The Brahmin Left, the Merchant Right, and the Bloc Bourgeois

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Working paper

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Abstract

In a recent paper, Piketty (2018) argues that the vote for the left in France, the UK and the USA tends increasingly to be associated with a high education level whereas a traditional class- or income-based divide separated left from right individuals in the 1950s and 1960s. The current situation would be characterized by a dominance of "elites" in left and right constituencies: financially rich elites vote for the right (merchant right), high-education elites vote for the left (Brahmin left). Using ISSP data for 17 countries, this paper tests the influence of income and education inequalities on political leaning and a variety of policy preferences: the support for redistribution, for investment in public education, for globalisation and immigration. Results show that income levels are still relevant for the left-right divide, but the influence differs across education levels. Our findings also point to a certain convergence of opinion among the Brahmin left and the merchant right, which could lead to a new political divide beyond the left and the right, uniting a *bloc bourgeois*.

Keywords: political cleavage, redistribution, inequality, political economy.

Introduction

Changes in the structure of political divides in developed democracies have been the focus of many studies, not only in political science but also in political economy. The former literature often depicts the changes that took place in the recent decades in a two-dimensional space spanned by an economic cleavage that can be summed up as a distributive conflict, and a cultural cleavage based on the opposition between "libertarian" and "authoritarian" values.[1] The political economy literature on the other hand considers a multidimensional economic differentiation that concerns domestic issues such as income distribution or redistribution as well as international matters such as protection against foreign competition.[2] In this literature, the level of education or human capital plays a central role in the redefinition of the policy preferences of agents or social groups. Economic evolution, technological change or globalisation, affects low-skilled individuals and tends to increase the correlation between economic and cultural divides.[3]

In this spirit, Thomas Piketty (2018, 2019) argues that the class-based political divide has been deeply altered by the complete reversal of the educational cleavage. The traditional political divide was between a left that represented the low income and education level constituency, and a right with a social basis characterised by a high income and education level. But since the 1970s/1980s, the left has become the party of the highly educated. This has led to a multiple elite system composed of what Piketty calls the brahmin left and the merchant right, the latter representing the interests of the most prosperous fractions of the population. A simplification of the multidimensional political conflict could then be based on another two-dimensional space spanned by the traditional economic divide and the conflict over distribution/redistribution of income, and an educational divide based on the education level and a conflict over public investment in the education system. Piketty parallels this second dimension to a divide over globalisation insofar as a high education level would be a protection against the adverse consequences of foreign competition in product or labour markets, the immigration issue representing a significant element in this divide.

The political conflict that used to split the left from the right would then become more complex because the two-dimensional representation delivers a potential partition between four groups that could be associated in coalitions or not. A binary divide could separate a united elite composed of the brahmin left and the merchant right from the popular classes. But a divided elite, between the brahmin left and the merchant right could face divided popular classes, between social and "nativist" groups. A third possibility considered by Amable & Palombarini (2018) for France and whose extension to other countries is discussed by Piketty (2019) is that a social coalition gathering the most skilled and affluent fraction of the population, the *bloc bourgeois*, would face divided popular classes and dominate the political competition.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the relevance of the Brahmin left/merchant right distinction and the possibility of unification of the educated and high-income groups into a bloc bourgeois with the help of individual data. We use different ISSP surveys for a pooled sample of 17 OECD countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) from 1985 to 2016. We focus on four main items: (1) political leaning using a variable of self-placement of individuals on a left-right scale; (2) the attitude towards redistribution using a variable on the role

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[1] Kitschelt (1994), Oesch (2008), Kriesi et al. (2006), Norris & Inglehart (2019).

[2] Rodrik (2018).

[3] Gennaioli & Tabellini (2018).

of government to reduce income differences between the rich and the poor; (3) the attitude towards public investment in education using two variables on the level of education spending by government and on the feeling of (in)justice that rich people can buy better education; and (4) the opinion on globalisation – using two variables on the effect of free trade and large companies on the local economy, and towards immigration using two variables on the effect of immigration on the economy and on jobs.

Using different models, we find contrasted results regarding the validation of the propositions derived from Piketty's framework. First, our results indicate that the separation between high and low education levels does not substitute to the income level differences as a foundation for the left – right divide but complements it. Second, results also reveal that income levels are still relevant for the other dimensions (redistribution, investment in public education, globalisation/immigration), but the influence differs across education levels. These findings point to the possibility of taking into account a certain convergence of interests among highly educated and high-income social groups for the definition of a political strategy "beyond the left and the right" actively looking for such a social base.

The paper is organised as follows. Next section presents our conceptual framework presenting how political changes can be analysed and the subsequent testable propositions. The following section presents the data used in the estimations and the empirical strategy. The empirical results are then discussed followed by some robustness checks. Finally, a last section interpreting the results concludes.

Changing political divides

A multi-elite party system

Piketty (2018, 2019) proposes the following analysis of the transformation of the left/right political divide. This divide reflected a traditional class- or income-based cleavage in the 1950s and 1960s, but it has partially and gradually turned into an "identity-based conflict" thereafter. Two structural evolutions explain this change. First, the increased exposure to foreign competition, either directly through migrations or indirectly through foreign trade, has fostered a divide on the desirability of globalisation linked to the capacity to benefit or suffer from foreign competition. Increased international competition, which results from political choices and not from "spontaneous" economic evolution, has made income redistribution more difficult to implement. This has shifted the main political debate on income standards from a national redistribution issue to a conflict over the limits to international opening, particularly regarding immigration. Second, the increasing level of education of the population has made it possible for those who succeeded in the so-called meritocratic competition to join the "elite" groups; this opened a new dimension of inequality supplementing the old wealth-based dimension.

The capacity to face foreign competition being related to meritocratic success, the evolution of developed economies since the 1970s/1980s can be interpreted with the help of the two dimensions of inequality: financial and educational/social capital.[4] To each of these dimensions correspond two hierarchies and therefore two elite groups with a common interest in the pursuit of "globalisation" and a divergence regarding the level of taxation and public expenditure. The meritocratic elite is favourable to public investment in education, whereas the financial capital-based elite would prefer low taxes and limited redistribution. Piketty calls these elite groups the "brahmin left" and the

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[4] It is not entirely clear whether the reference is Gary Becker's "human capital" or Pierre Bourdieu' "social capital".

"merchant right" respectively, and predicts the emergence of a multiple-elite party system. This evolution would explain at least part of the collapse of the party system in developed economies, characterised notably by the growing disinterest of left parties for the demands of the population with low levels of both income and education.[5] This would feed into the growing disaffection of the popular classes for left parties, reinforcing the predominance of the interests of the brahmin groups in left party politics.[6]

Piketty (2018, 2019) provides empirical evidence of this evolution for France, the United States and the United Kingdom. Additional evidence has been found in this direction by Gethin (2018) for Canada and for Australia and by Kosse and Piketty (2019) for Germany and Sweden, where higher educated individuals in all countries increasingly have chosen the left since the 1960s. By contrast, the positive relationship between education and vote for the left is not verified in Japan (Gethin, 2018).

Different possible coalitions

The political conflict is multidimensional, but for the sake of simplicity and following Piketty (2019: 913-932), two main dimensions can be considered: the economic dimension based on the income distribution/redistribution issue, and the education/globalisation/immigration dimension. Crossing these two dimensions gives a possible partition of the political space into four groups. Piketty (2019) takes the example of France to describe these four possible groups: (i) internationalist-egalitarian; (ii) internationalist-inegalitarian; (iii) nativist-egalitarian; (iv) nativist-inegalitarian.[7] Two questions of different importance can be raised about this partition. First, the internationalist-nativist divide may be only partially linked to the education divide, which questions the relevance of the reduction of the political conflict to two dimensions only. Second and more importantly, the partition in four groups may be unstable. As shown in Amable & Palombarini (2018) and mentioned by Piketty (2019), the affluent part of the brahmin left joined the inegalitarian and voted for Macron while the less affluent part voted for the radical left.

A possibility is that a complete realignment of the party system could be possible in the future in case of a unification of high-education and high-income voters opposing "globalists" (high-education and high-income voters) to "nativists" (low-education and low-income voters), in conjunction with the growing disaffection of the popular classes for left parties.[8] Amable & Palombarini (2009, 2014) analyse the demise of the traditional party system in terms of changing socio-political alliances related to the transformations of socio-economic models. These transformations affect the relative economic and political weight of the different social groups, which has positive or negative consequences for the

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[5] Piketty (2019) implicitly develops the idea of an intergenerational loyalty for left parties to explain the emergence of the brahmin left: whereas a majority of voters in the 1950s/1960s had a low education level and voted for left parties, their children and their grandchildren in the 1980s/1990s who benefited from mass education continued to vote for those parties. In this sense, the shift from a traditional to a brahmin left would not be not based on a specific political strategy to attract more educated voters.

[6] Piketty (2019) points out the role played by increasing educational inequalities: education spending has become increasingly more concentrated among high-income households (and to a lesser degree among middle-income households), and has on average declined over time. As a consequence, the marginalisation of the popular classes would contribute to increasing inequalities because the left has become increasingly indifferent to redistributive issues.

[7] According to Piketty (2019), each of these groups was represented by a candidate in the French presidential election of 2017. The four candidates obtained comparable scores (20 to 24%) in the first round.

[8] Frank (2005, 2017) analyses the transformation of the party system in the United States in the direction of an increasing opposition between low-income and low-educated voters (supporting the Republican Party) and high-income and high-educated voters (supporting the Democratic Party).

success, or lack thereof, with which these groups can put forward their policy demands, in particular the demands that have income- or-power distribution consequences. Applied to France and Italy (Amable et al. 2012; Amable 2017), this analysis leads to identify in the 1990s/2000s a breakup of the traditional social blocs that, until then, gathered different social groups unified around a certain expression of their policy demands: for instance, a left bloc opposing a right bloc. The breakup of the traditional social blocs opened the way to a reshuffling of socio-political alliances. A particular restructuring was the unification of the high-skilled or well-off social groups belonging formerly to the traditional left and right blocs into a new social bloc, the *bloc bourgeois*. This bloc would gather social groups belonging both to the brahmin left and the merchant right.

As mentioned before, a political strategy based on the support of this bloc bourgeois was electorally successful in France in 2017. A question can be raised. First, is the new social bloc stable or are divergences between the brahmin left and the merchant right likely to emerge and lead to a split between the two social groups? The conditions for such a stability will be the focus of the following empirical study.

Testable propositions

Starting from the two-dimensional representation based on income and education levels, we can derive four different social groups. Popular classes are characterised by low levels of income and education. Merchant right, or at least a fraction of them, have high incomes but not necessarily high education levels. Brahmin left, or at least a part of them, on the contrary have high education levels but not necessarily high incomes. Finally, the bloc bourgeois includes the more affluent and educated fractions of the merchant right and the brahmin left.[9] These classes have heterogeneous preferences on four items: (1) politics (left vs right); (2) redistribution; (3) public investment in education; (4) globalisation/immigration. Table 1 summarises the predicted preferences of the social classes for each item. We can deduce different testable propositions from these preferences.

For political leaning, we have the following propositions:

- P1: Support for the left should increase with the education level; this is one of the key hypotheses behind the existence of a brahmin left.

- P2: Support for the left should decrease with income, more steeply at low education levels; this would split apart the brahmin left from the merchant right and the less educated part of this latter group from popular classes.

- P2b: Support for the right should increase with the income level more steeply at low education levels.

- P3: Support for the right should decrease with the education level at high income levels; this would favour the unification of the bloc bourgeois (brahmin left and educated merchant right)

For redistribution, we have:

- R1: support for redistribution should decrease with income more at low than at high levels of education; this would explain the emergence of a brahmin left less concerned about inequalities.

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[9] See part C of the Appendix for more details on the definition of the social groups and additional regression estimations.

- R2: support for redistribution should decrease with education at low levels of income and should be constant at high level of income; this would support the separation of the brahmin left from the popular classes.

Table 1 – Definition of classes' preferences

Education \ Income	Low level	High level
Low level	**Popular classes** Growing dissatisfaction with left parties Favourable to redistribution Hostile to investment in education Hostile to globalisation of business activities Hostile to immigration	**Less educated part of the merchant right** Support right politics Hostile to redistribution Hostile to public investment in education Favourable to globalisation of business activities Hostile to immigration
High level	**Less affluent part of the brahmin left** Growing support for left parties Moderately favourable to redistribution Favourable to investment in education Mildly favourable to globalisation of business activities Favourable to immigration	**Bloc bourgeois (high income and education level)** Support centre-right politics Hostile to redistribution Mildly favourable to investment in education Favourable to globalisation of business activities Favourable to immigration

For the attitude towards public investment in education, three different propositions can be tested:

- PI1: support for investment in education should increase with the education level more strongly for low income than high income; this would support the existence of the brahmin left.

- PI2: support for investment in education should decrease more strongly with income at low education levels than at high education levels. This would point at the possibility to unite the brahmin left and the merchant right in a bloc bourgeois.

- PI3: support for investment in education should increase more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals self-identified as right. This would support the existence of the brahmin left.

Regarding globalisation of business activities, we have:

- G1: support for globalisation of business activities should increase with the education level at low income levels and stay constant at high income levels; this would point to the importance of the globalisation divide for the split between the popular classes and the brahmin left.

- G1b: the support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people.

- G2: support for globalisation of business activities should increase with income, more strongly at low education levels; this would separate the merchant right from other social groups.

- G2b: the support for globalisation should increase with the income level more strongly for left people than for right people; this would characterise the brahmin left.

And finally, for immigration:

- I1: support for immigration should increase with the education level at all income levels; this would unite the bloc bourgeois.

- I2: support for immigration should be constant with income at all education levels; this would support the existence of an education-based globalisation divide.

Data and empirical strategy

The testable propositions defined above are brought to the data using different ISSP surveys for a pooled sample of 17 OECD countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) from 1985 to 2016.

Dependent variables

The first item considered is political leaning expressed on a left-right scale. We use the variable PARTY_LR (party voted for in last general election: left – right scale") present in 14 different ISSP waves (1985, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016). Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the distribution of the PARTY_LR variable. The share of left respondents (Far Left and Left) is about 33 percent of our sample whereas right respondents (Right and Far Right) account for about 30 percent of our sample. Finally, centre respondents are about 17.5 percent; the last category has been gathered in other and no preference (abstention) which accounts for 18.5 percent of our sample.

Table 2 – Political self-placement descriptive statistics

	Observations	Percent
Far Left	9,128	3.15
Left	87,169	30.11
Centre	50,578	17.47
Right	82,504	28.50
Far Right	6,581	2.27
Other/No preference	53,536	18.49
Total	289,496	

The second item reflects the attitudes towards redistribution which are estimated using the following question: Is the governments' responsibility to reduce income differences between rich and poor. This variable is available in the module of "Role of Government" (1985-1990-1996-2006-2016). A similar question is also available in the modules of "Social Inequality" (1987-1992-1999-2009), "Religion" (1991-1998) and "Environment" in 2010. Table 3 displays the distribution of the attitudes towards redistribution: 36 percent of the respondents do not support redistribution whereas 66 percent is in favour of government intervention to reduce income inequality.

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards redistribution

	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	16,382	8.91
Disagree	33,151	26.93
Indifferent	12,658	33.81
Agree	63,658	34.63
Strongly agree	58,054	31.56
Total	183,934	

The third item is public investment in education. The first variable measures the support for education spending by government. This variable is provided in the 1985, 1990, 1996, 2006 and 2016 waves. The second variable evaluates whether respondents estimate just or unjust (right or wrong) that people with higher incomes can buy better education for their children than people with lower incomes. This variable is available for 1999 and 2006. Table 4 displays descriptive statistics for these two variables: we find that 68 percent of our sample is favourable to education spending by government (whereas a very small share of our sample declare to be against). In addition, descriptive statistics indicate that about 62.3 percent of the respondents estimate unjust (or wrong) that richer people can buy education than poorer people (whereas about 20 percent find this situation just or right).

Table 4 – Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards public investment in education

Education spending by government

	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	472	0.65
Disagree	1,923	2.65
Indifferent	21,056	29.00
Agree	31,946	44.00
Strongly agree	17,210	23.70
Total	72,607	

Just or unjust that rich can buy education

	Observations	Percent
Very just	2,227	6.56
Somewhat just	4,537	13.37
Neither just nor unjust	6,016	17.73
Somewhat unjust	9,986	29.44
Very unjust	11,158	32.89
Total	33,924	

The final item is globalisation and immigration. Four different variables are used to capture this dimension. In a first variable, the support for large companies is measured by the share of people who disagree with the statement that large international companies are doing more and more damage to local businesses. This first variable is available only in 2003 and 2013. In a second variable related to globalisation, the support for free trade is measured by the share of respondents who agree with the statement that free trade leads to better products becoming available in their own countries. Table 5 provides descriptive statistics and produce some contrasted results. First, it can be observed that a large majority (56 percent of our sample) do not support the action of large international companies (whereas about 19 percent appears in favour of large companies); second, we find that about 58 percent agree or strongly agree the statement that free trade allows to better products.

Table 5 – Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards globalisation

	Support for large companies		Support for free trade	
	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	5,757	18.09	871	2.73
Disagree	12,176	38.26	3,830	12.00
Indifferent	7,832	24.61	8,735	27.37
Agree	4,863	15.28	14,842	46.51
Strongly agree	1,196	3.76	3,632	11.38
Total	31,824		31,910	

Two additional variables are used to assess the attitudes towards immigration. The support for immigration is first estimated by the share of respondents who agree the statement that immigrants are generally good for the economy of the respondents' country. Additionally, the support for immigration is then measured by the share of people who do not agree the statement that immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in the respondents' country. These variables are available for 1995, 2003 and 2013. Table 6 displays descriptive statistics for attitudes towards immigration and gives some similar results for the two variables: we find that about 40-44 percent of the respondent agree and strongly agree that immigration is good for the economy and is not a threat for jobs; whereas about 30 percent of the respondents do not support immigration.

Table 6 – Descriptive statistics for attitudes towards immigration

	Immigration is good for the economy		No immigration-related job substitution	
	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent
Strongly disagree	3,490	8.12	4,137	9.44
Disagree	8,837	20.55	9,589	21.88
Indifferent	13,312	30.96	10,662	24.33
Agree	14,974	34.82	13,970	31.88
Strongly agree	2,390	5.56	5,461	12.46
Total	43,003		43,819	

Independent variables: Income and education

The preferences regarding these four different items can be explained by two major predictors: the income and education levels. First, ISSP recovers individuals' earnings as well as post-tax family income. To make these income (country-specific) variables comparable across countries, we compute income deciles at the country level for each available year. Second, to compare the education level across countries, a general classification is used. A first category refers to no qualification or primary level of education (i.e. lowest and above lowest formal qualification); a second category refers to secondary level of education (i.e. higher secondary qualification or above higher secondary level) and a last category refers to higher level of education (University degree completed).

Empirical strategy

First, we run binary logit regressions of individuals' political leaning, and attitudes towards redistribution, public investment in education and globalisation/immigration with pooled data. As a set of control, we introduce the following variables: gender (dummy variable for male), age and age

squared (to allow for concavity). Income and education are used as the main predictors, these two variables are interacted to test their combined effect:

(model 1a)

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta_D * D_i + \beta_I * I_i + \beta * D_i * I_i + \gamma * X_{it} + \eta_1 * Country + \eta_2 * Year + \varepsilon_i$$

with D_i and I_i respectively the degree and income decile of individual *i*. X is a vector of individual socio-demographic characteristics (age, and sex). Finally, Country and Year are respectively two vectors of country and year dummies, and ε is the error term.

An augmented model also considers the interaction between income and political leaning:

(model 1b)

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta_D * D_i + \beta_I * I_i + \theta_P * P_i + \beta * D_i * I_i + \theta * P_i * I_i + \gamma * X_{it} + \eta_1 * Country + \eta_2 * Year + \varepsilon_i$$

To check for robustness, we run additional estimations using different identified social classes (see Appendix A). Finally, we also perform ordered logit regressions (see Appendix B) since all our variables to be explained encompass discrete choices that can be easily ordered.

Estimation results

Political leaning

We start by computing the impact of the education level on the support for the left (estimated with model 1a) in order to test proposition P1. Figure 1 displays the marginal effect of the education level (highest degree) on the probability to place oneself to the left according to the income level (decile).[10] One can see that the support for the left is increasing with the education level for all income deciles, but with some differences across income levels: it increases faster for lower (left panel in Figure 1) than for higher income deciles (right panel) where left self-placement varies little moving from lower-educated individuals to medium-educated ones. This result confirms proposition P1: support for the left increases with the education level controlling for income levels.

Moving on to proposition P2, we compute the impact of the income level on left sympathies estimated with model 1a. Figure 2 shows the marginal effect of the income level (decile) on the probability to place oneself to the left according to the education level. One notices first that for all income deciles, the probability to place oneself to the left is higher at higher than at lower levels of education. Also, the evolution of this probability is hump-shaped rather than monotonically decreasing at all education levels. The decreasing part of the curves occurs after the fifth decile of the income distribution and one notices that left leaning decreases more rapidly with income at the highest education level. Therefore, the proposition that the support for the left should decrease with income but should also decrease more steeply at low education levels is only partially validated.

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[10] Supplementary tables are available to present the results of our regressions and the estimated marginal effects.
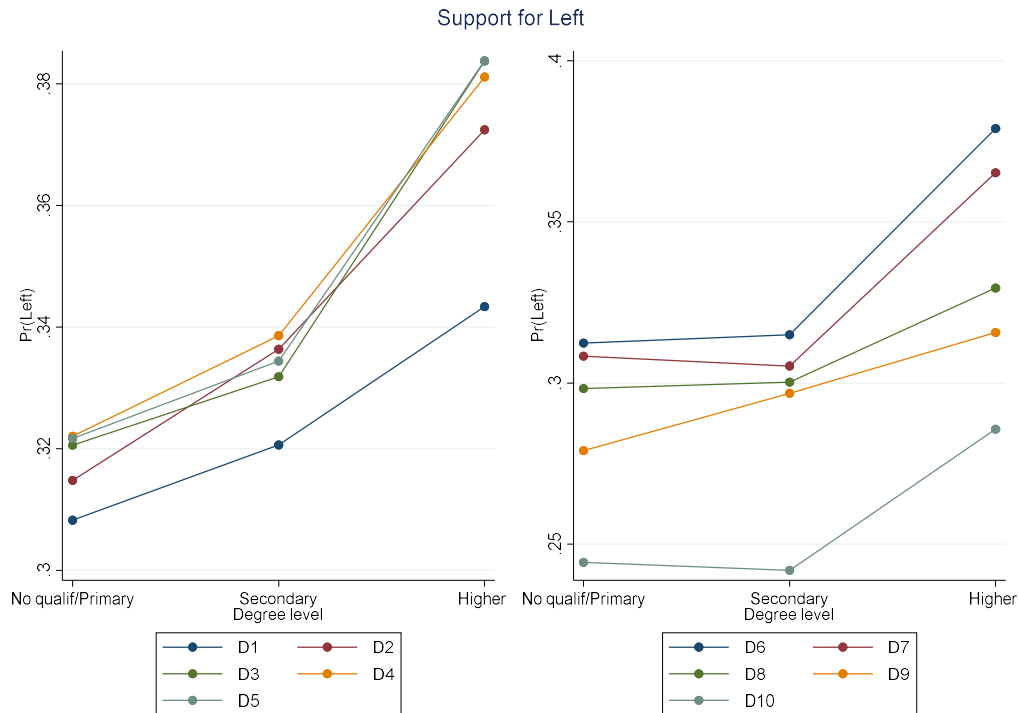
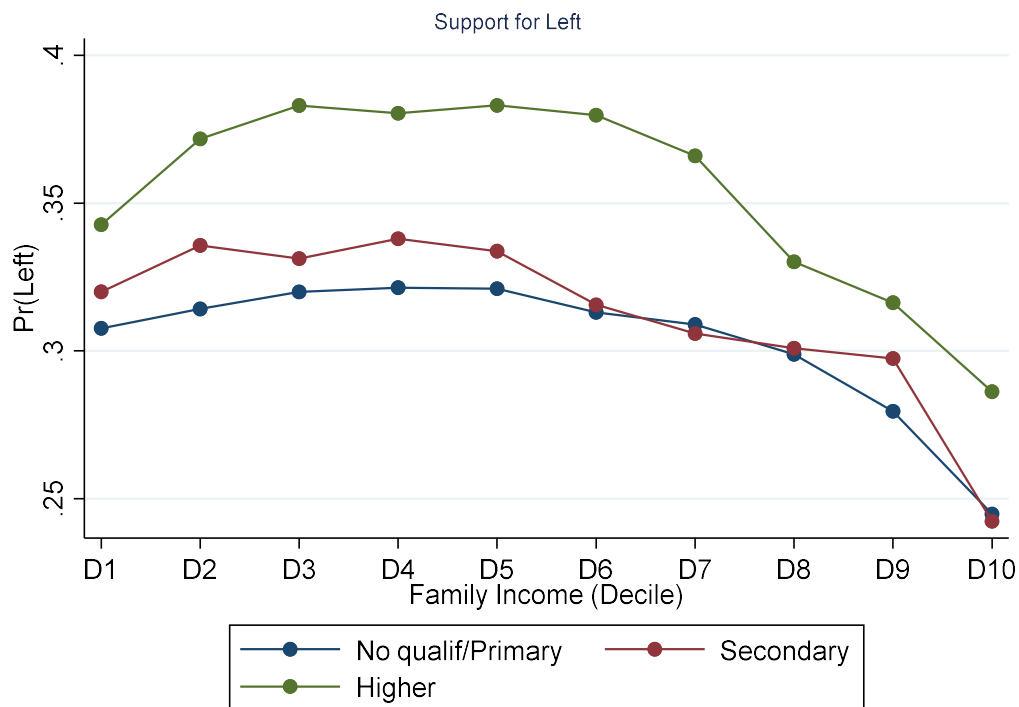**Figure 1 – Marginal effect of education level on the support for the left**

Figure 2 - Marginal effect of the income level on the support for the left

Similarly, marginal effects of the education or income levels are finally computed to explain the support for the right as displayed in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 displays the marginal effect of the income level (decile) on the probability to place oneself to the right according to the education level.

We find that the support for the right increases monotonically with income at all education levels. One can see that above the 5th income decile, the support of highly educated individuals increases faster than that of individuals with a low education level, which contradicts proposition P2b.

Figure 4 shows the marginal effects of the education levels on the probability to place oneself to the right according to the income level. According to proposition P3, we should observe a downward schedule at high income levels. In fact, we find a similar shape at all income levels: the support for the right strongly increases from the lowest education level to the medium education level for all income deciles, and decreases when moving to the highest education level.
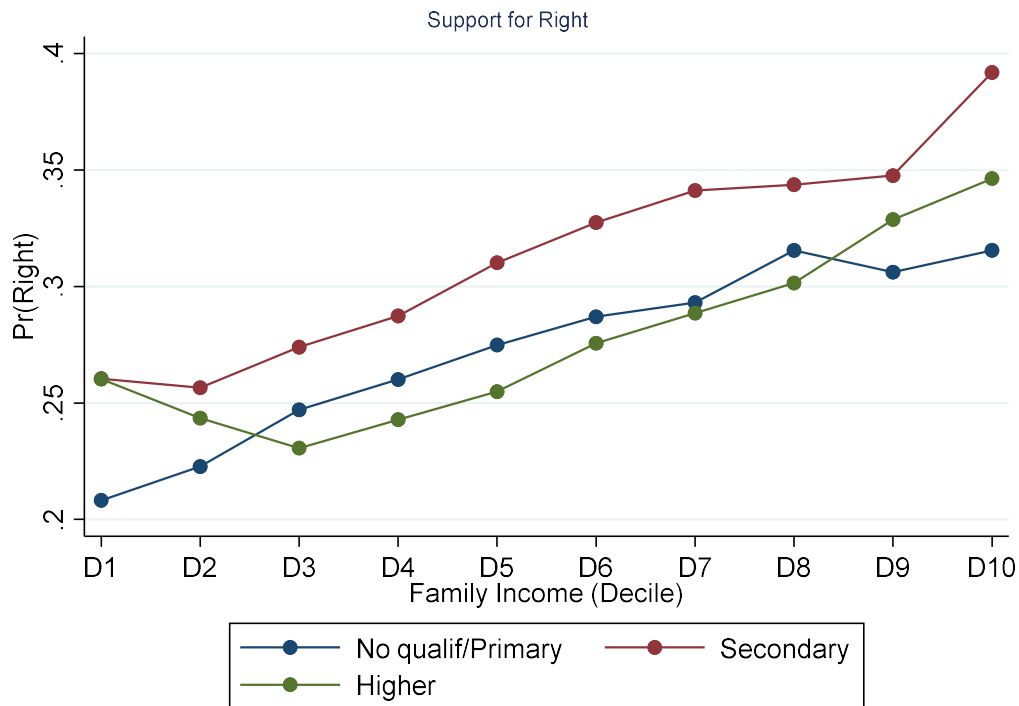
Figure 3 - Marginal effect of the income level on the support for the right
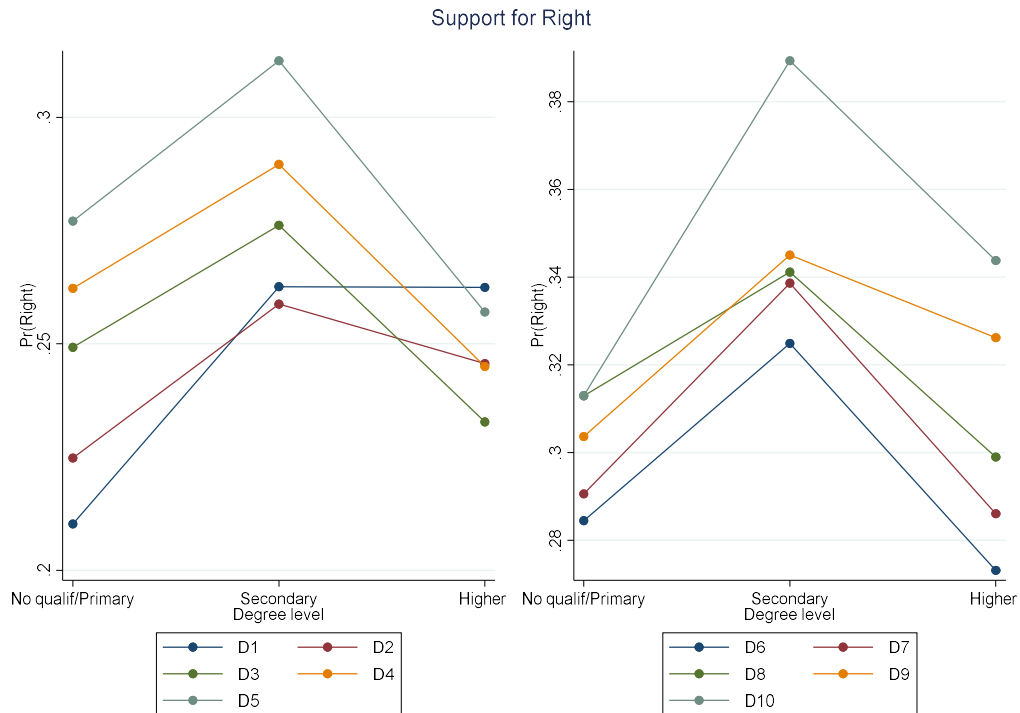
Support for Right

Figure 4 - Marginal effect of education level on the support for the right

Redistribution

The marginal effects of income levels obtained with the estimation of models 2a (left panel) and 2b (right panel) to explain the support for redistribution are displayed in Figure 5. Support for redistribution decreases with income at all education levels without noticeable differences in the steepness of the decline, contrary to proposition R1, which stated that because of an expected moderate support for redistribution from the brahmin left, the decrease of the support for redistribution should be less steep at high levels of education. This questions the fact that the whole brahmin left should be less concerned about inequality and thus less supportive of redistributive policies. A difference appears when one splits the sample according to the political leaning: the decrease is steeper for individuals on the right, as could be expected.

Support for redistribution
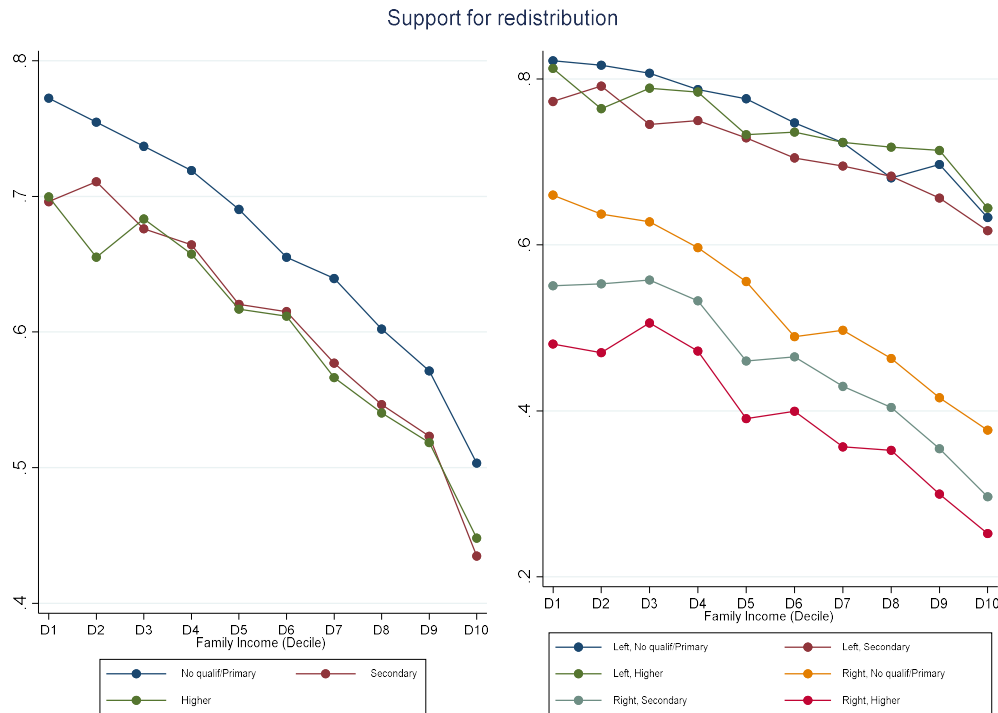
Figure 5 - Marginal effect of income on the support for redistribution according to the education level (left panel) and according to the education level and political leaning (right panel)

Figure 6 displays the marginal effects of the education level on the support for redistribution estimated with model 1a. Support for redistribution strongly decreases from the lowest education level (no qualification or primary education) to the medium education level (secondary education) for all income levels, especially for the lowest income deciles and for the highest income decile (D10). Support remains then relatively flat from the medium education level to the highest level (except for D2). This suggests that the support for redistribution decreases with education at low level of income but also at high level of income, only partially validating proposition R2.

Investment in public education

Figure 7a and 7b display the marginal effects of the education level respectively on the support for education spending and on the opinion that it is unjust that the rich can buy education. The support for education spending (Figure 7a) increases with the education level for all income deciles, and this more strongly for low income that high income as stated in proposition PI1.

The opinions on the equality of opportunity give, however, a slightly different picture (Figure 7b). Regression results indicate that the probability to consider that it is unjust that rich can buy a better education increases from the lowest level of education to the medium level for almost all income deciles (except for D5 and D7), but to decrease and remain stable among highest educated individuals for all deciles (except for D6). The question mixes redistribution and education issues, which may explain the difference with the findings of the previous question. It confirms however the existence of a divide regarding education that could split apart the low educated from the other individuals.

Then, we find the support for education spending increases with education level for all ideological orientations, and this more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals

self-identified as right, which confirms the specificity of the brahmin left. But again, we find more nuanced results when explaining the opinions on the equality of opportunity: while the probability to think that it is unjust that rich can buy education is decreased with the education level among right respondents, we find a positive relationship among left respondents. Therefore, the left-right cleavage still matters on education issues.
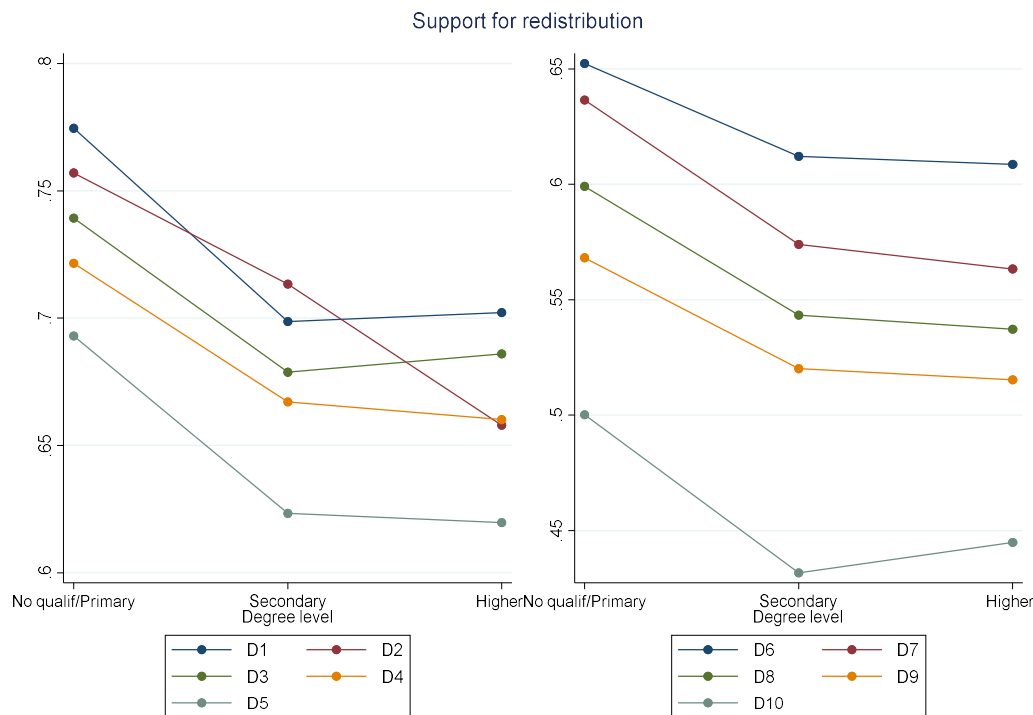

Figure 6 - Marginal effect of education level on the support for redistribution

Marginal effects of the income level on the support for investment in public education estimated with models 1a and 1b are displayed in Figure 8. We look at the evidence that the support for investment in education should decrease with income more strongly at low education levels than at high education levels (PI2). This seems to be the case in panel (a) when one considers the drop in the support for education spending for incomes above D6, but not when one looks at the question on the possibility for rich people to buy a better education (panel b).

Regarding PI3, the proposition that the support for investment in education should increase with the education level more strongly for individuals self-identified as left than for individuals self-identified as right is not verified. This mitigates the previous findings that confirmed the specificity of the brahmin left with respect to education issues. However, this specificity is still observable in the level of support.

Globalisation

Two questions assess the degree of support for globalisation of business activities. The first one is focused on the benefits of free trade while a second question refers to the role of large companies in the domestic economy. Figures 9a and 9b display the marginal effects of the education level respectively on the support for free trade and for large companies. We find that the support for large companies clearly increases with the education level, especially for high income deciles, whereas proposition G1 stated that the increase in support should take place at lower income levels. This points

to the importance of the education level in the globalisation divide and points to a possible community of interests among educated groups on such matters. We do not find a clear relationship between the education level and the support for free trade at low income levels, but the pattern is clearer for incomes above D6. This gives some support to the idea that a possible bloc bourgeois could be unified around the globalisation issue. But we find no support for proposition G1b according to which the support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people. We find that the support for globalisation slightly decreases with education level for individuals self-identified as left (free trade) or increases more slowly than for individuals self-identified as right.

Figure 10a and 10b which display the marginal effects of the income level respectively on the support for free trade and for large companies according to the education level and to political leaning indicate that the support for large companies increases with income level, more strongly among high-educated individuals, which invalidates proposition G2. This points to a divide between the highly-educated and the rest that would tend to unite the bloc bourgeois. However, the support for free trade is more volatile across income levels, especially for the lower educated people. When we look at the interaction between education and political leaning, we find that the support for globalisation is higher and increases more strongly among right respondents, with some differences across education levels. This does not bring support to proposition G2b: right respondents, regardless of their education level, are more in favour of trade openness.
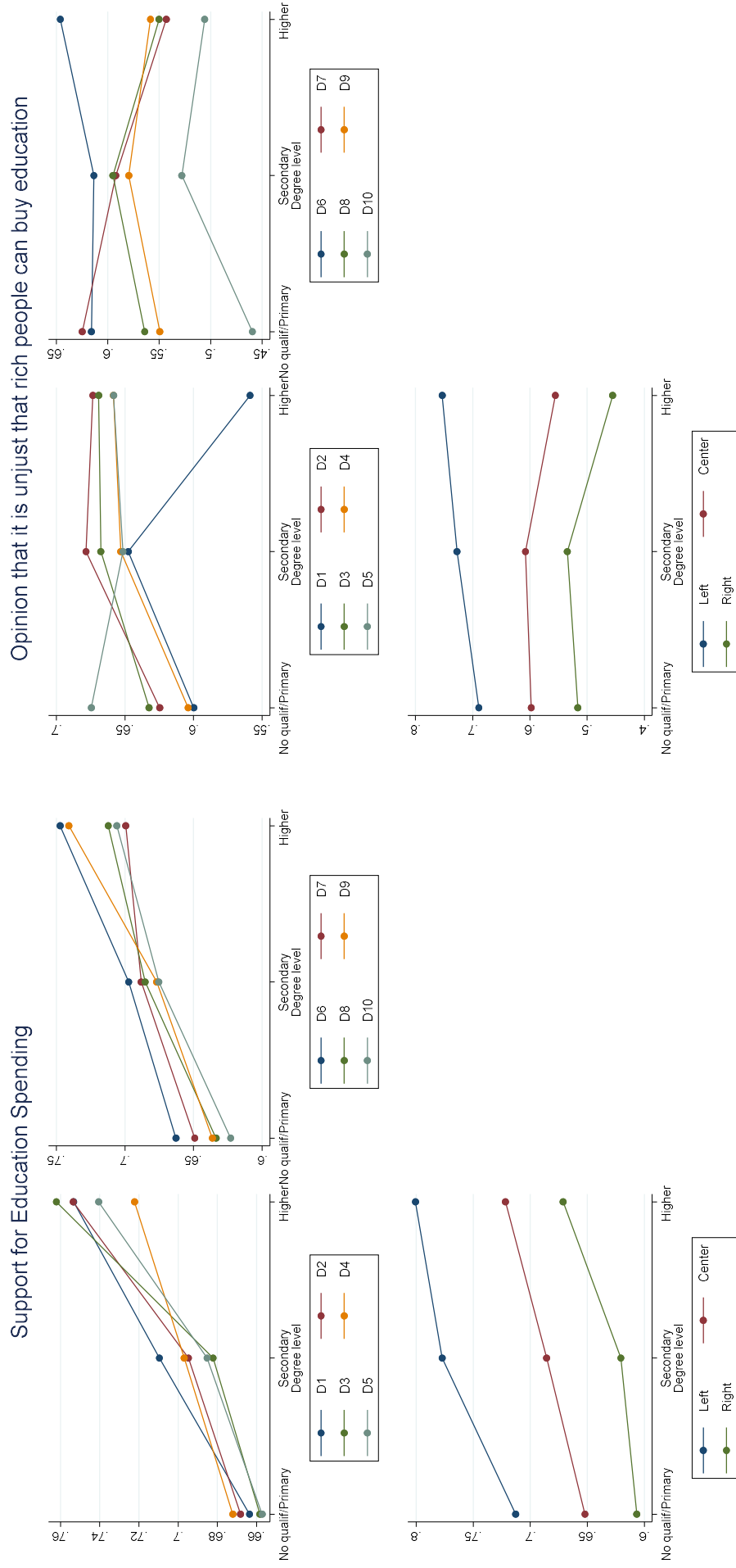
Figure 7 – Marginal effect of education on the support for investment in public education according to the income level (above panels) and according to political leaning (below panel)
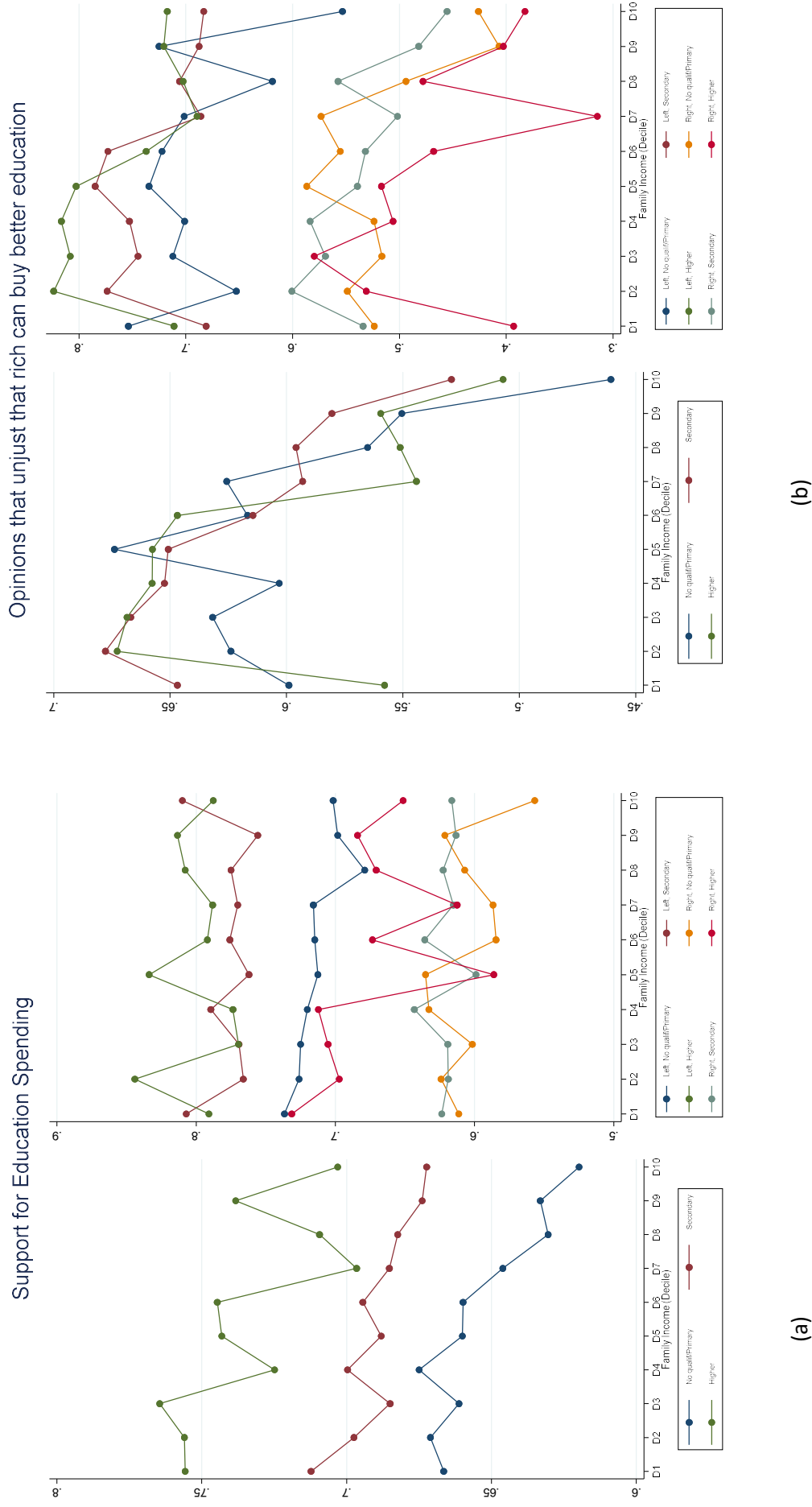
Figure 8 – Marginal effect of income on the support for investment in public education according to the education level (a) and according to political leaning (b)
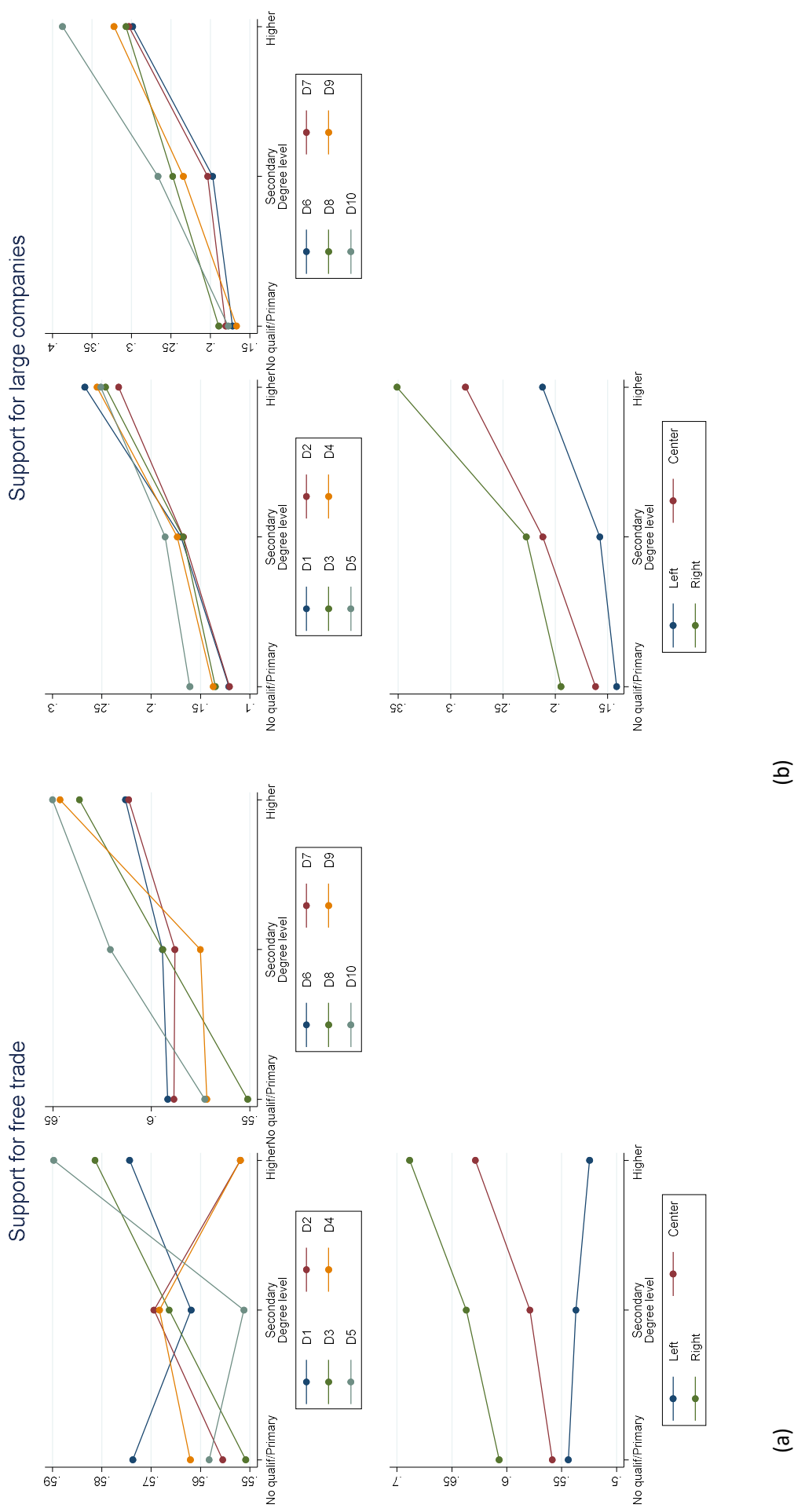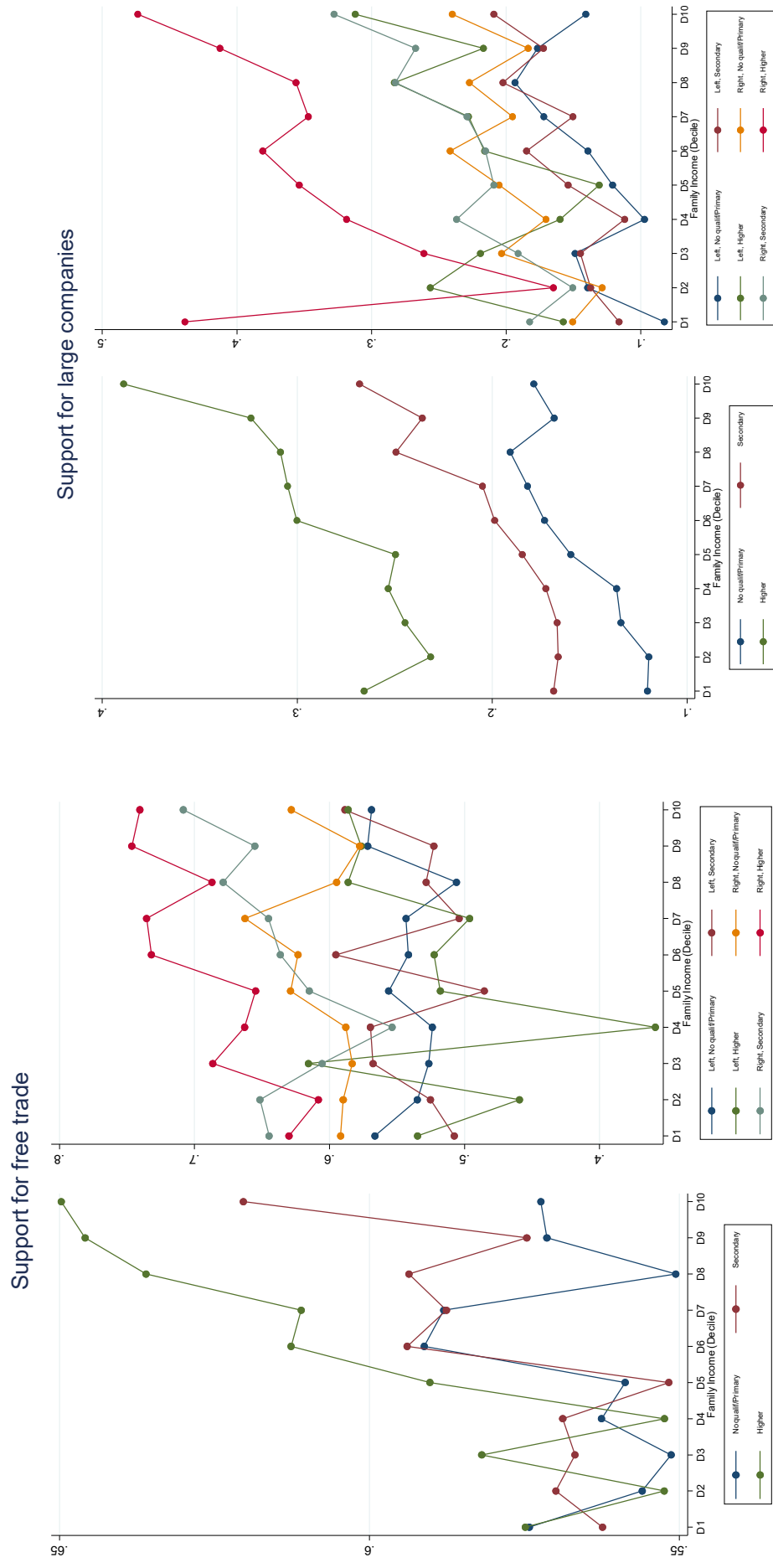
Support for free trade

Support for large companies

(a)

(b)

Figure 9 – Marginal effect of education on the support for globalisation according to the income level (above panels) and according to political leaning (below panel)

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Figure 10 – Marginal effect of income on the support for globalisation according to the education level (above panels) and according to political leaning (below panel)

Immigration

Opinions on immigrations are evaluated using two different questions on how individuals perceive the impact of immigration on the economy. The first question assesses the support for immigration by asking whether immigration is good for the economy while the second question relates to the impact of immigration on job substitution.

Figures 11a and 11b display the marginal effects of the education level on the support for immigration. We find that the support for immigration increases with the education level, with no substantial differences across income levels, which validates proposition I1. The education cleavage on immigration is present. Unsurprisingly, one can observe that left respondents are more in favour of immigration than others, but we cannot see any large differences across political orientations in the evolution of the support.

Figure 12a and 12b, which display the marginal effects of the income level respectively on the support for immigration according to the education level and to political leaning, indicate that the support for immigration increases with the income level, and this for all education levels. This invalidates proposition I2 and stresses the importance of the income divide, which is not erased by the educational cleavage. If we look at the interaction between education level and political leaning, we find that the level of education plays a determinant role to explain the differences in the attitudes towards immigration: the support for immigration increases more strongly among high-educated individuals (among left and right respondents) and more slowly among low-educated individuals (again among left and right respondents).

Opinions that immigration is not a threat for jobs

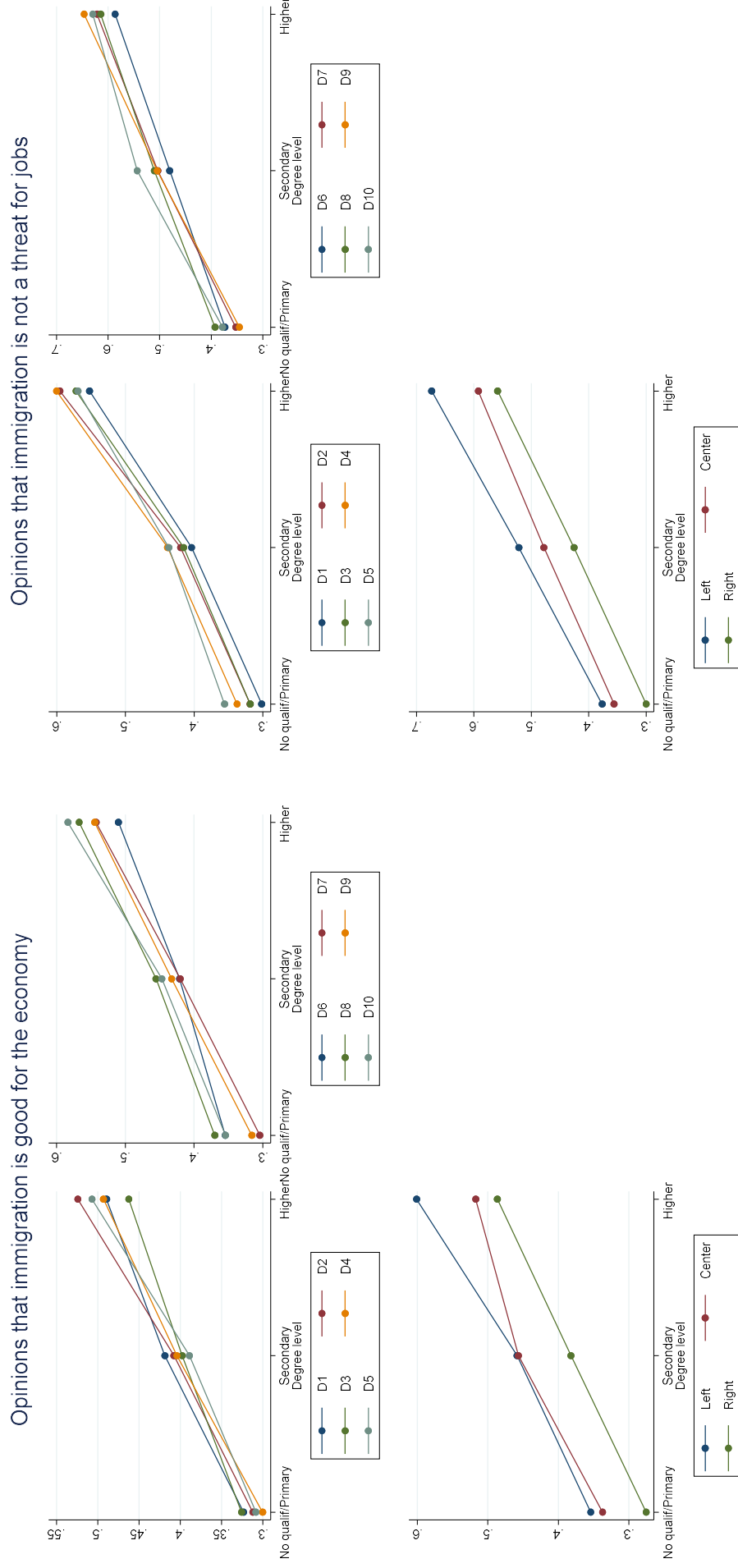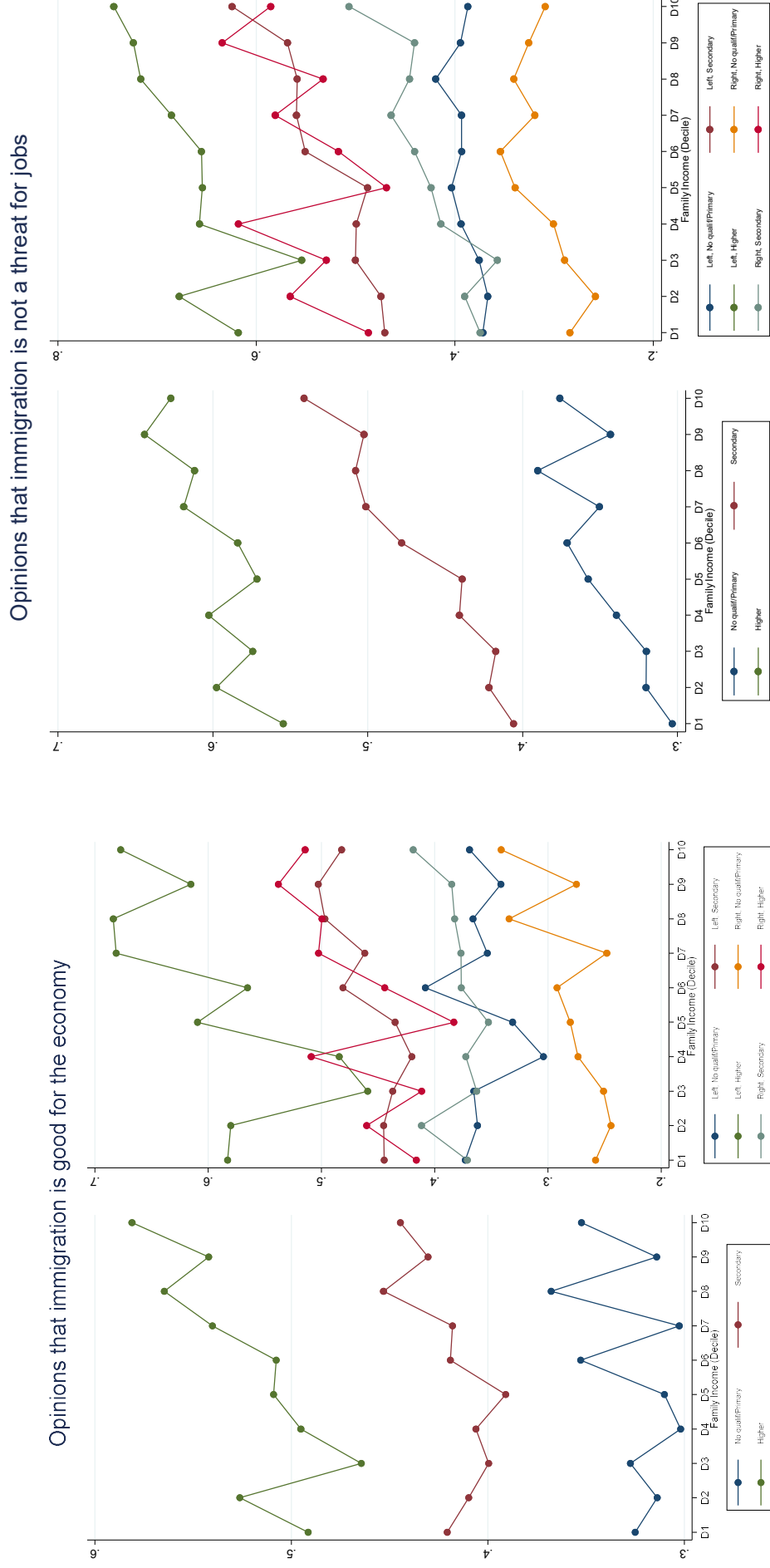Opinions that immigration is good for the economy

(b)

(a)

Figure 11 – Marginal effect of education on the support for immigration according to the income level (above panels) and according to political leaning (below panel)

22

Opinions that immigration is good for the economy

Opinions that immigration is not a threat for jobs

Figure 12 – Marginal effect of income on the support for immigration according to the education level (above panels) and according to political leaning (below panel)

Conclusion and interpretation of the results

Our estimations produce some contrasted findings regarding the importance of the educational cleavage and the socioeconomic divides that would oppose different groups such as the brahmin left, the merchant right or the bloc bourgeois to popular classes.

Both the education and income levels influence individuals' political leaning. Regarding the second influence, income, the link between an individual's financial situation and the support for the right is a well-established fact. A more original proposition made in Piketty (2018,2019) concerns the existence of the brahmin left, i.e. of a left in large part detached from the popular classes. Our estimations tend to support the existence of the brahmin left: we do find that, when controlling for income, support for the left increases with the education level, suggesting that the left may become the party of the skilled though not necessarily affluent individuals. The fact that the support for the left decreases with income more steeply at high education levels suggests that the left could have become the party of the middle-income skilled.

At the other side of the political spectrum, the income factor still plays an important role in the left-right divide and, symmetrically, right leaning is not reducible to a matter of the financial status. We find that the support for the right increases with the income level but more steeply at high education levels: this points to the right being the party of the rich and skilled. Finally, the support for the right decreases with the education level at high income levels, suggesting that a high skill level tends to decrease the political distance among individuals. This supports the emergence of a bloc bourgeois aggregating the affluent or high skilled individuals.

Also, the interactions between income and education in the determination of the preferences regarding redistribution do not quite follow the lines of Piketty's argument (propositions R1 and R2). The support for redistribution decreases with income with no sizeable differences across education levels, and decreases with education at all income levels. This points to the importance of the income level in the determination of the attitude towards redistribution and supports the existence of an affluent fraction of the brahmin left less concerned about inequality. Therefore, the separation between the Brahmins and the Merchants may not be as clear-cut as one may think and both may find common interests a policy mediation uniting these two groups, which corresponds to a political strategy aiming for the support of the bloc bourgeois.

The support for investment in education increases with the education level more at low income levels than at high income levels (PI1). This could point in the direction of the constitution of a Brahmin left but there does not seem to be a significant difference between left and right individuals in this respect (PI3). In fact, even the empirical invalidation of proposition PI2 – the support for investment in education should decrease more strongly with income at low education levels than at high education levels – questions the separation between a Brahmin left and a merchant right in this respect and points to the possibility to unite educated groups in a bloc bourgeois. Results are, however, less robust when looking at the opinions on fighting inequality in the access to education.

The attitude towards the various aspects of globalisation also casts some doubt on this separation. Propositions G1 (support for globalisation should increase with education level at low income levels but not at high income levels) and G2 (support for globalisation should increase with the education level more strongly for left people than for right people) are not supported by the data. Then, income and education also play a central role in understanding the opinions on immigrations: we find that the support for immigration increases with income at all education levels, suggesting a unification of the bloc bourgeois. We find no evidence of the existence of an education-based

globalisation divide as the support for immigration is also increasing with income. Left-leaning individuals are not likely to support more strongly globalisation – measured by attitudes either towards trade openness at the global level or towards immigration. One can derive two conclusions from these findings: first, some segments of the Brahmin left and of the Merchant right are probably united on these topics by at least one determinant: their common financial situation. Second, our findings question the possibility of a realignment of the political conflict opposing "globalists" and "nativists" *as a substitute for* a more traditional economic issue-based left-right divide. Piketty (2018) gives a central role to globalisation/immigration in the emergence of a multiple-elite party system, mainly based on a gradual rise in educational level. Political conflicts would therefore result from educational dispersion rather than from income dispersion. However, our findings point to the relevance of the financial situation in a series of divides, even taking into account differences in the education level.

To conclude, one finds mixed results of the existence of a brahmin left: first, the analysis of the support for left provides some evidence of its existence. Additional results analysing the attitudes towards redistribution, investment in education and globalisation are less clear. Our estimations may suggest some evidence of a separation of the brahmin left from the popular classes, which implies the emergence of a fraction of left voters less concerned about inequality: this fraction would be less likely to support redistribution and investment in public education. Finally, results suggest mixed evidence of the possibility to a unification of a bloc bourgeois around the globalisation issue. All in all, these findings lead us to conclude that in order to analyse further the reorganisation of the political space, it would be necessary to take more than two dimensions into consideration.

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Appendix

A. Estimations on social classes

A.1 Definition of classes

We define different social classes to analyse the impact of the interactions between income and education levels on the respondents' attitudes to political leaning, redistribution, public investment in education, and to globalisation/immigration.

First, "popular classes" refer to low-income individuals (i.e. up to D5) with low/middle level of education (No qualification/Primary and Secondary). Popular classes account for 34.8 percent of our sample (Figure A1). Second, "Brahmin" refers to high-educated individuals (i.e. with higher level of education) with low and middle level of income (up to D8). This category accounts for 9.3 percent of our sample. Third, "Merchant" refers to high-income individuals (D10) with intermediate level of education (i.e. Secondary education) and accounts for 8.9 percent of our sample. Finally, the "Bloc bourgeois" refers to high-educated and high-income individuals (i.e D9 and D10 combined with higher level of education). This last category accounts for 6.7 percent of our sample. Finally, the residual class (which will be considered as the reference class in the following analysis) accounts for 40.2 percent of our sample and refers to middle-income individuals (with low and intermediate level of education) and high-income individuals with lowest level of education.
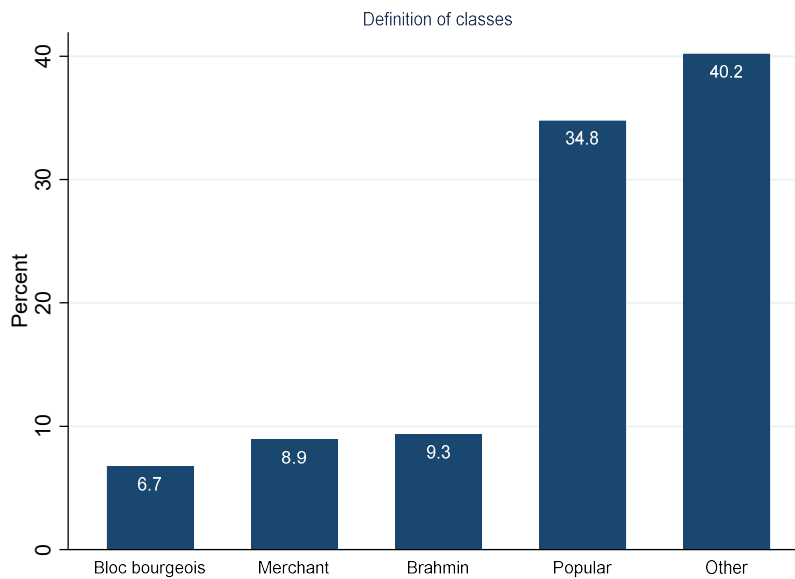
Figure A1 – Distribution of classes

A.2 Estimation strategy and empirical results

In this first series of regressions, our dependent variables have been all dichotomised. As a set of control, we introduce the following variables: Gender (dummy for male), age and age squared (to allow for concavity). As the main predictors, we use the social classes which have been previously identified (model A1). The equation to be estimated can be defined as follows:

(model A1)

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 * Popular + \beta_2 * Brahmin + \beta_3 * Merchant + \beta_4 * Bloc\_Bourgeois + \gamma X_i + \eta_1 Country + \eta_2 Year + \varepsilon_i$$

Where Y_i^* is the latent variable, i.e. the intensity of preferences for political party, redistribution, public investment in education, globalisation/immigration. The observed variable, Y_i , is equal to 1 for individual *i* if $Y_i^* > 0$ and 0 otherwise. The main explanatory variables are our different social classes denoted by four different dummy variables (*Popular*, *Brahmin*, *Merchant* and *Bloc_Bourgeois*). *X* is a vector of individual socio-demographic characteristics (age, and sex). Finally, Country and Year are respectively two vectors of country and year dummies, and ε is the error term.

Political leaning

We start with the pooled estimations of model A1. The odds ratio for group belonging are displayed in Figure A2. One can see that left politics (i.e. a self-placement of individuals close to social-democratic parties) is more likely to find support among low-income and low- and middle-educated individuals ("popular classes") as well as low- and middle-income and high-educated individuals ("Brahmin"). These two classes are found to be less supportive of conservative politics. By contrast, high-income and high-educated individuals (bloc bourgeois) and especially high-income and middle-educated individuals ("Merchant") are more likely to support right politics. This last category is also more likely to be more opposed to left politics.
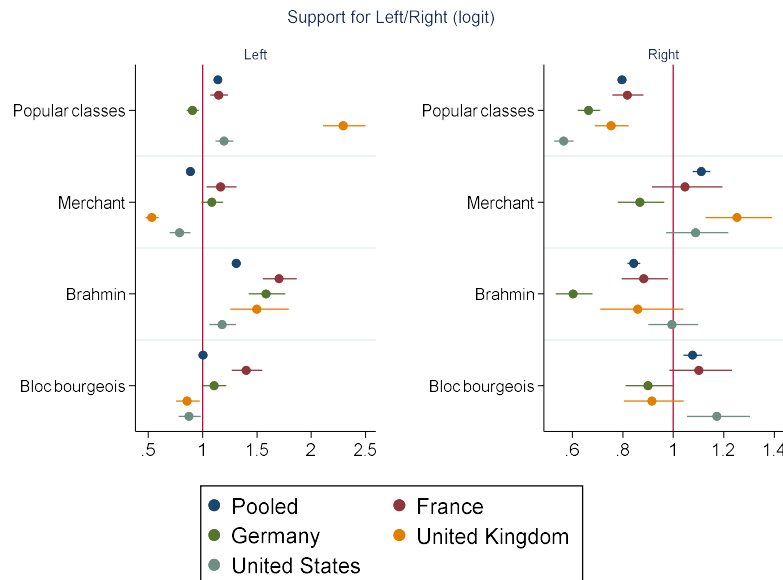
Figure A2. Model A1 logit estimations on political leaning (odds ratio for group belonging)

Country-level logit regressions for model 1 show contrasted evidence (Figure A2). In France and in Germany among the four defined classes, "Brahmin" are more likely to be supportive of left politics, surprisingly followed by the Bloc bourgeois, "Merchant", and finally the popular classes, invalidating the proposition P1 for low-income individuals and the proposition P2 for low- and middle-educated individuals. Then, when examining the support for the right, the Bloc bourgeois are more likely to support the most the right followed by the "Merchant", the popular classes and the "Brahmin". These findings provide some evidence of the proposition P3: high-income individuals are more likely to be in favour of right parties than low-income individuals (with a low influence of education). This, however, is hardly a revolutionary finding. We find somewhat different results in the United Kingdom and the United States: the popular classes and the "Brahmin" both tend to support left parties while the "Bloc bourgeois" and the "Merchant" are more inclined to be hostile to it, thereby validating the proposition P1 but not P2. By contrast, the "Merchant" in the United Kingdom and the

"Bloc bourgeois" in the United States are more likely to support right-wing politics while the popular classes tend to be against right politics, suggesting that the support for the right is mainly driven by income differences in line with Piketty (2018)'s prediction.

These findings suggest that the proposition P1 according to which the support for the left should increase with the education level is partially validated: we find some evidence of this among low-income but not among high-income individuals. Then, the proposition P2, i.e. that the support for the left should decrease with income level more steeply at low education levels, is partially verified: among the middle-educated individuals, support for the left is strong for the "popular classes" and decreases for the "Merchant" individuals. In addition, we find that among high-educated individuals, the support for the left is lower (but not statistically significant) among the "Bloc bourgeois" than among the "Brahmin".

Redistribution

The predictions regarding redistribution are standard: better off individuals are supposed to be less favourable to redistribution (left panel in Figure A3). The estimates on the pooled sample with model 1 do not question this basic assumption. Popular classes are the most favourable to redistribution, other classes are less favourable to it than the reference class, in particular the merchant class and the bloc bourgeois. This hierarchy of sympathy towards redistribution is also found for the four countries under consideration. Only in the UK does the Brahmin class appear to be more pro-redistribution than the reference class. Restricting the sample to left individuals (right panel) does not fundamentally modify the conclusion. The brahmin left are slightly more pro-redistribution than the (left) reference class, but less so than the popular class.
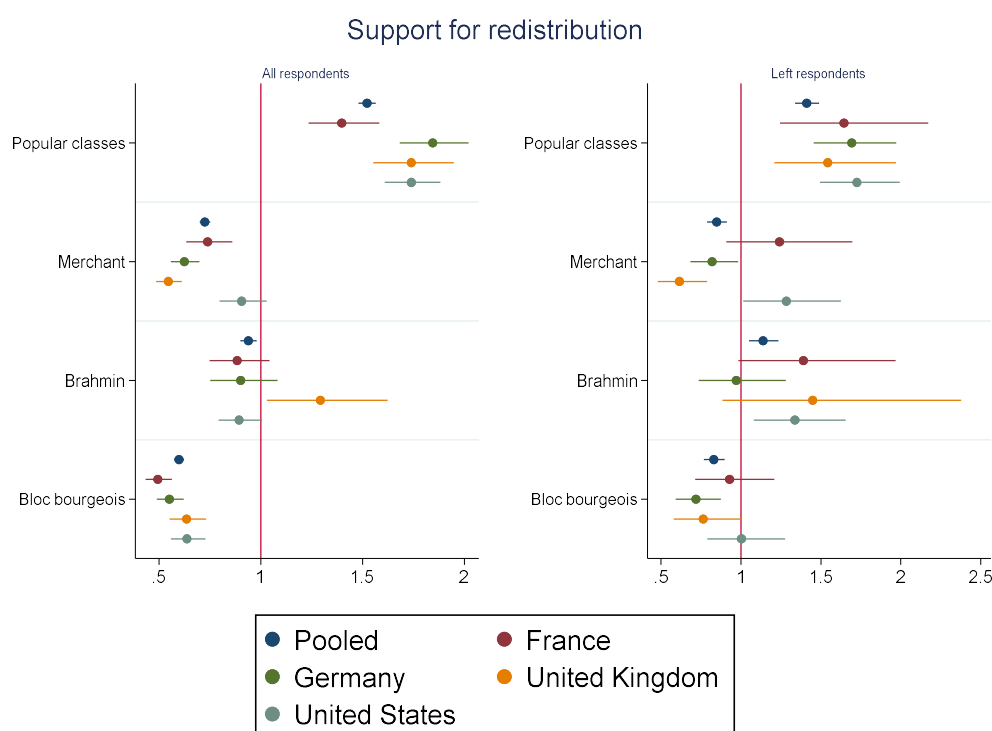

Figure A3. Model A1 logit estimations on the support for redistribution (odds ratio for group belonging)

Spending for investment in education

Support for education spending at the pooled level is, as expected, stronger for Brahmin and bloc bourgeois but there are some differences across countries. The UK and, to a lesser extent, the US follow the broad aggregate pattern, but in France, the Brahmin and particularly the bloc bourgeois do not particularly support investment in education in comparison to other social groups. This situation contrasts with Germany where these two groups and even the merchant class do support education spending more than the reference class (left panel in Figure A3). The opinions on the equality of opportunity give a different picture. Popular classes are the most sensitive to the inequality of education opportunities (pooled results are shown in right panel in Figure A3). This is true also for Germany but not for the US or France. At the pooled as well as at the national level, the Brahmin class are less concerned than the popular class by the lack of equality of opportunities. Without surprise, the merchant class and the bloc bourgeois are even less concerned.
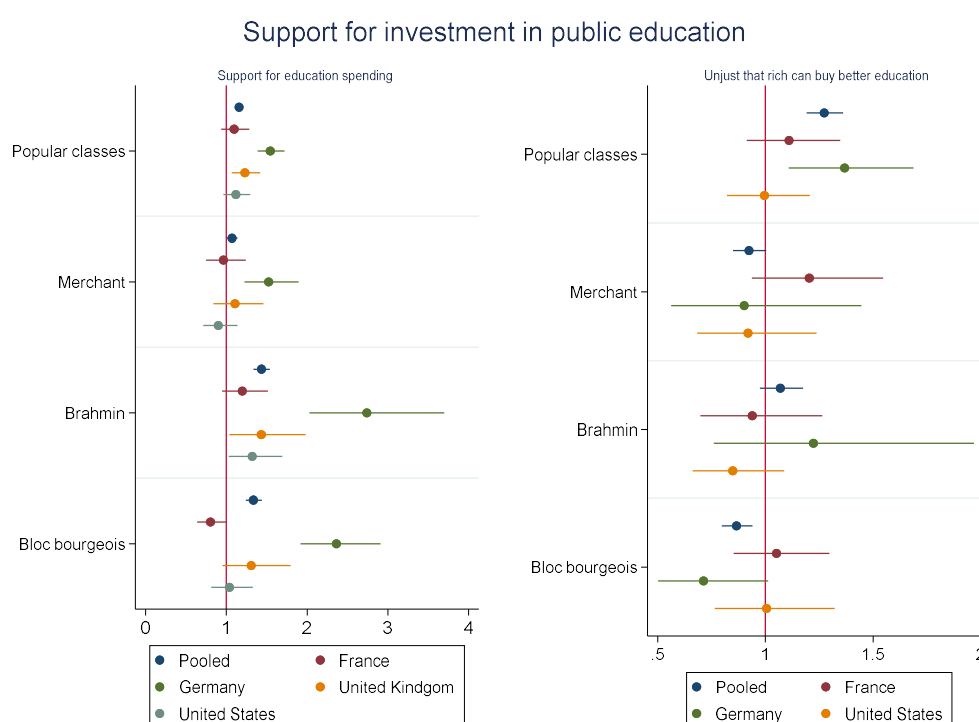
Figure A3 - Model A1 logit estimations on the support for investment in public education (odds ratio for group belonging)

Globalisation

The pooled regression results show that the bloc bourgeois are the group the most supportive of free trade, with the brahmin and merchant classes slightly more supportive than the reference class, and the popular classes slightly less so (left panel in Figure A4). Country differences are interesting to notice. In Germany, there is no anti-free trade sentiment visible among the popular classes but there is one among the brahmin. This contradicts Piketty's assumptions. The same pattern may be found in France, whereas the US do exhibit a hierarchy of free trade support similar to that found with the pooled sample. The other question (large companies) leads to results more in line with Piketty's assumptions (right panel in Figure A4): the hierarchy of support for globalisation goes from popular classes to the bloc bourgeois both at the pooled as well as the country levels.
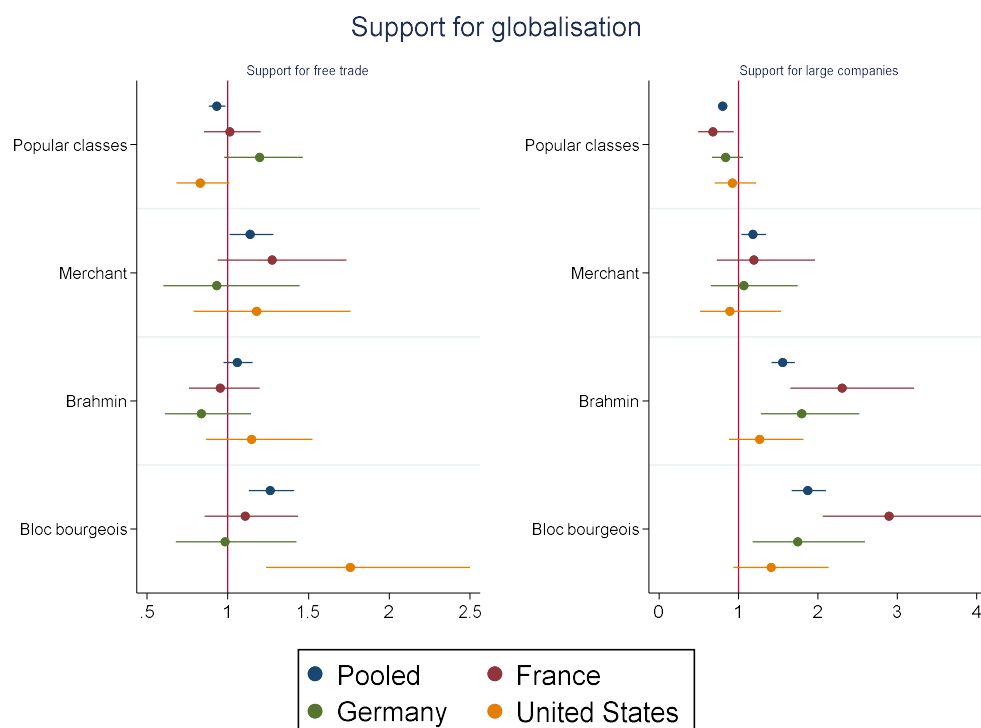
Figure A4 - Model A1 logit estimations on the support for globalisation (odds ratio for group belonging)

Immigration

The first question assesses the support for immigration by asking whether immigration is good for the economy (left panel in Figure A5). The pooled regression results show that the bloc bourgeois are the group the most supportive of immigration, with the Brahmin and merchant classes slightly more supportive than the reference class, and the popular classes slightly less so. Some cross-country differences are observable. In France, the support for immigration by the bloc bourgeois and the Brahmin are much higher than in other countries. In addition, the Brahmin are the most supportive of immigration in Germany, followed by the bloc bourgeois. The second question relates to the impact of immigration on job substitution (right panel in Figure A5). Results are very similar to those of the first question. The bloc bourgeois, the brahmin and then the merchant are more likely to support immigration than the reference class, whereas the popular classes are less likely to do. Similar cross-country differences are also observable.

Support for immigration
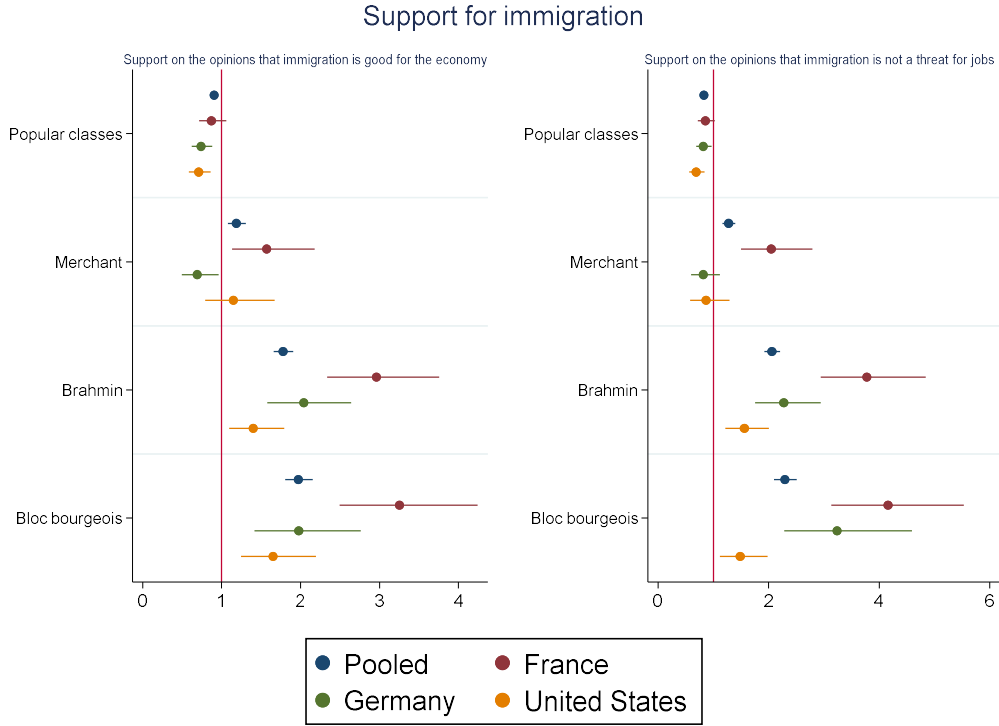
Figure A5 - Model A1 logit estimations on the support for immigration (odds ratio for group belonging)

B. Ordered logit regressions

In the following robustness checks, we run additional ordered logit regressions, since all our variables to be explained encompass discrete choices that can be easily ordered. First, we run regressions by income or education level. In Model 2a, the individual preferences for each dimension are predicted by income deciles for each level of education (No qualification/Primary; Secondary; Higher):

(model 2a)

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta * D_i + \gamma X_{it} + \eta_1 Country + \eta_2 Year + \varepsilon_i$$

with Y_i^* a variable which is not directly observable but related to the observable Y_i that takes the values of 1 to 5 and increases with the individual support for right parties, for redistribution, for public investment in education, and for globalisation/immigration. In particular, we have:

$$Y_i = j \text{ if } \mu_{j-1} < Y_i^* < \mu_j, j = 0, 1, \dots, 5 \text{ and } \mu_0 = -\infty \text{ and } \mu_j = 5$$

Alternatively, in Model 2b, the individual preferences for each dimension are predicted by education level for each income decile:

(model 2b)

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta * E_i + \gamma X_{it} + \eta_1 Country + \eta_2 Year + \varepsilon_i$$

with Y_i^* a variable which is not directly observable but related to Y_i as in the previous equation.

For each dimension, we look at the separate effect of education and income in reference to a baseline category (secondary degree for education level and D5 for income level). This strategy – estimating the separate effect of education and income – does not allow us to test our different propositions. First, we analyse the effect of education level by each income decile; second, we analyse the effect of income level by each degree level.

For the first dimension, political leaning (Figure A5), we find that higher educated people are statistically significantly more likely to be in favour of right or far-right parties (in comparison with medium-educated individuals) and this with little differences across income deciles. In addition, we find that the support for right (or far-right) increases with income deciles, with significant effect from D6) and with larger differences across education levels especially for higher income deciles (D8 to D10).
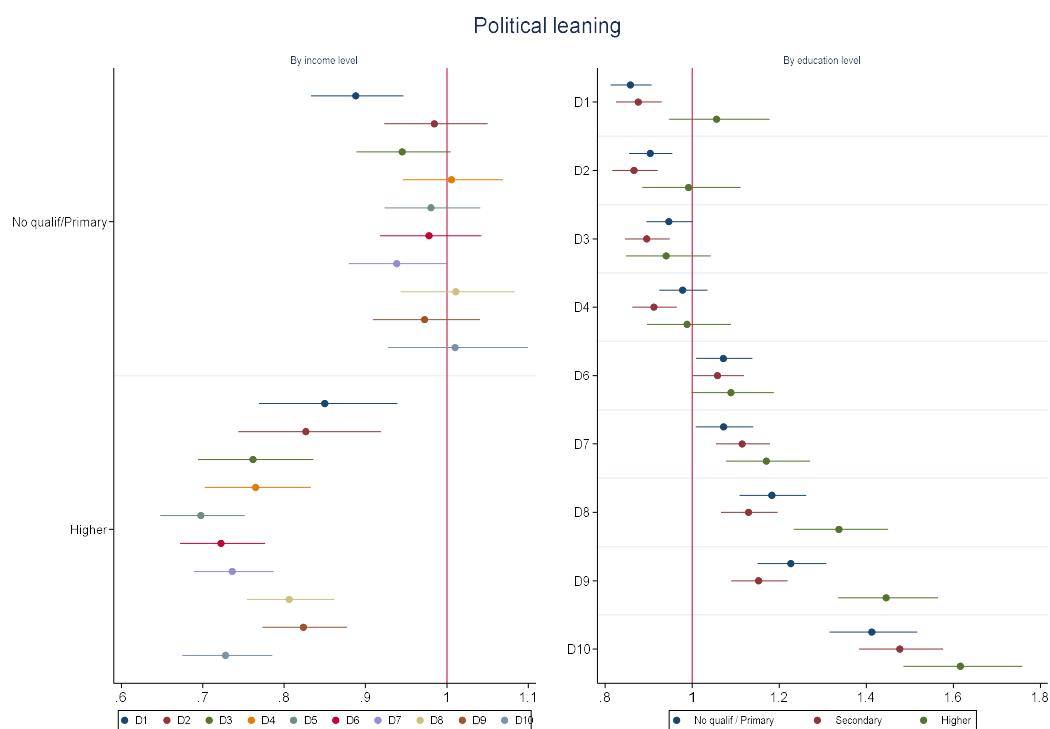
Figure A5 – Effect of education level (left panel) and income level (right panel) on the self-placement of individuals on a left-right scale

Figure A6 provides estimation results to explain the attitudes towards redistribution. First, we analyse the separate effect of income and political leaning for each education level (left panel). The support for redistribution is clearly decreasing with income deciles, with small differences across education levels. We find that left respondents are more in favour of redistribution (in comparison with centre respondents), especially among higher-educated individuals whereas right respondents are more likely to be opposed to it with no differences across education levels. Then, when we look at the effect of income and political leaning on the support for redistribution for each income decile (right panel), we find that lower-educated individuals are more likely to support redistribution, and this regardless of their income level. Estimates are not statistically significant among higher-educated individuals. Finally, results clearly reveals an ideological cleavage: left respondents are more favourable to redistribution, with an increasing support with the income whereas right respondents are opposed to redistribution, with no variations across income level.
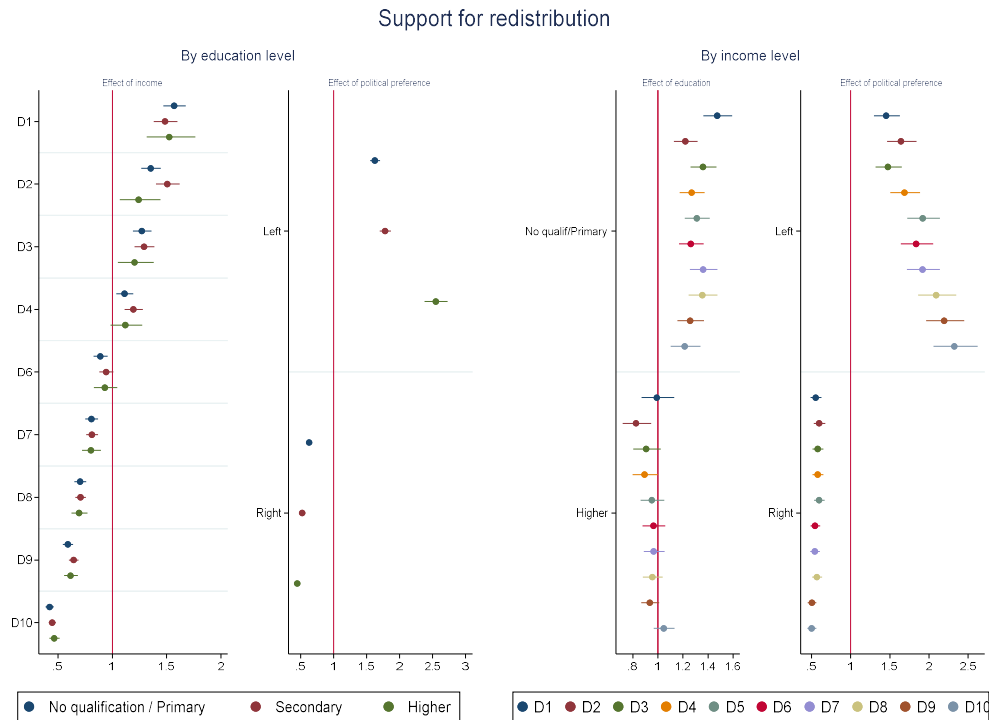
Support for redistribution

Figure A6 - Effect of income, education and political leaning on the support for redistribution

Figure A7 displays estimation results using our two different variables measuring the attitudes towards investment in public education. As the previous dimension, we analyse first the separate effect of income and political leaning for each education level (left panel). First, one can notice that similar effects are overall found for the two variables used. Second, the support for investment in public education decreases with income level, with no large differences across education levels. For the second variable, results indicate no significant coefficients for lower income deciles whereas significant effects are found for highest income deciles (from D7). This suggests that there is a sharp divide between the lowest and highest deciles of income on the opinion on the equality of opportunity, with no significant differences across education levels. Third, we find that left respondents (respectively right respondents) are more (respectively less) statistically likely to support education and to express the opinion that it is unjust that rich individuals can buy better education. Second, when the attitudes towards public education are explained for each level of income, we find more nuanced results: first, higher educated people are more in favour of education spending in contrast to lower-educated respondents, with small variations across education levels. Second, results also reveal as previously that left respondents are more likely to support public education, with the increasing support with income deciles, whereas right respondents are more less supportive but with no differences across income levels.
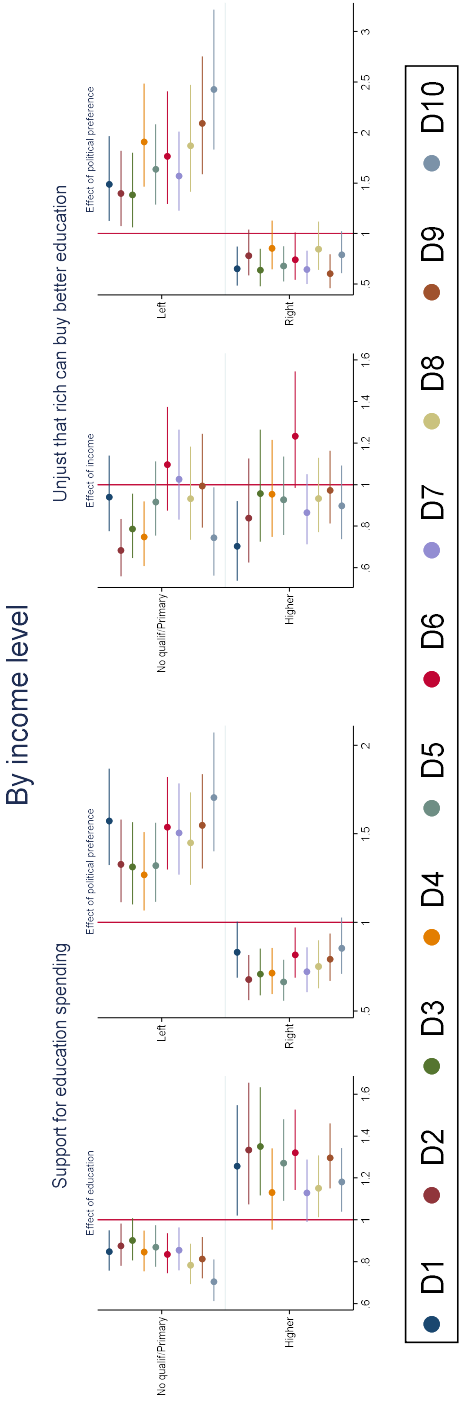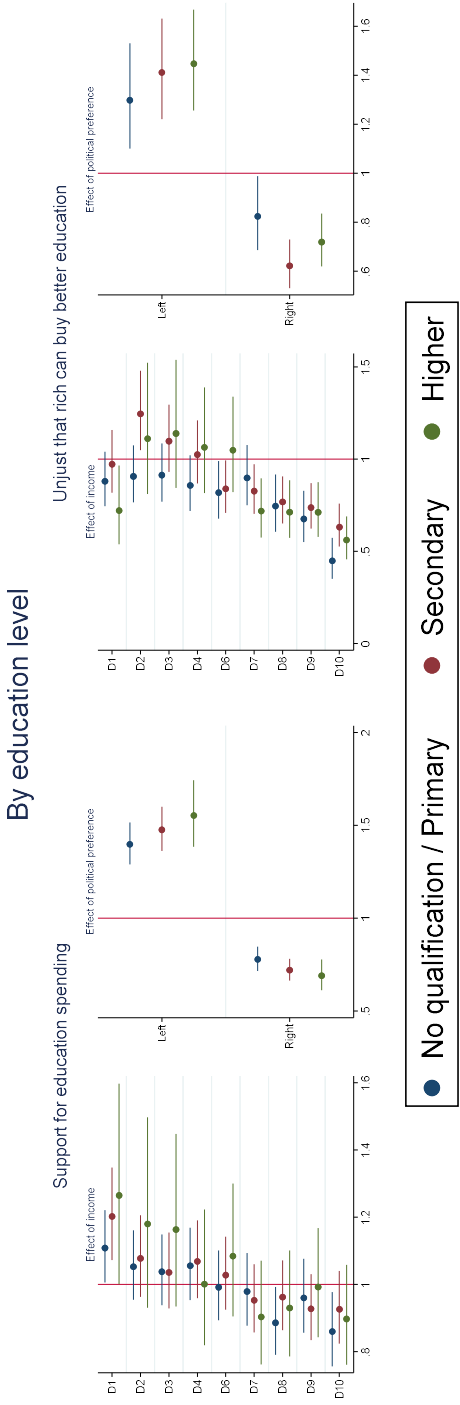
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Figure A7 - Effect of income, education and political leaning on the support for investment in public education

Figure A8 presents estimation results on the attitudes towards globalisation (i.e. the support for free trade and large companies). First, one can find that the support for globalisation slightly increases with the income level, with larger differences across education levels. Moreover, left respondents are less supportive of (economic) globalisation, and this more particularly among higher-educated individuals. We find symmetrical results among right respondents. When analysing the estimations for each level of education, we find small (and weakly significant) differences across income levels and across political leaning, except as for the support for large companies: higher-educated individuals are more likely to support large companies whereas lower-educated individuals appears opposed, and this with small differences across income levels.

Finally, Figure A9 presents estimation results on the attitudes towards immigration (i.e. the support for free trade and large companies). First, results suggest that the support for immigration slightly increases with income deciles, but with some differences across education levels. It is supposed by Piketty that the support for immigration should increase with the education level. To this regard, we find somewhat contradictory results: when explaining the opinion on the effect of immigration on the economy (i.e. whether immigration is good or not for the economy), we find that this is the case among high-income individuals. By contrast, when support for immigration is measured by its effect of jobs, we find that positive attitudes increase more with education at low income levels. Finally, we find that the support for immigration is higher among left respondents, and this more particularly among higher-educated individuals. If we focus on the effect of education and political leaning for each income decile, we find again some nuanced results: we find that the support for immigration (i.e. positive effect of immigration on the economy) does weakly vary across income but is mainly driven by education level: low-educated individuals are not supportive of immigration whereas high-educated individuals are in favour of immigration, and this regardless of the income level. This result is in line with Piketty's assumptions, competition with immigrants is less harmful when one has a high education level. However, we also find that the support for immigration (job substitution question) decreases with income for all levels of education. This second finding is not so easily interpretable along Piketty's line of argument. One could have expected that high income individuals would be less hostile to immigration, feeling less threatened by competition, income acting as a protection in the same way as education.
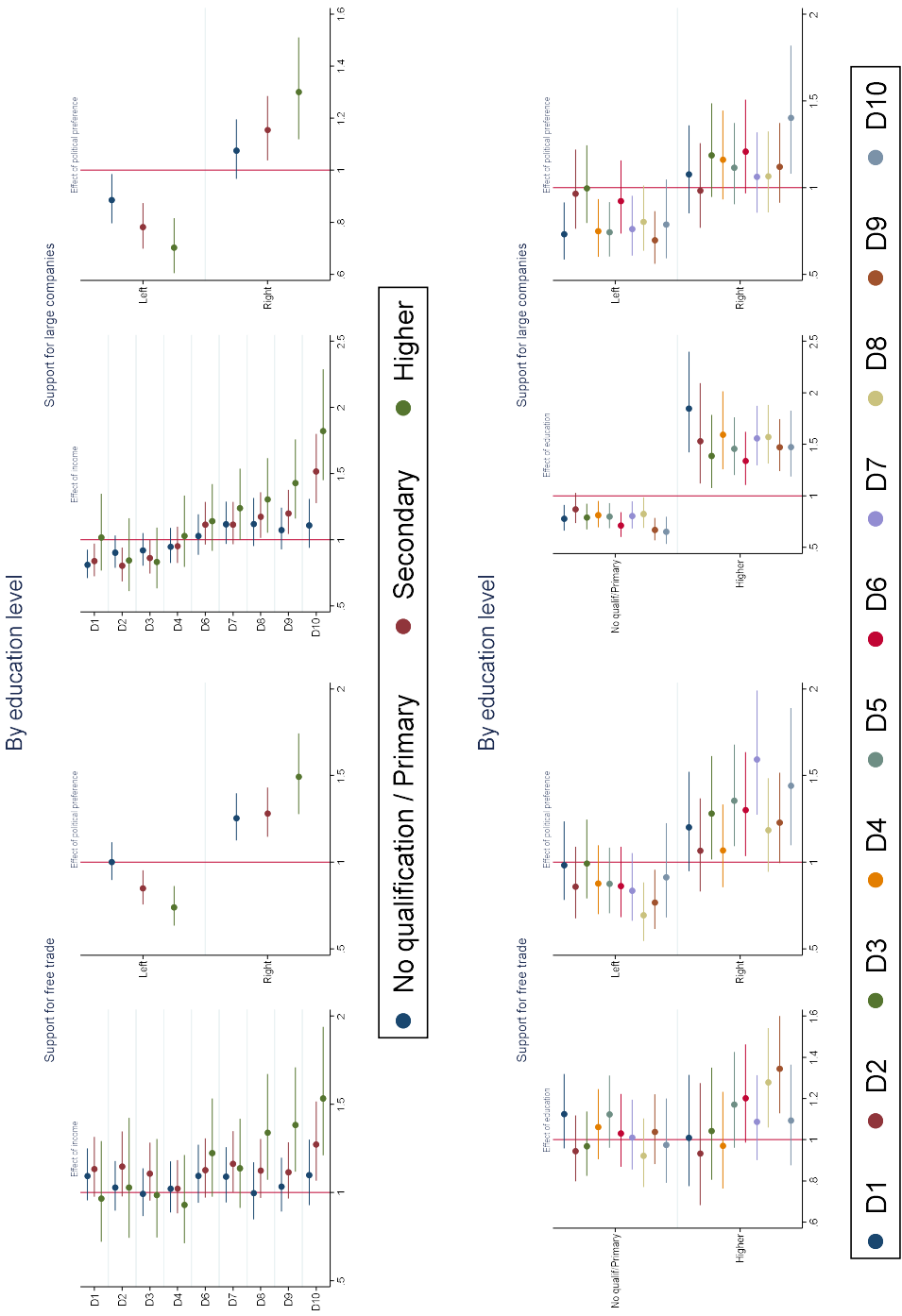
Figure A8 - Effect of income, education and political leaning on the support for globalisation
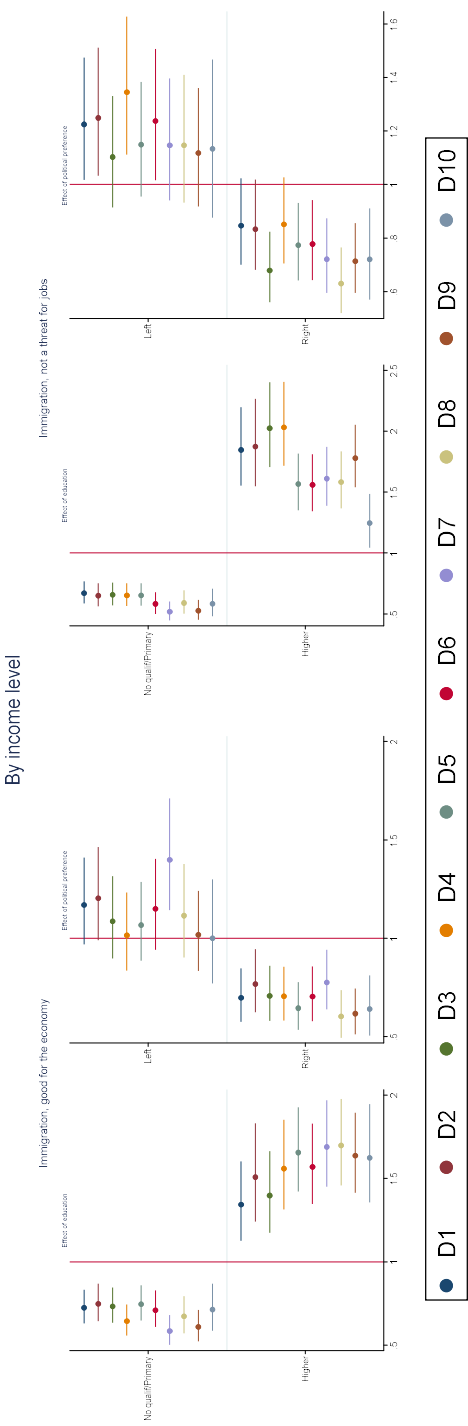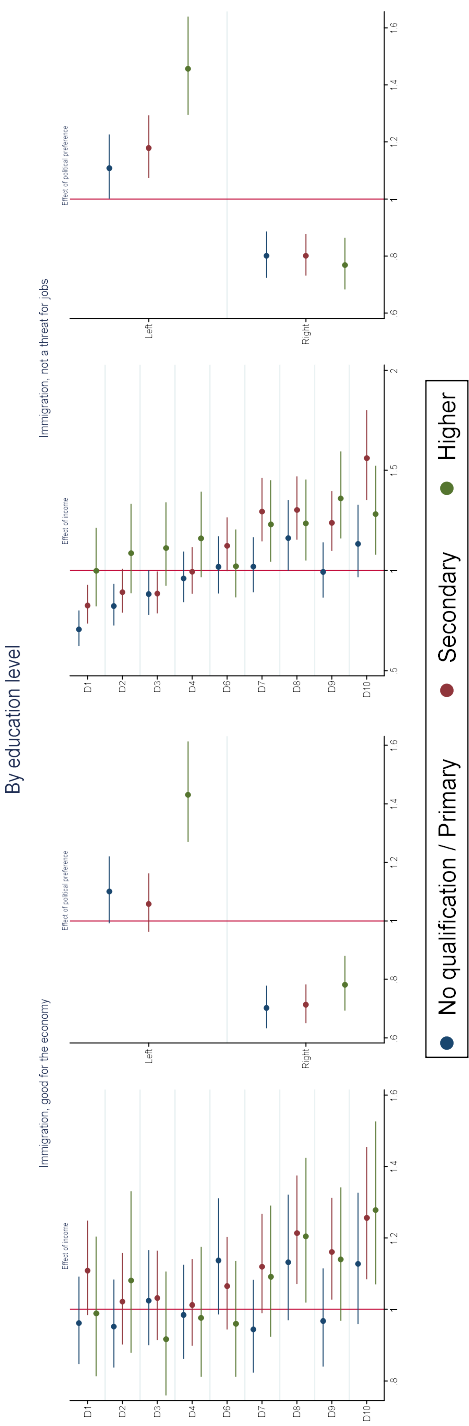
Support for immigration

Figure A9 - Effect of income, education and political leaning on the support for immigration

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C. Logit estimations over time

Finally, Piketty (2018) extensively exploits the temporal dimension to analyse changes in the political cleavages. Although our database provides a more limited time span, we can analyse the evolution in the support for political parties and for redistribution over time, using a logit model with an interactive term between education, income levels and a time variable considering different periods (1985-1992; 1995-1999; 2003-2010; 2011-2016).

First, Figure A10 shows the evolution in the support for left over time according to income (left panel) and education (right panel) levels. It appears that the support for left has similarly varied over time for all income deciles (with a little exception for D10): overall, the support for the left increased from the mid-1980s to the 1990s and then decreased from the 2000s, and especially from the 2010s. One can notice that the support for left among the richest individuals (D10) remained constant between 1995 and 2010 and declined since then. When looking at the evolution in the support for the left over time for each education level, lowest and medium-educated individuals are characterised by similar trends: the support strongly increased from the first period to the second, and continuously and sharply declined after 2000. By contrast, left leaning among higher-educated individuals began to decline after the third period.
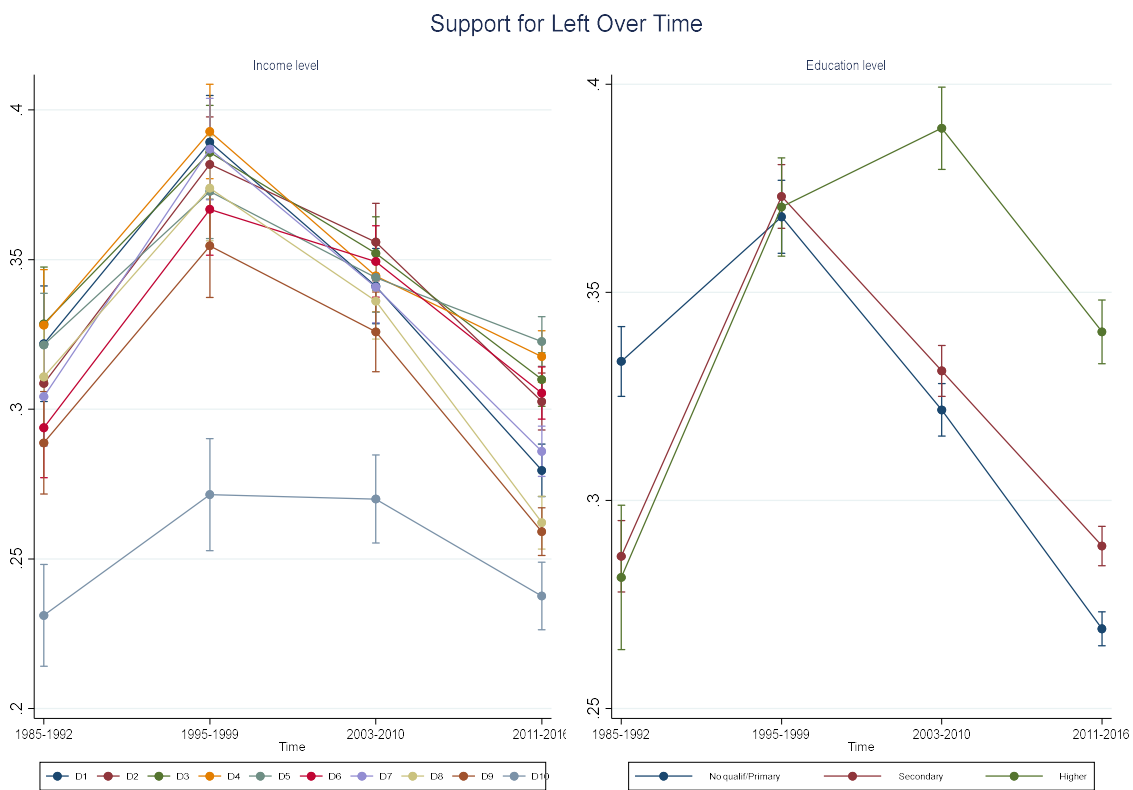

Figure A10 –Support for left over time (1985-1992; 1995-1999; 2003-2010; 2011-2016)

Then, we analyse the evolution of right leaning over time as displayed in Figure A11. Larger differences across income levels than for left leaning can be observed: some income deciles in the middle of the income distribution (i.e. D4, D5, D6 and D8) have shown a relative stagnation over time; other deciles in the bottom of the distribution (D1, D2, D3) or D7 exhibited an increase or a decrease and then a stagnation. Finally, higher-income individuals (D9 and D10) have shown a stagnation and a decline in their support for the right. As for left leaning, strong similarities can be remarked among

low- and medium-educated individuals, with strong differences in levels: right leaning increased from 1985 to 2010 and declined during the last time period.
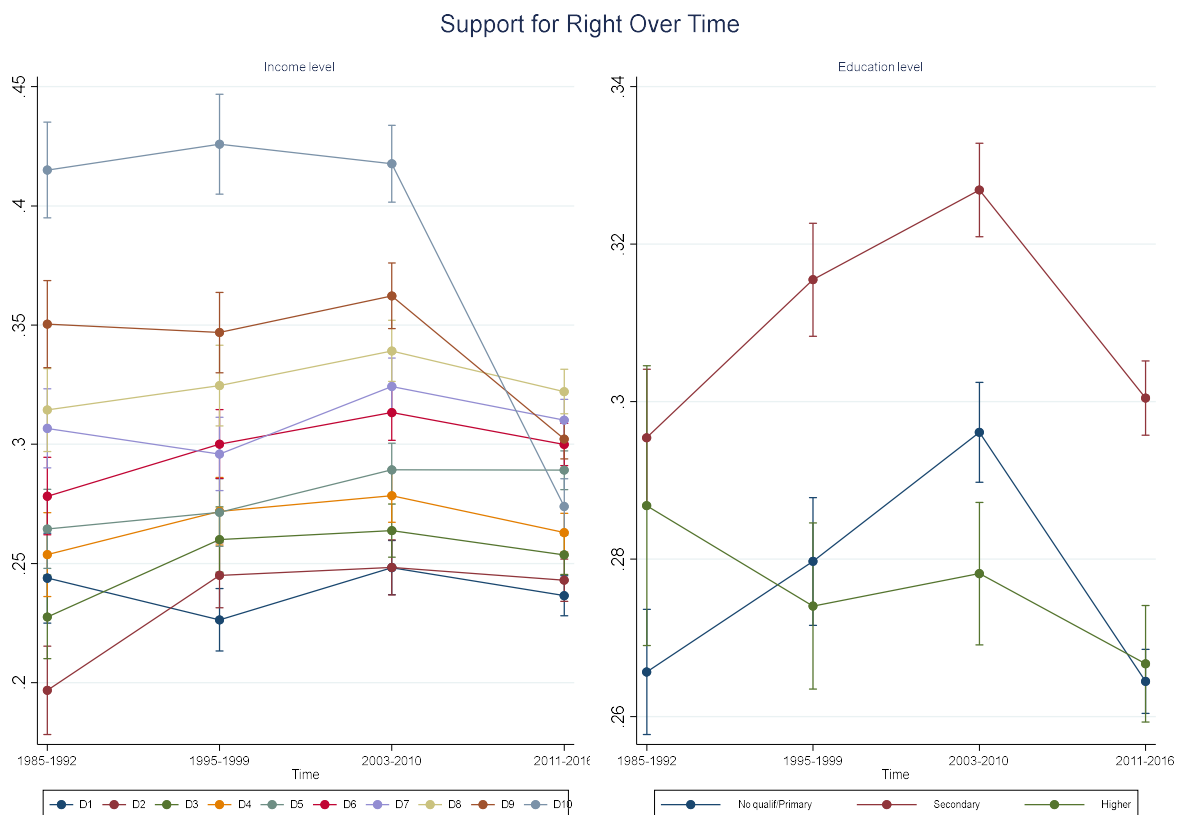

Figure A11 – Support for the right over time (1985-1992; 1995-1999; 2003-2010; 2011-2016)

Finally, we analyse the evolution in the support for redistribution over time: Figure A12 does not show strong differences in the evolution in the support for redistribution across income levels (except maybe for high income deciles which show a strong increase during the last period) and across education levels: overall, one can see that the support for redistribution increased from the first period (1985-1992) to the second period (1995-1999), then slightly decreased to the third period (2003-2010) and finally increased to the last period (2011-2016).
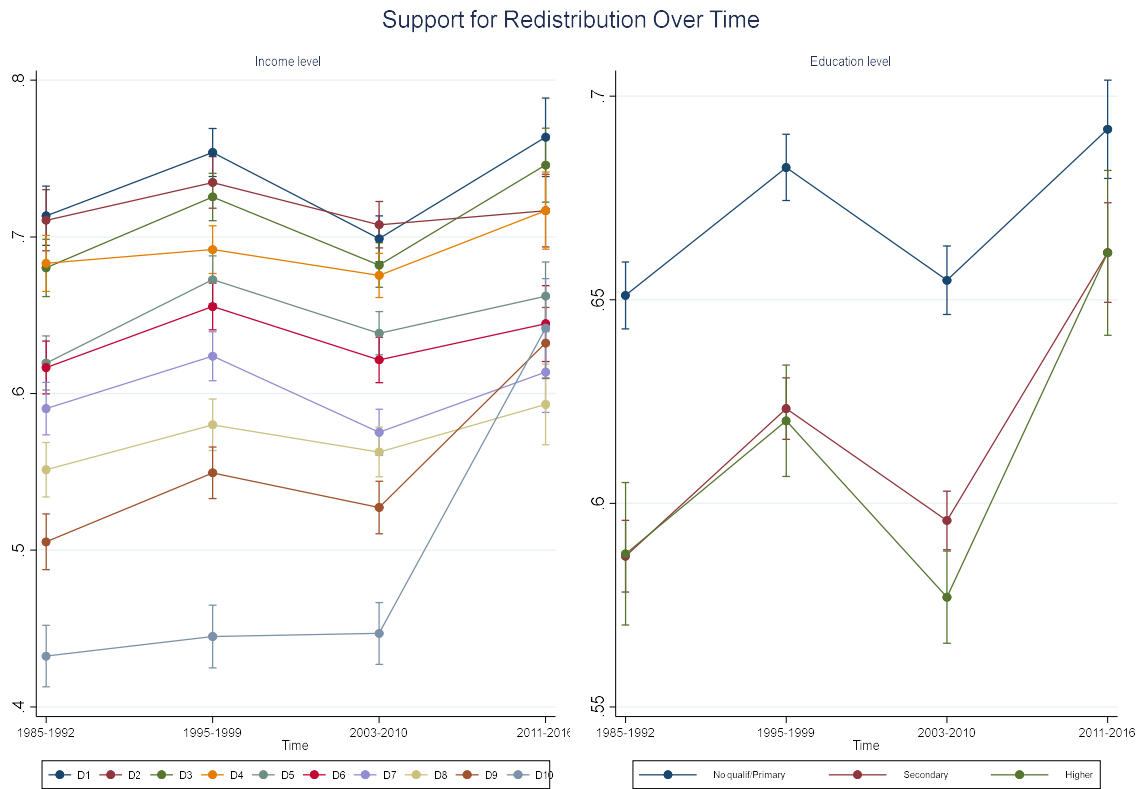
Figure A12 – Support for redistribution over time (1985-1992; 1995-1999; 2003-2010; 2011-2016)