

Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right:
Rising Inequality and the Changing Structure of Political Conflict
(Evidence from France, Britain and the US, 1948-2017)

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Abstract. Using post-electoral surveys from France, Britain and the US, this paper documents a striking long-run evolution in the structure of political cleavages. In the 1950s-1960s, the vote for left-wing (socialist-labour-democratic) parties was associated with lower education and lower income voters. It has gradually become associated with higher education voters, giving rise to a “multiple-elite” party system in the 2000s-2010s: high-education elites now vote for the “left”, while high-income/high-wealth elites still vote for the “right” (though less and less so). I argue that this can contribute to explain rising inequality and the lack of democratic response to it, as well as the rise of “populism”. I also discuss the origins of this evolution (rise of identity/migration cleavage, and/or educational expansion per se) as well as future prospects: “multiple-elite” stabilization; complete realignment of the party system along a “globalists” (high-education, high-income) vs “nativists” (low-education, low-income) cleavage; return to class-based redistributive conflict (either from an internationalist or nativist perspective). Two main lessons emerge. First, with multi-dimensional inequality, multiple political equilibria and bifurcations can occur. Next, without a strong egalitarian-internationalist platform, it is difficult to unite low-education, low-income voters from all origins within the same party.

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Section 1. Introduction

Income inequality has increased substantially in most world regions since the 1980s, albeit at different speeds (see Alvaredo et al, *World Inequality Report 2018*, wir2018.wid.world). This process of rising inequality came after a relatively egalitarian period between 1950 and 1980, which itself followed a long sequence of dramatic events – wars, depressions, revolutions – during the first half of the 20th century (see Piketty, 2014). Given the recent evolution, one might have expected to observe rising political demand for redistribution, e.g. due to some simple median-voter logic. However so far we seem to be observing for the most part the rise of various forms of xenophobic “populism” and identity-based politics (Trump, Brexit, Le Pen/FN, Modi/BJP, AfD, etc.), rather than the return of class-based (income-based or wealth-based) politics. Why do democratic and electoral forces appear to deliver a reduction in inequality in some historical contexts but not in others? Do we need extreme circumstances in order to produce the type of Social-Democratic/New-Deal political coalition that led to the reduction of inequality during the 1950-1980 period?

This paper attempts to make some (limited) progress in answering these complex questions. The general objective is to better understand the interplay between long-run inequality dynamics and the changing structure of political cleavages. In order to do so, I exploit in a systematic manner the post-electoral surveys that were conducted after nearly every national election in France, Britain and the United States over the 1948-2017 period. I construct homogenous long-run series on the changing structure of the electorate in these three countries, i.e. who votes for which parties or coalitions depending on different dimensions of inequality (income, wealth, education, age, gender, religion, foreign or ethnic origins, etc.). To my knowledge, this is the first time that such consistent series are established in a long run and comparative basis.

Next, and most importantly, I document a striking long-run evolution in the multi-dimensional structure of socio-political cleavages in these three countries. In the 1950s-1960s, the vote for “left-wing” (socialist-labour-democratic) parties was associated with lower education and lower income voters. This corresponds to what one might label a “class-based” party system: lower class voters from the different

dimensions (education, income, wealth) tend to vote for the same party or coalition, while upper and middle class voters from the different dimensions tend to vote for the other party or coalition. Since the 1970s-1980s, “left-wing” vote has gradually become associated with higher education voters, giving rise to what I propose to label a “multiple-elite” party system in the 2000s-2010s: high-education elites now vote for the “left”, while high-income/high-wealth elites still vote for the “right” (though less and less so). I.e. the “left” has become the party of the intellectual elite (Brahmin left), while the “right” can be viewed as the party of the business elite (Merchant right).¹ I show that the same transformation happened in France, the US and Britain (see Figure I), despite the many differences in party systems and political histories between these three countries.

I argue that this structural evolution can contribute to explain rising inequality and the lack of democratic response to it, as well as the rise of “populism” (as low education, low income voters might feel abandoned).² I also discuss the origins of this transformation. I stress three main mechanisms: the rise of the identity cleavage; the process of educational expansion; and the shift in global ideology toward the market system and private property. The identity-based mechanism is often described as the central explanation behind the realignment of the US party system. Namely, following the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the pro-African-American turn of the democrat party, a number of white lower-class voters gradually started to vote republican, leading half-a-century later to a complete reversal of the social structure of the white vote vis-a-vis the two parties. One problem with this explanation is that there was no Civil Rights movement and no racial conflict in France or Britain (at least not in the 1950s-1960s), and that we observe the same evolution in the three countries. The rise of the conflict over migration (and more generally over globalization) certainly played an important role in the European context, a role that is comparable in some ways to the racial conflict in the US context. However the migration cleavage became salient relatively late in Europe (mostly since the 1980s

¹In India’s traditional caste system, upper castes were divided into Brahmins (priests, intellectuals) and Kshatryas/Vaishyas (warriors, merchants, tradesmen). To some extent the modern political conflict seems to follow this division.

² It is worth stressing that the massive increase in abstention which took place between the 1950s-1960s and the 2000s-2010s (particularly in France and Britain; in the US abstention has always been relatively large in the post-war period as compared to Europe), arose for the most part within the lower education and lower income groups. See Piketty (2018, Appendix Figures A1-A2). A natural interpretation is that these voters do not feel well represented in the “multiple-elite” party system.

and 1990s), while the shift in the socioeconomic composition of the party electorates seems to begin much earlier (namely, as early as the 1950s-1960s, like in the US).

A second mechanism which could allow to better explain the long-run evolution of the cleavage structure (and particularly the commonality of the observed evolutions across developed countries) is related to the process of educational expansion. At the time of primary and secondary education, it was relatively straightforward to design an egalitarian educational platform. Parties seeking to reduce social inequalities could simply aim to bring the entirety of a generation to the completion of primary school, and then to the completion of secondary school. With the rise of tertiary education, things have become more complicated. Left parties, which used to be viewed as pro-poor, have increasingly been viewed as parties defending primarily the winners of the higher education game rather than the less well-off. I will present a simple model arguing that this might be related to the development of a new form of merit-based ideology among the highest educational achievers (similar in spirit to the standard merit-based ideology developed by the highest income and wealth achievers). The important point is that the educational-expansion-based mechanism could have delivered the observed evolution of political cleavages even in the absence of the identity-based and migration-based mechanism.

Lastly, a third possible mechanism, arguably the most important of all, involves the shift in global ideology toward inequality, market forces, progressive taxation and private property which occurred following the conservative revolution of the 1980s and the fall of soviet communism. If one believes that it is undesirable (and/or impossible) to reduce socioeconomic inequality and if one chooses to organize globalization accordingly (e.g. by having free capital flows with no fiscal coordination), then it is not surprising that the political conflict focuses on other issues such as border control, immigration and identity (including cultural conflicts between migrants/minorities and non-migrants/majorities as well as between high-education, high-income and high-wealth elites). I should make clear that the data series uncovered in this paper are wholly insufficient to rigorously test the relative importance of these various mechanisms, which in my view should be considered as complementary rather than substitute. It is my hope however that these series allow for a more informed discussion for the issues at stake, particularly regarding the fact

that we need to take an explicitly comparative perspective in order to explain what appears to be common structural transformations of the party system.

Finally, I also discuss in the paper the various possible evolutions for the party system: “multiple-elite” stabilization; complete realignment of the party system along a “globalists” (high-education, high-income) vs “nativists” (low-education, low-income) cleavage; return to class-based redistributive conflict (either from an internationalist or nativist perspective). Recent elections held in the three countries in 2016-2017 suggest that several different evolutions are possible. As we will see, France and the US illustrate the possibility a shift toward the “globalists” vs “nativists” cleavage structure, while Britain supports the “multiple-elite” stabilization scenario (and possibly the return to class-based internationalism, though this seems less likely, at least in the short-run).

Two general lessons emerge from this research. First, with multi-dimensional inequality (income, education, wealth, ethnic or foreign origins, etc.), it is more complicated to build redistributive coalitions than in a simple one-dimensional world. With many dimensions of inequality and redistributive policies, multiple political equilibria and bifurcations can naturally occur. Globalization and educational expansion have created new dimensions of inequality and conflict, leading to the weakening of previous class-based redistributive coalitions and the gradual development of new cleavages. Next, without a strong egalitarian-internationalist platform, it is difficult to unite low-education, low-income voters from all origins within the same coalition and to deliver a reduction in inequality. Extreme historical circumstances can and did help to deliver such an encompassing platform; but there is no reason to believe that this is a necessary nor a sufficient condition.³

This work builds upon a long tradition of research in political science studying the evolution of party systems and political cleavages. This literature was strongly influenced by the theory of cleavage structures first developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). In their seminal contribution, Lipset-Rokkan stressed that modern

³ E.g. the Great Depression, World War 2 and the rise of Communism certainly made the Social-Democratic New-Deal platform more desirable, while unregulated globalization, the conservative revolution and the fall of Communism contributed to weaken it.

democracies are characterized by two major revolutions – national and industrial – that have generated four main cleavages, with varying importance across countries: center vs periphery; state vs churches; agriculture vs manufacturing; workers vs employers/owners. Their classification had an enormous influence on the literature. One limitation of this work, however, is that Lipset-Rokkan largely ignore racial/ethnic cleavages, in spite of their importance in the development of the US party system.⁴ In the present paper, I argue that the particularities of US party dynamics (whereby the Democratic party very gradually shifted from the slavery party to the poor whites party, then the New Deal party, and finally the party of the intellectual elite and the minorities), which often seem strange and exotic from a European perspective (how is it that the slavery party can become the “progressive” party?), might be highly relevant to understand the current and future transformation of cleavages structures in Europe and elsewhere.

Subsequent research has contributed to extend the Lipset-Rokkan framework. In particular, a number of authors have argued that the rise of universalist/liberal vs traditionalist/communitarian values since the 1980s-1990s, following in particular the rise of higher education, has created the condition for a new cleavage dimension, and the rise of the “populist right” (see e.g. Bornshier, 2010). My findings are closely related to this thesis. In particular, I stress the interplay between income, education and ethno-religious cleavages, and the commonalities and differences between US and European trajectories in that respect (while Bornshier focuses on Europe).⁵

This work is also related to the study of multi-issue party competition⁶ and to a number of papers that have recently been written on the rise of “populism”.⁷ However, to my knowledge, the present paper is the first work trying to relate the rise of “populism” to what one might call the rise of “elitism”, i.e. the gradual emergence (both in Europe and in the US) of a “multiple-elite” party system, whereby each of the

⁴ It is paradoxical that Lipset-Rokkan refer so little to racial cleavages, especially given that they write in the middle of the US Civil Rights movement. Their approach is arguably a bit too centered on the European (and especially North European) party systems of their time.

⁵ On the gradual transformation of the European party system and the rise of populist right, see also Kitschelt (1994, 1995) and Mudde (2007, 2013).

⁶ For an ambitious attempt to calibrate multi-issues models of party competition (vertical redistribution vs attitude to migration/minorities), using both US and European data, see Roemer, Lee and Van der Straeten (2007).

⁷ See in particular Inglehart and Norris (2016) and Rodrik (2017).

two governing coalitions alternating in power tends to reflect the views and interests of a different elite (intellectual elite vs business elite).

More generally, the main novelty of this research is to attempt to build systematic long-run series on electoral cleavages using consistent measures of inequality (especially regarding education, income, wealth). In particular, by focusing upon differentials in voting behavior between deciles of income, wealth or education (relatively to the distribution of income, wealth or education prevailing for a given year), it becomes possible to make meaningful comparisons across countries and over long time periods, which is not possible by using occupational categories (which the literature has largely focused upon so far).⁸

The present paper should be viewed as a (limited) step in a broader research agenda seeking to analyze in a more systematic manner the long-run interplay between inequality dynamics and political cleavages structures. The post-electoral survey data that I use in this paper in order to cover the case of France, the US and Britain over the 1948-2017 period has obvious advantages: one can observe directly who voted for whom as a function of individual-level characteristics like gender, age, education, income, wealth, religion, etc. Post-electoral surveys now exist for a large number of countries, at least for recent decades. They could and should be used in order to test whether the same patterns prevail, and to better understand the underlying mechanisms. The advantage of looking at only three countries is that I am able in this paper to analyze these cases in a relatively detailed manner. However it is clear that in order to go further one would need to add many more country studies.

⁸ An important strand of work in political science relies on occupational categories like « blue-collar workers » and indexes like the « Alford class voting index » (Alford, 1962), i.e. the difference between the labour party vote within the « working class » (typically defined as manual wage-earners or low-skill manufacturing workers, with substantial variations over time and space in the exact definition and the population share) and labour party vote within the « middle class » (all other voters). Such categories (blue-collar workers, manual wage-earners) can be highly relevant to characterize the political conflict within a given period, but do not allow for consistent comparisons over long time horizons and across countries, which is why I choose to focus on income, wealth and education (of course education also raises issues of comparability over time and across countries ; but at least it can be ranked on a common scale, at least to some extent : primary-secondary-tertiary, advanced degrees, etc.). The same issue arises for the measurement of long-run trends in inequality.

Post-electoral surveys also have major drawbacks: they have limited sample size,⁹ and they do not exist before the 1940s-1950s (and in some countries not before the 1980s-1990s). The only way to analyze changing inequality patterns and political cleavages from a longer run perspective (i.e. going back to electoral data from the 1870s onwards, or before) is to use local-level electoral data together with local-level census data and/or other administrative or fiscal data providing indicators on the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the area. This kind of data exists in pretty much every country where elections have been held. It is only by collecting and exploiting this material that we can hope to reach a satisfactory understanding of the interplay between inequality dynamics and cleavages structures.

Another obvious limitation of the present paper is that cleavages structures cannot be properly analyzed without using other types of sources and materials, including party manifestos, political discourses, and other non-voting expressions of opinion. Platforms and promises are not always straightforward to analyze and compare over time and across countries, however. Looking at cleavages structures, as revealed by the changing structure of the electorates, gives an interesting snapshot on how the different social groups perceive the various parties and coalitions and what they are likely to bring to them. This needs to be supplemented with other data, including material trying to quantify the actual policies that were implemented (e.g. regarding tax rates applied to various income and wealth groups, educational spending, etc.).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I present my results on changing political cleaves in France. I then proceed with the case of the US (Section 3) and Britain (Section 4). In Section 5, I present simple two-dimensional models of inequality, beliefs and redistribution, which might help to interpret some of these evolutions, via the identity, educational-expansion and ideological-shift channels described above. In effect, these models build upon some previous work of mine (Piketty, 1995) and introduce multiple dimensions of inequality (domestic vs external inequality; education vs income/wealth) in the simplest possible manner in order to account for observed patterns. Finally, Section 6 offers concluding comments. I also

⁹ As we will see, the long-run evolutions that I document are statistically significant, but many of the year-to-year variations are not.

discuss research perspectives and on-going work on other electoral democracies, which so far seems to confirm the patterns found for France, the US and Britain.

Section 2. Changing Political Cleavages in France

In this section, I present detailed results on the changing structure of political cleavages for the case of France. I begin by briefly describing the evolution of the structure of political parties and popular vote in France over the 1945-2017 period (section 2.1), and the post-electoral surveys that I will be using (section 2.2). I then present basic results on changing voting cleavages by gender and age (section 2.3), before moving on to my main results on the reversal of the education cleavage (section 2.4), income and wealth (section 2.5), and the shift to “multiple-elite” party system (section 2.6). I finally present results on changing cleavages by religion and foreign origins (section 2.7) and on the emergence of two-dimensional, four-quarter political cleavages in France (section 2.8).

Section 2.1. Changing Political Parties and Electoral Results in France 1946-2017

The French multi-party system has always been substantially more complicated and diversified than the US and British two-party systems. This can be attributed to the differences in electoral system (two-round vs one-round), though this itself could be endogenous, at least in part.¹⁰ In order to analyze changing voting patterns and political cleavages in France, I will exploit both presidential and legislative elections.

Beginning in 1965, French voters have been electing their president directly via universal suffrage, using a two-round electoral system.¹¹ Only the top two contenders in the first round are allowed to compete in the second round.¹² One of the objectives

¹⁰ For classic references on the interplay between party systems and electoral systems, see e.g. Duverger (1951) and Lijphart (1994).

¹¹ There was a first and failed attempt in 1848 to elect Presidents via universal suffrage (the winner of the election decided to become Emperor Napoleon III and to stop conducting open elections altogether). This led to a long interruption, until De Gaulle imposed the current system by referendum in 1962 (with a first application for the presidential election of 1965). Between 1871 and 1962, the President was elected by Parliament and had limited powers.

¹² This is the same electoral system that is currently used for legislative elections in each of the approximately 570 constituencies, except that in legislative elections all candidates who made more than 12,5% of the registered electorate in the first round (i.e. about 15-20% of the vote depending on turnout) are qualified for the second round (and not only the top two).

of the reform was to reinforce executive power and stability, and to some extent it contributed to the emergence of something closer to a two-party system in France (or at least to a two-coalition system). In most presidential elections since 1965, one indeed observes in the second round a pretty tight race between a “left” or “center-left” candidate (usually supported by the socialist party, the communist party and other left-wing parties) and a “right” or “center-right” candidate (usually supported by the Gaullist party and other right-wing parties). The electoral scores obtained by both contenders have generally been close to a perfect split 50-50 of the popular vote : the largest margins have been of the order of 55-45 (De Gaulle vs Mitterand in 1965) or 54-46 (Mitterand vs Chirac in 1988), and have usually been closer to 51-49 (Giscard vs Mitterand in 1974) or 52-48 (Hollande vs Sarkozy in 2012).¹³

I will also be using legislative elections outcomes, first because they cover longer historical periods (legislative elections have been conducted approximately every five years since the beginning of the Third Republic in 1871), and next because they provide a better testimony of the complexity of French politics (though this is not my main focus here). If we look at the overall evolution of popular vote shares obtained by left-wing parties (combining center-left, left, and extreme-left parties) and right-wing parties (combining center-right, right, and extreme-right parties) in all legislative elections that were conducted in France between 1946 and 2017, we find that it is usually relatively close to 50-50.¹⁴ The classification of parties that I use here corresponds to the way parties are described by voters (using the questions on left-right party scales that are available in post-electoral surveys) and is largely non-controversial in the study of French politics.¹⁵ The only parties that I left out of this left-right classification are those which voters do not rank in a consistent manner or refuse to rank (such as regionalist parties). In practice, their share of the popular vote is usually very small: typically less than 3% of the vote.¹⁶

¹³ For the complete set of second-round left-right presidential races that I will be focusing upon in order to analyze changing political cleavages is described on Piketty (2018, Figure 2.1a).

¹⁴ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.1b). I use first-round legislative elections because they are more meaningful (many parties do not qualify for the second round in a large number of constituencies).

¹⁵ Voters are asked to rank parties on a left-right scale usually going from 1 to 10 or 1 to 7. In order to classify parties one can simply use the average rank attributed to them by voters. Unsurprisingly, communists appear to be ranked at the left of socialists, which are ranked at the left of center-right parties, themselves at the left of extreme-right parties.

¹⁶ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.1b). One major exception is the 32% vote share obtained in 2017 by the self-designated « centrist » LRM-Modem alliance (which I split 50-50 between center-right and center-

I stress that this basic left-vs-right characterization of the French party system should be viewed as an enormous simplification of a much more complex landscape. The only reason for making this simplification is that in the context of this paper I am primarily interested in establishing broad long-run evolutions, and most importantly in making comparisons with the evolution of political cleavages observed in the US and Britain (two countries with well-established two-party systems). The fact that we find similar evolutions of political cleavages in the three countries is in itself interesting, and could not have been documented without this simple left-vs-right characterization of the French party system.

That being said, let me emphasize once again that one cannot properly analyze and understand French political dynamics without taking into account the complexity of each coalition.¹⁷ In particular, the total left-wing vote in French legislative elections 1946-2017 can be broken down into three main components (extreme-left, left, center-left).¹⁸ The “extreme-left” component includes the communist party (PCF) and other extreme-left parties (such as LO, LCR, NPA, PG, LFI, etc.). The “left” component includes mostly the socialist party (SFIO-PS) as well as a number of smaller allied parties (including various green parties).¹⁹ The “extreme-left” was the strongest component in the immediate post-war period (with 28% of the popular vote for PCF in 1946, its highest historical score), and was overtaken by the “left” during the 1970s-1980s.²⁰ The total right-wing vote in French legislative elections 1946-2017 can also be decomposed into three main components (extreme-right, right,

left on the series reported in Piketty (2018, Figures 2.1b-2.1d). I will return below to the special case of the 2017 election, which cannot be properly analyzed in left-right terms and exemplifies the breakdown of the postwar party system into four quarters (see section 2.8 below).

¹⁷ This also applies to Britain and the US, albeit in different institutional contexts (i.e. one needs to take into account the various factions within each party, the dynamics of the primary system, etc.).

¹⁸ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.1d).

¹⁹ The French socialist party was founded in 1905 and used the name SFIO (*Section française de l'internationale ouvrière*) to designate itself until 1969 (after which it used the acronym PS, *Parti socialiste*). The communist component (PCF, *Parti communiste français*) splitted from SFIO in 1920, and has recently been overtaken by LFI (*La France insoumise*).

²⁰ I have included in the “center-left” component the Radicals and its followers (PRG, etc.) as well as half of the LRM-Modem vote in 2017. The Radicals used to be the most pro-Republic party during the early decades of the Third Republic (when monarchist and bonapartist groups dominated the right-hand half of the political spectrum) and until World War 1, before being overtaken on their left by socialists and communists during the interwar period (during which the three components of the left were often of comparable size, in particular during “Front Populaire” 1936 coalition government). This “center-left” component became very small during the 1960s-1970s, but recently re-gained strength with the 2017 election (in a certain way).

center-right).²¹ The “extreme-right” component includes the FN (*Front National*) and other parties such as the Poujadist movement in 1956 (when Le Pen was first elected). The “right” component includes the various “Gaullist” and post-Gaullist parties (RPF, UDR, RPR, UMP, LR, etc.). The “center-right” component includes the MRP in the immediate post-war period and various parties in the following decades (UDF, UDI, etc.).²² I should stress again that the frontiers between these various components are uncertain and porous, both within the left and within the right, and that the broad left vs right coalitions are themselves highly unstable, and do not necessarily imply any particular ability to govern together.²³ They should merely be viewed as a way to cut the electorate into approximately two halves (on the basis of left-right scales used by voters themselves) in order to make historical and international comparisons. I will later return to the discussion of how meaningful these groupings really are when I present the results on the long-run evolution of political cleavages – as measured by the evolution of the structure of the corresponding electorates – and make comparisons between France and the other two countries (see in particular section 4.6).

Section 2.2. Data Sources: French Post-Electoral Surveys 1958-2017

There exists a long tradition of post-electoral surveys in France. Major surveys have been conducted after all national elections (legislative and presidential) since 1958 (namely in 1958, 1962, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1973, 1974, 1978, 1981, 1986, 1988, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017). Most of these surveys were conducted by a consortium of academic organizations. The corresponding micro-files have been well preserved and documented, and are easily accessible.²⁴

²¹See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.1e).

²²Including half of the LRM-Modern vote in 2017.

²³ In particular, the right and center-right components never shared a governing coalition with the extreme-right since 1946 (except during brief periods in some regions after the 2004 regional elections). The left, center-left and extreme-left components did share national governing coalitions in some instances (e.g. after the elections of 1936, 1981 and 1997), but not in others (e.g. between 1947 and 1958, the ruling “*Troisième Force*” coalition generally included the left, center-left and center-right; during the Third Republic, i.e. between 1871 and 1940, the center-left Radicals also often formed coalitions with the center-right; finally, the governing majority following the 2017 is also based on a “centrist” coalition borrowing both from the center-left and the center-right).

²⁴ Most post-electoral surveys since 1958 were organized by FNSP (*Fondation nationale des sciences politiques*) and its various research centers in political science (in particular CEVIPOF), and are currently being archived and distributed by the ADISP-CDSP data center (French data archives for the social sciences, quetelet.casd.eu). This includes in particular the surveys conducted in 1958, 1962,

These post-electoral surveys are reasonably large in size (typically about 4000 observations, though the earlier surveys are somewhat smaller, i.e. around 2000-2500). As we shall see, this is sufficient to deliver highly significant results regarding long-run evolutions (though not necessarily for year-to-year variations). These surveys include detailed questionnaires involving dozens of variables on socio-demographic characteristics, including in particular gender, age, family situation, education (including highest degree obtained), occupation, religion, and income (with a relatively large number of income brackets, typically about 10-15 brackets). One of the particularities of the French post-electoral surveys is that they also include relatively detailed information on wealth and asset ownership, beginning with the 1978 survey, which turns out to be particularly interesting for our purposes (more on this in section 2.5 below). Recent surveys also include very useful information on foreign origins (see section 2.7).

All surveys include questions about voting behavior for the current election (the survey typically takes place in the two weeks following election-day), as well as retrospective questions about voting behavior in past elections (typically the past two or three elections). We focus upon the current-election variables (except for the 1956 election, for which we use the retrospective question asked in the 1958 survey), but we also checked that we obtain the same results using retrospective variables.²⁵ All technical details and computer codes describing the way I have used these surveys are available in the on-line data appendix.

Section 2.3. Evolution of Gender and Age Cleavages

1978, 1988, 1995, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017. Some other surveys (in particular those conducted after the 1967 and 1968 elections) were organized by other academic teams and are distributed via ICPSR. A small number of post-electoral surveys (in particular those following the 1974 and 1981 elections) were organized by a consortium of media organizations and do not seem to have been preserved in micro-file format (only published tabulations are available). See on-line data appendix for details.

²⁵ Retrospective questions are generally biased in terms of levels (i.e. in retrospect more voters generally report generally to have voted for the winner than the observed fraction and what they report the week immediately after the election), but not in terms of socio-economic differentials (i.e. the left-vs-right voting gaps by gender, age, education, income are about the same in retrospective variables as in current variables).

I begin by describing the evolution of French political cleavages with respect to gender and age. I should stress that there is nothing really new here: the substantial novel results begin with the reversal of the education cleavage in the next section. Before looking at voting cleavages by education and income, it is useful however to have in mind the basic results regarding voting patterns by gender and age.

Regarding gender, I confirm a well-known result in the political science literature, according to which women have become more left-wing over time. This pattern has been found both in Western Europe and North America (see e.g. Inglehart and Norris 2000; Edlund and Pande 2002).²⁶ I observe the same general voting pattern for France. I.e. in the 1950s and early 1960s, the difference between the fraction of women voting for left-wing parties and the fraction of men voting for left-wing parties was large and negative, of the order of about -15 percentage points; the size of this gap gradually dropped in absolute terms during the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, and since the late 1980s this gap has been close to 0, i.e. women and men vote in approximately the same manner.²⁷ One can also compute the same differential after controlling for age, family situation (single vs married/cohabiting), education (highest degree), household income bracket and wealth bracket. This has relatively little impact on the trend.²⁸ If one includes religious practice however (which we observe beginning in 1967), then the trend entirely disappears. That is, the only reason why women appear to vote more for right-wing parties than men in France in the 1960s-1970s is because they more often report to be practicing Catholics. Controlling for religious beliefs and practice, they vote roughly in the same manner as men. The fact that the gender effect disappears after controlling for religion is suggestive, but not entirely conclusive. The process through which women have become more left-wing over time (which we also find for the US and Britain) involves complex issues which are beyond the scope of the present paper.²⁹

²⁶ Edlund and Pande (2002) relate their findings to the decline of marriage and the rise of divorce and the economic fragility of women. The results I obtain for France are not inconsistent with this explanation, but suggest a somewhat more complex story, involving transformations in the structure of the ideological conflict about women's role (see below).

²⁷ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.2a).

²⁸ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.2b-2.2c).

²⁹ The difficult question is to understand why women used to express stronger religious practice and beliefs, and what this really means. This evolution is certainly related to the gradual emergence of gender equality as a central political issue in recent decades. Back in the 1950s-1960s, gender equality was not a very salient issue: the patriarchal, bread-winner ideology was largely dominant, and one might argue that the traditional housewife role (which a majority of women ended up choosing – or

Regarding age, I confirm the common intuition and previous finding according to which younger voters tend to be more left-wing than older voters. However the youth also appears to be highly volatile: the gap between the fraction of young (18-to-34-year-old) and old (65-year-old and over) voters supporting left-wing parties was as large 30 points in the 1970s (and about 20 points in the mid-2000s), as compared to as little as 5-10 points when De Gaulle, Chirac or Sarkozy were elected for the first time. We observe the same strong time variations if we compare age groups 18-34, 35-64 and 65+ and if we include controls for gender, family situation, education, income, wealth and religion.³⁰ Generally speaking, the young seem to lean strongly to the left following long periods of right-wing governments, and to lean much more modestly to the left (or even not at all) following periods of left-wing governments. I find similar results for the US and Britain.

Section 2.4. The Reversal of the Education Cleavage

I now move to the main results, namely the complete reversal of the education cleavage. At the beginning of the period, i.e. in the 1950s-1960s, the more educated voters systematically vote more for the right: the higher the education level, the higher the right-wing vote. At the end of the period, i.e. in the 2000s-2010s, I observe the complete opposite pattern: the higher the education level, the higher the left-wing vote. This complete reversal takes place in a gradual manner over more than half a century and appears to be extremely robust.

The simplest indicator which one can use in order to visualize this long-term trend is the difference between the fraction of university graduates voting left and the fraction of non-university graduates voting left. This difference was large and negative in the 1950s and early 1960s, with a gap of about -20 percentage points; the gap gradually dropped in absolute value during the 1960s-1970s and was close to 0 during the 1980s; it became slightly positive in 1990s, and strongly positive in the 2000s-2010s,

were induced to choose – at the age of child rearing) was better rationalized by conservative and religious discourses; hence women's higher religiosity and stronger right-wing preferences; of course causality is likely to go both ways here.

³⁰See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.2d-2.2g).

with a gap around +10 percentage points. The shift between the 1950s-1960s and the 2000s-2010s amounts to about 30 percentage points, which corresponds to a complete and massive change in the relation between education and voting behavior.

Next, it is striking to see that if we look separately at voters with primary, secondary and tertiary degrees, the relation between education and left-wing vote used to be systematically and monotonically downward-sloping, and that it has become systematically and monotonically upward sloping. In the 1950s-1960s, election after election, voters with primary degrees vote more for the left than those with secondary degrees, who themselves vote more the left than those with tertiary degrees (higher education). In the 2000s-2010s, it is exactly the opposite: election after election, voters with primary degrees vote more for the right than those with secondary degrees, who vote more for the right than those with tertiary degrees (higher education). Looking at the patterns for all French elections between 1956 and 2017 gives a sense of how deep and far-reaching this transformation is (see Figures II-III).

It is also striking to see that this holds within the set of university graduates. Back in the 1970s, voters with more advanced tertiary degrees (in particular the graduates of *grandes écoles*, i.e. selective higher education, as opposed to shorter and/or less selective higher education tracks) vote more for the right than those with less advanced degrees. In the 2000s-2010s, it is exactly the opposite: the more advanced the degrees, the stronger the vote for the left.³¹

Finally, the reversal of the education cleavage appears to be strongly significant from a statistical standpoint, and highly robust to the inclusion of control variables. Generally speaking, the inclusion of control variables affects the levels of our simple education-gradient indicator (i.e. the difference between the fractions of university graduates and non-graduates voting for the level), but does not affect the trend. For instance, including gender and age control variables pushes the education gradient downwards: this is because young cohorts tend to be both more educated and more left-wing. However this effect is moderate in size as compared to the total education gradient, and most importantly the age effect has always been there (with volatile

³¹See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.3f).

variations but no long term trend, as we early noticed), so that this does not affect the trend (see Figure IV).

More precisely, the differentials reported on Figure IV (and on all subsequent similar figures) come from simple linear regressions of the following form:

$$\text{left}_{it} = \alpha + \beta_t x_{it} + \gamma_{ct} C_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (\text{E1})$$

With: $\text{left}_{it} = 1$ if left-wing vote, 0 if right-wing vote

x_{it} = explanatory variable of interest (here higher education: $x_{it}=1$ for university graduates and $x_{it}=0$ for non-university graduates)

C_{it} = control variables (here gender, age, family situation, income, wealth, parental occupation, religion, etc.)³²

In the absence of control variables, the coefficient β_t is simply equal to the difference between left-wing vote among university graduates and non-university graduates in election year t (i.e. $\beta_t = E(\text{left}_{it}=1, x_{it}=1) - E(\text{left}_{it}=1, x_{it}=0)$). As one adds controls, one obtains the coefficients β_t reported on Figure IV and other similar figures.

I should also make clear that the coefficients β_t reported on Figure IV (and all subsequent figures) combine the results obtained from all post-electoral surveys and elections (using both presidential and legislative elections). In practice, the results come from legislative elections for years 1956, 1958, 1962, 1967, 1973, 1978, 1986, 1993 and 1997 (when there was no presidential election), and from presidential elections for years 1965, 1974 and 1995 (when there was no legislative election) and years 1981, 1988, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017 (when there were both presidential and legislative election; I choose to report presidential coefficients β_t for these years, but the results are virtually identical with legislative elections coefficients).³³

³² In our baseline specifications, control variables enter as dummy variables. We use five categorical values for age (18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65+) and all available values and brackets for income and wealth. In addition I also include employment status (wage earner, self employed, or not working). For religion, I distinguish between practicing and non-practicing catholics (more or less than once a month at church), atheists (no religion) and other religion (more on this in section 2.7 below). I have also conducted probit regressions and they yield similar results. Given that the coefficients are easier to interpret with simple linear probability regressions, I focus on the latter.

³³ This is not saying that electoral scores obtained by the left and right in presidential and legislative elections conducted during the same year are always identical in levels (though they are usually fairly

Conversely, including income and wealth variables pushes the education gradient upwards: this is because higher income and/or higher wealth individuals tend to be both more educated and more right-wing (see below). However this effect is again moderate in size as compared to the total education gradient, and most importantly it is approximately constant over time, so that controlling for income and wealth again leaves the trend unaffected. The same conclusion applies if one also controls for father's occupation. I also used other control variables, including father's and mother's education level (when such variables are available), and this leaves the trend unaffected.

From an intergenerational perspective, it is worth stressing that the fraction of university graduates has increased enormously over the past half-century. Back in 1956, 72% of the electorate held primary school degrees, 23% held secondary degrees, and only 5% held tertiary degrees; by 2012, primary degree holders make only 18% of the electorate, vs 56% for secondary degree holders and 26% with tertiary degrees (including 16% with advanced degrees) (see Figure II). In other words, when we look at the parents and grand-parents of the individuals voting in the 2000s-2010s, almost everybody had parents or grand-parents who were primary (or sometime secondary) degree holders. But the point is that controlling for family origins, those who made it to higher degrees vote more for the left, and those who did not make it vote more for the right. In other words, the left has become the party of the winners of the higher education system.

In order to take into account the structural change in the distribution of educational attainment, I also estimated the evolution of the difference between the fraction of left vote within top 10% education voters and the fraction of left vote within bottom 90% education voters (education deciles are defined within a given year, and average decile-level vote shares are computed assuming a constant left score within each education-year cell). I find the same long-run trend, both before controls and after

close), but rather that the left vs right voting differentials with respect to gender, age, education, income, wealth, etc., are the same for presidential and legislative elections. For presidential elections 1973, 2002 and 2017 (when the left was eliminated from the second round), we use first-round voting for left vs right candidates (more on this below).

controls.³⁴ This is not too surprising, given that we observe a complete reversal of the education gradient (from monotonically decreasing to monotonically increasing). Although the classification of degrees into education deciles is not fully satisfactory, this is probably the most meaningful way to measure changes in education cleavages over time (and also the best manner to make comparisons with the strength of income and wealth cleavages).³⁵

One explanation that has been put forward in the political science literature and which could potentially explain the reversal of the education cleavage is the rise of “universalist values” and the rise of the migration cleavage (see e.g. Bornshier 2010). Unfortunately (or fortunately), questions on attitudes toward immigrants were not asked in French post-electoral surveys before 1986-1988, and in any case these attitudinal questions are obviously imperfect. For what it is worth, I have also included the immigrant question in the regression. I find that this reduces the higher-education left-wing coefficient (as expected), albeit in a relatively moderate manner, and without affecting the trend.³⁶ Needless to say, this is highly imperfect evidence, and it is hard to draw any strong conclusion from this. In the end, the most striking finding is that the reversal of the education cleavage seems to begin much before conflicts about identity and migration become salient, thereby suggesting that another mechanism might have played an important role. I will later return to this discussion (see in particular sections 2.7-2.8).

Section 2.5. Stability and Attenuation of Income/Wealth Cleavages

I now present the results on the income and wealth cleavages. One of the most simplistic – yet very widespread – ways of describing the left vs right cleavage involves the poor vs rich dimension: poor vote for the left, while rich vote for the right. As I highlight in this paper, the empirical evidence is actually a lot more mixed and complex. If we look at the profile of left-wing vote by income percentile in France over the 1956-2017 period, we find that the curve is relatively flat within the bottom 90% of

³⁴ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.3k). See also Figure VII.b below.

³⁵ We estimate voting shares by education deciles in the same way as for categorical variables on income and wealth, i.e. by assuming a fixed voting share within a given education or income or wealth category. In effect this leads to underestimate somewhat the absolute strength and sign reversal of the gradient. See the discussion below.

³⁶ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.3l).

the income distribution: one needs to enter the group of top 10% incomes (and especially the top 5% and top 1% incomes) to see a significantly lower vote share for the left (see Figure V). In effect, several counterbalancing factors contribute to attenuate income effects within the bottom 90%. In particular, many self-employed workers – and especially small independent peasants, which have long been very numerous in France – have at the same time relatively low incomes and a weak propensity to vote for the socialist and communist left (which has long been associated to the defense of wage earners and the collectivization of the means of the production, something independent producers usually do not like too much). This is another illustration of the multi-dimensionality of inequality and political cleavages.

If we look at the profile of left-wing vote by wealth percentile (rather than by income percentile), then we find a much steeper curve: the percentage of left-wing vote is systematically much higher in lower wealth deciles than among voters in the middle of the distribution, and much higher in the middle than among top 10% wealth holders (see Figure VI). This much steeper profile illustrates the fact that the political conflict about economic inequality has historically been much more a conflict about property than a conflict about income per se.³⁷ These findings also show how critical it is to have information about wealth and asset ownership (and not only about income) in order to analyze political cleavages. The wealth variables available in post-1978 French post-electoral surveys are imperfect and probably underestimate the steepness of the profile, but they are sufficiently precise to demonstrate that wealth is a stronger determinant of voting attitude than income.³⁸ To my knowledge this simple fact has not been established in previous research.³⁹

³⁷ The property of the means of production does play a special role: as noted above, self-employed and systematically vote more to the right in French post-electoral surveys (controlling for other factors). But even for a given employment status (wage-earner, self-employed, not working), I find the same steep profile of vote by wealth percentile.

³⁸ Generally speaking, the findings reported on Figures V-VI (and in subsequent results on income and wealth deciles) are based upon the assumption of a fixed left vs right voting fraction within each income and wealth bracket. This amounts to neglecting the within-bracket gradient and therefore to underestimate the total steepness of the income and wealth profiles. In addition, regarding wealth, for most years we only observe categorical variables on asset ownership (for about 5-10 asset categories), from which construct a composite wealth index and decile indicator. We observe explicit wealth brackets in 2007, which allows us to check that both methods deliver consistent results (but the comparison also shows that the wealth index method tends to underestimate somewhat the top gradient as compared to the wealth bracket method). All computer codes and detailed results based upon the different specifications are available on-line.

³⁹ A number of papers have used wealth variables available in French and other surveys to analyze the positive impact of asset ownership (and particularly of the ownership of “risky” business and

I now turn to the evolution over time of the income and wealth gradients. As one can already see from Figures V-VI, the steepness of the profile seems to be particularly strong at the beginning of the period (from the 1950s to 1980s), especially at the top of the income and wealth distributions, and to decline over time. In order to further investigate this issue, it is useful to focus upon a simple steepness indicator, namely the difference between the fraction voting left among top 10% income earners and the fraction voting left among bottom 90% income earners (and the corresponding difference for top 10% and bottom 90% wealth holders). The main results that we obtain can be summarized as follows.

First, in the absence of controls, the income gradient is clearly declining over time: the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% income earners used to be around -10 and -15 percentage points from the 1950s to the 1980s, and it is of the order of -5 points in the 2000s-2010s. However the attenuation of the income gradient over time looks less strong after the introduction of controls, and especially education controls.⁴⁰ This is due to the reversal of the education gradient: high-education and high-income always tend to be positively correlated; at the beginning of the period, high-education is associated to stronger right-wing vote, so that controlling for education reduces the impact of high-income on right-wing vote; conversely, at the end of the period, high-education to weaker right-wing vote, so that controlling for education reinforces the income effect. After including controls, the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% income groups is relatively close in 1958-1962 and in 2007-2012, i.e. around -10 points, so it is unclear whether we really see an attenuation of the gap at this stage.

Next, one should be careful about the interpretation of the results for 2017. Without controls, the income gap in left vote becomes slightly positive in 2017, meaning that top 10% voters support the “left” more than bottom 90% income voters. However the gap is back to zero (very slightly negative) levels after inclusion of controls. Most

financial assets) on right-wing vote. See e.g. Foucault, Nadeau and Lewis-Beck (2013), Foucault (2017) and Persson and Martinsson (2016). To my knowledge these works do not explicitly compare the magnitude of the income effect vs wealth effect. Regarding the 1978 French post-electoral survey and the introduction of wealth variables (a rightly celebrated innovation), see the collection of essays edited by Capdevielle et al (1981).

⁴⁰ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.4c).

importantly, it is unclear at this stage whether the 2017 election should be viewed as an outlier or a new normal. In the results presented on Figure VII.a for income cleavages in 2017 (as well as in the results that I presented in previous subsection for education cleavages in 2017), I define the left vs right vote on the basis of the first round of the 2017 presidential elections: “left” vote includes the votes for Mélenchon/Hamon (28%) and Macron (24%), i.e. a total of 52%; “right” vote includes the votes for Fillon (22%) et Le Pen/Dupont-Aignan (26%), i.e. a total of 48%. This is not an entirely unreasonable definition of “left” vs “right”, in the sense that it cuts the electorate into approximately two halves, and that most voters (when asked to rank parties and candidates on a left-right scale) rank Macron to the left of Fillon/LePen/Dupont-Aignan. However it is clear that such left vs right groupings are highly unsatisfactory, and that the 2017 French election is better viewed as the archetype of a two-dimensional, four-quarter election (see the discussion in section 2.7 below; see especially Table I). If we were to use solely the first-round Melenchon-Hamon presidential vote as “left” vote (and/or the legislative left vote, excluding LRM/Modem), then the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% income voters would be negative in 2017 (roughly at the same level as in 2012: about -10 points before controls, -5 points after controls).⁴¹ And if we were to look at the gap in first-round Macron presidential vote (and/or in the legislative LRM/Modem vote) between top 10% and bottom 90% income voters would be strongly positive (about +15 points before controls, and +10 points after controls).

Finally, if we look at the evolution of the wealth gradient, we also find an attenuation of the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% wealth voters, although the attenuation is again less clear once we introduce control variables.⁴² The one stable fact is that the wealth gradient is systematically larger than the income gradient: after controls, and leaving aside 2017, the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% voters is usually between -15 and -20 points for wealth and about -10 points for income.⁴³ The difference between the two is statistically significant, election after

⁴¹ In contrast, the results on education cleavages are virtually unaffected if we move to this Mélenchon-Hamon definition of left vote (rather than Mélenchon-Hamon-Macron).

⁴² See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.4d).

⁴³ The wealth gap drops in absolute value in 2017 (though it is still negative), but again this entirely comes from the highly affluent profile of the Macron vote.

election, which shows that high wealth is a stronger determinant of right wing vote than high income.⁴⁴

Section 2.6. Multiple-Elite Party System or Great Reversal?

By combining the results on changing cleavages by education and by income/wealth, I am now in a position to synthesize my main findings. I compare on Figure VII.a the evolution of the gap in left vote between university graduates and non-university graduates and the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 10% income and wealth voters, before controls. I do the same on Figure VII.b for the left vote gap between top 10% and bottom 90% education voters and between top 10% and bottom 90% income and wealth voters, after controls, which is the probably the most meaningful way to look at the data.⁴⁵

The general conclusion is clear: we have gradually moved from a class-based party system to what I propose to label a “multiple-elite” party system. Back in the 1950s-1960s, the party system was defined along class lines: the vote for left-wing parties was associated to both low-education and low-income voters, while the vote for right-wing parties was associated to both high-education and high-income voters. The left vote has gradually been associated with higher education voters, and in the 2000s-2010s we have a system where high-education voters support the “left” while high-income support the “right”. For reasons explained above, the inclusion of control variables accentuates the separation between the education and the income and wealth dimension. In effect, the most left-wing voters have become those with high education and relatively low income and wealth, while the most right-wing voters have become those with relatively low education and high income and wealth. This was not the case in the 1950s-1960s, when all dimensions were pushing in the same direction.

The difficult question – a question that I am unable to fully answer in the present paper – is to understand where this structural transformation comes from, and whether this is a stable equilibrium or not. To the extent that high education

⁴⁴ See e.g. the confidence intervals on Figures VII.a-VII.b.

⁴⁵ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.5a-2.5d) for all the other combinations.

commands high income in the long-run, one might argue that a “multiple-elite” party system is inherently unstable. That is, one might expect that the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% income voters will also come structurally positive in the future, just like the gap in left vote between top 10% and bottom 90% education voters. If this was to happen, this would correspond to a complete realignment of the party system: the former “left” (which used to be associated to low-income, low-education voters) would now be associated to high-income, high-education voters; whereas the former “right” (which used to be associated to high-income, high-education voters) would now be associated to low-income, low-education voters. In effect, such a party system would have little to do with the “left” vs “right” party system of the 1950s-1960s. Maybe it should better be described as an opposition with the “globalists” (high-income, high-education) and the “nativists” (low-income, low-education). This is roughly the way in which the new political actors themselves – e.g. Macron and Le Pen during the 2017 presidential election – tend to describe what they perceive to be the central political cleavage of our time (and indeed the second round of the French presidential election of 2017 is a perfect illustration of this).⁴⁶

It is unclear however at this stage whether this complete realignment will take place. One can also find some forces pushing for a stabilization of the “multiple-elite” party system. One such force is the wealth effect. In effect, the education gap has become strongly positive (i.e. high education voters now strongly support the “left”), the wealth gap has remained strongly negative (i.e. high wealth voters maintain a strong support to the “right”), while the income gap is in between the two and remains moderately negative. This reflects the fact that income is determined by a combination of education (human capital), wealth (non-human capital), and other factors. One could imagine a situation where some families and individuals specialize in the accumulation of education, while some others in the accumulation of wealth, so that the “multiple-elite” party system persists.⁴⁷ Also some members of high-education

⁴⁶ This “globalists” vs “nativists” cleavage was already visible in the 1992 and 2005 French referenda on Europe (as well in many parliamentary votes on Europe).

⁴⁷Note that the correlation structure between education, income and wealth - as measured in post-electoral surveys – appears to be relatively stable over time, at least as a first approximation. That is, the raw correlation between income and education appears stable around 0.3-0.35 over the 1958-2017 period, while the income-wealth raw correlation is stable around 0.2-0.3, and the education-wealth correlation is stable around 0.1-0.15.

elite might voluntarily choose to make career choices that are financially less rewarding than the high-income and high-wealth elites. I will further discuss these issues when I present evidence on changing political cleavages in the US and Britain (sections 3-4), and when I describe multi-dimensional models of inequality and political cleavages (section 5).

Section 2.7. The Transformation of Religious and Origin-Based Cleavages

I now turn to the evolution of religious and origin-based political cleavages. The structure of the electorate by religion has changed substantially in France between 1967 (when questions on religious practice were first asked in post-electoral surveys) and 2017. The fraction of the electorate reporting to be “Catholic” declined from 91% to 55%, while the fraction reporting to have “no religion” rose from 6% to 35%, and the fraction reporting “other religions” rose from 3% to 10%.⁴⁸ Among “Catholics”, the fraction reporting to be “practicing Catholics” (which I define as those reporting to go to the Church at least once a month) declined from 25% to 6%, and the “non-practicing Catholics” dropped from 66% to 49%. Among “other religions”, Islam rose from less than 1% to 5%, while Protestantism/Judaism/Buddhism/other rose from 3% to 5%. While Muslim voters are still a very small minority, they have become a noticeable minority (comparable in size to practicing Catholics).

Regarding the Catholic voters vs no-religion voters, we observe a strong and persistent right vs left cleavage. The gap has reduced over time, but it still very substantial and significant (see Figure VIII). Catholic voters tend to be older and to have higher income and wealth than voters with no religion, which partly explains their support for right-wing parties. But even after controlling for all observable characteristics, practicing Catholics vote a lot more for the right, while Atheists (individuals who report no religion vote) a lot more for the left.⁴⁹ Although the magnitude of the impact has declined over time, it is still of the order of 10-20 points in recent years, i.e. comparable or higher than the effects associated to education, income or wealth.

⁴⁸ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6a).

⁴⁹ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6c-2.6d).

I now turn to the effects associated to other religions, and particularly Islam. Until 1978, Islam is not registered separately from other religions in post-electoral surveys. In 1988 and 1995, Muslim voters make up about 1% of the electorate, and their reported vote is more left-wing than that of catholic voters, and comparable to that of voters with no religion. Between 1997 and 2012, the fraction of (self-reported) Muslim voters in the electorate gradually rises from 1% to 5%, and the fraction of them voting for left-wing parties rises to even higher levels, typically in the 80%-90% range (see Figure IX). Although the number of observations is limited, the fact that Muslim voters lean to the left is highly significant from a statistical standpoint, and more and more so over time.⁵⁰ Muslim voters tend to be younger and have lower income and wealth than other voters, which partly explains their left vote. However, all explanatory variables combined can only explain a relatively small part of the Muslim preference for the left: after taking into account all controls, the impact is systematically of the order of 30-40 percentage points, year after year (see Figure X). This is substantially larger than all other effects that we studied so far (gender, age, education, income or wealth). The strong left-wing preference of Muslim voters could seem surprising, especially in light of the fact that the left vote has historically been strongly associated to Atheists vs Catholics in France (and is still is), and given that the family values (particularly toward women's role and homosexuality) of Muslim voters are pretty far from those of lefty Atheists. This suggests that there is something stronger going on in other dimensions of the political conflict: presumably this has to do with the fact that Muslim voters perceive to be a lot of hostility from right-wing parties (and more sympathy from the left; more on this below).

Ideally, one would like to be able to distinguish between the effect on voting attitudes coming from the reported Muslim religion and the effect coming from different foreign origins (which might well have an impact on perceived discrimination and racism). Unfortunately, detailed questions on family origins were not asked before the 2007 post-electoral survey, which limits how much one can say about this.

The results obtained with foreign origins in 2007-2012 are relatively straightforward and consistent with those obtained with religion.⁵¹ As of 2012, 72% of the French

⁵⁰ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6h).

⁵¹ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6j).

electorate reports to have no foreign grand-parent, while 19% reports to have at least one foreign grand-parent coming from another European country (in practice mostly from Spain, Italy and Portugal), and 9% reports to have at least one grand-parent coming from an extra-European country (in practice mostly from Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa). Those with European foreign origins vote exactly in the same way as voters with no foreign origin (with left scores equal to 49% for both groups in 2012, vs 52% for the entire electorate), while those with extra-European origins vote massively for the left (77%). If we combine all explanatory factors of the vote, both socio-economic factors (gender, age, education, income, wealth) and religion/origins, we find that the pro-left attitude of Muslim voters resists to the inclusion of foreign origins. More precisely, socio-economic control variables reduce the Muslim left-wing preference from +42 points to +38 points in 2012, and adding foreign origins (including separate dummies for each region of origin) further reduces the effect to +26 points.⁵² In other words, for given gender, age, education, income, wealth and region of origin (for instance North Africa), there is still a sizable effect associating self-reported Muslim identity and left-wing vote. One natural interpretation is that Muslim voters perceive an additional, specific hostility from right-wing parties (and/or an additional, specific sympathy from left-wing parties), as compared for instance to voters with North African origins but who do not describe themselves as Muslim.⁵³ In the absence of more detailed data (more observations/questions and/or longer historical series on countries of origin), it is difficult to go further.

Section 2.8. Two-Dimensional, Four-Quarter Political Cleavages in France

We also have other direct survey evidence about the strength of the migration cleavage in French politics. Beginning in 1988, French post-electoral surveys systematically ask voters whether they believe or not that there are too many immigrants. The proportion of voters responding that there are too many immigrants has actually declined over time: it used to be as large as 70-75% in the 1980s and until the mid-1990s (vs 25-30% of voters believing that there are not too many immigrants), and it has declined to about 50% in 2007-2012, with a rebound a little

⁵² See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6k).

⁵³ There is strong evidence about specific anti-Muslim labour market discrimination in France (see Valfort 2017), so this interpretation seems plausible.

above 55% in 2017.⁵⁴ However the intensity of the right vs left cleavage on migration seems to have actually increased: the gap in left vote between voters believing there are not too many immigrants and those believing the opposite has always been large and positive (about 30-40 points, i.e. bigger than any other effect except the Muslim effect), and if anything it seems to have risen between the 1980s and the 2010s, both before and after controls, albeit in a relatively irregular manner.⁵⁵ In other words, the issue of migration seems to have become more divisive over time: the population is split almost 50-50 as to whether there are too many migrants or not (there is still a majority believing that there are too many migrants, but there is now a large minority - of almost equal size - believing the opposite), and the voting cleavage between the two quasi-halves is bigger than ever.

I will return to this discussion in section 5 when I present two-dimensional models of inequality and redistribution, with a pro-migrants/anti-migrants cleavage and a pro-redistribution/anti-redistribution cleavage. For now, it suffices to note that when the French voters are asked whether social justice entails further redistribution from the rich to the poor, we also observe that the electorate is split into two halves of comparable size: the fraction of the electorate responding that we should reduce inequality was equal to 52% in 2017 (vs 55-60% in 2002-2012).⁵⁶ The interesting point, however, is that the pro-migrants/anti-migrants halves and the pro-poor/pro-rich halves are almost entirely uncorrelated, in the sense that by combining these two questions we obtain four quarters of comparable size, particularly in 2012-2017.⁵⁷

The four quarters can be labeled as Internationalists-Egalitarians (pro-migrants, pro-poor); Internationalists-Inegalitarians (pro-migrants, pro-rich); Nativists-Inegalitarians (anti-migrants, pro-rich); Nativists-Egalitarians (anti-migrants, pro-poor). Back in 2002, the Internationalists-Inegalitarians made much less than a quarter of the electorate (only 12%); this is the group that has been growing the most (up to 23% in

⁵⁴ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6l).

⁵⁵ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6m).

⁵⁶ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6n). The rich-poor question is deliberately phrased in a fairly aggressive manner, namely: "In order to achieve social justice we need to take from the rich and give to the poor. Do you agree or disagree?". In the same manner as for the immigration questions ("There are too many immigrants in France. Do you agree or disagree?"), I grouped together the answers "completely agree"/"somewhat agree" and "completely disagree"/"somewhat disagree" and excluded the individuals who do not answer (less than 5%).

⁵⁷ See Piketty (2018, Figure 2.6o).

2007) (see Figure XI). Unfortunately the rich-poor question was not asked in the same manner before 2002 (and the immigrant question was not asked at all before 1988), so it is impossible to do consistent longer run analysis.

Finally it is interesting to note that this four-quarter decomposition of the electorate fits very well with the results of 2017 French presidential election, which looks like a perfect illustration of two-dimensional, four-quarter politics. I.e. in the first round the electorate was split into four groups of almost exactly equal size (see Table I): 28% of the vote for the “left” candidates Mélenchon/Hamon (these happen to be the most pro-migrants and pro-poor voters); 24% of the vote for the “centrist” candidate Macron (these voters are also pro-migrants, though a bit less so, and they are also pro-rich); 22% for the “right” candidate Fillon (these are anti-migrants and pro-rich voters); and 26% for the “extreme-right” candidates Le Pen/Dupont-Aignan (these are the most anti-migrant voters, and they are also pro-poor). I will return to this discussion and to the relation with the education vs income cleavages in section 5, after presenting the results for the US and Britain.

Section 3. Changing Political Cleavages in the United States

In this section, I present detailed results on the changing structure of political cleavages for the case of the United States. I begin by briefly describing the evolution of political parties and popular vote in the US over the 1948-2016 period (section 3.1), and the post-electoral surveys that I will be using (section 3.2). I then present basic breakdowns by gender and age (section 3.3), before moving on to my main results on breakdowns by education (section 3.4), income and wealth (section 3.5), and the shift to “multiple-elite” party system (section 3.6). I finally present results on breakdowns by ethnic and foreign origins (section 3.7). In all of these dimensions, I will stress the similarities and differences with the results obtained for France.

Section 3.1. Changing Political Parties and Electoral Results in the US, 1948-2016

The US party system is the best existing example of a two-party system (Democrats vs Republicans). As such, it is much simpler than the French party system, and also

much simpler than most party systems observed in Europe (including in Britain) and around the world. Although it is formally simple, the US party system is nevertheless relatively exotic and mysterious for many outside observers in Europe and elsewhere: how is it that the Democrats, which were the pro-slavery party in the 19th century, gradually became the New-Deal party and the “progressives” party over the course of the 20th century? One of the points that I am trying to make in this paper is that a better understanding of this historical trajectory might be highly relevant to analyze the evolution of multi-dimensional political cleavages that might occur in Europe, North America and elsewhere in the 21st century.

The apparent formal simplicity of the US party system should also not overshadow the fact that there has always been large ideological heterogeneity within each of the two main parties. These conflicts are not being addressed via the continuous creation of a multitude of new parties (as they are in a country like France), but this does not mean they do not exist: they rather take different forms and involve different institutional processes like factions and primaries in order to arbitrate them.

I will focus upon voting attitudes in US presidential elections (rather than in congressional elections), because they are usually more centered on national issues and involve the same candidates and policy platform for all voters (by construction).⁵⁸ The shares in popular vote observed in US presidential elections 1948-2016 have usually been relatively close to 50-50.⁵⁹ In particular, the vote shares obtained by third party candidates are usually very small (less than 10% of the vote for all third party candidates combined), with the exception of Wallace in 1968 (14%) and Perot in 1992 and 1996 (20% and 10%, respectively). In what follows I will exclude these candidates and focus upon the Democrats vs Republicans voting patterns (excluding third party voting), first because I am mostly interested in long run evolutions (and third party candidates are all unique in their own way), and next because my main purpose is to make comparison with left vs right voting patterns in France and Britain.

Section 3.2. Data Sources: US Post-Electoral Surveys 1948-2016

⁵⁸ I have also computed the same results for votes in congressional elections, and I find the same transformations. See on-line data appendix for computer codes and series.

⁵⁹ See Piketty (2018, Figure 3.1a).

There exists a long tradition of post-electoral surveys in the US. I will be using two main series of surveys: first the ANES series (American National Election Studies); and next the NEP series (National Exit Polls). Both series have strengths and drawbacks (which is why I choose to use both). The ANES surveys have been organized following every presidential election in the US between 1948 and 2016 (and also after every mid-term congressional election). They have been run by an academic consortium and the micro-files are easily accessible.⁶⁰

In this paper, I choose to rely primarily on ANES surveys because they provide the longest available consistent series. Their sample size was relatively limited in early surveys (about 1000-2000 observations) but it has grown over time (up to 4000-5000 observations in recent surveys). ANES surveys include dozens of questions on gender, age, education, occupation, income, religion, race, etc. Unfortunately, unlike the French post-electoral surveys, they do not include detailed questions on wealth and asset ownership.⁶¹

The NEP series have been organized following every US presidential election between 1972 and 2016 (and also after most congressional elections) by a consortium of media organizations (including CBS, CNN, NYT, etc.). They are less easily accessible than the ANES micro-files, they do not cover the pre-1972 period, and their questionnaire is more rudimentary and includes much fewer variables.⁶² Also the income question asked in NEP usually includes much fewer income brackets than the corresponding ANES question (typically 5-10 brackets in NEP

⁶⁰ ANES micro-files are available on-line on ANES website (see www.electionstudies.org). The academic consortium in charge of ANES has been based mostly at the University of Michigan (ICPSR/ISR).

⁶¹ We do have basic information on home ownership and self-employment status, which gives similar results than in France. Unfortunately we cannot compute wealth deciles.

⁶² NEP are exit polls (i.e. they are run right outside voting booths), while ANES are post-electoral surveys (i.e. individuals are interviewed in the days after the election, typically within two weeks, which allows for a longer questionnaire). I have accessed the NES files via the Roper Center (ropercenter.cornell.edu). The Roper Center also archives Gallup exit polls and opinion surveys that were organized in the US regularly since 1935, and which in some cases might include more detailed variables than those available in ANES surveys (see e.g. Kuziemko and Washington (2018) for a recent use of the information on racial attitudes available in early Gallup surveys; see section 3.7 below).

instead if 15-20 or more in ANES), so that it contains less information.⁶³ NEP does not include wealth information (just like ANES). Given my purposes in this paper, the only real advantage of NEP files is their bigger sample size (up to 20 000-25 000 observations in recent elections). I have therefore used NEP files mostly to perform robustness checks and to replicate ANES findings for the years and variables for which NEP data is available. In what follows I will focus upon the ANES results.

Section 3.3. Evolution of Gender and Age Cleavages

I begin by describing the evolution of US political cleavages with respect to gender and age. In the same way as for France, I should stress again that there is nothing really new here: the substantial novel results begin with the reversal of the education cleavage in the next section.

Regarding gender, I confirm previous findings according to which women have gradually turned from right to level during the past five to six decades.⁶⁴ As compared to France, the trend is very similar, though the level is different: in the US, women used to be moderately right-wing (pro-Republicans) and over time they have turned strongly left-wing (pro-Democrats); while in France, and to some extent in other European countries, women used to be strongly right-wing (apparently in relation to their stronger religious beliefs), and over time they have turned moderately left-wing. This is consistent with previous findings (see e.g. Edlund and Pande 2002), and this is not an issue on which this paper has much to contribute (see the discussion in section 2.3 above).

Regarding age, I again find the same basic pattern as for France: young voters generally tend to support the left substantially more than old voters, but the gap is highly volatile, can sometime be very close to zero, or even go the other way, for instance at the time of the Reagan election in 1980.⁶⁵

Section 3.4. The Reversal of the Education Cleavage

⁶³ Typically it is difficult to isolate the top 5% or top 1% income group with the NEP data (for some years it is even difficult to isolate the top 10% group), while this is do-able with ANES.

⁶⁴ See Piketty (2018, Figure 3.2a).

⁶⁵ See Piketty (2018, Figure 3.2b).

I now turn to my findings on the reversal of the education cleavage. Generally speaking, the results that I obtain for the US regarding education cleavages are almost identical to those obtained for France. Given the enormous differences in party systems, socio-economic structures and political histories between the two countries, this is very striking.

Let me start with the simplest indicator of education cleavage, i.e. the gap in Democratic vote between university graduates and non-university graduates. Back in the 1940s-1960s, the gap was large and negative, around -15 points: university graduates voted a lot more for Republican candidates than other voters. The gap has gradually shrank over time, and by 2016 it has become strongly positive, close to +15 points. Of course there might be a special Trump effect in 2016 – an issue on which I will return below, and which appears to be particularly strong regarding the income cleavage. Regarding education, however, what we see in 2016 does not seem out of line with what we in previous years: it rather fits well in the continuity of a long-run evolution, in the same way as what we saw regarding the education cleavage in France for the 2017 election (see section 2.4 above).

The detailed results by highest degree are again very striking (see Figure XII). Back in the 1940s-1960s, we observe a monotonically decreasing relationship between education and Democratic support: the higher the education level, the lower the Democratic vote. E.g. in the 1948, more than 60% of voters with primary or no degree (i.e. high-school dropouts, 63% of the electorate at the time) supported the Democratic candidate, vs about 50% of voters with secondary degrees (high-school graduates, 31% of the electorate) and only 20% of voters with university degrees (only 6% of the electorate). This monotonically decreasing relationship has changed gradually during the 1970s-1980s-1990s, and by the 2000s-2010s it has started to look more and more upward sloping at the top of educational pyramid.

By 2016, the relation between education and Democratic vote is close to being monotonically increasing. The only exception (and the only difference in France) lies at the very bottom of the distribution: high-school drop-outs support the Democratic candidate more than high-school graduates. This is largely due to a minority effect

(though not entirely). Above high-school level, the relation between education and Democratic vote is strongly increasing. In particular, 70% of voters with Master degrees (11% of the electorate) supported the Democratic candidate. At the very top of the educational distribution, 76% of voters with PhD degrees (2% of the electorate) voted democrats. In contrast, only 51% of voters with Bachelor degrees (19% of the electorate) and 44% of high-school graduates (59% of the electorate) did the same.

We now look at the evolution of the education voting gap before and after controls. The controls for gender and age have limited impact, while the controls for income and race have a significant upward effect on the levels. This is due to the fact that minority voters tend both to have much lower education levels and to vote massively more for Democrats. Controlling for race, the gap in Democratic vote between university graduates and non-university graduates is pushed upwards, and becomes marginally positive during the 1980s-1990s and strongly positive in the 2000s-2010s (much before the Trump election).

Given the magnitude of educational expansion over the 1948-2016 period, the most meaningful way to analyze changing political cleavages by education is probably to look at the gap in voting behavior between top 10% education voters and bottom 90% education voters (and more generally to compare relative positions in the percentile distribution of education rather than absolute levels). In the same manner as for France, I define education deciles within a given year, and I estimate decile-level vote shares by assuming a fixed vote score within education-year cell.⁶⁶

The results on the gap in Democratic vote between top 10% and bottom 90% education voters are reported on Figure XIII, both before and after controls. The complete reversal of the gap, from large and negative in the 1940s-1960s to large and positive in the 2000s-2010s, is even more spectacular than when we look at the gap between university graduates and non-university graduates, particularly in recent decades.⁶⁷ This is because the gradient within university graduates has become very large in the recent period (with holders of advanced degrees supporting Democratic

⁶⁶ In effect, this leads to underestimate inter-decile gap, whether the relation between education and voting score is monotonically decreasing or increasing, since this neglects within-cell variations.

⁶⁷ See Piketty (2018, Figure 3.3a).

candidates much more strongly than those with bachelor degrees). It is also striking to see that the after-control top-10%-vs-bottom-90% education gradient observed in the 2016 election appears to be just a little bit higher than in previous elections, and very much in line with the long run evolution. In this particular sense, the Clinton-Trump election is not an anomaly. As we see below, the change in income gradient is the real novelty of the election.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, the reversal of the education gradient appears to be almost identical in timing and magnitude in the US and in France. This is true whether we look at the gap in voting attitudes between university graduates and non-university graduates, before or after controls, or between top 10% and bottom 90% education voters, before and after controls.⁶⁸ I will later discuss how these similar evolutions can be interpreted.

Section 3.5. Stability and Attenuation of Income/Wealth Cleavages

I now turn to my findings on changing US political cleavages by income. I have computed the profiles of Democratic vote share by income percentiles for all presidential elections between 1948 and 2016, by using the same estimation method as for France. The profile is generally downward sloping, particularly at the level of the top 10% (except in 2016). Within the bottom 90%, the profile appears to be more strongly downward sloping (i.e. less flat) in the US than in France, which seems to be related to the lesser historical importance of the “poor right-wing self-employed” (in particular “poor right-wing peasant”) in the US as compared to France, at least in the post-World War 2 era. At the level of the top 10%, the profile is generally more strongly downward sloping in France than in the US. But overall the two countries display broadly similar income profiles.

If we now look at the profile observed during the 2016 US presidential election, we see something entirely new: for the first time, top 10% income voters support the Democratic candidate more than the Republican candidate, and more so than lower income groups.⁶⁹ By computing the evolution of the gap in Democratic vote between

⁶⁸ See Piketty (2018, Figures 3.3d-3.3g).

⁶⁹ See Piketty (2018, Figure 3.4a-3.4b).

top 10% and bottom 90% income voters, both before and after controls, one can see that this gap was approximately constant between the 1940s-1950s and the 1980s-1990s, increased slightly in the 2000s and early 2010s, and most importantly rose sharply in 2016. This is the real innovation of the 2016 election: high education voters had already turned Democrats many elections before, but for the first time high income voters turned Democrats as well.

Regarding political cleavages by wealth, we unfortunately do not have the same detailed wealth questionnaires in US post-electoral surveys as those available in French surveys. Note however that we do have some basic wealth variables for a number of elections (particularly regarding home ownership, and sometime for other assets), and this data shows the same pattern that what we find for France (we also find the same profile for Britain, see below), namely that high wealth is an even stronger predictor of the vote for Republicans (or right-wing parties in the French context, or Conservatives in British context) than high income. We also have more detailed US wealth data for certain years (for instance in 2012), which again confirms this finding.⁷⁰ It seems likely that this conclusion also applies in earlier years and throughout the period 1948-2016 period, just like in France and Britain.⁷¹

Section 3.6. Multiple-Elite Party System or Great Reversal?

By combining our results on changing US political cleavages by education and by income, we obtain the following picture. Whether we measure education cleavages by comparing university graduates vs non-university graduates (before and after controls), or by comparing top 10% vs bottom 90% education voters (also before and after controls, which is probably most meaningful, we find the same broad evolution of the party system in the US.⁷² Moreover the evolution is very similar to that observed in France (compare Figure XIV to Figure VII.b). Back in the 1940s-1960s, the US party system could be characterized as a class-based system, in the sense

⁷⁰ The 2012 data comes from the US version of the CSDS project (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems), an international consortium organizing homogenous post-electoral surveys in dozens of countries. All data is available on-line (www.cses.org). The project includes four waves so far: module 1 (1996-2001), 2 (2001-2006), 3 (2006-2011) and 4 (2011-2016). Module 4 includes a special questionnaire on wealth (including categorical questions on ownership for several asset categories: home ownership, stock, saving, and professional business assets).

⁷¹ See the discussion on Britain in section 4.5 below.

⁷² See Piketty (2018, Figure 3.5e-3.5h).

that low education and low income voters supported the same party (the Democrats), while high education and high income voters supported the other party (the Republicans). The US have gradually moved toward a “multiple-elite” party system, whereby the high-education elite votes for Democrats and the high-income elite votes for the Republicans. We have also included on Figure XIV the results obtained for the wealth cleavage by combining income information with the home ownership variable available in ANES surveys. This should be viewed as exploratory, given the lack of better wealth data.⁷³

In the same as way for France, it is unclear at this stage whether this “multiple-elite” party system will persist, or whether it will gradually evolve toward a complete realignment of the party system along “globalists” (high education, high income) vs “nativists” (low education, low income) lines. The 2016 election clearly seems to point in this direction: for the first time, the Democratic vote was associated both to high education and high income voters. It could be that this is largely due to a specific Trump factor, and that the high-income elite will return to Republicans in the near future (of course this will depend on the choice of Republican and Democratic candidates). The important point, however, is that the unusual political events observed in the US and France in 2016-2017 should also be viewed within the context of a long-run transformation of the party system. The latter is now facing different possible trajectories: stabilization of the “multiple-elite” party system; “globalists” vs “nativists” realignment; return to some form of class-based system.

Section 3.7. The Transformation of Racial and Origin-Based Cleavages

I now turn to the evolution of US racial and origin-based cleavages. Here the basic facts are relatively well-known, and I would like to stress the differences and similarities with French evolutions (which are less well known), and most importantly the interaction with the multiple-elite transformation.

⁷³Namely we define a high-wealth index equal to 1 for individuals who are home owners and members of the top 20% income group, and equal to 0 otherwise. See the discussion below for the case of Britain, where more asset variables are available.

I report on Figure XV the evolution of vote shares for Democratic party candidate by ethnic groups in US presidential elections between 1948 and 2016. The proportion of Blacks (Africans-Americans) in the electorate has been relatively stable around 10-12% throughout the period, and the fraction voting Democrats has constantly been within the 80-95% range from 1964 (the beginning of the Civil Rights movement) until the present day. In previous elections (1948-1960), the Democratic vote share among Blacks was less overwhelming, though already very substantial (about 60-70%). The fact that Black voters already supported the Democrats before the party officially supported desegregation can be rationalized in a number of ways. First and mostly, from the 1930s onward, or even before, the Democratic New-Deal-type policy platform was already benefiting low-income low-education voters (and therefore the vast majority of Black voters, albeit indirectly). Next, Northern Democrats were not segregationists (unlike Southern Democrats), and their attitude on racial issues was not necessarily very different from that of Republicans.^{74 75}

In any case, the point is that from 1964 onwards Black voters have always given overwhelming majorities (80-95%) to Democratic candidates, and that this has become one of the most structuring (if not the most structuring) characteristics of the structure of US political conflict. In contrast, Whites have never given a majority to a Democratic candidate since 1964 (i.e. with a whites-only voting system based on popular vote all Presidents would have been Republicans).

It is striking to see that the overwhelming Black vote for Democrats (80-95%) is quantitatively similar to the overwhelming Muslim vote for left-wing parties in France since the mid-1990s (80-95%; see Figure IX and section 2.7 above). Also, in the

⁷⁴ The limited opinion survey evidence that we have from 1936 onwards suggests that Blacks were already supporting Democratic candidates (i.e. Roosevelt) in the 1936-1944 presidential elections by a margin of about 70-30 (close to what we see in the 1948-1960 elections); party identification among Blacks moved more gradually (about 50-50 in 1936-1944, up to 70-30 in 1948-1960, and over 90-10 from 1964 onwards), suggesting that it took more time for Black electorate to acknowledge that Democrats had pro-Blacks. See e.g. Ladd and Hardley (1975) and Bositis (2012, Table 1) for a compilation of early opinion survey polls (mostly from Gallup). Unfortunately there is very little survey data available before 1936, and one needs to use local-level election data to recover individual-level cleavages.

⁷⁵ Post-1860 Republicans were abolitionists and pro-free-labour, but this obviously does not imply that they were strong supporters of the political and economic emancipation of Africans-Americans. On the way Democrats were able during the Reconstruction period to rebuild a winning coalition by portraying Republicans as captured by the North-East financial and manufacturing elite (a coalition which in many ways seeds the grains for the future New-Deal Democratic coalition), see e.g. Barreyre (2015).

same way as for the Muslim vote in France, adding control variables for education, income, wealth, etc. explains only a relatively small fraction of the Black vote for Democrats (see Figure XVI, and compare to Figure X for France). In the two countries, these voting patterns can be accounted for by the fact that both minorities – the Black racial minority in the US and the Muslim ethno-religious minority in France – perceive substantial hostility on the “right” side of the political spectrum (Republicans in the US, right-wing parties in France) and more sympathy on the “left” side (Democrats in the US, left-wing parties in France). On the other side, a substantial fraction of the White majority considers that the “left” unduly favors the minority, which in their view justifies their vote for the “right”.

Although there are commonalities between the two situations, there are also enormous differences, and in particular the role of the Latino vote in the US. Non-Blacks minorities accounted for a very small fraction of the US electorate during the 1940s-1960s (less than 1%), but since the 1970s they have increased enormously, up to almost 20% of the electorate in the late 2010s (mostly Latinos).⁷⁶ The Latinos and other non-Black minority voters have always given a strong majority to Democratic candidates: between 55% and 70% of the vote in all presidential elections between 1972 and 2016. Although this is less overwhelming than the Black Democratic vote, this is still a very strong majority: the gap with the White vote is strong and persistent, about 20 percentage points, and only moderately reduced by controls. This makes a very big difference with France (or more generally with European countries). In France, about 10% of the electorate in 2010s has extra-European foreign origins (mostly Maghreb and Sub-saharan Africa), i.e. roughly the same fraction as the Black population in the US, and about 20% of the electorate has European foreign origins (most from Spain, Portugal and Italy), i.e. roughly the same fraction as the Latino population in the US. But the big difference is that the French Latinos are not Latinos, in the sense that they vote exactly in the same manner as the population with no foreign grand-parent (see Figure XVII).

In the case of the US, it has long been argued that racism and anti-Blacks attitudes can contribute to explain the smaller size of the welfare state and social transfers (as

⁷⁶ Here we include non-Black non-Latino minorities (less than 2% of the electorate in 2016) with Latino voters.

compared to Europe).⁷⁷ In particular, racial issues are the prime candidate explanation as to why the Democrats gradually lost a large part of the working class White voters after the Civil Rights movement (especially in the South), thereby contributing to weaken and eventually dismantle the Democratic New-Deal coalition.⁷⁸ In effect, racial diversity and racial conflict have made it more complicated to keep the poor Blacks and the poor Whites in the same coalition. This can contribute to explain the transition away from the “class-based” party system of the 1950s-1960s toward the “multiple-elite” party system of the 2000s-2010s.

This certainly does not imply, however, that this is the only explanation. First, the extent of “racism” of certain White voters in the US (or France or elsewhere) cannot simply be taken as given. At some level, it must be related to actual experience with racial relations, and also to the ability of certain social policies and institutions to unify (or not) the perception of identity and class solidarity. E.g. French Latinos are not perceived and do not perceive themselves as Latinos, unlike US Latinos. The fact that social policies have been relatively segmented in the US (i.e. targeted toward specific groups) has arguably made it more difficult to develop a sense of common interest and to counteract racist perceptions and other prejudices.⁷⁹

Next, even in the absence of any racial divide, one can find some other reasons and mechanisms (e.g. related to educational expansion per se) which might have contributed to the shift from “class-based” to “multiple-elite” party system. In the case of the US, I find the same transformation of the party system into a “multiple-elite” pattern even if I exclude entirely the Southern states. Maybe most importantly, in the case of France, I find that the gradual shift toward the “multiple-elite” system started in the 1960s-1970s, i.e. before the cleavage about migration (and particularly about non-European migrants and Islam) really became salient, i.e. in the 1980s-1990s.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Alesina, Glaeser, Sacerdote (2001) and Roemer, Lee, Van Der Straeten (2007).

⁷⁸ See e.g. recent research by Kuziemko and Washington (2018), which shows that racial attitudes (as measured by responses to survey questions) – rather than the rise of the income of Southern Whites (relatively to national average) – can better account why specific groups of White voters shifted from Democrats to Republicans in particular states and years.

⁷⁹ Ashok, Kuziemko, Washington (2015) analyze other reasons explaining declining support for redistribution within specific groups in recent decades (in spite of rising inequality), e.g. among the elderly (who might fear to lose Medicare benefits in case social transfers are extended to other groups) and among Africans-Americans (which might reflect the fact that “transfers” have been increasingly associated to race-based aid and negative perceptions).

This points towards the existence of a separate mechanism which can contribute to explain the transformation of the structure of political conflict, independently from the issue of migration and racial/ethnic/religions diversity (which of course does not mean that this issue did not contribute as well). I will return to this discussion when I present theoretical models in section 5.

Section 4. Changing Political Cleavages in Britain

In this section, I present detailed results on the changing structure of political cleavages for the case of Britain. I begin by briefly describing the evolution of political parties and popular vote in Britain over the 1945-2017 period (section 4.1), and the main data sources (post-electoral surveys) that I will be using (section 4.2). I then discuss basic breakdowns by gender and age (section 4.3), before moving on to my main results on breakdowns by education (section 4.4), income/wealth and the shift to “multiple-elite” party system (section 4.5). I finally present results on breakdowns by religion and ethnic groups (section 4.6).

Section 4.1. Changing Political Parties and Electoral Results in Britain 1945-2017

Together with the US system, the British party system is the best example of a two-party system. The shares in popular vote obtained by the various parties competing in all British general elections that took place between 1945 and 2017 show that the top two parties over this 72-year-long period have always been the Conservative party and the Labour party.⁸⁰ In the famous 1945 election, Attlee’s Labour party attracted 48% of the vote, vs 36% for Churchill’s Conservative party. This led in the following years to the creation of the NHS and the modern British welfare state. In the 2017 election, May’s Conservative party obtained 42% of the vote, vs 40% for Corbyn’s Labour. Third parties usually obtain less than 10-15% of the vote, except in 1987-

⁸⁰ See Piketty (2018, Figure 4.1a). Note that in the 18th and 19th centuries the two-party system involved the Conservatives and the Liberals (or the Whigs). It took almost half a century, between 1900 and 1945, for the Labour party to replace the Liberals as the second major party. In other words, the British system has always been a two-party system, but the identity of the two parties has changed, and transitions from one two-party system to the next one can take a very long time. Internal within-party transformations usually provide a simpler mechanism to shift the party system.

1992 and 2005-2010 when the Lib-Dems attracted over 20% of voters; by 2015-2017, they seem to be back around 5-10%, where they were in the 1950s-1960s.⁸¹

The contrast between the stability of the two major British parties (Conservative and Labour) provides a striking contrast with the French political scene, where both sides of the spectrum have a long history of permanently creating new party names and acronyms. The contrast is usually attributed to the different voting system (one-round in Britain, two-round in France), but as I already noted this might be endogenous, at least in part. In the context of the present paper, I will exclude the other votes and I will concentrate on the Labour vs Conservative vote. The justification for excluding the other votes is again that my main purpose in this paper is to look at broad long-run evolutions and to make comparisons with the two other countries.

Section 4.2. Data Sources: British Post-Electoral Surveys 1963-2017

There exists a relatively long tradition of post-electoral surveys in Britain. The most complete and longest series are the BES surveys (British Election Study). They are organized by a consortium of academic organizations and the micro-files are easily accessible.⁸² The first BES survey was conducted in 1963 (including retrospective questions on voting attitudes in the general elections of 1959 and 1955), and subsequently BES surveys were conducted after all general elections since 1964 (namely in 1964, 1966, 1970, 1974, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017).

In the same way as the French and US equivalent surveys, BES surveys include dozens of questions on gender, age, education, occupation, income, wealth, religion, ethnic and foreign origins, etc. Sample size is about 4000 observations in recent surveys (but closer to 1000-2000 in early surveys). The wealth variables are less detailed than in the French surveys, but more detailed than in the US (see below).

Section 4.3. Evolution of Gender and Age Cleavages

⁸¹ The Liberals-Democrats (Lib-Dems) are the modern incarnation of the Liberals. During the 1980s they briefly formed the Liberals/SDP Alliance with a split from the Labour party.

⁸² The BES project has been based for the most part at the universities of Manchester and Oxford. All files are accessible on-line (www.britishelectionstudy.com).

I begin by briefly describing the evolution of British political cleavages with respect to gender and age. In the same way as for France and the US, I stress that there is nothing really new here: the substantial novel results begin with the reversal of the education cleavage in the next section.

Regarding gender, I confirm previous findings according to which women have gradually turned from right to level during the past five to six decades.⁸³ The trends are the same in France and the US, and the levels are closer to France than then to the US: in the US, women used to be moderately right-wing (pro-Republicans) and over time they have turned strongly left-wing (pro-Democrats); while in both Britain and France, women used to be strongly right-wing and over time they have turned moderately left-wing.

Regarding age, I again find the same basic pattern as for France and the US: young voters generally tend to support the left substantially more than old voters, but the gap is highly volatile.⁸⁴ The enormous gradient observed in 2015-2017 is particularly striking: the fraction of voters supporting labour is about 30-40 points higher among the 18-to-34-year-old than among the 65-year-old over, a magnitude that has never been recorded for an age in post-war survey data in the three countries under study. Even in France in the 1970s, with a youth strongly leaning to the left, the similarly defined age gradient was somewhat less than 30 points. This expresses the strong hostility of the youth to the Tories and to Brexit in recent years.

Section 4.4. The Reversal of the Education Cleavage

I now turn to the results on the education cleavage. I find the same basic result as in France and the US. In particular, the gap in labour vote between university graduates and non-university graduates used to be large and negative in the 1950s-1960s (as large as -20 points or even -30 points), and it gradually dropped in absolute values during the 1970s-1980s-1990s, before becoming positive in the 2000s-2010s, both before and after controls. The same conclusion holds when I look at the gap in labour

⁸³ See Piketty (2018, Figure 4.2a).

⁸⁴ See Piketty (2018, Figure 4.2b).

vote between top 10% and bottom 90% education voters (both before and after controls), which is probably the most consistent way to look at this evolution (see Figure XVIII).⁸⁵

It is worth noting that although the trend is virtually identical in the three countries, the level of the gap in left vote between high and low education voters has always been somewhat lower (i.e. more negative, or less positive) in Britain than in France and the US (see Figure I above). This holds whether we compare the left vote gap between university graduates and non-university graduates, both before and after controls, or the left vote gap between top 10% and bottom 90% education voters, both before and after controls, the latter variant being the most robust comparison.⁸⁶

In other words, the British party system used to be even more “class-based” than the French and US systems: back in the 1950s-1960s, it was very rare for educated individuals to vote for Labour rather than the Conservative; and it took a very long time for the educated elite to shift vote from Conservative to Labour (as compared to France and the US); and when they finally shifted, they did so less massively than in France and the US. This is consistent with the ideological and political origins of the Labour vs Conservative divide in Britain, which are indeed more explicitly class-based (as the very name of the “labour” party indicates) than the cleavages which led to the development of the party systems in the other two countries.⁸⁷ The interesting point, however, is that at the end of the day the long run evolutions appear to be very similar, particularly in recent years, when university graduates and particularly those with the highest degrees (the top 10% education group) have massively shifted to labour.

Section 4.5. Multiple-Elite Party System or Great Reversal?

⁸⁵ See also Piketty (2018, Figure 4.3a-4.3c) for the alternative specifications.

⁸⁶ See also Piketty (2018, Figure 4.3d-4.3g) for the alternative specifications.

⁸⁷ In an interesting article (« Am I a Liberal ? », published in 1925 in *The Nation & Athenaeum*, republished in his *Essays in Persuasion*, 1931), John Maynard Keynes – a perfect example of the educated elite – famously explained why he would never vote Labour : « I do not believe that the intellectual elements in the Labour Party will ever exercise adequate control; too much will always be decided by those who do not know *at all* what they are talking about. (...) I incline to believe that the Liberal Party is still the best instrument of future progress ». Had he not died in 1946, he might have finally become a Labour Brahmin ; but this certainly would have taken a long time.

I now present the results on income and wealth cleavages. The profile of labour vote by income percentile has generally been relatively steep in Britain, both within the bottom 90% (typically steeper than in France) and at the level of the top 10%. The gap in labour vote between top 10% and bottom 90% income voters has always been substantial in Britain, particularly at the beginning of the period, both before and after controls, with a slight attenuation over time.⁸⁸

If we combine the findings on education, income and wealth cleavages, we find that Britain has gradually moved from a “class-based” party system (with low education, low income and low wealth voters supporting Labour) to a “multiple-elite” party system: high education voters now strongly support Labour, while high-income and especially high-wealth voters strongly support Conservative (see Figure XIX).⁸⁹

One interesting difference with France and the US is that in Britain there is no sign that high-income voters could shift sides and support Labour in the near future. If anything, the “multiple elite” nature of the British party system was reinforced in the recent 2015-2017 elections: high-education voters have increased their support for Labour party, while high-income voters have increased their support for the Conservatives. This stands in clear contrast with the recent evolutions observed in France and the US (see Figure VII.b for France and Figures XIV for the the US), where high-income voters were moving in the direction of the “left-globalists” (Clinton-Macron), suggesting the possibility of a gradual shift toward a complete realignment of the party system along “globalists” (high-education, high-income) vs “nativists” (low-education, low-income) lines.

Despite its imperfections, available evidence on wealth cleavages in Britain also confirms the stabilization of the “multiple-elite” system. High-wealth voters have always had a strong Conservative preference (even stronger than that of high-income voters), and this does not seem to be changing.⁹⁰ The fact that high-income and

⁸⁸ See Piketty (2018, Figure 4.4a-4.4c).

⁸⁹ See also Piketty (2018, Figure 4.5a-4.5h) for the alternative specifications.

⁹⁰Here I define high-wealth as full home owners (no mortgage). This information on mortgages is available on a consistent basis in BES surveys (unlike in the US). I would get similar results by combining home ownership and income information like in the US. In the BES surveys of the 1980s-1990s, we also have information on ownership of newly privatized stock ownership, and this again

high-wealth voters show no tendency to shift Labour can naturally be related to the relatively strong pro-redistribution stance taken by the party leadership (Corbyn). Of course one could also imagine a different scenario for the future, e.g. one where Labour takes an increasingly pro-EU stance (and the Conservative an increasingly protectionist stance), so that high-income and high-wealth voters join Labour on this basis; this could mean that Britain also moves toward a globalists vs nativists cleavage. But this does not seem to be the most likely evolution at this stage.

In any case, the point is that this comparison between Britain and France-US illustrates the fact that different possible evolutions are possible, including a stabilization of the “multiple-elite” party system, or a complete realignment (globalists vs nativists). A third possibility would be a return to class-based party system. In principle, this could happen either from an internationalist or a nativist perspective. In the context of Britain and the Labour party (a party that has long been associated with a pro-migrant stance, as compared to Conservatives), the internationalist perspective is more relevant. A return to class-based system would correspond to a situation where Labour leadership would amplify its pro-redistribution platform. In order to regain the low education vote, one would however need to be very persuasive regarding the possibility of an internationalist egalitarian platform (e.g. based upon transnational fiscal coordination to enforce a more progressive tax system) that would benefit them (more than the anti-migrant stance which many support). This is uncertain but not impossible.

A shift to a nativist class-based party system seems less likely (but again not entirely impossible). This would correspond to a situation where a nativist party (e.g. National Front in France, or Trump in the US) gradually shifts to a strong pro-redistribution platform. The chief historical precedent is the gradual transition of the Democratic party from the party of slavery to the party of the New Deal over the 1860-1960 period (an evolution which itself did not prove to be very stable). The recent experience with Trump suggests that ruling nativists are more likely to adopt an anti-migrant pro-business platform, but different trajectories could take place in other countries in the future. E.g. in recent years ruling nativist parties in Poland, Hungary

strongly associated to Conservative vote. Unfortunately we do not have enough consistent asset ownership variables to estimate wealth deciles in a reliable manner (as I do for France).

or Italy have implemented more generous social policies (e.g. regarding family benefits) than their predecessors. However so far they have proved little willingness or ability to develop more redistributive taxation or education policies. In any case, historical evidence shows that such transitions can span over many decades and entail substantial violence and damages.⁹¹

The general point is that with multi-dimensional inequality and cleavages, multiple equilibria and bifurcations are possible, depending on different party strategies (e.g. Corbyn vs Blair strategy in the case of the British Labour party), or to small differences in tight election races. E.g. the cleavages structures in the 2016 presidential election would probably have looked fairly different (at least along the income dimension) had Sanders won the Democratic primaries against Clinton. The clearest case where multiple bifurcations could have happened - and could happen in the future - is the first round of the French 2017 presidential election (see section 2.8 and Table I above): all top four candidates were so close that any combination of two could have made it to the second round; presumably the cleavages structures would have been very different with a second round Mélenchon-Fillon, Mélenchon-Le Pen, Fillon-Le Pen, Mélenchon-Macron or Macron-Fillon (instead of Macron-Le Pen), possibly with long lasting effects, for better and for worst.

Section 4.6. The Transformation of Religious and Origin-Based Cleavages

I now turn to the results on the transformation of religious and origin-based cleavages in Britain. Generally speaking, the results are very close to those obtained for France.

This is particularly striking regarding the evolution of religious cleavages.⁹² Just like in France, more than 90% of the voters used to describe themselves as Christians: 96% in 1964 (putting together Anglicans, other Protestants and Catholics). This proportion gradually fell to 43% in 2017. In the meantime, the proportion of voters reporting “no religion” rose from 3% in 1964 to 48% in 2017 (even more than in France). Just like in France, the Christians vs no-religion divide is strongly associated

⁹¹ I.e. before becoming the New Deal party and finally the Civil Rights party, the Democratic party implemented highly harmful policies against minorities in the South during almost a century.

⁹² See also Piketty (2018, Figure 4.6a).

to Conservatives vs Labour voting pattern (though the magnitude of the effect is somewhat smaller in Britain). Next, and most importantly, we observe exactly the same patterns regarding the Muslim vote. In Britain like in France, Islam used to be non-existent (it is still largely non-existent in the US). Before 1979 Islam was included with other religions in BES surveys so we can look specifically at Muslim voters. When the question is first asked in the 1979 survey, less than 1% of voters describe themselves as Muslims. The proportion gradually rises in the following three decades, up to 5% of voters in 2017, exactly the same level as in France, albeit with different origins (British Muslims largely come from South Asia, while French Muslims mostly originate from North Africa, reflecting different colonial experiences). Even more strikingly, British Muslims have always voted massively for the Labour party, typically with scores around 80-95%, just like in France (see Figure XX, and compare to Figure IX for France), and also like the Black Democratic vote in the US. The magnitude of the effect seems to have increased somewhat over time, but it was already massive at the beginning of the period.

Unfortunately the British surveys do not include the same questions on foreign grandparents and countries of origin as those asked in the recent French surveys, so we cannot go fully compare the results between the two countries. Starting in 1979, the British surveys start asking questions on self-designated ethnic groups. At that time, 98% of the voters described themselves as “Whites” (or “English”, or “Scott”, etc.), while about 1% described themselves as “Africans-Caribbeans” and about 1% as “Indians-Pakistanis-Bengladeshis”. By 2017, the proportion of “Whites” has declined to 89%, while “African-Caribbeans” have increased to 3%, “Indians-Pakistanis-Bengladeshis” to 6%, and others categories (mostly “Chinese” and “Arabs”) to 2%. In the same way as for France, voters with extra-European origins give strong support to the Labour party (see Figure XXI). This holds independently from religion, but there seems to be an additional effect associated to Islam as such (like in France, though the data is imperfect).

The basic reason why Muslim and extra-European voters support so massively the Labour party in Britain throughout the 1979-2017 period is also the same as in France: voters with extra-European origins (and especially the Muslims) perceive a lot of hostility from the Conservatives, and more sympathy from the Labour party.

Also starting in 1979, British surveys start asking questions about whether there are too many immigrants in Britain (similar to the questions which appear in the French surveys in 1988). It is striking to see that a vast majority of voters responds that there are too many immigrants (over 75% in 1979), but that Conservative and Labour voters give very different responses as how to address the problem: Conservative supporters believe that the only viable solution is to stop immigration altogether, while Labour supporters believe that creating more jobs and constructing more housing units in large cities could help solve the problem (though a large proportion also favours a complete end to immigration). When asked about which party is more likely to deliver a full stop to immigration, 96% respond the Conservatives (and only 4% respond Labour). In retrospect, the issue appears to play a significant role in the 1979 election and the Conservative victory.⁹³

It is tempting to relate this to the US research showing that the racist white flight strongly contributed to the decline of the Democratic party following the Civil Rights movement (see section 3.7 above), and in particular contributed to the Nixon 1968 election, and later to the Reagan 1980 and Trump 2016 elections. This is interesting, especially because the Thatcher-Reagan victories are usually associated with the rise of neo-liberalism: it is possible that the rise of ethno-religious cleavages played a larger role than what is usually assumed. Also this shows that major transformations of cleavage structures can take place within the same institutional party structure, i.e. without changing the names of the party or creating new parties. In the case of France, it is natural to associate the historical rise of low-education right-wing vote to the development of the National Front (and the historical decline of low-education left-wing vote to the demise of the Communist Party).⁹⁴ However the US and British cases show the same structural transformations can take place within the same two-party systems, i.e. without a Communist Party and without a National Front. Of

⁹³ It has also been argued that attitudes on migration already played a decisive role in the 1970 Conservative victory, following Enoch Powell's famous « Rivers of Blood » April 20 1968 speech against the Race Relations Bill promoted by the Labour government. According to Gallup polls conducted at the time, 73% of the British electorate supported Powell (and disapproved the decision of Tory leader Heath to sack him from Shadow Cabinet) and 84% approved a drastic reduction of immigration. Powell was sacked, but the episode contributed to make the Labour vs Conservative conflict on migration more salient.

⁹⁴ Detailed results by party show that communist vote was indeed stronger among low education voters in the 1950s-1960s (as compared to socialist vote and center-left vote), and that FN vote is also stronger among low education voters in the 2000s-2010s (as compared to vote for center-right and other right-wing parties).

course this is not saying that parties are unimportant. But this shows that it can be fruitful and justified to group parties in broad ideological coalitions (as we did for France) in order to compare the evolution of political cleavages between countries with very different party systems and political histories. Some of the most important evolutions might be taking place independently from the institutional party structure, and appear to be better accounted for by the changing structure of underlying intellectual and substantial cleavages than by the specific institutional vehicles carrying these cleavages.

Section 5. Multi-Dimensional Models of Inequality and Political Cleavages

In this section, I present simple two-dimensional models of inequality, beliefs and political cleavages, which might help to interpret some of the evolution analyzed in the previous sections. In effect, these models build upon some previous work of mine (Piketty, 1995) and introduce multiple dimensions of inequality (domestic vs external inequality; education vs income/wealth) in the simplest possible manner in order to account for observed patterns. Although I view the primary contribution of this research as historical/empirical, I hope that these theoretical models can also be of interest to the reader. I start by presenting the simple one-dimensional model (section 5.1), before introducing the identity/migration cleavage (section 5.2) and the education vs income/wealth cleavage (section 5.3).

Section 5.1. A Simple One-Dimensional Model of Inequality, Beliefs & Redistribution

Consider a country with a continuum of agents i of mass one, and two possible income levels $y_0 < y_1$. One can think of y_0 as the income associated to low-paid job and y_1 as that of a high-paid job. The probability to access a high-paid job depend both on individual effort and on family origins:

$$\text{Probability } (y_i=y_1) = \pi_0 + \theta e_i \text{ if parental income} = y_0$$

$$\text{Probability } (y_i=y_1) = \pi_1 + \theta e_i \text{ if parental income} = y_1$$

With: e_i = individual effort

θ = index of how much individual effort matters

$\Delta\pi = \pi_1 - \pi_0 =$ index of how much inequality in social origins matters

One should think of effort as including both education-related effort (diligence and motivation at school, etc.) and business-related effort (diligence and motivation at work and/or to develop one's business, etc.). These two dimensions will be further distinguished in section 5.3 below. Family origins could matter for a number of reasons: better off families might offer better access to skills and schooling, and/or better networks or assets to find good jobs or start a business, and so on.

At some general level, everybody agrees that both individual effort and family origins matter. But there is wide disagreement about how much exactly each factor matters.

The country needs to choose an income tax rate $T \geq 0$, the proceeds of which finance a universal cash transfer $c = Ty$, where Ty is per capita tax revenue and y per capita average income. More generally, one can interpret the transfer c as the equivalent value of public services (education, health, etc.) paid by tax revenues.

For a given policy $T \geq 0$, agents are assumed to choose their effort level e_i by maximizing utility $U_i = y_i - c(e_i)$, where y_i is expected post-tax post-transfer income, and $c(e) = e^2/2a$ is a simple quadratic effort cost function (extensions to more general functional forms are straightforward). One can easily show that $e_i = a\Theta(1-T)(y_1 - y_0)$. I.e. effort declines as the tax rate rises. In case the tax rate is equal to $T = 100\%$, then all incentives to provide effort disappear, so that $e_i = 0$. How bad this is will depend on how much effort matters for generating high-paying jobs.

Further assume that everybody in the country shares a Rawlsian objective function, i.e. seeks to maximize the expected lifetime welfare of the individuals with lower class family origins. The one can easily show that the optimal tax rate T^* is given by:

$$T^* = q\Delta\pi/a(y_1 - y_0)\Theta^2$$

Unsurprisingly, the optimal level of redistributive taxation T^* is an increasing function of $\Delta\pi$ and a decreasing function of Θ . In other words, the higher the inequality of

opportunity due to social origins, the more it needs to be corrected; and the stronger the role of effort, the more severe the incentive problem.⁹⁵

One can also show that different mobility trajectories can naturally generate different beliefs, so that in practice individuals and families with high income will tend to believe more in effort and will favor low redistribution, while those with low income will tend to believe less in effort and will favor high redistribution (Piketty 1995). Of course this pattern might be reinforced by the existence of self-serving beliefs (i.e. some high-income individuals might choose to believe in effort, even though they know they have just been lucky) and the fact not all individuals behave as consistent Rawlsian (i.e. some high-income individuals might simply maximize their own interest and discard the interests of the poor, though they usually claim the opposite).

In any case, the point is that this beliefs-based one-dimensional model of redistributive politics can explain why the relation between income and preference for redistribution is not deterministic (left-wing vote tends to be weaker among high-income individuals than among low-income individuals, but this is only true on average, not systematically), and also why mobility trajectory and not only current income seem to matter (Piketty, 1995).

Section 5.2. Introducing the Identity/Migration Cleavage

Assume now that we start from an initial policy conflict about the domestic redistributive tax rate and that there are two broad parties and coalitions, with the “left” proposing a higher level of redistributive taxation than the “right” ($T_L > T_R$). Lower income groups have on average more “left-wing beliefs” than higher-income groups (along the lines described above) and tend to vote more for the “left”. One can think of this as the standard class-based political conflict observed in the 1950s-1960s in France, the US and Britain.

⁹⁵ See Piketty 1995. One could also assume (maybe more realistically) that tax revenues can be split into $T_y = c + g$, where g is public investment in education (or other relevant public investment: infrastructure, health, etc.); g increases the probability to generate high-paying jobs by kg , where k is an index of public spending efficiency, as opposed to c (pure transfers). One can easily show that if $k(y_1 - y_0) > 1$ then it will be optimal to spend all tax revenues on g (i.e. pure transfers $c=0$), and the optimal T^* will be an increasing function of $\Delta\pi$ and μ and a decreasing function of Θ .

One simple way to model the rise of the globalization/identity/migration cleavage is the following. First, in addition to the policy dimension T (redistributive domestic tax rate between rich and poor), each country also needs to choose about the degree of economic openness, and in particular openness to migration flows.

For instance, the issue of extra-European migration gradually started to become more relevant in France and Britain beginning in the 1960s-1970s, with flows often coming from ex-colonial empires (South Asia for Britain, North Africa for France), and especially in the 1980s-1990s-2000s, with the coming of the second generation (the children of the migrant workers). In all countries and time periods for which we have survey information (e.g. Britain starting in the late 1970s and France starting in the 1980s), voters view the policies advocated by the “left” as more favourable to migration and migrants than the “right”: i.e. we start with a situation with $O_L > O_R$. This can be accounted for by the internationalist-egalitarian tradition of the labour and socialist movement. In the case of the US, we also start in the 1960s-1970s with $O_L > O_R$: Democrats are more open to migration flows (in particular Latino migration), and in addition they are also pro-Africans-Americans in the US Civil Rights context.

How do different individuals perceive the benefits and costs of openness? We simply assume utility functions of the form:

$$U_i = y_i - c(e_i) + \mu_i \beta O$$

μ_i measures individual perceptions of the costs and benefits of migration. Individuals with $\mu_i > 0$ prefer more openness (higher O), maybe because they value the cultural diversity (which on average tends to be associated with higher education) or because they have special family or personal ties with migrant population.⁹⁶ Conversely, individuals with $\mu_i < 0$ prefer less openness (smaller O), maybe because they perceive migrants as competitors that can reduce their employment and wage prospects (which on average tends to be associated to lower income and lower education). The

⁹⁶ E.g. individuals with a spouse or a friend with origins in South Asia or Maghreb will tend to view more positively family reunification policies (“chain migration”, as anti-migrant parties describe it) than individuals with no such tie.

parameter β measures the strength of the globalization/migration cleavage and can be assumed to have increased over time. Back in the 1950s-1960s, one can think of β as relatively small, so that whatever policies $O_L > O_R$ were advocated by left and right parties, this had virtually no impact on voting patterns: the policy differentiation on domestic redistribution $T_L > T_R$ was more relevant.

As the issue of extra-European migration gradually became quantitatively more significant between the 1970s-1980s and the 1990s-2000s, β increased, which implies that for given policy pairs (T_L, O_L) and (T_R, O_R) voters with large negative μ_i started shifting their support from “left” to “right” (especially voters with lower education and/or lower income, except those with special ties to migration), while voters with large positive μ_i started shifting their support from “right” to “left” (especially voters with higher education and/or higher income). Assuming the shift is particularly strong along education lines, one can see how this can make the party system moves toward a “multiple-elite” party system: high education voters join the “left” on the migration issue, while high income voters keep supporting the right because of the redistribution issue.

Now assume that globalization – given the way it was organized beginning in the 1980s-1990s, i.e. with free capital flows and a complete absence of fiscal or informational coordination – is also affecting the possibility to conduct domestic redistributive policies. To make things really extreme and simple (though not entirely unrealistic), assume that unregulated globalization gradually makes it easier and easier for high income individuals to evade taxation, in the following sense: by putting dissimulation effort f (or by paying an equivalent cost in legal services), high-income taxpayers manage with probability ω to locate their income in tax havens and pretend that they have income y_0 instead of y_1 . The higher ω , the easier it is to avoid taxation. I stress that ω should itself be viewed as a choice parameter regarding the organization of globalization. However it is a choice that is partly determined at a global level, and that is particularly difficult to affect for smaller countries (which might therefore be tempted to take it as given). In particular, the current regime of unregulated capital flows has been largely influenced by the global ideological shifts

that happened in the 1980s-1990s following the conservative revolution, the fall of communism and the rise of unregulated financial globalization.

Assume that this set of factors leads to an increase in ω . Then one can easily see that for a given initial set of beliefs and policies $T_L > T_R$, both the “left” and the “right” will reduce their proposed rate of redistributive taxation. I.e. they will shift to $T_L(\omega) > T_R(\omega)$, with $T_L'(\omega) < 0$ and $T_R'(\omega) < 0$. As ω becomes infinitely large, both $T_L(\omega)$ and $T_R(\omega)$ converge toward 0: it is infinitely simple to evade taxation, then redistributive taxation becomes impossible.

If and when this happens, then the domestic redistribution dimension becomes irrelevant (both the “left” and the “right” propose almost the same policy on this issue, as T_L and T_R become arbitrarily close), and the globalization/migration/openness dimension becomes the main determinant the vote, as both the “right” and the “left” keep proposing very different policies $O_L > O_R$. This can be further exacerbated by the fact that the two parties or coalitions might choose to overemphasize their differences on the O_L vs O_R dimension (in reaction to the fact there is not much difference on the T_L vs T_R dimension). Building models of endogenous party positioning is however notoriously difficult, especially with multi-issue politics, and far beyond the scope of the present paper.⁹⁷

In the extreme case where no redistributive taxation at all becomes feasible, so that the only dimension of political conflict is about openness (O_L vs O_R), then by construction the only possible party system is organized along “globalists” (high education, high income) vs “nativists” (low education, low income). In the long run, the only way out is the development of a new platform and new internationalist-egalitarian policy tools making redistribution and globalization compatible – like for instance a global financial register and a coordinated wealth tax (which in effect amounts to a coordinated strategy to change the ω parameter).⁹⁸ The comparison of the recent evolutions in Britain vs France-US also show that different national party strategies and positioning can make a difference regarding the transition between the

⁹⁷ See the models of multi-issue party competition developed by Roemer, Lee and Van der Straeten (2007).

⁹⁸ See e.g. Piketty (2014) and Zucman (2015).

“multiple elite” party system and the “globalists vs nativists” party system. This suggests that different positioning on the domestic redistribution (T_L vs T_R) can still make difference, and that the ω parameter is not sufficiently large yet.

The magnitude of the parameters β and ω can also help determine what type of political equilibrium will emerge from a four-quarter electorate (such as the French electorate; see section 2.8 and Table I). As long as β and ω are relatively small, the dominant dimension of political conflict will be domestic redistribution between the rich and the poor: the “internationalist-egalitarians” and the “nativists-egalitarians” will be able to unite against the inegalitarians of all sorts, because their divergence on openness is less important than their agreement on redistribution. However as β and ω , the agreement on redistribution becomes less and less relevant (as all parties propose more or less the same platform on this dimension), and the conflict on migration becomes dominant, so that the “internationalist-egalitarians” and “internationalist-inegalitarians” end up uniting against the nativists of all sorts.

Section 5.3. Introducing the Education vs Income/Wealth Cleavage

The rise of the globalization/identity/migration cleavage is certainly an important part of the explanation behind the development of the “multiple-elite” party system and the possible evolution toward a “globalists vs nativists” system. It is unclear however whether this is the only explanation. As I already argued, it seems that the shift toward a “multiple-elite” system and differentiation between the high-education elite and the high-income elite has started before the globalization/migration issue became salient, and could have taken place in its absence (albeit possibly in a less pronounced way).

The main alternative mechanism that I have in mind is the following: educational expansion, and in particular the rise of higher education, creates new forms of inequality cleavages and political conflict that did not exist at the time of primary and secondary education. For a long time, the main issue in terms of education policy was to generalize access to primary and secondary education. Such a policy agenda is naturally inclusive and egalitarian: one can argue that the objective is to bring the

totality of a given generation to this level. Once everybody has reached primary and secondary schooling, things look markedly different: it is difficult to imagine a situation where the totality of a generation becomes university graduates. And even if this happens it is hard to think of a world where everybody in a generation obtains a PhD, at least in the foreseeable future. In other words, the rise of higher education forces societies and political forces to deal with inequality in a new way, and to some extent to accept certain educational inequalities on a permanent basis, which can lead to complicated political cleavages.

One simple way to model this is the following. Forget about the globalization/openness cleavage introduced in section 5.2, and start from the simple model presented in section 5.1. We still have a continuum of agents i of mass one, and two possible income levels $y_0 < y_1$, which one can think of as the incomes associated to low-paid and high-paid jobs.

The only difference is that I now introduce two possible education levels $x_0 < x_1$. One can think of x_0 as the basic education level which everybody attains (say, primary and secondary education) and x_1 as higher education. In an educationally more advanced society, one could also think of x_1 as restricted to more advanced university degrees or more selective university tracks (like *Grandes écoles* in France, or Ivy League in US, or Oxford/Cambridge in Britain).

Assume that the probability to be access higher education x_1 depends both on education-related individual effort f_i and on family education origins:

$$\text{Probability } (x_i=x_1) = \alpha_0 + \varphi f_i \text{ if parental education} = x_0$$

$$\text{Probability } (x_i=x_1) = \alpha_1 + \varphi f_i \text{ if parental education} = x_1$$

With: f_i = individual education-related effort

φ = index of how much education-related effort matters for accessing high education

$\Delta\alpha = \alpha_1 - \alpha_0$ = index of how much inequality in educational origins matters for accessing high education

Life is organized follows. Each individual i chooses education-related effort f_i and observes where she/he is able to access higher education or not ($x_i=x_1$ or $x_i=x_0$). Then she/he chooses business-related effort e_i and observes whether she/he is able to find a high-paid or a low-paid job ($y_i=y_1$ or $y_i=y_0$). I assume that being a higher education graduate is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to find a high-paid job. Being a graduate ($x_i=x_1$) simply increases the probability to find a high-paid job ($y_i=y_1$), along with two other factors, namely business-related effort and family origins. That is, the probability to find a high-paid job is determined as follows:

Probability ($y_i=y_1$) = $\pi_0 + \theta e_i + \mu s$ if $x_i=x_1$ (high education) and parental income = y_0

Probability ($y_i=y_1$) = $\pi_0 + \theta e_i$ if $x_i=x_0$ (low education) and parental income = y_0

Probability ($y_i=y_1$) = $\pi_1 + \theta e_i + \mu s$ if $x_i=x_1$ (high education) and parental income = y_1

Probability ($y_i=y_1$) = $\pi_1 + \theta e_i$ if $x_i=x_0$ (low education) and parental income = y_1

With: e_i = individual business-related effort

θ = index of how much business-related effort matters for accessing high-paid jobs

$\Delta\pi = \pi_1 - \pi_0$ = index of how much inequality in social origins matters for accessing high-paid job

s = per capita spending in higher education

μ = index of how much higher education matters for accessing high-paid jobs

By applying the same logic as in Piketty (1995), one can immediately see that even with fully sincere and rational learning the society will never reach complete learning.⁹⁹ That is, depending on their trajectory, different individuals and families will end with different set of beliefs about the various parameters (φ , $\Delta\alpha$, θ , $\Delta\pi$). Typically, individuals and families that have a long record of accessing high education (i.e. the high education elite) will tend to believe more strongly in the importance of education-related effort (they will believe in high φ). Individuals and families that have a long record of accessing high-paid jobs (but not necessarily high education), i.e. the business elite, will tend to believe more strongly in the importance of business related effort (they will believe in high θ). Needless to say, self-serving beliefs will also play a role (i.e. part of high education elites will pretend to believe in

⁹⁹ Unless of course social sciences make huge progress in their attempts to estimate these parameters, and managed to convince societies that they did.

education related effort, even though they know their Brahmin family origins did help a lot), and self-interested policy objectives as well (i.e. part of high education elites will prefer to spend most tax revenues on elitist higher education because they care more about their own children than about the poor children).

When it comes to the policy conflict, one can see how this structure can naturally give rise to a “multiple-elite” party system. Assume the country needs to choose an income tax rate $T \geq 0$, the proceeds of which finance both a universal cash transfer c (accessible to everybody) and a higher education spending level s (benefiting only those who access high education). I.e. $Ty = c + s$, where Ty is per capita tax revenue and y per capita average income. More generally, one can interpret the transfer c as including the equivalent value of the basic education (primary and secondary) and other public services (health, etc.) accessible to everybody.

In such a setting, the business elite will tend to favor very low taxation (they are not so much interested in higher education spending, and they are not interested at all in the universal transfer), the education elite will favor somewhat higher taxation (they want to fund higher education), and the low-education low-income groups should favor even bigger taxation (in order to pay for generous universal transfers and spending, as well as higher education for those poor students who make it).

One can also think of all sorts of reasons why some coalitions between the business elite might take place, e.g. if one combines these ingredients with the globalization/migration cleavage introduced in the previous section. Building explicit models of multi-issue party positioning along these lines would be very interesting, but far beyond the scope of the present paper.

Section 6. Concluding Comments and Perspectives

In this paper, I have used French, US and British post-electoral surveys covering the 1948-2017 period in order to document a striking long-run evolution in the structure of political cleavages. In the 1950s-1960s, the vote for left-wing (socialist-labour-democratic) parties was associated with lower education and lower income voters. It has gradually become associated with higher education voters, giving rise to a

“multiple-elite” party system in the 2000s-2010s: high-education elites now vote for the “left”, while high-income/high-wealth elites still vote for the “right” (though less and less so). I have argued that this can contribute to explain rising inequality and the lack of democratic response to it, as well as the rise of “populism”. In effect, globalization and educational expansion have created new dimensions of inequality and conflict, leading to the weakening of previous class-based redistributive coalitions and the gradual breakdown of the postwar left-right party system.

It is clear however that we still face many limitations in our understanding of these issues, and more research is needed. Two open questions stand out. First, to what extent could the transition to a “multiple-elite” party system have happened without the rise of identity/migration cleavage? Next, can “multiple-elite” party systems persist, or they inherently unstable? I have stressed that educational expansion per se could generate multi-dimensional cleavages and a persistent conflict between the high-education elite and the high-income elite, even in the absence of an identity/migration cleavage. In order to go further, it would be interesting for instance to test whether “multiple-elite” cleavages also develop in countries that have little exposition to migration.

On-going work on other western electoral democracies suggests that the results uncovered for France, the US and Britain also apply to other countries, irrespective of the salience of the migration cleavage.¹⁰⁰ More generally, the transformation of social-democratic parties from the “party of the workers” to the “party of the graduates” has been taking place pretty much in most countries as a gradual, long-run process beginning the 1950s-1960s and spanning until the 2000s-2010s. I.e. the process started much before the migration cleavage really become salient. This would tend to suggest that other factors (like the educational-expansion mechanism or the global-ideological-shift effect) have played a more important role than the migration/identity cleavage. Of course this does not mean that the latter cleavage did

¹⁰⁰ See Gethin, Martinez-Toledano and Piketty (2019) and Kosse and Piketty (2019). In India, identity-based conflicts were exacerbated in since the 1980s-1990s, which can be partly attributed to the declining focus upon socioeconomic redistributive policies. See Banerjee, Gethin and Piketty (2019). The case of post-communist European countries also provides an interesting example of left-right inversion. This illustrates the potential impact of post-communist skepticism with internationalist-egalitarian ideology (this can be highly relevant for other countries as well). See Lindner, Novokmet, Piketty and Zawisza (2019). See also Tavits and Letki (2009).

not play a significant role to exacerbate the trend. But this implies that structural shifts in redistributive policies (particularly regarding education and taxation) are needed to affect the cleavage structure. I.e. the main problem explaining the crisis of the postwar party system might well be the selfishness of the rich and the graduates (and their ability to appeal to the cause of globalization and openness to promote their interests) rather than the supposedly racism and backwardness of the poor.

More generally, collecting new series on the interplay of inequality dynamics and political conflict for more countries and/or longer time periods is certainly the most promising way to bring additional light on the long-run evolution of cleavages structures. One of the oldest party systems in the world, namely Conservatives vs Whigs in 18th century Britain, was to large extent a conflict of elites (landed elite vs urban-commercial elite). Of course, this was a time of limited suffrage, when only the top 1% could vote, so there was little else that politics could be except a conflict of elite. It would be naïve however to imagine that universal suffrage in itself has permanently brought a different type of equilibrium. Unequal access to political finance, media and influence can contribute to keep electoral politics under the control of elites. The class-based party system that emerged in the mid-20th century was due to specific historical circumstances, and proved to be fragile as social and economic structures evolved. Without a strong and convincing egalitarian-internationalist platform, it is inherently difficult to unite low-education and low-income voters from all origins within the same redistributive coalition.

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