

Ideological perceptions across age groups

A quantitative analysis on how young people in Europe position political parties on an ideological left-right scale in comparison with older age groups

Amanda Balslev Handest



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Abstract

Extensive research has been done on how people position and perceive political parties as well as on youth political participation and behaviour. However, less is known about how young people position political parties and whether they perceive the parties differently from older age groups. This thesis aims to fill this gap. By using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems from 1996 to 2016, this study examines whether young people in Europe position political parties differently from older age groups on an ideological left-right scale and the details of the differences. The findings imply that there are differences between how young people position political parties compared to older age groups and that the young perceive political parties the most different from the oldest age group. By using multilevel models, this thesis finds that young people tend to position political parties more towards the left on the ideological left-right scale compared to the older age groups, however, this varies depending on the party type. Moreover, there are clear regional differences in Europe in how the age groups position the parties. In Northern and Western Europe, there are big differences between how the youngest age groups position the political parties and between the youngest and the oldest age groups, whereas the biggest difference in Eastern Europe is between the oldest people and the rest. In Southern Europe, the young and the older perceive and position the political parties rather similarly.

Understanding how young people position political parties on an ideological left-right scale and how their perceptions differ from older age groups is of great importance. It can help understand how they think and behave politically and the implications this has for their political engagement. Moreover, understanding age group differences can help political parties better tailor their policies, creating the most beneficial information and policies for all citizens.

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All remaining errors are mine alone.

Amanda Balslev Handest

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1 Introduction

To ensure a stable and successful democracy, the citizens of a democracy must vote in free and fair elections. If citizens do not vote, the democracy is not representative. Citizens should moreover vote for parties with which they identify the most and that have policies that best represent the citizens own interests. Thus, citizens need to acquire relevant information about parties' political issues to be able to make informed choices which ensure a free and representable democracy. One of the most efficient ways to understand and obtain information about a political party is through its ideology. A party's ideology functions as a summary of its policies and positions on relevant issues and an ideological left-right scale can be used to position parties to understand their differences (Downs, 1957). Parties' ideologies are thus important for voters when they decide which party to vote for. However, people of, for example, different age groups, get information from various places about parties and their ideology and their positions and stances on single issues, which could lead to different age groups achieving diverse information about the same parties. This might cause people to perceive parties differently. Moreover, people grow up in different settings and experience life differently from each other, making them obtain different sets of values that furthermore can affect their ideological perceptions.

Ronald Inglehart has shown that large groups of the populations in several democracies have moved away from materialist worries, such as economic and security concerns. With many years of economic safety, people have acquired new priorities such as self-expression, autonomy, and quality of life (Inglehart, 1997, 2018). This has had political implications and led to changes in the political landscape, as people have changed their preferences and perceptions of political parties and their ideologies. Such changes in values have especially been seen among the youth. However, economic growth and security have varied across Europe. Moreover, the people living in the different regions of Europe have different values, norms, and beliefs that all lead them to perceive life and politics differently. Thus, there is reason to believe that ideological perceptions of political parties will be different across the European continent and that young people might perceive ideology differently depending on where they live.

It has been found that several different factors affect how people perceive political parties ideologically ranging from factors on the individual level to party- and system-level factors (Dahlberg

2009a, 2013; Busch, 2018; Gordon & Segura, 1997; Carroll & Kubo, 2018; van der Brug & van der Eijk, 1999). Moreover, young people participate differently in politics today compared to older age groups. Young people vote less than older people do and have the lowest voter turnout at elections among the different generations. Instead, they tend to participate in demonstrations and sign petitions when engaging in politics (Norris, 2002; Sloam & Henn, 2019). This could indicate that young people do not feel aligned with the current political streamlines and that they do not identify with the current political parties and ideological perspectives. Thus, examining whether and how young people perceive political parties ideologically would be a starting point in identifying the barriers to and reasons behind their political engagement.

Moreover, one might ask the question: if young people perceive the ideological left-right scale differently, does it still maintain its usefulness? If young people perceive political parties as being too extreme or disconnected from their own ideological leanings, this may lead to lower trust and confidence in the democratic process. Thus, what is missing from the literature is an understanding of whether age has a significant effect on how people position political parties on an ideological scale and thus if age is something to be more aware of in future studies of ideological perception as well as in general political contexts.

This thesis enrolls in a field of research covering electoral studies, political behaviour and perception, and youth political participation. By examining how people of different ages position and perceive political parties and how young people differ from older age groups in this area, this thesis contributes to a missing space by understanding how young people's ideological perceptions deviate from older age groups. This thesis thus seeks to answer the following research question:

Do young people in Europe position political parties different from older age groups on an ideological left-right scale?

Drawing on theories of materialism and postmaterialism, the research question will be analysed by assessing five theoretical based hypotheses, which all contribute to understanding the age group differences between young people and older age groups, as well as what these differences look like in different settings.

The research question will be examined based on data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and thus answered by using a quantitative research design with large-N data. The

aim of the thesis is to study the variation in age groups' positioning of political parties, and by using a large-N study, I am more likely to encounter the variations in the variables that I am interested in (Bryman, 2016: 53). The data I analyse from the CSES datasets covers a 20-year time period from 1996 to 2016. The dataset consists of several national election surveys from countries in all of Europe that are integrated into one large dataset. The dataset allows me to examine how people position a variety of political parties on an ideological left-right scale. Differences in how the respondents position specific party types as well as regional differences will also be examined.

A quantitative research design makes it possible to draw more generalised conclusions about the differences between how age groups position political parties and how they perceive them ideologically. Whereas a qualitative analysis would have provided more thorough insight to the reasons that make young and older people perceive parties ideologically different, using large-N survey data will provide a more general understanding of how the different age groups position the parties. Thus, I will get insight into the general tendencies there are among larger populations.

As differences between how young and older people position political parties on an ideological scale, and what these differences might look like, have not previously been the main focus of research, it is important to get a broader understanding of this before getting more in-depth with what the more specific reasons behind these differences are. I therefore believe that a quantitative research design is preferable in this study. The analysis will be conducted by implementing multilevel regression models, examining whether there are any age group differences between how people position political parties ideologically. The focus will primarily be on the youngest age group, which consists of individuals aged 24 and younger, with older age groups being compared to this age group.

1.1 Clarifications and limitations

The aim of this thesis is to examine ideological perceptions among different age groups in Europe. However, not all European countries are included in the examination. As this thesis uses data from the CSES, only countries included in this dataset are included. Moreover, not all countries had the relevant questions that are needed for this examination included in their questionnaire which further limits the countries included. Thus, not all European countries are included in this study but enough countries, and from the different regions in Europe, are included to be able to generalise based on the results.

The thesis further seeks to examine whether young people tend to position political parties more to the left or the right on the ideological scale compared to older age groups. To examine this, there will be a primary focus on how the age groups position left-wing and right-wing parties with all other parties being included in an “other” category. Thus, this thesis only examines how the age groups position these two specific party types whereas all other party types only will be examined in a unified group. This limits the research, as it is likely that it will vary from party type to party type how young people and the other age groups position them. However, I will still get valuable results on how the different age groups overall position all parties on the ideological scale.

1.1.1 Defining ideology

This thesis examines how different age groups position political parties on an ideological left-right scale and uses Anthony Downs’ definition of ideology as the theoretical foundation for understanding the ideological dimension. Ideology and ideological dimensions can be interpreted in different ways. In this thesis, a party’s ideology is in short defined as a summary of its policy positions and what it believes a good society should consist of. Ideologies can thus be used by voters to orient themselves in the political world and as a reference point when voting. Ideologies make it possible for voters to understand parties without having to know where each party stands on every single policy and in that way distinguish between the parties (Downs, 1957). To make ideologies more manageable, an ideological dimension or scale can be used to position the parties and thus distinguish between them. In this thesis, I use an ideological left-right scale. This scale is spatial and represents a weighted average of several political issues. The left side of the scale typically represents parties in favour of government control of the economy and state control to achieve social equality and often includes social democratic, socialist, green, and communist parties. The right side of the scale typically includes parties in favour of a free economic market, private property rights and more traditional values and often includes conservative, liberal, nationalist, and Christian democratic parties. Thus, the ideological left-right scale provides a general orientation towards where a party typically is positioned and is an efficient dimension on which to understand, order and store political information. Parties’ ideological positions on a left-right dimension summarise party policies effectively on a wide range of specific policies and issues which is the reason it is chosen for this thesis. The definitions of ideology and the ideological left-right scale will be described more extensively in the theory chapter of this thesis.

1.2 Relevance

Over the last decades, young people have increasingly participated in politics in different ways from older age groups. Moreover, young people are the age cohort that have the lowest voter turnout in most democracies, and the turnout is continuously decreasing. Thus, it will be a goal for political actors and parties, who want a representative democracy, to increase and encourage youth voting. Understanding how young people perceive the left-right positions of political parties could help identify some of the barriers to their engagement. Moreover, if young people feel that their ideological perspectives are not adequately represented by the existing parties, it can discourage their participation. By addressing these concerns and ensuring that there are viable options across the left-right spectrum, political parties can enhance their appeal to the youth and encourage their active involvement in the political process.

Additionally, political parties want to reach out to as many voters as possible and gain their support. Thus, if there are differences in how young people understand what the left and the right entails from an ideological perspective, gaining a comprehensive understanding of these difference becomes crucial, especially for the parties. Such insights could enable political parties to effectively tailor their policies and platform to address the specific concerns and priorities of young people. Moreover, knowing and understanding these differences and young people's perception of left-right positions could help identify and address any gaps or concerns. This could ensure that political parties would be more representative and responsive to the ideological diversity within the younger generation.

The political world has gotten broader and more complex during the last many decades with more parties being established, old parties disappearing and new policy issues and political actors appearing. In an ever-changing political world, ideologies and the ideological dimension have always remained as a common point of reference that democracies have made use of to understand and simplify the political world and the parties within it. However, if young people tend to position political parties different from older age groups, it shows that they might have a different understanding of the ideological left-right dimension. This will not only play a crucial role when they choose who to vote for and thus which parties are elected but examining the perceptions of young people can provide valuable insight on how the left-right scale will be utilised in the coming decades, if the young increasingly perceive it differently from older age groups.

Thus, if the values associated with the left and the right differ across the different age groups, and particularly between the younger and the older people, it could indicate that the left-right scale needs

to be revised and adapted accordingly. This would be crucial to ensure that the left-right concept remains useful and relevant for everyone's understanding of politics.

1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, presenting the motivation behind the thesis and its relevance, Chapter 2 will present some of the existing literature and ongoing debates within the field. Factors affecting voters' perceptual agreement when positioning political parties will be described followed by an overview of the literature on youth political participation and ideological perceptions. Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical foundations of the thesis. I will present the theoretical conceptualisation of ideology and the left-right scale as well as the theory of materialist and postmaterialist values. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the thesis' hypotheses, that I wish to examine.

In Chapter 4, I present the data, research design and methodological considerations of the thesis. This includes a presentation and discussion of the datasets, the operationalisation of the variables, and the model choice and its implications. Lastly, the reliability and validity concerns of the data are discussed.

The hypotheses are put to an empirical test in Chapter 5 where the results of the thesis will be analysed. First, whether there is a difference between how young people and older age groups position political parties is examined. Next, it is examined whether young people position the political parties more towards the left or the right compared to the older age groups, with a focus on left-wing and right-wing parties. In the third section of this chapter, it is assessed whether there are any regional differences between how the age groups position political parties in Europe. Lastly, the validity of the results is discussed.

In Chapter 6, a discussion of the findings and its implications is presented alongside suggestions for further research. Finally, Chapter 7 includes the final conclusions of the hypotheses and research question.

2 Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of some of the existing literature within this field of study. The first part covers perceptual agreement among voters and the different factors which affect it. Next, how the youth participate politically and how it deviates from older age groups is described followed by a section on the ideological differences between young and older people. I conclude the chapter by pointing out the limitations of the literature and how this thesis will seek to fill out the missing gaps on the different ideological perceptions there exists among young and older voters.

2.1 Perceptual agreement among voters

In democracies, it is important that parties present stable and divergent policy programs, so voters are given meaningful electoral choices, according to the Responsible Party Model (RPM) (Dahlberg, 2009a: 270). However, it is at least as important that voters agree about the positions of political parties' policy and perceive them adequately, as it affects the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a system (Downs, 1957). Scholars refer to this as perceptual agreement (PA) among voters, which is defined as the positions of parties being perceived similarly across all voters. PA is considered as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an electoral process to function as an effective channel of communication between citizens and political actors (Dahlberg, 2013: 670; van der Brug & van der Eijk, 1999: 138-140; van der Eijk, 2001: 326).

To a large degree, voters perceive parties based on their policy and their implementation hereof and on parties' statements, rhetoric and actions. As it is the voters who cast their ballots and thus decide the outcome of an election, the most crucial perspective is the perception of the voters. Parties therefore need to communicate their policies and intentions clearly which can be challenging in an ever-growing and changing political landscape. To simplify and facilitate the communication from parties, ideological labels and cues can be used by the parties and voters to help the voters make reasonable political evaluations and choices (Zechmeister, 2006: 151).

Thus, it is beneficial to know what factors contribute to voters' perceptual agreement. Using the ideological left-right dimension, Dahlberg (2009a; 2009b; 2013) analyses different system-, party- and individual-related variables that might impact voters' PA. Overall, he finds that party- and individual-related variables exert the greatest impacts on voters' PA, whereas system-related variables have the lowest effect (Dahlberg, 2013: 678).

2.1.1 System-level factors: the degree of competition and democratic experience

The only system-related variable Dahlberg finds has a significant effect on voters' PA is the degree of competition within a party system, i.e., where there is good support for several parties. The more competitive a multiparty system is, the higher is the perceptual agreement among voters. However, the effect is rather small when it comes to the degree of competition (Dahlberg, 2013: 677). Dahlberg explains that in more competitive systems with several parties, where there is good support for several parties, there seems to be a greater motivation for voters to acquire political information as well as for party representatives to profile its party's position more clearly in terms of ideology, which help voters differentiate more clearly between the parties (Dahlberg, 2013: 678; Dahlberg, 2009b: 111).

The age of the democracy in a country is furthermore found to influence ideological perception. According to Busch (2018), voters pay more attention to and acknowledge parties' ideologic positions in older democracies, as they are more clear-cut and many of the parties' positions have been repeated (Busch, 2018: 169). Comparing former communist countries with more established democracies in Europe, van der Brug, Frankling & Tóka (2008) find that the post-communist countries are less likely to use ideological location when thinking of political parties' policy orientations and that they instead use religion as a cue slightly more than the established democracies. However, their main takeaway from the analysis is that the voters in the newer democracies in general make their political choices in a similar manner as voters in older democracies, and thus that voters in East European countries are not very different from those in Western Europe (van der Brug, Franklin & Toka, 2008: 589, 598).

2.1.2 Party-level factors: Divergence, age and size

Among party-related factors, party divergence, i.e., the ideological distance of a party from all other parties, and stability have the greatest total effect on PA among voters. In particular, divergence in a party's ideological position from that of others and parties proposing policies that are more distinct from other parties has a significant effect (Dahlberg, 2009a: 276-277; Gordon & Segura, 1997: 142). Contrary to this, Busch finds that parties that have more divergent positions are estimated less accurately among the voters. A possible explanation, she argues, could be that fewer voters pay attention to the more divergent parties and therefore know them less accurately, though, there is no clear explanation as to why the two analyses show different results (Busch, 2018: 168, 170).

Busch further concludes that older parties are estimated more accurately. The PA increases with the age of a party, which she explains by the longer-term exposure voters have to the party, which lead

the voters to know the parties better or probably consider them more reliable than younger parties (Busch, 2018: 168). This is again contrary to Dahlberg's findings, as he finds no significant effect of party age when including all other explanatory variables in his model. When including only party-level variables he finds that the age of a party influences voters' PA, however, when system- and individual-level variables are included, the effect of party age decreases and is not significant (Dahlberg, 2009a: 275; Dahlberg, 2013: 678).

The electoral size of a party is found to have a negative effect on the agreement in voters' perceptions of party positions, which means that the bigger the party, the more do voters struggle to apprehend the position of the party (Dahlberg, 2009a: 276-277; van der Brug & van der Eijk, 1999: 142). Furthermore, parties with government experience and parties with greater electoral support tend to contribute to more distorted perceptions among voters (Dahlberg, 2013: 676-677). The most reasonable explanation for this is that larger and governmental parties need to appeal to a large part of the electorate and consider diverse interests, which is often done by downplaying a party's ideological differences, which makes voters struggle to apprehend the positions of the bigger parties (Dahlberg, 2009a: 276).

2.1.3 Individual-level factors: Education, ideological self-placement, and attachment

Looking at individual-related factors, there is a general tendency for higher-educated men tend to have a higher PA and estimate party positions more accurately than less educated female voters (Dahlberg, 2013: 676; Busch, 2016: 168; Gordon & Segura, 1997). However, adding to these findings, Carroll & Kubo (2018) claim that the effect of education level in improving citizens' ability to perceive party ideological placements varies in some political contexts. In newer democracies, where ideological information is more limited due to less democratic experience, the effect of education is weakened, whereas the effect of education increases in contexts where parties are least polarised and institutional factors add complexity to party competition (Carroll & Kubo, 2018: 14). Partisan affect of parties among voters impacts their perceptions of party ideology. Voters with strong attachments to a party will hold more extreme views of that party's ideological position (Ward & Tavits, 2019: 1) leading to less accurate estimates of the party (Busch, 2016: 166). As such, the greater distance between a voter's self-placement on a left-right ideological scale and a party, the more difficulty will that voter have in positioning that party accurately. Furthermore, affective ties to a

party lead to biases about the party's ideology resulting in more blurred perceptions of that party (Busch, 2016: 166; Dahlberg, 2013: 679).

2.1.4 Summing up

The existing literature on perceptual agreement among voters thus states that misperceptions about parties' ideological positions occur when voters are affectively related to a party, when several parties share a position on the ideological dimension or when the party is big (Dahlberg, 2013: 679; van der Eijk, 2001: 336; Busch, 2018: 276).

Furthermore, the main tendency in the literature suggests that higher-educated men in competitive multiparty systems tend to perceive parties' ideological placement more adequately. However, none of the studies examined found a significant effect of age, even though Dahlberg hypothesised that older people would have a greater PA (Dahlberg, 2013: 676). This is interesting since a vast body of literature demonstrates that young people behave and participate politically different than older generations, which is further elaborated in the following section.

2.2 Youth political participation

A growing body of literature recognises that young people tend to vote less compared with older generations and instead engage in newer forms of political expression and participation such as demonstrating, signing petitions, and partaking in consumer boycotts rather than being long-term members of traditional political parties or doing campaign work (Norris, 2004; Sloam & Henn, 2019). It is further concluded that young people tend to engage in more issue-specific politics such as climate change, global poverty, and free higher education (Norris, 2002; Ehsan & Sloam 2020) which might be related to the fact that young voters often vote for more right-wing and left-wing parties (Rekker, 2022; Sloam & Henn, 2019). The literature thus demonstrates that young people tend to use different forms of political participation than older generations.

Studying young cosmopolitans in Britain, Sloam & Henn (2019) elaborate on how younger citizens have turned away from political parties and elections and suggest that it is related to a disconnection between young people and the political system rather than a lack of political engagement (Sloam & Henn, 2019: 17). Furthermore, young people tend to focus on specific issue politics and causes in which they can believe and engage, which poses an immense challenge for political parties. Political parties must emphasise and communicate policies that young people are interested in and provide

them with a set of values or ideology with which they can identify, to be able to connect with the youth (Henn & Foard, 2014). This is however rarely the case (Sloam & Henn, 2019; Hart & Henn, 2017). It is further suggested that young people will turn out to vote when they can identify with the issues emphasised by a candidate or party, reinforcing the point of young people's engagement in politics on a case-to-case basis (Sloam & Henn, 2019: 6, 25).

Using data from 21 Western democracies between 1949 and 2019, Roderik Rekker (2022) finds that particular left-wing parties¹ obtain a higher average vote share among young voters than among older voters and further that new parties enjoy a large electoral advantage among the youth. He explains this tendency with young people not yet having developed strong attachments to political parties and that young people are less likely to identify with a political party than older voters (Rekker, 2002: 6-9).

Rekker (2022) further uncovers that the electoral shifts among young voters predicted similar changes among older citizens in the subsequent election, either because youths replace or influence older voters. As younger people replace older generations, they thus bring their electoral behaviour along. Furthermore, because Rekkers' findings show a consistency among young peoples' voting behaviour, it is likely due to life-cycle effects² rather than generational differences³ (Rekker, 2022: 10).

This contrasts with Maggini's (2017) findings, in his comparative study of young people's voting behaviour in six European countries. He claims that when understanding the relationship between age and voting, a generational effect predominates rather than an "age effect"⁴. To understand voting choices, he argues, what is important is not the fact of being young but having been young and been socialised in politics in a given historical period, which changes from generation to generation (Maggini, 2017).

¹ Rekker characterises left- and right-wing parties based on where voters placed themselves on a left-right scale. A party is classified as left-wing if survey respondents who had voted for this party on average placed themselves below the centre of a left-right scale, whereas it is classified as right-wing if its voters placed themselves above the centre of the scale (Rekker, 2022: 6).

² Life-cycle effects are the effects people experience over the course of their life and describe how people's behaviour changes predictably as they get older. As people go from being young to getting older, different things in life make them lean more in one direction than another, for example, getting a higher income, owning a home or retiring. Thus, the same actions or behaviour is consequently expected from the same age groups.

³ Generational differences or effects refer to events that have affected and could influence how an entire generation thinks about specific issues. Generational effects describe how a cohort of people born at a certain time is different from another cohort of people born at a different time. They are also referred to as cohort effects.

⁴ Age effects are also referred to as life cycle effects. See footnote 2.

2.3 Youth and ideology

As research on youth political behaviour shows, the young tend to vote for more left- and right-wing parties and generally participate differently in politics than older people do. Does this mean that the ideological differences between young people and older generations are and have become larger as well? Examining whether age-based polarisation is growing in Europe, Tom O’Grady (2022) uncovers that there is a gap between young and older on non-economic issues, such as environmental politics and cultural and inequality issues, but that it has, to a large extent, remained the same since the 1980s. He finds that the young in Europe have become relatively libertarian, that they are more socially liberal than older generations but more opposed to taxation and government spending. On economic issues, the age gap has become larger during the past 20 years, but the young are the more conservative age group. O’Grady further argues that it is cohort⁵ and period⁶ effects that are the principal source of evolving age gaps, making polarisation volatile over time rather than permanent (O’Grady, 2022: 1).

The ideological gap between the youngest and the oldest age groups, in the average European country, has barely changed over time, but an interesting finding is that everyone has become much less conservative on social issues and immigration. Furthermore, the main difference is between the oldest citizens and all others. As such, the difference between the young and middle-aged is less distinguishable on social and immigration issues, which, O’Grady argues, can be explained by younger cohorts beginning their political lives closer to the middle-aged than in the past (O’Grady, 2022: 6, 9).

O’Grady further points out regional differences. In Eastern European countries, the young are uniformly more libertarian and the generational differences on economic issues are smaller than in Western and Southern Europe. Furthermore, Denmark is the only country where the younger prefer higher taxes and spending than the old. However, age polarisation has evolved almost identically in all regions across all dimensions, even though all age groups have liberalised more slowly on non-economic issues in Eastern Europe (O’Grady, 2022: 7-8).

⁵ Cohort effects are also referred to as generational effects. See footnote 3.

⁶ Period effects are when an outcome is associated with living during a particular time period or era, regardless of how old one was at the time. Thus, period effects are when a change occurs at a particular time, which affects all age groups and generations alive at the time, no matter the age.

Having concluded that ideological age gaps are largely unchanged, O’Grady asks why the age gaps for voting then have widened recently. He considers the emergence of new parties with more extreme positions on social issues and immigration over the past 30 years along with more vigorous communication of these stances, have helped both young and old citizens to better express their long-standing non-economic differences when voting (O’Grady, 2022: 11).

2.4 The limitations of the literature

The existing literature on youth political participation contributes to the understanding of how and why young people behave politically different than older people which is essential knowledge in the research on if and why young people perceive political parties ideologically different than older people. However, just as the literature on perceptual agreement among voters does not examine the effects of age on voters’ ideological perception of parties, neither is the literature on youth political participation examining whether age has any implications for or impact on perceiving political parties.

O’Grady shows that there is an ideological age gap, with the young being more socially liberal than older voters while being more conservative on tax and spending. This illustrates that there are ideological differences between younger and older people, which is further illustrated by young peoples’ tendencies to vote for more left- and right-wing parties. However, it is not clear what these differences might be or what kind of role they play in young peoples’ ideological perception of parties compared to older people. It is not clear whether young people are more to the left or more to the right in their ideological perception of parties.

Thus, because the existing literature on ideological perception of political parties does not focus on age and the existing literature on youth political participation does not focus on ideological perception, this thesis will look at the effect of age on ideological perception and investigate how young people differ from older age groups in their perception of political parties and their placement of parties on an ideological left-right scale. This will give insight into young people’s tendency to vote for more left- and right-wing parties and whether young people have the same ideological understanding as older generations. As such, this thesis contributes to the existing literature on ideological perception among voters as well as on youth political behaviour and understanding.

3 Theory

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the thesis, which consists of three sections, will be outlined. In the first section, I explain and conceptualise ideology as a term as well as the ideological left-right dimension. Drawing on materialism and postmaterialism, the second section will present theory on how and why young people are different from older age groups as well as discuss the regional differences on the European continent. Left-wing and right-wing parties will moreover be described and contextualised. Finally, based on the theory, the thesis' hypotheses will be presented.

3.1 Conceptualising ideology

The political world is broad and complex and can be difficult to navigate in. However, in democracies, it is important that voters are well informed about the political landscape and political parties' policy positions to be able to vote for the party that are closest to their own preferences, so the elected parties reflect the voters' views and values. If voters do not hold the necessary information, it may be difficult to understand and differentiate between the parties in their society. To avoid this problem, citizens and political actors can use ideologies to overcome possible information shortfalls. Ideologies can be used by people to orient themselves in a complex political world, helping them get a more accurate understanding of it (Dahlberg, 2013: 671; Knutsen, 1995: 63, Lupia & McCubbins, 1998: 3-4). As such, ideologies can be used to categorise and differentiate between political parties and their policies, which make ideologies important in analysing people's perceptions of political parties.

In describing and understanding ideology and democratic political landscapes, this thesis will use Anthony Downs' (1957) definitions and characterisations of these. Downs defines ideology as a public statement about party policy since it neither contains nor implies specific proposals for action. He further describes an ideology as a party's view of a good society, on which voters can base their voting decision, without having to know every specific policy of a party (Downs, 1957: 102, 113). As such, voters will use parties' ideologies as information short-cuts when trying to estimate a party's positions and considering its policies (Dahlberg, 2009a: 271, Downs, 1957: 102, 113; Lupia & McCubbins 7-8).

Ideologies are furthermore used to distinguish parties from each other and help voters understand the differences between the parties in their country. Thus, voters often base their votes on ideologies and not on specific issues, as it is less costly for them to keep informed about ideologies than about issues

(Downs, 1957: 98-99). This is interesting in the context of the existing literature on youth political participation, which states that young people today tend to be more focused on single issues (Henn & Foard, 2014; Norris, 2004). Downs' theory might thus suggest that young people would misperceive parties and their ideologies to a larger extent than older people, since they spend their time focusing on specific issues rather than gaining a broader understanding of the parties' ideology, thus not obtaining the necessary political information. It is at least expected that young people will perceive parties' ideology differently than older generations, as they focus on different political aspects.

3.1.1 Social class and political information

Ideologies are designed to attract many social groups. However, different ideologies are appealing to different social groups, which ensures that no one political ideology will be dominating or more effective. Furthermore, parties will strategically position themselves in the ideological space in the way they believe will be most beneficial for them and generate the highest number of votes. However, societies change all the time which makes it unclear which ideology will appeal to the most social groups from election to election. Therefore, parties may create ideologies that vary broadly, even though they share identical objectives (Downs, 1957: 100-101). Moreover, to remain as effective signals for citizens, ideologies must change when policies change significantly and reflect what a party is likely to do in the future. Thus, a party's ideology must be either consistent with its prior actions or its statements about its future actions or both (ibid.: 103).

Because of parties' general goal of attracting as many voters as possible, their ideologies will likely change slightly over time. This may lead to people perceiving a party differently from each other. It is plausible that older people will have one perception of a party that stems from one period of time, where a party acted and presented its policies and ideology in one way, whereas younger people might have a different perception of the same party's ideology that reflects the party's more recent statements. However, at the same time, it is expected that most people keep themselves informed about politics and political parties, thus taking changes in parties' policies into consideration when perceiving them ideologically.

Political information comes in many forms and shapes and is anything but scarce. It appears in newspapers, television, radio, and books, all coming from different agencies that interpret and communicate the information in different ways (Downs, 1957: 212; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998: 3).

To navigate between the many different news sources that provide information, people will choose to obtain information from the agencies who provide them with versions of events that are the most similar to the versions they would formulate themselves (Downs, 1957: 213).

Furthermore, a person's social class plays a big role in the political information one consumes. Political information is often communicated through friends and family (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998: 6), and how much and with whom one works will also influence how much and what kind of information one obtains, which further affects a person's political perception (Downs, 1957: 223-224). It is also found that people who watch more news on the TV, read more newspapers, surf the internet, and pay more attention to political campaigns are more knowledgeable and participatory in political contexts (Norris, 2002: 29). Downs emphasises that it is not possible to determine what kinds of occupation leads to the greatest obtainment of political information, but the division of labour will produce differences among people and their ability to use their acquired data (Downs, 1957: 235).

Different social groups obtain information from different places, people, and agencies. However, with the rapid technological development today, many people acquire their information online. There are clear differences in media use between age groups and it is found that young people to a larger degree use social media for political purposes whereas older age groups tend to use traditional news media to acquire political information (Holt et al.: 2013: 30). The fact that different age groups obtain political information in different ways might thus help explain differences in perceptions of political parties between young people and older age groups.

3.1.2 The left-right dimension

Ideologies are an efficient way to get a broad and deeper understanding of the political world and political parties' position in it. Therefore, it is also important to be able to measure political parties' ideologies, to obtain an understanding of where parties position themselves and of people's understanding and positioning of the parties. In Western democracies, most people use an ideological left-right dimension to place political parties and distinguish between them. It is one of the few comparable measurements for ideologies and belief systems as it summarises the parties' programs and labels important political issues (Dahlberg, 2013: 671; Knutsen, 1995: 63).

In order to organise parties according to their ideological positions, Downs describes a spatial model with a linear scale running from zero to 100 in a left-to-right fashion. In the model, political preferences are ordered from left to right in a manner that is agreed upon by all voters, making the

scale politically meaningful. The first political question Downs bases the scale on, is “how much government intervention in the economy should there be?”, where the left side of the scale represents full government control while the right end represents a completely free market. Thus, parties can be ranked on this scale based on their views on this issue (Downs, 1957: 115-116).

However, a political party consists of several different policies and issues on which they take different positions, with some being more to the left and others more to the right on the scale. To accurately place a party, Downs proposes that a party’s position on the left-right dimension can be assumed to be where the weighted average of all its positions on the individual policies is. Citizens might however weigh the single policies differently because different policies affect citizens in different ways and to different degrees, leading some voters to think of a party as more left-wing than others might think. Nevertheless, Downs emphasises that there is still a consensus as to where the party’s net position lies, which makes this left-right scale useful in distinguishing right-wing parties from centre and left-wing parties (ibid.: 132-133).

Oddbjørn Knutsen has further found that the left-right semantics have an absorptive power and indeed is a spatial dimension which can incorporate many types of conflict lines, with new meanings of left and right added to the old meanings. This means that the economic meaning of the left-right language does not fade away but is instead supplemented by new issues or value orientations (Knutsen, 1995: 67, 87). As such, when new issues and policy areas become relevant to the public and political parties, they will, to a certain extent, be incorporated into the existing left-right dimension, according to Knutsen.

3.1.3 Limitations of the left-right dimension

Even though it is found that new issues, to some extent, become part of the existing left-right dimension, the dimension is not without its limitations. Ronald Inglehart argues that speaking in terms of left and right is an oversimplification, however a useful one (Inglehart, 1990: 293). He believes that the meaning of left and right has been transformed and that a new dimension of political conflict has become more prominent and relevant. This new dimension reflects a polarisation between materialist preferences, focussing on economic and physical security, and postmaterialist issue preferences, focussing on self-expression and quality of life, which he sees as distinct from the traditional left-right dimension, which is more economy-focused (ibid.: 287-289). Inglehart believes that because the issues in politics today have largely shifted and now focus more on postmaterialist values, this new dimension better summarises people’s stand on the important political issues of the

day (ibid.: 292-293). It should however be noted that Inglehart sees this new dimension as a “new version” of the traditional left-right dimension, with the rise and spread of the new values reshaping the meaning of left and right, thus keeping the left-right dimension imagery (ibid.: 375). This could be argued as being another way of understanding that new issues are being added to the existing issues on the left-right dimension, as Knutsen (1995) states. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that government intervention in the economy, as is the basis for the left-right dimension, would become an issue of the past. That is not to say that Inglehart’s points are not relevant and not should be taken into consideration. The political world is complex and ever-changing and that should always be taken into consideration. A more social ideological scale, the GAL/TAN dimension, which reflects many of Inglehart’s points, is often used today in addition to the more traditional and economic left-right scale (Jolly et al., 2022). Thus, the traditional left-right dimension captures issues like gender equality, sexual minorities’ rights, immigration, EU attitudes and the environment poorly, which are all issues that are becoming increasingly important for the European population (Kenny & Langsæther, 2022: 3). It is likely that some respondents additionally will think about the GAL/TAN dimension or other issues not incorporated well in the traditional left-right dimension when answering ideology-based questions. However, it is assumed that the main dimension used is the traditional one.

New political issues are not the only thing that might place limitations on the understanding of left and right. According to Peter Mair (2009), the way that the differences between left and right are regarded has been subject to change and several developments have undermined the understanding of the left and the right. One type of development that could undermine the left-right understanding, is the emergence of new parties. The emergence of a new and distinct ideological left in the 1960s, which was organisationally and sociologically different from the existing, traditional class left is one example, which grew into a group of radical, postmaterialist and often green political parties. The rise of ostensibly right-wing populist parties in Western democracies, which promote the defence of values traditionally associated with the liberal left, further undermines the differences between left and right (Mair, 2009: 215, 217). Another development that has undermined the traditional distinctiveness of the left and right is the decline of policy opposition between the traditional left and right parties. These parties unite increasingly on a consensual centre, leading to the differences between left and right being more narrowed (ibid.: 215). This narrowing of differences might be explained by the rise of the new left and right-wing populist parties, which can have led the more centre-oriented parties to join forces. Thus, since the traditional left and right parties are getting increasingly closer to the middle, it can be argued that another dimension, different from the

traditional left-right dimension, focusing on other and newer issues is needed, making it easier to distinguish between these parties.

More generally, parties on both the left and the right have changed character, with increased prioritisation of office-seeking rather than policy-seeking goals. An emergence of the professionalisation of political leadership has led to a competition that is more closely engaged with issues of political management and efficiency rather than with substantive political or ideological oppositions. This has made it more difficult for left and right parties to distinguish themselves as well as being much less structured (Mair, 2009: 216; Katz & Mair, 1995: 19, 2009: 755). In continuation of this, parties are intentionally blurring their position on the left-right scale, for example by taking vaguely broad positions on issues, in the hope of appealing to as many voters as possible (Rovny, 2012: 271).

Lastly, Mair describes how new alignments have emerged in post-communist Europe with some of the more conventional positioning associated with left and right being turned on its head. On the one hand, these new alignments reflect the more traditional left-right divides found in the older European democracies. On the other hand, however, particularly on issues relating to the advancement of reform, traditional patterns are sometimes reversed (Tavits & Letki, 2009). In these countries, socialist parties have defended the remains of the traditional power structure, whereas liberal and conservative parties have promoted more radical reformist strategies. As such, the division between left and right corresponds with those between socialist and liberal on the economy and equality, but they tend to confound that division on issues of democracy and political reform (Mair, 2009: 216-217).

It is clear that the ideological left-right dimension has limitations and that new political issues might change or at least add to the existing meaning of left and right as well as developments over the years have had an impact on understanding left and right. However, the left-right dimension remains the most widely used shorthand term when comparing voters, parties and leaders and no other tool for comparison has properly challenged it (*ibid.*: 217). The traditional left-right dimension is still found to be very stable, and its relevance has only increased over the years (Jahn, 2022). With its limitations in mind, the left-right dimension is thus a useful and relevant scale to use for this thesis' analysis. It is used and understood in all of Europe and will show the different perceptions among the young and the older, making it a great tool for measurement.

3.1.4 Ideological perceptions

There is a general consensus of a political party's positions on an ideological left-right scale. However, different people might have slightly different perceptions of the exact placement, which can be explained by the limitations of the left-right dimension explained above. Furthermore, as previous literature states, different factors affect how people perceive political parties and how much people agree on a party's ideological placement. Moreover, as stated by Downs, people are part of different social groups which affect how and from which sources they obtain political information, which can play a role in how they perceive a party. Additionally, different political issues have various importance for different people, which in turn will affect their preferences and perceptions of parties. Policy dimensions might change across time and space, with left and right having different meanings in different settings and in different countries. It might therefore vary from country to country what issues are valued and emphasised in perceiving parties' ideological position (Laver, 2014: 210; Budge et al. 2001: 61-62). However, what is relevant for this analysis is not that citizens in the different countries across Europe might emphasise different issues when placing political parties, but that young people in general perceive parties different than older generations do.

3.2 The differences between young and old

In understanding why young people might differ from older age groups in their perceptions of political parties, it is necessary to look at cultural factors and deviate from Downs' rational choice approach.

Ronald Inglehart describes how the world is constantly changing both socially, politically, and economically, which in turn transform the culture within a society. Since World War II, the economy has developed rapidly and the welfare state has expanded in many Western and industrial societies, leading to major cultural changes. These changes have led to fundamentally different formative experiences of the younger generations from those of older generations, leading to different value priorities being developed among the younger generations. Thus, the values and norms of older generations vary significantly from those of younger generations because of economic, scientific, and technological changes, among other things, in recent decades as well as the younger generations having grown up in societies where survival is taken for granted. This has led to transformed worldviews with a big change in basic values concerning politics, work, family, religion, sexual behaviour and job motivations (Inglehart, 1990: 3-4; Inglehart, 1997, 4; Inglehart, 2018: 11-12).

3.2.1 From materialist to postmaterialist

People holding materialist values emphasise economic and physical security above all, whereas people holding postmaterialist values, still valuing economic and physical security, emphasise self-expression and the quality of life to a larger extent. Postmaterialists further tend to prioritise political issues such as the environment and freedom of expression (Inglehart, 1997: 4, 28; Inglehart, 2018: 12; Norris, 2002: 24). Consequently, with the rise of postmaterialist values, new political issues have been brought to the centre stage, reshaping the political outlook (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018: 1470; Inglehart, 1997: 33).

Inglehart describes the older generations' values as materialistic whereas the younger generation is more post-materialistic. He finds that the differences reflect generational changes rather than aging effects, that is, the values one obtains growing up will stick and a given generation will not become more materialist as it ages if it grew up with post-materialist values. He thus assumes that societies will become increasingly postmaterialist, describing this change as intergenerational (Inglehart, 1990: 87; Inglehart, 1997: 25).

As such, it is plausible to expect that young people behave politically different than older people and that they perceive the political world with its existing political parties differently as they have grown up prioritising different values and norms. However, as postmaterialist values have been developing for a few decades and gradually become more and more integrated in each new generation, it is plausible that middle-aged people also prioritise some postmaterialist values. Thus, it is expected that young people will differ the most from the oldest age groups in their perceptions of political parties, as the oldest generations will emphasise materialist values the most.

3.2.2 Left- and right-wing parties

As stated by previous literature on youth political participation, young people tend to vote for left-wing and right-wing parties as well as new parties. Parties on the left side of the ideological scale are in favour of more state control to improve and achieve social equality and want the state to play an important role within the economy, whereas parties on the right side favour minimal governance interference, a self-regulating power of the market and private property rights (Mudde, 2007: 25-26). In a European context, left-wing parties, also referred to as far-left or radical-left parties, reject the underlying socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism and its values and practices. Furthermore, they advocate for alternative economic and power structures where redistributions of resources from existing political elites are emphasised. Left-wing parties largely focus on economic

inequality and advocate for collective economic and social rights, as well as prioritising and searching for cross-national networking and solidarity (March, 2011: 8-9). Postmaterialist values appear on the left side of the political spectrum as they are related to the idea of equality, community and structuring the environment in a way that facilitates well-being, which explain postmaterialists and thus young people's increasing tendency to vote for left-wing parties (Inglehart, 1990: 263).

Based on Cas Mudde's (2007) definition, right-wing parties, also referred to as far-right, radical-right, and extreme right parties, are characterised as nativist, xenophobe, having faith in law and order provided by the state and highlighting welfare chauvinism. A big focus for these parties is that the state should only include the members of the native groups, i.e., people from one's "own" nation, and that people and ideas that are not native are a threat to the nation-state (Mudde, 2007: 16-19). Immigration is thus seen as a threat and a problem by right-wing parties (ibid.: 19). These characteristics can be applied to all right-wing parties. However, though they all see immigration as a threat, right-wing parties in Western and Northern Europe see immigration as an economic problem for their country's welfare society (Norris & Inglehart, 2019: 73), whereas right-wing parties in Eastern and Southern Europe to a larger degree see immigration as a cultural threat (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018: 36-37). No party is the exact same as another party, but each right-wing party will have features in common with all the other right-wing parties across the continent (Mudde, 2007: 13), which is also the case for the left-wing parties.

Left- and right-wing parties can to some extent be said to focus on more issue-specific politics, with right-wing parties often focusing on immigration and left-wing parties emphasising environmental politics or equality for certain groups of society. That these parties tend to drift more towards single issues may help explain why young people increasingly vote for them, as young people also tend to focus on specific political issues when engaging in politics (Ehsan & Sloam 2020; Norris, 2004). With young people tending to vote for both left-wing and right-wing parties, which are on the opposite sides of the spectrum, it can be hard to predict whether they perceive these types of parties as more to the left or more to the right on an ideological dimension (Rekker, 2022). However, as young people tend to be more postmaterialist, which is consistent with more left-sided politics, it is expected that young people perceive political parties from a postmaterialist point of view and thus tend to position parties more towards the right end of the ideological left-right dimension than older people do.

3.2.3 Regional differences

Similar cultures and norms generally exist throughout Europe. However, different values exist among the different societies on the continent, with especially regional differences being evident. All European countries have gone through an intergenerational shift with postmaterialist values becoming increasingly emphasised, however, the shift has occurred at different rates among the nations. The shift to postmaterialist values occurs when people experience economic growth and thus high levels of economic and physical security, leading them to focus on and prioritise the quality of life instead. In the European context, economic growth has happened at different times and at different rates, leading to the postmaterialist shift not happening at the same time across the nations as well as not at the same speed. However, when economic growth have happened, it have had a similar impact on the different societies (Inglehart, 1997: 131).

3.2.3.1 *East vs. North and West*

Eastern European countries are in general less prosperous than Western European countries. However, a country's absolute wealth is not crucial for postmaterialist value changes to occur. What is important is whether the people of a country have experienced a sense of economic and physical security in their formative years. Thus, even though Eastern European countries lag behind Western European countries in terms of GDP per capita, they are still economically secure enough for some of its citizens prioritising postmaterialist values. However, it is expected that postmaterialist values aren't as integrated in the East European societies as the economic and physical security was experienced at a later stage in these countries. It is particularly the younger birth cohorts of the ex-Soviet Union, that have experienced greater security during their formative years than the older ones did (Inglehart, 1997: 143).

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a political event that had a huge impact on its citizens. The people of the Soviet successor states experienced a sharp decline in living standards as well as experiencing a total collapse of the belief system they had lived under for decades, leading to a feeling of being neither economically nor physically secure. Inglehart further finds that the levels of postmaterialist values among all the generations experiencing the collapse of security in the post-Soviet countries dropped and have not yet recovered (Inglehart, 2018: 19, 56). As such, the generations experiencing the collapse are expected to emphasise materialist values. The generations growing up after the collapse, grew up in democracies, feeling more secure, which likely has led them

to emphasise postmaterialist values. It is therefore expected that there is a larger distinction between the youngest and older generations in East European societies compared to Northern and Western Europe, as the postmaterialist values have had better conditions to flourish in Northern and Western Europe for a longer time. Thus, it is likely that there is a bigger gap politically between younger generations and older in Eastern Europe, leading to a bigger gap between how young Eastern Europeans position and perceive political parties and how older generations position them. Consequently, this gap will be bigger than the gap between the young and older in Western Europe.

3.2.3.2 Southern Europe

With economic growth and the rise of postmaterialist values, the role of the family is not as important as it once was, as the individual no longer must rely on its family for economic and physical security. People's economic life now takes place largely outside the home and the welfare state has further taken over most of the responsibility for survival (Inglehart, 1997: 40).

Focusing on Southern Europe, many of the countries in this region share similar values with family values and the importance attached to the family being high on the list. Young people live with their parents for a longer time in Southern Europe compared to for example Northern Europe, with between 45% and 62% of young adults up to 34 years of age still living with their parents in Southern Europe (Eurostat, 2020). This is most likely related to young people experiencing high rates of unemployment in this region, with Spain, Italy and Greece having the highest youth unemployment rates in the European Union (Eurostat, 2021). Therefore, as young people in Southern Europe live at home longer, it is assumed that they spend more time with their family and therefore, to a larger extent than other regions, share more of the same values with their family, which likely will be more materialistic. Adding on, the high rates of youth unemployment and diminishing job security will most likely make the young people feel less economically secure, which in turn will lead them to emphasise more materialistic values. Taking this into consideration, it is expected that the youth in Southern Europe will be more materialistic and in general share more of the same values with the older generations, and that the youth therefore will perceive political parties more similarly to older generations than in other regions in Europe.

3.2.4 Concluding remarks

Each generation is shaped by different experiences in their formative years. The world is constantly changing, new values and priorities are developed, and new issues are prioritised. Consequently, there

will be changes between young and old consistently over time because they grow up experiencing different norms and cultures leading them to prioritise different issues and values. Though culture generally is resistant to change, it is primarily the young and relatively secure who accept new forms of behaviour (Inglehart, 1997: 41). Thus, there will constantly be differences between the young and the older age groups over time, which can be seen across all sorts of areas, one of which is politics and peoples' perception of politics. As young people accept change and new behaviour faster than older age groups, they will likely also perceive parties, both new parties and parties that change over time, differently than older age groups.

3.3 Hypotheses

The theoretical framework has been summarised into three hypotheses with two underlying hypotheses. Based on the theory, the following five hypotheses will be examined in the thesis.

The first hypothesis assesses the difference between young people and older generations in their perception of political parties. As young people tend to focus on single issues within politics (Henn & Foard, 2014), they are likely to base their perception of political parties on these issues rather than on ideologies. Furthermore, young people tend to prefer postmaterialist values to a larger extent than older age groups, creating a difference between young and old people's political preferences (Norris, 2002; Ehsan & Sloam 2020). Additionally, since the rise of postmaterialist values is intertwined with the emergence of the new generation for whom the traditional, materialist values have become less relevant, the young will prefer postmaterialist values the most and materialist values the least while the oldest age group will emphasise postmaterialist values the least and materialist values the most. The gap between which values one prefers and thus one's political outlook will therefore be largest between the young and the oldest generations. Moreover, as postmaterialist values are often linked to left-sided politics, young people, who see parties from a postmaterialist point of view, generally perceive parties as being more to the right and will thus position political parties more to the right on the ideological left-right scale. This leads to the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Young people position political parties ideologically different than older age groups.

Hypothesis 1a): Young people will deviate the most from the oldest age group in their perception of political parties.

Hypothesis 1b): Young people position political parties more to the right on the ideological left-right scale than older age groups.

Postmaterialist values have been present and have had better conditions to flourish in Northern and Western European countries for a longer time than in Eastern Europe, namely because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The older generations of Eastern Europe have most of their lives lived under conditions that have made them prioritise materialist values. The opposite is the case for young people, who grew up feeling more secure, therefore prioritising postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 2018: 19, 56). In Northern and Western Europe, a feeling of security has prevailed for a longer time, leading the older generations to prioritise postmaterialist values sooner than in Eastern Europe. The young and the old in Northern and Western Europe therefore prioritise more of the same values to a

larger degree than in Eastern Europe, as the old generations in Northern and Western Europe have had more time to adopt the same postmaterialist values as the young also prioritises. This leads the age groups in North and West to perceive politics more similarly, which leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The gap between how young people and older age groups place political parties will be bigger in Eastern European countries compared to Northern and Western European countries.

Young people in Southern Europe live at home longer than the young do in other European regions (Eurostat, 2020). Moreover, the rate of youth unemployment in Southern Europe is the highest on the continent (Eurostat, 2021), leading young people to emphasise economic security and thus materialist values more than the young elsewhere in Europe. The older age groups in Southern Europe have grown up prioritising materialist values. Moreover, the unemployment rate for older age groups in Southern Europe is also relatively high (Eurostat, 2022) leading them to continuously prioritise economic security and thus materialist values. Therefore, the young in the south of Europe will be more alike the older age groups, as they prioritise the same values. This leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: The young in Southern Europe perceive political parties more similar to the older age groups than is the case in other European regions.

4 Methodology, data and research design

This chapter presents the data and research design applied to this thesis. First, the data used to test the research questions and hypotheses are presented followed by a description of the case selection defining the countries included in the analysis. Next, the dependent variable, independent variables and control variables used in the statistical models are explained, followed by a description of the multilevel model along with the model's assumptions. Lastly, a discussion of the reliability and validity of the methods is presented.

4.1 Data source: the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems

To test the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter, I use data from the Integrated Module Dataset from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), which covers the years of 1996 to 2016. The CSES is a comparative dataset combined of election studies from democratic countries around the world. The survey is conducted by a national research team following a national election in a country. Because the data are based on national election studies, the questions are asked in each country's native language, ensuring the best translations and understandings of the questions. The participating countries include a common set of questions in their national post-election studies, which is combined with electoral variables, demographics, district and national level variables and information on the respective political system. The studies are merged into a single dataset ensuring that a considerable number of important questions are asked across the participating countries in a consistent manner leading the countries to be comparable and the data useable for cross-level analysis (Wäckerle, 2020).

The Integrated Module Dataset is comprised of the first four CSES dataset modules. A core set of questions remains the same in every survey, with new research topics incorporated in each new module (Wäckerle, 2020). The data include a large set of countries. Countries are included if they have held a national election, however, many countries do not participate in the election study after every election, leading some countries to be included several times in the 20-year period whereas other countries are only included once or twice.

The data are chosen based on the belief that the CSES includes the most satisfying information about ideological perception, as it asks questions about where on an ideological left-right scale the respondent would place various parties in their country. The dataset further includes other ideology-based questions as well as various questions and information about individual and election factors

relevant to the analysis. This gives the best prerequisites for examining the thesis' hypotheses and research question.

4.2 Case selection

As this thesis focuses on Europe, only European countries are included in the analysis. The countries included in the analysis are chosen as they participate in the CSES survey and, as mentioned, it varies when and how many times a country is included in the dataset. Furthermore, all non-European countries are excluded. This includes countries that are not regarded as geographically and democratically European, which thus excludes Belarus, Russia and Turkey. All three countries are considered *not free* by the Freedom House Index (Freedom House, 2023a; Freedom House, 2023b; Freedom House, 2013c), and can therefore not be thought of as fully democratic.

Furthermore, Belgium, Iceland, Lithuania, the 1997 election in Great Britain and the 2010 election in Latvia are removed from the dataset. This is done because the respondents were not asked some of the questions that are crucial for this analysis, for example, such as placing the political parties on the ideological left-right scale, their household income and whether they live in a rural or urban area. The data on these countries and elections would thus have appeared as missing which would be of no use for the analysis.

This leaves a total of 29 European countries as the empirical baseline for the examination, covering 84 national elections over a 20-year period from 1996 to 2016. An overview of the countries included in the analysis and the election years in which they participated in the CSES election survey is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Case selection

Country	Year of election(s)
Albania	2005
Austria	2008, 2013
Bulgaria	2001, 2014
Croatia	2007
Czech Republic	1996, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2013
Denmark	1998, 2001, 2007
Estonia	2011
Finland	2003, 2007, 2011, 2015
France	2002, 2007, 2012
Germany	1998, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2013
Great Britain	2005, 2015
Greece	2009, 2012, 2015
Hungary	1998, 2002
Ireland	2002, 2007, 2011
Italy	2006
Latvia	2011, 2014
Montenegro	2012
The Netherlands	1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Norway	1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013
Poland	1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Portugal	2002, 2005, 2009, 2015
Romania	1996, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2014
Serbia	2012
Slovakia	2010, 2016
Slovenia	1996, 2004, 2008, 2011
Spain	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Sweden	1998, 2002, 2006, 2014
Switzerland	1999, 2003, 2007, 2011
Ukraine	1998

4.3 Variables

The following section provides an explanation of the thesis' variables. First, the thesis' dependent variable, *deviation from average party positioning*, is described followed by descriptions of the three independent variables: *age groups*, which is the main independent variables, *party type* and *regions*. Lastly, the control variables used in the analysis are explained including both the individual-level control variables and the country-election level variables.

Answers such as 'other', 'refusal', 'don't know' and 'no answer' have been removed from all variables. This is done from an analytic point of view, to make the variables quantifiable.

4.3.1 Dependent Variable: Deviation from average party positioning

To test this thesis' hypotheses, a measurement of how much an individual deviates in her positioning of the political parties from the average positioning of parties among all individuals is required. Thus, the average placement of political parties among the respondents is needed as well as each individual's deviation from this average. The dependent variable captures how much a person's placement of the political parties on the ideological left-right scale deviates from the average positioning of the parties in a country in a given election year. It relies on the question from the CSES survey that asks the respondent: "*In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place Party [A-F] on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*". The formulation of this question varies slightly in the four different modules of the dataset included, however, the differences are so small, that I believe it will not change the understanding of the question among the respondents.

The respondents are asked to position six political parties in their country on the ideological left-right scale. The parties included in the questionnaire are the six most popular parties in the country, ranked on the share of votes the parties received in the given election the respondents are asked about. As such, 'Party A' in each country is the party that received the most votes in the election, 'Party B' received the second most votes, and so on.

Thus, the parties classified as for example 'Party A' will be different types of parties in the different countries as well as different parties within a country in the different election years. The parties are therefore placed ideologically different, as some parties might be social democratic parties, others conservative parties and so forth, and thus cannot be compared ideologically. Therefore, I need to calculate the average of all party A's to bring them into a comparative perspective and not just look

at the absolute measure of where the party stands in the political space. Two party A's from different countries will not be comparable, as they, most likely, are different types of parties.

I calculate the overall average for all individuals' positioning of Party A in a country in an election year. Then, to find the deviation for each person from the average positioning of Party A in a given country in a specific election year, I subtract the ideological position of Party A, that each respondent has stated, from the average positioning of Party A that I just calculated. With this calculation, I now have a variable that states how much a respondent deviates in her positioning of Party A from the average positioning of Party A. As such, all Party A's across the dataset are now comparable when examining how much a person or an age group deviates from the average positioning of Party A. These calculations are completed for Party A through F including all countries and elections. I then combine these six new variables into one variable, that includes all the parties. As mentioned, because there is no theoretical reasoning that combines the different parties, i.e., all party A's are just the biggest party in each country and thus have no other similarities, all the parties can be combined into one variable, which functions as my dependent variable. The dependent variable thus determines how much a person deviates in her positioning of all the political parties compared to the average positioning of all the political parties on the ideological left-right scale.

With this calculation, the average position of all parties is considered to be zero, which means that the point of departure for the variable, i.e., the parties, is zero. This makes it possible for me to make an accurate comparison across the countries and uncover how young people on average position political parties compared to older age groups and how much the age groups deviate in their positioning of parties compared to the youngest age group. The dependent variable thus does not state where on the ideological left-right scale the respondents place the parties but instead states how the respondents on average place political parties and how much this placement deviates from the average placement. As such, the dependent variable in the analysis is the deviation from the average positioning of political parties on the left-right ideological scale among all individuals.

4.3.1.1 Analysing the dependent variable

When the respondents are asked about placing the political parties on the ideological left-right scale, the higher the value the respondent gives a party on the scale, the more to the right the party is placed. However, because of how the dependent variable is calculated when finding the deviation from the average party placement, these values are swapped around, so the lower the number (below zero)

indicates that the party on average is placed more to the right, and the higher the number (above zero) indicates that the party on average is placed more to the left.

To give an example: The individual deviation from the average placement of the parties is calculated by taking the average of all the individuals' placement of the parties and subtracting the actual placement of the parties on the left-right scale, which looks like this:

$$\text{Individual deviation} = \text{Average placement} - \text{Left-right placement.}$$

Thus, if the left-right placement number is bigger than the average, the result will be positive and if the left-right placement is a lower number than the average placement number, the result will be negative. So, if we say that the average placement of the parties among all the individuals are 8.5 and an individual place the parties at 10 on the left-right scale (which is indicating that the person positions the party furthest to the right), the individual deviation is $8.5-10=-1.5$. This is a negative number and illustrates that people or age groups that position the parties more to the right than the average placement will show up as a negative number in the table. If we take the same example but instead the individual position the parties at 6 on the left-right scale, which is more to the left than the average of 8.5, the calculation would be: $8.5-6=2.5$. The person positions the parties more to the left of the average and this is a positive number. Thus, positive numbers in the result tables indicate that people or age groups with positive numbers on average position the parties more to the left.

4.3.1.2 Hypothesis 1b: Left-wing and right-wing parties

The dependent variable is used throughout the analysis when examining all but hypothesis 1b. When examining how the respondents position the chosen left-wing and right-wing parties, the variable stating where the respondents position a party on the ideological left-right scale, *ideological placement*, will be used. This dependent variable is measured from the same question as the main dependent variable, however, here the actual ideological numbers, stated by the respondents, are used. This variable is used to determine where the age groups position the specific types of parties on the ideological dimension which gives an understanding of how much to the left or the right the parties are placed. Using this variable will show where the age groups on average position the three different party types chosen, with the exact ideological numbers, which run on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates furthest to the left and 10 indicates furthest to the right, now shown. Thus, it will be possible to get a broader understanding of how the age groups on average perceive left-wing and right-wing parties compared to other parties and analyse the actual placements on the ideological scale.

4.3.2 Independent variable: Age groups

As discussed in the chapter on previous literature, several factors that might influence how people perceive political parties. One factor is a person's age, which has not yet been profoundly investigated. I assume that people's ideological perception is influenced by their age. Young people are likely to perceive different aspects of life different from older people and to participate in politics in different ways than older age groups. Moreover, the young have grown up in different times than older age groups have, leading them to have obtained a different outlook and perception of politics, political parties, and ideology. The main independent variable in this thesis is the *age group* of the respondents. The individuals are divided into six groups that are assigned to them based on their age. The main independent variable is thus analysed based on these six different age groups. The age groups are categorised based on levels coded by the CSES, which is listed as follows:

Age group 1	Age group 2	Age group 3	Age group 4	Age group 5	Age group 6
24 years and younger	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65 year and older

The youngest age group, those aged 24 and younger, will be used as the reference category throughout the analysis. The results will thus all be compared to the youngest age group, which gives the most beneficial results, as I am interested in examining the differences between the youngest age group and the other age groups.

In age group 1, most people are between 18 and 24 years old, however, 106 of the respondents are either 15, 16 and 17 years old. These are still included to capture the fullest picture of young people and their ideological perceptions. All ages between 18 and 70 include at least 2000 respondents. From the age of 79 and upwards there are fewer than 1000 respondents at each age and generally very few respondents older than 90 years old. The oldest age group is thus set to be those aged 65 and older, which is assumed to catch the general tendencies of elderly people.

4.3.3 Independent variable: Party type

To get a better understanding of how young people perceive political parties compared to older voters, I will examine how the different age groups position left- and right-wing parties compared to all other parties on the ideological left-right dimension. However, not all 29 countries will be included in this part of the analysis. The main criteria for including a country in this part of the analysis is that there exists a left-wing party and a right-wing party that participated in a given election which is included

in the CSES dataset. These parties must fit the definition of left- and right-wing parties described in section 3.2.2. Furthermore, only countries where both a left-wing and a right-wing party competed in the same year will be included. This is chosen to make sure that the data is balanced and only respondents who have been asked about both a left-wing and a right-wing party are included making them as comparable as possible.

Another major factor that played a role in which countries and parties are examined is the availability from the dataset. Even though a party competed in an election, the respondents are not always asked about that specific party. The respondents are only asked about the six parties gaining the most votes, with a few exceptions if a smaller party played an important or notable role in the election. As such, even though a left- or right-wing party participated in an election, there is not always data on how the respondents would position that specific party. Furthermore, coalitions of parties are not included either, as I am only interested in examining single parties. The parties included in the part of the analysis that examines hypothesis 1b is shown in Table 2. The specific elections where both a left-wing and a right-wing party participated, and where the respondents were asked about them, are combined into a new dataset used for this specific part of the analysis.

Table 2: List of left- and right-wing parties

Country	Right-wing parties	Left-wing parties
Czech Republic	Association for the Republic – Czech Republican Party (SPR-RSC) Dawn of Direct Democracy (Usvit)	The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)
Denmark	Danish People’s Party	The Red-Green Unity List
Finland	True Finns	Left Alliance
France	Front National	French Communist Party Revolutionary Communist League Left Front Workers Struggle
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AfD) National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD)	Left Party (Die Linke) Left/Party of Democratic Socialism (Left.PDS)
Greece	Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) The Independent Greeks (ANEL)	Communist Party of Greece (KKE) Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left)
Hungary	Hungarian Justice and Life Party	Hungarian Worker’s Party
Netherlands	List Pim Fortuyn Party for Freedom	Socialist Party

Norway	Progress Party (FrP)	Red Party
Poland	League of Polish Families	Self Defence of the Polish Republic
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	Left Party

The parties included in this part of the analysis can be categorised as either a left-wing or a right-wing party. For instance, all the right-wing parties are not the exact same party having the exact same views and opinions on every single issue or focusing on all the same political issues in their party programs. However, every right-wing party has features in common with all the other right-wing parties included, thus making the parties comparable across the countries. The same applies to the left-wing parties.

What is furthermore important in this part of the analysis is to get an understanding of how young people position these parties compared to older age groups and what the differences are. The parties not being completely the same will not affect the examination as it will still show how the different age groups position these types of parties and whether they position them more to the left or the right on the ideological left-right scale compared to each other.

In the dataset used for this part of the analysis, a new variable is created stating whether a party is “left-wing”, “right-wing” or “other”, which functions as a second independent variable. This “party type” variable thus has three categories and captures whether a party is categorised as a left-wing party, a right-wing party or another party. All other parties besides the left-wing and right-wing parties are coded into “other”. The “other” category therefore consists of several different party types, which can be considered as being more centrist parties compared to the left-wing and right-wing parties. This category functions as a reference group to the left- and right-wing parties. The “other” category is created as I want to have a reference point against which the left- and right-wing parties can be compared. By creating these three categories, I have a reference to how the respondents position parties that are neither left- nor right-wing as well as how they position left-wing parties and right-wing parties. As such, the interpretation is made more efficient and it will be possible to compare how the different age groups position these types of parties.

4.3.4 Independent variable: European regions

Besides giving a general picture of the difference between young and older peoples’ ideological positioning of parties, I also want to examine regional variations in Europe. This is done by dividing the countries into categories of Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western Europe. This division is

based on the categorisation of the countries into four regions that is included in the CSES dataset. The division can be seen in the following table.

Table 3: Regional division of European countries

Region	Countries
Southern Europe	Albania, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain
Eastern Europe	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine
Northern Europe	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Sweden
Western Europe	Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland

The “regions” variable thus captures whether a country can be categorised as Eastern, Northern, Southern or Western European and functions as the second independent variable in the analysis of how the six age groups position the political parties in each European region.

4.3.5 Control variables

Control variables are added to the models to ensure that the estimated effects are not influenced by confounding or inessential variables and thus are not spurious. Different socio-demographic and election-related factors have previously been found to influence people’s ideological perception and placement of political parties. Such variables are thus included in the models. The gender, education, household income, and rural/urban residence variables are all coded as factor variables. This is done so they are not treated as numerical variables that are continuous but instead are treated as separate groups, that can be compared with each other. Thus, the variables are given values that are legitimate and observable.

4.3.5.1 Gender

Gender is used as a control variable, as gender is the first thing one is given when born, which means that everything from then on can, in principle, be decided or affected by one’s gender. Men and women differ in various ways, one is in which they engage in politics another is in what type of parties they vote for. Thus, a person’s gender may influence how they position political parties. Furthermore, it has previously been found that men tend to have a higher perceptual agreement of party positions than women (Dahlberg, 2013; Busch, 2016; Gordon & Segura, 1997).

In this analysis, gender is a binary category, which is consistent with the answers the respondents gave when asked about their gender. The gender variable is coded 1 if the respondent is male and coded 2 if the respondent is female.

4.3.5.2 Education

Education is assumed to correlate with ideological perception. Several scholars have concluded that higher educated people tend to have a greater perceptual agreement on the ideological placement of political parties (Dahlberg, 2013; Busch, 2016; Gordon & Segura, 1997). People with higher education are furthermore more likely to vote in elections (Goerres, 2007), which might affect their perception of political parties. Education is therefore included as a control variable to control for its possible effect on people's positioning of political parties.

The education variable is measured from the question asking the respondents about their level of education. The variable ranges from 0 to 4, with 0 indicating the respondent have no education, 1 indicating having a primary education, 2 indicating having achieved a higher secondary education, 3 indicating a post-secondary (non-university) education and 4 indicating the respondent has achieved a university education.

4.3.5.3 Household income

Income is generally considered to correlate with political behaviour and attitudes. As described in chapter three, Downs (1957) explains how a person's social class plays a role in the political information she consumes. Though a person's household income is not an indicator of the social class a person is a part of, it is likely to give some insight into a person's social class. A person's income will moreover affect the resources one has in terms of access to, and time invested in, political information which will influence one's perception of political parties.

Moreover, a lower household income might make people more prone to prioritising materialist values, as they might not feel as economically secure as people with a higher income. This is further related to research finding that people with low-level incomes to a higher degree tend to support populist parties rather than parties prioritising postmaterialist values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Household income is thus included as a control variable. The household income is included rather than a person's single income, so young people who are at school and living at home can be perceived based on their family's income and not by their own, most likely, lower income.

The question used to measure a person's household income varies slightly from country to country. In some countries, respondents are asked about their annual income while in others they are asked about their monthly income. For all countries, the income data is grouped and re-coded into quintiles, creating five quintiles that reflect the income levels in each country. This thus makes the countries comparable with one another, as I will compare the individuals based on which quintile their household income belongs to rather than their income in a valuta. As such, the household income variable is measured by the household income quintile appropriate to the respondent. The variable ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 being equal to the lowest income quintile and 5 equalling the highest income quantile.

4.3.5.4 Rural or urban residency

In the same way as income might reflect a person's social class, so can a person's place of living also partially play a role in the social class, she belongs to. Whether one lives in the countryside or a small village compared to living in a big city will affect the person's political interests, expectations and focus. The type of job a person holds is often related to where a person lives. People working in agriculture and manufacturing often live in more rural places, whereas people working in financial services, creative industries and technology more often live in urban areas. Political information is partly attained through the people a person associates with, which is correlated with where and with whom one works and lives. Thus, it is assumed that the type of area a person lives in might correlate with the person's perception of political parties.

The rural/urban variable is measured from the question asking about the size of the respondent's residency area. The variable is divided into four categories ranging from 1 to 4. 1 indicates that a respondent lives in a rural area or village, 2 indicates that a respondent lives in a small or middle-sized town, 3 indicates that a respondent lives in the suburbs of a large town or city, and 4 indicates that a respondent lives in a large town or a city.

4.3.5.5 Individual's left-right self-placement

Where a respondent places herself on the ideological left-right scale is expected to correlate with her positioning of a political party on the same scale. This is assumed as it has been found that the greater distance there is between a person's self-placement on the ideological scale and the common placement of a party in a country, the more difficulty will that person have in placing that party

accurately. It is thus assumed that the further a person positions herself from the average position of a party, the more will that person also deviate from that average.

The variable about an individual's self-placement on the left-right scale is measured based on the following question: "In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?" The same scale is used when the respondents answer where they would position themselves as when asked about positioning the political parties, which makes them comparable.

4.3.5.6 Country-election level control variables: regime age, level of democracy & number of parties

The abovementioned control variables are all variables on the individual level. Three control variables on the second and third levels are further included in the models. It has been suggested that the age of a democracy influences ideological perception with older democracies providing more learning opportunities about parties as well as more stable parties, i.e., the same party being elected and represented for a longer time several times. Therefore, *regime age* is included as a control variable and is measured based on data on the age of the current regime, which tell us how long a country has been a democracy.

The level of democracy in a country is further believed to play a role in people's ideological perception, as more democratic countries are thought to provide more clear-cut information about politics and ideology and consist of a variety of parties. *Level of democracy* is thus included as another control variable on the second level, measured based on a country's reported Polity IV rating at the time of the elections.

Moreover, it is believed that the number of political parties participating in an election will affect people's ideological perception. In a country with few parties, voters' tastes tend to become more homogeneous, and they tend to rely on more non-ideological factors, whereas ideologies are much more integrated in countries with several parties, as ideologies are used to distinct parties from each other (Downs, 1957). Hence, the control variable *effective number of electoral parties* is included, which states the effective number of parties in a given election.

4.4 Model Choice: Multilevel regression model

The following chapter describes the choice of using multilevel models for this thesis. Throughout this description, several of the underlying assumptions multilevel models rely on are discussed in the light of this study.

This thesis uses a multilevel statistical model to answer the research question and hypotheses. The model choice is first and foremost based on the research question, which consists of a multilevel problem that concerns the relationship between variables that are measured at several different hierarchical levels (Hox, 2010, 5). In multilevel models, the data is hierarchical and structured with individuals being nested within groups, which create up to three levels of units (Christophersen, 2018: 107). This is consistent with the data used for this thesis, as my data consist of individuals (level 1) that are nested within elections (level 2) that are nested within countries (level 3). What makes multilevel modelling relevant is that the level 2 and level 3 units, in my case the elections and the countries, have their own specific characteristics or culture that seem homogenising on the level 1 units that are within the level 2 and 3 units. Furthermore, individuals living in the same geographical area will be more like each other than individuals living in different geographical areas (Hox, 2010: 6). Thus, it is expected that the respondents from a specific election or a specific country generally are more similar to each other than to individuals from other countries or individuals that participated in other elections. However, when the data are nested with individuals from the same group being more similar to each other, it violates the assumption of independence of all observations (Hox, 2010: 14). Therefore, multilevel modelling is assumed to be needed for this thesis, as it provides a coherent model that incorporates both individual- and group-level models at the same time.

To assess whether correlation within groups is a problem in my data, I calculate the intraclass correlation (ICC). The ICC expresses the proportion of variance that the level 2 and level 3 units answer for. As a rule of thumb, an ICC over 5% suggests that multilevel modelling should be chosen (Christophersen, 2018: 111). However, when running the ICC test on my models it is below 5% and shows that I have very little intraclass correlation. Thus, in theory, based on the ICC, I do not have to run a multilevel model.

Nevertheless, I still choose to run multilevel models because of the structure of my data. As explained, my data consist of respondents (individuals) who are nested within elections (level 2 units) as the respondents have participated in different national elections. They are furthermore nested within countries (level 3 units), as my dataset consists of up to 29 different countries. Thus, even though the ICC test does not suggest it, there is still a theoretical possibility that the observations are not independent from each other, due to the structure of the data. I therefore consider multilevel models as the most efficient and explanatory model to run.

No data will be lost by running the multilevel models but the amount of explained variance on the level 2 and 3 units will likely not be very high and the important variables for this analysis will likely be on the level 1 units. Thus, running a statistical model with the same specification but without the clustering would likely lead to similar results as to what I am getting when running the multilevel models. However, by running the multilevel models I still control for the possibly explained variance on the level 2 and 3 units as there is a theoretical possibility that these two levels matter in the analysis. Moreover, ignoring the multilevel nature of the data could furthermore create several statistical problems such as clustering, nonconstant variance and underestimation of standard errors (Anderson & Singer, 2008: 579).

Like all regression analysis, multilevel regression requires that there are no omitted variables. Therefore, the model needs to be correctly specified with all variables associated with the outcome included. Excluding relevant variables increases the risk of type 1-errors, that is, concluding that the findings are significant when they, in fact, have occurred by chance (Christophersen, 2018: 31). Knowing and including all the relevant cofounders associated with the outcome is, however, impossible. In this analysis, all control variables that are thought to be relevant to the outcome are included and based on theoretical assumptions. Very similar control variables are included in other studies examining political behaviour such as Dahlberg (2009a, 2009b, 2013) and Busch (2016). Thus, even though there is always a risk that the models suffer from omitted variable bias, I did my best to control for all conventionally used personal background characteristics.

Furthermore, the residuals at all levels must be normally distributed. A lack of normality in a model can lead to bias in the standard errors at both levels. Looking at the scale residuals of the multilevel models, the median is close to zero and both the minimum and maximum, and the Q1 and Q3 show similar numbers on each side of the scale, e.g., the minimum of the first multilevel model is -4.59 and the maximum 4.66, which illustrates that the residuals are normally distributed (see figure 4 in appendix).

Finally, as missing data might potentially bias parameter estimates and inflate type-1 and -2 error rates, all missing data are removed from the dataset. This is possible given the large amount of data the dataset provides. Even though the removal of the missing data lowers the total amount of respondents, there are still so many respondents that the analysis will give valuable and generalising results. Furthermore, removing the missing data creates consistency among the different models, as the same number of observations will be present across the models. Thus, if there are any differences

across the different models, these will largely be due to the model specifications, i.e., the included variables, and not because of observations that had to be excluded in some of the models due to missing data.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

In this section, the reliability and validity of the data and research design are discussed. How research is conducted, and data measured has implications for a variety of issues concerning the research's reliability and validity. In short, reliability concerns the overall consistency of the measurements and entails whether a measurement is stable over time, leading the results to be consistent (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 191). Validity can be measured in several ways. This section focuses on internal and external validity with internal validity being discussed in terms of measurement validity.

The integrated CSES dataset used in this thesis consists of several surveys conducted in several different countries, in many different years. The questions used in this integrated dataset are the same in the different countries and years, with only a few minor differences in the framing of some of the questions. The measurements of the indicators are therefore considered to be stable and consistent over time, thus producing similar results on repeated occasions (*ibid.*: 191). Furthermore, the CSES makes thorough quality checks on the questionnaire, ensuring accurate translations of the questions, consistency and commensurability of the individual studies. With the measurements being carefully crafted and consistent over time, I consider the reliability to be high.

Moreover, the dataset consists of standardised and close-ended survey questions, which means that the coding is not dependent on the researchers' own interpretations of the answers. This limits the threats of coding bias, which furthermore increases the reliability of the study and makes the measurements of the operationalised variables consistent (Bryman, 2016: 156-157).

However, with the questions being close-ended and thus less nuanced, there is a risk that the respondents do not understand the questions in the same way as the researcher intend them to, which could be a threat to the internal validity. I do, however, argue that all the independent and control variables used are straightforward, asking about the respondent's age, gender, education, residency and income. I thus believe that the questions are understood in the same way by the respondents across the included countries. Furthermore, I consider the questions asked as neutral and thus not leading or phrased in a way that could lead to bias in the respondents' answers. This all indicates a high degree of internal validity.

However, there is a risk that the dependent variable, which is based on the question asking the respondents to position political parties on the ideological left-right scale, might be understood or interpreted differently across the countries, or that the understanding of the left-right scale change over time. As discussed in the theory chapter, the ideological left-right dimension has its limitations and is by some believed to have changed over time with new issues added to the dimension. However, this dimension is still the most universally used scale and I thus believe that most people perceive and understand it similarly. Hence, I do not believe that possible different perceptions of the ideology dimension weaken the results of the thesis.

The CSES employs a random probability sampling from the populations of the participating countries. All countries have a high response rate, which ensures a high degree of validity, and thus that the samples in the individual countries are representative of the given country's general population.

It is important for the external validity that the sampling represents a representative selection of the population one wishes to examine. The CSES data covers many European countries and includes a large number of respondents who are randomly chosen for the survey. Thus, the data is considered to be representative of the European population and it is possible to draw conclusions on all European citizens and their perceptions of political parties. However, not all European countries are included in the survey, and the part of the analysis covering how the respondents perceive left- and right-wing parties is limited to include only 11 European countries. Therefore, even though this part includes countries from all four regions of Europe, a generalisation can only be made for those specific 11 countries. Furthermore, not all other European countries have left- or right-wing parties that can be categorised based on this thesis' definition of these parties, which makes it impossible to make generalisations on these countries. This weakens the external validity of this part of the analysis (Andersen, 2012: 105).

Overall, the datasets consist of several hundred thousand of observations that are randomly sampled, which makes it possible for the results to be generalised to the relevant populations giving it a high degree of external validity (Lund, 2002: 105).

5 Results

In this chapter, the empirical analysis of the data is presented. The first section, section 5.1, focuses on the difference between the different age groups' positioning of the political parties on the ideological left-right scale. In section 5.2, I turn to a more specific analysis of the left- and right-wing parties in Europe and examine whether young people position these parties more to the left or more to the right compared to the other age groups. Section 5.3 focuses on the four regions in Europe and the regional differences there are between the age groups in their perception of political parties. The models throughout the analysis will be presented with and without control variables. The control variables are mainly included to test the explanatory power of the main independent variable, age, and will thus not be discussed in detail.

5.1 Age differences in ideological perception

This section examines whether there is a difference in how young people position political parties on the ideological left-right scale compared to older age groups and thus answers hypotheses 1 and 1a. The first hypothesis, hypothesis 1, anticipates that *young people position political parties ideologically different than older generations*, while hypothesis 1a anticipates that *young people will deviate the most from the oldest age group in their perception of political parties*. To test these two hypotheses, I analyse how much each age group on average deviates from the youngest age group in their positioning of the political parties.

5.1.1 Baseline models

Table 4 presents the results from four different models examining the age group differences in ideological positioning of parties. The first model (1) shows the baseline model and only includes the dependent variable, thus only showing the constant. The second model (2) reports the model with the independent variable, age groups, included. In the third model (3), control variables on the individual level are included, and the fourth model (4) includes the country-election level control variables as well. The control variables are first and foremost added to test whether the explanatory power of the independent variable remains robust. Thus, they will only be briefly discussed in this chapter.

Table 4: Age group's deviation from average placement of parties on the ideological dimension

	Dependent variable: Deviation from average party positioning			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	-0.009** (0.004)	0.113*** (0.010)	0.196*** (0.025)	0.028 (0.091)
Age group:				
24 and younger			(reference category)	
25 - 34		-0.062*** (0.013)	-0.033*** (0.013)	-0.033*** (0.013)
35 - 44		-0.104*** (0.012)	-0.081*** (0.012)	-0.081*** (0.012)
45 - 54		-0.172*** (0.012)	-0.155*** (0.012)	-0.155*** (0.012)
55 - 64		-0.159*** (0.012)	-0.155*** (0.012)	-0.155*** (0.012)
65 and older		-0.156*** (0.012)	-0.173*** (0.012)	-0.173*** (0.012)
<i>Individual level controls</i>				
Gender (female)			-0.009 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)
Education:				
No education			(reference category)	
Primary/Lower Secondary			-0.002 (0.021)	-0.002 (0.021)
Higher secondary			-0.061*** (0.021)	-0.062*** (0.021)
Post-secondary (non- university)			-0.032 (0.022)	-0.034 (0.022)
University			-0.171*** (0.021)	-0.172*** (0.022)
Household income:				
Lowest quintile			(reference category)	
Second quintile			-0.014 (0.010)	-0.014 (0.010)
Third quintile			-0.038*** (0.010)	-0.038*** (0.010)
Fourth quintile			-0.046*** (0.010)	-0.046*** (0.010)
Highest quintile			-0.054*** (0.010)	-0.054*** (0.010)
Rural/urban residence:				
Rural area/village			(reference category)	
Small or middle-sized town			0.004 (0.008)	0.003 (0.008)
Suburbs of large town/city			-0.017* (0.009)	-0.017* (0.009)
Large town/city			-0.038*** (0.008)	-0.038*** (0.008)
Individual left-right score			0.003** (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)
<i>Country-election level controls</i>				
Effective number of parties				0.001 (0.004)
Polity IV score				0.017* (0.009)
Regime age				0.00005 (0.0001)
Observations	478,813	478,813	478,813	478,813
Log Likelihood	-1,020,999.000	-1,020,857.000	-1,020,627.000	-1,020,641.000
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,042,007.000	2,041,731.000	2,041,299.000	2,041,333.000
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	2,042,051.000	2,041,831.000	2,041,542.000	2,041,610.000

Note:

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

Model 1 in Table 4 reports the baseline model, also called a null model, with only the intercept included. This model serves as a benchmark with which the other models are compared. The intercept, which is indicated by the constant, is estimated as -0.009. This indicates the average deviation from the average party positioning across all individuals, elections, and countries. The intercept is larger than its corresponding standard error, which is at 0.004 and is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level.

The second model includes the thesis' main independent variable, the different age groups of the individuals. The intercept in this model is at 0.113 and is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, which is a bit more significant than the intercept in the baseline model. All age groups are furthermore statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

The age group's regression coefficients indicate that the average positioning of parties varies between the age groups. The youngest age group, those aged 24 and younger, functions as the reference category, as the age group variable is a factor variable. The regression coefficient for the second youngest age group, those aged 25 to 34, is -0.062 (significant at $p < 0.01$), which indicates that this age group on average deviates -0.062 points from the youngest age group in their positioning of political parties. Age group 3, the 35- to 44-year-olds, deviates on average -0.104 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) from the youngest age group in their placement of the parties. The 45- to 54-year-olds and the 55- to 64-year-olds deviate on average -0.172 (significant at $p < 0.01$) and -0.159 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) respectively from the youngest age group, and the oldest age group, those aged 65 and older, deviates -0.156 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) on average from the youngest.

In this model, the age groups deviate to different degrees from the youngest age group. On average, the young are closest in their positioning of political parties to the second youngest age group and their positioning of the parties deviates the most from age group 4, the 45- to 54-year-olds.

With the intercept being at 0.113, the youngest age group thus deviates 0.113 points from the average positioning of the parties among all individuals in all countries. As the 25- to 34-year-old age group deviates with -0.062 points from the youngest age group, they deviate 0.051 points in their party positioning from the overall average placement of the parties. The 35 to 44-year-olds deviate 0.009 points from the average placement of all individuals. Age group 4 and 5, those aged 44 to 54 and 55 to 64, deviates respectively by -0.059 points and -0.046 points from the total average and the oldest age group deviates with -0.043 points from the average placement of the political parties among all individuals in all countries.

As the dependent variable has been centred, the average placement of the political parties among all individuals is considered to be zero. Therefore, if one divides the scale into two groups, a left-side group, which places the parties more to the left, and a right-side group, which places the parties more to the right, the left-side group is for those age groups which on average place the parties above zero and the right-side group are those age groups that on average place the parties below zero. Thus, age groups 4, 5 and 6 place the political parties, on average, more to the right on the ideological dimension whereas the youngest age group and age groups 2 and 3 place the parties, on average, more to the left on the left-right scale. The youngest age group is the age group that perceives the political parties as being positioned the most to the left, while age group 4, the 44 to 54-year-olds on average perceive the parties as being positioned the most to the right. Furthermore, with an average placement of the parties just 0.009 points from the average placement of all individuals, the 35 to 44-year-olds is the age group that deviates the least from the average.

5.1.2 Extended models

The results from models 1 and 2 may be spurious, i.e., driven by confounding factors, as several cofounders are assumed to correlate with both the dependent and independent variables. Control variables on the individual level and on the country-election level that are assumed to correlate with the dependent variable and the independent variable are therefore included in the model to avoid omitted variable bias which poses a threat to the internal validity. Model 3 includes the individual-level control variables and model 4 includes both the individual-level and the country-election level variables.

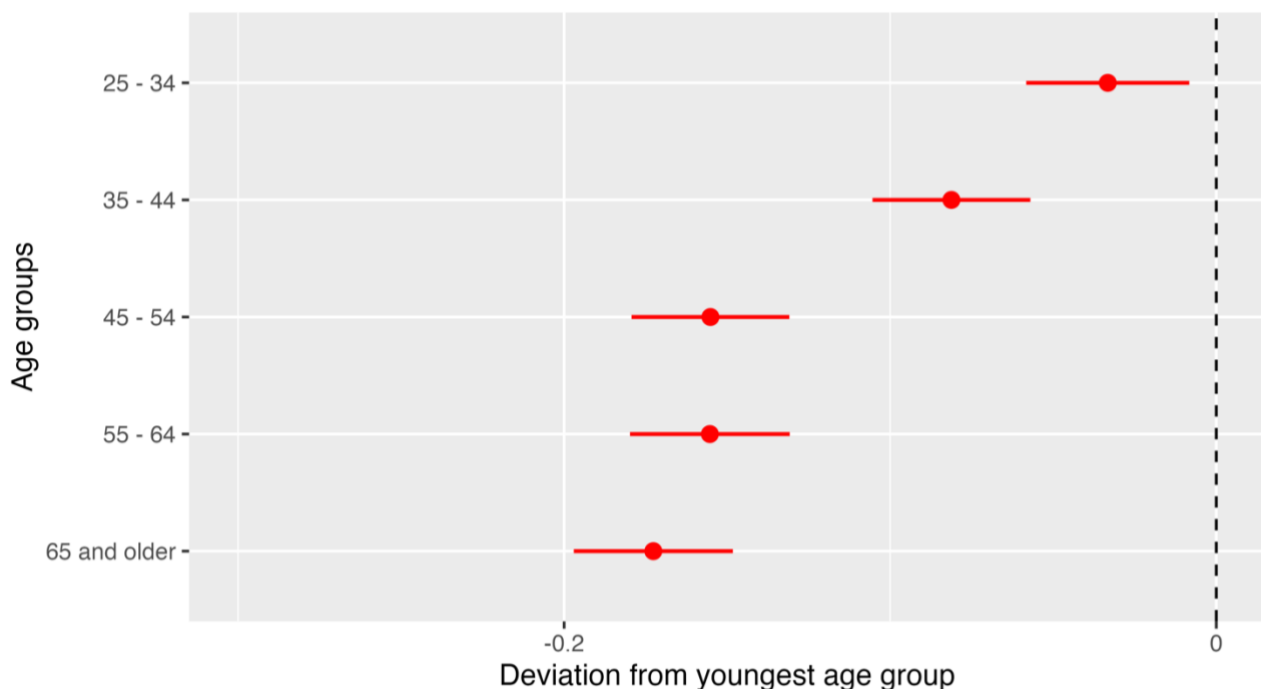
In model 3, with the added individual-level control variables, the deviance goes down slightly, which is indicated by the Log Likelihood. This is expected when control variables are added and indicates that the model fits better than the previous models (Hox, 2010: 21). This model indicates the differences between the age groups when all the individual-level control variables, and thus possible confounders, are held constant. The normal distribution distinguished in model 2 therefore also deviates, because all these other factors are held constant.

The intercept is now at 0.196 and estimates a statical significant effect of 0.01. The differences between the youngest age group and most of the other age groups are now a bit smaller. The second youngest age group now deviates -0.033 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) from the youngest age group,

with age group 3 deviating -0.081 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) from the youngest age group in the average positioning of the political parties. Age group 4 and 5 deviates the same amount from the youngest age group, with both age groups placing the parties, on average, -0.155 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) more to the right than the youngest age group. The oldest age group is the most different from the youngest age group in their party placement, as they deviate -0.173 points (significant at $p < 0.01$) from those aged 24 and younger. Thus, the model suggests that the older the person, the more she deviates from young people in her positioning of political parties, which is illustrated in Figure 1. The dotted line in Figure 1 illustrates the youngest age group and it is thus possible to see how much the other age groups deviate from the youngest age group. Furthermore, all the age groups place the political parties, on average, more to the right relative to the youngest age group and they all estimate a statistically significant effect at the 0.01 level.

It should moreover be noted that the confounders have the biggest effect on the youngest and the oldest age groups, as the coefficients change more for these age groups compared to the other age groups when the control variables are added.

Figure 1: Party position deviations from the youngest age group



The differences between models 2 and 3 remain stable. The coefficients of the independent variable are consistent with the control variables added, and the findings thus appear to be robust towards

inclusion of potential confounders. Furthermore, several of the added individual-level control variables are statistically significant, which indicates that they have an impact on people's ideological perception of political parties and thus on how they position the parties on the left-right scale. As such, both education, household income, where a person lives, and a person's individual left-right placement are all likely to play a role in people's placement of parties with only a person's gender not having any significant effect. It is therefore relevant to control for these variables as they most likely matter in the context of ideological perception of political parties. Including these variables thus gives a clearer and more correct result of the difference between the age groups. However, as mentioned, I refrain from interpreting the control variables further, as they are likely biased and can bias estimates by creating imbalance (Montgomery et al., 2018: 767).

In model 4, the country-election level control variables, i.e., level 2 and level 3 control variables, are added. Comparing model 3 and 4, there appears to be either no or very small changes between the models which indicates that the country-election control variables does not influence the explanatory power of the independent variables and thus do not influence how the age groups position the political parties on the ideological dimension. I will therefore not describe the results in model 4 in any more detail.

Lastly, to compare the fit of the four statistical models, it is beneficial to look at the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) which assumes that the compared models are fit to the same dataset, using the same estimation method. The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) is a similar fit index to the AIC, however, since the models are multilevel models, the AIC is more preferred (Hox, 2010: 50-51). The lower the AIC number a model has, the more attractive is the model considered to be. Thus, looking at the four different models in Table 4, model 3 is assumed to be the most attractive and accurate model, since it has the lowest AIC out of the four models. This is consistent with the deviance that also goes down in model 3 compared to the first two models, all indicating that the model is a better fit. However, the AIC only slightly changes between the models. This indicates that the independent variable, the age groups, is the main explanatory factor when it comes to positioning parties on an ideological left-right scale.

5.2 Left-wing and right-wing parties

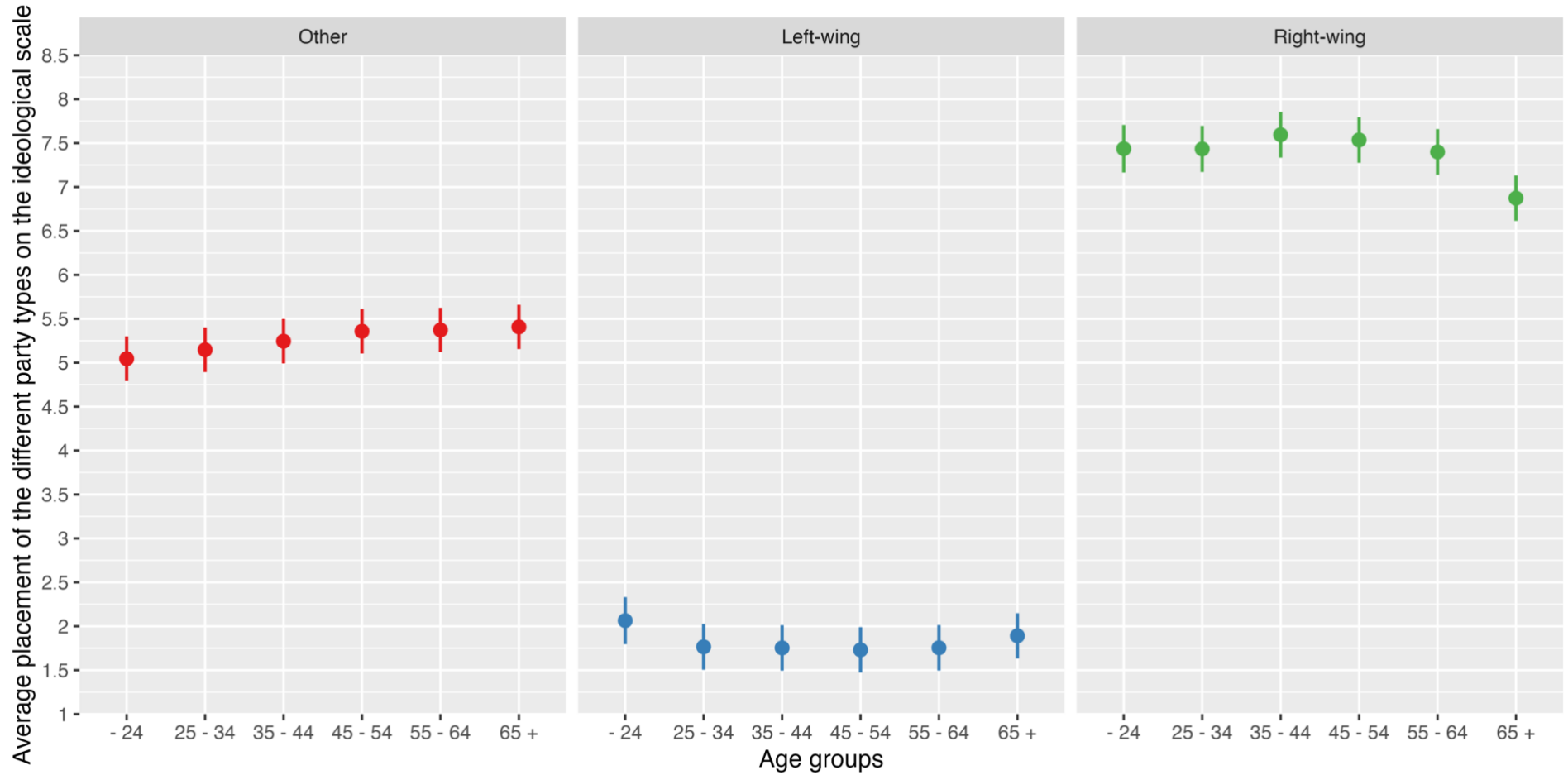
In this section, a deeper examination of how the different age groups position the political parties and how they perceive the parties ideologically will be conducted. This will be done by focusing on left- and right-wing parties and analysing how the age groups position these specific party types. The actual positioning of the parties on the ideological left-right scale will be used as the dependent variable in this section, which will show where each age group on average positions the party types on the ideological scale. Thus, the higher the number on the scale, the more to the right is a party type positioned. Figure 2 presents how the three party types on average are positioned by the six age groups and will primarily be used to analyse the data in this section. Figure 2 is based on a multilevel model where the interaction effect between the “party type” and “age group” variables is examined. The table for the multilevel model can be found under Table 6 in the appendix. The same multilevel model and graph are performed using the “deviation from average position” dependent variable to demonstrate that the two models provide the same results. Thus, figure 2 is primarily used for convenience, as it shows the actual numbers, 0 to 10, from the ideological scale.

5.2.1 Party types

In Figure 2, three party types are shown: “other”, “left-wing”, and “right-wing”. The “other” group is not a group consisting of one specific party type but consists of a wide range of parties, such as conservative parties, social democratic parties, and green parties. The parties in this group are considered to be positioned more towards the centre than the left-wing and right-wing parties are. Thus, the group of “other” parties functions as a reference group with which the left-wing and right-wing parties are compared.

Looking at how the different age groups position the “other” parties, the youngest age group places these parties, on average, at around point 5. Thus, the youngest age group perceives all other parties to be positioned, on average, in the middle of the ideological dimension. The older the age group, the more the average positioning of the parties deviates from the youngest age group and the more the “other” parties are positioned towards the right end on the ideological scale. Age groups 4 and 5 position the parties at the same point. However, the differences in the average party positioning among the age groups are rather small, deviating from around 5 for the youngest age group to around 5,4 for the oldest age group. As in model 3 in Table 4 in the previous section, the youngest age group deviates the most from the oldest age group.

Figure 2: Age group variations in positioning of left-wing, right-wing and other parties



5.2.2 Left-wing parties

When positioning the left-wing parties, the youngest age group positions this party type the closest towards the centre of all age groups. The youngest age group positions the left-wing parties, on average, at 2.1 on the ideological left-right scale. The second youngest age group, those aged 25 to 34, positions the left-wing parties at around 1.75 and thus deviates substantially from the youngest age group in their perception of this type of party. The 35- to 44-year-olds, the 45- to 54-year-olds and the 55- to 64-year-olds all deviate approximately the same amount from the youngest age group as the second youngest age group does. Thus, there are only marginal differences between the four middle age groups in how they perceive left-wing parties, which is quite far towards the left on the ideological dimension. The oldest age group positions left-wing parties at around point 1.85 and is thus the age group that deviates the least from the youngest age group when perceiving left-wing parties. The youngest age group is the age group that overall perceives left-wing parties the most different compared to the other age groups and places them a bit more towards the centre of the ideological scale. The four middle age groups perceive left-wing parties as being more towards the left.

Comparing how the age groups position the left-wing parties to how they position the “other” parties, the youngest age group has the smallest gap between how it positions these two party types. The three oldest age groups position these two party types the furthest from each other among the age groups. Thus, the youngest age group perceives both left-wing parties and the “other” parties as being more towards the centre of the ideological dimension than the other age groups.

5.2.3 Right-wing parties

The youngest age group positions the right-wing parties, on average, at point 7.4, which is also where the second youngest age group positions this party type. The 35-to 44-year-olds is the age group that positions the right-wing parties the furthest towards the right, by placing this party type at around 7.2. Those aged 45 to 54 place the parties close to the 35- to 44-year-olds, however, a bit more towards the centre, while the 55- to 64-year-olds position the right-wing parties very similar to the two youngest age groups. However, they position this party type a bit more towards the middle than the youngest does. The oldest age group, those aged 65 and older, deviates a lot from the five other age groups in its positioning of the right-wing parties. They position this party type at point 6.8 and thus perceive the right-wing parties as being positioned much more towards the middle of the ideological dimension than the other age groups do. This is the biggest deviation of an age group in party

positioning among all three party types. As with the left-wing parties, age groups 3 and 4 position the right-wing parties the most “extreme”, i.e., the most towards the right.

When comparing how the age groups position the right-wing parties and the “other” parties, the oldest age group perceives these two party types as rather similar. In fact, this is the smallest difference in how any age group positions two different party types. The biggest gap within an age group in positioning these two party types is found in the youngest age group. Where they perceive the “other” parties as being placed ideologically in the middle, they deviate less from the other age groups, except the oldest age group, in their placement of the right-wing parties, which they all position somewhat towards the right. The gap is also relatively big in the age group consisting of the 35- to 44-year-olds. However, where a more linear trend is found at the “other” parties, with the age groups positioning this party type more and more towards the right the older the age group is, it varies more on how they perceive the right-wing parties. They agree more on the positioning of the right-wing parties with smaller differences in how they place this party type, however, the oldest age group varies significantly from the other.

5.2.4 Party type differences

Looking at all three party types, the oldest age group positions the parties with the least deviation between them. However, whereas the 65 and older perceive the left-wing parties and the “other” parties as being positioned more towards the right compared to the other age groups, they perceive the right-wing parties as being positioned much more towards the centre and thus more towards the left. The youngest age group perceives both the left-wing and the right-wing parties more moderately than the middle-aged age groups. The age groups in the middle, the 35- to 44-year-olds and the 45- to 54-year-olds deviate the most when looking at where they place the left-wing parties and the right-wing parties and place these two party types more radically than the other age groups. Thus, they perceive the left-wing parties as being more to the left and the right-wing parties as being more towards the right than the other age groups, especially compared to the youngest and the oldest age groups.

All age groups perceive left-wing parties as being more towards the left than they perceive right-wing parties as being towards the right. Furthermore, the “other” parties are perceived as being towards the right side of the centre among all age groups. Thus, the age groups all position the “other” parties and the right-wing parties closer to each other compared to the difference in how they place the “other” parties and the left-wing parties. The age groups perceive the right-wing parties as being less different

from the “other” parties than how they perceive the left-wing parties, which they all position far from the centre.

5.3 Regional differences in party placement

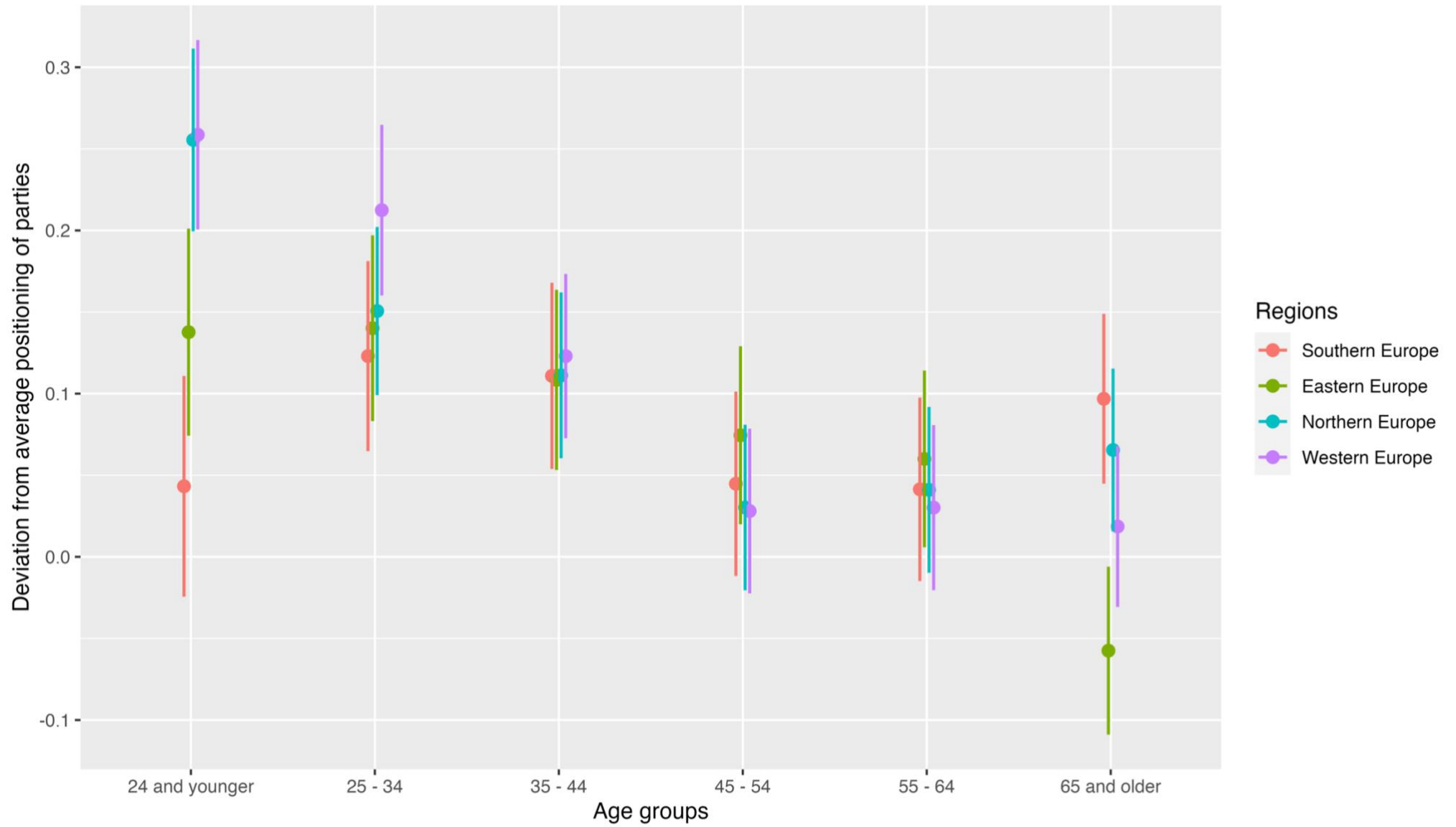
In section 5.1, I found that there are differences between how young people position and perceive political parties ideologically compared to older age groups. In this section, I will focus on the regional differences between how the age groups position the political parties. Every age group in each region, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, and Western Europe, will be assessed and compared. Thus, the differences between the age groups in each region are examined individually and the age groups across the four regions are then further examined and compared. This examination is based on hypotheses 2 and 3, with hypothesis 2 anticipating that *the gap between how young people and older age groups place political parties will be bigger in Eastern European countries compared to Northern and Western European countries*. Hypothesis 3 anticipates that *the young in Southern Europe perceive political parties more similar to the older age groups than is the case in other European regions*.

To test these hypotheses, a two-way interaction between the “age group” variable and the “region” variable is examined. The examination is primarily based on Figure 3 which is based on a multilevel regression model. The table for the multilevel regression model can be found in the appendix, Table 8. As was the case in the first analysis of this chapter, section 5.1, the model that fits the data the best is the one with the added individual-level control variables, with the same control variables having an impact on people’s ideological perception of political parties. The youngest age group in Southern Europe functions as the reference group. All age groups in Northern and Western Europe have a statistically significant effect at the 0.01 level. The statistical significance for the age groups in Eastern Europe varies between the 0.1, 0.05 and 0.01 levels, with the 45- to 54-year-old age group not being statistically significant.

5.3.1 Differences between the age groups

Many of the six age groups across the four regions agree in their positioning of the political parties and tend to place the parties, on average, similarly. Mainly age groups 3, 4 and 5 are very similar in their average placement of the parties across the regions. However, big differences can be found between the four regions when looking at the youngest and the oldest age groups, where the age groups deviate a lot from each other in their average positioning of the parties.

Figure 3: Regional differences in the average placement of political parties



When comparing the youngest age groups, those aged 24 and younger, in the four regions, the biggest deviations in the average positioning of the political parties are found. Thus, this age group has the largest regional differences and is the age group that agrees the least in its perception of the parties. In Northern and Western Europe, this age group is very similar in its average party placement. However, the youngest age group in these two regions are the two groups that deviate the most from the average placement among all individuals in all four regions. Moreover, the youngest age groups in these two regions are the two groups that deviate the most to the left compared to the average, and thus perceive the parties, on average, as being positioned more to the left on the ideological dimension.

Northern and Western Europe deviate the most from Southern Europe in this age group, with Eastern Europe, on average, positioning the parties in between these three regions. However, Eastern Europe is closer to Southern Europe in its average party placement. Thus, in this age group, Eastern Europe positions the parties, on average, between the other three age groups, with Southern Europe positioning the parties the most to the right while Northern and Western Europe position the parties the most to the left. Eastern Europe positions the parties more to the right than Northern and Western Europe but more to the left than Southern Europe, on average.

The second youngest age group, those aged 25 to 34, positions the political parties, on average, much more similar across the regions than is the case with the youngest age group. However, Western Europe deviates more from the other three regions in this age group, placing the parties, on average, more towards the left. The other three regions in this age group position the political parties much closer to one another. Nevertheless, Southern Europe still places the parties more to the right compared to the other regions and deviates the least among all from the average placement. Next is Eastern Europe, which places the parties a tad more to the left compared to Southern Europe, and then Northern Europe which deviates a bit further towards the left in its party positioning. Northern Europe and Eastern Europe are the most similar in their party positioning in this age group, and as with the youngest age group, Southern Europe deviates the most towards the right and Western Europe deviates the most towards the left, however, the differences are much smaller in this age group. Thus, the same order as in the youngest age groups is still to be found here.

Age group 3, the 35- to 44-year-olds, is the age group where the four regions deviate the least from each other in the placement of the political parties on the left-right scale. Eastern, Northern and

Southern Europe position the political parties, on average, at the same position, with Western Europe deviating a tiny bit more to the left in their average placement.

The people aged 45 to 54 are also rather similar in their average placement of the political parties. However, bigger deviations between the regions are to be found than was seen with age group 3. As with the youngest age group, Northern and Western Europe position the parties at the same place. Conversely, opposite of the youngest age group, these two regions position the political parties more to the right compared to the other two regions. Southern Europe is close to Northern and Western Europe in their average positioning of the parties but deviates more to the left compared to the two regions. Eastern Europe is in this age group the most different compared to the other regions in their average party positioning, placing the parties further to the left than the three other regions.

As with age group 4, age group 5, the 55- to 64-year-olds, position the political parties, on average, very similar across all four regions. Northern and Southern Europe position the parties at the same point, with Western Europe deviating slightly more towards the right in their placement of the parties. Eastern Europe positions the parties, on average, more towards the left on the scale compared to the other three regions. Furthermore, Eastern Europe deviates more towards the left of Northern and Southern Europe than Western Europe deviates towards the right compared to the two middle regions in this age group.

The oldest age groups deviate much more from each other than the previous age groups did across the four regions. Only the youngest age groups deviate more in their perception of the political parties in the regions. Eastern Europe positions the political parties, on average, more to the right of the average positioning of the parties among all individuals, and is the only group, both in terms of age and region, that on average positions the parties more to the right of the average placement. Western Europe, in this age group, positions the parties slightly to the left of the average placement but is close to this point. Even more to the left is Northern Europe to be found, with this region on average placing the parties more to the left than Western Europe and thus also more to the left than the overall average placement. The 65-year-olds and older in Southern Europe position the parties around 0.1 points more to the left than the average positioning of the parties and is the region of the oldest age group that on average deviates the most to the left. In this age group, Southern and Eastern Europe deviates the most from each other.

5.3.2 Differences within the regions

The age groups in Northern and Western Europe are quite similar in their positioning of the political parties. The youngest age group in both regions deviates the same amount from the average positioning of political parties, as mentioned, and are the two age groups that deviate the most towards the left compared to the average placement of all the age groups across all four regions.

In Western Europe, the age groups deviate more and more from the youngest age group the older the people in the age group are. Moreover, the older the age group, the positioning of the parties deviate more to the right. The youngest and second youngest age groups position the political parties with around 0.5 points difference, whereas age group 3, the 35- to 44-year-olds, deviates with almost 1 point from the second youngest age group. This trend follows to the next age group, age group 4, which also deviates almost 1 point from age group 3. Thus, there is a big gap between how the youngest age group positions political parties and how those aged 45 to 54 position the parties ideologically. However, this trend stops here as age groups 4 and 5, those aged 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 position the parties completely alike. The oldest age group deviates slightly to the right of these two age groups, thus being the age group that deviates the most from the youngest age group while also being the age group that deviates the least from the overall average positioning of political parties.

In Northern Europe, the youngest age group deviates much more from the other age groups than in Western Europe, however, a similar linear trend between the four youngest age groups is seen in this region as was the case in Western Europe. In Northern Europe, the 25- to 34-year-olds deviate just over 1 point from the youngest age group, which is the largest deviation between these two age groups across the four regions. The deviation between the second youngest age group and the 35- to 44-year-olds is more moderate, being less than 0.5 points. Then, the deviation between the 35- to 44-year-olds and the 45- to 54-year-olds broadens, as the 45- to 54-year-olds position the parties a sizeable amount more to the right. As with the age group differences in Western Europe, the linear trend between the age group stops here in Northern Europe as well. Those aged 55 to 65 deviate marginally more to the left than those aged 44 to 55. Thus, this age group, age group 5, deviates slightly less from the youngest age group than age group 4. The oldest age group in Northern Europe deviates more towards the left than age groups 4 and 5, leading it to deviate less from the youngest age group than these two age groups. It still deviates more from the youngest age group than age groups 2 and 3 but is not the age group that deviates the most from the youngest.

In Eastern Europe, the youngest and second youngest age groups deviate equally from the average positioning of the political parties and thus position the parties at the same point. Age group 3 deviates a bit to the right in their positioning of political parties compared to the two youngest age groups. Age group 4 deviates further to the right compared to age group 3, however, the differences are small. Age group 5, the second oldest age group, deviates marginally to the right from age group 4, however, the difference is not substantial. Thus, the differences from the youngest age group to the second oldest age group are small and all the age groups deviate within less than 1 point from each other. Moreover, the older the age group, the more it deviates to the right compared to the youngest age group, just as with Northern and Western Europe. Looking at the oldest age group, the 65-year-olds and older, this age group deviates much more from the other five age groups, with more than 1 point from the second oldest age group. Whereas the five age groups position the political parties rather similarly, the oldest age group perceives the political parties very differently from the five other age groups. The oldest age group deviates the most from the two youngest age groups, thus deviating more to the right in its placement of the parties. Furthermore, the oldest age group in Eastern Europe is the age group that overall deviates the most to the right in positioning the parties ideologically.

Opposite to the other three regions, the age groups in Southern Europe do not position the political parties more and more towards the right compared to the youngest age group. In Southern Europe, those aged 24 and younger, those aged 45 to 54 and the 55- to 64-year-olds, all position the political parties, on average, at the same place. Thus, these three age groups have a similar perception of the political parties and where they are placed on the ideological left-right scale. It should however be noted that the intercept, which indicates the youngest age group in Southern Europe, and functions as a reference group, is not statically significant. The three other age groups in Southern Europe, those aged 25 to 34, 35 to 44 and the oldest age group, the 65-year-olds and older, also position the political parties fairly similar to one another. They all deviate more to the left in their positioning of the parties compared to the three other age groups that were first mentioned. The second youngest age group deviates the most to the left in its positioning of the political parties compared to the other age groups, while the youngest age group, the 45- to 54-year-olds and the 55- to 64-year-olds deviate the most towards the right in Southern Europe. The differences between the age groups in Southern Europe are much smaller than in the other three regions and the young and older perceive the parties more similar in this region.

It should however be noted that the Southern Europe coefficients vary in terms of significance with some of the age groups in this region not being statistically significant and thus might show relatively weak effects.

Summing up, in Southern Europe, the young and the older are the most alike in their positioning of the political parties comparing all four regions. The region in which the youngest age group deviates the most from the oldest age group in their perception of parties is Western Europe. In Eastern Europe and Northern Europe, the youngest age groups deviate the same amount from the oldest age groups, which is only a bit less than is the case in Western Europe. However, whereas the oldest age group is the age group that deviates the most from the youngest age group in both Eastern and Western Europe, it is the age group consisting of people aged 45 to 54 years that deviates the most from the youngest age group in Northern Europe. In Southern Europe, the age group that deviates the most from the youngest age group is the second youngest age group. Furthermore, in Eastern, Northern and Western Europe, the older age groups deviate more to the right in their party positioning compared to the youngest age groups, whereas the opposite is the case in Southern Europe, where the oldest age group position the parties more to the left in their average positioning of the political parties.

5.4 Validity of Results

In this section, the results in terms of their external and internal validity will be discussed. Overall, the results have a high degree of both external and internal validity, however, there are some possible sources of concern for the validity of the results.

5.4.1 External validity

As mentioned in section 4.5, my datasets consist of a high number of observations, which is positive in terms of the external validity of the results. Furthermore, no respondents are excluded based on the independent variable, as all ages are included in the analysis. Thus, as my data are based on several countries and elections over a period of 20 years and include many observations, the results are considered to be generalisable over time and space. Moreover, the collection of countries included in the datasets consists of all European regions, various political systems, and social and cultural contexts, which gives me great confidence, with this taken altogether, that the findings in this thesis are applicable to all of Europe and possibly to all other democracies as well. This implies that the findings have a high external validity. Thus, as the models in the previous chapter showed, the

different age groups position the political parties differently with young people deviating the most from the oldest age groups in their perception of the political parties, I believe that this perception of the parties also applies to later years and elections.

However, a possible concern for the results is that my data only consist of 29 countries (i.e., top-level clusters). How many clusters are needed in a multilevel model to get reliable estimates is still an open discussion, with the minimum number varying from 25 to 50 (McNeish & Stapleton, 2016). Thus, my dataset is at the lower end, and it could be argued that my models do not consist of enough top-level clusters (level 3 units). Therefore, the 3-levelled sample size is insufficient for drawing inferential conclusions for the variables on the third level, and I avoid interpreting the significance of the country-level predictors (ibid.). However, it still serves a purpose to cluster the variance of relevant variables on the lower levels to control for the cross-contextual variation (Gellman & Hill, 2007).

The respondents are not asked about all the participating parties that participated in the given national elections, which will have limited the data on how all parties are positioned. However, the respondents are asked about at least six parties and up to nine parties, which will have covered a wide range of parties in each country, leading to sufficient party data. Yet, by only including the largest parties in each election, several left-wing and right-wing parties have been excluded from being asked about in the datasets. This has limited the number of observations in the model from section 5.2, analysing how the respondents position these specific types of parties. Some countries were excluded because no left-wing or right-wing parties participated in an election, however, most often, a country had to be excluded because the respondents were not asked about the left-wing or right-wing parties that had participated in the election. By focusing specifically on left-wing and right-wing parties, I excluded several countries in this part of the analysis, which led to limitations on the data. This lowered the degree of external validity in this section. However, it is still possible to generalise the results to the populations in the countries that were included.

5.4.2 Internal validity

The validity of the results partly depends on whether they are statistically significant at conventional levels of uncertainty. In social sciences, the conventional level typically used is 0.05, i.e., a significance level of 5% (Christophersen, 2018: 29). The significance level being at 5% means that the probability that type-1 errors have been made among the reported statistically significant results

is 5%. Most of my results were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, which is below the 5% mark, indicating that the results are very unlikely to be explained by chance or random factors. Thus, the results indicate that the effects in the models are true and there is less than a 1% probability that the null hypothesis is correct. However, the estimates that failed to reach a statistical significance of 5% have a greater chance of type-1 errors having occurred, which means that I am not able to reject the null hypotheses for these estimates. Most of the results were significant, which is positive for the internal validity of the results.

As mentioned in section 4.5, there is a risk that the dependent variable might be understood or interpreted differently across the countries or over time. Despite the questions being translated to national languages and carefully formulated to be universally understood, the risk prevails of there being different understandings of what ideology entails, especially across the different regions. Looking at the results from the model that analyse the regional differences in Europe, many of the age groups across the four regions position the parties rather similarly. This may indicate that the respondents have the same, or at least very similar, understanding and interpretation of ideology and what the ideological left-right scale entails as well as where parties typically are positioned, since they have a similar perception of where the parties are positioned.

5.4.2.1 Causality

The results from the models presented in Chapter 5 remain robust across the various model specifications. That is, when adding the control variables to the models they remain significant and stable. However, the robustness of the results is not evidence of causality between the dependent and independent variables. To ensure a high degree of internal validity, the causal inference between the dependent and independent variables needs to be valid. First, one needs to make sure that there is a correlation between X and Y. Moreover, causality implies that X leads to Y through a causal mechanism. Thus, the value of the independent variable should be decided before the value of the dependent variable, to ensure that the direction of the correlation is in fact such that X causes Y, rather than being a response to Y (Andersen, 2012: 104). By having age as the independent variable, the time aspect of the correlation, that X causes Y and not the other way around, is not a problem. A person will always have an age before they position and perceive political parties, and how a person positions a political party could never cause a person's age. The outcome of the multilevel models in

this thesis implies that a person's age does indeed cause a certain perception of political parties' ideological positions.

Another assumption of any regression model is that the correlation between the dependent and the independent variable cannot be spurious and thus that there is no omitted variable bias. No other variables can affect either the dependent or the independent variables or make the correlation between the two disappear when added as a control variable (*ibid.*). There are no ways to perfectly control for omitted variable bias, and several of the added individual-level control variables appeared to have a significant effect on how people position political parties. However, looking at the AIC values of my models, with and without the added control variables, suggests that the age groups are the main explanatory factor when it comes to positioning the political parties on the ideological scale, as the AIC values only changed slightly between the models. I thus assume that there is a correlation between the dependent and independent variable and that this correlation is not spurious as well as it being X that causes Y, which all assumes a high internal validity for the results.

6 Discussion

In this thesis, I have examined whether young European age groups position political parties differently from the older age groups. The focus has primarily been on how much the different age groups deviate from the youngest in their positioning of the political parties, what these deviations look like when focusing on specific party types, and how the age groups differ between the four European regions. In this chapter, I will discuss the main findings that were presented in the previous chapter and include suggestions for further research.

6.1 Age group difference

Based on my theory and the previous literature on political behaviour and perception, I anticipated that young people would position political parties ideologically different from older age groups and that young people would deviate the most from the oldest age group in how they perceive the political parties. In accordance with the expectations formulated in *hypothesis 1* and *hypothesis 1a*, the findings suggest that young people do position political parties differently from other age groups and that the older the age group, the more it deviates from the youngest age group in placing the parties on the ideological left-right scale. These findings do however vary, as it is only when the control variables are added to the model that the oldest age group deviates the most from the youngest age group. The model with the added individual-level control variables is nevertheless the most explanatory model and estimates the most significant results, leading it to be the most relevant model to analyse and discuss. The results discussed in this section are therefore based on this model.

The model which also includes the country-election level variables does not improve the significance of the results and shows that these group-level variables do not have a significant impact on the model. One of the goals of multilevel analysis is to determine the effects of individual- and group-level variables and determine whether the group-level confounders serve as moderators of individual-level relationships (Hox, 2010: 4). This has not been proven the case in this analysis. As expected, the group-level control variables, controlling for country and election effects, do not have a significant effect on the outcome or the age group coefficients. Thus, the group-level confounders do not serve as moderators of the individual-level relationship. It is therefore, in principle, only relevant to control for the individual-level variables, as they have an impact on the respondent's ideological perception of the political parties. This is in line with Dahlberg's (2009a, 2013) findings on individual factors having a high significant effect on people's perceptual agreement. Thus, it would be relevant to look

further into individual-level variables when examining people's perception of political parties and study their individual effects.

6.2 Left and right positioning

The findings in the first section of the results chapter showed that young people tend to position political parties more towards the left than the other age groups, with each age group, the older it gets, positioning the parties more and more towards the right compared to the youngest age group. However, this trend waned when studying how the age groups position specific party types. The findings on how the age groups place left-wing and right-wing parties do not show the same linear trend among the age groups as was found when examining all the political parties at once. This linear trend was only found when examining the "other" party types, which consist of all other parties than left- and right-wing parties. Placing this "other" party group, the age groups positioned this group more and more towards the right end of the ideological scale, the older the age group got. This is consistent with the findings in the first part of the analysis, which further validates *hypotheses 1* and *1a*.

However, as mentioned, the oldest age group is not the age group that deviates the most from the youngest age group when positioning the left-wing and right-wing parties on the ideological dimension. When examining the left-wing parties, the oldest age group deviates the least from the youngest age group in placing this party type. Furthermore, the youngest age group is the age group that positions the left-wing parties the least extreme, i.e., the most towards the centre of the ideological scale. This is interesting when considering the fact that young people tend to vote for left-wing parties (Rekker, 2022). Thus, the findings imply that young people perceive left-wing parties as being "less towards the left" and not as "left-wing" as others perceive them to be.

Left-wing parties are often associated with postmaterialist values and so are young people. Thus, by placing the left-wing parties less towards the left than the other age groups, it can be discussed that young people perceive left-wing parties, and thus postmaterialist values, as being more mainstream. This could further partly explain their tendencies to vote for this type of party. Young people do not perceive left-wing parties as being far left in their ideology, and they do not perceive them as risky to vote for. Moreover, many young people tend to prefer postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1997: 25), which for them thus will be "normal" values, whereas older generations possibly will perceive these values as more radical, leading them to perceive left-wing parties, being associated with postmaterialist values, as more radical and thus positioning them further towards the left end of the

ideological scale. This does, however, not explain why the oldest age group positions the left-wing parties furthest towards the centre of the ideological dimension next after the youngest age group.

The oldest age group perceives both left-wing and right-wing parties as being less radical, i.e., more towards the ideological centre, than most of the other age groups. Particularly, that age group positions the right-wing parties and the “other” parties rather close to each other, especially compared to how the other age groups position these parties. Right-wing parties are often considered to prioritise more traditional values when forming their politics and to be parties based on traditional values. Furthermore, older people tend to prioritise materialist values, which moreover are considered to be traditional values. Thus, as right-wing parties support more traditional values, which older people in general also support, it is likely that older people perceive these parties as being “normal” or more towards the centre. This may explain why the oldest age group positions the right-wing parties much more towards the centre of the ideological dimension than the other age groups do, as this age group and this party type share similar materialist values. As such, it is the same case as with the youngest age group who places the left-wing parties, who they share the same postmaterialist values with, more towards the centre of the ideological scale. The young prefer postmaterialist values which often correspond with left-wing parties’ values while the older age groups prefer materialist values, which often correspond with right-wing parties’ values. Thus, both age groups perceive these party types as being positioned more towards the centre of the ideological scale than the other age groups, as they perceive the parties’ politics as being more like the norm.

Nevertheless, the results clearly do not support *hypothesis 1b*, which states that *young people will position political parties more towards the right on the ideological scale than older age groups*. When examining all the parties at once, the opposite is the case, with young people being the age group that positions the parties the most towards the left. Moreover, when positioning the right-wing parties, it is the middle-aged age groups that position the parties the most towards the right, with the youngest age group placing the right-wing parties neither the most towards the left nor right when comparing the age groups. However, when positioning the left-wing parties, the youngest age group is the age group that positions this party type, on average, the most towards the right out of all the age groups. This clearly shows that there are differences among the age groups in their perceptions of the different party types. Thus, even though it is clear how all parties on average are positioned by each age group, further research could focus on examining more specific party types, for example green parties, that

have been found difficult to place on the traditional left-right scale, or more traditional conservative or social democratic parties, in greater detail, to get a broader understanding of how the different age groups perceive these party types. As the findings in this thesis show, there are clear differences in how left-wing and right-wing parties are positioned among the age groups, which are parties that are positioned on either end of the scale. It would therefore be relevant to investigate how such differences would play out with other party types.

6.3 Regional differences

This thesis has furthermore brought attention to the regional differences there exist in how the different age groups position the political parties. Contrary to the expectations formulated in *hypothesis 2*, the findings imply that, overall, the gap between the youngest age group and the older age groups is the biggest in Northern and Western Europe and not in Eastern Europe. However, the results are not all clear-cut. While the differences are big between the four youngest age groups in Northern and Western Europe, there is a big difference between the two youngest age groups and the oldest age group in Eastern Europe. Thus, the differences between the age groups in Northern and Western Europe are overall bigger, as there are big differences between several of the age groups, whereas the only big difference in Eastern Europe is between the youngest age groups and the oldest age group. However, the gap between the youngest age group and the oldest age group is very similar in all three regions. *Hypothesis 2* thus cannot be confirmed but the regional differences in these three regions are still worth looking into.

Northern and Western Europe are overall very similar in their average positioning of the political parties. This is to be expected taking the regions, and countries within them, their political and party systems, history, and culture into consideration, which are all considered to be much alike. Many of the countries have similar party systems and party types which likely could lead the citizens of these countries to perceive parties more similarly. Furthermore, these two regions experienced the transition from materialist to postmaterialist values among the age groups at around the same time. Thus, it is expected that the two regions will perceive the political parties similarly across the age groups, as the age groups are expected to have grown up in similar environments and to share similar values.

In Eastern Europe, the five “youngest” age groups perceive the political parties rather similarly. The Eastern European countries all experienced the fall of the Soviet Union and the transformation into

becoming new democracies with newly established parties in the early 1990s. Thus, most of the people in these countries have been able to follow and watch new political parties being established and grow, leading them to possibly get similar perceptions of these parties. Whereas in Northern and Western European, the countries in these two regions have been democracies for a much longer time with some of the parties in these countries being formed hundred years ago. Thus, the older age groups in these countries have been able to follow these parties all their lives and have developed opinions about these parties at different times than the younger age groups have, leading to different opinions and perceptions of what these parties stand for and where they are positioned on the left-right scale. The oldest age group in Eastern Europe will have lived many years or most of their lives in the Eastern Bloc, experiencing politics very differently from people growing up in democracies and will possibly be emphasising materialist values. This will likely have given this age group a different outlook on political parties leading them to perceive them differently from other age groups. This could also partly explain why age groups 4 and 5 in Eastern Europe position the parties a bit different from the three youngest age groups. They will have lived longer under the Soviet Union, likely emphasising materialist values leading them to partly perceive political parties differently from the youngest age groups, who have grown up in a democracy and spend most of their lives in a democracy.

Another explanation for why the age groups do not vary much from each other in Eastern Europe is related to the reasoning behind hypothesis 3. Youth unemployment is somewhat high in Eastern Europe, but still lower than in Southern Europe (Eurostat, 2021). This could lead the younger age groups to emphasise more on materialist values which likely would be similar to the older age groups that are expected to emphasise materialist values. Thus, the youngest age groups in Northern and Western Europe would be expected to prioritise postmaterialist values the most, explaining why they differ the most from the older age groups. This could furthermore explain the big differences within the youngest age group across the four regions. The young in Northern and Western Europe are likely to feel more economically secure leading them to emphasise postmaterialist values and focus on issues such as the environment and human rights, whereas the young in Eastern and Southern Europe may feel less economically secure, leading them to emphasise materialist values to a larger degree.

In line with *hypothesis 3*, the findings suggest that the youngest age group in Southern Europe perceives the political parties more like the older age groups than is the case in the other European regions. The theoretical argument behind this argument suggests that it is due to the young people in this region emphasising materialist values to a larger degree than postmaterialist values, because of

the high youth unemployment leading them to value economic security. Furthermore, young people live at home with their families for much longer than in the other three regions. The older age groups will moreover experience the effects of the high youth unemployment leading them to prioritise the materialist values they also grew up with. Thus, all age groups will emphasise materialist values more in this region. This economic effect on the age groups is however not tested directly. Further research could therefore, for example, in greater detail examine how economic issues and security influence people's perception of political parties.

However, the effects in Southern Europe are not statistically significant. Therefore, because the risk of type-1 error is greater than 5%, I am not able to confirm *hypothesis 3*.

There are clear regional differences across Europe in how the different age groups perceive political parties. However, there are several possible explanations for these differences. This leads one to think there might also be some more specific country differences that were not caught by the multilevel model. Studying the single countries in more detail could be an avenue for further research and could help shed light on more specific reasons for the regional differences that are found.

6.4 Generational effects?

Much research has debated whether differences between young and older people in terms of political perception, behaviour and participation are due to generational effects, life-cycle effects, or period effects. The way this analysis is conducted makes it impossible to suggest whether the findings are due to generational effects. The study is conducted based on data that covers several elections over 20 years. However, all respondents who were 24 or younger when responding to the surveys over the 20 years, have all been coded into the same age group consisting of those aged 24 and younger. Thus, this study does not consider possible generational effects by for example following how the youngest age group in the late 1990s, where the first data are from, has changed its perception later as the individuals have grown older. Thus, it is not possible to conclude whether there is a difference in how young people positioned political parties in the 1990s and how young people positioned parties in the 2010s and how big a difference there might be. The findings do somewhat imply that the individual's perception of the political parties could be due to life-cycle and period effects as there are big differences between the young and the oldest, implying that these differences have been there throughout the 20 years. This is in line with Rekker's (2022) findings on young people's voting behaviour, and has implications for O'Grady's (2022), Maggini's (2017) and Inglehart's (2018)

findings and studies. However, this thesis does not suggest that the differences between young and old are not due to generational effects but instead that life-cycle and period effects possibly have an impact. This is another great avenue for further studies, and it should be examined whether and how big the generational effects are in terms of the different age group's perception of the political parties.

7 Conclusion

Extensive research has been done on how people perceive political parties in general as well as on how the youth participates politically, but less is known about whether young people perceive political parties differently from older age groups. This thesis has sought to fill this gap by studying how different age groups position political parties on the ideological left-right scale. Thus, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: *Do young people in Europe position political parties differently from older age groups on an ideological left-right scale?*

Drawing on theory on ideology and the ideological left-right dimension as well as theories on materialism and postmaterialism, I argued that young people would deviate from older age groups in how they position political parties on the ideological left-right scale and that young people would deviate the most from the oldest group in its perception of the parties. Individuals, age groups and generations grow up at different times, experiencing the world differently as they grow up and throughout their lives. Furthermore, the world is constantly changing and developing, which leads people of different ages to have different priorities and prioritising different values. All in all, many factors have a say in how different age groups perceive politics and political parties differently. In accordance with the theoretical arguments, the findings of this thesis imply that young people do position political parties differently on the ideological left-right scale from the older age groups and that the older the age group is, the more it deviates from the youngest age group's positioning of the political parties.

The findings imply that, overall, when looking at all parties, the youngest age group positions the political parties more towards the left with each age group positioning the parties more and more towards the right the older it is, compared to the youngest age group. However, these findings change slightly when focusing on more specific party types. When focusing on left-wing parties, the youngest age group position this party type the most towards the right out of the age groups, and the oldest age group is now the age group that deviates the least from the youngest age group. On the other hand, when positioning right-wing parties, the youngest age group positions this party type in the middle of where all the age groups position the parties. This suggests that even though the youngest age group overall positions political parties the most towards the left out of all the age groups and deviates the most from the oldest age group, it also depends on the specific party type the age groups position and differences between the age groups will occur depending on the party type.

It can furthermore be concluded that there are regional differences in terms of how differently the age groups position the political parties in Europe. The age groups in Southern Europe position the parties much more alike than in the other three European regions, with the youngest age group positioning the political parties at the same point as those aged 45 to 64 in this region. In Eastern Europe, the three youngest age groups agree in their positioning of the parties, however, in this region, a big difference is found in how the oldest age group position the parties compared to the other age groups. In Northern and Western Europe, it is the three oldest age groups that agree the most with each other and position the political parties at the same point. Here, large differences are found both between the three youngest age groups and especially between the youngest age group and the oldest age groups. In these two regions, the youth clearly perceive political parties differently from older people. These regional differences in and between the age groups may very well be explained by the individuals emphasising different values with some prioritising materialist values while others emphasise postmaterialist values. However, the exact reasons for the differences are not tested directly.

Overall, it can be concluded that young people deviate from older age groups when positioning political parties on the ideological left-right scale and that they deviate the most from the oldest age group when focusing on all types of political parties. How the different age groups position parties furthermore vary depending on the specific party type but the young deviates from the other age groups regardless. Moreover, regional differences exist both regarding the degree to which the age groups deviate from each other within each region and also in terms of how differently a specific age group positions the political parties across the regions.

Understanding how different age groups position and perceive political parties ideologically, and particularly how young people deviate from older people in their perceptions, is of great importance, as it helps to understand how people and different population groups think and behave politically and why they might do so. Moreover, it can help political parties become more representative and responsive to the ideological diversity across the age groups and within the younger generation. Understanding how different age groups and thus different groups of the population perceive political parties and how they think of ideology and political behaviour, is relevant for political parties and actors when they make campaigns, inform the public or groups of the public and when tailoring new policies. By understanding the public, the most useful and beneficial information and policies can be

made and shared by political actors. Furthermore, getting insight into age differences enables political parties to address specific concerns and priorities of young people more effectively. Political parties can moreover enhance their appeal to young people and encourage their active involvement in the political process when having a better understanding of young people's ideological perception of parties.

Despite its limitations, this study constitutes one attempt to directly study how age influences how people position and perceive political parties. Taking all age groups into consideration when creating new policies or sharing new political information can be a challenge. However, understanding some of the ways age groups differ from each other in their understandings and perceptions of politics and political parties can help to better include all groups in a complex political world.

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Appendix

Figure 4: Scaled residuals for model 3 in table 1

```

Linear mixed model fit by REML ['lmerMod']
Formula: deviation_indi ~ as.factor(age_group) + as.factor(gender) + as.factor(education) +
  as.factor(house_inc) + as.factor(rural_urban) + ideology_self +
  effective_parties + polityIV + regime_age + (1 | country/election_year)
Data: cses_subset

REML criterion at convergence: 2041283

Scaled residuals:
  Min      1Q  Median      3Q      Max
-4.5883 -0.6168 -0.0154  0.5894  4.6614

Random effects:
Groups              Name          Variance Std.Dev.
election_year:country (Intercept) 0.0006514 0.02552
country              (Intercept) 0.0001141 0.01068
Residual                                4.1573689 2.03896
Number of obs: 478813, groups: election_year:country, 81; country, 28

```

Figure 5: Age group deviations in positioning of left-wing, right-wing and other parties

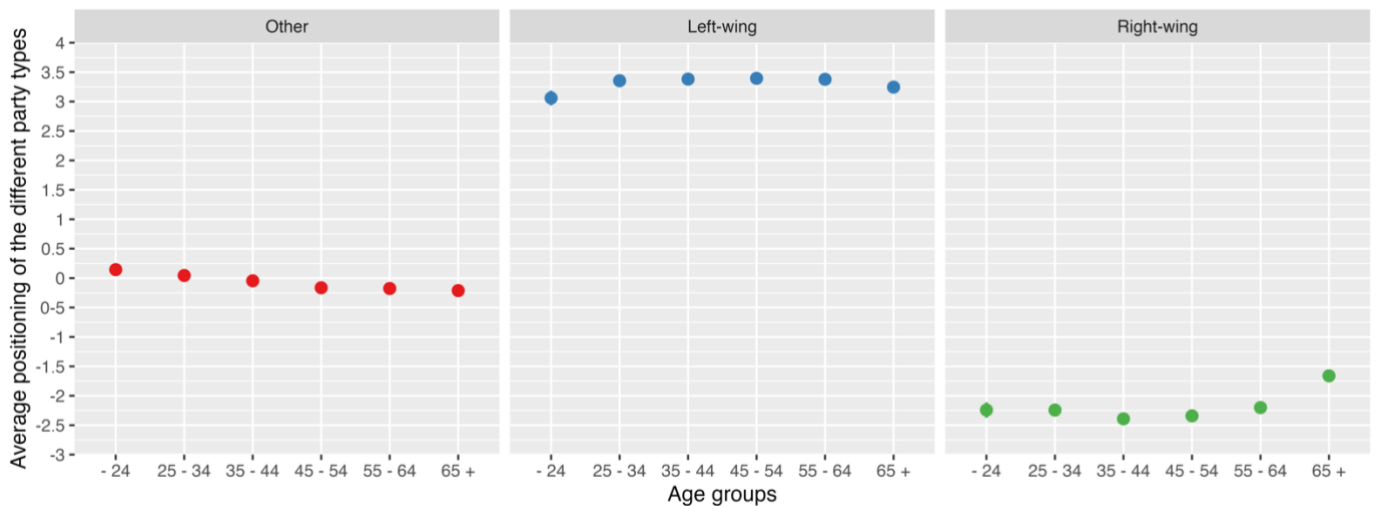


Table 5: Overview of countries, elections and left- and right-wing parties

Country	Election years	Right-wing parties	Left-wing parties
Czech Republic	1996, 2013	Association for the Republic – Czech Republican Party (SPR-RSC); Dawn of Direct Democracy (Usvit)	The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)
Denmark	2001, 2007	Danish People’s Party	The Red-Green Unity List
Finland	2007, 2011, 2015	True Finns	Left Alliance
France	2002, 2007, 2012	Front National	French Communist Party; Revolutionary Communist League; Left Front;
Germany	2005, 2009, 2013	Alternative for Germany (AfD); National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD)	Left/Party of Democratic Socialism Left Party (Die Linke)
Greece	2009, 2012, 2015	Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS); The Independent Greeks (ANEL)	Communist Party of Greece (KKE); Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left)
Hungary	1998	Hungarian Justice and Life Party	Hungarian Worker’s Party
Netherlands	2002, 2006, 2010	List Pim Fortuyn; Party for Freedom	Socialist Party
Norway	2005, 2009, 2013	Progress Party (FrP)	Red Party
Poland	2001, 2005	League of Polish Families	Self Defence of the Republic Polish
Sweden	2006, 2014	Sweden Democrats	Left Party

Table 6: Ideological differences in placement of left- & right-wing parties among the age groups

	Dependent variable: Ideological placement of parties		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constant	5.159*** (0.112)	5.198*** (0.118)	8.247*** (1.679)
Age groups:			
24 and younger		(reference group)	
25 - 34	0.143*** (0.026)	0.102*** (0.026)	0.102*** (0.026)
35 - 44	0.231*** (0.025)	0.200*** (0.025)	0.200*** (0.025)
45 - 54	0.344*** (0.025)	0.313*** (0.025)	0.313*** (0.025)
55 - 64	0.341*** (0.025)	0.327*** (0.025)	0.327*** (0.025)
65 and older	0.344*** (0.025)	0.362*** (0.025)	0.362*** (0.025)
Party type:			
Other		(reference group)	
Left-wing	-2.971*** (0.051)	-2.981*** (0.051)	-2.981*** (0.051)
Right-wing	2.393*** (0.055)	2.391*** (0.055)	2.391*** (0.055)
<i>Individual level controls</i>			
Gender (female)		0.001 (0.010)	0.001 (0.010)
Education:			
No education		(reference group)	
Primary/Lower Secondary		-0.008 (0.043)	-0.007 (0.043)
Higher secondary		0.065 (0.044)	0.066 (0.044)
Post-secondary (non-university)		0.085* (0.044)	0.086* (0.044)
University		0.201*** (0.044)	0.201*** (0.044)
Income:			
Lowest quintile		(reference group)	
Second quintile		0.009 (0.016)	0.009 (0.016)
Third quintile		0.032** (0.016)	0.032** (0.016)
Fourth quintile		0.034** (0.017)	0.034** (0.017)
Highest quintile		0.054*** (0.017)	0.054*** (0.017)
Rural/urban residence:			
Rural area/village		(reference group)	
Small or middle-sized town		-0.004 (0.015)	-0.004 (0.015)
Suburbs of large town/city		0.005 (0.016)	0.005 (0.016)
Large town/city		0.027* (0.015)	0.027* (0.015)
Individual left-right score		-0.026*** (0.002)	-0.026*** (0.002)
<i>Country-election level controls</i>			
Effective number of parties			-0.075 (0.060)
Polity IV score			-0.269 (0.164)
Regime age			-0.0003 (0.004)
<i>Age group x party type</i>			
Other x 24 and younger		(reference group)	

Left-wing parties:			
25 - 34 x Left-wing	-0.408*** (0.063)	-0.400*** (0.063)	-0.400*** (0.063)
35 - 44 x Left-wing	-0.520*** (0.061)	-0.510*** (0.061)	-0.510*** (0.061)
45 - 54 x Left-wing	-0.658*** (0.061)	-0.645*** (0.061)	-0.645*** (0.061)
55 - 64 x Left-wing	-0.648*** (0.061)	-0.636*** (0.061)	-0.636*** (0.061)
65+ x Left-wing	-0.548*** (0.061)	-0.535*** (0.061)	-0.535*** (0.061)
Right-wing parties:			
25 - 34 x Right-wing	-0.106 (0.068)	-0.104 (0.068)	-0.104 (0.068)
35 - 44 x Right-wing	-0.043 (0.066)	-0.041 (0.066)	-0.041 (0.066)
45 - 54 x Right-wing	-0.215*** (0.066)	-0.213*** (0.066)	-0.213*** (0.066)
55 - 64 x Right-wing	-0.367*** (0.066)	-0.364*** (0.066)	-0.364*** (0.066)
65+ x Right-wing	-0.929*** (0.066)	-0.925*** (0.066)	-0.925*** (0.066)
Observations	246,053	246,053	246,053
Log Likelihood	-574,038.800	-573,891.500	-573,897.100
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,148,120.000	1,147,851.000	1,147,868.000
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	1,148,338.000	1,148,205.000	1,148,253.000

Note:

* p < 0.05
 ** p < 0.01
 *** p < 0.001

Table 7: Differences between the average positioning of the three party types

	Dependent variable: Deviation from average party positioning		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constant	0.016 (0.021)	-0.083* (0.049)	-2.490*** (0.159)
Age groups:			
24 and younger		(reference group)	
25 - 34	-0.152*** (0.026)	-0.109*** (0.026)	-0.100*** (0.026)
35 - 44	-0.228*** (0.025)	-0.201*** (0.025)	-0.190*** (0.025)
45 - 54	-0.343*** (0.025)	-0.316*** (0.025)	-0.308*** (0.025)
55 - 64	-0.336*** (0.025)	-0.321*** (0.025)	-0.321*** (0.025)
65 and older	-0.341*** (0.025)	-0.347*** (0.025)	-0.357*** (0.025)
Party type			
Other parties		(reference group)	
Left-wing	2.870*** (0.051)	2.884*** (0.051)	2.916*** (0.051)
Right-wing	-2.403*** (0.055)	-2.399*** (0.055)	-2.386*** (0.055)
<i>Individual level controls</i>			
Gender (female)		-0.002 (0.010)	0.004 (0.010)
Education:			
No education		(reference group)	
Primary/Lower Secondary		0.021 (0.042)	-0.037 (0.043)
Higher secondary		0.018 (0.042)	-0.056 (0.043)
Post-secondary (non-university)		0.029 (0.043)	-0.101** (0.044)
University		-0.136*** (0.043)	-0.235*** (0.043)
Household income:			
Lowest quintile		(reference group)	
Second quintile		0.0003 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.016)
Third quintile		-0.042*** (0.016)	-0.039** (0.016)
Fourth quintile		-0.022 (0.016)	-0.027* (0.016)
Highest quintile		-0.017 (0.017)	-0.024 (0.017)
Rural/urban residence:			
Rural area/village		(reference group)	
Small or middle-sized town		0.004 (0.014)	0.0001 (0.014)
Suburbs of large town/city		-0.0005 (0.016)	-0.053*** (0.016)
Large town/city		-0.095*** (0.015)	-0.079*** (0.015)
Individual left-right score		0.028*** (0.002)	0.026*** (0.002)
<i>Country-election level controls</i>			
Effective number of parties			0.065*** (0.006)
Polity IV score			0.213*** (0.016)
Regime age			0.001*** (0.0002)

Other parties x 24 and younger	(reference group)		
Left-wing parties:			
25 - 34 x Left-wing	0.402*** (0.063)	0.399*** (0.063)	0.394*** (0.063)
35 - 44 x Left-wing	0.519*** (0.061)	0.514*** (0.061)	0.511*** (0.061)
45 - 54 x Left-wing	0.654*** (0.061)	0.648*** (0.061)	0.643*** (0.061)
55 - 64 x Left-wing	0.649*** (0.062)	0.641*** (0.062)	0.639*** (0.062)
65+ x Left-wing	0.557*** (0.061)	0.545*** (0.061)	0.541*** (0.061)
Right-wing parties:			
25 - 34 x Right-wing	0.103 (0.069)	0.102 (0.069)	0.100 (0.069)
35 - 44 x Right-wing	0.043 (0.066)	0.043 (0.066)	0.040 (0.066)
45 - 54 x Right-wing	0.211*** (0.066)	0.211*** (0.066)	0.209*** (0.066)
55 - 64 x Right-wing	0.365*** (0.067)	0.364*** (0.067)	0.362*** (0.067)
65+ x Right-wing	0.943*** (0.066)	0.940*** (0.066)	0.938*** (0.066)
Observations	246,053	246,053	246,053
Log Likelihood	-574,830.800	-574,635.300	-574,438.500
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,149,704.000	1,149,339.000	1,148,951.000
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	1,149,922.000	1,149,693.000	1,149,336.000

Note:

* p < 0.05
 ** p < 0.01
 *** p < 0.001

Table 8: Regional differences: Age group's deviation from average placement of parties

	Dependent variable: Deviation from average party positioning		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constant	-0.048* (0.026)	0.033 (0.035)	-0.120 (0.095)
Age group:			
24 and younger		(reference category)	
25 - 34	0.059* (0.031)	0.080** (0.031)	0.080** (0.031)
35 - 44	0.058* (0.031)	0.068** (0.031)	0.068** (0.031)
45 - 54	0.001 (0.031)	0.001 (0.031)	0.002 (0.031)
55 - 64	0.011 (0.032)	-0.002 (0.032)	-0.002 (0.032)
65 and older	0.089*** (0.032)	0.053* (0.032)	0.054* (0.032)
Regions:			
South Europe		(reference category)	
East Europe	0.106*** (0.034)	0.089** (0.035)	0.094*** (0.035)
North Europe	0.221*** (0.031)	0.209*** (0.033)	0.212*** (0.033)
West Europe	0.223*** (0.032)	0.213*** (0.033)	0.215*** (0.034)
<i>Individual level controls</i>			
Gender (female)		-0.008 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.006)
Education:			
No education		(reference category)	
Primary/Lower Secondary		0.009 (0.021)	0.009 (0.021)
Higher secondary		-0.049** (0.021)	-0.049** (0.021)
Post-secondary (non-university)		-0.021 (0.022)	-0.020 (0.022)
University		-0.158*** (0.022)	-0.157*** (0.022)
Household income:			
Lowest quintile		(reference category)	
Second quintile		-0.011 (0.010)	-0.011 (0.010)
Third quintile		-0.033*** (0.010)	-0.033*** (0.010)
Fourth quintile		-0.040*** (0.010)	-0.041*** (0.010)
Highest quintile		-0.048*** (0.011)	-0.048*** (0.011)
Rural/urban residency:			
Rural area/village		(reference category)	
Small or middle-sized town		0.003 (0.008)	0.002 (0.008)
Suburbs of large town/city		-0.019** (0.009)	-0.019** (0.009)
Large town/city		-0.040*** (0.008)	-0.040*** (0.008)
Individual left-right score		0.002** (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)
<i>Country-election level controls</i>			
Effective number of parties			0.0003 (0.004)
Polity IV score			0.016* (0.009)
Regime age			-0.0001 (0.0002)
<i>Age group x region</i>			

South x 24 and younger East:		(reference category)	
25 - 34 x East	-0.077* (0.042)	-0.078* (0.042)	-0.077* (0.042)
35 - 44 x East	-0.098** (0.041)	-0.097** (0.041)	-0.097** (0.041)
45 - 54 x East	-0.069* (0.041)	-0.064 (0.041)	-0.065 (0.041)
55 - 64 x East	-0.083** (0.041)	-0.075* (0.041)	-0.076* (0.041)
65 + x East	-0.265*** (0.041)	-0.248*** (0.041)	-0.249*** (0.041)
North:			
25 - 34 x North	-0.207*** (0.038)	-0.185*** (0.038)	-0.185*** (0.038)
35 - 44 x North	-0.240*** (0.038)	-0.212*** (0.038)	-0.212*** (0.038)
45 - 54 x North	-0.258*** (0.038)	-0.226*** (0.038)	-0.227*** (0.038)
55 - 64 x North	-0.242*** (0.039)	-0.212*** (0.039)	-0.213*** (0.039)
65 + x North	-0.272*** (0.038)	-0.243*** (0.039)	-0.244*** (0.039)
West:			
25 - 34 x West	-0.126*** (0.039)	-0.126*** (0.039)	-0.126*** (0.039)
35 - 44 x West	-0.212*** (0.038)	-0.203*** (0.038)	-0.203*** (0.038)
45 - 54 x West	-0.247*** (0.038)	-0.232*** (0.038)	-0.232*** (0.038)
55 - 64 x West	-0.244*** (0.039)	-0.226*** (0.039)	-0.227*** (0.039)
65 + x West	-0.319*** (0.038)	-0.293*** (0.039)	-0.294*** (0.039)
Observations	478,813	478,813	478,813
Log Likelihood	-1,020,823.000	-1,020,607.000	-1,020,622.000
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,041,699.000	2,041,295.000	2,041,330.000
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	2,041,998.000	2,041,738.000	2,041,807.000

Note:

* p < 0.05
 ** p < 0.01
 *** p < 0.001