-psychological tradition, instead contending that partisanship can alter over time based on short-term changes – the so-called running tally model (Fiorina, 1981), which found its roots in the rational choice school (see further below). However, despite the disagreement over its persistence or its applicability cross-nationally, with it undoubtedly being more prevalent in the American tradition (Guntermann, 2020), party identification enjoys the status of an almost indispensable consideration when it comes to explaining why people vote the way they do.

However, the interest in studying party identification as the core explanatory variable of vote choice gradually waned. Additionally, the sociological and socio-psychological traditions began to talk more about stable and long-term linkages between voters and parties (such as class membership, or party identification). This makes them less successful in capturing short-term changes in electoral politics (Clarke et al., 2004), such as the effects of the economy, leaders, electoral campaigns, different crisis, and many other things that can shift voters' mood and political preferences *overnight*.

Starting in the 1970s, scholarly interest grew in the individual rationality of political participation in general, with a special focus on voting behaviour (Downs, 1957; Olson, 1965; Uhlaner, 1986; Verba & Nie, 1972). This framework is based on sound economic principles, as it assumes voters are rational individuals who actively participate in dynamic and complex political processes, and they choose by weighing up the costs/benefits they get from each alternative. Rational voters will choose the option that involves the highest utility accruing to them.

In this thesis, I build mainly on findings from the rational choice theoretical framework, and I adopt several of the key assumptions of the rational choice models: voters, when choosing the party/candidate they will support, are rational and utility maximizing individuals. "A choice is rational if it is the best way of achieving a certain, logically consistent end. No judgement is made as to whether this end is normatively desirable" (McGann, 2016). Adopting the rational framework does not mean that other schools of thoughts should be rejected, or that other theories do not have something to offer. In testing the mechanisms from the rational choice theory in this analysis, I also control (when data availability permits) for the other main theoretical explanations of voting behaviour. However, because I test the effects of short-term changes and the issue preferences of individuals, I rely mainly on rational choice.

When talking about this rational framework we almost inevitably enter the discussion about positional (spatial) and valence theories of vote choice, as these two models have strongly influenced research in the rational strand. These two models of vote choice (positional and valence) are often treated as rivals or oppositional, and scholars have often focused on testing whether one outperforms the other in explaining vote choice (for some examples see Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2000; Clarke & Whitten, 2013; Lewis-Beck et al., 2013; McAllister et al., 2015). However, these two models do not necessarily have to be treated as *rivals*, but rather as complements. These two are "closely related to each other, although this has not been fully recognized in the literature" (Sanders et al., 2009, p. 30). Thus, in this research, I aim to bring these two research traditions together, and to explore the interplay of various aspects of these models in explaining vote choice through economic issues. To do this, I rely on two types of connections between these two perspectives (i.e., positional and valence). The first one is about exploring whether there is a link between taking certain positions on economic issues and support for outgoing incumbents. So, it is important to explore the direct effects of redistribution preferences on incumbent support, and whether those who want more redistribution tend to support left-wing incumbents, left-wing opposition groups, or do not vote for left-wing parties at all. After exploring the direct relationship between the two, I introduce a valence condition (specifically rising income inequality) as a moderator that helps us further model vote choice, particularly in complex multi-party systems. Finally, I look away from explanations of actual voting behaviour, and explore what voters who want more redistribution are *ought* to do, if they are casting a *correct* vote, and how rising income inequality explains cross-national differences in the levels of what we can call the correct vote.

In line with that, the theoretical chapter is structured as follows. First, I examine the key mechanisms and literature findings from both the valence and positional models of voting behaviour. Second, I focus on economic issues, and present the key postulates of positional economic voting, as well as major findings from the positional economic voting literature thus far. Following on from that literature review, I present what I find to be the major gaps, and why it is important to consider the interplay between the valence and spatial perspectives.

Further, I connect the two through to a discussion on how taking positions affect the vote for incumbents of different ideological leanings. After that, I incorporate certain findings from inequality backlash theory into my theoretical model, which aims to explain why I take redistribution preferences as an issue, that affect incumbent electoral fortunes, and how different levels of inequality mediate that relationship. Finally, to round out the theoretical framework, I present the key findings of the correct vote literature, and think through in more detail why we should expect those who hold preferences for more redistribution to vote *correctly*, and what exactly the "correct vote" means in their case.

2.1. Valence politics

Valence politics focuses on issues over which there is no disagreement in a society. There is no doubt that in every society all (or almost all) citizens want economic prosperity (e.g., high rates of economic growth and low rates of unemployment), low crime rates, efficient healthcare, a good educational system, the prevention of terrorism, security and so on. These are all desired outcomes which individuals place high values on, and most importantly, these are all outcomes about which everyone agrees. In the realm of valence politics, citizens chose parties/candidates based on their performance on these issues, and the results they achieve over time. Electorate, in Stokes words, "rewards a governing party for its success in bringing prosperity or holds a governing party responsible for its failure to avoid hard times" (1992, p. 147).

When we talk about valence we talk about performance and competence. However, valence models of politics are much more complex than that, and have various definitions, operationalizations, and open ongoing academic debates. In this section, I try to sum up the key findings of the existing literature on valence politics.

Starting from this definition, most of the scholarly work on valence relies on the ideas of Donald Stokes. Stokes defined valence issues as "those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate" (1963, p. 373). So, valence politics is about assigning positive or negative values to goals/outcomes. Stokes further argued that the desirability of such goals, and their shared nature, provide powerful explanations for party-voter linkages. The reason for that lies in the fact that parties and voters often do not disagree about desired outcomes on these issues where public opinion is heavily skewed towards *good/desired* outcomes. Thus, voters are the judges of the capability of each party/candidate to deliver on the desired goals. They are the ones who choose "which party, which party leader, and which policies are most likely to achieve the outcomes that virtually everyone wants" (Clarke et al., 2004, p. 23).

Moving beyond the definition of valence to its operationalization, we see that the empirical world is far less conclusive on what are (or are not) valence issues. There are several problems with the operationalization of valence issues: certain issues can be both valence and positional in nature. In different contexts or at different times a valence issues can turn and became positional or equally, positional issues become valence ones; what is valence in one country/society can be highly positional in another, and *vice versa*.

To illustrate the above with several examples. An issue can be both valence and positional, depending on the focus on that issue – are we focusing on the means or on the ends? (Fiorina, 1981) and also are we focusing on the single outcome, or trying to understand repercussions that outcome can have on other aspects of life? Undoubtedly, all citizens want to live in a safe environment (a valence issue). However, resources are limited, and investing resources into security/defence, might leave less for healthcare or the educational system. So, a valence issue suddenly became an issue about how to distribute limited resources between important parts of the political system. There, different people have different preferences. So, suddenly a purely valence issue (safe country) became very much positional.

An issue can be a valence issue in one country and highly contested and positional in another. One of the most popular modern examples of this phenomena is the European Union (EU) membership issue. While in some countries EU membership is a desired outcome for as much as 80% of citizens (taking into account EU member states and countries aspiring to become EU member states), in other countries there is much more debate as to the benefits of membership. The best example is the United Kingdom (UK), where citizens in a very tight 2016 referendum decided to leave the EU, with 51.89% voting to leave and 48.11% voting to remain, showing how polarized the issue is within the UK.

Moreover, certain issues can, over time, turn from positional to valence, and *vice versa*. Saliency theory points out that with the rise of issue salience, some issues became more divisive (Franklin & Wlezien, 1997). For example, the protection of the environment was at some point a valence issue, as there was almost universal support for the environmental policies. However, with the rise in the saliency of that issue, and faced with economic challenges, and the high costs of environmental protection, the rise of anti-environmentalism occurred. Strict and expensive policies aiming to preserve the planet are today contested by those who favour economic benefits and less stringent environmental regulation.

All of that does not mean that valence issues are not important, or that valence issues do not provide an important explanation of the party-voter linkage. In fact, the opposite is true. Many authors claim that valence is the most powerful explanatory theory of voting behaviour (Clarke et al., 2004; Clarke & Whitten, 2013; Sanders et al., 2009). There are several reasons to back that claim. First, there are relatively few issues that shape the voting behaviour of the majority of the electorate. Traditionally, especially in mature democracies, these few issues are related to the economy, public services, or other internal matters. Thus, valence issues make what is a complex political reality much simpler (Clarke et al., 2004) which is why they are appealing, easy to understand and a handy *tool* for voters to evaluate political life. Furthermore, valence issues make it much harder for incumbent parties to manipulate voters, as voters judge them most often by their past performance and not their future promises, when it comes to valence issues. So, there is usually a clear indicator of whether incumbents have delivered on the promised valence issue, and far less space for the relativization of past political moves and manipulation, at least when compared to positional issues.

Bearing all that in mind, it is clear why the valence paradigm is such a powerful and appealing explanation of voting behaviour. Even if we accept the valence theoretical framework, and accept that valence dominates as an explanation for political behaviour, that does not mean that spatial explanations of political behaviour are not also important and relevant. As Green and Jennings nicely phrased it “we shouldn’t necessarily conclude that performance-based models are a ‘one size fits all’ solution” (2017, p. 544).

Spatial explanations of voting behaviour also hold a prominent place in the literature. However, the two (valence and spatial perspectives) are often portrayed in the literature as opposing views or opposing explanations of voting behaviour. In fact, both of these approaches contribute to our understanding of the phenomena, and I argue that it is important to study the two perspectives together and explore the interplay between the two. I make the argument that the economy is a particularly potent field to study the interplay between valence and positional issues. Before elaborating on that, I first present the basic idea behind positional and issue voting, with a particular focus on positional economic voting.

2.2. Spatial politics

The debate on the relationship between voters' issue positions and their vote has been present in political science for decades (Downs, 1957; Fournier et al., 2003; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Walgrave et al., 2020).

When thinking about the effect issues have on vote choice, political scientist normally view issues in terms of positions and competences (Downs, 1957; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Stokes, 1963; Walgrave et al., 2020). Traditionally, the literature on issue voting mainly deals with these two dimensions. More recently, there has been an appreciation that a new dimension of issue voting, (*commitment issue voting* as examined by van der Brug, W. et al., 2017) should be explored more. Furthermore, new trends in issue voting literature also connect these issues with government accountability (Anderson & Hoff, 2001; Edlund, 2006). All three dimensions and the new explorations of issues in the political realm are significant in terms of the scope of this thesis. Thus, all of these aspects deserve a brief presentation of the main ideas they rely on.

Issue positions draws it pedigree mainly from the spatial school of voting behaviour (Downs, 1957). Voters connect their own issue positions with the perceptions of parties' issue positions and cast their vote for a party (or candidate) based on these perceptions and personal stances on issues. This major theory is further split into two different types of spatial models. The proximity model assumes that voters choose parties based on the proximity of party issue stances to their own (Enelow & Hinich, 1984). On the other hand, directional models stipulate that voters are mainly interested in whether they are on the same side of the issue as the parties/candidates (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989). Up to now, these two directions have received strong empirical support (McMurray, 2017; Merrill & Grofman, 1999).

One alternative view of issue voting has quickly gained more attention. Back in the 1980s, political scientist recognized that voters, apart from judging the closeness of party issue positions to their own, might also vote based on their view who is the most competent in terms of solving an issue (problem) – this is issue ownership, or issue competence. Stokes' (1963) work on the valence issue laid the groundwork for this strand of issue voting theory. The idea is that voters agree on the desired outcome related to the issue (thus, it is a valence issue), and among parties/candidates they choose the one which they perceive to be most competent in delivering that outcome. Like the issue position strand, issue competence/ownership has also received strong empirical support and is a widely present theoretical framework in modern scholarship (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Green, 2007; Green & Jennings, 2012; Lanz, 2017).

The third dimension of issue voting tackles the idea that voters consider certain parties to be particularly committed to specific issues, and these are perceived as issues that these parties really care about. This strand of research in issue voting theory started in in last decades of 20th century (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996), and later popularized by van der Brug (2004) and Bellucci (2006). The phenomenon was a couple of years later labelled *associative issue ownership* (Walgrave et al., 2012). This strand of issue voting posits that for voters it is not only important to agree positionally with the party/candidate they vote for, or that they perceive that party/candidate as the most competent to deal with that issue, but also that this party/candidate gives priority to that issue. Thus, voters appreciate a parties' commitment to specific issues. The study of the associative issue ownership dimension of issue voting is still in its infancy, though it is gaining more and more attention. A smaller group of authors have already provided strong empirical evidence that commitment perceptions also matter for the vote (Walgrave et al., 2020).

Apart from the new strand in issue voting research, more recently there has been a growing body of work on issue-specific accountability (Canes-Wrone et al., 2011). While economic issues have often been present in the issue voting literature, they have normally been treated as predictors of incumbents' electoral failures/success, more in line with the valence perspective. The idea of this research strand is to estimate if voters' hold elected officials accountable for their positions on specific issues. Results provide evidence that "issue accountability exists, but depends on the level of public concern and a member's party affiliation" (Canes-Wrone et al., 2011, p. 26).

The connection of issue voting and government accountability received some attention in the issue salience and issue ownership theories (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008). On the other hand, research on the direct link between specific positional economic issues and government accountability is surprisingly scarce (Canes-Wrone et al., 2011), leaving us without comprehensive information on the patterns of position-taking and incumbents' electoral fortunes (Bovitz & Carson, 2006). The idea behind this avenue of issue voting research is that voters care about issues, and when parties/candidates fail to deliver, or if they are perceived as incompetent, they get sanctioned at the following election. So far, the research findings on this relationship, mainly coming from the United States, provide evidence that specific issues have a significant effect on incumbents' electoral margins (Bovitz & Carson, 2006; Canes-Wrone et al., 2011).

For the purpose of this research, I utilize important contributions from all of these research strands. Notably, I take a positional economic issue, preference for redistribution, which polarizes voters (Bobzien, 2019), but also political parties (Alesina & Giuliano, 2011), which leaves us in the area of issue positions. Further, I explore how that relationship is moderated by rising income inequality (changing levels of income inequality, as a valence macro condition), which is related to the issue competence research strand. In the whole work, I connect issue preferences with voting for incumbents, as advised by research findings which connect issues with accountability. Lastly, when redistribution is mentioned, voters normally have clear idea as to the parties which promote redistributive policies (de Mello & Tiongson, 2006), which is an element typical of the issue commitment dimension.

Analysing the effect of preferences for redistribution on vote choice is certainly not a novel approach. Taking the positional economic issue, and estimating its explanatory power in voting behaviour models, leads to positional economic voting theory. Although it is a relatively new strand in economic voting, positional economic voting is gaining more and more attention among scholars (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020; Talving, 2017). Thus, in what follows, I present the core postulates of the theory, I review the existing literature, and identify the research gaps which this thesis aims to fill.

2.3. Positional economic voting

The theory of positional economic voting is at the core of this thesis. The effect of citizens' position on economic issues on their vote choice is the main mechanism that is tested in this project. That is why in this section, I first present the key postulates of the positional economic dimension of economic voting theory. I then move on to review the existing literature in the field, and draw certain conclusions on the gaps in the literature, which this work aims to fill. These gaps lay the groundwork for connecting economic issues, particularly redistribution preferences, to incumbents' electoral fortunes, dependent on their ideological leanings and moderated by the effect of rising income inequality – all of the things which are investigated in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

2.3.1. Key postulates

After decades of treating the economy dominantly as a valence issue within the umbrella of economic voting theory, economic voting scholars have now started exploring new dimensions of the economic vote. Although there is still broad agreement that the economic outcome (the valence perspective) is still the most powerful predictor of the vote in the economic voting models, research treating the economy as a positional issue has begun to emerge (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020; Talving, 2017). By including the positional perspective, valuable insights for our understanding the relationship between economics and the vote can be gained.

This comparatively new strand of economic voting theory assumes that citizens have a position on an economic policy issue(s) and that their opinion/position constitutes one of the set number of alternatives on economic policy more generally. Since there are several potential alternative positions on a given economic policy, a distribution of opinion among citizens in a given society occurs. For example, on the issue of government intervention in the economy, some citizens would like to see more intervention, while some would like to see less. The positional economic voting dimension assumes that the position citizen takes on a given economic issue will affect their vote.

To vote in accordance with the positional economic voting theoretical framework, apart from actually having a position on the relevant economic issue(s), voters also need to be able to discern the positions of the political parties. Previous research has shown that voters normally have a stance on the economic issue(s) which exist, and that they are capable of recognizing party ideology (Önnudóttir, 2014). Thus, previous research provides support for these postulates. Somewhat surprisingly, this is the case even in post-communist Europe, where these ideological divides do not have strong historical roots (Tavits & Letki, 2009).

These two elements, having set economic stances and recognizing the ideological positions of political parties, are crucial for positional economic voting to have an effect. For voters for whom these conditions are met, positional economic voting assumes that their vote will be issue-motivated. In effect, when they choose based on an economic issue, they will vote for the party/candidate with whom they share the most similar views on the given economic issue.

These are the key postulates of the positional economic voting dimension. To provide evidence of the importance of positional economic voting, I review the existing literature in the field and point to the research gaps this work aims to fill.

2.3.2. Literature review

The literature of positional economic voting is mushrooming, especially after the seminal work in the field by Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2011). However, most of the research contributions come from Western advanced democracies, particularly focusing on the US and the UK. Moreover, only some of the articles consider the comparative dimension. This section aims to present the *state of the discipline*, by showcasing the key findings in the existing literature on positional economic vote.

As is often the case, the birth of the idea about links between economic policy and vote came from the United States. One of the first explorations of positional economic voting dynamics, although not labelled as such at the time can be found in Kiewit's work (1981). Analysing data from the American National Election Study (ANES), Kiewit finds support for economic policy-oriented voting in the United States. He tested whether voters with concerns about unemployment tend to vote Democrats, and if those concerned about inflation tend to vote for the Republicans. Inflation proved to be weak predictor of tendency to vote for the GOP. By contrast, concerns about unemployment were consistently associated with higher support for Democratic candidates. The effect was particularly prominent in years which featured high unemployment.

Thereafter, the link between economic policies and the vote featured only occasionally in US scholarly literature. Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2011) found only four papers which tackled the positional hypothesis of economic voting. Bratton (1994) examined the 1988 US Presidential election, and showed that the national budget deficit was a salient issue for the elections. Many thought that the policies suggested by the Republicans were a better solution for the future with respect to that problem. Thus, Bratton's analysis shows that, even though this economic issue was perceived as a significant problem of the Ronald Reagan era, the perception that the Republicans were the ones best able to fight it, resulted in the GOP suffering very little at the ballot box. Alvarez and Nagler (1998) did not find much of the support for positional economic voting in the 1996 US Presidential election. Their analysis shows that perceptions of the general economy (a valence issue) were a more important predictor of the vote than economic policy.

Further, they showed that other non-economic policy issues, such as abortion, were more important than economic issues for explaining the vote in 1996. The two other articles dealt with US gubernatorial elections. Kone and Winters (1993) found only weak overall support for taxation in 407 gubernatorial elections in the 50 US states across 28 years (1957-1985). They found that some governors were punished for governing at a time when taxes increased, but no governor was rewarded for decreasing taxes. This finding was confirmed by Niemi et al. (1995), who showed that governors were punished for tax increases in their state, based on their analysis of the 36 governor races in 1986.

A significant shift happened two decades later. For the 2008 US Presidential elections Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2009) showed that Obama's victory can easily be attributed to economic factors. Additionally, they provide evidence that economic positional issues "clearly add greatly to the explanation of the vote." In particular, those who were concerned about unemployment were much more likely to vote for Obama, alongside those who were concerned about economic inequality and who favoured redistributive policies. Surprisingly, they showed that positional economic issues jointly were more important than valence issues for the 2008 election. Their main conclusion was that economic issues, both valence and positional, should be taken together, and that treating the economy simply as a valence issue underestimates its overall impact on elections. Thus, positional economic dynamics should not be neglected.

This finding was confirmed in their seminal paper on new dimensions of the economic vote (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). The authors showed that valence and positional issues worked heavily in Obama's favour in 2008, particularly the positional issue of tax fairness. This paper came as a turning point for our understanding of the economy and its effect on the vote, and after that, many other authors followed the trend, and started exploring the link between economic policy and voting intention.

Most of these subsequent studies dealt with one case (in one country), or one election. Apart from studies of the US, there is ample evidence from other contexts that the effect of positional economic voting is a strong and important predictor of the vote. Lewis-Beck et al. (2011) showed that all dimensions of the economic vote have their own independent effect on the vote in the UK (the *compleat economic voter* in UK). They analysed the 2010 British election study data, and found that voter positions on economic policy influenced their voting behaviour. More specifically, those who were less inclined towards progressive taxation were much more likely to support the Conservative Party. Positional economic voting is also prominent on the

Iberian Peninsula. Costa Lobo (2013), using four economic issue, found an effect of economic policy on voting in the general election in Portugal in 2011. The effect was statistically significant, though not strong, as valence issues clearly dominated positional ones. In Spain, Fraile and Lewis-Beck (2013) also showed that positional economics have an effect of their own. In the 2008 general election in Spain those who were against paying more taxes were against the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE). Voter stances on pro-bailout policies affected their vote in the general election in Greece in 2012, as was shown by Nezi and Katsanidou (2014) who found evidence that the positional economic vote gains strength in times of crisis. More recently, Okolikj and Quinlan (2020) showed that the German economic voter is also *compleat*, and that all dimensions of the economic vote have strength as predictors of voting behaviour in Germany. They showed that German voters who are against income redistribution were more likely to vote for centre-right parties in 2013. Additionally, the effect was more pronounced for more politically sophisticated voters. In a forthcoming article, Lewis-Beck and Quinlan show that positional economic considerations played important factor in shaping the vote decisions of Irish voters in the 2020 general election. The authors show that voters' views on income redistribution and taxes/spending affected their vote choice, providing the first empirical evidence of the multidimensionality of the economic vote in Ireland (Lewis-Beck & Quinlan, forthcoming).

The comparative evidence about the importance of economic policy voting is also growing. One of the first cross-national explorations of the phenomenon came from Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck (2013a). They explored unemployment as an economic policy issue, and found some evidence for policy-oriented hypotheses and a link between those who favour lower unemployment and those who vote for left leaning parties. However, they find that effect is conditioned by incumbency, and leftist incumbents actually experienced electoral losses when unemployment rates were on the rise. Paparo and Lewis-Beck (2017), studying seven advanced democracies (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States) showed that economic vote is driven by valence and positional issues, and very surprisingly found that the "positional economic vote appears about as weighty as the valence economic vote." Talving (2017) confirmed that finding, and additionally followed up on the work of Nezi and Katsanidou (2014) showing that the effect of positional economics gains strength in times of crisis. In a comparative analysis, Talving shows that fiscal austerity policies as an economic issue affected the vote during the European Parliament (EP) 2014 elections. Studying income inequality as a positional economic issue, Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck

(2020) confirmed the effect this issue has on the vote. However, they also show that both left- and right-wing incumbents are held accountable for changes in income inequality, and conclude that "even a positional economic policy issue, can affect the vote in a valence way, at least at the macro-level" (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020). Using a plethora of positional economic issues (redistribution preferences, welfare and defence spending) Quinlan and Okolikj (2020) showed the global strength of the positional economic vote. They also confirmed the importance of the positional economic voting dimension, adding that "positional economic voting is more likely to take hold in mature democracies" (Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020).

As we can see from the literature review above, these authors, in national and comparative studies, for various first and second order elections, find that positional economics, distinct from valence, contribute to explaining vote choice. Even though valence remains the most prominent dimension of the economic vote, studying only the valence perspective underestimates the depth of economic voting.

However, no one has examined the potential link between the valence and positional perspectives, and all of the above authors treated these dimensions independently in their models of voting behaviour. The following section brings the two perspectives together, arguing that voters are not "one or the other", that is merely valence or positional, but that both of these are factors in voting decisions.

2.4. The interplay between the spatial and valence perspectives

Two major schools of thought within the rational choice theory have mostly been treated as *rivals* in explanations of voting behaviour – these are the valence and spatial perspectives. Following the basic logic of the two, voters can be divided into two types.

The first type, Voter A, is *the vengeful god*, a voter who takes into consideration what the government has done, whether it has performed better than a certain threshold, or reached a preestablished value or set of criteria. Based on that, Voter A votes for the government or punishes it by voting for the opposition. Because of that, these models are often labelled as "incumbency-oriented models" or "performance-voting models". Additionally, because this logic assumes voters evaluate governments by their achieved results (or lack of the same), Voter A is typically labelled as a "retrospective voter" (Fiorina, 1981), because Voter A looks back at the results and provides a reward or punishment for the incumbents.

The second type, Voter B, is the one who tries to find the candidate/party which is closest to them on the ideological spectrum, or closest on the issue(s) that Voter B finds important. Thus, Voter B has a clear policy stance, places candidates/parties on an ideological spectrum, and casts a ballot for the one they feel closest to, trying to minimize the ideological distance between the voter and the party (Downs, 1957). Logic assumes these voters mostly care about issues and policies, and that is why they have often been labelled in the literature as "issue voters" or "policy voters". These voters are prospective and they select parties based on their expectation for the future (Kiewiet, 1981).

The first school of thought imagines that Voter A only cares about government's performance and ideology does not play any role for this voter. On the other hand, scholars who take spatial voting perspective assume that for Voter B ideological closeness is the most important factor when deciding for whom this voter will cast a ballot, and incumbency status is irrelevant for this voter. Both of these perspectives have mainly be "investigated by self-contained literatures" (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007).

However, it is hard to be convinced by the argument that voters are merely one type or the other. Furthermore, it is difficult to argue that a performance voter (that is Voter A) completely disregards candidate/party ideology and does not consider that at all in their voting decision. The same argument works in reverse - it seems very unlikely that a positional voter (in this case Voter B) does not care at all about the performance of incumbents, and sees their choice only in terms of ideological proximity or distance.

I am interested in how both of these factors contribute to voting decisions. As such, I suggest that an ideological voter is also sensitive to incumbency status, in addition to choosing candidates or parties with whom they are ideologically close. The key assumption is that a positional economic voter will include information on the performance of incumbents in the factors that affect their choice, especially if that information relates to incumbents which are ideologically close to them. This piece of information becomes particularly relevant in multiparty systems, where voters are faced with a choice between more than one party which might be said to be close to them in ideological terms. Furthermore, factoring in both incumbency status and the performance of certain parties may help us explain why voters choose one left (right) party above another left (right) party. So far, the positional economic voting literature, as discussed above, has mainly treat parties with similar ideological perspectives *as a bundle*. Thus, this strand of literature does not give us an explanation as to why a German left-wing voter would, for instance, vote for the SPD instead of the Green Party or Die Linke, or why a Spanish right-wing oriented voter would chose the People's Party instead of the Citizens, to provide only a few examples. Applying the logic, I suggest above could help us explore and better understand the decisions that positional voters make within certain ideological families, in the context of these parties either as incumbents or in opposition.

Let us illustrate how the combination of the two factors might work with an example. Voter B, a positional voter, cares about redistribution and inequality-reducing policies, social justice, and is someone who prefers left-wing parties to be in office. In a multiparty system, with some left-wing parties being incumbents and some in opposition, Voter B will vote for incumbent left-wing parties if they are happy with how they perform, and will vote for left-wing opposition parties if they think the incumbents are doing a poor job. So, Voter B, in their voting decision considers both positional preferences and also performance in office. The same goes for a hypothetical right-wing oriented voter.

Following this example, this research tries to fill the recognized gaps by exploring the interplay between the spatial and valence voting approaches. To do that, I factor in the incumbency status in the voting decision of the positional economic voter. I try to bring the two perspectives of economic voting into one equation. To further understand the basic logic behind making these kind of decisions for voters, I apply the logic of previous research connecting issues with accountability (Bovitz & Carson, 2006; Canes-Wrone et al., 2011)

Although they both explore issue motivated voting preferences, the two voting theories, issue voting and positional economic voting, remain separate theories. In the following section, I connect the two through the concept of government accountability.

2.5. Issues/policies and accountability

One of the central questions in studies of elections, and indeed of democracy in general, is whether voters hold their elected officials to account. It is the *gold standard* in the theory of democracy that elected officials should be accountable for the way they govern, for the policies they adopt, for the ways they implement them, and for the outcomes of these policies. This is known as democratic accountability.

The concept of accountability is often present in political science studies. The definition of accountability is rather straightforward, and nicely presented by Fearon (1999): "The concept of accountability is not by itself problematic, or at least it should not be. We say that one person, A, is accountable to another, B, if two conditions are met. First, there is an understanding that A is obliged to act in some way on behalf of B. Second, B is empowered by some formal institutional or perhaps informal rules to sanction or reward A for her activities or performance in this capacity."

In relation to issue voting theory in particular, link between issue preferences and government accountability has been explored many times, even specifically with economic issues (Arnold, 1990; Canes-Wrone et al., 2011; Kingdon, 1977). However, normally these would be valence issue, or issues treated as if they are valence issue. By contrast, positional economic voting has also briefly explored the connection between positional economic issues (economic policies) and voting for incumbent governments (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013a; Lewis-Beck & Quinlan, 2021). However, in the studies focused on positional economic voting, the dependent variable is most often voting for left or right parties/candidates (Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020). So, this strand of research tends to show that left (right)-leaning voters on economic policy have a higher likelihood of voting for leftist (rightist) parties/candidates.

These two traditions of connecting issues to parties do not engage in a mutual dialogue. As argued above, it is natural that a voter (to some extent, at least) factors in both party ideology and the performance of the incumbents when deciding on who to vote for. Keeping the two traditions separate from each other creates unnatural divisions, in arguing that voter is of only one type or the other. This hardly reflects the empirical reality (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007).

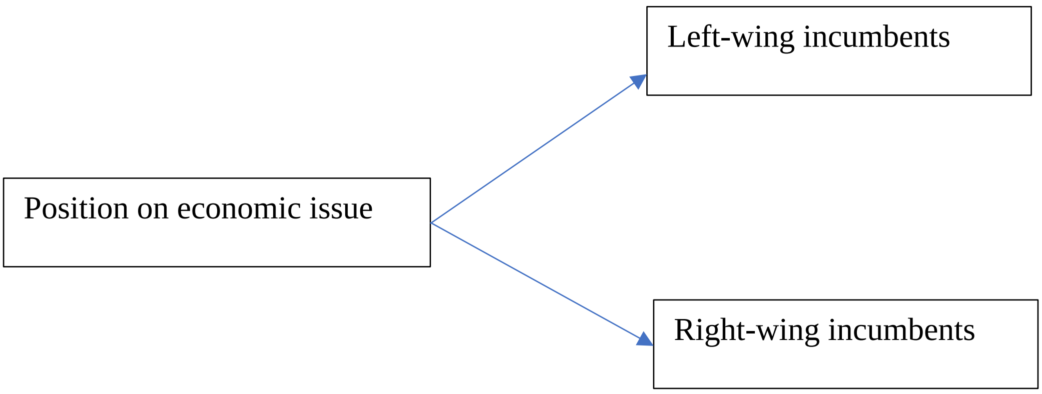
Research on the links between issue positions and accountability is surprisingly scarce, especially outside of the United States. The comparative work on the topic is also very scant. The existence of that link, comparatively, is something this thesis aims to explore.

Figure 2: The basic relationship related to the link between issue position and support for incumbents

However, *not all economic issues are created equal.* Nor are all governments. Taking positions on economic issues inevitably involves the consideration of the ideological preferences of voters, which are reflected in their own ideological predispositions as well as their preconception of ideological positions of parties/candidates. Moreover, most governments have policy leanings towards leftist or rightist orientation. While, I acknowledge that more recently there is a growing trend of thinking about left and right in terms of cultural issues (Vries et al., 2013), particularly national identity (Otjes et al., forthcoming), in this thesis, I rely on economic dimension of left and right. Left leaning parties are those who advocate for more government intervention in economy with the goal of achieving more equal economic outcomes. Right leaning parties are those who advocate for free markets, advocating that economic inequality and free markets boost economic development.

Thus, it would not make much sense to connect positional issues with all governments, and to have one expectation regarding the link between the two. Because positional economic issues polarize voters, I argue that it is important to explore the link between issue positions and government performance conditional on that governments' ideology. So, the government's ideology should moderate the relationship between the position on a given economic issue and the evaluation of incumbents.

Figure 3: Base relationship conditional on the governments' ideology



In this way, the base relationship takes into account the fact that accountability depends on voter positions on the issue, but also on each governments' ideological position. Thus, the interplay of incumbency-oriented economic voting (the performance model) with positional economic voting (the partisan theory of economic voting) comes into play. The next challenge is to answer a question - what is the expected relationship, or two relationships in this case? I consider that question in the following section.

2.6. *Who is to be blamed and for what?* – Accountability and Ideology

Previous research show that voters will not judge all governments in the same way. Powell and Whitten found evidence that, depending on their ideological preferences, voters hold governments to different standards (1993). Explaining the expected relationship between ideological preferences and governments ideology is also essential to understanding relationship between accountability and ideology.

To briefly recap, there are two theories on the expected relationship between ideology and government performance evaluation, covering two types of voters. The first one assumes that voters are retrospective (they look back) and second considers prospective voters (those who look in the future).

The first, a more traditional view, is that voters will have expectations from parties based on both their own and the party ideology. It is natural to assume that voters with leftist (or rightist) attitudes will expect the parties they vote for to deliver the policies their voters prefer. The expectations are based on the ways governments traditionally behave. Left-leaning governments normally opt for a different set of economic policies or priorities than right-leaning ones. Naturally, this is not the law of politics, and there are many differences within ideological families, and among left (right) parties/candidates. However, traditionally, left-wing governments are more concerned with issues such as full employment or income redistribution, and when they are in office, they tend to rely more strongly on state intervention in the economy. Conversely, right-wing incumbents are traditionally more concerned with inflation or limiting the tax burden on individuals and/or corporations.

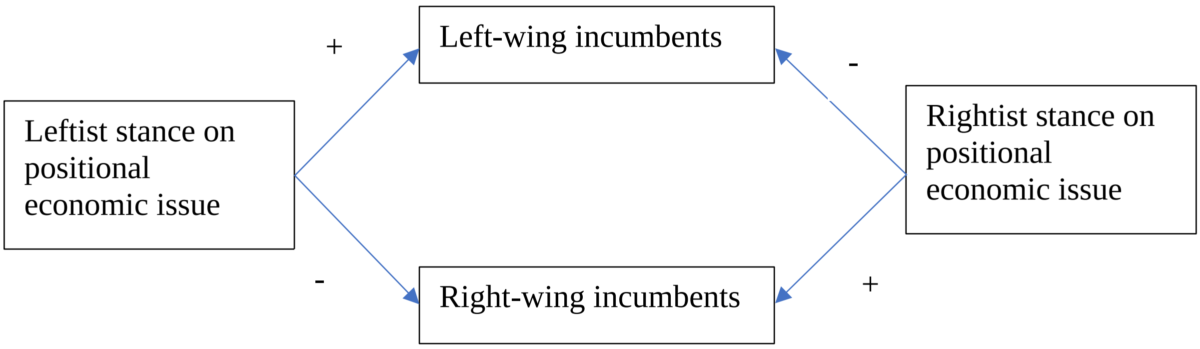
Consequently, voters formed expectations along those lines. When they are retrospectively assessing government achievements, and when they judge government performance in office, voters will hold left-wing governments to a higher standard on (un)employment and redistribution. On the other hand, they will hold right-wing governments to a higher standard in relation to dealing with inflation (Powell & Whitten, 1993).

According to this view, those who hold leftist preferences on positional economic issues will try to keep leftist governments in office, and try to remove a right-wing one. The opposite is true for those voters who hold rightist preferences on positional economic issues. These relationships should hold because voters expect left (right) incumbents to adopt left (right) policies when in office.

The other view, based on more recent findings, relies on issue ownership theory. Specifically, Egan (2009) points out that accountability and government responsiveness might vary, depending on positional issues. He proceeds to argue that political parties enjoy "long-term trust in their ability to handle specific issues" (Egan, 2009). Once the issue ownership perspective is incorporated in the model, empirical evidence shows that parties tend to be less responsive on issues they "own." However, because of the long lasting trust on the issue, left-leaning prospective voters are still expected to support leftist incumbents, while right-leaning prospective voters are expected to support right-wing incumbents. Despite lower levels of responsiveness on the part of the issue-owning party and despite the fact that this party might be in office during the difficult period, prospective voters will still give them their vote because they are the issue owners. This is the case when voters decide not to sanction or reward, but instead to choose based on competency (Hellwig, 2012).

So, the expected relationship between stances on positional economic issues and incumbent performance will be conditional on the ideology of that incumbent, and will take a following direction.

Figure 4: Expected relationship between issue stances and vote for incumbents conditional on incumbents' ideology



This figure and the above presented mechanisms have, to some extent, the underlying logic of two-party systems, with one party being in government and the other in opposition, and with one party being primarily left-wing and the other being mainly right-wing. However, most advanced democracies are now multi-party systems. Thus, it is entirely possible, and empirical reality confirms, that in each system there will be several left (right) wing parties, some of which are in opposition, and some which are incumbents. As such, the logical question is – why would a voter wanting more redistribution cast their vote for one left-wing party, and not another, or would that voter vote for right-wing incumbents or opposition? There are numerous possible answers to this question. Here, to the above outlined logic, I add contextual effects, arguing that context will *help* voters in their decision to cast a vote for one and not the other left-wing party. Abundance of literature provides empirical evidence that the issue of redistribution preferences gains more importance as income inequality rises (Bobzien, 2019; Paul & Verdier, 1996; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015). Thus, the effect of redistribution preferences on vote choice should be more pronounced when there is more economic inequality in a country. Given how interconnected are income inequality (contextual factor, macro level) and redistribution preferences (positional issue, individual level), I take rise in income inequality as factor which will help us explain and better understand the relationship between a particular positional stance on the issue of income redistribution and vote choice. The following section explores the role of context in the relationship between redistribution preferences and support for incumbents.

2.7. Context matters – the backlash against rising income inequality

Over the years, studies on economic voting have become increasingly comparative (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020; Talving, 2017). While the scholarly output produced has keep finding new evidence that economic vote is robust across time and different countries (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2019), scholars are still puzzled by the differences in effect, and try to explain these differences on the basis of the different contexts. So, contextual variables feature prominently in explanations of economic vote variance, particularly in comparative studies. Among other things, researchers have investigated the effects of government composition, that is single party vs. coalition governments (Duch & Stevenson, 2008), the clarity of responsibility (Nadeau et al., 2002; Powell & Whitten, 1993), the electoral rules (Dassonneville et al., 2017), the number of political parties (Anderson, 2000), government ideology (Powell & Whitten, 1993), globalization (Hellwig, 2001), economic crises, in terms of bailout vs. non-bailout countries (Okolikj & Quinlan, 2016), and various others.

As with many other findings from the economic voting literature, the above ones mainly come from exploring the traditional valence (performance-based) model. The role of context in explaining differences between countries or across time, when it comes to other dimensions of the economic vote (patrimony and positional economic voting) is yet to be thoroughly investigated, with several articles making important contributions to this research strand so far (Anderson, 2000; Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020; Talving, 2017). And even the above mentioned list of factors that can influence the economic vote does not exhaust all the potential options (Dorussen & Palmer, 2002). In this thesis, I explore changes in income inequality as an important contextual factor which moderates the relationship between taking positions on the economic issue of redistribution preferences and support for incumbents.

Voluminous literature from the sphere of political economy points to a strong link between inequality and redistribution preferences, showing that redistribution levels and redistribution preferences tend to be higher when income inequality is on the rise (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Cheung & Lucas, 2016; de Mello & Tiongson, 2006). Establishing the relationship between the two is nothing new, and this topic has been debated in political economy literature for decades (Meltzer & Richard, 1981; Paul & Verdier, 1996). The prevailing evidence supports the presence of a positive link between the two.

While the link between income inequality and redistribution preferences is widely accepted in the literature, rising dissatisfaction with income inequality is something that is gaining more and more attention, and comparative voting behaviour research is no exception to this trend. Even though income inequality has been on the rise for several decades now (Milanovic, 2012), its' salience increased with the rise of the "Occupy" movement (Gaby & Caren, 2016). This, further, led to the politization of the issue, and income inequality caused a political backlash (Burgoon, 2013; Newman & Hayes, 2019).

The inequality backlash theory, suggested by Newman and Hayes (2019), posit that citizens will use their votes to punish elected officials when inequality is on the rise. The authors further assume that this punishment for rising inequality is more likely to happen in contexts where inequality is high, and thus visible in everyday life. Additionally, the authors claim that "punishment for inequality will be heightened by an officeholders' culpability for inequality, which in coarse form can be comprised of their record of voting for inequality - enhancing economic policies" (Newman & Hayes, 2019, p. 7). So, the authors connect the inequality backlash with both policies aimed at reducing income inequality and those in office at times when income inequality rises.

Newman and Hayes (2019) test the inequality backlash theory only in the American context, but they do find support for the theory, finding evidence that, in the USA at least, voters who live in places with high inequality tend to vote against incumbents who oppose inequality reducing policies (such as changes in tax policies, or minimum wage increases). The effect holds for both Democratic and Republican incumbents.

I expand on their findings, and test the inequality backlash theory globally, connecting it with the most prominent inequality-reducing policy (redistribution) and also with different types of political parties (left-wing vs. right-wing), and their different incumbency statuses (incumbents vs. opposition). Thus, I posit that in multi-party systems, this contextual condition (income inequality), will help us better understand why voters who want more redistribution choose one left-wing party over another.

First, I elaborate on the decision to treat rising income inequality as a valence macro condition. Given the documented dislike of citizens' around the world for high inequality and unfairness (Bartels, 2009; Borck, 2007), and empirical support for treating income inequality as a valence issue (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020), I identify sufficient reasons to treat rising income inequality as a valence macro condition. Furthermore, since I am faced with empirical limitations in the data I use, and do not have citizens' attitudes towards income inequality at the individual level, but only aggregate data related to the levels of inequality (through the GINI index), I take rising income inequality as a valence macro condition, not as a valence issue. In what follows, I explain in more detail why I treat rising income inequality as a valence condition (in Subsection 2.6.1.). Then, in the following subsection, I expand on how rising income inequality moderates the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice.

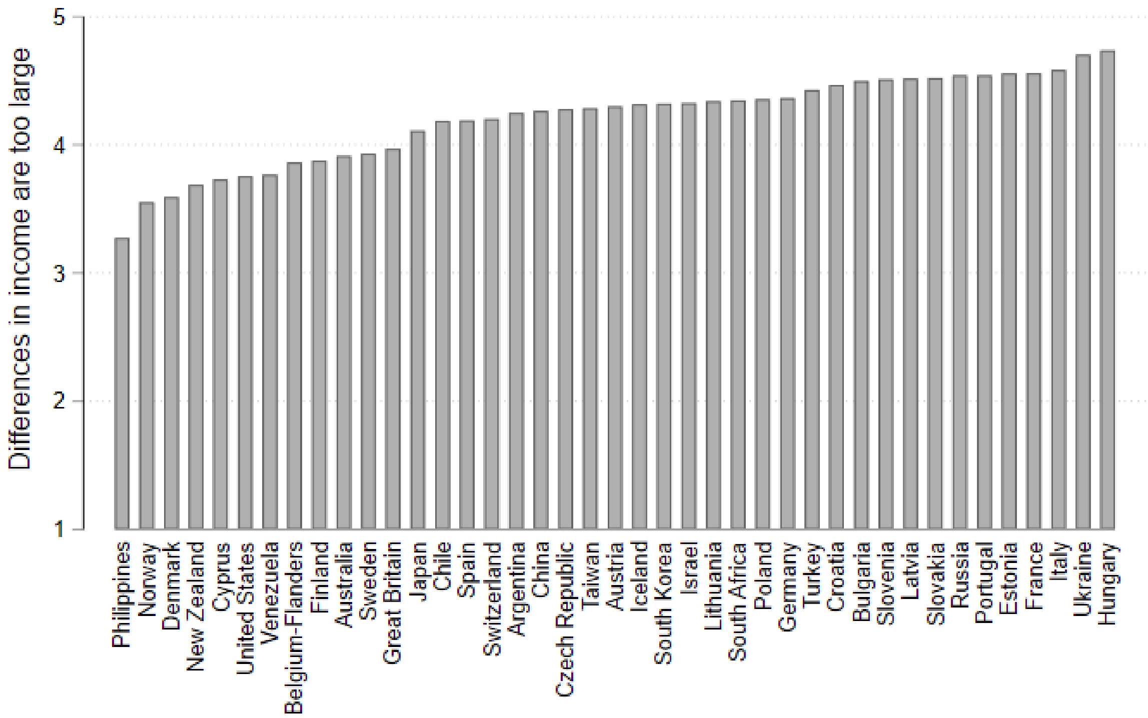
2.7.1. The rise in income inequality as a valence condition

In this section, I argue that a rise in income inequality (that is changing levels of income inequality) should be treated as a valence macro condition in the economic voting models. I base that claim on (a) the previous research findings; (b) the strong empirical evidence that the majority of citizens in democracies around the world think that differences in income in their respective countries are too large; and (c) showing that various groups in society all have negative feelings towards a rise in income inequality.

In a recent, and very thorough, study Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck (2020) fond that both economic growth and income inequality are good predictors of incumbent support. They find evidence that the higher economic growth is, the higher the chance of incumbent re-election, and, conversely, the higher the income inequality, the lower the chance of incumbent re-election. Their study was conducted on a sample of 318 elections in 37 countries, over a time span from 1963 up to 2017. Somewhat surprisingly for the authors, and not in line with their initial expectations, they found that a rise of income inequality hurts both left- and right-wing incumbents. Based on the extensive evidence presented in the article, the authors question whether income inequality in fact functions as position issues (which was their expectation) and suggest that it might actually be a valence issue.

Further evidence for that claim can be found in the empirical world. Looking at the data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) module on Social Inequality from 2009, we see that in all countries which participated in the module, the majority of citizens thought that "differences in income levels are too large." The descriptive analysis from the 41 studies included in the ISSP module reveals that, across the whole dataset, 83.5% of all respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement. Even though the total percentage is very high, the figure below reveals that there is some variation between countries. We know historically that some countries (the UK and the USA are perhaps the best-known examples) strongly advocated (and generally still do) for strict market-oriented policies, known to generate higher levels of income inequality. However, even in these countries, the overall agreement with the above statement is now fairly high. As we know from the literature, sometimes issues can convert from positional to valence (Clarke et al., 2011; Sanders et al., 2009). Details can be found in the figure below, where countries are sorted from those that have lowest support for the income differences statement to those that have highest support, on a 5-point scale.

Figure 5: Differences in income are too large, mean by country. Source: ISSP, 2009



Additional evidence to support the claim that a rise in income inequality should be treated as a valence condition is shown in the fact that when income inequality is on the rise, it tends to affect citizens from all walks of life. It is obvious why poorer people and those belonging to the middle class are affected by any rise in income inequality (to name just one example, their chance of climbing up the wealth ladder is significantly damaged, as inequality strongly reduces economic mobility). However, even those belonging to richer groups in a society are negatively affected by the rise in income inequality, as is pointed out in the literature. Rehm et al. (2012) found evidence that income inequality is a sizable risk for wealthier citizens, too. They show that economic disadvantage, something that is a major problem for low-income citizens, strongly correlates with economic insecurity, something that is a major risk for those with higher income. Additionally, studying the US context, Rueda and Stegmueller (2016), show evidence that affluent individuals tend to be more supportive of redistribution in US states where levels of income inequality are greater.

Based on all of the above, I argue that a rise in income inequality should be treated as a valence condition in economic voting models. However, the policies which aim to deal with the problem of rising income inequality are positional issue. In the section that follows, I combine preferences for redistribution with the vote for left-wing parties, and show how the contextual effect (the rise in income inequality) helps us better understand the relationship between positional issues and evaluations of incumbent performance.

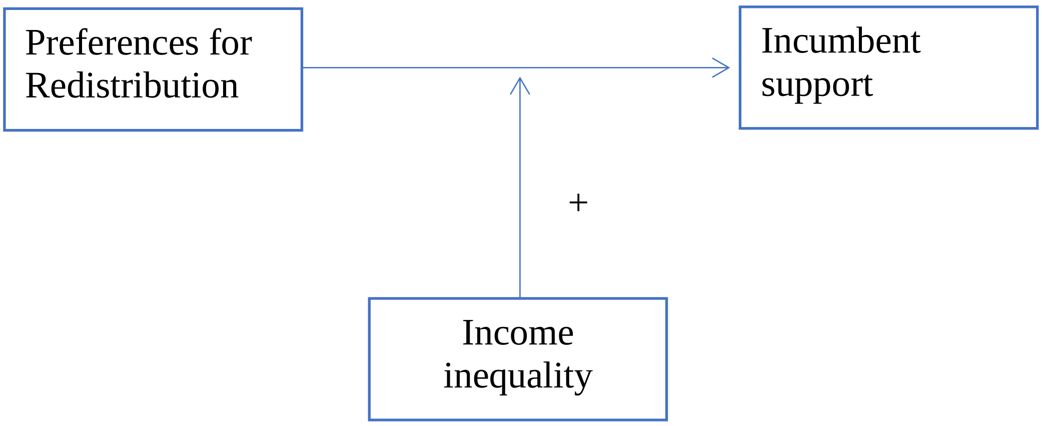
2.7.2. Income inequality, redistribution preferences and vote choice

This section develops a model showing how a rise in income inequality could factor in to the minds of voters, and help in the explanation of their voting behaviour. Furthermore, I investigate how a rise in income inequality can be a moderating factor in the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice. I build on the arguments of the previous section, and the demonstrated relationship between redistribution and voting behaviour, and add the rise in income inequality (the inequality backlash) into the equation. To do that, I first explore how rising levels of income inequality affect the relationship between preferences for redistribution and the vote for incumbents. Second, I elaborate on how contextual factor can help us explain vote choice differences on economic policy in multi-party systems.

Since I treat rising income inequality as a valence condition, given the reasons above, I follow Clarke et al. who wrote that “in the realm of valence politics, it is not ‘what’, but rather ‘who’, and ‘how’ that matters” (2011, p. 238). To further strengthen the argument, I add a further two empirical findings. First, governments are usually perceived as the actors who are to be blamed for rising income inequality (Dorn et al., 2018). Second, governments are responsible for implementing and adopting policies which aim to fight rising income inequality (Leon, 2011). Given this, it is reasonable to expect that governments will punished (or rewarded) when income inequality is on the rise (or the decline) by those voters who want more redistribution. Thus, rising income inequality moderates the relationship between redistribution preferences and the level of vote for incumbents.

Political economy literature almost without exception shows that rising levels of income inequality nearly everywhere mean that citizens want more redistribution (Lind, 2005). Thus, I follow the same mechanism, and assume that rising income inequality will make the issue of redistribution more salient, and will lead to the stronger effect of redistribution preferences on government support.

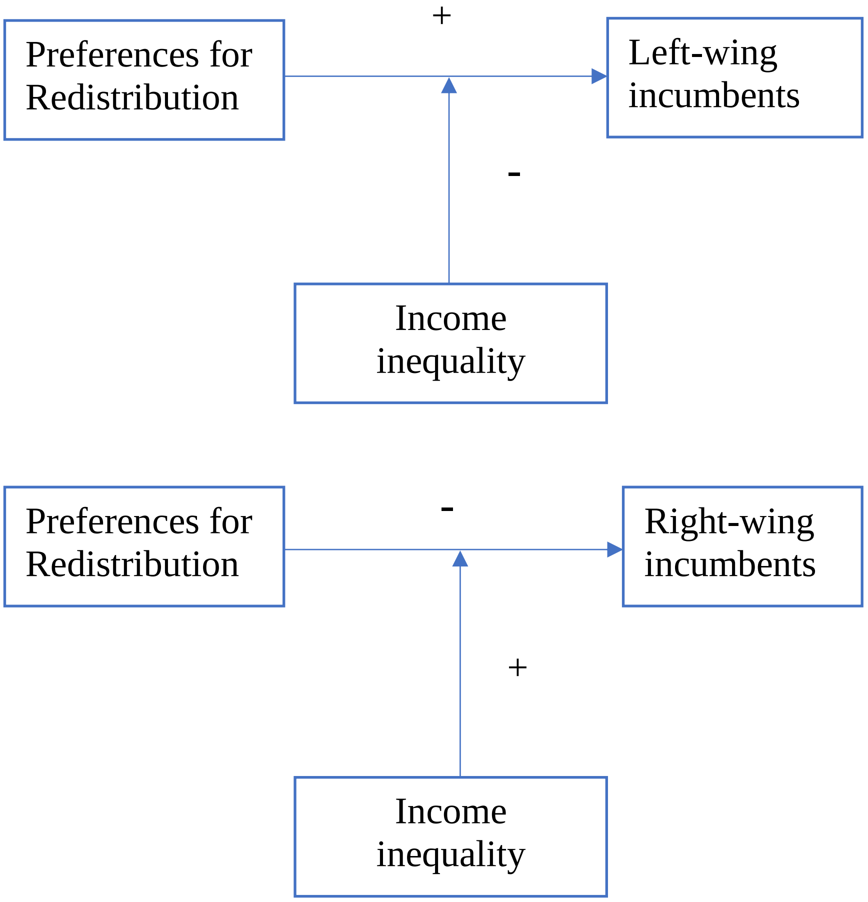
Figure 6: The effect of income inequality on the relationship between preferences for redistribution and incumbent support



From the discussion above we, know that there is a reasonable expectation that voters will not evaluate all governments in the same way, and they will not hold them to the same standard when it comes to economic policies. Logically, left (right) leaning voters want governments to enact leftist (rightist) economic agendas, and this follows previous research findings on the topic (Powell & Whitten, 1993). As redistribution is one of "the core issues of contention between parties of the Left and Right" (Pontusson & Rueda, 2010, p. 674), the distribution of policy preferences among voters with different ideological backgrounds, and their expectations from different governments, are easy to recognize. Thus, the relationship described above in Figure 3, stating that left (right) leaning voters will vote for left (right) leaning governments and punish their ideological counterparts in office.

The question that remains open is how the contextual valence condition, the rise in income inequality, affects that relationship. Since right-wing incumbents are not to be expected to be proponents of increasing redistributive policies, we would expect that voters who want more redistribution will tend to replace them, and that rising levels of income inequality will actually make their desire (that relationship) even stronger. Left-wing parties, on the other hand, should be the ones who benefit from rising income inequality, since voters are supposed to see them as a solution to that, rather than part of the problem. However, once they are in office, they are to be held accountable, just as any other government would be, for the adverse developments. This has already been demonstrated by Dassoneville and Lewis-Beck (2013a) who provided empirical evidence that left-wing incumbents are more severely punished when unemployment is on the rise. Following that logic, we would assume that the same mechanism will be in place for rising levels of income inequality, and that those who want more redistribution will punish left-wing incumbents when income inequality is on the rise.

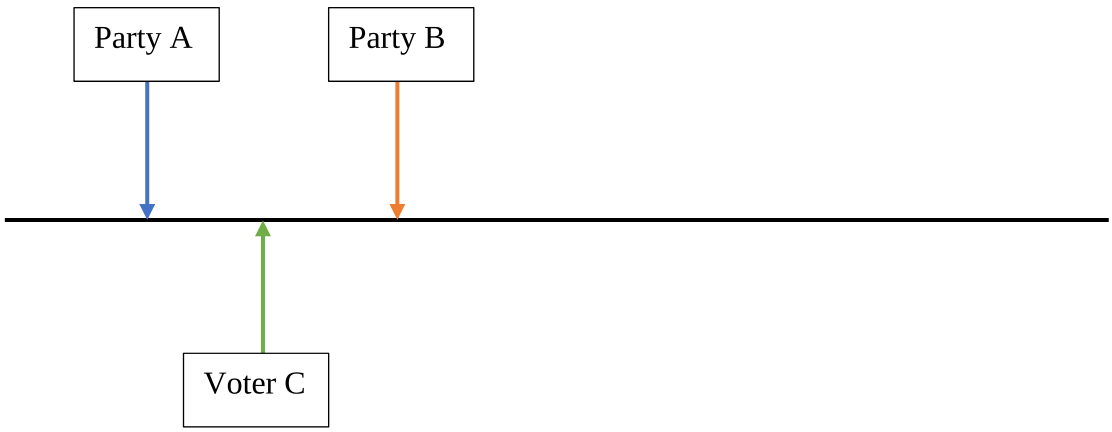
Figure 7: Income inequality as a moderator in the relationship between redistribution preferences and the vote for incumbents of different deological leanings



However, in multi-party systems, which are predominant in the advanced industrialized world, it is rather rare that one ideological camp is in government and the other is in opposition. Voters are rarely faced with these clear-cut choices between left (right) wing incumbents and a right (left) wing opposition. More often than not, in advanced democracies, voters face a plethora of options on the ballot, with multiple parties on both sides of the ideological divide, some of which are incumbents and some of which are in opposition. Let us take Germany as an example. Some left-wing parties are in government (the SPD) while some are in opposition (Die Linke), just as some right wing parties are in government (the Liberals) and some are in opposition (the CDU/CSU Union).

Previous research on positional economic voting in multi-party systems has rarely investigated what is happening within these ideological camps, and why a voter votes for one left (right) wing party and not another. I attempt to dig into this problem by exploring how incumbency status and contextual factors can make voter more or less likely to vote for certain parties within a given ideological bloc. Let us first investigate Scenario 1, presented in the figure below.

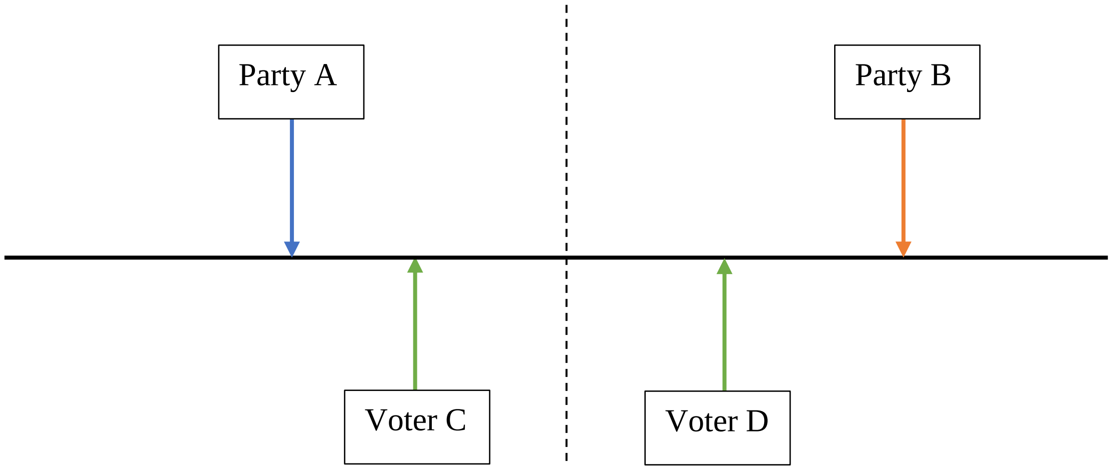
Figure 8: Scenario 1 – Voter's and parties' position in the ideological spectrum



Voter C is a typical voter who would want to see more income redistribution in their country. When estimating whom to vote for, this voter chooses between the available options on the left wing. The traditional positional economic voting view would tell us that this voter will vote either for Party A or for Party B, as both are left-wing parties. Further, positional issue voting would not really be able to provide more detailed answer, as Voter C is at the same ideological distance (proximity) in relation to these two left-wing parties in the political system.

However, let us take into account the fact that Party B is the incumbent, while Party A is in opposition. So, a voter who is voting for a left-wing party, apart from party ideology, has more information available at their disposal, and can evaluate the performance of Party B in office. Thus, Voter C can add additional element to the equation, and can factor in whether she is happy with the performance of the incumbents, Party B. Since we know that Voter C cares about redistribution, and the level of income inequality in the society, we use changes in income inequality in between elections as a proxy for their satisfaction with the government's performance. If income inequality is on the rise, Voter C will be unhappy with the government's performance and the policies they have implemented to fight income inequality. Thus, this voter will tend to vote for the opposition option, Party A. If income inequality is on the decline, Voter C should be happy with the government performance on this issue, and the implemented policies to combat inequality. Thus, Voter C in that scenario will tend to support the incumbent government, and will vote for Party B. Let us now consider another scenario, with a right-wing government in office.

Figure 9: Scenario 2 – Voter and Party positions on the ideological spectrum



In the second scenario, Party B is again incumbent; however, this time it is a right-wing incumbent. Voter D is a right-leaning voter, and is ideologically positioned on the right side of *the fence*. However, if this voter slightly cares about redistribution, and sees rising income inequality as something negative, and if she is dissatisfied with the incumbent, all of that should result in higher probability of Voter D choosing Party A, despite the fact that Party A is *on the wrong side of the ideological fence.* As in Scenario 1, rising levels of income inequality, controlling for other economic indicators, will point to voter's dissatisfaction with the performance of Party B in office. On the other hand, Voter C might become a Party B voter, in case when income inequality declines, and Voter C is happy with the implemented policies and the decline of inequality in the period during which Party B has been in government.

These are certain typical scenarios that could emerge and that demonstrate how ideology, performance and contextual factors can shape voter party preferences. Or at least, they can serve as examples of expected relationships. Based on the data and the observed behaviour, I try to provide evidence that these expected patterns provide a good description of voter behaviour, or to provide evidence that this is not the case, and offer alternative explanations. This part of the analysis is based on the observed behaviour of voters through survey instruments. The following section is about what voters are *supposed* to do, given their preferences, and aims to explain to what extent voters are casting votes that are as in accordance as possible with their preferences and what parties/candidates on the ballot are advocating for/offering. Furthermore, I will explore whether rising income inequality as a macro factor contributes to higher/lower levels of this “correct” vote cross-nationally.

2.8. Voting *correctly*

The first two empirical chapters of this thesis attempt to explain voting behaviour in the countries under study, and further explore contextual factors that might serve as moderating variables in the relationship between preferences for redistribution and vote choice. As discussed above, this type of analysis assumes and tests the link between the leftist (rightist) economic policy stances of voters and their actual vote for leftist (rightist) parties. Additionally, the mechanism assumes that voters will be aware of when income inequality is on the rise, and that they will consider this information when deciding for whom they are going to vote. Thus, the valence economic condition (the rise in income inequality) will guide their decision to punish or reward the government. The mechanism further assumes that voters are knowledgeable enough to identify which parties are advocating their preferred economic policy, in this case which parties are advocating for more redistribution. Whether these assumptions are based in reality or represent too high a standard for the *ordinary voter* to reach is something I return to in the subsequent chapter.

However, from the abundant previous research, we know that citizens rarely reach the normatively desired goal of democratic theory – being fully informed voters (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006; McKelvey & Ordeshook, 1985; Zaller, 2018). Despite the fact that they often lack all the necessary information, voters tend to vote for parties with whom they ideologically align (Tausanovitch & Warshaw, 2018), and evidence suggests that the majority of voters would vote the same way they do even if they were *fully informed* about everything that is happening in the country and about the policy positions of the candidates/parties (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997). Does this apply to those who want more redistribution or those who think governments should redistribute less? Are these voters voting in line with what they “ought” to vote for? Do rising levels of income inequality affect the levels of those who vote *correctly*?

In an attempt to answer these questions I rely on the theory of correct voting (Lau et al., 2014; Lau & Redlawsk, 1997). Correct voting is the name of a theory introduced by Lau and Redlawsk (1997) which is one way of trying to estimate the quality of votes in the system. Specifically, the correct vote is “the extent to which voters, inevitably under conditions of incomplete information, nonetheless actually choose the candidate they would have chosen had they been fully informed about the issues and candidates running in that election" (Lau et al., 2014, p. 240). So, it is important to highlight that a correct vote is not something that is imposed on the voters, as the correct choice in the given election. On the contrary, based on voters' values, preferences and beliefs, the correct vote for that voter is the one that most closely aligns with the parties that are advocating for the same or most similar values, policies and beliefs of that voter. So, the theory is not about universal values and definitely not about ascribing a correct option which is correct for all voters. The correct voting theory estimates what each voter ought to do, given his or her values, and given what the candidates/parties are standing for. As such, it is often the case that for one voter the correct vote in one election is Party A, while for another voter the correct vote in the same election is Party B.

Thus, correct voting also implicitly informs us about quality of democratic representation, as it tells us if voters align their votes with their personal values. Economic policies are particularly important in that aspect, as these shape a lot of decisions within a political system (Dorussen & Palmer, 2002). All of this makes it important for this research endeavour to explore whether those who ought to vote for parties advocating for more redistribution actually do that. It helps us to further understand the link between redistribution preferences and voting choice, and it also advances our knowledge of the correct voting theory, especially in relation to the comparative correct vote.

Comparatively we know little about correct voting. Lau et al. (2014) in their seminal work broke new grounds by exploring correct voting across thirty three democracies worldwide. However, up to today this remains one of the very few explorations of the correct voting phenomenon comparatively, as most studies deal with single country analysis, predominantly analysing correct voting in the US context. The obvious reason for that might lie in the lack of survey instruments comparatively. Empirical testing of correct voting theory requires a plethora of survey instruments, which have to be run in the same way across countries and have similar substantive meanings across different countries. All of these factors together are understandably hard to achieve.

For these reasons, Lau et al (2014) relied on only three criteria (three survey items) for their comparative assessment of levels of correct voting: retrospective performance evaluation, party identification and placement on a left-right ideological 11-point scale. I say "only" three criteria, as it is very few compared to the typical correct voting paper written using the American National Election Study, where authors tend to include several dozen survey items and candidate/party stances to estimate the voters' correct vote (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; Pierce & Lau, 2019; Stiers & Dassonneville, 2019).

I attempt to advance Lau's et al. (2014) comparative research on the topic in three ways. First, I introduce a specific economic policy (preferences for redistribution) into the equation and avoid drawing conclusions based on a very general left-right positioning. Second, I perform analysis using new data (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Modules 4 and 5). Third, I explore an additional contextual factor (the rise in income inequality) which so far, to the best of my knowledge, has not been tested as a contextual factor for explaining levels of correct voting.

This empirical chapter should reveal whether those who want more redistribution indeed vote in their own interests, and whether rising levels of income inequality make the level of (in)correct vote higher across countries.

Pierce and Lau (2019) found evidence that increasing political polarization among elites in US Presidential elections positively influences the levels of correct vote in the elections. Polarization presents citizens with clear options (political options become more distinct), and strengthens the effect of political knowledge on voting decision. All of that leads citizens to casting a correct vote more often. Based on their research, I adopt a similar logic. I would expect that rising levels of income inequality, as argued before, will make redistribution preferences more salient, which will make voters pay more attention to the inequality issue, and which parties are competent to deal with it. Thus, I also expect that rising income inequality will have a positive effect on the levels of correct vote, cross-nationally.

Before empirically testing the different parts of the theoretical model, I take a step back, and examine the underlying assumptions that are part of my theoretical model in greater detail.

3. Meeting the assumptions

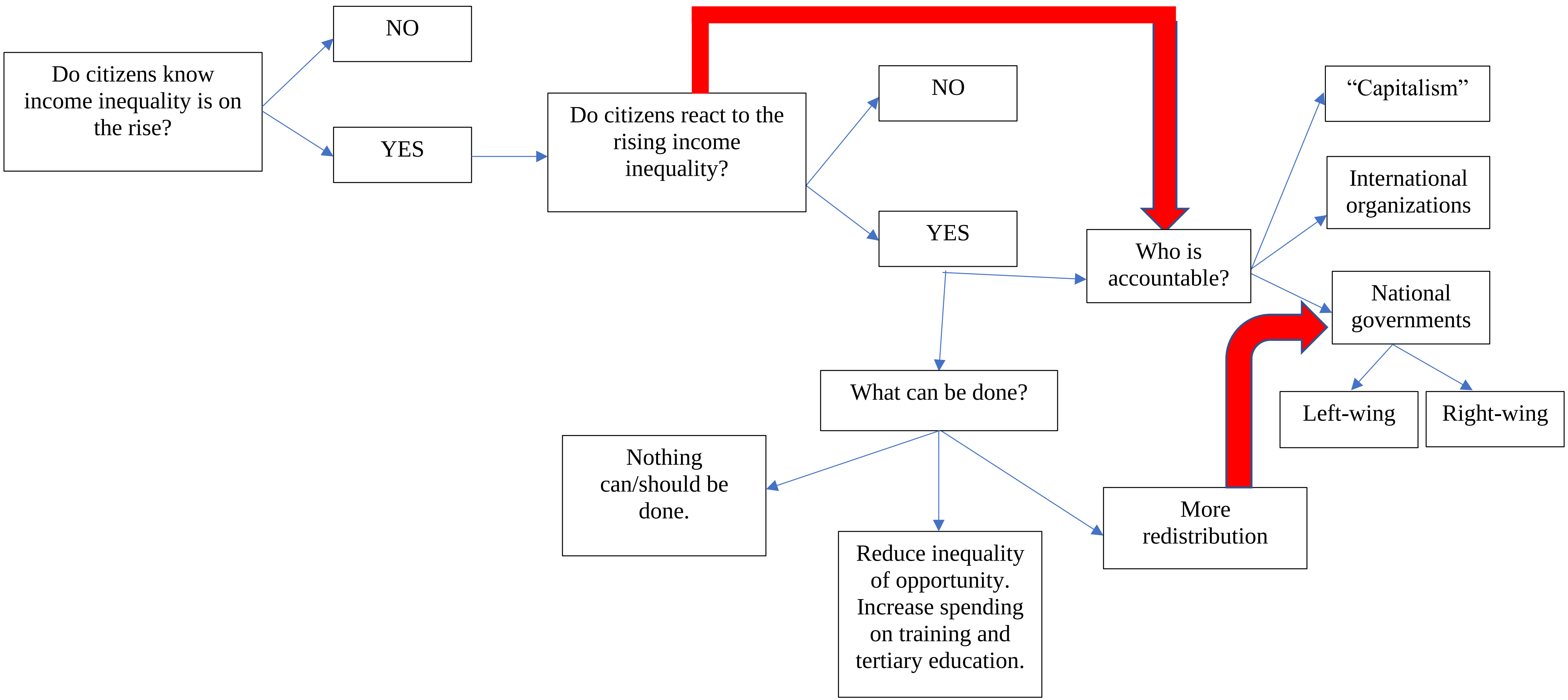
Rising levels of income inequality have caused many to ponder the effects these might have on various aspects of life. By now, we know a lot about countries' institutional reaction to the problems of rising income inequality. Governments have tried various policies to combat the rising trends in income inequality across different times and contexts. To name a few - one of the most comprehensive attempts is progressive taxation (Heathcote et al., 2020). Another attempt, which became very prominent after the rise of unemployment caused by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), was to increase benefits for the unemployed (Checchi & García-Peñalosa, 2008), especially targeting certain groups in the greatest need (Carriero & Filandri, 2019). The fast digitalization of societies has often been listed as one of the leading causes of the rise in income inequality (Agrawal et al., 2015). Thus, countries invested in various training, hoping to prepare their citizens for the new demands of the labour market and bridge the gap between generations, which should eventually reduce income inequality (Jaumotte et al., 2013).

All of these, and many other means, are just different forms of governmental attempt to redistribute resources within society. The political economy literature agrees that redistribution is an effective tool in combating rising income inequality (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Lind, 2005). However, this agreement comes without a consensus on precisely which redistributive policies should be adopted or how these policies should be implemented.

This research project aims not to dwell on the debate on whether redistribution is good or bad for society or which type of redistributive policies are most effective. However, the abundant empirical evidence confirms that redistribution happens when citizens demand it (Kelly & Enns, 2010). Citizens keep hearing about the potentially devastating effects income inequality might have on society, but their response is often limited to the demand for more redistributive policies. One of the most prominent ways to demand more redistribution and send the message to the government is through the ballot. When citizens are not happy with unequal economic outcomes, they can use the vote to punish the incumbent, as they do for other unfavorable economic outcomes.

The relationship between income inequality, preferences for redistribution, and vote choice is the main focus of this thesis. To investigate that relationship in more detail, in this chapter, I try to answer some of the underlying questions which are in the basis of this research. There are many assumptions that are built into the theoretical model on the relationship between rising income inequality, redistribution preferences and vote choice. I tried to summarize these issues in the figure below and place them in the logical order. In the places where the chain ends, the answers to the set questions lead to scenarios where it is not required to pursue the research question of this project further. Relationships that are the focus of this project and which will be investigated in the empirical chapters of this thesis are highlighted in red.

Figure 10: Graphical depiction of citizens' response to the rising income inequality



Exploring the relationships highlighted in red, as we can see from this logical chain, relies on certain assumptions, some of which are at the core of the theory behind the relationship between income inequality, redistribution preferences, and the vote. Thus, I look here at the questions presented in Figure 10, which will help us clear the path to the main links I want to investigate.

First of all, for the relationship to exist and for citizens to vote on inequality (directly or via policies designed to remedy income inequality), they should have at least some information on the levels of inequality or the income inequality trend. If citizens are informed about inequality, at least to some extent, the following logical question is – do citizens react to the rising levels of income inequality? The prevailing evidence, particularly from the last two decades, shows that citizens indeed do respond to increasing income inequality. The main points of the growing literature on this topic will be present in a separate sub-section.

Since citizens react to the rising income inequality, three questions flow from that finding. The first question from the figure is examined, using empirics and previous finding in the theoretical section, where I provided evidence that income inequality can (and should) be treated as a valence issue/condition. Furthermore, if citizens do not want a rise in income inequality, and no party advocates for that, who is accountable for the existing inequalities? Last but not least – what can (or should) be done to prevent any new rise in income inequality?

Some economic theories (for a brief overview please see Loveless, 2013) argue that income inequality is a normal product of free-market capitalism. Additionally, they would claim that inequality is an opportunity for citizens to improve their life chances, increase their social mobility, and make the best use of their skills. As such, income inequality is something that should be accepted as a somewhat normal *state of affairs*, and normal product of capitalism and market forces. However, no widely accepted economic worldview argues for rising income inequality. The same is true of political parties. Even those who are traditionally on the economic right, and accept income inequality as an unavoidable consequence of free-market capitalism, do not argue that things would improve if income inequality was higher than it is.

Additional questions that should be addressed before we consider the data and try to provide some answers to the research questions concern the main policy which citizens demand from governments as a response to rising income inequality – redistribution. Are citizens unanimous in their request for more redistribution, or are there some groups in society that want redistribution while others do not? Who are the people who want more redistribution? And most importantly, do they vote in line with their preferences on that economic issue?

This chapter aims to answer some of these questions and provide evidence that the assumptions on which the theory and empirics rely hold.

3.1. Citizen information on income inequality

For a rise in income inequality to have an effect on citizen voting behaviour, it is important, first of all, that the citizens are aware of the fact that income inequality is on the rise. Income inequality is not an economic indicator that receives a lot of media attention, unlike, for example, unemployment, GDP or inflation, which are regularly brought up by the media. Thus, we first need to establish what citizens know about income inequality, what their perception of inequality trends is, and whether they are aware of the rise in income inequality, as measured by objective macro-economic indicators, such as the Gini index, among others.

Apart from having some information about income inequality, it is also important to investigate how (if they do so) citizens benchmark income inequality – what is the period they take into consideration when they are estimating whether income inequality is on the rise? And perhaps most importantly, what is the period that empirical studies of the phenomenon should use in the analysis of income inequality as a reliable benchmark to estimate its effects on the vote? Does this economic indicator works in the same way as others with respect to benchmarking?

The next section digs deeper into the literature and the empirical evidence on the topics mentioned above. The first part is devoted to citizen knowledge about income inequality. The second part examines the benchmark(s) the citizens use when they estimate trends in income inequality.

3.1.1. Citizen knowledge about the rise in income inequality

The economic theory of voting has at its heart the concept that citizens vote on the basis of their reaction to the economy. The foundation of this relationship is the assumption that voters, if they vote based on the economy, will know at least a little about the macroeconomy (Paldam & Nannestad, 2000), and that their knowledge will, in theory, be reasonably accurate (Holbrook & Garand, 1996).

This notion, that the economic voter is informed about the state of the economy, has been contested. In the early years after the theory was first proposed, scholars suggested that citizens are actually extremely sophisticated in their knowledge of objective economic information and economic forecasts (Chappell & Keech, 1985; MacKuen et al., 1992). Later, more thorough empirical investigations of the issue discovered that this is probably not the case, and that citizens know relatively little about objective economic indicators (Conover et al., 1987; Duch & Stevenson, 2008).

However, previous research points to two very interesting and relevant findings in this regard. The first is that voters do know the general direction of economic trends (Holbrook & Garand, 1996). So, even when they could not provide precise estimates of various macroeconomic variables, such as the rate of inflation or the number of unemployed citizens, they generally knew whether these indicators showed a positive or a negative trend. The second finding is that voters are knowledgeable in line with the theory of grievance asymmetry – they care, often quite a lot, about the economic indicators which are problematic at the time, but tend to *forget* about problems that have been solved (Paldam & Nannestad, 2000). To illustrate with the example, during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which was often described in Europe as a crisis of unemployment (Guichard & Rusticelli, 2010), voters were significantly more likely to know more about the levels of unemployment than about the rate of inflation. In such a context, then, if inflation were to rise, for example, they would probably pay much more attention to that economic indicator.

These two findings have important implications for voter knowledge about income inequality.

First, citizens can rarely identify the exact extent of income inequality (Norton & Ariely, 2011; Osberg & Smeeding, 2006). The majority have probably never heard of the Gini index, or any other standard measure to quantify inequalities in income distribution. Nor would many be capable of interpreting a rather counter-intuitive index, such as Gini, to the degree necessary to draw solid conclusions. Some would not know enough to be able to explain the relationship between income inequality and attitudes to various types of taxes (Bartels, 2008), or governmental programmes which would lead to a decline in income inequality (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2018). All of that, as scholars have shown, might be the case. However, citizens are certainly well aware that income inequality exists (Kelly & Enns, 2010), and they are aware of when income inequality is on the rise (Atkinson, 2013). These two components are enough for us to realize that citizens are informed about these key features of income inequality.

Further evidence supports this position. As mentioned numerous times, income inequality is not something new. It started its steady rise back in the 1980s. Nevertheless, for a long period, income inequality has been the *dog that did not bark*. With the GFC that has changed. Its voice by now has been heard in many societies. Thus, the situation changed, in that income inequality now *worked* like any other economic indicator. In accordance with the above described logic, once the problem got “big”, citizens started paying more attention (Carriero & Filandri, 2019).

One additional factor that is also significant for citizen knowledge about income inequality is to consider how people get the information they possess about the economy. Here, I also take a step back to first have a look at how citizens normally obtain information about the economy, which informs their voting decision.

It is well known that people, in order to get information about the economy, pay a lot of attention to media, particularly TV stations (Paldam & Nannestad, 2000), or more and more to social media (Bode, 2016). However, in the modern era, there is an abundance of different news outlets, and they often present contradictory information. “Most experts, with inside information on one case or another, will probably agree that the true information very often appears somewhere in the news media, but also a lot of wrong or confused information appears. People must be able to choose, and in order to do this knowledge is necessary” (Paldam & Nannestad, 2000). Making sense of the wealth of information available out there normally takes (or would take) a significant effort and a level of commitment and time that many are not willing to engage with. However, that is certainly not the only source of information citizens have at their disposal. Blake (1985) emphasized that a significant amount of our information about the economy comes to us through our friends, colleagues and neighbours. People often talk about the economy, particularly during the election campaigns, when they talk about politics and different political options. More recently, scholars have realized that citizens also gain valuable knowledge about the economy from direct observation (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2018). They may, for example, witness more people without jobs in their neighbourhood, among their former colleagues, or among their friends, or notice price increases in shops.

All of these components are present when we talk about income inequality. There is a *media consensus* that inequality is increasing. While for decades this has been a rather neglected issue in the media, it has received a lot more attention from all the major news stations in Western World (USA, Canada, Western Europe) recently (Grisold & Theine, 2017). As expected, using different methods and approaches, when the media report on various aspects of income inequality, they put blame on one or the other side of the political spectrum. However, no one seriously contests the fact that income inequality is on the rise (Byrne, 2012; Grisold & Theine, 2017). Additionally, people tend to talk about inequalities with their friends, a process which, as with talk about all other economic issues, intensifies during election campaigns (Paldam & Nannestad, 2000). And evidence shows that they see rising economic inequalities, from direct experience, almost everywhere they go (Minkoff & Lyons, 2019). Thus, there is more than enough evidence to be confident that citizens are generally well informed about the existence and trends of income inequality, or as Kelly and Enns (2010) nicely put it – "… the public mood is not rooted in ignorance of increasing inequality. The mass public notices when inequality rises…"

The core of economic voting theory lies in connecting the economic perceptions of voters with their vote choice. This link assumes that voters are knowledgeable enough and possess some information about the economy. The same is true for income inequality. Here, I have presented some evidence that citizens are indeed aware of income inequality. Before exploring how they react to it, we first have to look at the issue of the benchmarking of income inequality.

3.1.2. Benchmarking income inequality

According to the economic voting theory, voters are the judges of the state of the economy when the election day comes. However, rather than just estimating the economy at that exact moment (on the election day), by now we know that voters are more interested in trends. We know that the economic information they use as the basis for the voting choice is the state of the economy compared to an earlier moment in time (or else their desired ideal economy). Voters try to estimate whether the economy improved in the previous period, or if the economy declined. So, if voters are retrospective, and most of the evidence shows that they are (Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007; Nadeau & Lewis-Beck, 2001) they take one moment in the past (a benchmark), and compare whether they think that the economy is *now* better than it used to be. I expect the same logic to work when it comes to income inequality. However, for more prominent economic indicators, which are more often extensively present in media and in everyday conversations about the economy (such as GDP and/or unemployment), voters usually take the previous twelve months as a benchmark point – that is, the year leading up to the election day. In this sub-section, I try to present some evidence, on what the benchmark point should be when it comes to income inequality.

For the most prominent economic indicators, such as unemployment or GDP, benchmarking logic is rather clear. There is an abundance of evidence that the election-year economy has a bigger influence on election results than cumulative indicators throughout the whole term in office (Achen & Bartels, 2004; Healy & Lenz, 2014). There are three most important reasons why that is the case. First, voters are *myopic* and they have a strong bias towards policies that have immediate effect, "myopic policies for myopic voters" as Tufte (1978) described. Second, when talking about the economy, the media almost always talks about the changes in the economy over the previous 6-12 months (Healy & Lenz, 2014), so that is the information voters have most often at their disposal. Third, understanding changes in the economy over a longer period (for example, over the 4 years of the term in office for a US President) takes a significant cognitive effort (Ariely & Carmon, 2000). As such, voters tend to simplify their task of understanding economy, by looking only at the most recent economic trends.

All of this has even changed the survey items scholars use to measure the economic vote. While previously in the US, the main survey question was "Do you think you are economically better off now than you were 4 years ago?", now the typical survey item asks about changes in the last 12 months. Even when fitting models which are using only aggregate data, economic voting scholars are most often estimating the effect of GDP or unemployment change on government vote share (Ebeid & Rodden, 2006; Powell & Whitten, 1993).

Despite this well-established logic in the economic voting research, I argue that income inequality as an economic indicator should be used slightly differently. In this thesis, when talking about the rise in income inequality, I am talking about the rise in this parameter between two elections in the country. There are substantive and statistical reasons for that decision.

The change in income inequality has been one of the most profound changes in society present since the 1980s (Stockhammer, 2015). However, inequality is something that changes over longer time periods. Whatever research on inequality over time we examine (Alvaredo et al., 2017; Milanovic, 2012; Milanovic & Roemer, 2016) we will see that when talking about income inequality we almost always talk about longer time trends. Taking shorter time-spans would risk a serious misinterpretation of data, and would not provide a proper depiction of the economic issue.

The statistical reasons for this decision flow from the substantive ones describe above. Income inequality is not something that normally changes particularly quickly (certainly not as quickly as GDP growth or unemployment). Taking the most recent year into account (the election year and the year before) would give us a variable with the minimal variation. And that minimal variation would hide the real trend, and the real magnitude of the rise in income inequality.

To illustrate with an example, I have taken the data from the World Bank on the Gini index estimates they provide. For all the countries available in the dataset, I have calculated two measures, the inequality difference over 12 months, and the inequality difference over 4 years. I have taken four years as the most common duration of a term, though I acknowledge that in some cases the term may be longer or shorter than 4 years. For the first measure (the difference over 12 months), the average difference is only 0.7. For the second measure (the difference over 4 years), the average difference between the two values is 3.1.

Thus, in this thesis, I am using the indicator of the rise in income inequality as the difference between inequality levels in the election year, and year of the previous election. If citizens are to react to rising income inequality, they are more likely to react to its more long-term trends, rather than just the difference which is visible in two years. The following sections aims to explore this question further – do citizens react to rising income inequality?

3.2. Do citizens react to rising income inequality?

In the previous section, I established that citizens have some awareness about trends in income inequality, and that, as with other economic indicators, they have some knowledge about income inequality too. This section thus examines the question of whether citizens react to rising income inequality.

Income inequality is traditionally not a *big* economic issue, i.e. it is not one that has received a lot of attention in the voting behaviour studies in the past. A few decades ago it was rarely used, neither as an economic issue, nor as an economic indicator. It was definitely nowhere near as important as the economic "big two" – GDP growth and unemployment (Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000). Even inflation received significantly more *coverage* in the literature (Desai et al., 2003). Comparative studies including income inequality as an issue or macro-indicator were particularly rare.

It is not that income inequality was low, or that it was not steadily on the rise even in the 1980s. One of the reasons why it was not present was the fact that, at the time, we did not know much about citizens' attitudes towards income inequality. We did not know if they were triggered by this issue at all. Let me illustrate with an example. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, the *gold standard* when it comes to voting behaviour datasets, the American National Election Study (ANES), asked respondents about their attitudes toward inequality. However, the survey instrument did not specify the type of inequality they were asking about. So, it could have been income inequality, but also racial inequality or gender inequality, or any other kind of inequality (political, social, wealth, or whatever else). Racial and gender inequality were, of course, particularly prominent issues in American society at the time. Thus, researchers could not know what voters were actually thinking about when they responded to this ANES survey item. This is just a simple illustration of the fact that income inequality, even though it existed and was on the rise, was not a salient issue.

At the time, authors actually took a different view, often claiming that citizens are ambivalent towards the issue of income inequality (Smith & Stone, 1989). That was particularly often said for American citizens (Hochschild, 1981). Some of these findings were more like assumptions, rather than based on empirical evidence, due to the issues described above with the data. Their main argument was that citizens do not accept inequalities in the political and social realms, but can and do accept them in the economic realm. Knowledge about citizen attitudes towards inequality from other countries was also scarce at the time.

All of this has dramatically changed in the 21st century, and most especially after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008-2009. As discussed earlier, the Occupy Wall Street Movement did manage to bring rising income inequality to the forefront of the political arena, and arguably it was one of the central issues of the 2012 United States Presidential campaign (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2018). As was the case in the United States, the issue of rising income inequality became salient across the world more generally. Political parties started talking about it more and more. This happened first as a reaction to the fact that populist leaders jumped on the income inequality bandwagon, and after that as a reaction to the issue becoming more and more salient almost everywhere in the world. Citizens started demanding answers from their political representatives as to how they planned to combat rising income inequality.

Some even argued that income inequality, and especially attitudes towards the elimination of inequalities in society, has become a new cleavage in the modern day world (Kaltenthaler et al., 2008). I will return to this notion later, but here it is important to highlight that political parties followed the trend, and any analysis of their manifestos clearly proves that issues of income inequality have become more and more present in mainstream party platforms (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2018).

The reaction of the public to the rise in income inequality also became apparent. First, in the years following the GFC, support for the welfare state has become huge. In the recent article, Garritzmann et al. (2018) estimated that support for an increase in government spending on various redistributive programmes was around 80% among voters in Western Europe. However, actual policymaking did not followed this extremely high level of demand (Pinggera, 2020).

After they realized they could not get what they wanted, many (whether they had already begun supporting populist parties or not) adopted attitudes typical of populist groups, arguing for increase in spending, without taking into consideration challenges associated with it. Burgoon (2013) showed that rising income inequality led to an increase in anti-globalization attitudes in a sample of 22 OECD countries. This would seem to additionally confirm that this effect is present across party families. Winkler (2019) found that the rise in income inequality led to a rise in the vote share of left-wing parties for the general population, but also to a simultaneous increase in the number of far-right-wing party supporters among older voters. One of his main findings was that inequality increased the polarization in these societies.

As another argument in favour of the presence of a citizen reaction to the rise in income inequality, Ansolabehere et al. (2003) pointed out that inequality encourages engagement on the part of rich individuals, particularly in terms of monetary contributions to political parties. This illustrates that there might be even more ways through which inequality provokes reactions from the public that are not part of conventional investigations of the phenomenon.

All of these points, which are examples of valuable empirical contributions, undoubtedly show that citizens do react to the changes in income inequality, particularly to a rise in it. As expected, in some areas their reaction is more pronounced than in others. Given that a reaction clearly exists, the next logical question is - whom they hold accountable for the rise in income inequality? The following sections delves into that issue.

3.3. Income inequality on the rise: Who is accountable?

While there is a general consensus on what accountability is[6], there is a significant debate on what outcomes politicians are accountable for, and the nature of the reward-punishment mechanism. In this section, I explore a very important issue for the relationship between rising income inequality and election outcomes. Specifically, if citizens were to vote on the issue of inequality, or policies which aim to reduce income inequality, that means that they hold governments/political parties accountable for the rise in income inequality. Thus, they are rewarding or punishing governments at the ballot box for the way they deal with income inequality. Is that the actually case? Do citizens hold governments accountable for rises in income inequality? Here, I take a closer look at this question.

In the public debate, there are two main alternatives to the theory that national governments are accountable for rising income inequality, and they should be briefly mentioned. The first alternative is that capitalism is to be blamed, which is closely related to the attitude that ”no one is to be blamed”, since inequality is a natural consequence of free-market capitalism. The second alternative is that globalization and international institutions are to be blamed for the rise in income inequality more than national governments.

The first view claims that income inequality is a normal product of free market capitalism. The root of this line of thinking has already been briefly presented. Here it is important to highlight that, if this reasoning is absolutely accepted, then there is no one to blame for rising income inequality. In accordance with this theory, the view people hold about income inequality is a product of the more general ideas they hold about politics, society and economics (Kaltenthaler et al., 2008). Thus, they see income inequality as an issue we should not be too worried about, as it is a normal consequence of the system the whole economy is based on. However, this view has been largely disputed, and many have showed that overwhelming majority of citizens are concerned by rising levels of income inequality, especially after the Global Financial Crisis (Newman & Hayes, 2019).

The second view appears out of international policy debates, and argues that globalization leads to higher income inequality. The basic logic of this strand of thought is that international trade and rising competition from emerging economies has led to a loss of many medium and low skill jobs in advanced democracies, which caused the rise in income inequality (Furceri &

[6] As briefly discussed in section 2.5 of this thesis.

Ostry, 2019). While that may very well be the case, and many have argued that it is, transferring this mechanism to the individual level is far from obvious. It is hard to imagine that *ordinary voters* will accept the argument that governments are not to be blamed for rising income inequality, but rather it is the process of globalization that is at fault. Indeed, those who have lost out as a result of globalization often manifest their rage towards national governments, and use national elections to express their dissatisfaction, as was the case in the US 2016 Presidential elections (Dorn et al., 2018).

As Kelly and Enns (2010, p. 856) nicely put it: “the idea that government cannot effectively redress economic inequities simply does not ring true when compared to empirical reality.” There seems to be a general consensus that rising inequalities, both political and economic, are important challenges for national governments (Kaltenthaler et al., 2008). Support for this claim has grown over the last decade, as societies have realized that inequality could result in high crime rates, poor health services and problematic education systems (to name just a few examples)l of course, these are all systems which are either regulated by governments or under direct governmental control (Winkler, 2019).

Voters perceive the situation similarly, and more and more empirical evidence has shown that they hold governments accountable for rising income inequality (Newman & Hayes, 2019). That finding bears additional importance when we know that voters play an extremely important role in acting to stop rising inequalities. They have at their disposal an essential element which can be used to fight for achieving a more equal distribution of income – democratic accountability. Voters can punish elected officials if they are not acting the way voters want.

This is exactly what voters seems to be doing. There is a growing trend in the economic voting theory which shows that incumbents are punished for rising income inequalities. Most prominently, Newman and Hayes (2019) showed that American voters punish incumbents (both Democratic and Republican) when inequality is on the rise, and interestingly that they reward inequality-attenuating incumbents in high inequality states. Cross-nationally, Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck (2020) find that both left and right-wing governments are held accountable for changing levels of income inequality. “Further, these effects appear unaltered by structural factors such as federalism or the electoral system” (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020).

However, knowledge about the effect of policies which were designed to fight rising income inequality and election outcomes is significantly more scarce (Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015). This is particularly true for empirical findings from cross-national studies, and those that consider this issue over time. This thesis is an attempt to fill those research gaps. To try to do that, in the following section, I examine the various options / policies which governments can implement to fight rising income inequality. Further, I provide some reasoning on why I find income redistribution to be the one policy that should trigger the strongest electoral response from voters.

3.4. Combating a rise in income inequality

Prior to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), before income inequality became a more salient issue, there was a *general agreement* in the literature that Americans (and generally Anglo-Saxons) thought that most poor people were poor because they were lazy (Alesina & Glaeser, 2006). On the other hand, continental Europeans tended to think that people were poor because different factors in the society (structural, political or other) made it extremely difficult to avoid falling into poverty (Kaltenthaler et al., 2008). Once income inequality became a more salient issue, and present more often in everyday discourse, there came a consensus that these rising differences between rich and poor, and more and more people falling below the poverty line, should be stopped, whatever the cause of it was. The expectation was that countries would at least seek to limit any rise in income inequality.

As described above, citizens attribute some blame for income inequality to globalization and international organizations. However, states remain the main actors in this fight. There are many ways that states have tried to combat rising income inequality. Here, I highlight the three most prominent responses, and argue why it is important to pay attention to income redistribution as the main *weapon* countries employ as they seek to stop the rise of income inequality.

First, there is a group of politicians and scholars which would argue that nothing can or should be done regarding rising income inequality (Foellmi & Zweimüller, 2006). The intellectual root for this line of thinking lies in Simon Kuznets' work. In the seminal article at the time, Kuznets (1955) argued that income inequality is good, because it promotes economic growth by fostering aggregate savings. Others followed up, and Rosenzweig and Binswanger (1992) made the case that inequality promotes the realization of high-value projects, while Foellmi and Zweimuller (2006) argued that it stimulates development. Some countries followed a similar line of logic, and implemented policies which were not designed with the idea of combating income inequality (Prechel, 1990). At the individual level, that was justified by the fact that there was a strong class-bias among voters, and that members of lower social classes tended more often to be abstainers and participate less in all forms of politics. Thus, politicians responded only to the interests of the wealthier groups (Bartels, 2008).

Many argued against the allegedly positive impacts income inequality has on the economy. Arguably the most important contribution was made by Halter, Oechslin and Zweimuller (2014). They showed that income inequality has short-term positive effects on growth, but significant negative long-term effects. Most importantly, they provided evidence that those long-term effects are more important and cause more harm than the benefit created by the short-term effects.

Bearing that in mind and knowing that income inequality has become a significantly more salient issue than it used to be prior to the GFC, many countries have started designing policies, particularly focused on the issue of rising income inequality. Even the United States, from the Obama administration most notably, joined that trend.

The most pervasive, and arguably the most widely used mechanism that governments implement to fight rising income inequality is the redistribution of income. This is also the most popular tool in the perception of citizens when it comes to fighting income inequality (Benabou & Ok, 2001; Bobzien, 2019; Corneo & Grüner, 2002). As such, when they demand that governments fight against rising income inequality, citizens are most often actually demanding more redistribution (Brooks & Manza, 2006). It is widely perceived that redistribution reduces volatility in the whole system, provides more stability in the economy and offers a chance for the less wealthy to have the opportunity of a decent life. As a counter-effect, redistribution may reduce growth, but people who want more redistribution generally prefer to stop poverty even at the expense of growth.

Up to now, there has been a huge volume of literature explaining preferences for redistribution (for a comprehensive overview see Alesina and Guiliano (2011)). I present most important of these findings in Chapter 4, and empirically investigate the link between redistribution preferences and the vote for incumbents.

4. Issue specific accountability: The effect of redistribution preferences on incumbents' support

This chapter tests "issue specific accountability" (Arnold, 1990; Canes-Wrone et al., 2011) by exploring the existence (and strength) of a link between voters' position on the redistribution preferences issue, and the vote for incumbents. This link is further explored by estimating its strength conditional on the incumbents' ideological leanings (left-wing versus right-wing leaning incumbents). It is the first empirical test in the thesis of the interplay between the positional and valence dimensions of the economic vote. As argued in the theoretical section, these two dimensions of the economic vote have been studied independent one from the other so far. Here, I introduce the interplay between the two, expecting that both the issue position and the performance of incumbents, taken together, will play a role in voters' minds, and be factored in to their voting decision.

As was shown in earlier chapters, we know that preferences for redistribution can have a direct influence on vote choice, but also that this is strongly influenced by policy outcomes, made by parties and institutions shaped by voting and other factors. A wealth of literature has explored the different links between redistribution preferences and various aspects of the political system, including voting (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Causa & Hermansen, 2017; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2016). Rueda and Stegmueller (2019) provided a detailed summary on redistribution preferences in a comparative perspective. There seems to be a consensus in the literature that redistribution is an important issue for politics, especially in advanced industrialized democracies.

Traditionally, the expectation is that those who want more redistribution will vote for left-wing parties, as the redistribution issue is usually seen as long-established stronghold of the Left. The link between the two has been empirically confirmed more than once (Kitschelt, 1993; Lindbeck & Weibull, 1987). The mechanism behind this link remains strong, as has been confirmed by more recent empirical studies (Rennwald & Evans, 2014; Roth & Wohlfart, 2018). Furthermore, redistribution preferences have featured prominently as a positional economic issue in more recent economic voting studies (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020; Nezi & Katsanidou, 2014; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020; Talving, 2017). In different contexts, these and other authors find evidence that redistribution preferences are a strong predictor of voting for left-wing parties.

The various aspects summarized here will be considered in more details in this section, from the factors that contribute to a person favoring redistribution to the effect of redistribution preferences on vote choice, particularly as a positional economic issue.

This knowledge will help in the goal of better understanding redistribution preferences, their voting/electoral consequences, and break new ground by connecting redistribution preferences and performance evaluation, conditional on the incumbents ideological leanings.

From the theoretical model (for more details see Chapter 2), several testable hypotheses can be devised.

H1a: Redistribution preferences will strongly influence support for incumbents

H1b: The more a respondent favours redistribution, the more likely they will be to support left-wing incumbents

H1c: The more a respondent favours redistribution, the less likely they will be to support right-wing incumbents

H1d: The more a respondent opposes redistribution the less likely they will be to support left-wing incumbents

H1e: The more a respondent opposes redistribution the more likely they will be to support right-wing incumbents

Before testing this mechanism empirically, which is explained in more detail in Chapter 2, it is important to first elaborate on several points related to it. Thus, this section is structured as follows. I start by introducing the discussions on redistribution in modern societies, and briefly presenting a wealth of literature about what shapes redistribution preferences and who those who want more redistribution nowadays actually are. Then, I take a look at redistribution as a political issue, as an economic positional issue, and at the ways it can influence vote choice. Later, I elaborate on the connection between redistribution preferences and government performance evaluation. After that, I present the data and methods used to test the interplay of the economic vote dimensions. Analysis with robustness checks and a discussion of the results concludes the chapter.

4.1. Understanding redistribution preferences

This section aims to examine modern views on redistribution preferences. To better understand how redistribution preferences can influence vote choice, first it is important to take a look at those factors that influence redistribution preferences. Many of these factors can also have an effect on vote choice, sometimes as a direct effect, and sometimes through different policy stances (as is the case with redistribution preferences), while at times the effect can be both direct and indirect. Thus, this subsection focuses on reviewing the key findings of the voluminous literature on redistribution preferences, particularly focusing on more recent findings.

However, to do that, it is important to take a step back, since the majority of our knowledge and contemporary research on redistribution preferences is influenced by the model of political economy developed in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably in the seminal work in the field by Meltzer and Richard (1981).

The two authors argue that the most important factor in shaping redistribution preferences is each individuals' income. Even today, the individuals' income remains the first category that comes to mind when trying to explain redistribution preferences. Meltzer and Richard (1981) claimed that all individuals who have an above-median income in society would want less redistribution, and those who have an income lower than the median want more. The underlying reasoning behind this assumption is that when redistribution happens, money from those with a higher income is redistributed to help those with lower income. This model was proved through the test of time and the scrutiny of many empirical studies that found evidence to support this claim. "This implies two key comparative statics: spending is higher (*a*) the greater the skew in the distribution of income, and (*b*) the greater the number of poor people who vote " (Iversen, 2011, p. 604). Iversen's quote shows how the model developed by Meltzer and Richard paved the way for the huge amount of literature connecting income inequality and preferences for redistribution, arguing that the more inequality there is, or the more inequality people perceive, the more likely they will be to favour greater redistribution (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Bobzien, 2019; Dion & Birchfield, 2010; Finseraas, 2009). A mountain of literature emerged connecting the two areas. Since then, an individuals' income and the actual or perceived levels of income inequality have remained the most important, and by far the most explored, predictors of redistribution preferences. The link between the two (redistribution preferences and income inequality) will be explored in more detail in the following chapter of this thesis.

However, actual levels of redistribution, as well as preferences for redistribution, significantly vary across modern democracies, and within every society (Causa & Hermansen, 2017; Iversen, 2011; Meltzer & Richard, 1981). This variation exists even after accounting for income distribution within the society and levels or perceptions of inequality. So, it was up to researchers to discover more explanatory factors that could account for this variation. "It has been generally noted that the importance of present income as a determinant of redistribution preferences is highly variable, both cross-nationally and temporally. The (still highly relevant) influence of material self-interest as a motivation for redistribution preferences therefore needs to be complemented and improved" (Rueda & Stegmueller, 2019, p. 35).

Models that followed the one developed by Meltzer and Richard included many new variables, trying to better understand how preferences for redistribution are formed, and why Meltzer and Richard's (1981) mechanism works in some places better than in others. A prominent place in the literature is given to the assessment individuals make of their chances of rising up the income scale. This gave birth to the famous POUM ("Prospects of upward mobility") hypothesis (Benabou & Ok, 2001). According to this assumption, not all individuals will behave following the logic of the model proposed by Meltzer and Richard. Specifically, some, who have low income, will actually support less redistribution, because they are confident that they will soon increase their income and earn more than the median citizen earns. They believe they will move upwards on the income ladder, and do not want more redistribution, because that will hurt them in the long term, given that they will soon find themselves on the other side of the income scale. Usually, in surveys, these individuals are recognizable through their support for attitudes claiming that "hard work will pay off" or "hard work is much more important than luck in determining someone's chances to succeed in life." This is usually seen as the main reason why redistribution preferences in United States differ from redistribution preferences in many other (mainly European) advanced democracies (Kambayashi & Lechevalier, 2021).

More recent studies have made an interesting, and very relevant, connection between the individuals' ideology and their position in the income distribution, as predictors of redistribution preferences. Two long-standing *truths* about redistribution preferences are that (1) poor people will favor more redistribution, and (2) left-leaning individuals will favor more redistribution. However, this results in a conundrum by which rich, left-leaning individuals, as well as their poor, right-leaning counterparts will favour something that is not in their best interest (either ideologically or as seen in terms of their best interests derived from their place on the income scale). So, in these instances, for those who are rich and left-wing (and those who are poor and right-wing), the question is – what will affect the formation of their redistribution preferences more, ideology or income status? Armingeon and Weisstanner (2021) had a closer look at this puzzling relationship between redistribution preferences, political ideology and material self-interest. They provide evidence that both groups (the "rich left" and the "poor right") resolve this problem by giving ideology a greater impact in shaping their preferences. This means that the "poor right" will tend to demand less redistribution, while the "rich left" will demand more, in line with their worldview. The reason for that, as argued by the authors, is that values and the worldview connected with a particular ideology are formed prior to redistribution preferences, as part of people's political socialization during their youth (Armingeon & Weisstanner, 2021).

Various other factors at the individual and country level were added to the equation as important additions in predicting variation in redistribution preferences. Individual attitudes towards government also play an important role in how people shape their redistribution preferences. People are more likely to favour more redistribution when they trust the government in office to be capable of guiding the process and make good decisions (Peyton, 2020; Yamamura, 2014). Conversely, evidence shows that when people suspect government incapability, such as when they are aware of rising levels of nepotism, corruption or financial scandals, they tend to demand less redistribution (Kambayashi & Lechevalier, 2021).

Contextual factors can also strongly influence individual attitudes towards redistribution. Recent scholarly work on the topic has discovered interesting relationships. Some of the most prominent and most recent investigations show a link between immigration levels or the extent of European integration on the one hand, and redistribution preferences on the other. Higher immigration levels make people less favorable towards redistribution in Western Europe, and the effect is significantly stronger when the immigrants are less skilled, poorly educated, or are from the Middle East or Eastern Europe (Alesina et al., 2021). When immigration is higher, native citizens see that as a threat to social cohesion, and as a threat to the welfare system, which leads to shifts in attitudes towards redistribution. European integration, on the other hand, can have both positive and negative effects on demands for redistribution. Tober and

Busemeyer (2022) found that an increase in European economic integration lead to an increase in the demand for more redistribution. By contrast, the authors showed that an increase in European political integration decreased the supply of social spending and social policy responsiveness.

All of the above factors (and many more) have an effect on redistribution preferences, and in various contexts they have a greater or lesser influence in explaining the variation in redistribution demand. It is important to be aware of these factors, because it is often the case that when we estimate the effect that redistribution preferences have on voting, we are actually seeing the effect some of these factor have on voting, expressed through redistribution preferences (Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015). The following section reviews the literature on the effect that preferences for redistribution have on vote choice.

4.2. Redistribution preferences and vote choice

The political economy literature on how redistribution preferences are formed, and particularly on the relationship between income inequality and redistribution preferences, is now so voluminous that it would take a life-time to read everything that has been written on the topic. On the other hand, the literature on the effect these preferences have on vote choice is surprisingly limited (in comparison with the scholarly work on inequality-redistribution) and "it is unclear that these preferences have in fact any influence over political behavior" (Rueda & Stegmueller, 2019, p. 185).

For that reason, I will briefly review the existing literature on the link between redistribution preferences and vote choice, so that reader can be aware of the starting point of this research endeavour.

Firstly, it is important to state that we would expect that redistribution will affect voting behaviour, since it has been one of the most important economic topics in the industrialized world for the past several decades, and we know that people take the economy into account when forming their voting decisions. Additionally, voting based on redistribution preferences is in alignment with the core of economic voting theory, which argues that individuals will cast a vote based on their-self-interest and their desire for the economy they want to see to be implemented (Duch & Stevenson, 2008). It is important to add here that "self-interest" does not mean *pocketbook voting* (voting for and based on your personal financial situation), but rather the self-interest of having and living in an economically prosperous society.

Most of the existing scholarly work on the relationship between redistribution preferences and voting come, as might be expected, from the economic voting literature, or literature related to the economic voting field, through the issue of voting literature which focuses on economic issues. While economic voting generally investigates two types of voting link, sanctioning and selection, scholars who have investigated the link between redistribution preferences and vote choice mainly did so through the prism of selection models. The key argument is that those who want more redistribution are more likely to select and vote for parties on the left of the ideological spectrum, on the assumption that these parties promote social equality and egalitarianism.

As such, the most obvious link, the one between redistribution preferences and voting for left-wing parties, has been the most widely-explored so far. There are three important aspects to be considered with respect to this relationship.

First, there are a significant number of scholarly article which manage to find enough empirical evidence to support the link and show that individuals who want more redistribution do indeed tend to vote parties on the left of the spectrum (Benedetto et al., 2020; Häusermann & Kriesi, 2015; Kitschelt, 1993; Rennwald & Evans, 2014). Needless to say, the relationship between the two is expected, since left-wing parties (mainly those labeled social-democratic parties in old democracies) insist on income redistribution in their electoral platforms, speeches, and legislative actions. Government spending towards income redistribution is highest once social-democratic parties are in office, data confirms (Benedetto et al., 2020). Also, income redistribution has been somewhat of "the 'go-to' measure of positional economic voting" (Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020, p. 222). Many have indeed used this fact in studies of positional economic voting, sometimes as the only or one of the few economic issues explored in the empirical models. Various studies dealing with positional economic voting have found support for the hypothesis that redistribution preferences will be positively connected with left-wing voting. The first results came from the US, showing that those who favour more redistribution are significantly more likely to vote for the Democratic Party (Lewis-Beck, 2009; Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). Similar patterns of the connection between the two (redistribution preferences as a positional economic issue and voting for left-leaning or left-wing parties) have been found elsewhere, in other country-level studies (Fossati & Häusermann, 2014; Lewis-Beck et al., 2013; Lewis-Beck & Quinlan, 2021; Nezi, 2012; Okolikj & Quinlan, 2020) but also in comparative explorations of the phenomenon (Paparo & Lewis-Beck, 2017; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020; Talving, 2017).

Despite all these findings, coming from different times and different contexts, we still have to be careful when assuming that the link between redistribution preferences and voting for left-wing parties and platforms will always be positive. This leads to the second important factor to consider. While many have found empirical evidence for a positive relationship between redistribution preferences and voting for left-wing parties, others have found no evidence to support that claim. A number of these studies are worth mentioning here. Green *et al*. (2004) show that partisan attachments and party identification prevail and have a significantly stronger influence on vote choice, than policy issues do, including economic policies and redistribution preferences. More recently, Achen and Bartels (2016) provided a very compelling argument that social identities and partisan loyalties shape vote choices, not political issues. They provide evidence that this is the case even for the most educated and most informed voters, those we would expect to pay most attention to issues and policies. The decades-long debate between the two schools of thought is still ongoing, with issues such as the need for rational choice models to take into account partisanship and social groups, at least as control variables, only one of the areas of disagreement.

Thirdly, more modern approaches to this link have attempted to further refine these models, and explore the link between redistribution preferences and voting for left-wing parties with different moderating and/or mediating variables added to their models. As might be expected, education features prominently as an important factor to consider, as it is anticipated that educated voters will pay more attention to politics, and form their vote choices based on issues, so redistribution preferences should not be an exception. However, Attewell (2021) found mixed evidence to support that claim at best, showing that educated individuals are significantly more likely to think that welfare beneficiaries are deserving of their benefits, which factors into their vote decision for left-leaning parties. Speaking of what is deserved, Lefgren *et al*. (2016) found support, in an experimental setting, for the idea that individuals tend to form redistribution preferences (and vote upon those preferences) which are different from their personal self-interest if they think that the groups benefitting from redistribution deserve redistributive help. On the other hand, Stegmuller (2013) shows evidence that religious individuals tend to vote for parties which do not advocate for redistributive policies, as they generally hold antiwelfare views and would want to see more conservative economic policies implemented. Another interesting contribution came from Marx and Schumacher (2018) who showed that low-income individuals who want more redistribution are ready to vote against their own self-interest (by voting for parties who are not redistribution champions in the political system) as long as their vote is an anti-establishment vote. This provides another example of how voters can and do, in their own minds, combine policy preferences and the evaluation of the government (though not necessarily government performance), as I argue in this chapter.

The list of additions to the redistribution preferences – vote left story is very long. Here, I briefly presented some of the most important and most recent additions to the examination of that linkage, which are relevant to my research. I attempt to further build on this knowledge by testing the redistribution preferences issue as a performance (sanctioning) issue in this chapter, as explained in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2). The data used to test this part of theory is presented in the following section.

4.3. Data and methods

4.3.1. The dataset

To empirically test the relationship between redistribution preferences and voting for incumbents, I use data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). More specifically, I merge CSES Module 4 Full Release (2018) and CSES Module 5 Third Advance Release (2021). The two datasets (out of the 5 CSES standalone module dataset) are chosen because these are the most up-to-date, with CSES Module 4 being fielded from 2011 to 2016 and CSES Module 5 being fielded from 2016 to 2021. The advance release of CSES Module 5 was the most up-to-date release of Module 5 at the time that the analysis was conducted.

Additionally, the two datasets included in the analysis provide data on the main independent variable – preferences for redistribution. Among earlier CSES datasets, only CSES Module 1 contained a survey item about redistribution preferences. However, CSES Module 1 was fielded from 1996 to 2001, which is ten years away from the earliest study in CSES Module 4, and significantly before the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) which is an important point for the mechanism I am testing, as argued in earlier sections of this thesis (see Chapters 1 and 2).

Including other comparative social science data sources (such as the European Social Survey (ESS) or the International Social Science Programme (ISSP)) would also be possible, but there are three main reasons I decided against that. First, and most importantly, unlike the CSES, these other sources are not tied to electoral cycles, and these contain respondents' voting intentions, rather than reporting actual voting behaviour, which is the case with the CSES. Since I am arguing about the relationship between redistribution preferences as an issue on which voters will sanction incumbents, it is theoretically and methodologically more logical to keep the analysis restricted to reported actual voting behaviour, rather than voting intentions. Secondly, data availability and comparability is also an issue, since not all the ISSP modules include questions on redistribution preferences, which makes them ineligible for inclusion. Thirdly, while the CSES, as mentioned above, provides a global variety of cases at a country-level, the ESS is restricted to Europe. Furthermore, the CSES already includes most of the countries that are in the ESS dataset, and the additional inclusion of one more dataset from Germany, the Czech Republic or Great Britain, does not offer that much added value from a theoretical or methodological standpoint.

The analysis was performed on all polities (election studies) in the combined dataset that passed the threshold as democratic systems. For that threshold, I used the Freedom House rating in the election year, and I kept all the polities that fall between a Freedom House score of 1 and 2.5, and are thus designated as having "free elections." Apart from those election studies that were excluded based on the Freedom House criteria, some other election studies were also excluded for a number of reasons. The Switzerland studies were dropped because it was impossible to distinguish incumbents from opposition in the Swiss consociational democracy. I excluded Taiwan studies, because left-right is not relevant in Taiwan (Jou, 2010). The Greece (2012) study was dropped because all members of the outgoing government were independents, as it was a caretaker government. The Romania (2014) study related to the presidential election, and the incumbent could not be ascertained because the president in office prior to the election ran on a Democrat Liberal Party (PDL) ballot, though he was closer to the People's Movement Party (PMP). On top of that, legally speaking, Romanian presidents cannot be party members. Thus, this Romanian study was dropped. Data on the redistribution preferences variable was missing for Latvia (2011), Greece (2015) and Ireland (2016), and thus these three studies were also dropped. Peru (2016) was also dropped, as the incumbents did not field the candidate in the election under study. Finally, both of the Belgium (2019) studies (one study from Flanders and one from Wallonia) from CSES Module 5 were dropped, because the analysis is run at an individual and country level, not at a regional level within a country, and these studies did not cover whole country, as Brussels, the capital, was not sampled for either of the two regions in the CSES dataset.

The final dataset, after excluding respondents from these studies, and also after excluding those for whom data was missing on at least one variable in the model, includes 57 348 respondents, nested in 50 election studies, from 31 countries/polities.

I choose the CSES as it gave me a global variety of countries to be included in the analysis, and to the best of my knowledge is the most comprehensive source of individual level data about voting. Inevitably in the social sciences we are most often faced with the fact that we can only work with data we have at hand. There are always other countries which we would like to include in the analysis, but for which there is no data, or that data is not up to date, or what is available does not meet certain methodological standards. All of that limits the general applicability of the findings. However, the variety of studies included in the CSES dataset does provide examples from various systems, different level of democratic maturity, different electoral and party systems, a variety in terms of geographical coverage, different welfare state systems, different historical experience, and many other things. Considering all of that, we can be pretty confident in the evidence and any conclusions found based on the CSES data.

4.3.2. The dependent variable

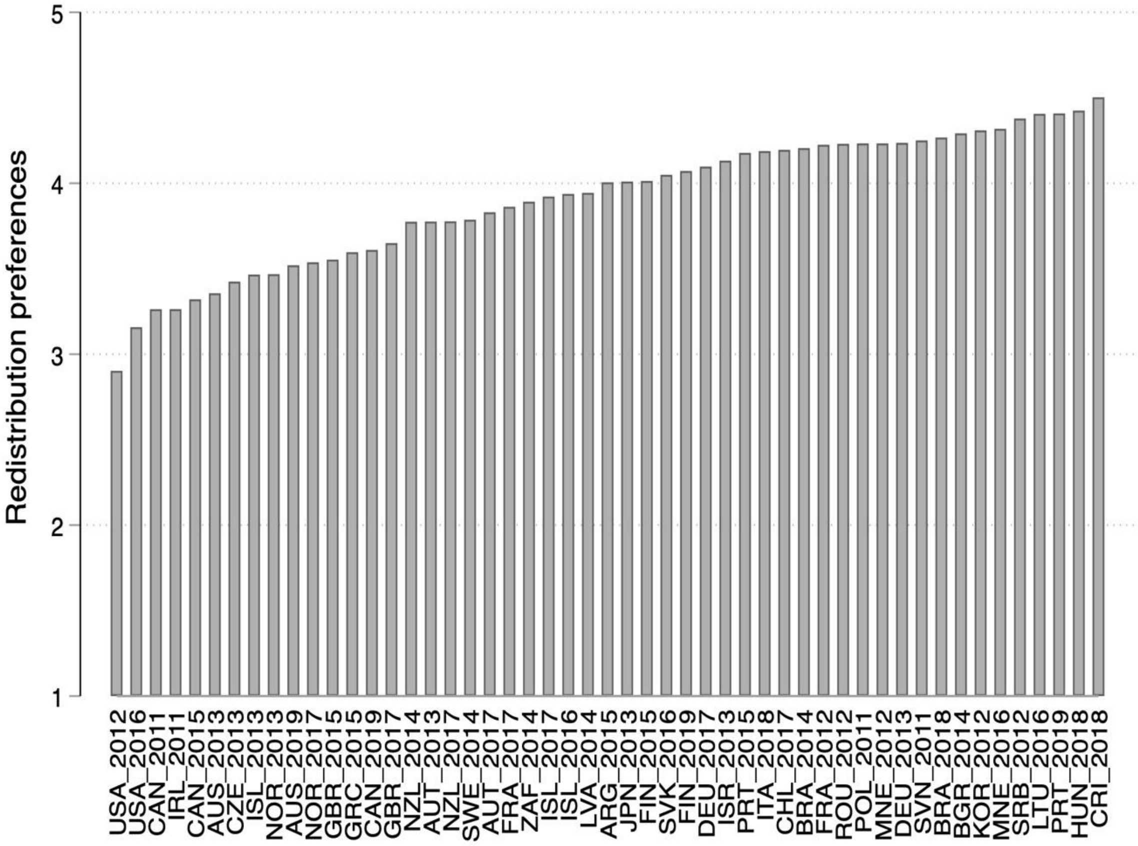
To test the devised hypothesis, the dependent variable is binary, distinguishing between those who voted for the outgoing government (coded as 1) and those who did not vote for the government (coded 0). Respondents who did not vote at all are also coded 0. Respondents who refused to answer the question about voting behaviour, who answered “don’t know”, or for whom the data is missing for this variable, are set to missing for the dependent variable, and thus, dropped from the analysis. This binary dependent variable approach captures the support for the governments, and aims to distinguish the difference of the effect that redistribution preferences have on voting for ideologically different incumbents (left-wing vs. right-wing incumbents), coded based on MARPOR or CSES expert classification.

4.3.3. Independent variables

The main independent variable in this chapter, and for the most sections of this thesis, is redistribution preferences. To capture the redistribution preferences of individuals in the dataset, I use the same survey item used by most of the researchers on the topic. Respondents were asked to express to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statement: "*The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels*." Readers should be aware that this item is far from a perfect measure of redistribution preferences, as it is a very general stance on the income differences in society, and can fit preferences that are ties to a very broad set of policies. However, despite that, it has been extensively used as the operationalization of redistribution preferences, particularly in comparative research. The CSES is no exception. The item was asked about in the exact same way in both CSES Module 4 and CSES Module 5, allowing easy comparability. I have reversed the original five-point scale, so that higher values indicate stronger agreement with the statement (and thus greater support for redistribution) and lower values represent stronger disagreement with the statement.

Additionally, this survey item shows the support for redistribution from those who think that it is, indeed, up to the government to deal with the problem, further strengthening one of the key arguments of this thesis about linking redistribution preferences with government performance. Further, as we can see from the following figure, redistribution preferences significantly vary between countries and election studies, adding to the puzzle which I investigate in this thesis.

Figure 11: Redistribution preferences in the election studies included in the analysis



Apart from redistribution, I also use the most traditional survey measure employed in performance models of economic voting, which is satisfaction with how the economy has performed over the last 12 months. This item is also measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from "the economy is much worse than it was 12 months ago" to "the economy is significantly better than it was 12 months ago."

In addition to the valence economy indicator, I add respondents' self-placement on the ideological scale and party self-identification, addressing "concerns that partisan and/or ideological bias may pollute economic positions and perceptions" (Quinlan & Okolikj, 2018). For variable ideology, which originally takes values from 0 (left-wing) to 10 (right-wing), I have multiplied the variable by -1 (then +1 added) for all election studies with left-wing outgoing incumbents (Nadeau et al. 2013). Party identification is a binary variable, with respondents' who identify with the incumbent party (or any governing party in the case of coalition governments) being coded 1; the remaining respondents were coded 0.

In addition, I use several demographic variables that are an indispensable part of almost all voting models. I recode the variable "female" as 1 for female respondents, and 0 for male respondents. I recode education into 4 categories, with 1 being "primary and lower education", 2 being "secondary education", 3 being "post-secondary, non-university education" and 4 being "university education." I use dummy variables for age quintiles categories, with the first quintile being the reference category in the models.

For all the independent variables, as for the dependent variables, those who refused to answer a survey question, or answered with "don't know", or those for whom the data is missing on that particular item, are set to missing, and thus, dropped from the analysis.

At a macro level, I control for the two most important economic indicators (GDP growth and unemployment), taking the values for these variables in the year prior to the election year, acknowledging the retrospective nature of the economic vote. I also control with a dummy variable distinguishing between left-wing and right-wing incumbents, coded based on MARPOR (when available) and on the CSES expert classification when MARPOR data is not available for the given country/polity. The variable is coded based on the party of the prime ministers, when coalitions are governing, following Hellwig's notion that the most blame for economic performance is usually placed by voters on the party of the prime minister rather than the coalition partners (T. Hellwig, 2012). Appendix I details the classification of each election study into left-right categories, and the classification of the incumbent parties in each election under study.

4.3.4. Methods

Given the structure of the dataset, with respondents nested in election studies, and given that the dependent variable is binary, I run multi-level logistic regression models. These are three-level models, since respondents (Level 1 of the analysis) are nested in election studies (Level 2), which are nested in countries/polities (Level 3). The models also include cross-level interactions. To show the effect of these interactions, I plot the main effects over different values of the contextual variable, in line with the suggestion in the literature on visualizing interaction effects (Williams, 2012).

I run different model specifications, showing that effects are not driven by the inclusion or exclusion of certain variables. On the contrary, the existing effects remain equally strong and do not lose statistical significance upon the inclusion of various (rather hard) controls.

Moreover, for models with cross-level interactions, I include a random slope for the lower level variable (redistribution preferences), in line with the suggestions in the literature (Heisig & Schaeffer, 2019).

4.4. Results

To test the devised hypothesis I ran a series of multilevel logistic regression models, and showed the effects for the main predictors in the models.

Before examining the results, there are a few issues worth discussing regarding the models. The first is the inclusion of the respondents' left-right self-placement, as a control variable in the model. There are arguments for and against inclusion. Given that I am testing a hypothesis derived from positional economic voting theory, we could argue that stances on economic issues already include a degree of left-right self-placement, and that having both variables in the model might cause statistical problems, and present too great of a test for positional economic voting. The fear is that left-right self-positioning as a *super-issue* in voting behaviour models, would "kill" any effect that the other economic issues (including redistribution preferences) might have, and that these other issues would have little chance to show up once joined with the super-issue in the model. On the other hand, we could equally well argue that the only real test for the positional economic voting model is with left-right self-positioning included, and that stances on positional economic issues only affect vote choice if they survive the scrutiny of the most rigorous model specifications. To reconcile the two views, both of which offer valid arguments, I ran models both with and without left-right self-positioning. As can be seen from the table, the substantive results remain the same regardless of the inclusion or exclusion of this variable.

The second issue is with models including interaction effects. Here, I follow recent statistical developments, arguing that we should always include a random slope for the lower-level variable involved in a cross-level interaction (Heisig & Schaeffer, 2019). Further, to show that this does not drive the effect, I also ran models without the inclusion of random slopes for redistribution preferences.

As such, the table below presents six models: the first two include all the variables (Model 1 without and Model 2 with left-right self-positioning). The subsequent two models include cross-level interactions (Model 3 without and Model 4 with left-right self-positioning). Finally, the last two models in the table include cross-level interactions and a random slope for the redistribution preferences (Model 5 without and Model 6 with left-right self-positioning).

Table 1: Multilevel logistic regression models testing the effect of redistribution preferences on incumbents' support

Vote for incumbents	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Redistribution preferences	**-0.104****	**-0.127****	**-0.223*****	**-0.191*****	**-0.207*****	**-0.188*****
	(0.0135)	**(0.0145)**	**(0.0202)**	**(0.0217)**	**(0.0177)**	**(0.0209)**
State of the economy	0.350***	0.335***	0.339***	0.326***	0.301***	0.316***
	(0.0160)	(0.0176)	(0.0161)	(0.0176)	(0.0192)	(0.0162)
Party ID (with incumbents)	3.474***	3.355***	3.422***	3.323***	3.337***	3.311***
	(0.0483)	(0.0507)	(0.0483)	(0.0507)	(0.0392)	(0.0551)
Left-right		0.122***		0.110***		0.104***
		(0.00668)		(0.00677)		(0.0052)
Female	0.185***	0.197***	0.187***	0.199***	0.172***	0.181***
	(0.0284)	(0.0310)	(0.0285)	(0.0311)	(0.0223)	(0.0303)
Age**						
Age second quintile dummy	0.0952*	0.119*	0.100*	0.124*	0.099*	0.114*
	(0.0438)	(0.0487)	(0.0440)	(0.0488)	(0.0411)	(0.0474)
Age third quintile dummy	0.0658	0.103*	0.0735	0.109*	0.0705	0.101*
	(0.0450)	(0.0497)	(0.0452)	(0.0499)	(0.0411)	(0.0482)
Age fourth quintile dummy	0.0624	0.0859	0.0723	0.0928	0.0698	0.0919
	(0.0465)	(0.0512)	(0.0467)	(0.0514)	(0.0402)	(0.0507)
Age fifth quintile dummy	0.0602	0.0632	0.0783	0.0773	0.0699	0.0768
	(0.0487)	(0.0537)	(0.0489)	(0.0538)	(0.0412)	(0.0522)
Education	-0.0824***	-0.0666***	-0.0809***	-0.0657***	-0.0772***	-0.0649***
	(0.0144)	(0.0155)	(0.0144)	(0.0156)	(0.0131)	(0.0142)
Union membership	-0.00453	-0.0205	-0.0106	-0.0276	-0.0101	-0.0262
	(0.0410)	(0.0438)	(0.0412)	(0.0439)	(0.0403)	(0.0395)
Left government	-0.185	-0.101	-1.697***	-1.382***	-1.593***	-1.376***

	(0.219)	(0.222)	(0.248)	(0.255)	(0.239)	(0.242)
Δ Unemployment rate	0.0965	0.102	0.0844	0.0892	0.0833	0.0876
	(0.140)	(0.142)	(0.144)	(0.146)	(0.131)	(0.139)
GDP growth	-0.0293	-0.0322	-0.0187	-0.0223	-0.0176	-0.0219
	(0.0765)	(0.0778)	(0.0781)	(0.0794)	(0.0772)	(0.0773)
Δ Inequality (GINI)	-0.0836	-0.0871	-0.0913	-0.0927	-0.0898	-0.0916
	(0.0930)	(0.0943)	(0.0952)	(0.0965)	(0.0899)	(0.0958)
Redistribution preferences X Left government			**0.390*****	**0.329*****	**0.382*****	**0.318*****
			(0.0274)	**(0.0298)**	**(0.0261)**	**(0.0285)**
Constant	-1.676***	-2.349***	-0.827***	-1.577***	-0.801***	-1.532***
	(0.204)	(0.212)	(0.216)	(0.227)	(0.203)	(0.219)
Random slopes						
Country	0.343***	0.351***	0.360***	0.368***	0.349***	0.359***
	(0.0908)	(0.0933)	(0.0951)	(0.0979)	(0.0939)	(0.0929)
Election study	0.155***	0.175***	0.154***	0.168***	0.765***	0.752***
	(0.0559)	(0.0635)	(0.0541)	(0.0602)	(0.262)	(0.257)
Redistribution preferences					0.0597***	0.0691***
					(0.0142)	(0.0149)
AIC	30972.4	26142.5	30769.2	26021.5	30323.2	26021.5
BIC	31106.5	26282.7	30911.7	26169.9	30875.2	26169.9
Ll	-15470.2	-13054.3	-15367.6	-12992.8	-14267.2	-12992.8
Countries	31	31	31	31	31	31
Election studies	50	50	50	50	50	50
Observations	32230	28058	32230	28058	32230	28058

Standard errors in parentheses

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release & Module 5 Advance Release 3.

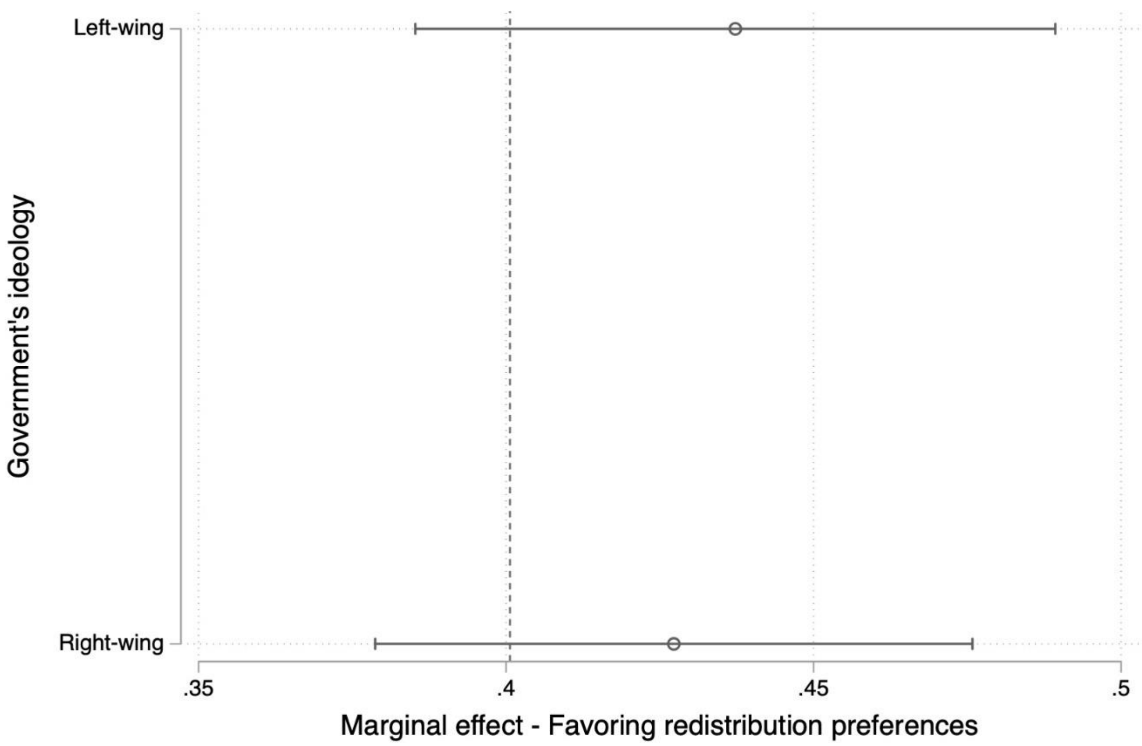
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

**The reference category for age is the first quintile

As we can see from the table above, redistribution preferences do indeed have an effect on voting for incumbents around the world. Looking at all the models in the table, we can see a consistently statistically significant effect for redistribution preferences. For the first two models (the ones without interaction) the effect is small, because these models do not distinguish separate effects for left-wing and right-wing incumbents, but instead put all incumbents together into one category. This is not in accordance with the theoretical model, and the hypothesized relationship between redistribution preferences and incumbents' support, where I expect the opposite effects, with those favouring redistribution tending to support more strongly left-wing incumbents, and those opposing redistribution to support more strongly right-wing incumbents. However, these are placed in the table as base models, without any interactions included.

Thus, to test the 4 hypotheses (H1b – H1d) with governments' ideology as a moderator in the link between redistribution preferences and voting for incumbents, I introduce an interaction term, between redistribution preferences and the dummy indicator for left-wing government, based on the party of the prime minister. These interactions are presented in Models 3-6. Since logits are not always the most intuitive form of data for interpretation, I plotted the predicted probabilities while setting the redistribution preferences to its maximum.

Figure 12: Support for incumbents by those who favor redistribution moderated by governments' ideology



The graph shows no support for H1b or H1c, as we do not see a distinctive effect for left-wing and right-wing incumbents. While both effects themselves are statistically significant, there is no distinction between them, strong enough to make a claim about the hypothesized relationship. I return to this finding and shed more light on it in the next chapter.

However, for H1d and H1e, the effect of redistribution preferences in terms of those who oppose more redistribution, we see a clear and strong effect, showing that respondents who oppose more redistribution are significantly more likely to support right-wing incumbents, compared to left-wing incumbents. The marginal effects are shown in the figure below.

Figure 13: Support for incumbents by those who oppose redistribution moderated by government ideology

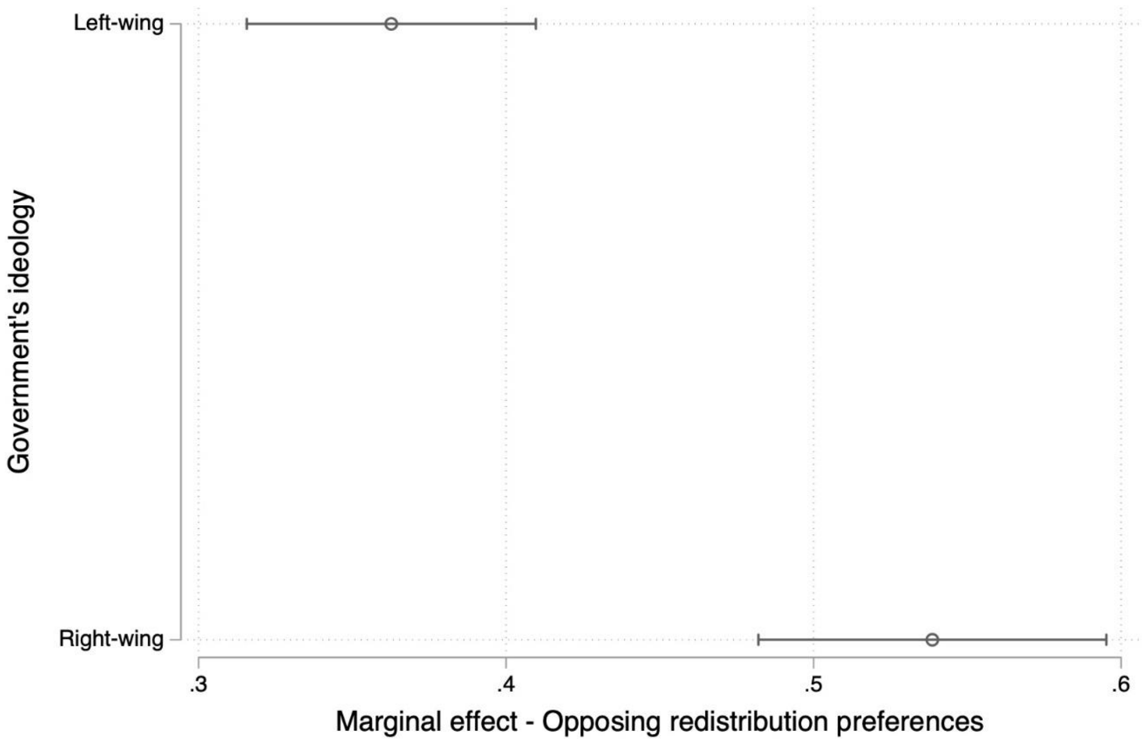


Figure 4 provides enough evidence for H1d and H1e. Interestingly, the effect is more pronounced and in line with assumptions for those who oppose redistribution, but not for those who favour redistribution, which is something I return to in the discussion section. Before that, I test the robustness of the above results, through various different models that tackle the same issues.

4.5. Robustness checks

As part of the robustness checks, I ran the same set of models, with two differences. The first difference was the dependent variable, which is now coded as a vote for the party of the prime minister (or the president in the few presidential systems in the sample), trying to show that the effects remain the same. Some could argue that blame for the state of the economy is significantly more pronounced for the party of the prime minister, rather than the whole (coalition) government.

Following that change, I also changed the variable party ID, which was coded 1 if the respondent identified with any of the parties that were in government. In the robustness check, this variable is coded 1 only if the respondent identified with the party of the outgoing prime minister (or the party of the president, when presidential elections are the main election for the election study in the sample).

In addition, readers should note that the South Korea 2012 study was excluded from this part of the analysis, as the outgoing Prime Minister of South Korea was an independent, and did not belong to any political party.

As in the main analysis section, I ran 6 different models, which followed the same structure as the models above. The results are given in the table below.

Table 2: Multilevel logistic regression models testing effect of redistribution preferences on support for the party of the Prime Minster

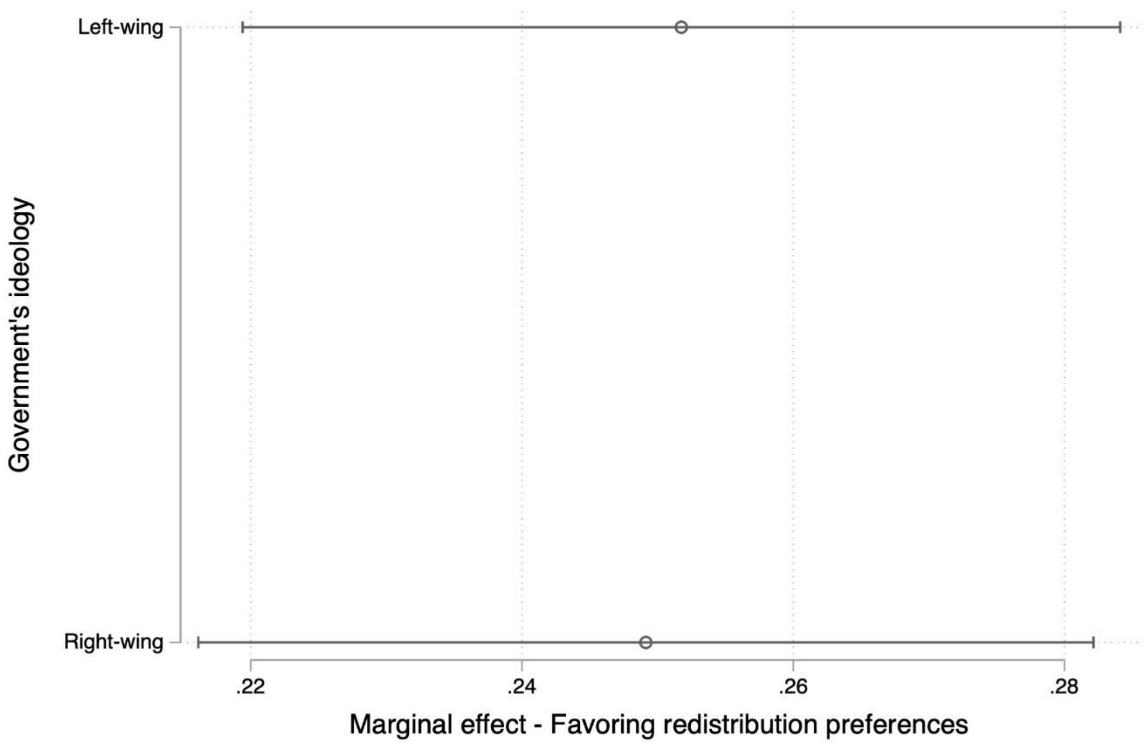
Vote for party of Prime Minister	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Redistribution preferences	**-0.0172****	**-0.0150****	**-0.150*****	**-0.125*****	**-0.179*****	**-0.145*****
	(0.0102)	**(0.0041)**	**(0.0206)**	**(0.0228)**	**(0.0376)**	**(0.0400)**
State of the economy	0.313***	0.299***	0.309***	0.296***	0.308***	0.295***
	(0.0165)	(0.0183)	(0.0165)	(0.0184)	(0.0165)	(0.0184)
Party ID (with incumbents)	3.292***	3.260***	3.253***	3.229***	3.240***	3.219***
	(0.0348)	(0.0377)	(0.0350)	(0.0379)	(0.0350)	(0.0380)
Left-right		0.0884***		0.0832***		0.0831***
		(0.00694)		(0.00699)		(0.00702)
Female	0.136***	0.159***	0.139***	0.162***	0.141***	0.166***
	(0.0290)	(0.0323)	(0.0290)	(0.0323)	(0.0291)	(0.0324)
Age**						
Age second quintile dummy	0.199***	0.183***	0.200***	0.185***	0.200***	0.186***
	(0.0447)	(0.0507)	(0.0447)	(0.0508)	(0.0448)	(0.0508)
Age third quintile dummy	0.257***	0.243***	0.262***	0.248***	0.262***	0.249***
	(0.0460)	(0.0517)	(0.0461)	(0.0518)	(0.0462)	(0.0519)
Age fourth quintile dummy	0.272***	0.220***	0.279***	0.227***	0.282***	0.232***
	(0.0475)	(0.0533)	(0.0476)	(0.0534)	(0.0477)	(0.0535)
Age fifth quintile dummy	0.251***	0.196***	0.261***	0.205***	0.265***	0.213***
	(0.0495)	(0.0557)	(0.0495)	(0.0557)	(0.0496)	(0.0559)
Education	0.0137	0.0146	0.0127	0.0133	0.0131	0.0149
	(0.0148)	(0.0163)	(0.0149)	(0.0163)	(0.0149)	(0.0163)
Union member	-0.00150	-0.0189	-0.00171	-0.0199	0.00677	-0.0120
	(0.0439)	(0.0473)	(0.0439)	(0.0473)	(0.0441)	(0.0475)
Left government	0.194	0.303	-0.721**	-0.457	-0.679**	-0.388
	(0.219)	(0.232)	(0.242)	(0.260)	(0.263)	(0.252)

Δ Unemployment rate	0.113	0.134	0.103	0.126	0.186	0.263
	(0.139)	(0.147)	(0.138)	(0.147)	(0.163)	(0.155)
GDP growth	-0.0230	-0.0484	-0.0266	-0.0480	-0.0584	-0.111
	(0.123)	(0.113)	(0.112)	(0.111)	(0.0993)	(0.104)
Δ Inequality (GINI)	0.00589	0.00834	0.00187	0.00572	0.0346	0.0101
	(0.0926)	(0.0979)	(0.0916)	(0.0974)	(0.107)	(0.100)
Redistribution preferences X Left government			0.238***	0.197***	0.249***	0.200***
			(0.0277)	(0.0307)	(0.0542)	(0.0578)
Constant	-3.182***	-3.579***	-2.647***	-3.112***	-2.577***	-3.045***
	(0.255)	(0.255)	(0.248)	(0.262)	(0.241)	(0.252)
Random slopes						
Country	0.321*	0.336*	0.307*	0.326	0.377**	0.290
	(0.128)	(0.161)	(0.131)	(0.169)	(0.128)	(0.210)
Election study	0.0127	0.0374	0.0204	0.0437	3.12e-27	0.0239
	(0.0720)	(0.113)	(0.0821)	(0.125)	(3.84e-14)	(0.178)
Redistribution preferences					0.0148**	0.0165**
					(0.00573)	(0.00608)
AIC	31795.1	25832.6	31723.4	25793.4	31682.6	25752.5
BIC	31941.5	25984.3	31878.4	25953.5	31837.7	25921.1
Ll	-15880.5	-12898.3	-15843.7	-12877.7	-15823.3	-12856.3
Countries	30	30	30	30	30	30
Election studies	49	49	49	49	49	49
Observations	40614	33779	40614	33779	40614	33779

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) M4 & M5 AR3.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
**The reference category for age is the first quintile

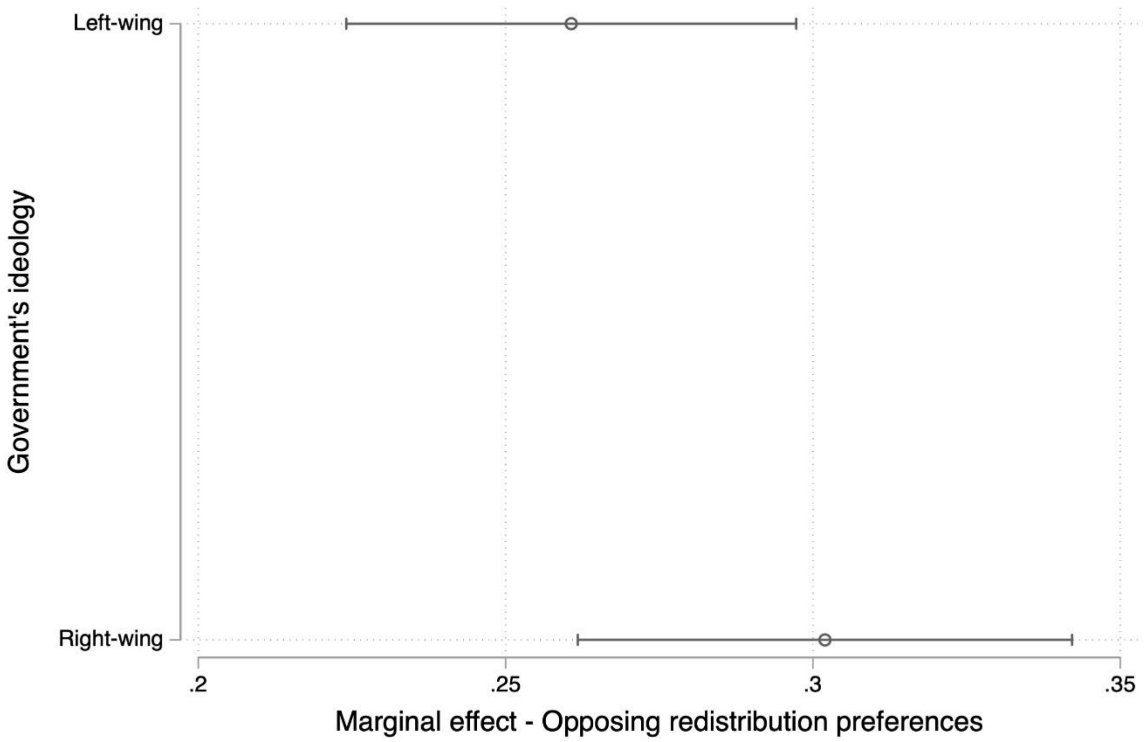
Table 2 shows the same pattern of results, with a different dependent variable (voting for the party of the Prime Minister instead of any party that is incumbent in a given election). As we can see, none of the coefficients changed with respect to statistical significance, or changed their sign. However, with this different dependent variable, the effects are somewhat smaller than they were when the whole coalition government was coded as 1 in the dependent variable. That can also be seen in the figures below, which plot the marginal effects for those who (do not) want more redistribution.

Figure 14: Support for the party of the PM by those who favour redistribution moderated by government ideology



The effect for those respondents who favour redistribution is now practically indistinguishable for both left-wing and right-wing prime ministers. This time, unlike in the previous subsection, which provided the main results, there is no statistically significant effect for respondents who are opposed to more redistribution preferences. The results are shown in the following figure.

Figure 15: Support for the party of the PM by those who oppose redistribution moderated by government ideology



These results are further discussed in the following section.

4.6. Discussion

This section is the first empirical test of the link between redistribution preferences and voting for outgoing incumbents. While the effects are statistically significant, a substantive interpretation is only possible when a government's ideology moderates the relationship. Redistribution preferences have an effect on incumbent support, but placing all incumbents into the same category results in the opposing expectation, as we can see from the theoretical model, where I argue that those who support more redistribution will vote for left-wing incumbents, and those who do not want more redistribution will vote to replace left-wing incumbents. Thus, for some election studies in the sample, the expected regression coefficient is positive (left-wing), while for other election studies, the expected regression coefficient is negative (right-wing). Even though the negative coefficients prevail in models, that does not tell us much, except in hinting that a grievance asymmetry mechanism might be at work here, with the sanctions for economic performance (and maybe even economic policy) being harsher than the rewards. The models above just hint in that direction, though it would be interesting and important to examine in future if grievance asymmetry works for the positional issues too, since it is clear it works for valence issues in some contexts.

For the theoretical model in this thesis, and the upcoming empirical analysis, what is more relevant is what happens once the effect is split, separately examining it from the standpoint of left-wing and right-wing incumbents. Here, the only substantive support I find is for the hypothesis claiming that those who oppose more redistribution are more likely to vote for right-wing incumbents. The effect is in the expected direction given that right-wing parties usually promote a different kind of economic worldview, and do not put much emphasis on income redistribution in society.

Why is there not such a clear link between those who want more redistribution and left-wing incumbents? I find no link in relation to both models where the respondents' ideology is included as a control variable and kept constant, and in models without the respondents' ideology. Previous findings point to the fact that preferences for redistribution traditionally correlate more strongly with those who are left-leaning voters (Attewell, 2021; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015). We might argue that for those who hold left-leaning beliefs, preferences for redistribution are a reflection of the values they have, and means of achieving the world they want. So, how can we explain this result? Here, I highlight two possible explanations.

Firstly, it is plausible that in a post-GFC context, for voters who want more redistribution, the link with left-wing parties is no longer really about values. In a comparative analysis of 15 Western European countries Stegmueller (2013) shows that the redistributive vote is primarily based on economic preferences rather than moral views or values. Left-wing parties have not been champions of redistribution preferences, particularly not in the last decade, and some have argued that they have, as such, completely lost their appeal for left-wing voters. If that is the true, it will be most visible for those left-wing parties that governed during this period.

Secondly, there are many system features that would also plausibly contribute to the lack of strength in the link between redistribution preferences and support for left-wing incumbents, which might also depend on the political offer at the given election, and whether voters had a choice between left-wing and right-wing oppositions, when casting a vote. Thus, the following chapter digs into the contextual effects (the primarily rise of income inequality), aiming to further help us in unbundling the difference in the vote between proponents and opponents of income redistribution.

5. The inequality backlash: The rise in income inequality as a moderator in the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice[7]

This section expands on the empirical findings presented in Section 4. Here, I test the rise in income inequality as a moderator in the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice. As discussed in the theoretical model (see Section 2), I expect a rise in income inequality to be a strong explanatory factor, which would help us disentangle and better understand the electoral behaviour of those who prefer (and those who oppose) more redistribution. There are many reasons why it is reasonable to expect that income inequality will affect redistribution preferences and the link with vote choice. I briefly recap the main arguments here.

First, income inequality and redistribution preferences are almost inseparable in the academic literature, as can be seen from the decades of scholarship on this issue in the areas of political economy, sociology and political science. I considered some of the most important aspects of this literature in previous sections, like Meltzer and Richard's model (1981) and the major academic reactions that followed. The link between the two is widely present beyond this seminal model, and there is an abundance of research showing that redistribution preferences and levels of redistribution in the country are affected by income inequality (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Bobzien, 2019; de Mello & Tiongson, 2006).

Second, the topic of income inequality now features more prominently than ever in public discourse worldwide (Anderson & Singer, 2008; Armingeon & Schädel, 2015; Avery, 2015). The rise in general interest in the topic has been noticeable in political science too, as scholars tried to estimate the direct effect income inequality has on vote choice, and most especially on government support (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2020). However, results on the empirical link between income inequality and vote choice are mixed, at best. Thus, Rueda and Stegmueller (2015) argued that the effect of inequality on voting is not direct, but reflected through "preferences that matter", for instance redistribution preferences. I follow their logic,

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[7] Part of the research design for this chapter has already been empirically tested. The results, with analysis performed on data coming from CSES Module 4 Full Release and CSES Module 5 Advance Release 2, were published in Živković, S. (2021). The interplay of economic vote dimensions: Inequality, redistribution preferences and support for incumbents. Comparative European Politics, 19(5), 594–621. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-021-00249-2.

and thus use inequality as a moderator in the link between redistribution preference and vote choice, rather than a direct predictor of vote choice.

Third, most of the studies exploring the relationship between income inequality and different attitudes or behaviour focus on the actual levels of inequality in a country or studied region. I make a detour from that literature, arguing that it is not about the levels of inequality, but about the rise in inequality, which is something nobody wants or advocate for. Thus, I treat the rise in income inequality as a valence macro condition that influences attitudes and, through attitudes, also impacts on political behaviour (Živković, 2021).

In the previous section covering the empirical analysis, I connected preferences for redistribution with voting for left-wing and right-wing incumbents. In this section, I argue that context can help us take the analysis further in two directions. First, a rise in income inequality can help us understand why those who want more redistribution are not voting for left-wing governments. Second, it can help us make the distinction between voters supporting incumbents and the opposition, depending on party ideology. In the theoretical model (Section 2), I argued that one of the shortcomings of positional economic voting is that scholars show the effect of positional issues on voting for left-wing or right-wing groups of parties, often bundling all the political parties in the political system into these (very) broad ideological groups. I attempt to break those groups using one additional criterion (incumbency/opposition status alongside party ideology), and argue that contextual factors should push voters in one group to vote for incumbents or the opposition within that ideological group.

For all of these reasons, summarized above and presented in more detail in the theoretical model, I devised several hypotheses which will be tested against the data in this section.

H2a: The greater the rise in income inequality, the stronger the punishment of the incumbents will be from those who want more redistribution, regardless of the incumbents' ideological leanings

H2b: Right-wing incumbents will be more strongly punished by voters who want more redistribution when the country is experiencing a more significant rise in income inequality

H2c: The left-wing opposition will benefit most from voters who want more redistribution during times of rising inequality

H2d: With a left-wing government in office and a rise in income inequality, voters who want more redistribution will vote for left-wing parties more than right-wing ones, but will sanction incumbents and prefer the left-wing opposition

Before testing these hypotheses against the data, several considerations from the theoretical model deserve more attention in this section. Thus, the structure of this chapter is as follows: first, I start with a brief recap of the literature about income inequality, why is it important for political systems, and what consequences it can have for countries. Second, I elaborate on the link between income inequality and voting, as explored in the existing literature. After that, I present the data and methods, following the empirical analysis. I conclude this section with a summary and a discussion of the main findings.

5.1. The economic, social and political consequences of income inequality

According to the available data, rising income inequality is a trend which has existed for several decades (and in some countries even longer than that) in the industrialized world (Milanovic, 2012; Piketty & Saez, 2014). The rise in income inequality happened in parallel with the historically unprecedent economic growth these industrialized countries witnessed, which caused the negative aspects to be ignored, and a clear focus placed on booming economies. Some have argued for years that inequality is something the world should not worry about, and that it is simply a normal consequence of increasing economic growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2002; Kuznets, 1955).

Thus, this “normalizing” of economic inequality made it a less salient issue. Having said that, not everyone agreed with the premise that it is normal to have higher economic inequality when the country’s economy is on the rise, too. Thus, the negative consequences of inequality have also been studied all along, though research on these negative aspects of economic inequality did not feature prominently for much of the “boom” period. However, with the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the world started talking more about the negative externalities of inequality and research output followed this general trend. As such, nowadays we know much more about the negative effects inequality can have, and it is a topic that has become much more salient than it was a decade ago (Scheve & Stasavage, 2017). Here, I summarize elements of this rich scholarship, and present some of the most widely-discussed negative consequences of income inequality.

The first, and perhaps most striking, negative consequences income inequality can have are reflected in the country's economy. Some would argue that all the other problems income inequality cause are actually, at base, a reflection of economic problems. For a while now we have known that the economy in a given country is significantly less efficient when income inequality is high (Stiglitz, 2012). This lack of efficiency is often reflected in the distribution of social goods, which tend to be lower in times of higher inequality, when paradoxically the demand is higher. Income inequality is also associated with higher rates of poverty, as research has found that inequality happens when income is concentrated at the top, which also leads to higher rates of poverty (Dincer & Gunalp, 2008). Income inequality can also drive some people into poverty, or other economy-related existential problems, as inequality can lead to significant increases in prices on the market, or even cause a rise in homelessness (Matlack & Vigdor, 2008). One more example, of many others, shows that income inequality is the leading factor that drives growing household debt, since high earners drive prices to such high levels that medium and low earners are not able to afford them. This, further, leads them to increase their personal or household debt, in order to afford the previously held standard of living. Income inequality can reduce peoples' chances in other ways too, as there is an empirical evidence that inequality reduces social mobility and decreases the opportunities for marginalized groups to get a decent job (Checchi & García-Peñalosa, 2008).

Second, aside from the economic consequences, income inequality affects society in different ways. By now we know that income inequality strongly affects citizens' attitudes. When income inequality is high, it is reflected in lower levels of trust in the society in question. Research shows that society's cohesiveness is reduced by higher income inequality, making people significantly more suspicious towards others (Loveless, 2013a). The effect gets even stronger once citizens can perceive inequality *with their own eyes,* making them think that the whole society is unjust, and that they are victims of a lack of justice. Lower levels of trust and lower social cohesion are related to many other socially problematic outcomes, such as higher crime rates, higher suicide rates, higher mortality rates, greater tension between different groups in the society (like disagreements between different ethnic groups living in one country) and many more (Hipp, 2007; Patterson, 1991). Economic inequality also *produces* different kind of other inequalities in the society, such as educational inequalities or labour market inequalities (Alt & Iversen, 2017).

Finally, a rise in inequality is also reflected in the political realm. Income inequality can have negative political consequences. These political consequences relate to how political systems are affected by income inequality. Research shows that economic inequality affects not just levels of social trust, but also political trust, making people in countries with greater inequality less inclined to trust their main political institutions, such as governments, parliaments, or political parties (Loveless, 2013a). With a rise in inequality, researchers have noticed that election turnout tends to be lower, as well as other general forms of political participation in the country, not only voting (Galbraith & Hale, 2008). And among those that do vote in countries with higher income inequality, those with higher income are disproportionally represented in the electorate (Avery, 2015). When income inequality is higher, citizens tend to think less of the country's democracy, through perceptions that the health or state of democracy is endangered (Scheve & Stasavage, 2017) or through widening gaps in levels of satisfaction with democracy between election winners and losers (Han & Chang, 2016).

While different kind of worries are expressed by those who advocate for reduced inequality and those who simply wish that it was reduced, many of these do become factors in some way (whether directly or indirectly) in the voting decision. The link between inequality and voting is the most important effect inequality can have, for the theoretical model which I devised for this thesis. As such, the following section looks at the detail of this link, trying to recognize some of the gaps which this analysis aims to fill.

5.2. Voting and income inequality

The link between voting and income inequality is nothing new in political science. However, before the topic of inequality came to the forefront of political debates, with the rise of the global Occupy movement in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, the interest in income inequality as a predictor of vote choice was not that great. Most of the earlier work was either normative (Coleman, 1974; Kondor, 1975) or focused on the effects inequality has on political system, or peoples' attitudes, but not necessarily behaviour or vote choice, as discussed in previous section.

Some exceptions do exist, though empirical studies about the direct link between income inequality and election outcomes emerged somewhat later. The real proliferation of inequality as a topic in political science happened, as stated, after the GFC. The literature started mushrooming, and probably only populism and the radical-right have seen a greater rise in interest among political science scholars over recent years. This rich scholarship has taught us a lot.

The most important contribution in the seminal work by Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck (2020), with respect to the analysis I am conducting, is that they provide empirical support that both left and right wing parties, are sanctioned when inequality is on the rise. Thus, we should re-think our approach to income inequality, and maybe start thinking about it more as a valence issue. This was contrary to their expectation that income inequality would function as a positional issue.

However, they are not alone in producing unexpected results, as many other research contributions have found effects for inequality which were not in line with their expectations from the theoretical models.

Despite the steep rise in income inequality in the United States (Piketty & Saez, 2014), and the logical expectation that the Democrats represent labour (and thus, have a voter base who want to lower inequality) and the Republicans represent the business establishment (and thus, have a voter base who are more comfortable with inequality), Gelman et al. (2010) found no clear relationship between income inequality levels and vote choice in the United States. The US context provides other surprises. Fenzl (2018) found that income inequality in the US does not lead to greater polarization among voters, nor among parties, and contrary to some expectation does not align voters more with their party groups, and does not make a right (left) party go further right (left) on the ideological spectrum. This is further negative evidence, proof of something that does not happen.

These same types of "non-findings" are found in comparative explorations of these topics. The most prominent example is a study conducted by Han (2015) who estimated the effect of income inequality on polarization in 24 advanced democracies between 1960 and 2011, and found effects that were not especially strong. Other studies seem to point out that certain conditions need to be met for income inequality to cause polarization among voters and parties, which is later reflected in party support. Gunderson's analysis (2021), on a dataset comprised of European national elections between 1996 to 2016, showed evidence that income inequality has a positive relationship with polarization on economic issues only among partisans, who are comfortable with respect to income, and when the saliency of economic issues is relatively high in elections. When these factors are not met, the relationship between the two is non-existent.

Given that the rise of populism and radical right support happened almost simultaneously with the rise in salience of economic inequality, scholars have thoroughly investigated the link between the two. The main reasoning behind the link was the notion of voters who are "left-behind" and who are more prone to voting for populist and radical-right parties, but also to being affected by the rise in inequality. Again, the evidence is mixed. Engler and Weistanner (2021) provided support for the view that rising income inequality increases the likelihood of radical right support. Further, their analysis shows that the effect of rising income inequality is particularly pronounced for lower-income voters, and for those with high subjective status. On the other hand, Stoetzer et al. (2021) in a causal mediation analysis do not find enough evidence to fully understand the relationship between income inequality and support for populist parties. This mixture of findings can be explained by Han's (2016) argument that income inequality has opposing effects on different groups that support radical right and populist parties. Here, according to his analysis, inequality encourages the poor to vote for these types of parties, but dissuades the rich from doing so.

Studying the effects of income inequality on local level politics, between 2002 and 2014, Winkler (2019) found that increasing inequality leads on average to more support for left-wing parties, but interestingly increasing inequality makes older voters more likely to support far right parties, though the author acknowledges that this relationship is mainly driven by anti-immigrant sentiments.

The above is only a very brief, and for this thesis relevant, recap of the extremely rich research output on the relationship between income inequality and voting. From this brief review, the most relevant points for the analysis in this chapter can be summarized. First, it is far from obvious that income inequality is exclusively a valence or exclusively a positional issue, and we need to be cautious when deciding how to use this issue in empirical tests. Second, income inequality influences vote choice and contributes to polarization among voters and parties. While not all the empirical studies find evidence for that, it is by now clear that certain conditions need to be met for a robust and substantive effect. Third, the effect of income inequality on vote choice can sometimes be completely different for different groups in a society, which could lead some to think that the overall effect of inequality is non-existent, as opposing effects for different groups in the society can cancel each other out. Finally, researchers should think carefully about the different needs and perceptions of various voters and how these are influenced by (rising) income inequality.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, I proceed to presenting the data and methods used for the empirical test of the devised research hypothesis.

5.3. Data and Methods

For the analysis I am using the same dataset as in Chapter 4. The data is again compiled from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release (2018) and Module 5 Third Advance Release (2021). As with Chapter 4, there are certain election studies which are excluded from the analysis[8].

There are two main differences between the two analyses, when it comes to the data against which the hypotheses are tested.

The first relates to the dependent variable. Following the set hypothesis, I have two dependent variables. The first one is binary, coded 1 for those who voted for outgoing incumbents, and 0 for those who did not. This is the same dependent variable as in the previous chapter. The second dependent variable is nominal, comprised of five categories, distinguishing non-voters as Category 1, voters who vote for right-wing incumbents (Category 2), voters voting for the right wing-opposition (Category 3), voters voting for left-wing incumbents (Category 4) and voters for left-wing opposition groups (Category 5). I code these parties from the data available in the CSES, both for their incumbency status and their ideology. For ideology, I code all the parties in the political system that received an ideology score by country collaborators/experts, on an 11-points scale, from 0 (left-wing) to 10 (right-wing). While this excludes voters who voted for some parties from the analysis, it is a rather small number, given that all the major parties in the political system are represented in the CSES relational data segment, from which I use the data for the left-right classification of parties. Parties scoring from 0 to 4 are coded as left-wing, while parties scoring from 6-10 are coded as right wing. For parties which the CSES collaborators scored as 5 on the ideological scale, I take the additional information available from the MARPOR project or from other sources, and make a decision on whether these parties

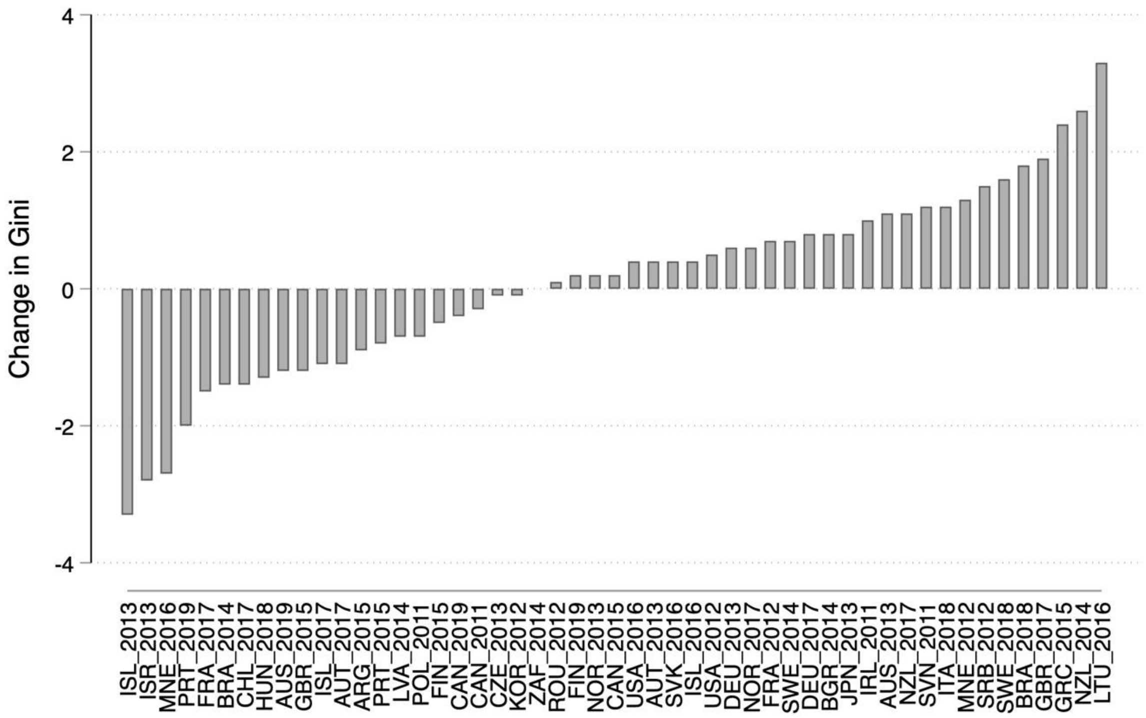
[8] For a detailed list and reasons for exclusion please consult Chapter 4, Section 4.3.

have economic policies that are mainly left-wing or right-wing. I provide a list of these parties, with my coding decisions, in Appendix II.

The second difference is in the explanation for the creation of the change in income inequality variable. As previously argued, I am not interested in the state of inequality at the time of voting. Rather, I want to explore the effect of changes (specifically increase) in income inequality. Not much is new in this approach, as many have explored the effect of changes related to other economic factors, with changes in GDP level, levels of unemployment or inflation featuring most prominently in the political science literature. Unlike these variables, for which almost all researchers calculate the change by comparing the year of election and the year before it (t-1), I argue for a longer time period to examine change when it comes to inequality[9]. To calculate the measure used in this thesis, I subtract the income inequality (measured by the Gini index) in the election year, from the income inequality in the previous election year. This way, I argue that the government in office will be held responsible for the change in inequality over their whole tenure. In addition, from a statistical point of view, and given that inequality changes significantly more slowly than the other most prominent economic variables, in this way I have enough variation in the key moderating variable for the models. This variable takes the following distribution in the sample I use in the analysis.

[9] For details on respondents' benchmarking of income inequality please see Section 3.1.2.

Figure 16: Change in income inequality between elections over the election studies in the sample



Apart from that, all the other things in the model used for the empirical tests of the hypotheses remain the same, with the control variables used in the model having the same coding as in Chapter 4. To ease the comparison of effects, all the variables are standardized from 0 to 1.

As was the case with Chapter 4, due to the hierarchical nature of the dataset, with respondents nested in election studies, which are then nested in countries (polities), I ran multi-level models. The dependent variable dictated the type of models I ran. For hypotheses H2a and H2b, I ran multi-level logistic regressions. For hypotheses H2c and H2d, because the dependent variable was nominal, I ran multi-level multinomial models.

5.4. Analysis

The analysis is split into two parts, following each devised hypothesis. In the first part, I test the first hypotheses H2a and H2b, showing the effects of rising income inequality on incumbents. In the second part, I test the remaining two hypotheses (H2c and H2d) and show the effect of rising income inequality on the link between redistribution preferences and voting for opposition parties. The results are presented in the following sub-sections. Models with different dependent variables (voting for the prime minister’s party instead of all parties comprising the government) are presented in the appendix as a robustness check. The results remain in the same direction and the same variables reach statistical significance with different dependent variable.

5.4.1. Effect for incumbents

The general expectation of hypotheses H2a and H2b is that a rise in income inequality will amplify the effect I found in the previous chapter (Chapter 4). Since I assume that a rise in inequality will work as a moderator in the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice, I ran models with interaction effects between the rise in inequality and redistribution preferences. Those models are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Multi-level logit model for testing the H1

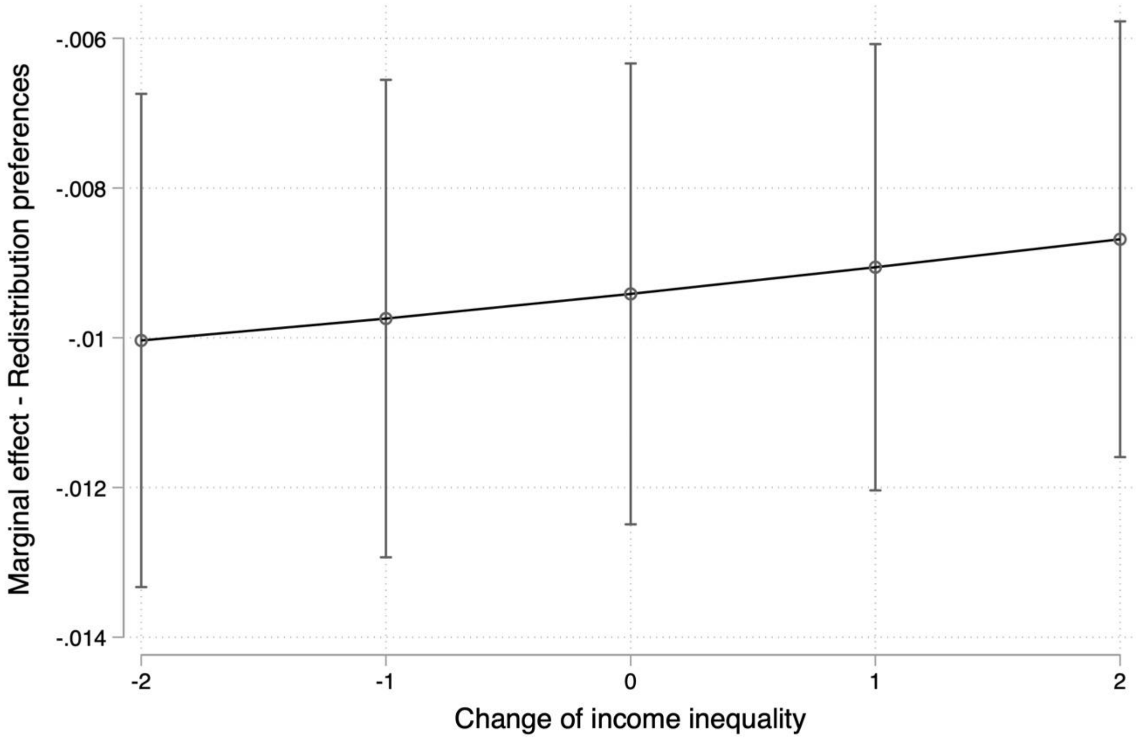
Vote for incumbents	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Redistribution preferences	**-0.0597***** **(0.00984)**	**-0.0582***** **(0.00985)**	**-0.123**** **(0.0438)**	**-0.0619***** **(0.0105)**	**-0.0604***** **(0.0105)**	**-0.123**** **(0.0422)**
State of the economy	0.419*** (0.0123)	0.419*** (0.0123)	0.391*** (0.0126)	0.408*** (0.0133)	0.408*** (0.0133)	0.382*** (0.0136)
Party ID	3.441*** (0.0361)	3.442*** (0.0361)	3.364*** (0.0364)	3.359*** (0.0376)	3.360*** (0.0376)	3.292*** (0.0379)
Left-right				0.118*** (0.00491)	0.118*** (0.00491)	0.106*** (0.00507)
Female	0.183*** (0.0216)	0.184*** (0.0216)	0.192*** (0.0219)	0.195*** (0.0233)	0.195*** (0.0233)	0.203*** (0.0236)
Age	0.00381*** (0.000662)	0.00378*** (0.000662)	0.00506*** (0.000674)	0.00378*** (0.000715)	0.00376*** (0.000715)	0.00502*** (0.000728)
Education	-0.0868*** (0.0111)	-0.0873*** (0.0111)	-0.0793*** (0.0113)	-0.0723*** (0.0119)	-0.0726*** (0.0119)	-0.0652*** (0.0121)
Union membership	-0.0590 (0.0306)	-0.0574 (0.0306)	-0.0477 (0.0310)	-0.0680* (0.0322)	-0.0667* (0.0322)	-0.0575 (0.0327)
Left government	-0.503** (0.167)	-0.504** (0.167)	-1.298*** (0.316)	-0.439* (0.178)	-0.440* (0.177)	-0.939** (0.313)
Δ Unemployment rate	0.0337 (0.135)	0.0366 (0.134)	0.0552 (0.253)	0.0365 (0.139)	0.0383 (0.138)	0.123 (0.249)
GDP growth	-0.0973	-0.0982	0.119	-0.103	-0.103	0.0993

	(0.0594)	(0.0591)	(0.118)	(0.0615)	(0.0612)	(0.116)
Δ Inequality (GINI)	-0.150*	-0.0274	-0.0142	-0.147*	-0.0441	0.0172
	(0.0623)	(0.0696)	(0.133)	(0.0663)	(0.0746)	(0.132)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)		**-0.0307*****	**-0.0324***		**-0.0259****	**-0.0333***
		(0.00801)	**(0.0126)**		**(0.00876)**	**(0.0115)**
Constant	-1.575***	-1.577***	-1.355***	-2.213***	-2.214***	-2.078***
	(0.175)	(0.175)	(0.310)	(0.185)	(0.184)	(0.309)
Random slopes						
Country	0.235*	0.236*	0.350	0.223*	0.224*	0.318
	(0.102)	(0.101)	(0.268)	(0.105)	(0.105)	(0.250)
Election study	0.155**	0.152**	0.803**	0.175**	0.173**	0.779**
	(0.0559)	(0.0551)	(0.273)	(0.0635)	(0.0627)	(0.265)
Redistribution preferences			0.0883***			0.0800***
			(0.0189)			(0.0174)
AIC	53831.3	53818.6	52849.7	46750.9	46744.2	45949.4
BIC	53956.7	53952.9	52993.0	46883.6	46885.6	46099.6
Ll	-26901.7	-26894.3	-26408.9	-23360.5	-23356.1	-22957.7
Countries	31	31	31	31	31	31
Election Studies	50	50	50	50	50	50
Observations	57348	57348	57348	51024	51024	51024

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release & Module 5 Advance Release 3.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

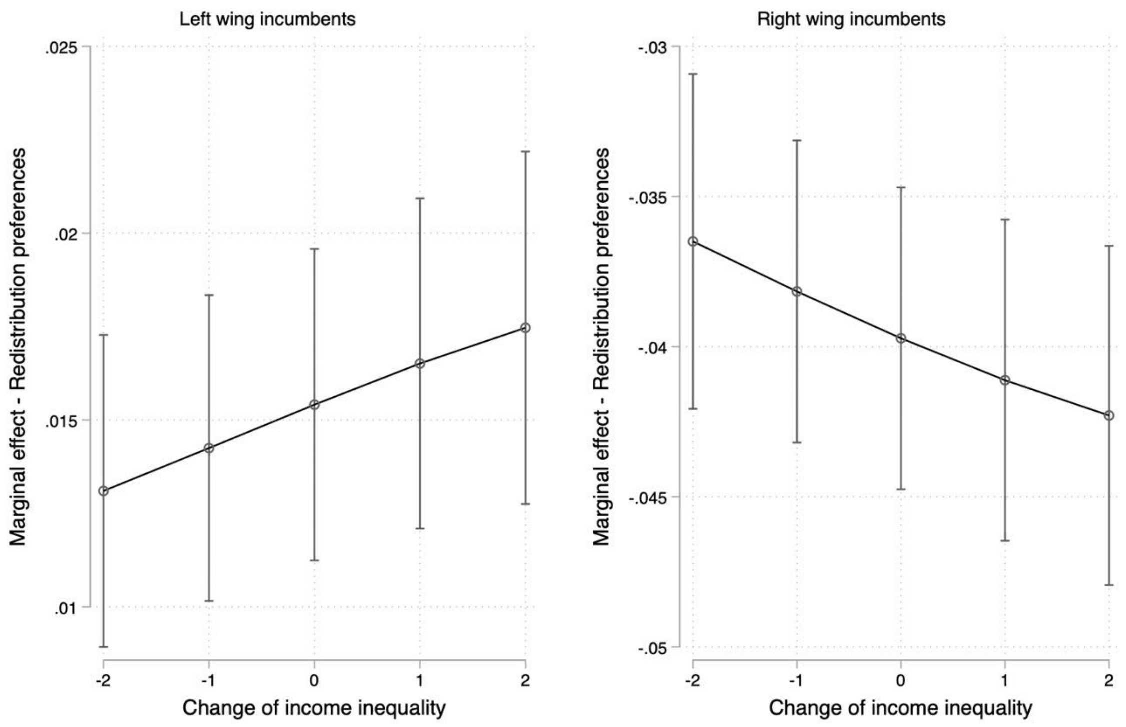
To have a better understanding of the effect, I plot the effect for the main independent variable (here, preferences for redistribution) over the values of the moderating variables – the rise in income inequality (Williams, 2012). This effect is presented in the following graph.

Figure 17: Marginal effect of redistribution preferences over changes in income inequality with 95% CI



As we can see, the results do not provide support for H2a. However, since the models above put all governments together in one category (regardless of their ideological leanings) it might very well be that the real strength of the effect gets cancelled because the mechanism would be different for left-wing governments compared to the effect for right-wing governments. This is hypothesized in H2b. To test this hypothesis, I plot the effect separately for left-wing and right-wing incumbents. The graph below shows the results.

Figure 18: Redistribution preferences over changes of inequality by type of incumbents



As we can see from the graph, the effects are in the hypothesized direction for both left-wing and right-wing incumbents. Despite this very modest support for H2b (only reflected in the correctly hypothesized direction of the effect), as we can see from the graph, the effects for the two groups are not statistically significant, and thus it is hard to argue that there is enough evidence to support H2b. Despite that, we see some (very modest) indications that left-wing incumbents benefit from rising income inequality among those voters who want more redistribution, and, on the other hand, when inequality is on the rise, right-wing incumbents tend to get punished more by those who want more redistribution.

While the effects are not particularly strong, the design contains certain limitations which future research should address and attempt to eliminate. These will be examined in greater detail in the discussion of this chapter. Before that, it is important to look into the effects of income inequality on the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice, including not just incumbents but also opposition groups. That analysis is provided in the following subsection.

5.4.2. The effect for incumbents and opposition groups

The previous section considered only the effect of income inequality on voting for incumbents. However, most of the countries included in the analysis are multi-party systems, with a plethora of party options for voters. It is often the case that voters are faced with several options which offer the same ideological leanings, meaning several left-wing parties and/or several right-wing parties. The positional economic voting literature has not taken this into account so far, but rather has most often bundled all the parties into binary categories (left-wing vs. right-wing).

Here, I take a first step in unbundling this grouping, by estimating the effect of incumbency within these groups. To do that, and to test the set hypothesis about the role income inequality plays in voters' mind when choosing a party, I ran a series of multi-level multinomial models. In the models below, non-voters are the reference group. That choice was made purely for statistical reasons. To be clear, the "non-voters" category is the only category in the nominal dependent variable which exists in all second-level (election studies) cases. The models are presented below. For computational reasons, the multinomial models are two-level, with respondents nested inside election studies.

Table 4: Multi-level multinomial models

Vote	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Right-wing incumbents			
Redistribution preferences	**-0.130*****	**-0.151*****	**-0.150*****
	(0.0135)	**(0.0138)**	**(0.0138)**
State of the economy	0.248***	0.252***	0.252***
	(0.00694)	(0.00710)	(0.00710)
Party ID	0.348***	0.286***	0.285***
	(0.0164)	(0.0171)	(0.0171)
Left-right	2.028***	1.992***	1.991***
	(0.0403)	(0.0408)	(0.0408)
Female	0.0538	0.0465	0.0460
	(0.0305)	(0.0310)	(0.0310)
Age	0.0219***	0.0234***	0.0234***
	(0.000909)	(0.000927)	(0.000927)
Education	0.254***	0.241***	0.240***
	(0.0152)	(0.0156)	(0.0156)
Union membership	0.153***	0.0736	0.0785

	(0.0442)	(0.0454)	(0.0454)
Δ Unemployment rate		-0.127 (0.159)	-0.126 (0.159)
GDP growth		0.291*** (0.0756)	0.291*** (0.0756)
Δ Inequality (GINI)		0.136 (0.0805)	0.160 (0.0915)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)			**-0.00658** **(0.0113)**
Constant	-4.339*** (0.152)	-4.702*** (0.201)	-4.700*** (0.201)
Right-wing opposition			
Redistribution preferences	**-0.184***** **(0.0118)**	**-0.190***** **(0.0120)**	**-0.192***** **(0.0120)**
State of the economy	0.251*** (0.00609)	0.255*** (0.00621)	0.256*** (0.00621)
Party ID	-0.0792*** (0.0143)	-0.0863*** (0.0147)	-0.0872*** (0.0147)
Left-right	-1.294*** (0.0586)	-1.332*** (0.0594)	-1.332*** (0.0594)
Female	-0.0950*** (0.0263)	-0.0926*** (0.0267)	-0.0933*** (0.0267)
Age	0.0162*** (0.000790)	0.0161*** (0.000799)	0.0161*** (0.000800)
Education	0.269*** (0.0134)	0.256*** (0.0137)	0.257*** (0.0137)
Union membership	0.187*** (0.0396)	0.150*** (0.0400)	0.143*** (0.0401)
Δ Unemployment rate		-0.494** (0.159)	-0.501** (0.159)
GDP growth		0.193* (0.0754)	0.196** (0.0754)
Δ Inequality (GINI)		0.142 (0.0802)	-0.00963 (0.0891)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)			**0.0404***** **(0.00994)**

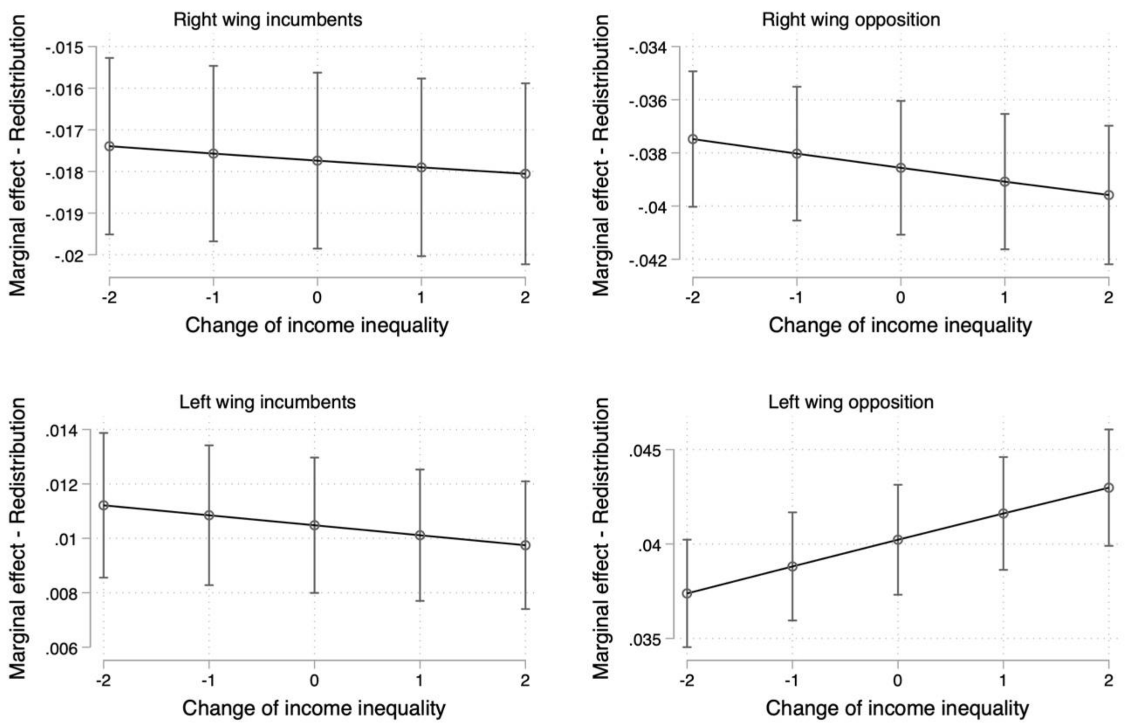
Constant	-1.579***	-1.754***	-1.753***
	(0.140)	(0.192)	(0.192)
Left-wing incumbents			
Redistribution preferences	**0.0842*** **	**0.0780*** **	**0.0814*** **
	(0.0141)	**(0.0142)**	**(0.0142)**
State of the economy	-0.129***	-0.121***	-0.121***
	(0.00655)	(0.00660)	(0.00660)
Party ID	0.298***	0.384***	0.384***
	(0.0161)	(0.0165)	(0.0165)
Left-right	2.195***	2.201***	2.199***
	(0.0393)	(0.0398)	(0.0398)
Female	0.153***	0.167***	0.167***
	(0.0296)	(0.0298)	(0.0298)
Age	0.00653***	0.00621***	0.00625***
	(0.000876)	(0.000886)	(0.000886)
Education	0.0788***	0.109***	0.108***
	(0.0149)	(0.0152)	(0.0152)
Union membership	0.0268	0.142**	0.147***
	(0.0434)	(0.0438)	(0.0438)
Δ Unemployment rate		-0.230	-0.228
		(0.159)	(0.159)
GDP growth		-0.161*	-0.163*
		(0.0758)	(0.0758)
Δ Inequality (GINI)		0.0777	0.244**
		(0.0805)	(0.0940)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)			**-0.0416*** **
			(0.0121)
Constant	-1.691***	-1.715***	-1.728***
	(0.147)	(0.197)	(0.197)
Left-wing opposition			
Redistribution preferences	**0.238*** **	**0.243*** **	**0.245*** **
	(0.0137)	**(0.0138)**	**(0.0139)**
State of the economy	-0.256***	-0.251***	-0.251***
	(0.00632)	(0.00637)	(0.00637)
Party ID	-0.0120	-0.0260	-0.0259
	(0.0149)	(0.0152)	(0.0152)

Left-right	-1.332***	-1.366***	-1.367***
	(0.0641)	(0.0643)	(0.0643)
Female	-0.0222	-0.0341	-0.0341
	(0.0272)	(0.0274)	(0.0274)
Age	0.0103***	0.00973***	0.00974***
	(0.000821)	(0.000825)	(0.000825)
Education	0.364***	0.357***	0.357***
	(0.0138)	(0.0140)	(0.0140)
Union membership	0.472***	0.479***	0.480***
	(0.0389)	(0.0392)	(0.0392)
Δ Unemployment rate		-0.167	-0.166
		(0.159)	(0.159)
GDP growth		0.140	0.140
		(0.0754)	(0.0754)
Δ Inequality (GINI)		0.171*	0.194*
		(0.0802)	(0.0928)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)			**0.0531***
			(0.0013)
Constant	-0.950***	-1.109***	-1.114***
	(0.143)	(0.194)	(0.194)
Random effects			
Election study	0.555***	0.508***	0.508***
	(0.114)	(0.105)	(0.105)
AIC	155360.0	151049.2	150995.4
BIC	155693.7	151490.4	151472.6
Ll	-77643.0	-75475.6	-75444.7
Election Studies	50	50	50
Observations	60176	60176	60176

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release & Module 5 Advance Release 3
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The models, as we can see from Table 2, provide support for H2c, showing that left-wing opposition parties indeed profit most from voters who want more redistribution when income inequality is on the rise. However, the multinomial models are not very intuitive for interpretation, and as such, I discuss the effects only after plotting the effect for each category under analysis: right-wing incumbents, right-wing opposition, left-wing incumbents and left-wing opposition. The effects are plotted for those who would want more redistribution, across different values of changes in income inequality. The figure is shown below.

Figure 19: Marginal effect of redistribution preferences over change in inequality by type of party



As was expected, out of all four categories (with non-voters being the base category) the largest increase in vote share with the rise in income inequality is for left-wing opposition parties. While the line showing the effect of redistribution preferences across different values of inequality change is almost flat for right-wing incumbents, for the other categories we see some (admittedly modest) effects. Both right-wing opposition parties and left-wing incumbents are sanctioned by voters who want more redistribution when inequality is higher. Substantively, the most important finding of this model and the graph above relates to left-wing opposition parties. Based on the predictions from the multinomial model, I find that an increase in income inequality leads to a 2.7% increase in vote share for left-wing opposition parties among those voters who want more redistribution.

However, given the differences between countries, most importantly with respect to differences in party systems, and the ideological leanings of incumbents, it is important to estimate these effects separately for those who have left-wing incumbents in power and those who have right-wing incumbents in power. Naturally, to estimate the effect for the left-wing (right-wing) opposition, once left-wing (right-wing) incumbents are in power, we need to have a viable left-wing (right-wing) alternative in opposition. The data at hand is reassuring, showing that on average, in countries with left-wing incumbents, the left-wing opposition wins 15.1% of vote. This is the average value for all cases with left-wing incumbents. At the election study level, this share varies from 0.3% to 37%. Similarly, when right-wing incumbents are in power, the right-wing opposition wins on average 17.6%, a share varying at the election study level from 1.26% to 30.77%.

Since this assumption is also met, below I proceed to presenting the models and analysis of the effects.

Table 5: Multi-level multinomial models by incumbents' ideology

	Left-wing incumbents		Right-wing incumbents	
Vote	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Incumbents				
Redistribution preferences	**0.0450***	**0.0453***	**-0.188*****	**-0.183*****
	(0.0181)	**(0.0182)**	**(0.0190)**	**(0.0191)**
State of the economy	-0.0915***	-0.0914***	0.250***	0.248***
	(0.00837)	(0.00837)	(0.00978)	(0.00978)
Party ID	0.401***	0.400***	0.306***	0.310***
	(0.0219)	(0.0218)	(0.0229)	(0.0229)
Left-right	2.336***	2.336***	1.910***	1.907***
	(0.0533)	(0.0533)	(0.0568)	(0.0568)
Female	0.180***	0.180***	0.145***	0.145***
	(0.0387)	(0.0387)	(0.0415)	(0.0415)
Age	0.00951***	0.00942***	0.0194***	0.0195***
	(0.00114)	(0.00114)	(0.00126)	(0.00126)
Education	0.164***	0.161***	0.206***	0.207***
	(0.0198)	(0.0199)	(0.0213)	(0.0213)
Union membership	0.0493	0.0602	0.111	0.107
	(0.0578)	(0.0578)	(0.0625)	(0.0625)
Δ Unemployment rate	-0.330	-0.319	-0.0626	-0.0665
	(0.220)	(0.219)	(0.213)	(0.213)
GDP growth	-0.117	-0.120	0.365***	0.355***
	(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.0999)	(0.100)
Δ Inequality (GINI)	0.0643	0.326*	0.283*	0.472***
	(0.111)	(0.130)	(0.114)	(0.129)
Redistribution		**-0.0632*****		**-0.0527*****

preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)				
		(0.0164)		**(0.0156)**
Constant	-1.908***	-1.903***	-4.005***	-4.017***
	(0.278)	(0.278)	(0.269)	(0.270)
Right-wing opposition				
Redistribution preferences	**-0.245*** **	**-0.245*** **	**-0.0573** **	**-0.0801*** **
	(0.0158)	**(0.0159)**	**(0.0191)**	**(0.0197)**
State of the economy	0.257***	0.257***	0.234***	0.233***
	(0.00833)	(0.00833)	(0.00955)	(0.00956)
Party ID	-0.146***	-0.146***	-0.0432	-0.0446*
	(0.0199)	(0.0199)	(0.0225)	(0.0225)
Left-right	-1.584***	-1.589***	-0.919***	-0.921***
	(0.0865)	(0.0865)	(0.0832)	(0.0832)
Female	-0.0404	-0.0410	-0.208***	-0.208***
	(0.0356)	(0.0356)	(0.0413)	(0.0414)
Age	0.0175***	0.0175***	0.0122***	0.0122***
	(0.00106)	(0.00106)	(0.00125)	(0.00125)
Education	0.352***	0.353***	0.136***	0.135***
	(0.0183)	(0.0183)	(0.0214)	(0.0214)
Union membership	0.129*	0.130*	0.106	0.110
	(0.0542)	(0.0543)	(0.0615)	(0.0615)
Δ Unemployment rate	-0.449*	-0.452*	-0.664**	-0.671**
	(0.219)	(0.219)	(0.213)	(0.213)
GDP growth	0.287**	0.287**	0.0957	0.103
	(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.0999)	(0.100)
Δ Inequality (GINI)	0.0173	-0.0303	0.332**	0.133
	(0.110)	(0.123)	(0.114)	(0.131)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)		**0.0116**		**0.0526** **
		(0.0136)		**(0.0164)**
Constant	-1.808***	-1.814***	-1.828***	-1.742***
	(0.273)	(0.273)	(0.267)	(0.268)
Left-wing opposition				
Redistribution preferences	**0.350*** **	**0.356*** **	**0.170*** **	**0.169*** **
	(0.0208)	**(0.0210)**	**(0.0193)**	**(0.0198)**

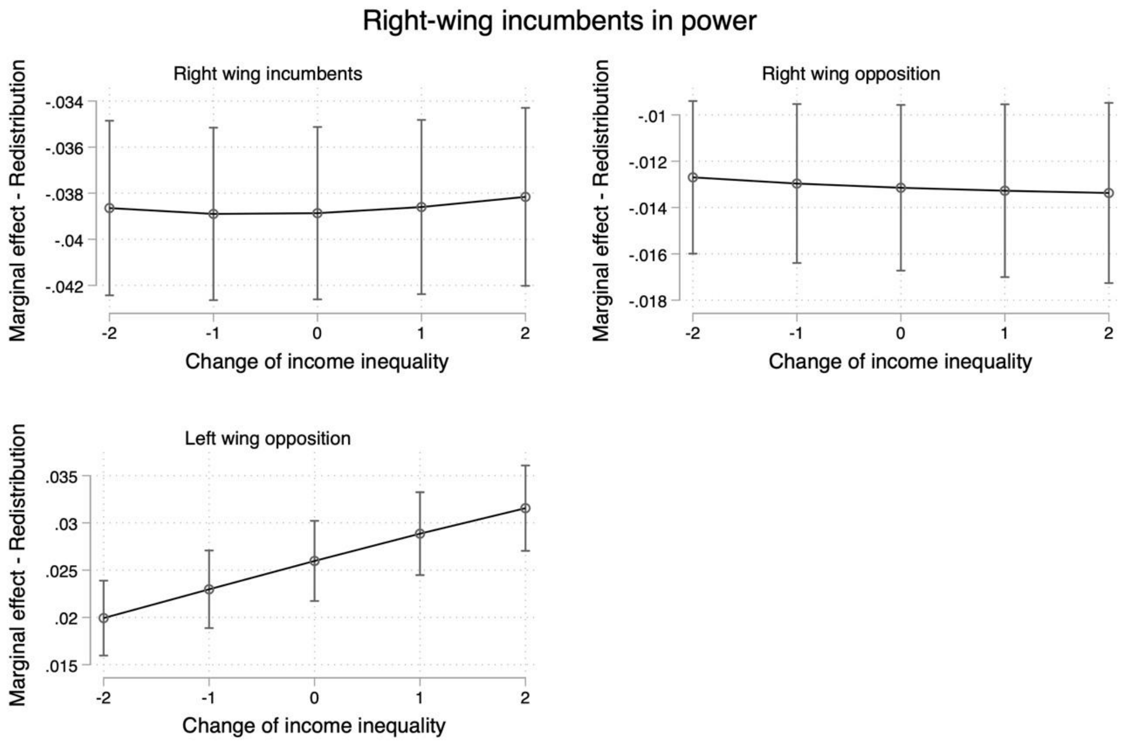
State of the economy	-0.214***	-0.214***	-0.283***	-0.283***
	(0.00900)	(0.00900)	(0.00931)	(0.00931)
Party ID	0.00865	0.00867	-0.0247	-0.0247
	(0.0223)	(0.0223)	(0.0217)	(0.0217)
Left-right	-1.264***	-1.267***	-1.344***	-1.345***
	(0.0932)	(0.0933)	(0.0895)	(0.0895)
Female	-0.0290	-0.0300	-0.0255	-0.0260
	(0.0397)	(0.0397)	(0.0389)	(0.0388)
Age	0.00624***	0.00629***	0.0124***	0.0124***
	(0.00118)	(0.00118)	(0.00119)	(0.00119)
Education	0.218***	0.219***	0.427***	0.426***
	(0.0204)	(0.0204)	(0.0202)	(0.0202)
Union membership	0.500***	0.492***	0.471***	0.470***
	(0.0559)	(0.0560)	(0.0563)	(0.0563)
∆ Unemployment rate	-0.359	-0.368	0.0294	0.0291
	(0.220)	(0.219)	(0.212)	(0.212)
GDP growth	0.201	0.203	0.177	0.177
	(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.0996)	(0.0998)
∆ Inequality (GINI)	0.0141	-0.143	0.353**	0.382**
	(0.111)	(0.131)	(0.114)	(0.131)
Redistribution preferences X ∆ Inequality (GINI)		**0.0366***		**-0.00712**
		(0.0168)		**(0.0161)**
Constant	-1.661***	-1.691***	-0.960***	-0.953***
	(0.282)	(0.282)	(0.263)	(0.263)
Random effects				
Election study	0.557***	0.556***	0.380***	0.381***
	(0.162)	(0.162)	(0.112)	(0.112)
AIC	72612.1	72543.5	69693.4	69650.8
BIC	73021.0	72985.8	70099.1	70089.6
Ll	-36257.0	-36218.7	-34797.7	-34772.4
Election studies	27	27	23	23
Observations	31084	31084	29092	29092

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release & Module 5 Advance Release 3
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

As with the previous table, we see that the effects of income redistribution preferences reach statistical significance in all the models and in all the categories of dependent variable. However, the relevant question is if the contextual valence condition, the rise in income inequality, plays a role in voters' minds and leads them to one specific group of parties over the other.

Thus, I first explore what happens when right-wing incumbents are in power.

Figure 20: Marginal effect of redistribution preferences over change in inequality by type of party for right-wing incumbents in power



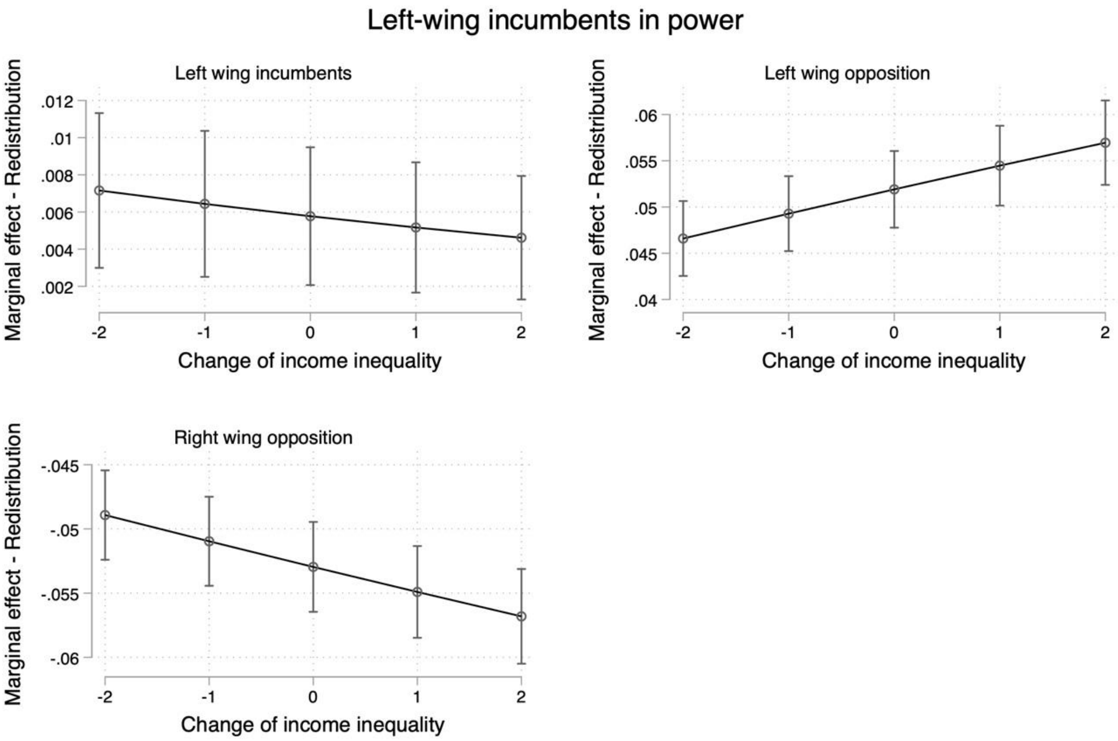
Following our theoretical expectations, voters indeed vote ideologically. As we can see from the table with the regression results, and also from the figure with plotted effects, when right-wing incumbents are in power, voters who want more redistribution tend to vote for left-wing parties in opposition. This is in line with the theory and the devised hypothesis that voters will vote ideologically. Thus, those who want more redistribution naturally align with left-wing parties. The effect becomes even more pronounced for countries in which income inequality has risen more during the tenure of a right-wing government (counting since the most recent elections). To make better sense of these coefficients, which can be hard to interpret in a multinomial multi-level model, I use predictions from the models and estimate that on average, when right-wing incumbents are in power, the left-wing opposition benefits in terms of a 2.1% higher vote share from those who want more redistribution. The effect is stronger when there is more inequality, and the left-wing opposition can benefit by up to 5.4% from voters who want more redistribution in countries with the greatest rise in inequality between elections.

For other groups, we see no particular effect when we compared them to non-voters (the base category) with voters who support right-wing incumbents and right-wing opposition parties not influenced much by a rise in income inequality. This also matches the general expectation, given that, as the literature points, these voters might have been more concerned with other non-redistributive or even non-economic issues over the last decade or so (Han, 2016).

It is important to note that though governments are coded as right-wing based on the party of the prime minister, some of these governments include left-wing parties too. For example, for the Germany 2017 study, that second-level case is coded as "right-wing incumbents", because the German prime minister (the Chancellor) came from the right-wing CDU, even though government also included the left-wing Social-Democratic Party (SPD). Even in these instances, the effect remain strong and statistically significant, and we see that voters who want more redistribution vote for left-wing opposition parties. The effect is even stronger in countries which experienced a greater rise in income inequality between elections. That being said, the models also include the category "left-wing incumbents" when right-wing incumbents are in power, as coalition partners. However, this category is small, and present in only a very few country cases, meaning that the numbers for this category lack the necessary real statistical power which would help us infer something from the data. The phenomenon is interesting for future research, though it would require more cases or deeper case studies.

Second, I explore the, arguably more interesting, situation when voters face a choice between different left-wing parties, some of whom are in power (leading the government in the prime ministerial role) and some in opposition. The following graph shows the effect for left-wing incumbents in power.

Figure 21: Marginal effect of redistribution preferences over change in inequality by type of party for left-wing incumbents in power



Interestingly and in line with the devised hypothesis, H2d, when the government is left-wing, and inequality is on the rise, voters who want more redistribution tend to support left-wing opposition parties. This finding shows that incumbency status plays an important role in positional dynamics, showing that voters do indeed care about ideology, but also about performance. The effect of redistribution preferences over changes in income inequality is in the expected direction, and statistically significant. Predictions from the models estimating the vote share changes show that left-wing opposition parties can expect a 4.7% increase in vote share when left-wing incumbents govern and when income inequality is strongly on the rise. This shows that the effect is strong and substantively relevant, providing important evidence in support of H2d.

The effect for left-wing incumbents is very modest, and in a negative direction, as the effects of the redistribution variable plotted over different values of changes in inequality create an almost flat line. There is a small indication, given that the line is in a negative direction, that greater changes in inequality lead to less support for left-wing incumbents among voters who want more redistribution, but there is no real empirical support for that.

The models also clearly show that respondents who want more redistribution do not support right-wing opposition parties, and that a greater rise in income inequality make these respondents even less likely to vote for right-wing opposition groups.

As with the analysis of the effects for right-wing incumbents, the same two caveats apply for this part of the analysis. Much like for the right-wing incumbents, some left-wing prime ministers head governments composed of a combination of left and right-wing parties. For the same reasons as above, the effect for the category "right-wing incumbents" when left-wing incumbents are in power is not displayed. I return to this issue in the discussion that follows.

Furthermore, as with the right-incumbents, I do not show the effect for the category "right-wing incumbents" when I classify the government as left-wing (based on the party of the prime minister), since that category is not especially broad and lacks statistical power.

Some of these limitations, but also certain further implications of the findings of this chapter, are considered in greater detail in the discussion which follows.

5.5. Discussion

A rise in income inequality matters for vote choice, especially for voters who want more redistribution. This section explored the dynamics between the three elements (vote choice, preferences for redistribution and changes in income inequality) and also adds a further element to the equation – the incumbency or opposition status of the parties. That proved to be a particularly important element in the equation.

It is clear that the, models provide only very modest statistical and substantive evidence that voters punish (or reward) incumbents when inequality is on the rise. This was the case even for voters who want more redistribution. Thus, the first part of the analysis, where I estimated the effect only for incumbents in the sample, and split them into left-wing and right-wing incumbents, did not yield particularly convincing results.

However, once incumbency status in incorporated, the results show that voters do care about redistribution, do care about inequality (since greater inequality produces a stronger effect) and evidently care about incumbency status. As the analysis shows, the left-wing opposition benefits most from rising income inequality by attracting voters who want more redistribution. This is particularly the case for systems where right-wing incumbents are in power (even if they are in coalition with left-wing parties) but the results hold, statistically and substantively, for political systems with left-wing incumbents too.

This approach takes us a step closer to better understating positional economic dynamics and the effect positional economic issues have on vote choice. So far, researchers from the field have estimated the effect of positional economic issues on two distinct groups: left-wing and right-wing parties, bundling all the parties into these two broad categories. With this approach, after incorporating incumbency status, we see that not all left (right) parties are equal in the eyes of voters, and that voters who care about a positional issue, also take incumbency status into consideration.

As is generally the case, this empirical strategy for exploring the devised hypothesis also come with certain limitations. Here I discuss some of them. First of all, it is not always easy to classify political parties into left/right binary categories. Certain polities were particularly challenging in that regards, as in some of them the left-right axis is not a matter of political contention (e.g. Taiwan) or the left-right categories are not always clear and easily separable. For example, parties in post-communist Europe sometimes present themselves as left-wing but vote and advocate for right wing-policies (Tavits & Letki, 2009). This is especially true for economic policies, as most parties with "social-democracy" in their name and their manifestos adopted clearly right-wing economic policies while they were in power. However, these kinds of problems also exist in more advanced democracies, as there are some centrist parties, which proved to be particularly challenging to classify. Second, the problem of coalition governments comprising of both left-wing and right-wing parties should be addressed in future research. Here, I classify these governments based on the party of the prime minister as either left- or right-wing. However, a more nuanced approach might lead to more convincing findings and the discovery of links and mechanisms that might have been missed in this analysis.

Despite these limitations this research provides an important first step in the direction of incorporating incumbency status and performance evaluations into the positional economic voting theoretical paradigm. This is further discussed in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

6. Voting in your own interest: Redistribution preferences and correct voting

The previous empirical chapters attempted to explain the reported behaviour of voters, using preferences for redistribution and the rise in income inequality as the main predictors. In the sixth chapter, I take a different approach and strive to analyse what voters *ought* to do when voting, given their redistribution preferences and the changing levels in inequality. To do that, I rely on the theory of "correct" voting. This is a change of tack, where I move away from identifying patterns of behaviour towards exploring normative perspectives of what voters should do if they want their interests to be realized.

The dominant support on the part of voters for certain policies is usually a strong predictor that governments will indeed act upon that support and adopt the given policy. By now we know that when voters are divided on policies, that "forces" parties to find a middle ground and, at least partly, converge towards a compromise (Lee et al., 2004). On the other hand, when voters predominantly want a policy to be put into practice, that "forces" parties to act upon it (Coenders et al., 2008). The previous chapters, and the descriptive data from major global projects such as the CSES and the ISSP confirm that most voters want to see more redistribution. The numbers of those who think governments should do more about this policy are above 50% in all the countries in these datasets. In some of these countries, the level of support for redistributive policies is even above 80%.

However, we live in a complex world, and voters are faced with many issues in political life, and consequently, voters are likely to factor in many policy preferences as well as both candidate and party evaluations in determining their final vote choice. "Unfortunately, there is an almost infinite number of ways in which voters can combine information about the candidates with their own values and policy preferences to form candidate evaluations" (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997, p. 589). Following the methods invented by Lau and Redlawsk, and further developed by others, we can estimate what is supposed to be the correct voting choice for voters, given their values, preferences, and party stances. I build on their work and try to estimate whether voters are voting in accordance with their interests when it comes to the policy of income redistribution. The methods developed for the empirical testing of correct voting theory allow me to factor in other considerations as well (Lau et al., 2014), such as retrospective satisfaction with incumbents and party identification, which are core explanatory variables in the voting behaviour models.

To test the mechanism from the theoretical model of the thesis about the relationship between redistribution preferences, the rise in income inequality and the *correct vote*, I have devised several testable hypotheses which will be tested against the data.

H3a: The majority of voters will cast a correct vote, based on their preferences for more or less redistribution

H3b: The greater the rise in inequality, the more correct votes will be cast in the given election

H3c: The greater the polarization on redistribution issue between parties, the more correct votes will be cast in the given election

Before proceeding, I first elaborate on the theory of correct voting itself, trying to answer the question of what makes a vote a correct one, and presenting some of the key findings from the correct voting field thus far. Then, I dig deeper into the comparative research on correct voting and present the new avenues which I am trying to open up with my research. After that, I discuss a missing predictor thus far in the correct voting research – the link between changing levels of income inequality and levels of correct voting. The data, methods and variable operationalizations follow, after which I present the results of my analysis. The chapter concludes with the discussion of the results.

6.1. What makes a vote correct?

Going back to the roots of democratic theory, the main assumption was that citizens will closely follow politics, that they would be involved, and eager to discuss things and participate in political life. Furthermore, all of that would contribute to their decision to vote and their vote choice. In short, the key assumption was that citizens, when voting, would make an informed and knowledgeable decision. An abundance of behavioral research has provided strong and growing empirical evidence showing that most voters fall short of these idealized expectations (Bartels, 1996; Fowler & Margolis, 2014).

Despite this evidence and the obvious lack of the complete information about the political developments in their own country or more broadly, voters still make choices. If these choices meet a certain level of "quality" then the lack of information on the voters' part is far less of a problem. In an attempt to provide one way of measuring “vote quality”, Lau and Redlawsk (1997) proposed the *correct vote* theory. According to their theory, a “correct” vote is the one which is based on the values and beliefs that an individual voter holds, and equates to one made on the basis of the complete information about the available vote options. “Thus, we define a ‘correct’ vote decision as one that is the same as the choice which would have been made under conditions of full information. Ideally, this determination can best be made subjectively, by the voter, on an individual basis” (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997, p. 586). So, the measure is about the levels to which voters, who are inevitably not fully informed, cast a vote which would be the same as the one they would cast, if they were to be fully informed individuals.

While the name of the theory, the correct vote theory, might sound rather normative and thus potentially even repulsive to some researchers, Lau and Redlawsk (1997) stress that the correct vote does not mean that there is only one voting option which is correct for all voters. On the contrary, each voter, given their own preferences, and given the options among candidates and parties, has their own vote which is correct for them.

Furthermore, correct voting is not a theory which aims to explain voting behaviour, or what voters did in certain elections. Lau *et al* are clear that “correct voting is a normative criterion representing what voters ‘ought’ to do, given their own values and relative priorities” (Lau et al., 2014, p. 243). Correct voting theory thus takes this normative criterion, and attempts to estimate how many individuals align their vote with their stated preferences, and what the factors that contribute to higher levels of correct vote actually are.

Back in 1997, when the theory was first proposed, it was tested in an experiment and also based on data from the American National Election Study (ANES). Lau and Redlawsk (1997) and this found that around three-quarters (around 75%) of all Americans cast the correct vote in five presidential elections from 1972 to 1988. This finding reassured some that elections indeed achieve “*the true will of people*”, while others complained that around 25% of voters vote “incorrectly”, which is still a high proportion. These 25% of voters did not align their vote with the actor that was most likely to deliver their preferences, arguably a substantial proportion, and one that would be sufficient enough to sway most of the presidential elections held in recent decades.

Today, the ANES remains the most used dataset for estimating the prevalence of the correct vote and the factors that contribute to higher or lower levels of correct vote, because the correct vote phenomenon is most widely studied in the US and because the ANES provides an abundance of survey instruments. Many authors that followed have tested the theory using the ANES data, and have discovered evidence for many new hypothesis about correct voting. In one of the earlier contributions, Lau *et al* (2008) found evidence that in the United States, cognitive capacity, political motivation, and the availability of political heuristics all contribute to higher levels of correct vote. Interestingly, Lau (2013) found that US voters do significantly worse in nominating elections (that is, primaries and caucuses) than in general elections, when it comes to correct voting. This could be explained by the greater difference between candidates in the general election than between the candidates standing in the nominating elections. In a further study on the United States, Sokhey and McClurg (2012) found that social networks and social connections help voters make a better decision, and cast more correct votes, as these "networks facilitate connections between individuals' vote decisions and their underlying preferences when they provide unambiguous signals regarding candidates." To the list of factors that contribute to higher levels of correct voting, Ha and Lau (2015) added personality traits, showing that the "Big Five" personality traits not only have direct influence on correct vote, but also moderate the effect of party identification, which is a long-established predictor of vote choice, especially in the US. Here, the personality of the candidate can make some traditional partisans start questioning their choice, and might motivate them to make a more "reasoning decision" which increases levels of correct vote. More recently, also studying data from the ANES, Stiers and Dassonneville (2019) made an important contribution to the theory, by showing that volatile voters are more likely to switch from an incorrect to a correct choice. However, they also find evidence that volatile voters are less likely to vote correctly than *stable* voters.

In one of the rare explorations of correct voting outside of the United States, Milic (2012) analysed data from Switzerland and found that the predominant majority of Swiss voters also vote correctly, in both referendums and direct legislation. The Swiss case is very informative for the theory, as in direct legislation votes they do not have ideology or the other typical heuristics that voters use to help them make the voting decision. However, most of them still do vote correctly, and according to his findings, project-specific knowledge significantly influences levels of correct vote in Swiss direct legislature voting.

A novel approach in studying correct voting was introduced by McGregor (2013) who posited that a vote is correct if the voters values and beliefs are in line with policy positions of those who are competing in the elections. To estimate the policy positions of the election contenders, McGregor used the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). He applies this new method to the 2004 Canada Federal Election and discovered that the overall rate of correct vote in Canada is above 50%. That is far below the rates which are observed in the United States, or in Switzerland, where most studies find that above 70% of voters vote correctly. I partly adopt McGregor's approach, in using the CMP data for matching voters values and parties' positions. However, I do the test of the method in a comparative setting, with some adjustments, which are described later in more detail.

Comparative evidence to support the correct vote theory remain scarce. There are only a few articles that deal with the phenomenon of correct voting comparatively. Most notably, Lau et al. (2014) published a seminal work in the field, using the CSES data to estimate the levels of correct voting in thirty-three democracies. I will return to their findings and the problems associated with comparative research on correct voting later. Aside from that research, Dassonneville et al. (2020) provided comparative evidence that women do not vote less correctly than men, challenging the long-held notion about the gender knowledge gap in politics and the perception that this gap is troublesome for democracy.

The relatively high levels of correct voting in the United States and cross-nationally should not come as a major surprise. Individuals are faced with making choices almost every day, and in most matters where they make a choice they are not fully informed. Despite that, we still make good and probably more often than not *correct* choices. Following that logic, there is no reason for voting to be an exception to the pattern.

6.2. Comparative research on correct voting – the next step

Comparative research on correct voting has so far been rather scarce. The vast majority of scholarly output on this important topic has been produced as single country studies, with most of the work coming from the American context and drawing conclusions based on data from the American National Election Study (ANES).

One extremely important exception is the contribution made by Lau et al (2014), who estimated the levels of correct vote (and the important individual and institutional factors that contribute to higher or lower levels of correct voting) across sixty-nine elections in thirty-three democracies around the world. For this research endeavor, the authors relied on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) data from Module 1 and Module 2. While their work remains seminal in the field, I attempt to further advance it in three important aspects in this thesis. Furthermore, I find these advancements to be important additions to the whole study of correct voting, particularly in relation to comparative correct voting.

Most importantly, I introduce a specific element of economic policy (preferences for redistribution) into the correct vote equation. Lau et al. (2014) drew conclusions about the correct vote comparatively from three indicators: party identification (1), satisfaction with economic performance (2), and left-right ideological placement (3). I follow their work with respect to the first two criteria (party identification and satisfaction with the economy), and introduce a change when it comes to the third. Here, I use preferences for redistribution as a policy issue which helps me estimate the levels of correct vote. There are several reasons for that choice. Preferences for redistribution represent a specific economic policy, and runs in parallel with the majority of scholarly work on correct voting, which work with the more specific policy stances of voters and candidates/parties (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; Pierce & Lau, 2019; Stiers & Dassonneville, 2019). In this way, I avoid using the general left-right scale, which is known to encompass many things, and can often mean completely different things in different countries. Of course, the idea that the general left-right scale can mean different things in different countries, or even to different individuals in the same country, is not new (Jou & Dalton, 2017). Occasionally, left-right might be just a name for a certain *superissue* which is actually a reflection of "major conflicts that are present in the political system" (Inglehart, 1990, p. 293). Furthermore, the left-right scale can be particularly problematic to conceptualize in post-communist countries, where left-wing (social-democratic) parties often advocate for and implement right-wing economic policies (Tavits & Letki, 2009). Thus, all of this poses a challenge for comparative research (Jahn, 2011), a challenge which is sometimes neglected by researchers of voting behaviour, even, in some cases, by those who do comparative voting behaviour research.

On the other hand, while redistribution can also take many forms and shapes, it possesses a core tenet of redistributing wealth from rich(er) to poor(er) people. The means can differ (different taxation levels, different pay grades, and so on), the motivation can differ (changing certain negative effects of other economic policies that are in place, raising living standards for those in most needs, or other factors), but the goal is essentially the same, no matter the context. Data on redistribution preferences for voters and for candidates/parties is available, despite often not being immediately at hand. Thus, I find that using redistribution is an improvement for comparative research on correct voting.

Second, by now the data Lau et al. used is slightly outdated, as CSES Module 1 ran from 1996 to 2001, and CSES Module 2 ran from 2001 to 2006. While their article was published in 2014, the data they used is now at least 15 years old, and for some election studies, the data is more than 25 years old. The world nowadays is quite a different place than it was in 1996 or even in 2006. After the Global Financial Crisis, certain things changed in the global, economic and political order. New economic debates have been opened. Thus, I am conducting a comparative correct vote analysis on a relatively new election studies, by using the CSES Modules 4 (Full Release) and the CSES Module 5 (Advance Release 3, the most up to data available at the time). The CSES Module 4 ran from 2011 to 2016, while the CSES Module 5 ran from 2016 to 2021.

Lastly, I test rising levels of income inequality as a contextual factor that could help us explain the different levels of correct voting between countries. As argued above, we now know a lot about the individual and contextual factors that contribute to higher or lower levels of correct vote across time and/or across countries. Standing on the shoulders of giants, I add one more contextual factor in an attempt to advance our knowledge about correct voting – by considering the issue in the light of changing levels in income inequality. A lot has been said about income inequality in this thesis, and most of it referred to the negative consequences income inequality can have on the social, economic and political life of a country. Somewhat surprisingly, we could argue that rising income inequality (which is, as argued, normatively not desired) can have a positive effect on higher levels of correct vote (which is, as argued, also normatively desired). In the following section I elaborate on that, and develop the link between changing levels of income inequality and levels of correct vote.

6.3. Correct vote and income inequality – Changing in the same direction?

Empirical investigations have found support for the view that several factors contribute to higher levels of correct voting, both at the individual and aggregate level. For some of these at the individual level, the link is straight-forward, and it comes as no surprise that voters who are more knowledgeable, have more information about politics, more closely follow politics, or show greater political sophistication or political efficacy, tend to cast a correct vote more often. The mechanism linking these factors to correct voting is more often than not evident. When it comes to contextual factors, from comparative research we know that a large number of party alternatives decreases the levels of correct voting, while a richer media environment, ensuring more political information for citizens, increases the levels of the correct vote (Lau et al., 2014).

From the same article, Lau et al. also provided evidence that the greater the ideological distinctiveness among parties, the more likely voters are to cast a correct vote (2014). The reason for that is that with the rise of ideological distinctiveness, party stances, and, crucially, differences between parties become more easily visible, making it easier for voters to make a choice guided by ideology. This finding is also confirmed in Pierce and Lau's article (2019) about correct voting in the U. S. Presidential elections from 1976 to 2016. The authors found that ideological polarization, and also ideological sorting and affective polarization, contribute to a higher probability of voters casting a correct vote.

I build on these two findings, which argue that polarization positively influences the levels of correct voting. Applying the same logic, I would expect that a rise in income inequality will also lead to more voters casting a correct vote. Rising income inequality, as argued in the previous chapters, increases the saliency of the redistribution issue. However, it is reasonable to expect that rising income inequality will also make parties who strongly advocate for redistribution more distinctive from other choices on the ballot paper.

Both of these factors should contribute to a positive link between levels of inequality and levels of correct vote.

First, with the increase in saliency of the issue, voters would be expected to pay more attention to income inequality and be more familiar with party offerings when it comes to income redistribution, a key policy in combating any rise in inequality. As previously discussed, when voters follow the political campaign more closely, when they know more about the parties and candidates, and their stances, that all leads to voters having more political information. Consequently, these voters will be more likely to cast a correct vote.

Second, with a rise in income inequality, I would expect that choices when it comes to redistributive policies will be more distinct, as this will *raise the stakes* and force parties to clarify their stances on the policy. That will help voters see the difference between the options, and, in line with previous research, help them in casting a correct vote more often. This redistribution policy distinctiveness, or more precisely the polarization on the redistribution policy, is also incorporated into the model, and empirically tested in this chapter.

In what follows I present the data that will be used to estimate the levels of the comparative vote across democracies worldwide, based partly on voters' and parties' stances on redistribution policy, and also the effect of changing income inequality on the level of correct vote.

6.4. Data

In seeking to test the correct vote comparatively, based on issue voting for policies on income redistribution, and the effect of rising income inequality on levels of correct vote across democracies, I combine data from several sources. First, I primarily rely on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) datasets. As was the case in the previous empirical chapters, all the data at the individual level comes from the CSES. More specifically, I combine the Full Release of CSES Module 4 (2018) and the Third Advance Release of CSES Module 5 (2021). I dope the same election studies, following the same criteria as for the previous chapter.

While I also heavily rely on the macro, aggregated data, provided by CSES, I also merge some additional data from the World Bank. As in the previous empirical chapters, I merge the data on income inequality (Gini index) as the key contextual factor used in the analysis. As argued before, instead of levels of inequality, I use the change in income inequality in between two elections (the current and the most recent previous elections of the same type). Thus, as in the previous chapters, I am arguing that the contextual effect that best contributes to explanations of voting behaviour is the rise in income inequality (that is, the change) rather than the current level of income inequality.

To the CSES dataset I also add data from two additional sources. The first is the MARPOR (2021) data from the Manifesto project which includes parties' policy positions. This data is derived from party election manifestos, through the content analysis of these election programmes. I use this data to include parties' positions on redistributive policies. The MARPOR data contains "the share of quasi-sentences in the respective category calculated as a fraction of the overall number of allocated codes per document" (MARPOR)[10]. More specifically, as a proxy for the party policy position on redistribution, I use the variable "Market regulation" (per403) from the dataset. This variable attempts to capture parties' support for policies whose goal is to promote a social market economy and increasing social expenditure.

[10] More information on the MARPOR coding scheme can be found on their webpage - https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu

Additionally, while this variable tackles parties' preferences towards redistribution only in part, it provides the most comprehensive data on all the parties on this dimension. Other available variables include a lot of missing cases, which would possess a significant challenge for the analysis.

Apart from the MARPOR data, I also include data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey – the CHES project (2022). The CHES data contains expert estimations of party positioning on various issues, including European integration, ideology and many other policy issues. The CHES is run in waves, and these waves of expert surveys do not always match electoral cycles. When the CHES data does not match the election year (and thus the CSES individual level data) I use the closest available year to the election. So, it could be that in one country, the election happened in 2018, and the CHES data for the parties in that country come from the 2019 expert survey. From the CHES dataset, I use the variable "redistribution" in which the experts estimate parties' positions on wealth redistribution in the country, from the rich to the poor. The variable ranges from 0, for those who strongly favour redistribution, to 10 for those parties who strongly oppose redistribution.

In this way, I cover two dimensions when it comes to estimating the party position on redistributive policies. I take party programmes (from the MARPOR data) and I take expert assessment (from the CHES data).

One limiting factor in adopting this approach is that I can only estimate the levels of (in)correct vote for parties for which there is MARPOR or CHES data. While some voters will inevitably be unclassified into correct or incorrect voters, this is a relatively small number of CSES respondents who cast a vote. These are, mostly, those respondents who reported voting for very small parties in the political system of their respective countries. Both MARPOR and CHES have data on all the major parties/coalitions in the systems, which get the vast majority of the vote share. While the problem remains for smaller parties, it is also a problem which exists in other comparative studies of correct voting (Dassonneville et al., 2020; Lau et al., 2014). In both those articles, due to data limitations, the authors had to rely only on examining the major parties in the system, those for which the CSES provides relational data, and neglected all smaller parties. My analysis is no exception to that.

In the following subsection, I elaborate on the process of examining the data, how I have operationalized the variables for this research, what methods I use to investigate levels of correct voting cross-nationally and how to consider the link between changes in income inequality and levels of correct vote.

6.4. Variable operationalization and methods

6.4.1. The dependent variable

As argued above, the backbone of this correct vote analysis is based on the economic policy considerations of voters and parties, and more precisely their preferences for redistribution. At the individual level, for preferences for redistribution, I use the survey item in which respondents expressed the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement “The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.” They have five-points scale at their disposal, which I recode so that 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree.” This survey item is asked in the same way in CSES Modules 4 and 5. With that, I merge the MARPOR and CHES data, as described above, and estimate the proximity of voting for each measure, separately for the MARPOR and the CHES measures. Because these measures are different and measure different aspects of party stances on redistribution policy, the analysis is conducted separately, once with the MARPOR data and once with the CHES data merged.

The position on an issue is, of course, just one part of the voting equation for each voter. To that, I add a retrospective performance measure, and combine the evaluation of the state of the economy in the year before the election and incumbency status. For the retrospective evaluation of the economy, I use the survey item asking respondents “Would you say that over the past twelve months, the state of the economy in [COUNTRY] has got better, stayed about the same, or got worse?”. In Module 4, respondents were asked this question on a 3 point scale, and for those answering “better” (or “worse”) they would then receive a follow up question asking whether it was “somewhat better” or “much better” (or “somewhat worse” / “much worse”). I combine that and recode the data into a 5 point scale ranging from 1 “Much worse” to 5 “Much better.” In CSES Module 5, this item was asked as a single survey question with a 5 point scale. For those who say that the economy did not change, or that it has changed for the worse, the *correct* choice is to vote for the opposition, while for those who say that the economy has changed for better, the *correct* option is to vote for the incumbents.

For the third component, I take party identification, as one of the cornerstones of all voting models. In CSES Modules 4 and 5, party identification was examined through a standard question about which party the respondent feels closest to. For every respondent that has a party identification, a correct vote is thus where that respondent votes for a party which they identify with. For those respondents who do not feel that they are close to any party or candidate, the correct vote is estimated using only the first two criteria.

Combining all three factors, I calculate the utility for each voter, and estimate whether they have cast a correct vote. To do that, I follow the same method applied in Lau et al. (2014). The same limitations and caveats apply here as in that research. To summarize these briefly, voters might consciously vote incorrectly, because they have decided to cast a vote for a certain candidate they particularly like, or one they particularly trust, despite all the other criteria. Moreover, voters can be very rational actors and sometimes opt to vote for one party/candidate, which has the best chance of winning, rather than the one they feel closest to, but which does not have a serious chance. The method proposed by Lau and Redlawsk (1997) does not incorporate "strategic voting", which is something I also briefly consider later, in the discussion of the results.

6.4.2. The independent variables

For the main independent variable, as in the previous chapters, I use the changing levels of income inequality in the country. More precisely, I again use the change between two elections to cover the change in inequality in the full period between elections, which in my sample in my sample a full term of one government, or one governing majority.

In addition, the standard set of control variables is also included in the models. These include the variable "female", coded 1 for female respondents, and 0 for male respondents. The variable "education" is recoded in 4 categories, with Code 1 assigned to respondents with "primary and lower" education, 2 being "secondary education", 3 being "post-secondary, non-university" and 4 being respondents with a "university education." Education also proxies for political knowledge, given that political knowledge is not available in CSES Module 5. Age is used in the models as a continuous variable, and is transformed into the age of the respondents at the time of the interview and not year of birth as is provided in the CSES. For all of these variables, those respondents who answered "don't know", who refused to answer a question or for whom data is missing in the CSES dataset, are set to missing and thus dropped from the analysis.

On a country level, I add the type of election dummy (distinguish between parliamentary, i.e. lower house and presidential elections) and a dummy indicator for advanced democracies, arguing that there might be a different mechanism for post-communist countries, given the occasional ideological mixture happening in these systems which I explained earlier.

Finally, I also add a “redistribution polarization” measure, showing the extent to which the system is polarized, or not, on the redistribution preferences issue. For this measure, I take the absolute value of a difference between the redistribution position of Party A (the largest party in the system) and Party B (the second largest party in the system). As argued above, the expectation is that the greater the difference, the easier it will be for citizens to distinguish between the offered alternatives, and make a correct vote choice. For those models in which I use the MARPOR data, I also use MARPOR to calculate redistribution polarization. For models in which I use the CHES data, I use the CHES variable about the redistribution position to calculate redistribution polarization.

In what follows, I elaborate on the methods I use in this chapter to test the link between these factors, primarily changes in income inequality and the levels of correct vote.

6.4.2. Methods

The structure of the dataset, and the coding of the dependent variable, determines the methods I use for this chapter. My dataset is at the individual level, with respondents being clustered into election studies (countries). Further, since my dependent variable is binary, showing those who cast a correct vote versus those who cast an incorrect vote, I use a multilevel logit model to predict cross-national variation in levels of correct voting.

In order to measure the effects more intuitively, I will hold all the independent variables at their mean or modal values, so that the change in the unit of the independent variable (the effect of the predictor) will show an increase or decrease in the overall mean of correct vote.

As stated above, I run the same analysis twice, once with the correct vote and redistribution polarization variables measured by the MARPOR data, and the second time with these two variables measured by the CHES data.

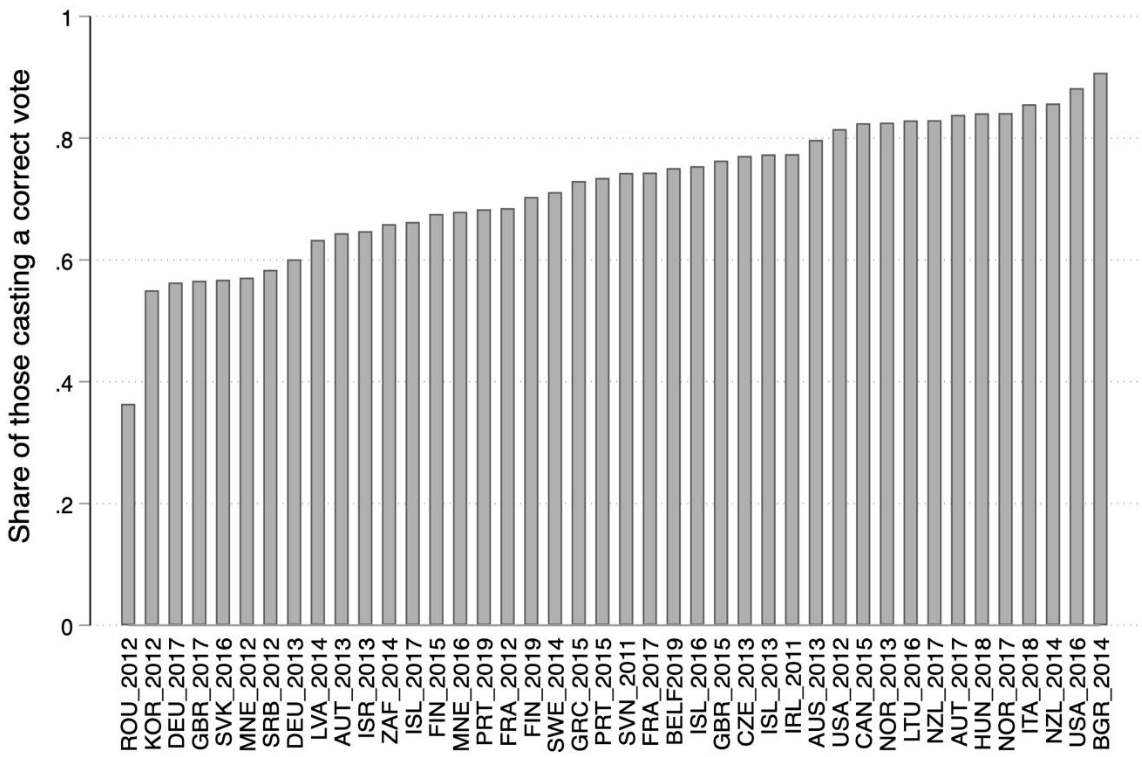
6.5. Analysis

6.5.1. Analysis using the MARPOR data

Using the MARPOR data for party positions on income redistribution policy analysis reveals that the overall level of the correct vote in my sample is 73.81%. The overall level of the correct vote is very similar to the previous comparative research on correct voting, using different measures. Lau et al. (2014) estimated that the overall level of correct vote was 72.3% using CSES Modules 1 and 2. Dassonneville et at. (2020), on a dataset combining the first four CSES modules, and covering 134 elections across a 20 year time span (1996–2016) estimated that overall 71% of voters cast a correct vote.

As in their research, my analysis of the level of correct voting also shows significant variation across countries, as can be seen from the following figure.

Figure 22: Levels of correct vote (MARPOR data) across countries in the analysis



We see from figure above significant variation in the level of correct vote, ranging from 36.38% in Romania (in the 2012 elections) to as high as 90.73% in Bulgaria (in the 2014 elections).

The Romania 2012 elections certainly are outlier on the lower side, given that the level of correct voting was so far below the overall mean, and also significantly lower than the 55.01% of correct vote in South Korea (in the 2012 elections) which is the second lowest score in the sample. Apart from that case, the other countries in the study look to be close to what was expected. The reader should not be surprised by such a high percentage of correct votes in Bulgaria. It is a country which ranks very high when it comes to levels of correct vote in other comparative studies too (Dassonneville et al., 2020; Lau et al., 2014). It is a curious case which should be further explored, but a separate analysis for Bulgaria, aiming to untangle this finding, is far beyond the scope of this thesis.

I now switch to explaining this cross-country variation in levels of correct voting in a multilevel logit model. Below is a table with several model specifications, testing some of the assumptions outlined above.

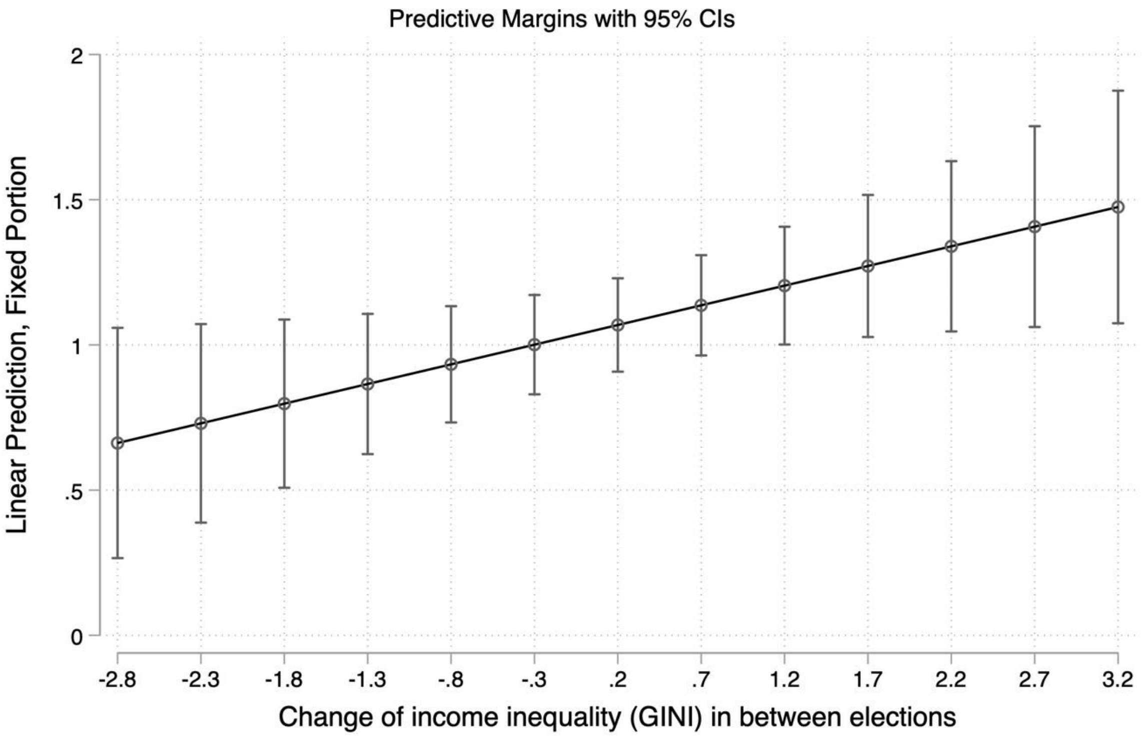
Table 6: Multilevel logit models with MARPOR data

Correct vote	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Macro				
Δ GINI index	**0.143***	**0.141***	**0.153***	**0.135***
	(0.0658)	**(0.0653)**	**(0.0636)**	**(0.0620)**
Redistribution polarization MARPOR				0.0584*
				(0.0217)
Parliamentary elections			-0.179	-0.143
			(0.231)	(0.223)
Advanced democracy			0.318	0.310
			(0.182)	(0.175)
Micro				
Female		-0.0919***	-0.0920***	-0.0920***
		(0.0264)	(0.0264)	(0.0264)
Age of respondent		-0.00272***	-0.00274***	-0.00275***
		(0.000808)	(0.000808)	(0.000808)
Education				
Secondary		0.105*	0.104*	0.103*
		(0.0420)	(0.0420)	(0.0420)
Post-secondary		0.121*	0.119*	0.118*
		(0.0502)	(0.0502)	(0.0502)
University		0.148***	0.146***	0.145***
		(0.0436)	(0.0436)	(0.0436)
Constant	0.981***	1.068***	0.865***	0.712***
	(0.0855)	(0.104)	(0.166)	(0.181)
Random slopes				
Constant	0.538***	0.533***	0.511***	0.491***
	(0.0607)	(0.0602)	(0.0580)	(0.0558)
AIC	35179.4	35147.4	35148.1	35146.8
BIC	35204.5	35214.4	35231.9	35239.0
lL	-17586.7	-17565.7	-17564.0	-17562.4
N of studies	42	42	42	42
Observations	32139	32139	32139	32139

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release & Module 5 Advance Release 3 & MARPOR
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The models show the robust positive effect of changing levels of inequality on the correct vote. As expected from the theoretical outline, the more inequality there is, the more voters cast a correct vote. The effect persists after including various types of controls, both at individual and at election study level. Below is a graph showing the size of effect changing income inequality has on the correct vote.

Figure 23: Predictive Margins with 95% Cis over changing levels of inequality (MARPOR data)



As can be seen from the graph, with the rise in income inequality, we could expect more voters to cast correct vote, based on the data about specific economic policies, in this case redistributive policies. The effect is in the expected direction, though it is counter-intuitive from the normative perspective, given that normatively, we would want more voters casting correct vote, but also to stop rising income inequality. I return to this conundrum in the discussion below.

Apart from this effect, there is a small but statistically significant effect showing that polarization on the policy of redistribution preferences also positively influences levels of correct vote. This is to be expected, as argued above, because the greater the polarization is, the easier it is for respondents to recognize where each party stands. The difference between the available options makes it easier for voters to vote correctly.

With respect to the control variables, the models provide evidence that male respondents, those who are younger, and those who are better educated, are all more likely to cast a correct vote. I find no evidence that voters in parliamentary elections are less likely to cast a correct vote than those in presidential elections, nor that voters in advanced democracies are more likely to vote correctly. It is up to future research to further explore and address these effects.

Before discussing these results in greater detail, and their implications, I move focus to the analysis using the CHES data instead of measures based on the MARPOR data.

6.5.2. Analysis using the CHES data

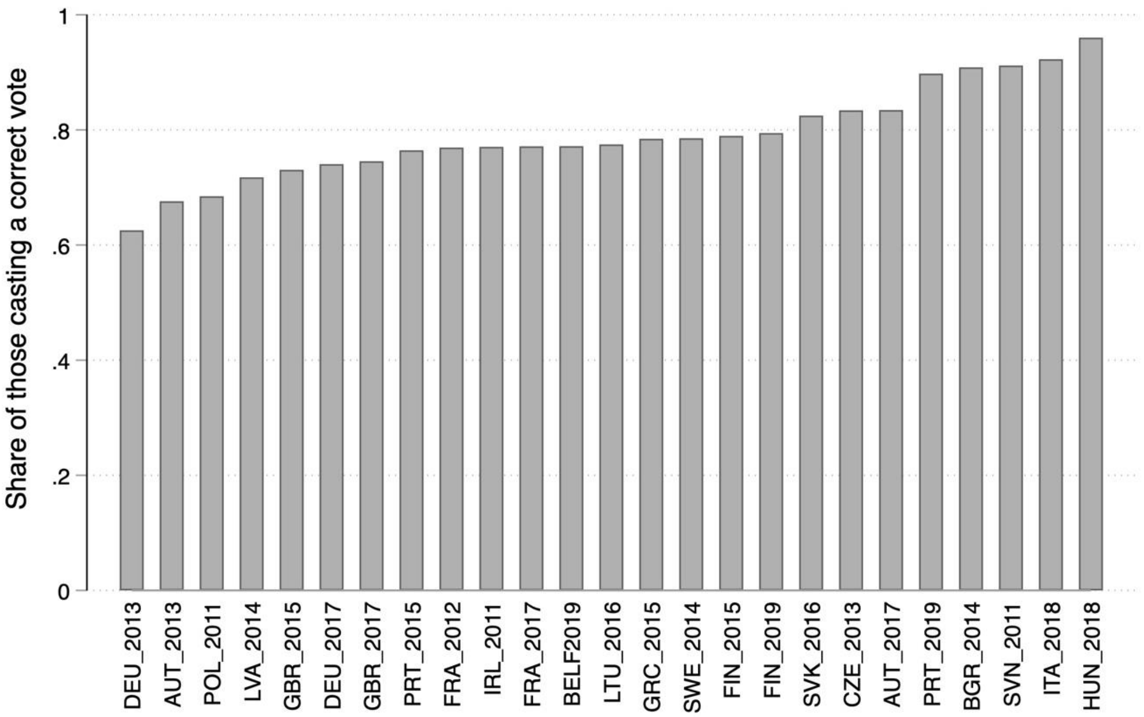
The original Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) variable about the party redistribution position is coded from 0 to 10, in such a way that lower values mean a party supports redistribution more strongly, and higher values on the scale mean that a party oppose redistribution. To make the results more intuitive for interpretation, and in line with the previous findings, I reverse the scale.

It is also important to note that for this part of the analysis, the number of observations, at both the individual level and the election study level, decreases significantly, as the scope of the CHES data is significantly smaller than the MARPOR data. The CHES covers only countries in the European Union, so this part of analysis only refers to the election studies in CSES Modules 4 (Full Release) and 5 (Advance Release 3) which are for EU member states. Further, it only covers voters who vote for major parties, for which the data is available in the CHES dataset. Thus, the dataset contains 15225 respondents from 24 election studies.

The correct vote measure, once based on party positions on the redistribution issue from the CHES data, reveals that 77.9% of respondents cast a correct vote. The number is again high, and slightly higher than the 73.81% as measured based on the MARPOR data. However, that figure is for all the countries for which MARPOR is available. Once the dataset is subset to only include EU countries, the level of correct vote based on the MARPOR data is 75.9%, even closer to the estimate based on the CHES.

As was the case with the analysis in the previous section, the level of correct vote, estimated based on the CHES data, also varies significantly between countries. The following figure shows the variation among the election studies.

Figure 24: Levels of correct vote (CHES data) across countries in the analysis



Like with other comparative papers on correct voting (Dassonneville et al., 2020; R. K. Lau et al., 2014), some surprising cases can be found on the right-hand side of the figure. Elections in Hungary in 2018 had the highest share of correct voters, based on this measure. Bulgaria's elections are (again) surprisingly high, consistently showing across different measures and different approaches to measuring correct vote, that Bulgarians indeed cast the correct vote in high numbers.

What is more important for the aims of this research here is the attempt to explain this variation at the election study level, particularly testing the effect that changing income inequality has on the levels of correct vote. The multilevel logit models related to that are provided in the table below.

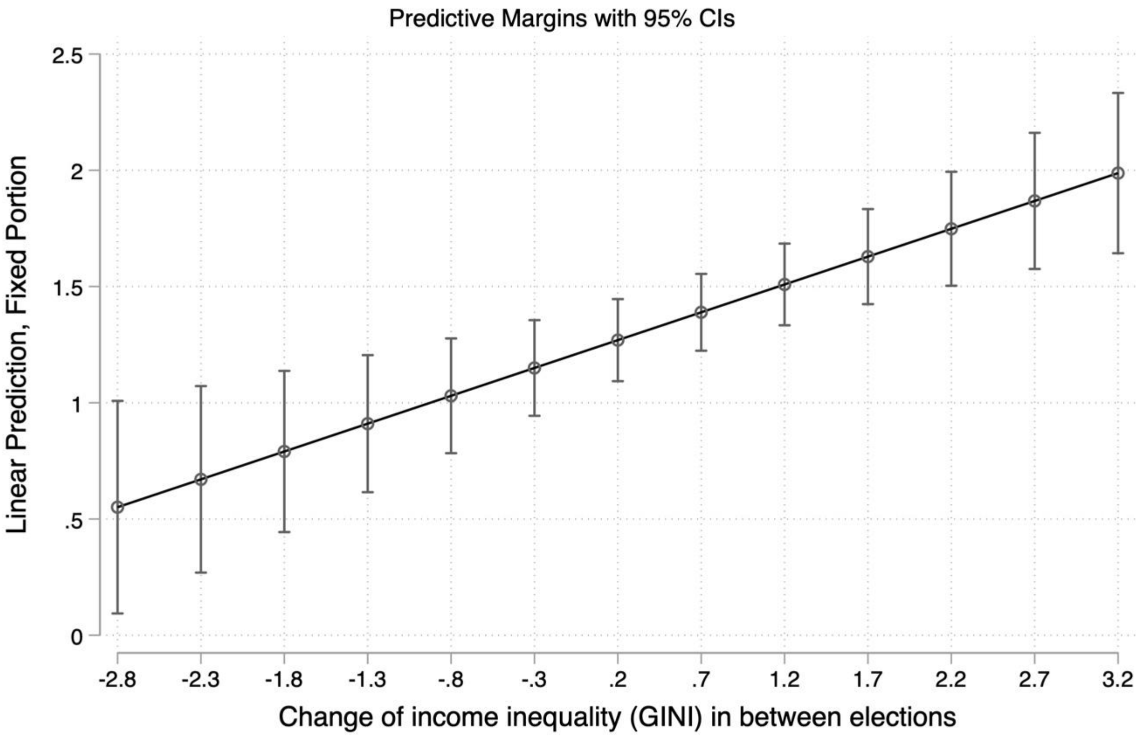
Table 7: Multilevel logit models with CHES data

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Macro				
Δ GINI index	**0.222****	**0.220****	**0.198****	**0.240*****
	(0.0721)	**(0.0718)**	**(0.0657)**	**(0.0620)**
Redistribution polarization CHES				0.159*
				(0.0671)
Parliamentary elections			-0.199	-0.101
			(0.281)	(0.255)
Advanced democracy			-0.441	-0.518
			(0.313)	(0.296)
Micro				
Female		-0.130**	-0.131**	-0.131**
		(0.0402)	(0.0402)	(0.0402)
Age of respondent		-0.00918***	-0.00916***	-0.00922***
		(0.00124)	(0.00124)	(0.00124)
Education				
Secondary		-0.00928	-0.00884	-0.0144
		(0.0654)	(0.0654)	(0.0654)
Post-secondary		0.00965	0.00892	0.00229
		(0.0816)	(0.0815)	(0.0816)
University		0.0302	0.0309	0.0254
		(0.0706)	(0.0705)	(0.0705)
Constant	1.263***	1.818***	2.177***	2.690***
	(0.116)	(0.150)	(0.211)	(0.293)
lns1_1_1				
Constant	0.479***	0.477***	0.429***	0.382***
	(0.0769)	(0.0767)	(0.0687)	(0.0622)
AIC	15510.5	15448.7	15447.4	15444.3
BIC	15533.4	15509.7	15523.7	15528.2
lL	-7752.3	-7716.3	-7713.7	-7711.1
N of studies	24	24	24	24
Observations	15225	15225	15225	15225

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 4 Full Release & Module 5 Advance Release 3
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The models in Table 2 show almost the same results as the models in Table 1, with the dependent variable based on the MARPOR data. For the main independent variable, the change in income inequality, the effect is again positive and significant, and even slightly stronger with the CHES measure. This can more easily be seen from the following figure, which shows a step regression line for the effect of income inequality on the correct vote, showing that the more income inequality was on the rise between elections, the more likely citizens were to cast a correct vote. The figure provides another piece of evidence to support the main hypothesis of this chapter.

Figure 25: Predictive Margins with 95% Cis over changing levels of inequality (CHES data)



With respect to the other variables in the model, not much is different from the results of the models using MARPOR data. Again, these is a small and positive effect of redistribution polarization based on the CHES data. The more polarization there is, the more likely voters are to cast a correct vote. The other macro variables are not statistically significant, and there is no evidence that correct votes are more prevalent in parliamentary elections, or in advanced democracies, as might be expected.

At the individual level, for the models in Table 2, the effect of education lost statistical significance. However, readers should bear in mind that these models included a significantly lower number of observations at both the individual and election study level, thus having less power, which could have influenced the education variable, given that it is a categorical variable, with four categories. The effects for age and gender (female) are statistically significant and in the same direction as in the models from the previous section, using the MARPOR data.

The following section discusses the key findings and implications from both the models based on the MARPOR data and the models based on the CHES data.

6.6. Discussion

The general purpose of the correct vote measure is to capture whether it is true that voters' "basic social identifications, their retrospective performance evaluations and their more forward-looking policy orientations – (are) represented by their political system" (Lau et al., 2014, p. 257). However, comparative research on the correct voting phenomenon has particularly lacked this latter part - "their more forward-looking policy orientations". This chapter is the first comparative exploration of correct voting which takes into account a specific economic policy, and uses that to estimate the levels of correct vote, rather than using a general left-right scale, as others have done before.

Given the importance of redistributive policies, in a world which is seeing a steep rise in income inequality almost everywhere (Milanovic, 2012), and especially considering the importance of redistributive policies for those who are in most need of income redistribution, it seems timely to estimate the levels of correct vote based partly on voter preferences for redistribution.

In this chapter, I find that slightly over half of all voters (52.6%) cast the correct vote, based only on their preferences for redistribution and the party policy stances on this issue. The party stances on the issue of redistribution preferences are derived from their party programmes, and taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP/MARPOR). When combined with *more traditional* explanations of voting behaviour, such as party identification and retrospective economic voting, the percentage of the correct vote rises to above 70%. That number is similar to the rates found in previous research, both comparative and from single-country studies, which usually identified that around 70% of voters cast a correct vote. The number tends to be slightly higher in EU countries compared to the other countries in the sample.

In the multivariate multilevel logic models, I find consistent evidence that rising levels of income inequality positively and modestly correlate with levels of correct vote – the greater the rise in inequality in a country in between elections, the more likely citizens in that country are to cast a correct vote (H3b). In addition, I find some support for the idea that greater polarization on redistribution issues leads to higher levels of correct vote, which is in line with previous research findings which indicated that polarization makes political options more separate and more distinct, thus making it easier for voters to identify the difference between parties/candidates, which in turn makes it easier for them to cast a correct vote (H3c).

As is often the case in these kind of research endeavours, there are some limitations to this research that readers should be aware of. First, as mentioned above, it is entirely possible that for some voters, the correct vote is in fact the one they cast, even though it is not the closest one to their preferences. This research, as is the case for previous studies, could not incorporate "strategic voting" decisions, leading some voters to vote for certain parties/candidates as their natural choice, despite not being aligned in terms of preferences. This is particularly problematic for comparative research on the correct vote, as some political systems might be more prone to having higher levels of strategic voting compared to others. However, Lau et al. found that when isolating political systems with high incentives for strategic voting, this is not related to lower levels of correct voting, as we might assume (Lau et al., 2014). Second, in this chapter, I use multi-level models to estimate the effect of predictors at both the individual and country level on the dependent variable. However, since the main dependent variable in the models is binary, it is not possible to split (allocate) the variance explained between the lower- and higher-level predictors, as could be done with a continuous dependent variable. While it would be nice to do that, as an addition, the most important contribution of the multilevel model is not affected by this shortcoming – the positive link between rising levels of inequality and levels of correct vote. Finally, since my measure of the correct vote is based on *only* three criteria, which is significantly less than is the case in single country studies, we could object that there is perhaps a measurement error present. That would be a valid objection; however, comparative work on correct voting is doomed to be limited to only a few indicators, as the available survey instruments are not comprehensive enough to provide us with the same level of detail in comparative research as in national election studies. As long as this does not lead to a systematic error, causing some types of cases to be mis-classified, the problem which exist should not affect inference. Or, as Lau et al. put it more precisely "The issue is not whether we have measurement error in our dependent variable (for surely we do), but whether such errors are going to systematically occur more often in some countries or electoral contexts than others” (Lau et al., 2014, p. 256).

Despite all of that, this chapter provides a rather provoking finding on the connection between rising levels of inequality and levels of correct vote. There is an opposite normative expectation for the two, as many normativists would indeed want to see higher levels of correct votes (as a measure of the health or quality of a democracy), but also no further rise in income inequality.

Of course, we should be cautious about making definitive conclusions about the relationship based on cross-sectional data. Both income inequality and correct voting levels have grown over recent years/decades, as suggested by a range of previous research. That is something that is a fact, even before starting this research endeavour. The relationship between the two *survived* different model specifications. However, it is up to future research to establish whether a causal link exists in an experimental setting.

7. Conclusion

The overall levels of demand for redistribution have always been matter of significant debate, especially in sociological research and the literature about political economy. Over recent decades, a mountain of literature from these fields has provided explanations on how these preferences are formed, what the basis of the formation of these preferences is, and what kind of in-country, cross-country, or over-time variation in redistribution preferences exist. Political scientists jumped on the bandwagon a bit later, showing that redistribution preferences in particular are the ones that can matter for political behaviour and that they can be a powerful predictor of vote choice (Attewell, 2021; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015).

The majority of political science studies about the relationship between redistribution preferences and vote choice have shown evidence that voters who (do not) prefer more redistribution tend to vote for (right) left-wing parties/candidates in elections (Marx & Schumacher, 2018). In the nature of the old tradition of issue / positional voting, new evidence was discovered for the decades old-claim that those who hold (rightist) leftist issue preferences will vote for (rightist) leftist parties. The issue of income redistribution proved to be no exception from that political science truism.

However, since the burst of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008, there have been more and more demands that governments (regardless of their ideological affiliation) should redistribute income more fairly around society, aiming to help everyone cope with the effects of the crisis. The issue of income redistribution in countries around the world has become (again) widely contested. It was clear that the GFC caused an earthquake in the global economy, felt both at the national and international level. The countries needed a new economic consensus within societies, and the issue of income redistribution was one very important aspect to be handled in that consensus.

The debates around redistribution preferences were further sparked by the rise in the salience of income inequality. While not a (completely) new topic by any standard, income inequality started featuring more prominently in citizen protests and news outlets around the world. The phrase “the 99% versus the 1%” became a trademark of the times, pointing to rising inequalities and the injustices that accompanied it. Many around the world were not happy with the economic outcomes and the policies which aimed to mitigate the negative effects of the financial crisis.

All these events surrounding the debates around a new economic consensus, the post-GFC economy, the redistribution of income, and the rise in income inequality, set the stage and strongly motivated this research endeavour. My goal was to estimate the effect of these attitudes (preferences for redistribution) on vote choice, especially once the relationship between the two is moderated by a significant rise in income inequality. I do that within the realm of the rational choice theory of voting behaviour, particularly focusing on economic voting, and the various dimensions of the economic vote (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). Unlike the majority of other research endeavours in this field, which analyse the different dimensions of economic vote independently one from the other, I took a different approach. Indeed, this thesis aimed to discover the new link (interplay) between the dimensions of the economic vote, but also to test what effect (if any) economic issues have in the post-GFC world, where so many new challenges have been brought to the forefront of political debates.

It is important to note that I do not consider the effects found in this research to necessarily be effects caused by the Global Financial Crisis. I explore these effects in the post-GFC period, because the events surrounding the GFC made redistribution and income inequality more salient, and thus in my view, more likely to have an impact on voting behaviour. It is entirely plausible that some of these effects existed, and maybe were even more pronounced, before the GFC, meaning that they are not caused by the GFC. However, exploring that would require a different research strategy, different data, and a different theoretical model, all of which is extremely interesting and highly relevant, but also far from the scope of this thesis.

In this research, I focus only on the period between two crisis, specifically the Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 global pandemic, in order to try to explain the role of the interplay of economic vote dimensions on vote choice. However, as I will discuss in more detail later in this section, I argue that these findings are relevant and applicable beyond the set of countries in the analysis and beyond the approximately decade long time period which has been empirically analysed.

In this conclusion, I will first summarize the key findings of the preceding chapters, and then I will discuss the research limitations. The academic and *real-world* implications of these findings follow. The concluding chapter of the thesis ends with a discussion of potential avenues for future research on these topics.

7.1. A summary of the key findings

This thesis contains three empirical chapters, which aim to explore the set research question from different angles. All three include empirical analysis with the purpose of shedding new light on various aspects of the relationship between redistribution preferences as the main independent variable, vote choice as the main dependent variable, and the rise in income inequality in between elections, as the main moderating variable. The following sub-section summarizes the key findings from the various strands of the empirical analysis.

First and foremost, this thesis provides enough evidence to support the view that positional economic issues can have a direct effect on support for incumbents. As such, researchers should in future incorporate this dimension of the effect into their models. The academic relevance of this link between the positional and the performance economic model is discussed in greater detail in a later section. Here, I note simply that the effect exists, as the evidence from Chapter 4 suggests. However, as the theoretical model (Chapter 2) suggests and empirical analysis (Chapter 4) confirms, it is important to also include the government’s ideology in some way, as different expectations are placed on governments with different ideological leanings when it comes to positional economic issues. In the first empirical chapter (Chapter 4) I find that overall the relationship between redistribution preferences and the vote for outgoing incumbents is negative. When I split the governments into two categories (left-wing vs. right-wing, based on the party of the prime minister), contrary to expectations in the devised hypothesis, I see no major difference in the effect of redistribution preferences on the vote for one of the two categories of dependent variable.

On the other hand, among those who oppose more income redistribution, there is a clear (expected) link, with those respondents being clearly more favorable towards right-wing incumbents compared to left-wing incumbents. The effect is clear, and both statistically and substantively significant.

Apart from the main models, I also ran a series of robustness checks, which all found exactly the same pattern of effects as the main models. These robustness checks were run on different dependent variable specifications, including only the vote for the party of the prime minister as the dependent variable, and not the whole governing coalition[11].

Since Chapter 4 shows evidence that voters who want more redistribution are not in fact more likely to vote for left- or right-wing incumbents, I extended the analysis further in Chapter 5, to explore the link between redistribution preferences and voting in more detail, notably with respect to incumbency status. This section is made more important by the fact that there were no clear effects on the link between redistribution preferences and voting for left- or right-wing incumbents.

To further the analysis, I introduced a moderating variable, the rise in income inequality, which should help us better understand the link between redistribution preferences and vote choice. Additionally, I provided evidence (both from empirical sources and from previous research findings) that a rise in income inequality should be treated as a valence measure. Since I did not have data on inequality at the individual level available in the dataset I used, I treated the rise in income inequality (measured using the World Bank's Gini Index) as a macro valence condition.

The rise in income inequality is an important mediator variable to include in the model, because it should make the effect of redistribution preferences more pronounced. I find modest support for that view, in the more inequality has risen in between elections, the stronger the effect of redistribution on votes for incumbents is. While the effects in the models are statistically significant and in the expected direction, it is hard to argue that a substantive effect exist, based on these findings. The same is true for the separate effects for left-wing and right-wing incumbents.

However, the analysis shows that incumbency status does play a significant role in the voting equation. Notably, in the same chapter, I extended the model by including a nominal dependent variable, trying to capture the different party groups in the political system (left-wing incumbents, right-wing incumbents, left-wing opposition, and right-wing opposition). This strategy should help us better understand who profits most from those voters who want more redistribution when inequality is (not) on the rise. These findings paint a very clear picture. In the analysed period, and in the selection of countries (elections) I have in my sample, left-wing

[11] Readers should note that the great majority of country-level cases in the analysis are governed by coalition governments, and not single party executives.

opposition parties were the biggest winners from those voters who want more redistribution. The effect holds, and is statistically and substantively significant, providing compelling evidence that left-wing parties still profit most from voters who want more redistribution. However, in the period after the Global Financial Crisis, the clear preference on the part of this type of voter was for left-wing opposition parties. This becomes even more pronounced with a greater rise in inequality, as left-wing opposition parties gained most from those voters wanting more redistribution in countries which experienced the most significant rises in income inequality between elections. The effect holds in both cases, both where the incumbents were left-wing and also where the incumbents were right-wing parties.

In Chapter 6, I took a slightly different perspective on the same relationship between redistribution, the rise in inequality and vote choice. Here, I tested whether those who (do not) want more redistribution vote *correctly*, that is for parties who align with their preferences and in accordance with values these voters stand for. More often than not that is in fact the case. The analysis showed that around 75% of voters (depending on the method used) cast a correct vote based on three criteria: party identification, satisfaction with economic performance, and preferences for redistribution. Furthermore, two important predictors positively correlate with levels of correct vote. Here, for example, a the greater the rise in inequality in between elections in a country, the more likely voters are to cast a correct vote in that country. Additionally, the greater the polarization on the issues of income redistribution between the two largest parties in the political system, the more likely the voters in that system are to cast a correct vote.

All the above has summarized all the findings (and non-findings) I have identified in the various models and empirical analysis throughout this thesis. However, the effects might have been even more pronounced if the research setting was perfect. As social scientists, we are of course used to working our way around the impediments that come on our way when conducting our research. In what follows, I discuss some of the specific limitations that exist for this research endeavour.

7.2. Research limitations

Inevitably, no matter what researchers do, some limitations will always occur, especially in quantitative comparative studies of voting behaviour. In this section, I discuss several of these limitations, and make an argument that, although they clearly exist, they do not substantively alter my findings. Readers should be aware that other research limitations might exist, and that the following discussion does not encompass every possible impact these might have on either my research design or the empirical results.

First it is important to mention the *usual suspects* when it comes to comparative research on voting behaviour patterns. The sample of countries in my analysis is strongly skewed towards Western, advanced democracies, and any research that included more studies from different parts of the world would surely benefit from the inclusion of other election experiences. It is a common problem in comparative voting behaviour research, and without a doubt it limits the generalization of my findings. However, I trust that I did all that I could to mitigate this issue. Out of all the available data sources, I have chosen one (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, CSES) which offers global coverage and which has election studies included from the most diverse set of countries/polities. While most non-Western studies are later excluded from the analysis, for several important reasons discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, some did still remain in the dataset, particularly from post-communist Europe, as well as a few from Latin America.

The second limitation for this research relates to the main independent variable in this thesis – redistribution preferences. In this research, I use a survey item about the respondents' level of agreement with the statement that "the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels." Two main problems occur with this survey item. One is that redistribution comes in various shapes and sizes. It is a very complex economic policy, which impacts several aspects of the economic system, and has an effect on almost all parts of the functioning economy. Thus, to measure all of that in one survey item and the attitude that voters (do not) agree that governments should take measures to reduce income differences is, it has been argued, somewhat oversimplistic and strips the phenomenon of income redistribution out of its true meaning (Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013). The other view is that this survey item diffuses support for redistribution, in that it only shows the general "inclination" towards equality in the society on the part of the respondent, that it is inconsistent and that it has very low predictive power when it comes to political behaviour (Dallinger, 2022). This author goes even further, saying that with this survey item "hardly any conclusions can be drawn regarding voting for left parties or support for redistributive programmes" (Dallinger, 2022). I recognize that the problem with this survey item does indeed exist, and acknowledge the validity of the issues raised about it. Research on the effects of redistribution preferences would certainly benefit from more studies and survey experiments on better ways to capture citizens' redistribution preferences in surveys. However, I rely on what has been a standard measure for redistribution preferences for decades, with an abundance of research showing the theoretically expected links between redistribution preferences (measured in this way) and various outcomes, such as political behaviour, attitudes towards inequality, preferences with respect to tax policies, and many other topics (Alesina et al., 2021; Alt & Iversen, 2017; Marx & Schumacher, 2018). Most of these have been discussed in more detail throughout the thesis. Furthermore, if I were to use any other measure for redistribution preferences, that would significantly limit the scope of my research, and the analysis would have to be conducted on a very small number of cases. For all the reasons given above, while recognizing the legitimate issues raised, I still decided to adopt the standard measure for redistribution preferences.

Apart from the main independent variable (redistribution preferences), the other main predictor in all my models, changing levels of income inequality, also comes with certain issues worth discussing briefly. I take rising income inequality as a macro valence condition, given that it is measured at a country level by the World Banks' GINI Index. Some might argue that this is not ideal, and that it would be preferable to have a measure of income inequality (or its' perceptions) at the individual level. The way rising inequality is incorporated in this research design, brings assumptions that voters' are aware of these changes, and that finding the link between the two implies that contextual factors affect voting behaviour, while they may only align together, for other reasons, and not be in a causal chain. It is important to stress several things about this point. The first is that in this research I do not imply any kind of causal link between rising income inequality and voting behaviour. Readers should be aware that I use rising income inequality as a contextual condition which affects individual redistribution preferences (not their vote choice), and that it is these preferences which further influence their vote. For the link between redistribution preferences and levels of income inequality, I rely on the voluminous literature from political economy which shows prevailing evidence that these two are connected and that the more inequality there is, the more individuals tend to demand income redistribution (Bobzien, 2019; Dion & Birchfield, 2010; Rueda & Stegmueller, 2019). Second, having a survey items about income inequality would be beneficial, since the more survey items the better is usually the case. However, those would not fit the above research design. They are not an objective measure of income inequality, but rather a perception which tends to be skewed in one direction, towards more inequality than there actually is (Loveless, 2013b). Additionally, it would not fit into the narrative built in the theoretical model that rising inequality (as an objective contextual effect) influences redistribution preferences, but would show us what is often a very biased version of individual perceptions about inequality (Minkoff & Lyons, 2019). While that has its own merit, it would require a different approach to building the theory around the link between the three items, that is redistribution preferences, vote choice, and perceptions of income inequality.

With respect to the important variables/data used in the model, one more element deserves careful consideration. Categorizing political parties on a left-right dimensional scale, and using the same scale for voters' self-identification in the model, always come with its' own set of challenges. That is especially the case in comparative research. The meaning of this dimension is very inconsistent across countries, and in different periods and different contexts it tends to switch from an economic to a cultural dimension (Caprara & Vecchione, 2018). This is particularly the case for post-communist countries in Europe. As is widely known, what is claimed as left can in fact be right and *vice versa* in this region (Tavits & Letki, 2009), meaning that left-wing parties can sometimes advocate very right-wing policies. That has happened quite often in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE), as parties which claimed to be social-democratic actually governed using very right-wing policies. This mixture led some to doubt whether this traditional Western left-right cleavage can be applied or used at all in CEE research (Savage, 2014). Despite all the problems with the use of the left-right dimension in comparative research, it has, so far at least, been arguably the most important framework through which we understand politics (Mair, 2007). Thus, avoiding the use of the left-right dimension in the study of positional economic voting would be something of a surprise, or even a risk, and bring into question the validity of the obtained findings. Additionally, whenever parties are a mixture of *two sides*, acting in the economic dimension as a right (left) wing party and in then cultural dimension as a left (right) wing, I categorize these parties based on the economic dimension, as what parties are doing and advocating with respect to the economy is far more relevant to this research than their cultural dimension is. In this way, while redistribution preferences are at the core of this thesis, with the left-right dimensions other issues/preferences are also taken into consideration to some extent, as all of the major issues in the political realm can be integrated into left-right dimension (Vries et al., 2013).

Finally, the scope of this research is placed in roughly the decade long period after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), with earliest analysed election happening in 2011 and latest in 2019[12].

[12] That is of further importance since the global change and effect of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 did not pose a challenge for this research. I discuss the potential implications of the COVID-19 outbreak in my consideration of possible avenues for future research later in this chapter.

I show the effects redistribution preferences and rising income inequality have on vote choice for this period, because it is my assumption that the salience of these issues rose during this period, especially because of the GFC and the prominence of the global Occupy movement. The two events placed significant emphasis on these issues, as I discussed in the introduction to the thesis. However, I do not have any kind of salience measure incorporated in the model, nor is the general argument that these findings are different than they would have been before the GFC. Most importantly, I do not claim that effects are caused by the Global Financial Crisis. To make an argument for something like that, I would need to have a different research design, and different data at hand which would allow me to test whether the effects can indeed be attributed to the GFC. That does not mean the role of the GFC is not important in the whole story. I argue that it is conceivable that some of these effects are caused by the events surrounding the GFC and its aftermath. Given that that is not tested in the empirical models, it is not to be taken for granted from this research. I return to this in more detail in the final section of this concluding chapter.

While I have discussed some of the findings in the individual empirical chapters, in what follows I take a step back and examine the overall implications of this research, with all of its limitations. I do that in the two following sub-sections, with the first one considering the research/academic implications of these findings, and the second one examining the implications for *real-world politics* and party behaviour.

7.3. Discussion of the key findings

The findings from this thesis, briefly summarized and presented in the section above, have important academic implications for voting behaviour research, but also bear relevance for our understanding of global political developments, particularly after the Global Financial Crisis. In this section, I discuss these two strands of the implications.

7.3.1. Implications for academic research

These findings point to new developments in the field of economic voting. The long dominance of performance-based economic models (valence models) has been interrupted and challenged by a proliferation of studies about the positional and patrimonial dimensions of the economic vote. Scholars started shedding light on these new dimensions of economic voting, providing strong and robust empirical evidence that the effect of the economy on vote choice is much more than the retrospective evaluation of the economic situation and vote for (or against) outgoing incumbents. As such, nowadays we know that not just what someone thinks about the economy, but also what assets they own, can strongly influence their vote choice. Additionally, we know that taking positions on economic issues also strongly affects vote choice, leading those who have leftist (rightist) economic preferences to vote for leftist (rightist) parties.

In this thesis I attempt to take a step further. I bring together two dimensions of the economic vote (valence and positional), arguing on the basis of several new developments in the economic voting theory. The first is that the positional issue can have a direct effect on the vote for the incumbent/opposition, and voters are the ones who judge parties based on their performance on positional issues, not just valence economic issues. While the evidence for this is modest, it still points to potentially important developments in the theory, which have been neglected so far. Economic issues can exhibit direct influence on voting for incumbents. However, because of their nature, it is reasonable to expect different incumbents to be held to different standards on various economic issues. That is why I argue that we should more carefully approach models which tackle this link, as it is who is in office that is important, i.e. whether they are left-wing or right-wing incumbents. Traditionally these two party groups have different issue priorities, often reflected in their party speeches, programmes, and campaign messages. Accordingly, voters form different expectations of these groups, and based on that form their vote choices. While this underlying logic has been the core mechanism for issue voting in general, and for positional economic voting more specifically, it can be, as my research shows, extended to the interplay of the economic vote dimensions. That leads to a second novelty in the research on the relationship between economics and elections.

The second point is that voters should not be considered as merely retrospective or simply ideological. There seems to be an unwritten rule in academic research that economic voters are one or the other. They either care about the retrospective economy and evaluate whether the national economy did well in the 12 months leading up to the elections, and based on that vote for the incumbents, or else the opposition if they are not happy. Alternatively, they care about a certain economic policy which is in line with their ideology, they have clear stance on that policy and then find the party that promises to act upon that policy and which shares similar stances to the voter. Because of all of that, the prospective./ideological voter casts a vote for the given party/candidate. My empirical analysis challenges this simplified depiction of reality. I provide evidence that voters take both elements into consideration. In the chain of vote choice formation, I suggest that voters are first and foremost ideological, but that vote formation does not stop there, and in fact takes into account the performance of the parties in office, as additional criteria. The evidence strongly points in that direction, as it is clear that with a rise in income inequality, people who want more redistribution tend to be drawn most towards left-wing parties in opposition. As such, they are clearly ideological (staying in the left camp) but also communicate their discontent with the incumbents (even when the incumbents are left-wing) which governed at the time of rising inequality.

These results should come as no surprise, as most party systems in democracies around the world are multi-party systems nowadays. Thus, voters are more often than not faced with several left (right) wing options. If votes decided to stay *loyal* to their preferred ideological camp, they still have options to choose from. Incumbency status, and performance in office (or in opposition) is evidently an important heuristic to consider, as it can lead voters to one party or another, even when both of the options share ideological leanings. The first evidence suggests that this is exactly what is happening.

The results are also important for the theory of positional economic voting. So far, researchers from this strand have shown that left (right) leaning voters have a tendency to vote for leftist (rightist) parties (Fraile & Lewis-Beck, 2013; Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011; Paparo & Lewis-Beck, 2017; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2020). It is important to note that, as in my analysis, in these articles most of the countries under study were in fact multi-party systems. As such, researchers would *bundle* all the left (right) wing parties into one category, and show the effect for these two groups, without acknowledging differences withing group. I see incumbency-opposition status as an additional distinction which could help us *unbundle* these (sometimes large) groups and make the mechanism between taking a position on economic issues and vote choice slightly more *precise.*

The third point is that the dimensions of the economic vote should not be examined only in self-contained literatures, as there might be an important link between the dimensions (their interplay) that we might be missing. It is entirely possible (and plausible) that some valence issues could make certain positional issues more salient and thus the link between economic positions and vote choice more pronounced. So far, scholars of economic voting have only scratched the surface of these mechanisms, with Lewis-Beck et. al being the most obvious pioneers, in their exploration of the link between valence dimensions and patrimonial economic voting (2013). This research adds to that strand, by exploring for the first time (to the best of my knowledge) the interplay between the valence and positional dimensions of the economic vote.

Finally, but certainly not least importantly, I add to our understanding of the correct voting theory in two ways. The first relates to how we explore *correct* voting behaviour comparatively. Thus far, most studies of correct voting have been conducted at the national level, with only a limited number of comparative investigations of the phenomenon. The two elements were not in sync. In particular, national level studies rely heavily on various voters' and parties' policy preferences. However, comparative evidence, on the contrary, relies only on a very general left-right positioning of voters and parties when estimating the levels of correct vote. I attempt to reconcile the two, taking redistribution preferences, a typical economic issue, as a backbone variable in estimating the comparative levels of the correct vote. Further I match voters redistribution preferences with the positions of parties on the issue, based on both party manifestos and expert judgment. This is a new trend that started in the theory with the work of McGregor (2013) but this is the first analysis which applies it at a comparative level. While the findings do not differ too much from the *gold standard*, Lau's et. al. (2014) work on comparative voting behaviour, this research could be a first step in a direction which might make the methods of estimating the correct vote much more alike, at both the national and the comparative level.

The second addition to this theory relates to the predictors of the correct vote, where I provide evidence that rising income inequality can also be an influential predictor, and that the higher inequality has risen in between elections, the more likely voters are to cast a correct vote. So far, this has been completely neglected in the literature, and to the best of my knowledge no one has considered the importance of income inequality (or rising income inequality, as in my case) as a variable that could contribute to the explanation of cross-national variation in levels of correct vote. This research shows that it has that explanatory potential, with a greater rise in income inequality positively influencing the levels of correct vote in a country. Even though some normativists would want the opposite from these two phenomena (with some arguing that more inequality is bad, and that more correct voting is good) my findings show that the two align in the same direction. On reflection, this makes a lot of sense, as rising income inequality makes the issues surrounding inequality more salient, shedding more light (information) on these topics, and making voting options more distinct, all of which we know from previous literature tends to produce higher levels of the correct vote. It is up to researchers to also include this dimensions of thinking in future models of the correct vote, and not disregard those factors which might be less desired, as positive contributors to more desired outcomes.

7.3.2. *Real-world* implications

Redistribution and income inequality matter; this is the shortest summary of the key findings for *real-world* politics. They matter for vote choice, for modern politics, and for the way voters form their political behaviour and interests.

This is not to argue that the many old and new challenges that have come to the forefront of world politics after the Global Financial Crisis, such as identity politics, immigration, environmentalism and other issues, are more or less important that positional economic issues. This thesis does not argue or show that. However, it does reveal that voters who care about redistribution still act upon that interest, and that this has important implications for the way we perceive contemporary politics in democratic countries around the world.

It has become something of a trend among political scientists and pundits to claim that the left / social-democracy is in crisis, and losing their core supporters – the working / middle class (Berman & Snegovaya, 2019; Bremer & Rennwald, 2022). The empirical data seems to back up that dominant narrative, as it shows the decline in overall levels of support for social-democratic parties in particular, but also left or left leaning parties more generally. Many have pondered on the reasons for this. Bandau (2021) nicely summarized the key structural reasons that could explain that, showing the key arguments of the two schools of thought on the topic. The first, the post-industrialists, claim that the transition to postindustrial societies forces left-wing parties to make serious trade-offs in their suggested policies, which leads to electoral losses as a consequence. The second school claims that social-democratic parties have been *contaminated* by neoliberal idea, and that turn towards neoliberalism has resulted in a loss of trust for these parties. While the two views debate the mechanism, they both agree on the outcome – related to the previous argument, social-democratic parties have lost the support of the working / middle class. This trend has been heavily attributed to the fact that these typical left-wing voters started voting more often on different issues (that is, not on traditional left-wing political and economic issues), and thus have more often opted for populist parties, or the radical right.

However, the findings of this thesis show us that left-wing parties (including social-democratic parties) are still winning on one of their core issues – income redistribution. Voters who want more redistribution are still more likely than not to vote for left-wing parties (and *vice versa*, those who want to see less redistribution tend to vote for right-wing parties). Yet, for the left parties to win, in the eyes of their potential voters, those who want more redistribution, they need to deliver results, if they are in office. If they want to have and retain the votes of those who want more redistribution, they need to deliver on a topic people who want more redistribution care about deeply – the prevention of rising income inequality. When income inequality gets more extreme during their tenure, these voters are significantly more likely to vote for left-wing opposition options, from among all the alternatives they have in the political spectrum. So, from the empirics of this thesis, we could slightly refine the general sentiment about the crisis of the left, and claim that *not all left-wing parties are equal*, and thus not all left-wing parties are in crisis, but those who were in office are particularly the ones that have lost support.

These findings point to another direction that is relevant to party politics. For left leaning parties in opposition, it seems to be clear that they need to go after the supporters of left-wing incumbents (when facing left-wing incumbents), as that is the pool where they can gain the most new voters. This seems to be a more realistic way to grow their electoral support, than to try to win over the voters of the radical right, which is something left-wing parties have dreamt about for the last decade or so. To do that, they could attempt to make typically left-wing issues more salient, especially those on which the incumbents are not performing well, and draw new supporters by utilizing blame attribution and asking for incumbent accountability. This strategy could benefit the left in general, not just the left opposition, as counter-intuitive as that sounds, as it has potential to win the votes of some voters who are not overall left-wing, but who care about certain issues, and whose preferences align with the policies and issues that left-parties stand for.

Related to the previous point, this research also hints that parties, especially left-wing, have something to gain in terms of electoral support if they were to place more emphasis on the topic of income inequality. While rising income inequality, as a separate predictor of vote choice, did not show a particularly pronounced effect, in line with previous research on the topic (Rueda & Stegmueller, 2015) I also find that it does influence attitudes, which in turn influences vote choice. So, for parties that plan to campaign on the income inequality issue, there is a group of voters that would positively react to that. Income inequality has so far appeared in many political campaigns. However, inequality has been portrayed in terms of "us vs. them" politics, most often by populists on both side of the ideological spectrum. A more nuanced, and significantly less populist, approach would be to think about the consequences of income inequality, and most importantly about remedies for rising inequalities, and to campaign on that. In this way inequality becomes a clear and specific problem that parties attempt to deal with utilizing very obvious means, such as the various mechanisms of income redistribution in the society, rather than just claiming that various elites are to blame, and should be overthrown to form a new economic order in the country. This is indirectly demonstrated by the results, which show that inequality itself does not have the effect on vote choice, but it does make the effect of certain issues related to vote choice significantly more pronounced.

The logic could potentially be extended to other topics (issues/problems) for which parties should think in greater detail about the effect on other parts of their programmes and campaigns, which are not necessarily always direct.

I have here covered several points, which I view as relevant takeaways for *real-life* politics, though I am sure more can be inferred from these findings. Additionally, this research points to certain directions which future research endeavours might explore, and potentially uncover even more pronounced effects which would bear even more relevance for everyday politics. The avenues for future research are something I discuss in more detail in the following section.

7.4. Avenues for future research

As is usually the case, researchers can always point to many new directions for future research, whether these are avenues which they themselves were not able to pursue because of certain limitations (in terms of available data, resources and so on), whether paths for the future were uncovered thanks to the obtained research results, or where refinements in the research design might in future provide more compelling evidence. The same is true of this research, and I conclude this thesis by discussing potential new research strands which could help us better understand the links analysed here.

Naturally, in an ideal world, researchers would be able to overcome all the limitations noted in the previous section, and provide cast iron evidence (or the lack of it) for the established links. While that is not realistic, some things might become more possible in the near future. It is clearly possible to expand this research, both in terms of more country cases, but also in terms of providing analysis over a longer period of time. Future research might want to include additional countries in the analysis, for which the data is available, even in the CSES dataset which I used, but which are not classified as fully free and fair electoral democracies, which is the reason I decided to exclude these cases. The mechanism on the link between policy preferences, macro conditions and vote choice, should work differently in countries where voters do not enjoy all the freedoms when it comes to the election processes. However, that does not mean that including these cases is completely irrelevant. On the contrary, it might significantly increase the inference and generalizability of the findings. To include them, one would have to think further about the theoretical mechanism, and how the non-democratic nature of these regimes affects the theoretical model. More specifically, we would have to incorporate the fact that accountability mechanisms function differently in these countries, and that it is not very likely that citizens vote on policy, when there is so little civic pressure they can exert, to ensure that their policy demands are translated into real policies.

When it comes to the temporal dimension, researchers could expand this research by including data from the period before the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which I take as a cut-off point, due to the rise in salience of the income inequality issue. However, by including data from the European Social Survey (ESS) or the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), we might explore whether the same effects could be beneficial, as this would uncover whether the obtained results could be attributed to the effect of the GFC with significantly more certainty, or if these links in the last decade are more or less the same as they were before. On the other hand, expanding this research in a different direction, and including more recent election studies, would also inform us about the potential effect that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had on voting behaviour. The global health crisis also had various strong effects on national economies, and measures to prevent the spread of the virus, and to address the consequences of the pandemic, have been a major part of the political debates since 2020. Including that element into the equation would also bring us closer to understanding the changing nature of the economic vote during the crisis period.

While the idea of the interplay of economic vote dimensions is rather new, and unexplored, I test it by combining income inequality, redistribution preferences and vote choice. The former two have been heavily tested together, in a wide range of academic research, particularly in the field of political economy. Future research should test the devised mechanism by exploring other sets of valence and positional issues (or conditions) and attempt to reveal whether the obtained results are indeed the confirmation of a theoretical mechanism more generally, or only apply to this specific set of issues I have chosen for this research. An additionally important layer would be to test the mechanism with valence and positional issues, both measured at the individual level, which is another very important avenue that has been left unexplored by this thesis.

This research is designed as a comparative study, with the comparison of effects between different group of parties, based on their ideology, and their incumbency status. For that, I utilize a large dataset of 50 election studies, from 31 countries. However, I do not look into the effects for individual countries, nor for certain regions, as that was outside of scope of this research. It is certain that comparing countries (or election studies) could be a fruitful new avenue for future research on this topic. Testing the developed theoretical model and mechanisms and investigating in which countries it works better than in others would give us important new insights on the macro heterogeneity of the interplay between economic vote dimensions. This represents an important next step even for the specific issues I have investigated, as certain countries have long-established traditions of redistributive policies, which certainly shape peoples' attitudes toward these specific policies, while others come from different backgrounds. Incorporating some measure that would account for this macro variance into the theoretical model would certainly be an important addition to the theory, that could relate to the voluminous literature on the global differences in welfare state regimes.

All of the above, and potentially various other factors that I failed to recognize as important, could benefit from academic research, and might further push the boundaries in relation to these issues and potentially open up exciting new research avenues.

Appendix

Appendix I

Table 8: Countries included in the analysis, with the party of the Prime minister, MARPOR/CSES classification and previous election year

Country	Election year (Year of previous election)	Party of Prime minister (outgoing incumbent)	Incumbents	MARPOR or CSES coding of the party of Prime minister	Left government dummy indicator
Argentina	2015 (2011)	Front for Victory	Front for Victory	Center-left (CSES)	1
Australia	2013 (2010)	Labor	Labor	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
	2019 (2016)	Liberal Party	Liberal Party; National Party	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Austria	2013 (2008)	Social Democratic Party (SPO)	Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPO); Austrian People's Party (OVP)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
	2017 (2013)	Social Democratic Party (SPO)	Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPO); Sebastian Kurz List - The New People's Party (OVP)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Bulgaria	2014 (2013)	Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)[13]	BSP Left Bulgaria - Coalition for Bulgaria; Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Brazil	2014 (2010)	Workers' Party	Workers' Party	Democratic socialist party (CSES)	1
	2018 (2014)	Social Liberal Party	Social Liberal Party	Conservative party (CSES)	0
Canada	2011 (2008)	Conservative Party	Conservative Party	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
	2015 (2011)	Conservative Party	Conservative Party	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
	2019 (2015)	Liberal Party	Liberal Party	40 – LIB Liberal parties	0
Chile	2017 (2013)	Socialist Party	Socialist Party	Socialist Party (CSES)	1

[13] BSP was the largest party supporting the independent Prime minister at the time.

Czech Republic	2013 (2010)	Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD)[14]	Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD); Christian and Democratic Union-Czech People's Party (KDU-CSL)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Finland	2015 (2011)	National Coalition	National Coalition Party (KOK); Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP); Swedish People's Party in Finland (RKP); Christian Democrats in Finland (KD)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
	2019 (2015)	Center Party	Center Party (KESK); Finns Party (PS); National Coalition Party (KOK)	80 – AGR Agrarian Parties	1
France	2012 (2007)	Union for Popular Movement (UMP)	Union for a Popular Movement (UMP)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
	2017 (2012)	Socialist Party	Socialist Party	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Germany	2013 (2009)	Christian Democratic Union (CDU)	Christian Democratic Union; Free Democratic Party (FDP)	50 – CHR Christian democratic parties	0
	2017 (2013)	Christian Democratic Union (CDU)	Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU); Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD); Christian Social Union (CSU)	50 – CHR Christian democratic parties	0
Great Britain	2015 (2010)	Conservative Party (Con)	Conservative Party (Con); Liberal Democrats (LD);	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
	2017 (2015)	Conservative Party (Con)	Conservative Party (Con); Liberal Democrats (LD);	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Greece	2015 (2009)	New Democracy (ND)	New Democracy (ND);Democratic Alignment (DISI or PASOK)	50 – CHR Christian democratic parties	0
Hungary	2018 (2014)	Fidesz	Fidesz	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Iceland	2013 (2009)	Social Democratic Alliance	Social Democratic Alliance (Sam); Left Green Movement	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1

[14] CSSD was the largest party supporting the independent Prime minister at the time.

	2016 (2013)	Progressive Party	Progressive Party (PP); Independence Party (IP)	80 – AGR Agrarian Parties	1
	2017 (2016)	Progressive Party	Progressive Party (PP); Independence Party (IP)	80 – AGR Agrarian Parties	1
Ireland	2011 (2007)	Fianna Fail (FF)	Fianna Fail (FF); United Left Alliance (ULA)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Israel	2013 (2009)	Likud (L)	Likud (L); The Jewish Home (HH); Sfarad's Keepers of the Torah (Shas); United Torah Judaism (YH)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Italy	2018 (2013)	Democratic Party (PD)	Democratic Party (PD)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Japan	2013 (2010)	Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); New Komeito (NK)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Latvia	2014 (2011)	Unity (V)	Unity (V); Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS); National Alliance (NA)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
Lithuania	2016 (2012)	Social Democratic Party (LSDP)	Social Democratic Party (LSDP); Lithuanian Poles Electoral Action - Christian Families Alliance (LLRA-KSS); Party Order and Justice (PTT); Labour Party (DP)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Montenegro	2012 (2009)	Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)	Coalition "For a European Montenegro"; Bosniak Party (BS); Democratic Union of Albanians (UDSH-DUA)	20 – LEF Socialist or other left parties	1
	2016 (2012)	Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)	Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS); Bosniak Party (BS); Albanians Decisively (FORCA-DUA-AA)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Norway	2013 (2009)	Labour Party	Labor Party (AP); Center Party (SP); Socialist Left Party (SV)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
	2017 (2013)	Conservative Party (H)	Conservative Party (H); Maori Party (MP)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
New Zealand	2014 (2011)	National Party (NP)	National Party (NP)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0

	2017 (2014)	National Party (NP)	National Party (NP); United Future (UFNZ)		
Poland	2011 (2007)	Civic platform	Civic Platform (PO); Polish Peoples Party (PSL)	40 – LIB Liberal parties	0
Portugal	2015 (2011)	Social Democratic Party	Portugal Ahead (PaF)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
	2019 (2015)	Socialist Party (PS)	Socialist Party (PS)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Romania	2012 (2008)	Democratic Liberal Party (PDL)	Social Liberal Union (USL)	50 – CHR Christian democratic parties	0
Serbia	2012 (2008)	Democratic Party (DS)[15]	Serbian Democratic Party (DS); Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)	40 – LIB Liberal parties	0
Slovakia	2016 (2012)	Direction-Social Democracy	Direction - Social Democracy (Smer)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Slovenia	2011 (2008)	Social-Democratic Party	Social-Democratic Party (SD)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
Sweden	2014 (2010)	Moderate Coalition Party	Centre Party (C); Liberal People's Party (FP); Moderate Coalition Party (M); Christian Democrats (KD)	60 – CON Conservative parties	0
United States	2012 (2008)	Democratic Party (DEM)	Democratic Party (DEM)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
	2016 (2012)	Democratic Party (DEM)	Democratic Party (DEM)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1
South Africa	2014 (2009)	African National Congress (ANC)	African National Congress (ANC)	30 – SOC Social democratic parties	1

[15] DS was the largest party supporting the independent Prime minister at the time.

Appendix II

Table 9: Left-Right classification of parties which are coded "5" on 11-points left-right scale in the CSES

Country	Election year	Party	Left-Right classification
Bulgaria	2014	Movements for rights and freedoms	Right-wing
Brazil	2014	Brazilian Social Democratic Party	Left-wing
Canada	2011	Liberal Party	Right-wing
	2015	Liberal Party	Right-wing
Czech Republic	2013	Action for Dissatisfied Citizens	Right-wing
France	2012	Democratic Movement	Right-wing
Great Britain	2015	Liberal democrats	Left-wing
Greece	2015	The River	Left-wing
Iceland	2013	Progressive Party	Right-wing
		Bright Future	Right-wing
Israel	2013	There is a Future	Right-wing
Japan	2013	Democratic Party of Japan	Right-wing
Latvia	2014	Unions of Greens and Farmers	Right-wing
Norway	2013	Christian People's Party	Right-wing
Poland	2011	Polish Peasants Party	Right-wing
		German Minority	Right-wing
Romania	2012	Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania	Right-wing
		Social Liberal Union	Left-wing
Serbia	2012	Democratic Party	Left-wing
		United Regions of Serbia	Right-wing
Slovakia	2016	Bridge	Right-wing
		OLANO	Right-wing
Slovenia	2011	Slovenia Democratic Party	Right-wing
		Democratic Party of Pensioners	Left-wing
		Gregor Virant's Civic List	Right-wing
South Africa	2014	Congress of the People	Left-wing

Appendix III

Table 10: Multi-level logit model for testing the H1 with vote for party of PM as dependent variable

Vote for party of PM	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Redistribution preferences	**-0.0355*****	**-0.0363*****	**-0.112****	**-0.0360****	**-0.0363****	**-0.111****
	(0.0106)	**(0.0106)**	**(0.0429)**	**(0.0114)**	**(0.0114)**	**(0.0427)**
State of economy	0.379***	0.379***	0.348***	0.372***	0.372***	0.343***
	(0.0133)	(0.0133)	(0.0128)	(0.0146)	(0.0146)	(0.0138)
Party ID (with party of PM)	3.380***	3.381***	3.459***	3.301***	3.301***	3.378***
	(0.0267)	(0.0267)	(0.0351)	(0.0285)	(0.0285)	(0.0365)
Left-right				0.0972***	0.0970***	0.0784***
				(0.00543)	(0.00544)	(0.00514)
Female	0.132***	0.132***	0.186***	0.153***	0.153***	0.197***
	(0.0230)	(0.0230)	(0.0223)	(0.0251)	(0.0251)	(0.0240)
Age	0.00696***	0.00695***	0.00535***	0.00615***	0.00614***	0.00567***
	(0.000695)	(0.000695)	(0.000687)	(0.000763)	(0.000763)	(0.000740)
Education	0.0289*	0.0286*	-0.0817***	0.0297*	0.0295*	-0.0656***
	(0.0119)	(0.0119)	(0.0115)	(0.0128)	(0.0128)	(0.0123)
Union member	0.0304	0.0310	-0.0383	0.0243	0.0248	-0.0444
	(0.0336)	(0.0336)	(0.0312)	(0.0356)	(0.0356)	(0.0329)
Left government	0.0429	0.00767	-0.982**	0.117	0.118	-0.714*
	(0.247)	(0.248)	(0.351)	(0.259)	(0.259)	(0.347)
Δ Unemployment rate	0.0229	0.0451	0.0591	0.0521	0.0527	0.108
	(0.189)	(0.189)	(0.271)	(0.197)	(0.197)	(0.267)

GDP growth	-0.101	-0.124	0.179	-0.122	-0.123	0.167
	(0.0876)	(0.0896)	(0.127)	(0.0937)	(0.0936)	(0.124)
Δ Inequality (GINI)	-0.00513	-0.0119	-0.0676	-0.0802	-0.0373	-0.0479
	(0.103)	(0.103)	(0.140)	(0.101)	(0.109)	(0.138)
Redistribution preferences X Δ Inequality (GINI)		**-0.0164**	**-0.0153**		**-0.0108**	**-0.0152**
		(0.00906)	**(0.0320)**		**(0.0100)**	**(0.0319)**
Constant	-3.557***	-3.496***	-1.646***	-3.958***	-3.955***	-2.232***
	(0.246)	(0.248)	(0.335)	(0.262)	(0.261)	(0.333)
Random slopes						
Country	8.62e-29	1.01e-28	0.217	2.78e-35	6.71e-32	0.190
	(3.48e-15)	(2.82e-15)	(0.287)	(3.26e-20)	(8.86e-18)	(0.263)
Election study	0.738***	0.724***	1.105**	0.793***	0.791***	1.074**
	(0.163)	(0.160)	(0.350)	(0.176)	(0.175)	(0.338)
Redistribution preferences			0.0842***			0.0819***
			(0.0182)			(0.0179)
AIC	51547.0	51545.0	51361.3	43510.8	43511.6	44766.9
BIC	51666.7	51674.0	51504.7	43637.4	43647.3	44917.2
ll	-25760.5	-25758.5	-25664.7	-21741.4	-21740.8	-22366.5
Countries	31	31	31	31	31	31
Election Studies	50	50	50	50	50	50
Observations	73932	73932	57348	62631	62631	51024

Standard errors in parentheses
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) M4 & M5 AR3.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.0$

Figure 26: Marginal effect of redistribution preferences over changes of income inequality with 95% CI, with vote for party of PM as dependent variable

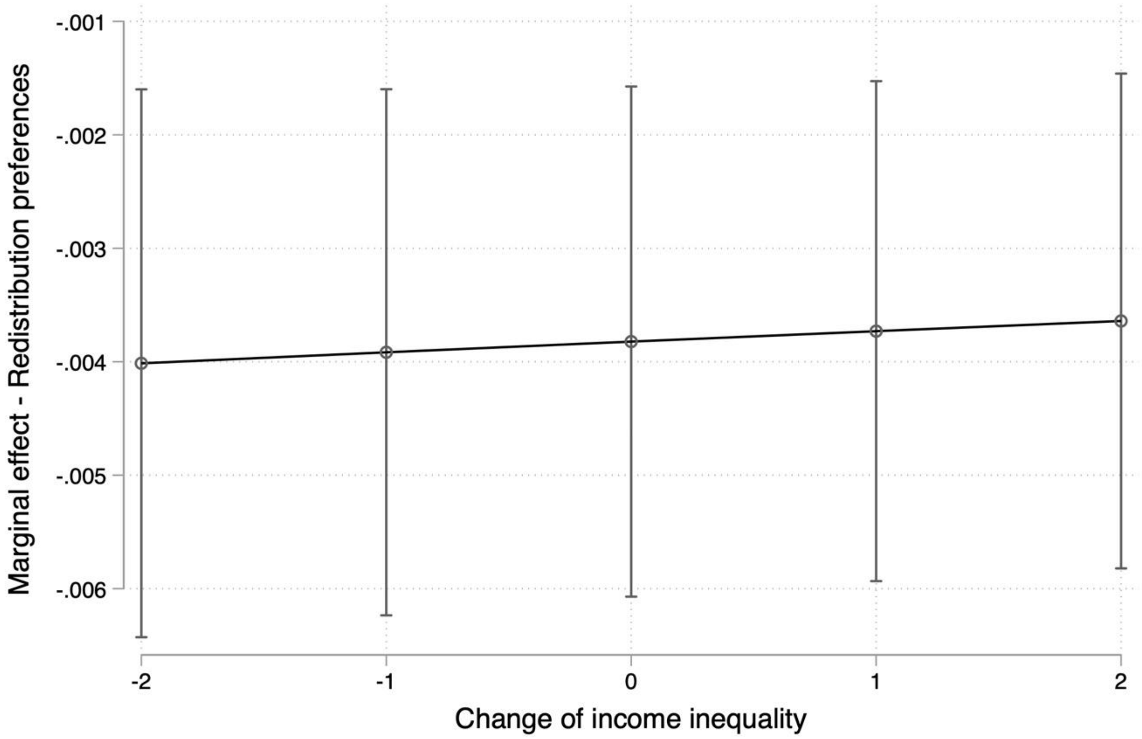
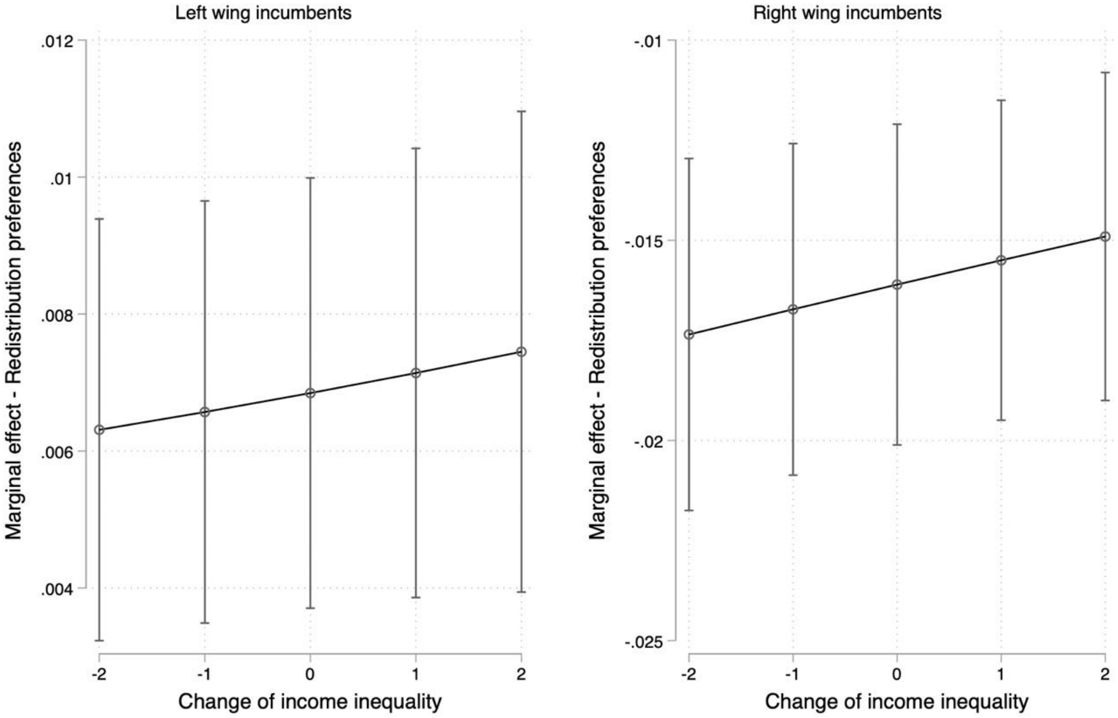


Figure 27: Redistribution preferences over changes of inequality by type of incumbents, with vote for party of PM as dependent variable



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Curriculum Vitae

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

August 2022 –
- **Executive director at DeFacto Consultancy**, Research agency in Podgorica, Montenegro
  Biggest Montenegrin research agency
  Job description: Coordination of research projects; development of working plan (overall plan for the agency and methodological plan for research project), managing research team, communication with business clients

November 2017 – November 2021:
- **Ph.D./Research Associate with the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**
  GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences:
  Job description: Processing survey data from national election studies to produce data sets ready for cross-national analysis.

September 2014 – September 2017:
- **Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro**

November 2013 – October 2017:
- **Researcher at DeFacto Consultancy**, Research agency in Podgorica, Montenegro

EDUCATION

- **Ph.D. in Political Science** (2018-2023)
  Faculty of Social Sciences, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany
  Ph.D. thesis: "It's about the economy, stupid – But what kind of economy?"
  Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Kai Arzheimer
- **Fulbright PhD Student Researcher** (October 2021 – July 2022) at the Florida International University (FIU), under the supervision of Prof. Tatiana Kostadinova
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- **MA in Political Science (2014 – 2016)**, Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro
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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

<u>*Peer-reviewed:*</u>

- Živković, Slaven (2021). "The interplay of economic vote dimensions: Inequality, redistribution preferences, and support for incumbents." Comparative European Politics.
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- Živković, Slaven (2014). From "people's revolution" to "democratic elections": U.S. foreign policy towards Egypt, *Civis - Montenegrin Journal of Political Science,* Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro, Vol. 3, No. 3.

<u>*Other:*</u>

- Živković, Slaven (2015) *Data analyses in SPSS: a statistical handbook*, DeFacto Consultancy, Podgorica, Montenegro

<u>*Working papers:*</u>

- Živković, Slaven. "Positional Economic Voting and Correct Voting: Do voters support actors that advocate their economic policy?
- Živković, Slaven; Otjes, Simon. "From Class Conflict to Culture War? The Changing Meaning of the Left-Right Dimension"
- Živković, Slaven; Kostadinova, Tatiana. "Has positional economic voting taken root in Central-Eastern Europe?"
- Katsanidou, Alexia; Otjes, Simon; Živković, Slaven. "Connecting the dots between economic policy positions and Euroscepticism in post-crisis Europe"
- Quinlan, Stephen; Guntermann Eric; Blinzler, Katharina; Živković, Slaven. "A Cross-National Exploration of Affective Polarization: Testing Institutional and Political Context Associations."

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Comparative voting behavior; Political Participation and Representation; Political and Social Inequalities; Public opinion; Economic Voting; Political Parties; Affective Polarization; Post-Communism - Central-Eastern Europe.

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL PROJECTS

- *Montenegro National Election Study (MNES)* – researcher, coordinator of data collection and data quality, preparation of dataset
- *E-learning module on electoral system in Montenegro, with the focus on local elections and women participation (WFD)* – consultant in charge of developing e-learning module with detailed information on women participation in Montenegrin politics. Module is created as part of "Western Balkans Democracy Initiative" programme, conducted by Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)
- *Social Cohesion in Montenegro (UNDP)* - national consultant for preparing a publication on social cohesion in Montenegro, as part of regional project "Dialogue for Future" conducted by UNDP
- *Gender Mainstreaming of local action plans in Montenegro (WFD)* – consultant for writing the report on gender mainstreaming of local action plans in Montenegro, project conducted by Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)
- *Strengthening capacities of parliamentary administration for design and implementation of data-driven public policies* – head of operations on behalf of De Facto Consultancy. Project is implemented in cooperation with Montenegrin Parliament and UK House of Commons, and supported by United Kingdom Embassy in Montenegro
- *European Value Study (EVS)* – part of Montenegrin team which conducts survey in Montenegro
- *Analyzing and understanding political parties' and candidates' behavior* – researcher in bilateral project between Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro and Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) team from University of Vienna
- *Europeanization of Civil Society in Montenegro and Slovenia* – researcher in bilateral project between Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro and Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana
- *SELDI Corruption Monitoring System* – Public opinion survey on corruption in Montenegro, researcher and data analyst
- *Balkan Barometer* – data collection coordinator for this longitudinal project, conducted three times in Montenegro so far; research is ordered by Regional Cooperation Council (RCC); survey is comprised of public opinion poll and business survey
- *Public opinion on Montenegrin EU integration process* – worked on three projects De Facto conducted for the purposes of assessing general attitude of Montenegrin population on EU integration process
- *Public opinion on Montenegrin NATO integration process* – worked on two projects De Facto conducted for the purposes of assessing general attitude of Montenegrin population on NATO integration process
- *Civic participation in Montenegro* – researcher at project on various ways Montenegrin population participates in country's political life: project is funded by Charles Stewart Mott foundation and conducted in cooperation between De Facto and Montenegrin NGO Civic Alliance
- *Political public opinion polls* – data cleaning and processing in various political survey De Facto is conducting on request of some political parties in Montenegro

ADDITIONAL TRAINING

Substantive:

- "5th Leuven-Montreal Winter School on Elections," Ph.D. Training Program, March 2-9, 2019, Leuven, Belgium

Methods:

- "How to specify Panel Data Analysis," GESIS Workshop, February 17-18, 2020, Mannheim, Germany
- "Sampling, Weighting, and Estimation," GESIS Summer School in Survey Methodology, August 20-24, 2018, Cologne, Germany
- "Regression modeling strategies to test research hypotheses: Theory and applications with Stata," GESIS Workshop, June 27-29, 2018, Mannheim, Germany
- "Sampling, Weighting, Estimation in Survey Methodology," SERISS training, April 24-26, 2017, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- "Multilevel Regression Modelling," 5th ECPR Winter School in Methods and Techniques, February 29 – March 4, 2016, Bamberg, Germany

Soft skills:

- "Academic Writing I: Writing Academic Texts in English," GESIS Workshop, November 4-5, 2019, Mannheim, Germany
- "Academic Presentation," GESIS Workshop, April 3-4, 2019, Mannheim, Germany

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Stata (Very good proficiency)
- SPSS (Very good proficiency)
- R (basic proficiency)
- Excellent command of Microsoft Office programs; Strong Excel proficiency
- Very experienced in using Google Apps (Gmail, Calendar, Google Drive, G+, etc.)
- Driving license – category B
- Active chess player

REFERENCES

- **Kai Arzheimer**, Professor of Political Science, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, arzheimer@politik.uni-mainz.de
- **Alexia Katsanidou**, Scientific director of the GESIS Department Survey Data Curation and Professor of Empirical Social Research at the University of Cologne; alexia.katsanidou@gesis.org
- **Stephen Quinlan**, Project Manager, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), stephen.quinlan@gesis.org
- **David Howell**, Director of Studies, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), dahowell@umich.edu
- **Tatiana Kostadinova,** Professor of Political Science, Florida International University (FIU); kostadin@fiu.edu