

What Are the Key Parties and Issues in the Integration-Demarcation Cleavage?

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Abstract

Recent literature has demonstrated the emergence of a transnational cleavage, driven by globalisation. This literature often makes two assumptions about parties: the cleavage's core issues are transnational governance, free trade, and immigration; and green (/new left/GAL) and radical right parties are emblematic of either pole. We examine whether these assumptions go together: do West European green (/new left/GAL) and radical right parties bundle positions on EU integration, immigration, and trade, as expected? Our results support the literature's view of the radical right as core to this cleavage, as they adopt the expected positions on all issues. However, green, new left, and GAL parties do not bundle issues as expected, mainly due to their positions on protectionism. Since both assumptions do not hold simultaneously, the role of green (/new left/GAL) parties and protectionism as emblematic parts of the transnational cleavage at the party level should be reconsidered.

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the literature has demonstrated that globalisation has led to the emergence of a new transnational cleavage at both the voter (e.g., Helbling and Jungkunz 2020; Steiner et al. 2023; Zollinger 2023; Zollinger and Attewell 2025) and party level (e.g., Dassonneville et al. 2024; Jackson and Jolly 2021). At the party level, two assumptions tend to be both prominent and common: immigration, EU integration, and trade are the cleavage's core issues (Kriesi et al. 2006; De Vries 2018; Hooghe and Marks 2018: 110; Polk and Rosén 2024: 107); and green and radical right parties (RRPs) are emblematic of either pole of the cleavage (Bornschieer 2010: 2; Hooghe and Marks 2018: 127; Marks et al. 2020: 177; Dassonneville et al. 2024: 46, 54; Crulli and Emanuele 2025: 6; Schäfer and Steiner 2025).

However, some scholars within this literature argue against combining both assumptions, especially due to concerns about which parties represent either pole. For example, green (as well as new left and GAL) parties are often seen as either economically protectionist or ambiguous on free trade and the EU (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2006: 925-926), which means that they cannot represent an integration pole that is defined by a combination of pro-free trade, pro-immigration, and pro-EU positions. Similarly, RRP are often seen as the driving force behind the politicisation of the cleavage (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2018: 111), without there necessarily being one party family to mobilise the pro-integration pole of the cleavage. Despite this discussion within the transnational cleavage literature, no study has empirically examined how well these two assumptions go together. Thus, our research question is: *do party families emblematic of the integration-demarcation cleavage take the positions on EU integration, immigration, and trade expected by their role in this cleavage?*

We test whether these assumptions hold simultaneously by examining party positions on EU integration, immigration, and trade in Western Europe, which is where the cleavage is strongest (Kriesi et al. 2006; Strijbis et al. 2020). If we are to find evidence in support of both assumptions anywhere, it should be there. Since the literature expects this cleavage to have become more important over time (e.g., Emanuele et al. 2020), we use the 2019 and 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) to examine these assumptions when the cleavage is strongest. Using this data, we document parties' positions on three issues associated with the cleavage.

We find that RRP's do bundle these issues as expected as they are protectionist, anti-immigration, and anti-EU. However, and in accordance with expectations from the transnational cleavage literature, we find that greens do not clearly adopt the opposite issue bundle. While green parties tend to be pro-immigration and pro-EU, they are too protectionist. In the appendix, we show that this finding also applies to two other party families that are often seen as emblematic of the integration pole: new left parties; (Bornschieer et al. 2021; Bornschieer et al. 2024; Zollinger and Attewall 2025), and GAL parties (Hooghe and Marks 2025). Thus, our findings suggest that there is not one party family that clearly adopts the integrationist position.

This finding is important because the lack of issue bundling from the greens suggests that there is a tension between these two assumptions, such that either one or both of these need to be relaxed. One option to reduce this tension is to argue that trade is of lesser importance in defining the cleavage than positions on immigration and the EU. Thus, rather than focusing on a broad definition of globalisation, one could argue that the transnational cleavage is driven by specific forms of globalisation (i.e., cultural and political integration), with greens and RRP's still seen as representing either pole. Alternatively, one could relax the assumption that green

(or new left/GAL) parties alone represent the integration pole. In doing so, one could argue that all three issues matter and RRP's are driving this cleavage, or that a wider spectrum of parties can be defined as integrationist, rather than there needing to be one party family that fulfils this role. For example, either liberal or green parties could be integrationist, with the party family playing this role varying across countries. Indeed, our analysis shows that there is party supply in the “integrationist corner” in most West European countries. In this vein, we suggest a new classification of *integrationist parties*, which allows researchers to define the integration pole in a more systematic, data-driven way. Thus, our finding of a tension between both assumptions has important consequences for how we understand this new transnational cleavage at the party-level.

Literature Review

At the core of this transnational/integration-demarcation cleavage is a divide between globalisation's winners and losers (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi et al. 2006), who are defined by their class, educational, and geographical characteristics (Bornschieer et al. 2021; Zollinger 2024). These characteristics influence whether one can take advantage of globalisation's opportunities or are threatened by its economic and cultural changes. Thus, the ‘winners’ tend to be highly educated, middle-class, and based in urban areas, whereas the losers tend to be less well-educated, manual working-class, and based in rural areas. This maps onto a cosmopolitan-communitarian divide over how much weight to attach to the interests of humanity versus one's fellow citizens (Bornschieer et al. 2021; Helbling and Jungkunz 2020; Zollinger 2022). There is considerable evidence that these divides have become increasingly important for voters, who can self-identify and define in- and out-groups on this basis (Helbling and Jungkunz 2020; Steiner et al. 2023; Zollinger 2024).

While the transnational cleavage can be used to explain changes in voter attitudes, it is also commonly used to explain the changing nature of party competition. In attempting to explain changes in party competition, the literature frequently assumes that the transnational cleavage combines three main issues: the EU (or global governance and international institutions more generally); immigration; and free trade vs. economic protectionism (e.g., De Vries 2018; Kriesi et al. 2006: 922; Polk and Rosén 2024: 107). This is because globalisation has both an economic (more free trade across borders) and cultural (greater movement of people across borders) component, which will influence how people view those institutions governing globalisation. The EU is an important example of such an institution as its Single Market requires a significant opening of domestic markets to competition from other Member States, and the importance placed on freedom of movement (Schäfer et al. 2021). Thus, how parties respond to free trade and immigration will influence their position on the EU. Indeed, for some scholars, the combination of these issues is crucial, with Hooghe and Marks (2018: 110) arguing that the “perforation of national states by immigration, integration and trade may signify a critical juncture in the political development of Europe”.

When examining the structure of party competition over the transnational cleavage, the literature frequently assumes that greens and RRP represent either pole of this cleavage (Bornschieer 2010: 2; Hooghe and Marks 2018: 127; Marks et al. 2020: 177; Crulli and Emanuele 2025: 6). Given their anti-immigrant nativism and principled opposition to any form of EU integration (Meijers and Williams 2020; van Elsas et al. 2016), RRP have long been seen as the exemplars of the demarcation pole. Indeed, by politicising globalisation, RRP are often seen as *the* driving force of this cleavage (Kriesi et al. 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2018: 111). While greens are not accorded the same prominence as RRP, they are often seen as exemplars of the integration pole. This is because greens prioritise cultural liberalism

(including on immigration) and have more cosmopolitan outlooks (Crulli and Emanuele 2025: 6; Dolezal 2010: 542; Marks et al. 2020: 177). In contrast, there is significant agreement that the historically dominant centre-left and centre-right parties in Western Europe cannot be exemplars of either pole as they face splits within their support base over the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Van de Wardt et al. 2014). Given that RRP and greens are exemplars of either pole of a cleavage that is built around EU integration, immigration, and trade, we should expect both party families to adopt positions on these three issues that correspond with their role in the cleavage.

However, while both of these assumptions are common, the literature also provides several reasons to doubt that both can hold true simultaneously. These concerns mainly relate to concerns about the structure of party competition over globalisation. More specifically, while the literature is in strong agreement that RRP represent the demarcation pole, there are doubts about the role of greens. This is because, while greens are strongly pro-immigration, they have been conflicted on the EU and international governance, and adopt left-wing economic positions (e.g., Carter 2013; Dolezal 2010). These left-wing economic stances, with the accompanying criticisms of capitalism, potentially stems from their strong opposition to climate change (Fredman 2013; Reitz and Jörke 2021). There is also an association between green attitudes and positive views towards protectionism (Bechtel et al. 2012), as increased economic activity and longer transmission routes means that free trade can lead to higher emissions (e.g., Meyer 2024; Stepnov et al. 2023). Furthermore, trade barriers can be used as a tool to attempt to force other countries to adopt climate change friendly policies (Bechtel et al. 2012: 838). Thus, while greens may be open to international governance, especially for dealing with the climate emergency, they may be less supportive of free trade. Indeed, one of the initial studies on the transnational cleavage (Kriesi et al. 2006: 925-926) argues that green

and new left parties combine cultural integration with economic demarcation (i.e., pro-immigration and protectionist positions), which means that they do not bundle issues in ways that we would expect from a consistently pro-integration party family.

Within the transnational cleavage literature, there are two main responses to these concerns about green parties. Firstly, some scholars (e.g., De Vries 2018) instead focus on liberal parties as potential exemplars of the integration pole as they are often pro-immigration, pro-free trade, and pro-EU. Secondly, this cleavage could be driven by asymmetric politicisation, such that the cleavage's politicisation is driven mostly by RRPs, rather than having party families consistently mobilising the cleavage's full spectrum. For example, while Hooghe and Marks (2018: 111) both discuss the greens and RRPs, as well as the three core issues, they argue that the cleavage is mainly driven by RRPs mobilising on all three issues.

However, while these two assumptions and concerns about greens have been discussed extensively in the literature, no study has sought to empirically test if both assumptions actually hold simultaneously. In other words, despite the theoretical debate, we do not know whether greens and RRPs adopt the positions on these three issues that are expected by the literature. Filling this gap is important as it will allow us to better understand the role of the transnational cleavage in our changing politics, both in terms of its substantive content and how it structures party competition. If both assumptions hold simultaneously, then greens should adopt pro-EU, pro-immigration, and pro-free trade positions, while RRPs should adopt the opposite. Thus, we hypothesise that:

- *Hypothesis 1a: Green parties tend to adopt pro-EU, pro-immigration, and pro-free trade positions.*

- *Hypothesis 1b: RRP*s tend to adopt anti-EU, anti-immigration, and protectionist positions.

Empirical Approach

To test if each party family adopts the expected positions on these issues, we rely on the 2019 and 2024 CHES waves. Focusing on the latest waves makes it easiest to find evidence in favour of our hypotheses as this cleavage is expected to strengthen over time. We are also limited by data availability, as there is no question on protectionism in earlier CHES waves. We restrict our analysis to Western Europe as this is where this cleavage is strongest (Strijbis et al. 2020). We only include the West European countries that have both an RRP and green party¹ (10 in 2019 and 14 in 2024), as it is not possible for both assumptions to hold if one of these party families is absent.² Consequently, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Portugal are excluded from the 2019 analysis, while Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Spain, and Malta are excluded from the 2024 analysis.

Using this CHES data, we provide a descriptive analysis of the position of all parties in our cases on free trade, immigration, and EU integration. This analysis will allow us to determine which party families tend to fall into the integration and demarcation poles by combining positive and negative positions on the EU, immigration, and free trade, respectively. We measure free trade using the ‘protectionism’ survey item, where “0 = strongly favors trade liberalization” and “10 = strongly favors protection of domestic producers.” We reverse code the variable so that 10 indicates favourable attitudes towards free trade. We measure

¹ Defined using CHES’s own party family coding.

² The absence of these parties further indicates that the cleavage is less strong there and it is thus not a most likely case.

immigration attitudes with the ‘immigrate_policy’ item, where 0 “strongly” indicates a restrictive, and 10 a liberal, policy on immigration (again, reverse-coded from the original data). Finally, we measure parties’ position towards EU integration with the question on whether the party leadership is anything from strongly opposed (1) to strongly in favour (7). We also examine party placement on the cosmopolitan-nationalist dimension, which is a key divide in the literature. This is measured using the ‘nationalism’ item, where ‘0 = strongly promotes cosmopolitan conceptions of society’ and ‘10 = strongly promotes nationalist conceptions of society’. Variable descriptions and descriptive statistics can be found in the Appendix.

Results

We start our descriptive analysis by plotting the positions of all West European parties on EU integration, trade, and immigration in Figures 1 (2019) and 2 (2024) below. Each graph is split into two plots, based on whether parties are more pro- or anti-EU integration, i.e., whether their score is above or below 4 (the midpoint). There are four parties that had exactly 4 as their score in each year, which have been excluded from Figure 1 and 2, but not from Table 1.³ Within each facet (pro- and anti-EU integration), we plot parties according to their trade (x-axis) and immigration (y-axis) positions.

We have marked in bold two quadrants, which we call the demarcation and integration quadrants. The former, located at the bottom left, is where we should find RRP as this quadrant combines low levels of support for free trade, immigration, and the EU. As expected, most

³ These include one RRP, two confessional parties, one Christian Democratic party, one conservative party, one socialist party, one radical left party, and a party with no family label.

RRPs are in this quadrant, with only one out of 17 in 2019 (5.9 percent) and six out of 20 (30 percent) in 2024 outside of this corner due to centrist or somewhat favourable views on free trade. No RRP supports either immigration or further EU integration in either year. In contrast, if the Greens are an integrationist party family, then they should fall into the integration quadrant, which combines high levels of support for free trade, immigration, and the EU. However, most greens fall outside of the integration quadrant in both 2019 and 2024. This is because, while no green parties are against immigration, and almost all are pro-EU integration, only six out of 17 (35.3 percent) in 2019 and five out of 14 (35.7 percent) in 2024 are pro-free trade. This is somewhat counter to the otherwise strong correlation between trade and EU positions, visualised by the fact that most pro-EU parties have a score above 5 on trade, whereas the opposite is true for more anti-EU parties.



Figure 1. Demarcation and Integration Quadrants of the West European Party Landscape - CHES 2019

Note: CHES 2019 data. Party names displayed if occupying more than 15% of seats in their national assembly.

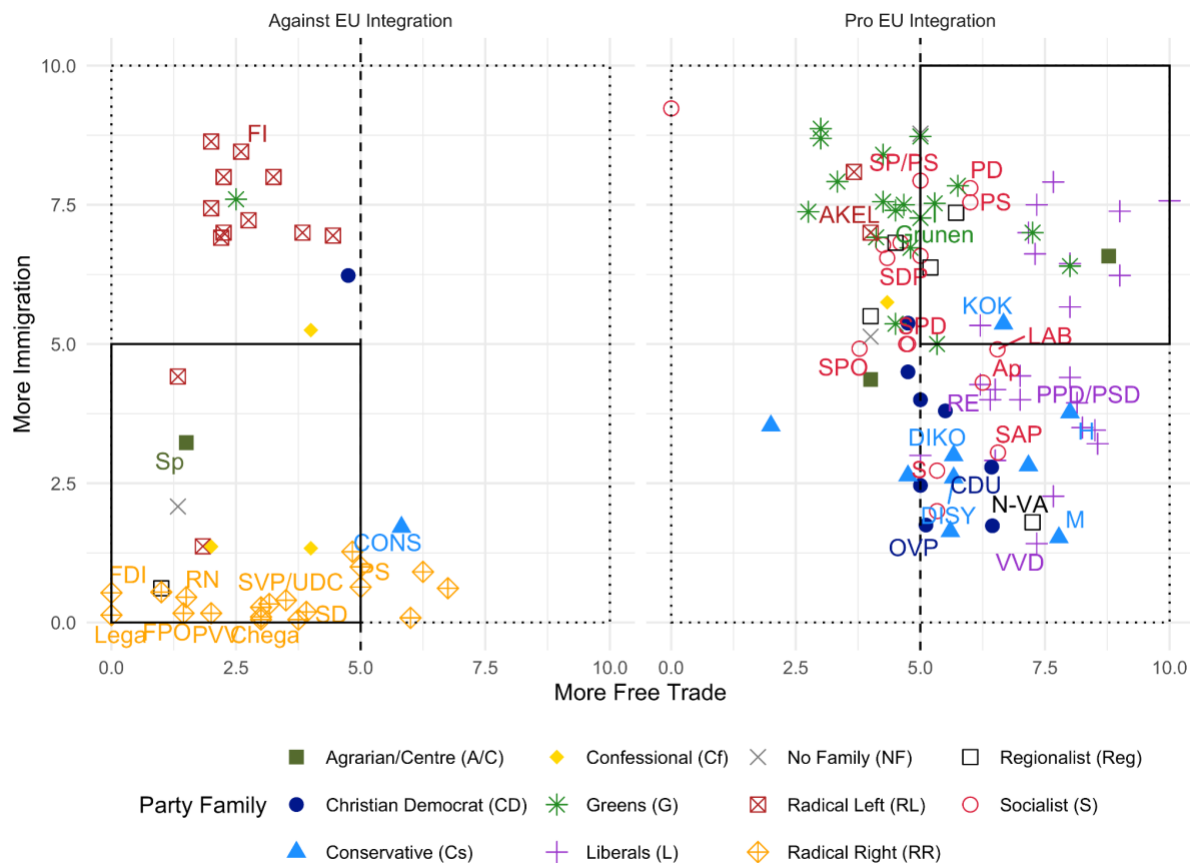


Figure 2. Demarcation and Integration Quadrants of the West European Party Landscape - CHES 2024

Note: CHES 2024 data. Party names displayed if occupying more than 15% of seats in their national assembly.

Next, Figure 3 and 4 below lists all parties that occupy the demarcation and integration quadrants in each country in each year. We highlight the boxes in bold that meet both assumptions, which means that the demarcation box is highlighted if it contains an RRP and the integration box is highlighted if it contains a green party. Five countries (out of ten) in 2019 and three (out of 14) countries in 2024 have both the integration and demarcation boxes filled by a green party and RRP, respectively. Thus, in 16 out of 24 countries (two thirds), the two assumptions do not hold simultaneously because the country does not have both an integrationist green party and a demarcation RRP. However, in 21 out of 24 countries voters

have multiple parties representing either pole, showing that there is party supply on this cleavage, if conceptualised as including all three issues.

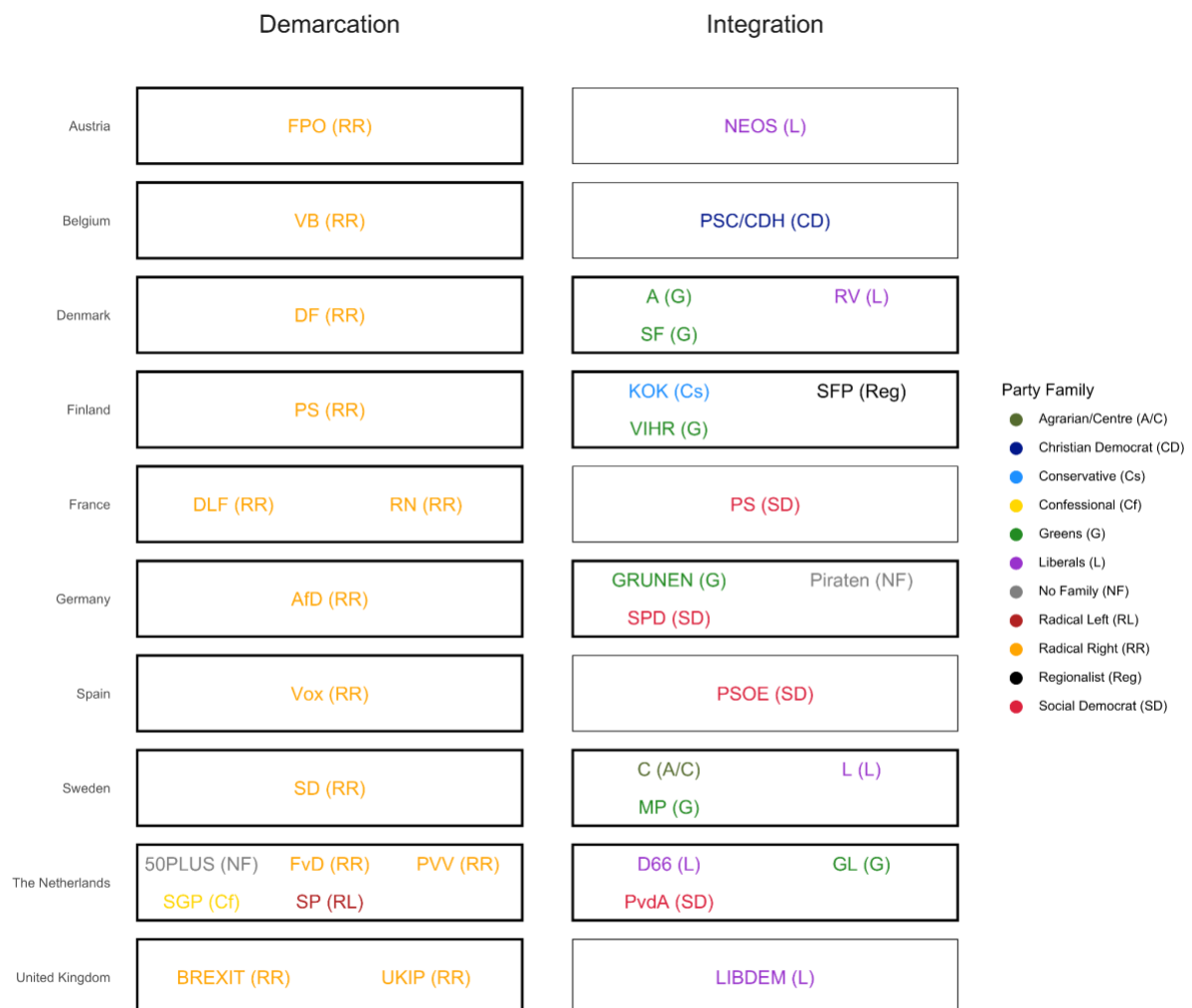


Figure 3. Parties Occupying the Demarcation and Integration Quadrants 2019

Note: CHES 2019 data. Parties displayed if they appear in the demarcation or integration quadrants in their respective country. An empty quadrant indicates that no party in the country meets the criteria. Demarcation quadrant is highlighted when an RRP is present, and the integration quadrant when a green party is present.



Figure 4. Parties Occupying the Demarcation and Integration Quadrants 2024

Note: CHES 2024 data. Parties displayed if they appear in the demarcation or integration quadrants in their respective country. An empty quadrant indicates that no party in the country meets the criteria. Demarcation quadrant is highlighted when an RRP is present, and the integration quadrant when a green party is present.

To make this more precise, Table 1 below shows the raw number and percentage of parties in each party family that end up in the two quadrants when combining the 2019 and 2024 data. Our unit of observation is now party-year, meaning that parties can be included twice if they are present in both the CHES 2019 and 2024 wave. In Table 1, we see that a higher percentage of both the socialist and (especially) the liberal party families occupy the integration quadrant than the green party family, as 41.5 percent of liberal party observations (or 17 out of 41) are in the integration quadrant, compared to 30.6 percent of green party observations (11 out of 36). Conversely, 80.1 percent of all RRP party observations are in the demarcation quadrant.

Table 1. Share of Parties in Each Quadrant by Party Family - 2019 and 2024 combined

Family	Total N	N Int. Q.	% Int. Q.	N Dem. Q.	% Dem. Q.
Agrarian/Centre	5	2	40%	1	20%
Christian Democrat	20	3	15%	1	5%
Conservative	21	3	14.3%	1	4.8%
Confessional	8	0	0%	3	37.5%
Green	36	11	30.6%	0	0%
Liberal	41	17	41.5%	0	0%
Radical Left	33	1	3%	3	10%
Radical Right	37	0	0%	30	81.1%
Regional	19	3	15.8%	1	5.3%
Socialist	25	11	31.4%	0	0%
No Family	9	1	11.1%	3	33.3%

Note: N = number of observations. Int. Q. = Integration Quadrant. Dem. Q. = Demarcation Quadrant.

In the Appendix, we provide two robustness checks. First, we show that our results are robust to using Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) data. Second, we show that our results are robust to replacing greens with two alternative party families: new left and GAL parties. Overall, we find strong support for H1b as RRP's do combine these issues as expected. However, we find rather limited evidence in favour of H1a, given that the majority of green, new left, and GAL parties fall outside the integration quadrant.

Given these results, there is a tension between utilising green, GAL, and new left parties as exemplars of the integration pole, while including protectionism as a core issue of this cleavage. One way to resolve this tension is to not rely on pre-existing party families and instead define "integrationist parties" based on the integration quadrant itself, i.e., parties that are pro-immigration, pro-EU, and pro-free trade. As a validity check, using 2024 CHES data, we compare where our integrationist parties and other key party families in the literature (namely, GAL, green, liberal, new left, and RRP's) fall on the cosmopolitan-nationalist divide. This is an important validity check because the ideological importance of the cosmopolitan-nationalist divide for the integration-demarcation cleavage (Bornschieer et al. 2021; Zollinger 2024) means that parties that are emblematic of the integration pole of the cleavage should also be on the cosmopolitan side of the cosmopolitan-nationalist divide. Figure 5 below presents a density plot of where these parties fall on the divide, which shows that almost all "integrationist" parties are cosmopolitan (below five on an eleven-point scale from cosmopolitan to nationalist), with very similar distributions to green and GAL parties. Integrationist parties could therefore be a potential substitute for the integration pole as they, by definition, adopt the expected positions on all three issues and are strongly cosmopolitan.

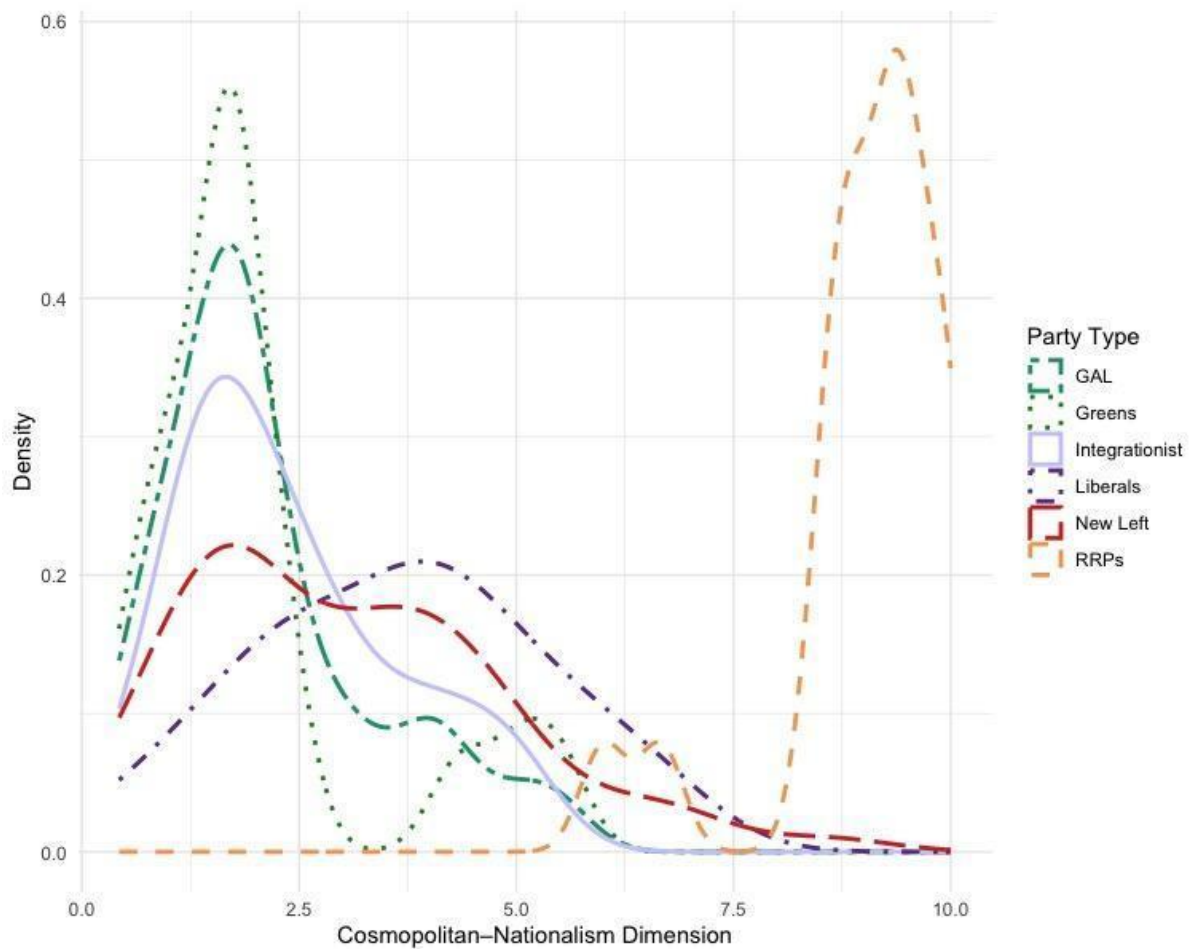


Figure 5. Density Plot of Party Groupings on a Cosmopolitan-Nationalism Dimension

Note: CHES 2024 data. GAL and New Left categories are defined in the appendix.

Discussion

We have examined how well two assumptions of the transnational cleavage go together: that trade, immigration, and EU integration are the cleavage's core issues; and that RRP and green parties are emblematic of the cleavage. Using 2024 CHES data, we confirm previous theorising in the literature: there is a tension between these two assumptions. The sole reason for this is that green parties are slightly more protectionist on average, when they should be more pro-free trade. The same is true for new left and GAL parties. This finding is significant as it highlights that these two assumptions are not perfectly compatible at the party level, which has important consequences for how we should understand this new cleavage.

One option is to conceptualise the cleavage primarily as a divide around issues like immigration, rather than a response to globalisation understood more broadly. Thus, while we weighted all three issues equally, one could argue that trade is less important for this cleavage. This marries well with cultural conceptions of the cleavage, but less well with more economic conceptions (e.g., Colantone and Stanig 2018). Alternatively, one could weigh all three issues equally but relax the assumption that greens (or new left/GAL parties) are emblematic of the cleavage. This has the benefit of not dropping the economic element, and the cleavage can be understood as one between winners and losers of globalisation in both economic and cultural senses, even at the party level. However, one then needs to decide about the integrationist pole. Researchers could leave this pole empty and simply see the cleavage as RRP-driven, given that it is not uncommon for cleavages to have asymmetric mobilisation (Hooghe and Marks 2018: 111). Alternatively, one could fill the integrationist pole by using our “integrationist” category. Regardless of which option researchers choose, this choice will inform how we understand the cleavage going forward.

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