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Bringing Rokkan into the twenty-first century: the cleavage structure of Western Europe

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ABSTRACT

Political science is revitalising cleavage theory by examining the possible demise of traditional Rokkanian cleavages or the rise of a new globalisation cleavage. However, studies rarely combine these perspectives within a single framework, leading to inconsistent criteria for evaluating old and new cleavages. Additionally, whether contemporary societal conflicts generate collective identities remains unclear due to insufficient survey data. As a result, the question of which cleavages characterise contemporary Western Europe remains a puzzle. This article addresses this research question by adopting the classical conceptualisation of a cleavage as a foundation for designing survey items. Consequently, our original cross-national survey investigates the socio-structural, normative, and organisational elements of old and new conflicts. The analysis rejects hypotheses of complete dealignment due to the waning of old cleavages and realignment under a broad globalisation cleavage. Instead, Western Europe appears characterised by multiple cleavages, driven by distinct social groups and represented by different party families. These cleavages vary in importance and ability to generate collective identities and political cues. The class cleavage and the GAL/TAN cleavage (including the ethnonationalists/cosmopolitans, traditionalism/LGBTQ+ rights, and economy/environment dimensions), stand out as the most structured. The study's implications for neo-cleavage theory are discussed in the conclusion.

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KEYWORDS Political conflicts; cleavages; group identities; survey data; Western Europe

Introduction

The debate on cleavage politics has gained renewed momentum in comparative political research (e.g., Borbáth *et al*., 2023; Marks *et al*., 2021). Two main strands can be identified within it. The first revolves around the alleged

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demise of traditional cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), i.e., territory, religion, and above all, class (Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012; Emanuele, 2024; Goldberg, 2020; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). The second strand considers the emergence and possible consolidation of a new 'transnational cleavage', pitting the 'winners' against the 'losers' of globalisation (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Kriesi *et al*., 2006).

This debate is flawed by two limitations. From a theoretical standpoint, the two aforementioned strands of literature rarely engage with one another. Despite very recent attempts comparing new social divides with old ones (Hooghe & Marks, 2025; Marks *et al*., 2023), this disconnect has resulted in an overall lack of studies that integrate the two perspectives within a unified analytical framework. Consequently, the criteria used to evaluate the structuring of old and new cleavages often differ, ultimately leading to confusion about what constitutes a fully-fledged 'cleavage' (Bartolini & Mair, 1990) as opposed to a less-structured 'conflict'.

From an empirical viewpoint, while the decline of traditional cleavages has been mostly studied through individual-level survey data (Best, 2011; Dassonneville *et al*., 2022; Elff, 2007), this has not been the case for the globalisation-related cleavage. Moreover, even scholars relying on survey data (e.g., Helbling & Jungkunz, 2020; Hooghe & Marks, 2025; Teney *et al*., 2014) have often glossed over the extent to which contemporary societal divides produce collective identities (Bornschier *et al*., 2024; De Wilde *et al*., 2023), which is at the core of the classical conception of cleavage.

Due to these theoretical and empirical limitations, the pertinent literature falls short of providing adequate answers to the following research questions: *Which cleavages characterise contemporary Western European society and politics?* In particular: [RQ1] Which socio-political conflicts possess all the required elements to be classified as cleavages? [RQ2] Are these cleavages *overlapping*, thereby constituting dimensions of a same broader cleavage, or *crosscutting* each other, hence autonomous?

The article attempts to answer these questions, introducing a third perspective that avoids the pitfall of looking at *either* the alleged abating of old cleavages *or* the alleged congealing of a single, comprehensive, globalisation cleavage. Through an original cross-national survey fielded in seven Western European countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), we investigate a set of old and new conflicts. We focus on both the four traditional Rokkanian conflicts – centre/periphery, state/church, urban/rural, and employers/workers – and four conflicts that characterise contemporary globalised and post-material societies – skilled/unskilled workers, ethnonationalists/cosmopolitans, traditionalism/LGBTQ+ rights, and economic growth/environmental sustainability.

In investigating these conflicts, this study makes the first attempt to empirically operationalise Bartolini and Mair's (1990) definition of cleavages

using survey data. Therefore, we assess whether each conflict: 1) creates a salient social division (socio-structural criterion); 2) produces shared identities (normative criterion); 3) is politicised by distinct party families (organisational criterion). Moreover, we also consider whether conflicts overlap or crosscut other conflicts (Lijphart, 1999; Rokkan, 1970), both socially and politically. We argue that, if criteria 1)-3) are met, the conflict under consideration can be categorised as a 'cleavage'. If, for instance, only criteria 1) and 2) are met, there is a 'latent cleavage', namely a societal conflict that has not yet entered the political arena or has ceased to be politicised. Hence, it cannot be classified as a fully-fledged cleavage. Finally, we propose that, if two or more conflicts meet criteria 1)-3), thereby qualifying as 'cleavages', but overlap socially and politically, then they can be conceived as dimensions of a broader 'cleavage', rather than autonomous cleavages with their own social groups and political referents.

This original research design allows us to better grasp the cleavage structure of contemporary Western Europe. The main takeaway is that both the idea of 'dealignment' due to the demise of traditional cleavages and that of 'realignment' through an overarching globalisation cleavage are rejected. Indeed, our survey data suggest that multiple old and new cleavages characterise Western Europe. First, two of the old Rokkanian cleavages – centre/periphery and owners/workers – seem to be here to stay. They are not downgraded to less-structured 'conflicts' and retain their relevance. Interestingly, the class cleavage stands out as the most salient and identity-shaping among all old and new conflicts considered. The centre/periphery cleavage overlaps from a social, but not a political, viewpoint with the other conflict originally derived from the National Revolution: state/church. However, both the latter and the remaining Rokkanian divide – urban/rural – seem to be not fully politicised, and hence cannot qualify as fully-fledged cleavages, based on our data.

As for new, globalisation-related conflicts, our analysis corroborates the idea that a 'GAL/TAN'[1] cleavage (Hooghe *et al*., 2002) has consolidated in Western Europe. This cleavage includes the ethnonationalism/cosmopolitanism, traditionalism/LGBTQ+ rights, and economy/environment dimensions. These three post-materialist conflicts satisfy the socio-structural, normative, and organisational criteria; however, they also appear to substantively overlap in social and political terms. Finally, the conflict between skilled and unskilled workers, or economic winners and losers from globalisation (Polk & Rosén, 2024), also qualifies as a 'cleavage' but seems weakly politicised and is separate from the three other globalisation conflicts. This implies that, *from the perspective of citizens*, there is no such thing as a proper 'integration/demarcation' (Kriesi *et al*., 2006) or 'transnational cleavage' (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), *if* the latter is supposed to include both cultural (ethnonationalism/cosmopolitanism) and economic (protectionism/

free trade) dimensions coherently. Based on our data, economic and cultural cleavages over globalisation are socially and politically separate.

In the remainder of the article, we first expound on our theoretical framework and introduce our alternative research hypotheses on cleavages' configuration in contemporary Western Europe. The subsequent research design section presents the data and method and clarifies the originality of our empirical approach, aimed at 'bringing Rokkan into the twenty-first century'. We then present and discuss our results and conclude by underlining the wider implications of our research for cleavage theory.

Theory and hypotheses

Traditional- and neo-cleavage theory

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) contended that European party systems arose out of a series of 'cleavages'. This term was never clearly defined by the authors, as 'precise definition was not Lipset and Rokkan's main goal' (Deegan-Krause, 2007, p. 538). However, according to Flora (1999, p. 34) who systematised Rokkan's scientific production, cleavages can be deemed as 'particularly strong and long-term conflicts rooted in the social structure'. In other words, a cleavage is a deep societal division fuelled by opposing social groups. For a social fracture to evolve into 'a cleavage', organised groups must prevent it from healing. It is therefore paramount to spell out that 'cleavage' is not a synonym for 'societal conflict' or 'divide' (Bartolini, 2013). Scholars who endeavoured to nail the concept of 'cleavage' down (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Deegan-Krause, 2007) stressed that a fully-fledged cleavage exists only when three elements are present. (1) The first one is the *socio-structural* element, i.e., a salient societal conflict that splits people into two distinct groups. (2) The second one is the *normative* element, namely, values and beliefs providing social groups with a sense of collective identity. (3) Finally, there must be an *organisational/behavioural* element, or a structure that motivates and coordinates the collective action of the respective social group within the political system. Such structure is usually represented by political movements or parties (Enyedi, 2005).

Four cleavages were identified by Lipset and Rokkan in 1967: the centre/periphery and state/church cleavages, closely bound up with the National Revolution; the rural/urban and workers/employers cleavages (the latter also known as the class cleavage), stemming from the Industrial Revolution. For some decades after Lipset and Rokkan's theory was formulated, the idea that these four cleavages underlay European politics has hardly been contested. However, the inception of new political alternatives from the late 1970s – green-ecologist and 'post-material extreme right' parties (Ignazi, 2003) – put serious question marks against the ongoing validity of

classic cleavage theory. These new political parties were not connected to traditional cleavages, as they were basing their platforms on post-materialist issues. Hence, Lijphart (1990) proposed a first review of the original cleavage model by adding two new dimensions of conflict – 'participatory democracy' and 'environmentalism' – to Lipset and Rokkan's framework. More influential was the comparative research by Franklin and colleagues (1992), who unveiled 'a new political world in which social cleavages no longer condition partisanship in the manner that was once the norm' (Franklin & Mackie, 2009, p. 2). According to these authors, the 1990s' political scenario of Western Europe was already much less 'frozen' than that described by Lipset and Rokkan, as the decline of traditional cleavages was fostering processes of political *dealignment* (Dalton, 1984), or a weakening of the linkages between specific social groups and party families. Hence, societal changes from the late 1970s (e.g., deindustrialisation, secularisation) would have reduced the importance of structural variables – such as religion, urban/rural residence, and class – in shaping voting preferences, ultimately resulting in a shift from 'stable alignment' to 'dealignment' in voting behaviour (Knutsen, 2017). The dramatic increase in electoral volatility (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2017) and decline in party membership (Sierens *et al*., 2023) can be seen as further signs that Western Europe has ceased to be structured along strong cleavage lines. Hence, our first hypothesis on the cleavage structure of contemporary Western Europe is as follows:

> **H1 (dealignment)**: Neither traditional Rokkanian cleavages nor new ones structure Western European society and politics.

However, the prevailing perspective today among scholars of cleavage theory is that of 'realignment'. Already in 1998, Kriesi suggested that 'the decline of traditional cleavages does not necessarily signify the end of structuration of politics by social divisions' (Kriesi, 1998, p. 181). Following this intuition, an increasing number of studies conceive of the conflict between the 'winners' and 'losers' of globalisation (De Wilde *et al*., 2019; Helbling & Jungkunz, 2020; Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Teney *et al*., 2014) as the basis for a potential overarching 'globalisation cleavage'. Globalisation has been interpreted as a third 'critical juncture', after the National and Industrial Revolutions, due to the long-term economic, socio-cultural, and political-institutional changes it provoked.[2] Hence, a 'neo-cleavage' theory has been advanced (Marks *et al*., 2021) to make sense of the transformations in cleavage politics brought about by globalisation and related crises.

Neo-cleavage theory suggests that while the traditional left/right political divide is fading, the GAL/TAN dimension is gaining ever more relevance, ultimately leading to the emergence of an 'integration/demarcation' (Kriesi *et al*., 2006) or 'transnational' (Hooghe & Marks, 2018) cleavage. The latter has been described as the conflict between those who aim to 'defend national political,

social, and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state' (Hooghe & Marks, 2018, p. 110) and those who do not feel threatened by such openness of national borders. Sociologically, education is key in distinguishing GAL from TAN voters, with the latter characterised by lower levels of it (Hooghe & Marks, 2025). Politically, this new cleavage appears to be primarily politicised by radical right (or TAN) and green/left-libertarian (or GAL) parties. In this respect, Jackson and Jolly (2021) demonstrated that adding variables on the transnational-nationalist dimension improves statistical models explaining Europeans' vote choices even more than measures of the economic left-right continuum (see also Dassonneville *et al*., 2024).

Depending on the aspect scholars have focused on, a diverse range of terminology has been proposed to refer to this value-based globalisation cleavage. Examples include the already mentioned 'integration/demarcation' and 'transnational' cleavage, the clash between 'libertarian-universalistic' and 'traditionalist-communitarian' values (Bornschier, 2010), the 'cosmopolitan/communitarian' cleavage (De Wilde *et al*., 2019; De Wilde *et al*., 2023; Teney *et al*., 2014), the cleavage between 'pluralism-libertarianism' and 'populism-authoritarianism' (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

We formulate our second hypothesis on Western Europe's cleavages' configuration based on this highly influential stream of literature.

H2 (realignment): Traditional Rokkanian cleavages have declined, while a new 'globalisation cleavage' structures Western European society and politics.

Beyond dealignment and realignment: assessing old and new cleavages with the same standards

The debate on a globalisation cleavage has massively contributed to updating traditional cleavage theory to a transformed and fast-evolving socio-political landscape. However, first, we cannot take for granted that the old cleavages have declined. Second, we cannot safely assert that there is such a thing as a 'globalisation cleavage.' Discussing these two points will pave the way for introducing our final alternative hypothesis.

The diminished strength of traditional cleavages does not necessarily make them obsolete; instead, they can be reinterpreted or 'updated' to analyse contemporary political phenomena. As Deegan-Krause (2007) pointed out, the four traditional cleavages may still influence electoral politics, though their intensities, scopes, and sometimes meanings have changed. The centre/periphery cleavage may now manifest as a battle over ethnicity or cultural differences. In fact, movements and parties advocating for independence or ethnonationalism have (re)gained momentum in some countries in recent years (e.g., Strijbis, 2023). The state/church cleavage has likely evolved into a dispute over moral values and religiosity. Indeed, the impact of religion on political behaviour has not vanished (Dassonneville

et al., 2022). Consequently, scholars observed the evolution of the state/church cleavage into a 'denominational' (Knutsen, 2004), 'confessional' (Minkenberg, 2010), or 'religious' cleavage (Goldberg, 2020; Pless *et al*., 2020). The urban/rural cleavage is also arguably still present, in both economic and cultural terms. However, it is likely to encompass geographical divides at large, as many of its characteristics have changed. Economically, the divide has developed into a contrast between a knowledge-based post-industrial economy located in urban areas vs. an export-focused industrial economy located in rural areas (Haffert & Mitteregger, 2023; Zollinger, 2024). Culturally, this cleavage now resembles a divide between cosmopolitan cities and a nativist countryside (Maxwell, 2019). Finally, the class cleavage may now refer more broadly to inequalities in socio-economic status. While the number of people in the reference social group for the class cleavage (i.e., the working class) has shrunk (Best, 2011), social identification and politicisation through class lines may still be in place. If class voting means the extent to which the working class tilts towards parties on the left, a decline in it is probably underway (e.g., Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012). However, if class voting means the presence of systematic links between distinct classes or class identities and parties, then class may well continue to structure party support (Elff, 2007; Emanuele, 2023).

As for the second point, we still lack in-depth knowledge of whether the integration/demarcation or transnational cleavage is, in fact, 'a cleavage' – in Bartolini and Mair's conception – and not a (sum of) simpler societal conflict(s). Above all, the normative basis of the alleged new cleavage has been neglected, or decisively under-studied, especially in a comparative perspective, though Bornschier *et al*. (2024) stands out as a prominent exception. Only very recently have scholars begun to investigate whether the winners and losers of globalisation hold values and beliefs that endow them with shared collective identities. Some works have found that people self-categorise themselves as winners or losers of globalisation coherently, although such pieces of evidence are based on single case studies, especially Switzerland (Bornschier *et al*., 2021; Zollinger, 2022) and Germany (Steiner *et al*., 2023), or, at best, a limited sample from a few Northern European countries (Bornschier *et al*., 2024). Therefore, while Bornschier and colleagues have significantly advanced our understanding of the role of identities in cleavage formation, the claim that 'research on the normative component of the globalisation cleavage appears to be a particular challenge' remains valid (De Wilde *et al*., 2023, p. 158).

For all these reasons, assessing the current state of old and new conflicts, and if they classify as cleavages, is paramount. Whether or not the globalisation cleavage exists, globalisation-related conflicts have come to prominence in European democracies. These might result in multiple, separate conflicting groups having multifaceted identities and partisanships. Based on the

pertinent related literature, we singled out four globalisation-related conflicts that have the potential to evolve into proper cleavages.

The first two correspond to the economic and cultural dimensions of the alleged globalisation cleavage. Neo-cleavage theory tends to assume that economic and cultural losers of globalisation overlap, suggesting that unskilled individuals coincide with culturally ethno-nationalist people, both opposing transnationalism and supporting nationalist or radical right parties. However, determining whether the culturally ethno-nationalist and the unskilled/deskilled constitute a coherent, homogeneous group should be tested empirically, rather than based on intuition. Hence, the first potential new cleavage that we consider is the one between the more secure and the more vulnerable segments of globalised societies: put simply, *skilled vs. unskilled workers*.

On a cultural level, globalisation has increasingly put those with a cosmopolitan worldview (e.g., supportive of migration processes and multiculturalism) against those with an ethno-nationalist or nativist mindset (i.e., opposed to migration, in favour of closing national borders and defending the nation-state's culture). Therefore, the second potential new cleavage we analyse is the one between *ethnonationalists and cosmopolitans*.

A third relevant cultural conflict that seems to characterise contemporary Western Europe is that between traditional family values and progressive attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. Researchers are increasingly incorporating sexuality into explanations of political participation (Turnbull-Dugarte & Townsley, 2020) and voting behaviour (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020). Sass and Kuhnle (2023) even posited that gender constitutes a cleavage on its own, as current contrasts over it cannot be traced back to other social divisions. Conversely, Off (2024) perceives gender as an element of multidimensional cultural grievances that include gender, sexuality, and migration. However, Turnbull-Dugarte and Ortega (2024) unpacked these dimensions, by illustrating how 'strategic tolerance' of LGBTQ+ citizens can stem from 'homonationalism' and 'femonationalism' (Farris, 2017). This means that LGBTQ+ rights can be espoused by nativists in response to perceived ethnic threats, especially when opponents of LGBTQ+ rights are from non-native minorities. Therefore, while little doubt remains over the existence of a conflict between *traditional family values and LGBTQ+ rights*, whether this is a cleavage independent of other possible cleavages remains to be tested.

Finally, we already anticipated how the inception of green parties (Poguntke, 1987; Spoon *et al*., 2014) challenged Lipset and Rokkan's framework. Since the Silent Revolution (Inglehart, 1977), environmental issues have become progressively relevant in European societies alongside other post-materialist concerns. In the last decade, the climate crisis has surged to the forefront, driven significantly by waves of ecological mobilisations,

often led by young activists who have placed this issue on the political agenda (Mannoni, 2024; Wallis & Loy, 2021). While the general importance of defending the environment is shared by wide segments of the population, a cleavage based on the socio-economic costs associated with the green transition may well be developing. Therefore, the last potential new cleavage we take into account is the one over the environment, between supporters of *economic growth and environmental sustainability*, respectively.

Our final hypothesis sums up this discussion by stressing the need to analyse old and new cleavages within the same framework.

H3 (multiple cleavages): Western Europe is characterised by multiple fully-fledged and autonomous cleavages.

Research design

Data and operationalisation

To test our alternative hypotheses on the cleavage structure of Western Europe, we conducted an original identical CAWI survey in seven countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.[3] The core part of the questionnaire aimed at detecting whether each conflict has a 1) socio-structural, 2) normative, and 3) organisational-behavioural basis (Bartolini & Mair, 1990). This task was made especially hard by the lack of previous attempts at mapping cleavages – especially their normative element – from the perspective of citizens. Indeed, as De Wilde *et al*. (2023, p. 172) reasserted, 'Cleavage literature in general – and globalisation cleavage literature in particular – has spent more resources investigating the structural and organisational component'. Likewise, Emanuele *et al*. (2020, p. 331; our emphasis) called for 'the use of *individual-level data* to assess the presence of *collective beliefs* and *identity feelings* among the members of the alleged social group of reference for the cleavage'.

Answering this call, we developed the following strategy. First, with regard to the socio-structural element, we designed a question to capture individuals' positions in each of the eight conflicts. Thus, respondents were required to locate themselves on one of the two opposite sides of each conflict. As an example, Table 1 shows the question we used to understand the respondent's position on the ethnonationalists vs cosmopolitans conflict. The corresponding questions for the other conflicts are reported in Table A1 in the Appendix.

For analytical purposes, we can identify an 'established' and a 'challenger' side for each conflict. The former represents the status quo, while the latter is the side that mobilises to change it, thereby activating the conflict itself. Detecting these established and challenger sides is a much more straightforward task for traditional Rokkanian conflicts than for new, globalisation-

Table 1. Survey items used to assess the socio-structural, normative, and organisational elements of a cleavage.

Element	Item	Question	Scale
Socio-structural	*Position* (e.g., ethnonationalists vs. cosmopolitans)	Many believe that in [country] there is a conflict between those who support the ethnic homogeneity of society (against migratory processes) and those who support a cosmopolitan society (and migratory processes). Considering this conflict, how would you place your views on this scale, where 1 means you are completely in favour of an ethnically homogeneous society and 6 means you are completely in favour of a cosmopolitan society?	1 = Ethnically homogeneous society 6 = Cosmopolitan society
	Salience	How important is this conflict for you?	0 = Not at all important 10 = Very important
	Social basis (e.g., ethnonationalists vs. cosmopolitans)	What is the highest level of education that you have attained?	Country specific, recoded into non-graduates/ graduates
Normative	*Identification*	Thinking about [chosen group*], how close do you feel to this group? By 'how close' we mean how much you feel you have in common in terms of identity, values, and interests.	0 = I don't identify with this group at all 10 = I identify with this group a lot
Organisational	*Politicisation*	Thinking about [chosen group*], in your opinion, which political party is more credible to represent their interests?	List of parties that were polling at least 1% by the time the survey was conducted + '*No party is credible*' option

related ones, which are arguably still in the process of structuring.[4] Bearing this in mind, we ultimately consider the following sides as 'established': centre, state, urban areas, employers, skilled workers, ethnonationalists, traditionalists, pro-economic growth. The following, by contrast, can be seen as the 'challenger' sides: periphery, church, rural areas, workers, unskilled workers, cosmopolitans, pro-LGBTQ+ community, pro-environment.

People's self-positioning on potential cleavages is informative but insufficient to properly appraise the socio-structural element of a cleavage. Arguably, only if the conflict is considered salient by at least one of the two sides involved does it become a structurally meaningful social division. Moreover, as research within neo-cleavage theory suggests (Hooghe & Marks, 2025), such a social division should result in the over-representation – in a given conflict side compared to the population – of the social group that is expected to be the

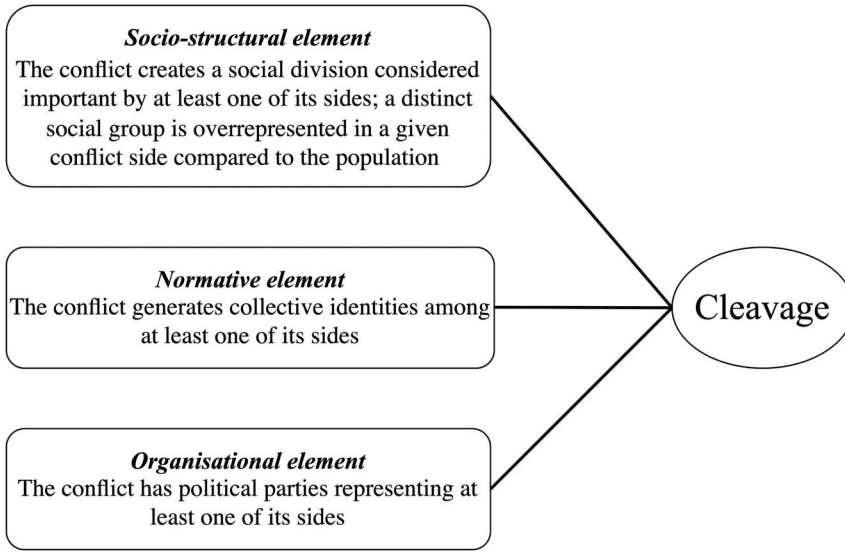

Figure 1. When a conflict turns into a cleavage.

most involved in structuring the cleavage (e.g., production workers for the class cleavage). Therefore, in addition to the question on conflict positioning, we also asked whether the conflict is perceived as salient and included a battery of socio-demographic items to assess the expected over-representation of specific social groups within a given conflict side. Finally, we devised two additional questions to gauge the remaining elements of a cleavage: whether the conflict fosters identity feelings among those positioned on a given conflict side (normative element) and whether certain political parties are deemed especially credible to represent the interests of those positioned on a given conflict side (organisational element).

Only if these three elements are simultaneously present can we safely label the conflict under study as a 'cleavage' (Figure 1).[5] Therefore, our next step is to establish operational criteria to assess whether each conflict meets the 'thresholds' of the socio-structural, normative, and organisational elements. This is necessary to answer RQ1. To address RQ2, we need to develop a method to evaluate whether potential cleavages are overlapping or cross-cutting.

Methods

We established the following operational criteria to evaluate whether each conflict constitutes a cleavage:

(1) *Socio-structural criterion*: the majority of individuals on one side of the conflict (e.g., those in favour of a cosmopolitan society, scoring 4–6 on

the Position item in Table 1) must consider it important. Thus, for at least one side, over 50 per cent of respondents must score above the midpoint on the Salience scale, namely between 6 and 10. Additionally, the social group expected to be the most involved in structuring the conflict must be over-represented on a conflict side compared to the whole sample.

(2) *Normative criterion*: the majority of individuals on one side of the conflict must identify with others on the same side. Thus, for at least one side, over 50 per cent of respondents must score above the midpoint on the Identification scale, namely between 6 and 10.

(3) *Organisational criterion*: for at least one side of the conflict, one party family must be deemed the most credible to represent that side's interests. Thus, at least one party family must be chosen by respondents of that side more often than the 'No party is credible' option.

We argue that having the criteria met for one side only is sufficient because a conflict might have the potential to structure politics even when it involves only a minority of the population. For example, the centre/periphery cleavage has historically affected a niche of the electorate, namely the members of the ethno-linguistic or religious minorities territorially concentrated in the 'periphery' (Caramani, 2004). Therefore, we will gauge whether the abovementioned thresholds are satisfied for at least the majority of those who align with one side of the conflict, no matter how many they are.

After assessing criteria 1–3 and answering RQ1 (sub-section 4.1), we still need to evaluate the social and political overlapping/crosscutting of potential cleavages. Building on Bartolini and Mair (1990), we defined those for whom the salience, identification, and politicisation thresholds were met as '*encapsulated voters*'. For each conflict, we created a sub-sample consisting of the respective encapsulated voters only. Using these samples, we ran different sets of country fixed effects regression models to evaluate the social and political overlaps of conflicts.

In the eight separate linear regressions regarding social overlapping, the dependent variables are positions in each conflict. The independent variables are the customary socio-demographics employed in analyses of political behaviour – sex, age, level of education, and type of profession – plus other variables useful for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the social composition of each conflict side. The latter include household living standards, type of residency (urban/rural), religion, ethnic group, and sexual orientation. In our approach, two or more conflicts overlap socially if the *same relevant socio-demographic variables* correlate with individuals' positions on those conflicts in a statistically significant and substantively similar manner.

		Political referents of distinct cleavages	
		Overlap	Crosscut
Characteristics of social groups formed by distinct cleavages	Overlap	One cleavage with multiple dimensions	Cleavages share social bases but have distinct political referents
	Crosscut	Cleavages have distinct social bases but share the same political referents	Multiple autonomous cleavages

Figure 2. Overlapping and crosscutting cleavages: a typology.

As for political overlapping, we ran eight distinct logistic regressions for each conflict (hence 64 models in total). For each conflict, the eight dependent variables are dichotomous, distinguishing between those who did and did not consider one of the following party families as most credible for representing the respective conflict: Radical Right, Conservative, Christian Democratic, Liberal, Green, Ethno-Regionalist, Social Democratic, Radical Left (see Table A2 for the country-by-country classification of parties into party families). The independent variable is the individual's position in the respective conflict. Controls are the left-right self-placement and the aforementioned socio-demographic variables.[6] In our approach, two or more conflicts overlap politically if the *same party families* are deemed more credible than others in representing the interests of the conflicts' sides in a statistically significant and substantively similar manner.

The typology in Figure 2 further clarifies under what conditions two or more conflicts meeting the criteria for being considered 'cleavages' are indeed autonomous cleavages or, rather, dimensions of the same cleavage, due to social and political overlap. Scrutinising the results of our regression models with these criteria and typology in mind will allow us to answer RQ2, which we do in sub-section 4.2.

Results

Conflicts or cleavages? Assessing the socio-structural, normative, and organisational criteria

We start by assessing whether the selected conflicts meet the socio-structural, normative, and organisational criteria. The overall findings suggest that while all conflicts display sufficient degrees of social structuration, salience, and group identification, their political representation varies considerably. Notably, the state/church and urban/rural conflicts fall short of the organisational criterion and should therefore not be considered fully-fledged cleavages.

Table 2 provides an overview of these elements by reporting the share of respondents who align with conflicts' sides (Position), consider the conflict important (Salience), show the identified key social characteristic (Social basis), and identify with the respective chosen group (Identification). The

Table 2. Socio-structural, normative, and organisational elements of old and new conflicts.

		Socio-structural element			Normative element	Organisational element
Conflict	Side	Position	Salience	Social basis	Identification	Politicization
Centre vs. Periphery	Centre	58	41	Ethnic minority 17.9 (+3.2)	45	RR
	Periphery	42	53		53	SD
State vs. Church	State	62,5	34		42	No party
	Church	37,5	53	Weekly churchgoers 13.8 (+6.1)	57	No party
Urban vs. Rural	Urban	41	27		43	No party
	Rural	59	54	Rural dwellers 30.5 (+7.3)	69	No party
Employers vs. Workers	Employers	26	32		34	CON
	Workers	74	68	Production workers 9.9 (+0.4)	74	SD
Skilled workers vs.Unskilled workers	Skilled workers	56	37	Non graduates 73.4 (+5.5)	51	No party
	Unskilled workers	44	55		60	SD
Ethnonationalists vs. Cosmopolitans	Ethnonationalists	43	45	Graduates 35.2 (+3.1)	39	RR
	Cosmopolitans	57	59		62	SD
Traditional family vs. LGBTQ+	Traditional family	50	38		52	RR
	LGBTQ+	50	61	Graduates 34.4 (+2.3)	60	SD
Economy vs. Environment	Economy	41	43		41	No party
	Environment	59	71	Graduates 34.0 (+1.9)	68	GREEN

Notes: Position = share of respondents that support the respective conflict's side; Salience = share of respondents in the respective side that consider the conflict important; Social basis = share of respondents sharing a particular social characteristic that is expected to be key in structuring the conflict (e.g., being part of an ethnic minority for the centre/periphery conflict). The related difference with the whole sample (i.e., the over-representation) – in percentage points – is indicated within brackets; Identification = share of respondents in the respective side that identify with the chosen group. Politicisation = most credible party family for each conflict's side. Party families: RR (Radical right); SD (Socialist/Social democratic); CON (Conservative); GREEN (Green/Ecologist).

party family deemed most credible to represent the interests of each side (Politicisation) is also shown in the table.[7]

As for *Positioning*, most respondents declared themselves to be in favour of the established side in three cases (centre, state, skilled workers). In other four, the majority aligned with the challenger side (rural, workers, cosmopolitans, environment). In the case of the traditionalism/LGBTQ+ conflict, the sample is perfectly split into two halves. Class is by far the most asymmetric conflict, with three-quarters of respondents positioning themselves on the workers' side.

Beyond these general preferences of citizens, we must look at *Salience* to get further insights into the conflicts' socio-structural element. We note that the majority of those who align with each challenger side consider the conflict as salient (from 53 per cent of the periphery and church sides to 68 per cent of the environment side). Interestingly, this is never the case for established sides (from 27 per cent of the urban side to 45 per cent of the ethnonationalist side). The salience gap between the two sides is particularly remarkable in the case of environment and class (38 and 36 percentage points, respectively). Consistent with cleavage theory (Bartolini, 2000; Emanuele, 2024), this finding suggests that the group mobilising to change the status quo is the one that mostly perceives the conflict as relevant.

Finally, our last step in assessing the socio-structural criterion was to look at the social characteristics underpinning each conflict. In line with cleavage literature – especially the recent contributions by Marks *et al*. (2023) and Hooghe and Marks (2025) – we identified the following social characteristic as being key in the structuration of each potential cleavage: ethnic minority (for the centre/periphery conflict); weekly churchgoers (for the state/church conflict); rural dwellers (for the urban/rural conflict); production workers (for the employers/workers conflict); education, i.e., being a graduate or not (for the four globalisation-related conflicts). As Table 2 bears out, the identified social characteristic is coherently over-represented on the respective conflict side compared to the whole sample. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that this over-representation varies across conflicts and in most cases is not as pronounced as one may expect. This preliminary finding suggests that, for a proper assessment of the social groups underlying each conflict, looking at a single social characteristic may be too simplistic. Hence, a multivariate perspective, such as the one we adopt in the following section, is needed. In any case, no conflict should be discarded as potential cleavage based on this first criterion.

Moving on to the normative criterion, we look at *Identification* and see that, as with salience, challenger sides always show figures above the 50 per cent threshold (from 53 per cent of periphery to 74 per cent of workers). The established side also scores above the threshold in the cases

of traditional family and skilled workers. This finding further reinforces the idea that cleavages emerge and remain active primarily thanks to the group that claims a change in the status quo. Hence, the addition of this second criterion reconfirms that no conflict should be discarded as potential cleavage. Of course, this does not mean that the eight conflicts must be considered equally relevant in Western Europe. By considering both salience and identification, employers/workers and economy/environment certainly emerge as the most relevant social conflicts, while state/church can be placed at the bottom of this scale. The limited importance of religion is not unexpected in ever more secularised societies (Dassonneville *et al*., 2022). On the other hand, the resilience of the class conflict is at least partially against the literature on class cleavage decline (Franklin *et al*., 1992; Goldberg, 2020). The relevance gained by the environmental conflict is instead a possible sign that the recent wave of mobilisation for climate carried out by the younger cohorts (Mannoni, 2024; Wallis & Loy, 2021) has now invested the whole society.

A conflict that is socially rooted, perceived as relevant and able to generate shared identities may nonetheless not yet (or no longer) be politicised, thereby not satisfying the *Organisational* criterion. This may be either the case of a recently emerged conflict that political parties have not yet targeted or a traditional one that has lost its previous political referents. The last column of Table 2 suggests that the latter scenario occurs in the state/church and urban/rural conflicts, where 'No party is credible' is the most frequently chosen option by both conflict sides. For all the remaining conflicts, a given party family outnumbers the 'No party is credible' option on at least one conflict side. Of the eight party families, four never represent the most credible option (Christian Democratic, Ethno-Regionalist, Liberal, and Radical left). Other two appear once in Table 2 (Conservative for employers and Green for environment). Finally, two families seem to dominate party competition in Western Europe: Social democratic and Radical Right. Interestingly, the former represents the challenger side in all five conflicts where it stands out as the most credible option.[8] Similarly, the latter represents the established side in three conflicts.

Besides the most credible party family, an additional relevant piece of information to gauge the strength of the organisational element of potential cleavages is the extent to which respondents on a given side homogeneously recognise the same political referent. In this regard, Table A10 shows the percentage distributions of the variables measuring the most credible party family for respondents on each conflict side. The table highlights that some sides are clearly more homogeneous than others in terms of selecting the same political referent. Ethnonationalists stand out in this regard, as the distance between the first (Radical Right) and the second most credible party family (excluding the 'No party is credible' option) is 23.4 points.

Other patterns of politicisation will be further inspected in the next subsection, which deals with the overlapping/crosscutting nature of the conflicts. However, we can already conclude that state/church and urban/rural should not be regarded as fully-fledged cleavages, as they fail to meet the organisational criterion.

Overlapping or crosscutting cleavages?

The descriptive analyses discussed in the previous sub-section suggest rejecting the dealignment hypothesis (H1), as six conflicts meet the required criteria to be considered cleavages. However, it is premature to conclude that Western Europe is characterised by six distinct cleavages. Some of the conflicting groups may share the same socio-demographic characteristics and political referents, implying that these conflicts overlap socially and politically. If this is the case, they should be considered dimensions of a broader cleavage (Figure 1). Verifying these overlaps is crucial for understanding whether Western Europe is defined by an overarching cleavage (H2), composed of economic or cultural dimensions, or a mosaic of multiple, crosscutting cleavages (H3). The following analyses reveal that some conflicts exhibit significant social and political commonalities, while others maintain clear distinctions, reducing the number of cleavages from six to four. This outcome still supports the idea of a mosaic of cleavages, confirming H3.

To test *social overlap*, we run eight OLS regression models (one for each conflict) with country-fixed effects, where the dependent variable is the respondent's position on a conflict and the independent variables are socio-demographic characteristics. The analyses are carried out on the subsample of so-called 'encapsulated voters' (see section 3.2). The coefficient plots in Figure 3 summarise the results, allowing us to single out the profiles of social groups that support opposing conflict sides and thus detect social overlaps.[9]

First, three 'new' conflicts (ethnonationalists/cosmopolitans, traditionalism/LGBTQ+, economy/environment) do not have substantive inconsistencies and rather show relevant commonalities. For example, being women and non-heterosexual correlates with supporting both cosmopolitanism, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmental protection.[10] The opposite applies to rural and religious citizens, particularly Catholics. Moreover, for these three conflicts, living in a rich household is always positively associated with the challenger side, although these effects are relatively weak. Overall, we can conclude that the three conflicts overlap socially.

The same can be said of centre/periphery and state/church. Here, there are no fundamental social inconsistencies and various remarkable similarities: educated voters, students, old people, and those living in small towns align with the centre and state sides. Young voters (once education and profession

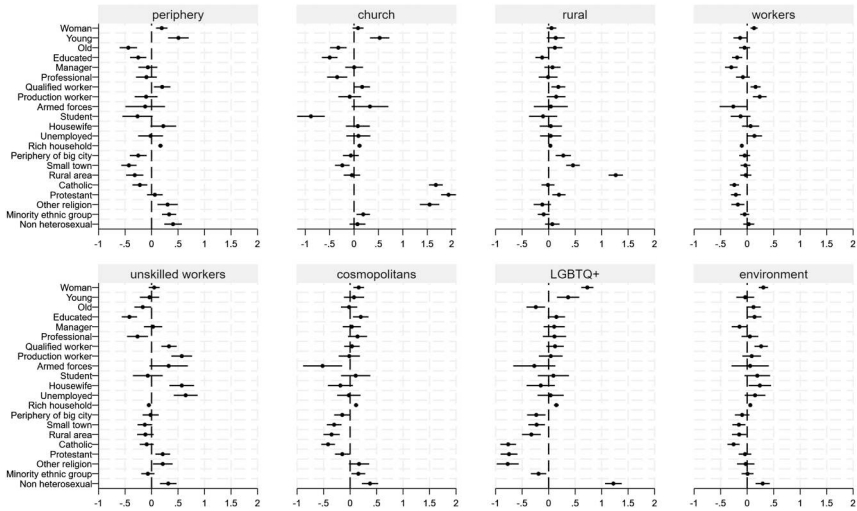

Figure 3. Socio-demographic characteristics and conflict positions.

Notes: Coefficient plots of OLS regressions with country fixed effects. 5–95 CIs displayed.

are controlled for), rich households, as well as those practicing non-Christian religions and belonging to minority ethnic groups tend to support periphery and church.[11]

Besides these two relevant social overlaps, the other three conflicts (employers/workers, urban/rural, and skilled/unskilled workers) show rather peculiar social configurations. Workers are strongly opposed by managers, armed forces and, to a lesser extent, men, educated, rich, and religious voters; rural areas are supported by old people and – unsurprisingly – voters living outside the central areas of big cities; unskilled workers are supported by low cultural (i.e., lowly educated) and economic (e.g., housewives and unemployed) strata, as well as non-heterosexual individuals.

Moving on to *political overlap*, we need to verify whether different groups defined by the eight conflicts share the same party families as their major political referents. Hence, Figure 4 summarises the results of 64 logistic regressions (as we have eight party families across eight conflicts) where the dependent variable is, each time, a given party family against all other options (including 'No party is credible'), the focal predictor is the respondent's position on a conflict, and control variables are all the socio-demographic variables included in the previous analysis (Figure 3) plus the respondent's left-right position.[12]

The interpretation of Figure 4 is that, for example, as one moves from a pro-employer to a pro-workers position, the likelihood of selecting social-democratic parties as the most credible party family increases whereas that of selecting conservative parties decreases. The Figure highlights that the

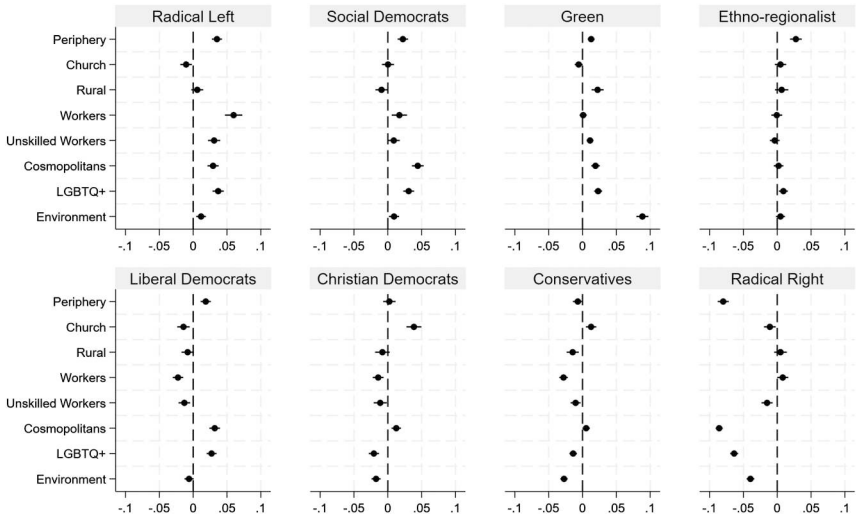

Figure 4. Conflict positions and political referents.

Notes: Average marginal effects of logistic regressions with country fixed effects. Socio-demographic controls (as in Figure 3) and respondent's left-right position not shown.

overlap observed between the centre/periphery and state/church conflicts at the social group level is not reflected politically. Indeed, various inconsistencies can be observed in the political referents chosen by the respective conflicting groups. By comparing the average marginal effects, supporters of the periphery tend to choose the radical left and the ethno-regionalist families (and, to a lesser extent, social democrats, liberals, and greens), while the radical right is indisputably the political referent of the pro-centre group. Conversely, in the case of state/church – which, as shown in Table 2, failed to meet the politicisation criterion – the main referents are, respectively, the liberal and the Christian democratic families.

The situation is radically different for the other instance of social overlapping emerging from Figure 3, concerning the three 'new' conflicts: ethnonationalists/cosmopolitans, traditionalism/LGBTQ+, and economy/environment. Here, the overlap is also substantially confirmed from a political viewpoint and shows an interesting asymmetry. While the radical right monopolises the established side (with extremely strong effects of the ethnonationalist and traditionalist groups), the challenger sides of these conflicts are represented by different party families. Specifically, being pro-environment enhances above all the probability of choosing the green party family; being pro-LGBTQ+ rights increases above all the chances of identifying radical left parties as most credible; pro-cosmopolitans are especially likely to see the social-democratic family as the most credible.

		Political referents of distinct cleavages	
		Overlap	Crosscut
Characteristics of social groups formed by distinct cleavages	Overlap	One cleavage with multiple dimensions: GAL-TAN: Ethnonationalists/Cosmopolitans + Traditionalism/LGBTQ + Economy/Environment	Cleavages share social bases but have distinct political referents: Center/Periphery - [State/Church]
	Crosscut	Cleavages have distinct social bases but share the same political referents	Multiple autonomous cleavages: [Urban/Rural]; Employer/Workers; (Skilled/Unskilled workers)

Figure 5. Outcome of the analysis of cleavages' social and political overlaps.

Notes: conflicts that do not possess all the attributes of a cleavage are enclosed in square brackets. Cleavages whose politicisation is less clear or strong are enclosed in round brackets.

Overall, given the substantive social and political overlaps, we can conclude that these three conflicts are best understood as dimensions of a broader cleavage (Figure 5). This finding supports the GAL/TAN perspective (Hooghe *et al*., 2002) regarding the existence of a cultural cleavage comprising environment, immigration, and minority rights as key elements of political contestation. At the same time, our analysis suggests that the idea of an overarching cleavage linked to globalisation combining *both* cultural and economic elements (e.g., Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Polk & Rosén, 2024) requires further scrutiny. This becomes evident when examining the political referents of skilled vs. unskilled workers, or economic winners and losers from globalisation (Kriesi *et al*., 2006; Polk & Rosén, 2024). The main referent of skilled workers is the liberal family, which aligns with TAN families on this cleavage but is also seen as very credible by cosmopolitans and pro-LGBTQ+ people. Meanwhile, unskilled workers, namely economic losers of globalisation, indicate GAL families like radical left and green as their referents, thus overlapping politically with cosmopolitans, namely cultural winners of globalisation (e.g., Kriesi *et al*., 2006). Therefore, the economic and cultural globalisation-related cleavages are not two sides of the same coin. In addition, one may notice that the effects for skilled/unskilled workers are rather weak, a sign that the economic globalisation cleavage lacks the political traction seen in more robust cleavages. The same applies to urban/rural, which corroborates the previous observation that this conflict does not satisfy the politicisation criterion.

Finally, the traditional class conflict, which qualifies as a fully-fledged autonomous cleavage, appears to have partially shifted from its classical twentieth century referents. The employers side is still represented by the established right: the conservative family in the first place and, to a lesser extent, liberal and Christian-democratic families; the workers side, instead, is represented by radical left parties and, to a lesser extent, social democrats

and the radical right (in line with the results of Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018).

A last consideration is worth mentioning here. We looked at the identification of political referents, and not voter behaviour, to evaluate the political translations of social cleavages and their political overlaps. However, we must acknowledge that identifying a party family as representing a particular cleavage side does not necessarily mean that individuals on that side would automatically vote for the corresponding party. To give just one example, respondents might be pro-workers, perceive the class conflict as salient, identify with other workers, recognise a party as representing that conflict, yet still vote based on other considerations. This scenario may also have affected some segments of the working class in the post-WWII societies that Lipset and Rokkan had in mind, especially in those fragmented societies cut across by many cleavage lines. Therefore, to evaluate whether the conflict position of encapsulated voters predicts political representation and voter behaviour in similar ways, we replicated the analysis in Figure 4 by using voting intentions for different party families – instead of political referents – as dependent variables (full regression outputs are reported in Tables A32–A39 in the Appendix). The results of these robustness checks are largely consistent with those of Figure 4. For instance, following the previous line of argument about class cleavage, Table A35 shows that being pro-workers predicts a higher probability of voting for radical left and social democratic parties, and a lower probability of voting for liberal democratic and conservative parties. This result, along with those of the other models, suggests that positioning on the analysed conflicts matters for voting behaviour.

In a nutshell, the analysis of social and political overlaps leads us to conclude that not all conflicts are autonomous cleavages (Figure 5). However, this does not mean that there is something such as a single, all-encompassing, globalisation cleavage (H2). Rather, Western European society and politics seem structured by a mosaic of multiple cleavages defining distinct social groups with distinct political referents (H3).

Conclusion

This article took stock of the validity of a cleavage theory approach to exploring socio-political conflicts in contemporary Western Europe. First, leveraging an original survey conducted in seven Western European countries, we made the first attempt to empirically operationalise Bartolini and Mair's (1990) definition of cleavages using survey data. Second, adopting a common analytical framework, we assessed which 'old' (Rokkanian) and 'new' (globalisation-related) conflicts meet the criteria to be considered cleavages. Third, we examined their social and political overlaps to provide a more accurate picture of Western Europe's cleavage structure.

The key finding is that the contemporary political reality of Western Europe is marked by multiple 'old' and 'new' cleavages, 'fed' by distinct social groups and represented by different party families. Based on our survey data, we rejected both the hypothesis of a complete *dealignment* due to the abating of old cleavages and that of a *realignment* under an overarching globalisation cleavage. Indeed, our analysis unveiled a complex and multifaceted picture, where society and politics in Western Europe are structured around *multiple cleavages* with varying degrees of importance and capacity to produce collective identities and political cues.

Two cleavages stood out as more salient and structured compared to others: the class and GAL/TAN cleavages. Regarding the former, our research challenges the widely accepted view that class cleavage has waned, aligning with recent studies based on aggregate data that highlighted the vitality of this cleavage (e.g., Emanuele, 2024; 2023). As for the latter, we reassert the relevance of the GAL/TAN perspective (Hooghe *et al*., 2002) to analyse contemporary European politics. Indeed, we found out that the ethnonationalists/cosmopolitans, traditionalism/LGBTQ+ rights, and economy/environment conflicts overlap socially and politically, beyond meeting the criteria to qualify as cleavages. We thus conclude that they can be better seen as sub-dimensions of the same GAL/TAN cleavage. We also detected a political 'asymmetry' between the GAL and TAN poles: the main political referent of the TAN-side is consistently the radical right party family, whereas that of the GAL-side changes depending on the specific sub-dimension. Hence, different party families – radical left, green, social democratic – must join forces if they are to effectively promote the interests of the GAL-side.

This multidimensional GAL/TAN cleavage does not include the conflict over economic aspects of globalisation, pitting skilled and unskilled workers against each other. We found that this conflict can also be seen as a 'cleavage', although it is not strongly politicised and does not overlap with the other three globalisation-related conflicts. In our interpretation, this suggests that a fully-fledged 'integration/demarcation' (Kriesi *et al*., 2006) or 'transnational cleavage' (Hooghe & Marks, 2018) has not crystallised yet, especially *if* we conceive of this cleavage as comprising both cultural (ethnonationalism/cosmopolitanism) and economic (protectionism/free trade) dimensions. Put simply, in contemporary Western Europe, economic and cultural cleavages over globalisation do not appear as two sides of the same coin – at least in the minds of citizens. This result contrasts with related research on the supply side, which claimed that the transnational cleavage also has a relevant economic component, as party positions on cultural conservatism and trade protectionism are usually aligned (Polk & Rosén, 2024). This warns us against taking for granted that what is true on the supply side is also true on the demand side of politics.

Finally, another traditional cleavage, centre/periphery, seems to be still in place, overlapping socially with the other divide historically stemming from

the National Revolution, state/church. This does not come as a complete surprise: peripheries and the Church historically mobilised against cultural standardisation and secularisation promoted by the same actor: the nation-building elite. However, the status of fully-fledged cleavage is rejected for the state/church conflict. Interestingly, this is not due to the complete secularisation of Western European societies. In fact, the state/church conflict meets the socio-structural criterion. What is missing is the link between society and politics, as no party family appears truly credible in representing either the secular or the religious side. The same applies to the urban-rural conflict. While living in urban as opposed to rural areas is certainly associated with different voter attitudes and behaviour, as well as positions on other cleavages like GAL/TAN (Crulli, 2024; Maxwell, 2019), the divide between cities and the countryside is no longer a cleavage *in itself*. This may reflect the evolution of that cleavage into a more generalised contrast between places that do and do not matter in post-industrial societies (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

To sum up, the picture arising from our analysis is one of fragmentation, not only in politics, but also in society. Indeed, our study highlights that a single social characteristic, such as education or class, is not enough to understand the social groups' composition underlying cleavages. A multivariate approach, like the one adopted in this study, better captures the complexity of a cleavage's social foundation. The distinct societal groups formed along various cleavages require representation, creating dilemmas for political parties that are called to respond to a wide range of heterogeneous interests. Such fragmentation is nowadays a common trait of Western European polities, posing challenges even to those systems that should be better equipped to handle it, such as consensus democracies. One of the likely consequences of this is an overall decline in political responsiveness, as parties can hardly manage to form miscellaneous coalitions bringing together diverse conflicting societal groups. Parties' failure to do so effectively is arguably resulting in increased voter abstention, dissatisfaction with democracy, or even alienation from the whole democratic process. Suggesting a way out of this vicious circle – linking societal fragmentation into multiple cleavages to voters' discontent – clearly goes beyond the scope of this article. We limit ourselves to suggest that the path that historically led mass parties to move from society to the state should be reversed: parties should regain an effective representation of the conflicting social groups defined by the current cleavage structure of Western Europe.

The implications of this paper for cleavage theory lie not only in its findings, but also in its methodology. In fact, a major contribution of the paper is the empirical operationalisation of the Bartolini and Mair's (1990) cleavage definition using survey data. We are conscious that, as a first attempt to employ an original approach to the study of cleavages from a citizens' perspective, this work inevitably comes with limitations. Future research

may build on our design to undertake new analyses or further elaborate on our findings. For instance, comparative studies could verify whether the patterns we observed at the pooled Western European level hold across individual countries. Since Lipset and Rokkan, cleavage theory has underscored the importance of cross-country differences. In this respect, we have provided only a partial – albeit necessary – snapshot of the aggregate cleavage configuration of contemporary Western Europe, which future country-by-country investigations should complement.

Notes

1. GAL stands for green-alternative-libertarian; TAN for traditional-authoritarian-nationalist.
2. While we agree with this interpretation of globalisation as a new potential critical juncture, we also acknowledge that, being a still unfolding process, it is particularly difficult to interpret within a coherent and well-defined theoretical framework, such as the critical juncture model of change (on this point, see Boas, 2017; Roberts, 2017).
3. We focused on Western Europe as this is the region where the development of national party systems most clearly followed cleavage lines. Consequently, cleavage theory, from Lipset and Rokkan on, has mostly investigated this region. We continue in the wake of this tradition, selecting a sample that is representative of different Western European sub-regions and different socioeconomic, institutional, and political contexts. The data collection started on the 15th of March and ended on the 31st of May 2024. Respondents in each country were selected through a quota sample and ranged between 1,512 and 1,550. The total N is 10,701. In each country, the sample is representative of the voting age population based on education, a combination of gender and age, and a combination of geographical area and municipality size. Trimmed (0.3-3) post-stratification weights using socio-demographic (education level, a combination of gender and age, a combination of geographical area and municipality size) and political variables (vote in the last general election) have been applied to all analyses. The results are almost identical by applying non-trimmed weights.
4. For example, the case of the 'ethnonationalists vs. cosmopolitans' conflict is much more complex than it may seem at first glance. While ethnonationalists are uneasy with globalisation, which seems irreversible today, we still live in a world of nation-states, where a specific ethnic group constitutes the majority of the national population. Hence, we considered cosmopolitans as the 'challenger' side, although we are aware that there would be good reasons to reach the opposite conclusion as well.
5. In this work, we are only interested in assessing whether the three elements are simultaneously present, so that the conflict qualifies as a cleavage. Given the nature of the study, we are unable to assess the specific temporal sequence through which the three elements have emerged.
6. Tables A11-A12 in the Appendix presents the descriptive statistics for variables employed in our statistical models.
7. The country-by-country replication of Table 2 is available in the Appendix (see Tables A3-A9).

8. Notice that, while the social democratic family appears to be the most credible option to represent the interests of the Periphery in the pooled Western European analysis, the ethno-regionalist party family is, as expected, the most credible in those contexts where rooted ethno-linguistic minorities exist. This is the case in Spain (see Table A7 in the Appendix) and, more specifically, among respondents located in regions like the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia, as well as Scotland in the United Kingdom.
9. Full regression models are available in Table A13 in the Appendix. For the sake of robustness, we have replicated the analyses by using ordered logistic regression models, which account for the ordinal nature of our dependent variables. The results are reported in Table A14, and they confirm those of our main models. We have opted to comment on the OLS regressions in the manuscript, as they allow for easier interpretation of the results.
10. We are conscious that certain social groups, such as non-heterosexual citizens, are small in terms of group size. However, we are not interested in determining which sociodemographic factors matter most for explaining positions on a single cleavage. Rather, the goal of Figure 3 is to compare whether the same sociodemographic factors predict positions on different cleavages in the same way. Therefore, we are not arguing that, for example, being non-heterosexual is an essential factor for being pro-cosmopolitan, but rather that it is one of the characteristics that tend to recur among pro-cosmopolitans, pro-LGBTQ+, and pro-environment individuals.
11. The only partial exception to this social overlap is that Catholics are clearly pro-church but also pro-centre, although the latter effect is not substantively strong.
12. Full regression models are available in Tables A16-A23 in the Appendix. Furthermore, given the potential idiosyncrasy of Southern Europe in the cleavage model (see, for instance, Kriesi et al., 2006), we replicated the analyses in Figure 3 and 4 for the five North-Western European countries only. The results, reported in Tables A15 and A24-A31, confirm our findings, with only a few exceptions. For instance, being Catholic was a substantively significant predictor of ethnonationalist and pro-economy positions, but this effect disappears when the two Catholic countries of Italy and Spain are excluded. Likewise, North-Western Europeans holding pro-periphery positions do not recognize ethno-regionalist parties as the most credible option to represent the pro-periphery side of the conflict.

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