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Intergenerational social mobility and anti-system support: the journey matters

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Abstract

Seminal sociological works propose that a high level of social mobility within a society underpins democracy. The salience of this relationship is particularly poignant in contemporary politics. Fewer individuals are upwardly mobile and more downwardly mobile than in previous generations. There is now also a political outlet for dissatisfied voters, anti-system parties. I analyse the European Social Survey with diagonal reference models, which separate origin and destination effects from mobility effects. My findings show that one's origins, measured by parental educational attainment, are an important predictor of anti-system right support. Mobile individuals with lower educated parents are more likely to vote for the anti-system right than their immobile counterparts. There is an additional mobility effect, upward social mobility reduces support for the anti-system right whereas downward mobility increases support. Contrastingly, anti-system left support derives from a wider cross-section of society, and there is no evidence that parental origin or social mobility is statistically significant. Finally, I show that origin effects are consistent across Western European countries.

1. Introduction

The idea that a high level of social mobility within a society underpins democracy has its origin in seminal social science literature (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Tocqueville, 1838). This relationship has once again become particularly poignant in the 21st Century (Kurer & van Staalduinen, 2020). Two forces are colliding: an electorate disappointed with their social mobility trajectory, and now also a political outlet, anti-system parties, through which dissatisfied voters can mobilise. There is evidence that upward absolute social mobility has slowed. In the USA, only half of those entering the labour market today can expect to earn more than their parents compared to 90% of individuals born in 1940 (Chetty et al., 2017). Similarly, occupational downward mobility in Europe is more prevalent than previously estimated (Bukodi et al., 2019). Second, establishment political parties have converged ideologically becoming "cartel" like (Katz & Mair, 1995), creating a political gap for anti-system parties (Hopkin, 2020). Whilst anti-system parties maintained a presence in Western Europe 30 years ago, there has been a clear increase post the financial crisis (Hopkin, 2020)[1]. So much so that approximately one in four voters supported anti-system parties in 2018, spread across most Western European countries.

Given these two empirical facts, I test to what extent mobile individuals differ from their non-mobile counterparts regarding anti-system support. Here, mobile individuals may associate with their social origin and destination position, as well as experiencing a separate effect from upward (downward) mobility. How does an individual's social origins relate to anti-system party support? Is there a mobility effect, over and above origin and destination? Whilst anti-system parties, by definition, oppose the establishment, expressing uncompromising opposition to the political and economic order (Hopkin, 2020), there is variation in underlying beliefs between those who support anti-system right and anti-system left parties. Does the impact of origin and mobility differ between support for the anti-system left and the anti-system right? Finally, given the differences between socio-economic groups outcomes varies dramatically between countries within Europe, there is no reason to assume that any effect will be consistent across countries. Does one's social mobility trajectory impact the tendency to support anti-system parties differently across countries in Europe?

Empirically, I test my hypotheses analysing the European Social Survey (ESS) using a diagonal reference model (DRM). The DRM separates origin, destination, and mobility effects which is not possible in conventional OLS models (Sobel 1981, 1985). My analysis focuses on Western European countries because of the differences in the underlying drivers of anti-system support in Eastern Europe (Santana et al., 2020). I use education as the indicator of socio-economic position, and thus also of absolute social mobility. As

[1]See also author's calculations in the supplementary materials.

I later argue, education is now a key cleavage in society, distinct to that of occupational class (Gethin et al., 2021; Stubager, 2013).

This article has three key findings. Theoretically, it is not clear as to whether socially mobile individuals should be more or less likely to support anti-system parties compared to their immobile counterparts. I argue and show empirically that socially mobile individuals differ in their tendency to vote for anti-system parties compared to the non-mobile. I find socially mobile individuals retain part of their political preferences in line with their social origins. The act of upward mobility reinforces the belief in capitalist democracy and meritocratic society, reducing the tendency to vote for anti-system parties. Conversely, the act of downward mobility increases the tendency to vote for anti-system parties. I explain these findings by drawing upon literature analysing the impact of an individual's social mobility trajectory on: polarising British society; hostility towards immigrants and; democratic values (Gugushvili, 2020; Houle & Miller, 2019; McNeil & Haberstroh, 2022; Paskov et al., 2020).

My second finding is that social mobility matters only for anti-system right support, not the anti-system left. The underlying drivers for anti-system right and anti-system left support are not the same (Hopkin, 2020; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018). Cultural attitudes such as negative views towards immigration and high importance of the nation state are prevalent across anti-system right parties (Golder, 2016; Mudde, 2007). These attitudes, on average, vary according to one's current socio-economic position and are likely to be transmitted across generations. By contrast, anti-system left support is driven by a view that capitalism creates untamed inequality (Golder, 2016; Kriesi & Schulte-Cloos, 2020). An attitude that is more evenly spread across individuals from across socio-economic positions, thus the relevance of social origins is less important.

Third, the empirics show similarity in the magnitude of origin effects across countries. This is somewhat surprising given the emphasis placed on welfare regime type and varieties of capitalism within the comparative political economy literature (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001). Moreover, studies focusing on redistribution preferences and well-being find a relationship between country level variables and the importance of social origins (Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019; Schuck & Steiber, 2018). I show that broadly the associations I describe above hold when sub-dividing the dataset by country. Given the reduced sample size, I form tentative conclusions when ranking the importance of social origins by country. I show that there is not a statistically significant correlation between income inequality and influence of social origins.

Despite the seminal literature theoretically outlining the relationship between social mobility and democracy, there is limited contemporary testing of this hypothesis. Notable exceptions include the impact of individuals' social mobility on Brexit support (McNeil & Haberstroh, 2022), voting in Europe (Ciccolini & Härkönen, 2021), and democratic values (Gugushvili, 2020; Houle & Miller, 2019). This work contributes two important new

dimensions. First, I investigate the research questions using education as the mobility variable, a crucial determinant of political cleavages (Gethin et al., 2021; Stubager, 2013). Second, I introduce a comparative angle demonstrating the importance of social origins across countries within Europe.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I outline the literature on how social mobility affects voting behaviour and preferences more generally, arguing that this is also relevant to anti-system support. The following section outlines the theoretical expectations and hypotheses. I then describe the data and methodology used for the research. Next, I outline the main results, followed by robustness tests and extensions to the theoretical framework. Finally, I conclude and describe potential implications.

2. Social mobility and voting behaviour

Classic sociological works such as Durkheim (1893) and Tocqueville (1838) argue that social mobility is key to social cohesion. Social class solidarity and differences between respective classes emerges if there is a lack of social fluidity, that is infrequent moving between classes across generations. Social immobility generates intense economic grievances for those stuck at the bottom and a tendency to want to hold on to power for those at the top (Houle & Miller, 2019). A theory formally modelled by Acemoglu et al., (2018).

Recent empirical literature has attempted to revive this hypothesis, causally linking social mobility within a society to reduced support for anti-system parties. Iversen and Soskice (2019) argue that the aspirational vote is key. The hypothesis is that even if one is not a beneficiary of the knowledge economy, one would still support the status quo in capitalist democracies, not anti-system parties, if one perceives that their children will be beneficiaries. Thus, aspirational voters quash populism. Aspirations and consequentially voting behaviours are driven by the belief that social mobility is possible or even probable. Iversen and Soskice provide evidence that countries with higher levels of social mobility, which they proxy through educational opportunity, tend to have less anti-system voting. Further examining the link between absolute social mobility and anti-system voting, Kurer and Staalduinen (2020) argue that absolute upward intergenerational social mobility has fallen overtime (see evidence from Bukodi et al., 2015; Buscha & Sturgis, 2018; Chetty et al., 2017), which in turn is one of the drivers of increased anti-system voting. A similar mechanism, albeit from a different perspective to that proposed by Iversen and Soskice. Houle (2019) goes further showing that low levels of social mobility can have dire consequences, leading to political unrest, including riots, demonstrations, and revolutions.

Whilst the theory is convincing, it is difficult to provide compelling evidence as to its validity. There are many potentially confounding variables which may conflate the association between social mobility and anti-system political support. In particular, there is an often-cited close relationship between social mobility and social equality, as described by the "Great Gatsby Curve" (Corak, 2013). Furthermore, data overtime and across countries on social mobility is rarely comparable, if it is available at all. Thus, this study uses individual level mobility trajectories to understand political preferences for anti-system parties. Analysing the effect of social mobility on preferences has a well-defined literature, although there is limited evidence regarding anti-system voting. Two recent papers working papers have started to explore this further, McNeil and Haberstroh (2022) regarding Brexit and Ciccolini and Härkönen focusing on Europe and occupational mobility (2021).

In a similar vein, Kurer and Staalduinen (2020) use micro foundations to support their argument, conceptualising 'status discordance', that is a measure of childhood expectations compared to realised position in adulthood. They show that those with higher levels of status discordance are more likely to support anti-system parties. Based on individual level mobility experiences, Houle and Miller (2019) using data from sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America find that individuals who have been upwardly mobile are more likely to have strong democratic values compared to the immobile. Similarly, Gugushvili's (2020) study of post-socialist countries finds that upwardly mobile individuals have stronger democratic values than non-mobile individuals. The context is important, upwardly mobile individuals have more democratic values in countries with a developed democracy when compared to those in authoritarian regimes. It follows the "cui bono?" logic, whereby one is more likely to be attracted to a regime that has benefited oneself. Whilst these studies on democratic values help to build our understanding of how social mobility affects anti-system voting, they are not one and the same (Hopkin, 2020). Despite the rise in anti-system politics in Western Europe, there is no evidence of a corresponding decline in support for democracy (Alexander & Welzel, 2017).

From this individual's perspective, the literature has proposed four main mechanisms through which social mobility may affect political preferences. The classic division is between whether individuals vote in a self-interested manner or rather as a social act (Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019; Nieuwbeerta, 2000). The former, the acculturation hypothesis, is derived from Downs's (1957) economic theory of political behaviour, it theorises that there will be a class division based on economic interest. Therefore, lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to favour left-wing parties with a greater redistributive focus. Hence, parental background is unimportant, or at least much less important than one's own status. A complementary mechanism for the dominance of destination is that individuals respond by mimicking the attitudes of their new class position for their own psychological well-being (De Graaf et al., 1995).

The counter hypothesis is the expressive theory (De Graaf et al., 1995) or similarly the socialisation hypothesis. One's upbringings are important in formulation of political views (O'Grady, 2019). This draws upon Bourdieu's (1984) idea of habitus where early-stage experiences such as family upbringing, neighbourhoods, and schooling ingrain habits, skills, and dispositions. Here, origin has a much more significant part to play than argued from an acculturation perspective. The existing evidence suggests that for a wide range of preferences and outcomes, one's experience is a mixture of both origin and destination effects. For example, political preferences on a pure left-right scale (De Graaf et al., 1995), redistribution preferences (Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019), and even well-being (Schuck & Steiber, 2018).

The above outlined the potential mechanisms as to why parental origin may be important. It is also argued that there may be an additional effect from upward or downward mobility. The dissociative theory states that the act of social mobility causes a 'mental strain', a disruptive and detrimental experience for the individual concerned (Sorokin, 1959). Friedman (2016) shows how in many cases the 'success' of being upwardly mobile may not in fact be so 'beneficial' for the individual given the complexities of the experience. This could be translated into voting behaviour, the act of being socially mobile leads to a dissociative effect, which in turn leads to a greater dissatisfaction with society and increases the propensity to vote for anti-system parties. Similarly, downward mobility may have an impact over and above the summative elements of origin and destination. It may lead to feelings of failure, which may in turn be blamed on the neoliberal capitalist system (Daenekindt, 2017).

However, theoretically the effect of upwardly mobility may work in the opposite direction. Experiencing upward social mobility may create a positive viewpoint of capitalism and in fact reduce the tendency to vote for anti-system parties. Upwardly mobile individuals associate their success with capitalist democracy, creating a positive view of that regime (Gugushvili, 2020; Houle & Miller, 2019). Houle and Miller (2019) also outline how upward social mobility can affect values that in turn are more likely to be make one have more democratic ideals. This can be translated into an explanation for why one would be less likely to vote for anti-system parties. Upward mobility results in a stronger belief in personal autonomy and a meritocratic society, thus a higher inclination to vote for the establishment parties. Such mechanisms would work in the opposite direction for the downwardly mobile, as they blame their own social decline on their perception of a non-meritocratic society, becoming less trusting of government and society. Much like the idea that those individuals who have experienced declining relative social status turn to anti-system parties (Gidron & Hall, 2017) or, similarly, those whose own income growth has been outpaced by others society face 'positional deprivation' and again spurs anti-system support (Burgoon et al., 2019).

3. Theoretical Framework

Socio-economic status, and correspondingly social mobility, is measured predominantly through occupation, income, or education. I choose the latter as the main variable in this study for theoretical and practical reasons, which I now explain further. Education has been shown to be especially important in anti-system voting (Lee et al., 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), polarising graduates and non-graduates (Iversen & Soskice, 2019). Anti-system views, mainly on the right, are often politically expressed on the 'cultural' rather than 'economic' axis of values, particularly in attitudes towards immigration. Moreover, education is now widely seen as the most important cleavage in society (Gethin et al., 2021; Piketty & Goldhammer, 2020), driving social status and esteem, as well as being the "last acceptable prejudice" (Goodhart, 2020; Sandel, 2020a, 2020b). In line with Stubager (2013), I argue that education represents a cleavage distinct to that of occupation. Education fulfils the three criteria offered by Bartolini and Mair (1990) to constitute a societal cleavage. Groups with different educational attainments 1) hold different values, 2) these form part of a group consciousness, and 3) are mobilised by political choices. Even if one does not think of education and occupation as distinct cleavages, we know that education plays a pivotal role in determining occupation and income through labour market outcomes (Ashenfelter & Rouse, 1998; Goldin & Katz, 2009).[2]

I make two key arguments regarding individual social mobility trajectories and anti-system voting. First, given that existing studies on social mobility and left-right voting preferences suggest that voting behaviour is a combination of one's current socio-economic status and one's origins, this should also apply to the anti-system right. As Hopkin (2020) argues, anti-system voting is likely a combination of economics and culture. Those voters with authoritarian tendencies often stick with the mainstream until 'triggered'. The activation mechanism is economic hardship, hence the recent rise in anti-system voting would have been triggered by the financial crisis and later the austerity measures seen across Europe. Given the literature's findings of large differences in support between the socio-economic positions, these origin and destination effects should be clear.

Moreover, the anti-system right is based on cultural attitudes that the nation state and its citizens should be prioritised over foreigners and immigrants, creating an authoritarian system ordered by "natural" differences in society (Golder, 2016; Mudde, 2007). These attitudes are likely to be formed through a combination of one's upbringing and current socio-economic status (see evidence on immigration attitudes in Paskov et al., 2020).

[2]From a practical perspective, using education as the mobility variable increases the dataset given that the ESS has less missing information on parental education background. In the supplementary material, I provide a robustness test by substituting in occupation for education as the mobility variable, the results are broadly consistent.

Preferences are formed during the formative years of childhood, through families, schooling, neighbourhoods (Jennings, 2007). These social networks effects persist in adulthood, as one is likely to form social networks with individuals from both their new socio-economic position and their socio-economic origins. Those friends and family from childhood with a low level education are more likely to be effected by economic precarity, creating both empathy and a fear that one 'could be next' (Liu et al., 2020).

Regarding the anti-system left, it is theoretically unclear as to whether one's social origins should have an effect. The core beliefs of the anti-system left are against the neoliberal ideals of the market economy producing artificially high levels of inequality, rather than expressing anti-migration or racist attitudes (Golder, 2016; Kriesi & Schulte-Cloos, 2020). Existing evidence suggests that origin position matters for economic views (Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019; O'Grady, 2019; Wilson et al., 2021). However, we know the variation between different socio-economic positions in level of support for the anti-system left is much smaller (Kriesi & Schulte-Cloos, 2020; Santana & Rama, 2018).[3] As a result, the magnitude of any origin effect will be small, if it exists at all. One cannot differentiate between the effect of origin compared to destination if there is little variation in voting behaviour between the non-mobile groups from different socio-economic statuses.

Origin hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a) 'Lower' social origin, measured by parental educational attainment, increases the tendency for individuals to support anti-system right parties

Hypothesis 1b) Social origins, measured by parental education, does not affect the tendency for individuals to support anti-system left parties

The second hypothesis is regarding individual mobility trajectories and how mobility effects will impact anti-system left and right support. These effects are in addition to those of origin and destination. Given that I argue the anti-system right is driven by cultural attitudes (albeit triggered by economic circumstances), the effect of moving from one social status to another may have the dissociative effect earlier described. This could be triggered through absolute upward or downward mobility. The potential dissociative effect must be balanced against the perception of democracy creating meritocratic conditions conducive for the opportunity to be upwardly mobile, and more generally affecting the values of those individuals that are upwardly mobile. It is an empirical question as to which of these effects is greater. However, I would expect the meritocratic effect to dominate in line with previous studies analysing democratic values (Gugushvili, 2020; Houle & Miller, 2019).

[3]See also the supplementary material showing the association between educational position and anti-system left support based on ESS data (author's calculations).

As anti-system left support is primarily a protest vote against the neoliberal idea of the market economy and the resultant inequality in society, I would expect mobility effects to be predominantly influenced by one's experience of capitalism. If one has been upwardly mobile, I would expect an increase in one's meritocratic view of society. An individual may thus update their view of society to have more equality of opportunity and a greater role for individual effort (Gugushvili, 2020; Piketty, 1995), reducing their likelihood of voting for the anti-system left.

Under both the meritocratic and dissociative hypothesises, downward mobility is associated with a greater tendency to support anti-system parties on the right or left. It is not possible to disentangle whether the mechanism is dissatisfaction with capitalist society, or the dissociative effect associated with not belonging to either class. In either case the hypothesised effect is a greater likelihood of anti-system support.

Mobility hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2) Upward (downward) mobility has an additional effect to origin and destination which reduces (increases) an individual's chance of supporting the anti-system parties, on both the right and left

The importance of social origins on political preferences may vary according to the institutional and social context (Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019). Regarding the importance of social mobility across countries, I would expect those countries which are more equal in terms of outcome to place less emphasis on social origins. Social mobility means less in terms of life outcomes, when the outcome differentials between socio-economic positions is smaller. Thus, one is less likely to be shaped by their social origins when society is less polarised in terms of living standards. This follows in a line of research arguing that class identity is likely to be stronger in countries where inequality is greater (Hout, 2008; Stubager et al., 2018). More generally, the logic fits into the welfare state literature on the conceptualisation of class, building on the seminal work of Esping-Andersen (1990).

Country hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3) Social origins are more important in countries with higher levels of inequality of outcome

These hypotheses are restricted to Western Europe, despite the availability of data for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), for two main reasons. Firstly, it has been shown that explanations of support for anti-system parties in Western Europe do not hold well when transported to CEE (Santana et al., 2020). It would be problematic when pooling the data from the two regions. Moreover, in many CEE countries anti-system parties are stronger

and in some cases part of government[4]. This is not the case in most Western Europe countries and when these anti-system parties are in government, they have tended to play the role of junior coalition members[5]. The fact that many anti-system parties are in power may theoretically reverse the mobility effects, over and above that of origin and destination. If one was upwardly mobile, the meritocratic hypothesis shows that one believes that society has played its part in this transition. When the government is controlled by anti-system parties, it may be that individuals believe that the anti-system party has created conditions conducive to social mobility. In such a scenario, upward mobility would be associated with a greater chance of voting for the status quo, anti-system parties. The theory resonates with the findings from Houle and Miller (2019) and Gugushvili (2020), where upwards mobility has a greater effect on support for democratic values when the country one resides in is a democracy.

4. Data

I use data from the European Social Survey (ESS), creating a consolidated dataset from across the 9 waves. It is a bi-annual, cross-sectional, representative survey, the first data was collated in 2002 and the latest in 2018. The ESS surveys 33 countries, I eliminate some of these countries based on data availability (participated in at least 4 Waves), population size (minimum 1 million), and being in Western Europe – I thus use data from 16 countries. It should be noted that data is not necessarily available for every country in each wave. I utilise only those respondents where there is information available for both parents' educational background. Data is weighted using the ESS's post-stratification weights.

I operationalise parental and respondent education using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). I create a 4-level categorical variable, splitting the level of educational attainment by tertiary, advanced vocational (sub-degree), school level qualifications, and no qualifications.

From the parental and respondent's levels of educational attainment, I calculate a social mobility trajectory. This is simply "upwardly mobile" if the respondent's education is higher than their parents' and "downwardly mobile" if the respondent's educational attainment is lower than their parents'. I take the parents' educational attainment as the highest of either the mother or father.

I code anti-system parties using *The PopuList* (Rooduijn et al., 2019), a now widely utilised peer-reviewed dataset, for example Lührmann et al. (2019). *The PopuList* codes European parties as populist, far right, far left, and/or Eurosceptic for all parties that have

[4]Examples of ruling parties include Fidesz in Hungary, Law and Justice in Poland, and ANO 2011 in Czechia – explored in detail by Santana, Zagórski, and Rama (2020).
[5]The obvious exceptions are the Lega and Five Star Movement in Italy and Syriza in Greece.

won 1 seat or at least 2% of the votes in a parliamentary election. *The PopuList* dataset starts in 1989 and hence covers the whole of my analysis (i.e., from 2002). I also complement this with additional coding for several of the smaller parties, for a full list of amendments see the supplementary material. Using *The PopuList* categorisation, I class all parties as anti-system right which are "far-right". For the anti-system left I include "far-left" parties and those which are populist but not designated "far-left" or "far-right". Thus, my anti-system left measure is a left and catch all anti-system measure. The results do not differ substantively should one include just "far-left" parties. Where *The PopuList* classifies a party as "border-line", "far-left" say, I still include it in the appropriate measure – again it makes no substantive difference to results should one exclude "border-line" cases. To measure support for anti-system left and anti-system right parties, I follow Burgoon et al (2019), using the ESS survey question where the respondent answers which party they "feel closest to". It is more appropriate than the party the respondent last voted for given the potential time lag between elections and surveys. Approximately 20% of the sample support anti-system parties, which is evenly split by the anti-system left and anti-system right respectively. Although, as shown in the supplementary material, anti-system support has increased overtime.

As control variables, I loosely follow the individual level controls specified by Inglehart and Norris (2016). Specifically, the covariates I build into the model are gender[6], age, occupation – categorically coded using Oesch's 5 level schema, a dummy for each wave of the ESS, a dummy for the country one resides, whether one belongs to the minority ethnic group in the country in which one lives, and how religious one is – measured on a Likert scale from 0, not very religious, to 10, very religious. In the supplementary material, I provide a version of the model without occupational controls. Some would argue that one's occupation is a "bad control" as it mediates the effect of education (Angrist & Pischke, 2009). The results are substantively similar.

I include only those aged 24 or over, to ensure that most respondents will have reached their highest educational status. When analysing the country level bivariate relationship between importance of social origins and level of equality, I use the latest available Gini coefficient from the OECD database. Descriptive statistics for the sample are below.[7]

[6] In the supplementary material, I also split the sample by gender. The effects of origin and mobility are marginally stronger for women than men.
[7] Missing data is excluded through listwise deletion.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Closest party		
	Anti-system left	10.14%
	Anti-system right	9.20%
	System	80.66%
Highest parents' education		
	Tertiary	17.01%
	Advanced vocational	8.78%
	Secondary education	44.21%
	No qualifications	30.00%
Respondent's education		
	Tertiary	28.27%
	Advanced vocational	13.61%
	Secondary education	47.82%
	No qualifications	10.30%
Intergenerational mobility		
	Upwardly mobile	40.96%
	Immobile	48.86%
	Downwardly mobile	10.18%
Gender		
	Female	46.28%
	Male	53.72%
Age		
	Years	52.7
Respondent's occupation		
	Higher-grade service class	22.55%
	Lower-grade service class	24.84%
	Skilled workers	35.85%
	Unskilled workers	16.76%
Belong to Minority Ethnic Group		
	Yes	3.58%

Religiosity		
	Mean on scale 1-10	4.55
Sample Size		
	N	60,629

5. Methodology

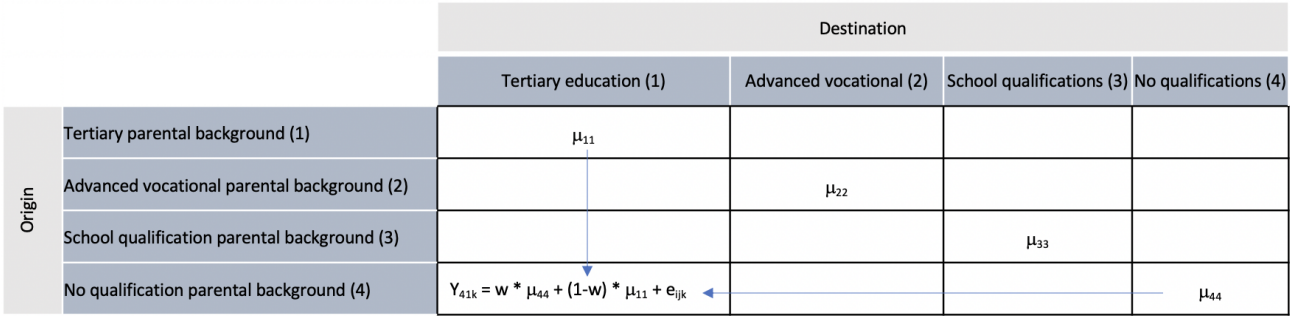
Given that my key independent variable is social mobility trajectory, a conventional OLS regression would be inappropriate. Specifically, such a model does not allow a separation of mobility effects from origin and destination. If one was to control for all 3 variables within one model, it would be over-identified. Mobility effects are by definition linearly dependent on both origin and destination (Blalock, 1967). The model proposed by Sobel (1981, 1985) to overcome this issue is known as the diagonal reference model (DRM) or diagonal mobility model. Hendrickx et al (1993) provides a comprehensive review as to the suitability of DRMs compared to more conventional methods for studying social mobility. DRMs have now been used extensively in sociology and are becoming more frequently used in analysing political variables (Clifford & Heath, 1993; Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019).

The DRM compares mobile individuals to those individuals who have been immobile only. For example, in the diagram I have adapted below (van der Waal et al., 2017), each mobile group is referenced to an immobile group on the diagonal. The mobile, off-diagonal, groups are then represented by “weights” of their origin (w) and destination (1-w). This must sum to 1 and it is usually assumed that both the origin and destination effect should be non-negative. Thus, in the simplest version of the model:

$$Y_{ijk} = w * \mu_{ii} + (1-w) * \mu_{jj}$$

Where Y_{ijk} is the dependent variable, i.e., a measure of anti-system voting, in cell ij of the mobility table of respondent k. Subscript i and j refer to the position of origin and destination respectively, that is parental education and respondent education. μ_{ii} is the average anti-system voting for non-mobile individuals in group i.

Figure 1: Illustration of the working of the DRM



The simple form of the DRM can be expanded to include mobility effects with the introduction of upward and downward mobility dummies. I include other covariates into the model as previously described, these are included in the $\sum \beta x_{ijk}$ term below. Standard errors are clustered according to country grouping. The dependent variables are binary, i.e., the probability of voting anti-system (Π_{ijk}) or a mainstream system vote ($1-\Pi_{ijk}$). Thus, adding these components into the mode, the DRM equation becomes:

$$Y_{ijk} = \log (\Pi_{ijk} / [1-\Pi_{ijk}] = w * \mu_{ii} + (1-w) * \mu_{jj} + \beta_1 up + \beta_2 down + \sum \beta x_{ijk} + e_{ijk}$$

The models are estimated in Stata using the *drm* package (Kaiser, 2018).

6. Findings

Anti-system right support

The first analysis is a binomial logistic DRM coding those individuals whose closest party is anti-system right as "1" and those who support a 'mainstream' party as "0". I also include in the supplementary materials, a version comparing anti-system right support to those who support either a 'mainstream' party or the anti-system left. I include only those countries where there is a meaningful anti-right support. Hence, the analysis excludes Ireland, Portugal, and Greece. If these countries were included, the results are substantively similar. As previously described, Model 1 is the baseline model including origin and destination effects, Model 2 adds in the impact of upward and downward mobility. Both models include the full list of controls.

Table 2: Binary logistic DRM of anti-system right support, based on educational mobility (coefficients are log odds)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Diagonal Intercepts				
μ_{11}: *Tertiary education*	-1.070	***	-1.127	***
	(0.067)		(0.067)	
μ_{22}: *Advanced Vocational*	-0.056		-0.033	
	(0.081)		(0.091)	
μ_{33}: *School qualifications*	0.553	***	0.577	***
	(0.077)		(0.067)	
μ_{44}: *No qualifications*	0.573	***	0.583	***
	(0.091)		(0.097)	
Weight of origin	0.224	***	0.361	***
	(0.053)		(0.040)	
Mobility (Base Immobile)				
Upwardly Mobile			-0.131	**
			(0.052)	
Downwardly Mobile			0.214	***
			(0.077)	
Controls	Y		Y	
N	49,545		49,545	
Log Likelihood	-13,898.995		-13,890.784	
AIC	27,861.99		27,849.568	
BIC	28,143.93037		28,149.12965	

***p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.1

Notes: Cluster robust standard errors in brackets

Unreported controls: Age, sex, occupation, belonging to ethnic minority, religiosity, country, ESS round. Regressions are weighted using the ESS's post-stratification weight.

Holding all other explanatory variables constant, the estimates of μ_{11}, μ_{22}, μ_{33} and μ_{44} indicate the log odds of immobile individuals in the respective groups supporting anti-system right parties. Across both models, these diagonal intercepts show a clear pattern. Immobile individuals with a higher level of education are significantly less likely to view their closest party as anti-system right compared to immobile individuals from lower categories. Immobile individuals with a tertiary education are especially unlikely to vote for the anti-system right. There is no statistically significant difference, in either model, between the two lower categories of immobile individuals, with school qualifications and no qualifications. This is in line with previous studies suggesting that the anti-system right support is not just from the lowest socio-economic class (Norris, 2005).

I find significant origin effects in both models. In Model 1, without additional mobility effects, the weight of origin is 0.224 ($p<0.001$). To take Model 2, origin has a substantial weighting, 0.361, and highly significant effect ($p<0.001$). According to the estimate, educational destination is more important than origin - but only just.

When introducing mobility effects in Model 2, being upwardly mobile decreases the odds of one's closest party being anti-system right by 12.3% ($p=0.011$). There is a statistically significant effect over and above destination and origin; being upwardly mobile reduces the tendency to support the anti-system right, supporting the "meritocracy" hypothesis. As would also be predicted by both the "meritocracy" and "dissociative" hypotheses, downward mobility increases the odds of voting for the anti-system right, over and above origin and destination effects. Being downwardly mobile increases the odds of supporting the anti-system right by 23.8% ($p<0.001$).

These two components of social mobility, origin effects and mobility, work in opposite directions regarding impact on anti-system support. To take an upwardly mobile individual, they retain some preferences from their origin position, which is more likely to support the anti-system right. However, the act of upwardly mobility reduces support. Thus, mobile individuals are not just a mixture of their old and new status. Rather, they are a group of their own.

Anti-system left support

I produce the two same models as previously, this time for the anti-system left analysis. Additionally, I include only countries that have a meaningful anti-system left party, which excludes the UK and Austria. Again, there is no substantive change if all countries are included in the model. The main change compared to the anti-system right models is that there seems to be very little difference between support across the immobile education groupings when compared to the anti-system right models. There is no statistically significant difference between any groups in all three models.

Table 3: Binary Logistic DRM of anti-system left support, based on educational mobility (coefficients are log odds)

	Model 1	Model 2
Diagonal Intercepts		
μ_{11}: *Tertiary education*	0.144	0.052
	(0.132)	(0.198)
μ_{22}: *Advanced Vocational*	0.025	-0.099
	(0.038)	(0.079)
μ_{33}: *School qualifications*	-0.042	-0.017
	(0.059)	(0.067)
μ_{44}: *No qualifications*	-0.127	0.064
	(0.100)	(0.122)
Weight of origin	-0.375	0.731
	(0.713)	(0.760)
Mobility (Base same)		
Upwardly Mobile		0.085
		(0.121)
Downwardly Mobile		0.020
		(0.084)
Controls	Y	Y
N	50,103	50,103
Log Likelihood	-17720.1	-17719.4
AIC	35510.3	35512.8
BIC	35819.0	35839.2

***p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.1

Notes: Cluster robust standard error in brackets

Unreported controls: Age, sex, occupation, belonging to ethnic minority, religiosity, country, ESS round. Regressions are weighted using the ESS's post-stratification weight.

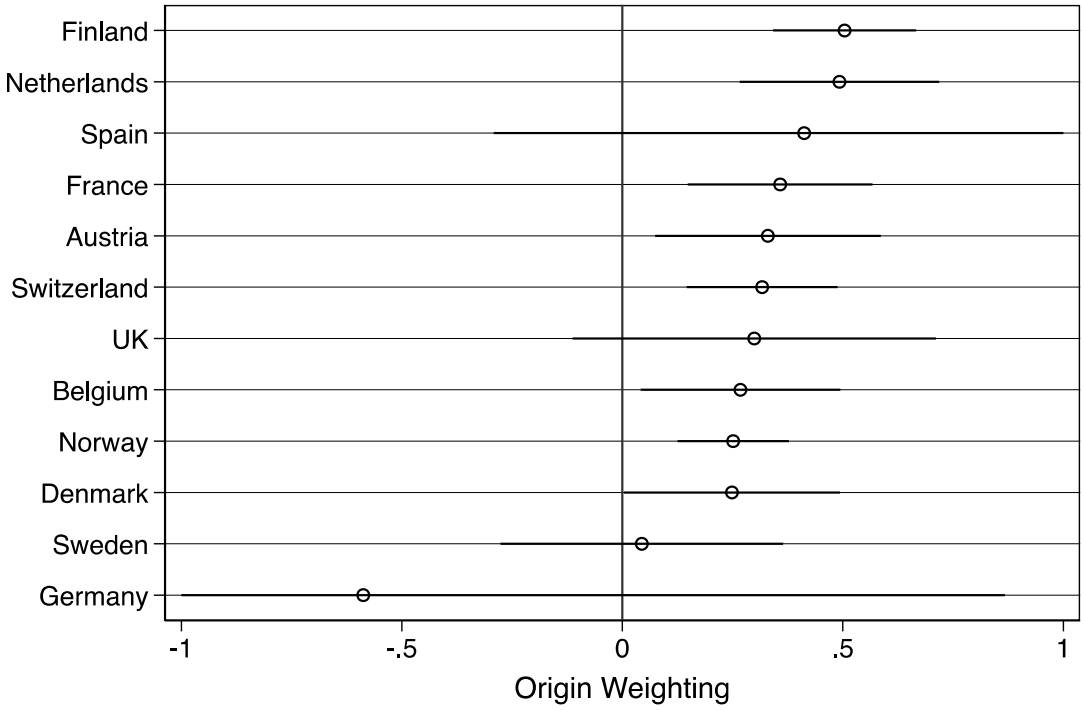
The weight of origin is not statistically different from zero, that is I cannot reject the null hypothesis that it is solely one's current educational attainment that matters. Given the much smaller difference between the immobile groups, the weight of origin is in any case much less important. Finally, there appears to be no significant mobility effect in addition to origin and destination.

Country analysis

First, I test to what extent the pooled analysis is replicated at the country level. Given the reduced number of observations when running a DRM for each country, I simplify the model. I reduce the number of controls to just age, gender, and ESS round. Whilst mobility effects are still included in my model, confidence intervals are wide given the sample size, thus I concentrate on how origin effects vary between countries.

As shown in the graphic below, when analysing anti-system right support, origin is statistically significant in 8 of the 12 countries sampled, and positive origin coefficient point estimates for a further 3. I have excluded from the analysis any country without any meaningful anti-system right party. It seems that it is more a story that origins matter throughout rather than a clear pattern between countries. However, the confidence intervals are wide when analysing data at the country level because of the smaller sample sizes.

Figure 2: Anti-system right origin weighting by country specific DRMs, based on educational mobility



Notes: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Sweden data unweighted. Italy removed due to non-convergence. Model controls: age, sex, mobility, ESS round.

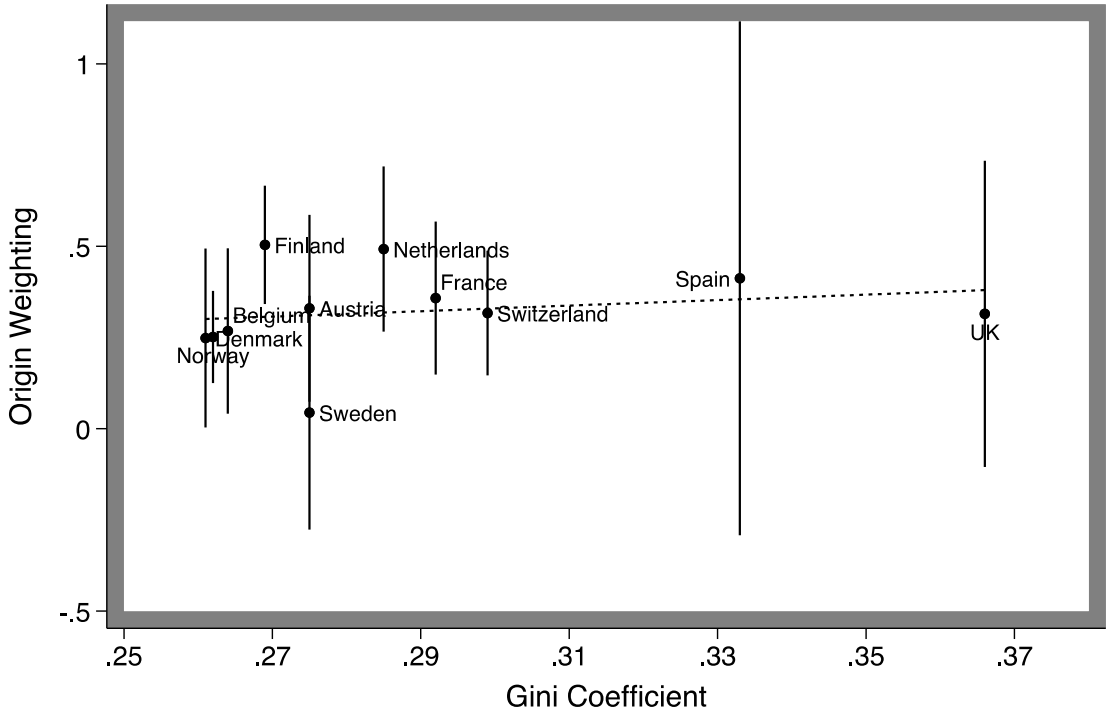
The same analysis for the anti-system left provides a significant origin effect in only 3 of the 14 countries (Finland, Ireland, and The Netherlands). Of these, The Netherlands has small differences between immobile groups, thus the magnitude of the origin effect is small. Full results by country are available in the supplementary materials.

In hypothesis 3, I expect countries with higher levels of income inequality to have a greater influence of social origins on anti-system political preferences. There seems to be no obvious relationship, I produce a simple bivariate relationship to explore this further. I only perform the analysis for the anti-system right given that there is a significant origin effect in only 3 countries for the anti-system left. As can be seen in the bivariate graphic relationship below, contrary to my expectation income inequality does not matter for the influence of social origins. Moreover, there does not seem to be a clear grouping in terms of region or type of welfare regime. For graphic simplicity I have excluded Germany and Italy. As shown in Figure 2 Germany has a very large confidence interval and the model does not converge for Italy. If I include only West Germany in the German regression the origin point estimate is 0.12 (95% C.I. -0.067,0.313), which may be more appropriate

given the difference in social mobility between East and West Germany (Müller & Pollak, 2004).

I complement the bivariate relationship with a Feasible Generalised Least Squares (FGLS) regression. Given that that the origin weights are estimates derived from single country regressions, it would be inappropriate to use an OLS with origin weight as the new dependent variable. The estimates would be affected by heteroscedasticity (Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019). The FGLS weights observation in the second step regression to correct for heteroscedasticity. In the second stage, the level of income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, does not have a statistically significant effect on origin weight. The full FGLS model is available in the supplementary material.

Figure 3: Bivariate relationship between Gini coefficient and origin weighting by country for the anti-system right



Notes: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

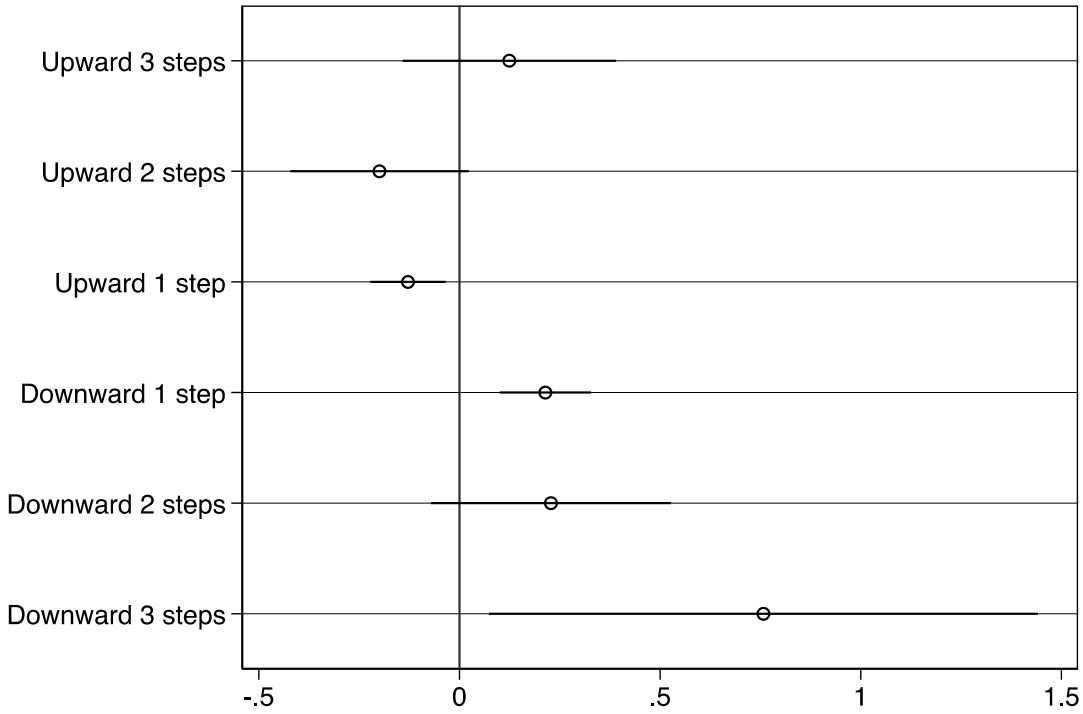
7. Model extensions

Decomposing the mobility effect

I further split the mobility effects identified in the anti-system right pooled country model to allow for different ranges of mobility. I divide mobility into steps, for example 3 steps

upwardly mobile would equate to one's parents having no formal education and the respondent having a university degree. As can be seen from the coefficient plot in Figure 4, being long range downwardly mobile most strongly affects the probability of anti-system right support. It increases the odds of voting for the anti-system right by 113% compared to the non-mobile (p=0.03), over and above origin and destination effects. There does not appear to be such a gradient for the upwardly mobile, short range upward mobility is strongly statistically significant (p<0.01) and medium range weakly statistically significant (p<0.1). The full model is again available in the supplementary materials.

Figure 4: Mobility effects decomposed into the "range" of the move. Log odds with 95% confidence intervals from anti-system right pooled sample DRM



Notes: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Model controls: occupation, age, sex, mobility, ESS round, country dummy, whether ethnic minority, religiosity.

Cross-Wave Analysis

Included in the supplementary material, I have also sub-divided the pooled analysis separately for each of the nine Waves for anti-system left and anti-system right support respectively. Unsurprisingly, the constant becomes less negative over-time for both anti-system right and left support. That is the likelihood of supporting anti-system parties increases between 2002 and 2018. When analysing anti-system right support, the origin

effect is statistically significant ($p<0.05$) for every wave apart from Waves 1 ($p=0.067$) and 2. By contrast, origin effects are only present in three waves for the anti-system left and this is based on very small differences between log odds ratios for immobile individuals. Thus, in substance the impact of origin is small across all waves when analysing the anti-system left.

Age variable

In the main analysis, I have used a simplistic version of age, treating it as a continuous variable. I have rerun the models with age as a categorical variable, splitting the sample into 10-year cohorts, for example those aged 41-50. As shown in the supplementary material, the linear approximation seems reasonable. Moreover, it may be that the weighting varies by these cohorts, a hypothesis often posited within the literature (De Graaf et al., 1995; Jaime-Castillo & Marqués-Perales, 2019). The idea is that one's origin becomes less important as one spends a greater amount of time in the destination class. I test this by interacting the categorical age variable with the weight. The point estimates suggest an interesting trend, namely that the origin weight is high for young adults (less than 28 years-old), lowest at the traditional peak of one's career (41-50) and then increases again for those over 70. However, these weightings are not statistically different from each other, and the model does not improve the 'goodness of fit'. The full model is available in the supplementary material.

Occupation as the mobility variable

I have used education as the variable of mobility, in part given its importance in predicting anti-system voting previously demonstrated in the literature (Lee et al., 2018). The most used social mobility variable in sociology is occupational status. I have rerun the models based on a 3-level categorical occupation variable using Oesch's (2006) class schema. The full models are available in the supplementary materials, broadly the results are as with the education model. The weighting of origin is 0.556 (95% C.I. 0.348; 0.764) for the anti-system right but not significantly different from zero for the anti-system left. Again, the mobility effects are in the same direction as the education models, albeit not significant when using cluster robust standard errors.

8. Discussion

The major finding is that social mobility matters for anti-system support. It is important in terms of social origins and additional mobility effects. However, this is only true for the anti-system right. Parental origins and mobility experience are not statistically significant for analysing anti-system left support. Regarding hypothesis one, parental educational class is nearly as important as one's own education as a predictor for anti-system right support. These are substantial effects given that there are large differences in tendencies

to vote for the anti-system right by immobile groups of educational attainment. Turning to hypothesis two, the effect of mobility over and above origin and destination class is generally smaller than the weighting component but still meaningful. There is only a statistically significant mobility effect for the anti-system right models, which supports the "meritocratic" hypothesis. The act of being upwardly mobile reduces the likelihood of an individual supporting the anti-system right. There is therefore not evidence of a dissociative impact of mobility, or at least it is outweighed by the meritocratic effect. Downward mobility increases the likelihood of voting for the anti-system right, here one cannot identify the mechanism. This is consistent with both the "meritocratic" and the "dissociative" hypothesis.

In summary, individuals that are upwardly socially mobile, measured by educational attainment, are less likely to vote for an anti-system right party than those who remain in a lower educational position. These individuals take on some voting behaviour of their destination educational position (less anti-system support) and retain some of their parents' education position (relatively more anti-system support). Additionally, the act of being upwardly mobile reduces the tendency to vote for the anti-system right. That said, in most cases when netting these effects, the upwardly mobile are still more likely to vote for an anti-system party than someone who has inherited their high educational attainment position from their parents. Socially mobile individuals are a distinct class.

Thus, there is some evidence supporting contemporary literature regarding one's declining position (Burgoon et al., 2019; Gest et al., 2018; Gidron & Hall, 2017), measured in various ways, increasing support for anti-system parties. However, overall, the group of individuals most likely to vote for anti-system right parties remains those who have inherited their low educational position from their parents.

In terms of national differences, the findings suggest that the general pattern of importance of origins holds across countries. Parental origins are statistically significant for anti-system right support in the majority of the countries despite a much smaller sample size than the pooled sample. There is no clear explanation for the ranking of country by weight of origin, and no clear bivariate relationship between the income inequality and influence of social origins. Only two countries show a significant and substantial origin weighting towards anti-system left voting, Ireland and Finland, which lends further support to the argument of this paper that social mobility trajectories are only relevant for the anti-system right.

These findings at the individual level leads to somewhat tentative conclusions for the macro puzzle: whether social mobility is key for a stable democracy and reducing the tendency for a large anti-system vote. Upward social mobility is supportive of the stability of democracy. The upwardly mobile share a large proportion of their anti-system preferences in line with their destination position (they are less likely to vote for the anti-system right), and the act of upward mobility reduces the tendency to support the anti-

system right. That said, there is evidence that fewer people, as measured by income mobility, are now upwardly mobile (Chetty et al., 2017). More concerningly, larger proportions of individuals measured in terms of occupation, are now downwardly mobile. Bukodi et al. (2019) suggest that it may be as much as a quarter to half of the population that are now downwardly occupationally mobile. Whilst these downwardly mobile individuals retain less anti-system right tendencies in line with their origin, there is a downward mobility effect increasing their anti-system right support. Thus, a society with high rates of absolute upward social mobility and low rates of downward social mobility reduces anti-system voting and support democracy.

The policy implications of these findings are complex. If one assumes that the findings in this paper are not affected by the size of the Higher Education system i.e., it does not dilute the impact of having a degree, then increasing the number of people that go to university will reduce the anti-system right support. However, these newly educated families will still be more likely to vote for the anti-system than individuals who have parents with degrees. However, to what extent individuals care about their absolute versus relative position may be important (Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018). If having a tertiary education is no longer able to make one stand out in society, given the overall number of graduates, it may no longer reduce the tendency to vote anti-system right. This leads to a further research agenda in understanding the extent to which educational upgrading of a population will increase the stability of democracy.

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