Social and Political Marginalization in Hard Times

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Abstract

Globalization, the current economic crisis and recent developments of welfare policies have been claimed to give rise to new cleavages between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in terms of social risk positions and in terms of political attitudes and party sympathy (Kriesi, 2006). There are, however, also reasons to expect increasing cleavages in terms of political involvement and efficacy between groups. So far the hypothesis of a relation between social and political marginalization has only been partly supported. The argument presented here is that in order to fully comprehend the political marginalization of more risk-exposed groups, and the mechanisms behind it, we need to simultaneously incorporate both the interest dimension and the trust dimension of people’s relation to politics. The central concept of political alienation is accordingly here defined as the combination of low political interest and low political trust. The analysis based on European Social Survey round 2 and 4 (2004 and 2008) show that defined in this way, political alienation is clearly linked to a social risk position in all 17 included countries. The occurrence of the financial crisis in 2008 decreased the general level of political alienation, but increased the cleavages due to social risk position. Generous and de-commodifying welfare policies do, contrary to most expectations, not seem to decrease the effect of social risk positions on political alienation. Rather, the results point, even if only vaguely so, in the opposite direction indicating that a social risk position in a generous welfare system might be seen as an anomaly and unfulfilled expectation on politics, thus increasing the political alienation.

Social risk and political alienation

Do western democracies risk polarization in the democratic citizenship? There are several indications that the economic development of the advanced democracies during recent decades has led to increased differences between various social groups, not only in material living conditions but also in relation to politics. Some claim that we are witnessing new cleavages emerging in post-modern nations as a consequence of globalization and increasing differences in life chances and conditions between the “winners” and “losers” of globalization (Kriesi, 2006, Kitschelt and Rehm, 2004). This “modernization losers” hypothesis identifies low educated, manual labour in risk for unemployment and deterioration of standard as
the losers of modernization and globalization. In the same perspective the winners
would be the well educated middle class, especially in cultural or knowledge intensive
sectors. The argument is that globalization processes lead to increasing social
differences where citizens with lower education, “unqualified” jobs, or weak relation
to the labour market bear greater costs and receive less benefits from changing
economic conditions (Scholte, 2005, Bobbio, 1987), and that this social and
economic marginalization would lead to political alienation in the sense of decrease
in political trust, engagement and involvement (Dalton, 2004, Goul Andersen and
Hoff, 2001, Kabashima, 2000). The hypothesis states that risk exposition
(modernization losers) rather than being pronounced politically might lead to an
abstention from politics all together, and that the consequences of increased social
and economic inequality have stronger political implications among more risk
exposed groups with low or few political resources, leading to political dissatisfaction
and alienation. The outcome might be that political alienation is overrepresented in
identifiable groups in society, leading to consequences for the representation of
interests of these groups and thus for political decisions made and policies
implemented. To take the argument one step further: if we can find that the
probability for political alienation is linked to certain policy arrangements, the lack of
political articulation of this group might lead to policies not taking the group into
consideration, and thus might bring about political alienation and even lead to the
growth of this group. This lead to the overarching hypothesis for this analysis: Social
risk positions increase the risk of being politically alienated.

The financial crisis of 2008

The financial turmoil that erupted in the fall of 2008 begun with a
liquidity crisis in US banks in 2007, spread globally and in the fall of 2008 it resulted
in collapses of financial institutes all over the world.1 Governments all over launched
huge rescue plans to guarantee the survival of banks and the functioning on the
financial markets, but even so the crisis led to increased unemployment, decreased
values of assets and housing and a significant decrease in GDP in many countries.

The crisis is by many considered the worst financial crisis since the 1930’s. The full consequences of the crisis on public economies might not yet (2010) been revealed. In the coming years the crisis is expected to have effects on governmental spending, including social transfers and services, when the costs of the financial crisis have consequences on the real economy of governments. Any firm conclusions on what consequences this economic crisis will have on social cleavages are therefore somewhat premature to draw. The consequences in the initial face is expected to differ between groups in that some, especially those employed in heavy export industries, experience an increased risk of unemployment, whilst others mainly experience the risk of loosing money invested in stocks or the risk to be in “over-debt” due to falling prices of property and houses. Either way it could be assumed that the global financial crisis in the fall of 2008 lead to a widespread feeling of insecurity and risk, and a strive for economic security.

The focus in this paper is on the consequences of the crisis for the political marginalization of people in a social and economic risk position. This means that the interest is not on social cleavages per se, but on how these are reflected in attitudes towards politics. Two scenarios could be hypothesized. The economic and political turmoil related to the crisis could be expected to have a general mobilizing effect. With an intense news flow, and governments all over presenting efforts to “solve the problems” it could be expected that political interest and political trust rises as has been shown to be the case in other crisis. In this case we would not necessarily expect the differences in political integration, or alienation, between groups to be affected. The second scenario however, is that the crises would lead to an increased feeling of abandonment and insecurity by risk exposed groups, whilst others that mainly experience financial risks to a higher degree might put their trust in the rescue plans presented by politicians. This would lead to increased cleavages in political alienation due to social risk exposure.

The welfare policies as filter

The consequences of a social risk position, or acute economic problems due to for example unemployment, vary between different welfare contexts. It is
consequently believed that a social risk situation is more devastating in weak welfare states. A central role of welfare states is what is often labelled “de-commodification” that is to protect the individual from the full consequences of market forces by various forms of social insurance schemes and social transfers (Esping-Andersen, 1990). By means of social transfers of various kinds these welfare policies to some degree compensate for a weak market position, thus reducing the risk of poverty. Focus in the work of Esping-Andersen was on social insurance systems, but also other forms of social transfers such as child allowance and social protection schemes could be said to have “de-commodifying” function. However, the degree to which these kinds of welfare policies reduce the risk of poverty varies between different countries, due to “welfare regimes”. For example, the Scandinavian countries are known for a high degree of de-commodification and generosity whilst other countries, such as Britain or the US, apply a lower degree of de-commodification.

When it comes to the consequences of social risk position for political involvement and integration a more de-commodifying and encompassing welfare system is supposed to alienate weaker groups to a lesser degree than more market oriented welfare systems (Goul Andersen and Hoff, 2001). A more de-commodifying system eases the consequences of a weak social position leading social marginalization to be less marginalising. Also, since the weaker groups are recognized in policies, they are more probable to feel as stakeholders of politics. Consequently, the effect of social risk position on political alienation would be expected to be weaker in more de-commodifying systems, as well as the consequences of the economic crisis.

Another aspect of how the design of the welfare state is however that welfare systems embody and create norms about what is fair and just, and form citizens’ expectations and demands (Mau, 2003, Rothstein, 1998, Mau, 2004, Svalfors, 2003, Svalfors, 2007). In a welfare system that is expected to be highly de-commodifying and generous, a social risk position could actually be more politically alienating than in a welfare system where risk exposition to a lesser degree could be seen as a politically relevant issue (Oskarson, 2007). This would be reflected in a stronger effect of social risk position on political alienation in less de-commodifying systems, as well as the consequences of the economic crisis.
So far, previous research have presented quite diverging results regarding the marginalization hypothesis, depending on how political involvement or integration is defined; or rather, whether it is political interest and/or political participation or political trust that is seen as the central dimension. Political interest is quite clearly related to such things as education and income as well as the general level of economic inequality (Solt, 2008, van Deth and Elff, 2004), whilst low levels of political trust is rather found among highly educated and younger citizens (Norris, 1999a, Dalton, 2004). When political alienation is linked to the social and economic marginalization hypothesis in Dalton’s book “Democratic Challenges – Democratic Choices,” it is defined in the same way as in most recent studies—as the opposite to political trust (Dalton, 2004). Dalton concludes, also in line with other findings, that there is no strong relation between “lower status” (operationalized as “low education”) and low trust. Rather, it is among the well-educated younger generations that he finds the decrease in trust. This finding is in line with the argument presented by Inglehart that post-materialists are demanding and distrustful citizens (Dalton, 2004, Inglehart, 1997).

The argument here is that we are not able to reach a firm understanding of how social and economic marginalization or vulnerability relates to political disengagement when the analysis is restricted to political interest and participation or political trust. By combining insights on effects of inequality and social determinants from two research areas; political engagement and political trust, it is possible to enhance our understanding. By a specification of political alienation as two-dimensional, incorporating both political interest and political trust, this study presents a test of the marginalization hypothesis. The concept of political alienation is presented in this paper as a qualitative concept indicating citizens “out of reach” of the political system.

In the following, the relationship between social risk positions and political alienation will be explored for 17 European countries in the years 2004 and 2008, based on the European Social Surveys round 2 and 4. The paper proceeds with a discussion of the concept of political alienation, followed by discussions of measurement and analytical models. The general correlations between social risk position and political alienation, as well as the impact of the financial crisis on this
Political alienation – the concept

Political equality is fundamental for democracy. In general, the concept of political equality is restricted to the formal rights and opportunities of citizens to participate in politics. Whether or not citizens actually choose to participate is usually seen as an individual decision, depending on the individual’s interest and resources. Studies of political participation have taught us a lot about what lies behind actual political participation, and how political equality in modern democratic states is reflected in actual participation (Verba et al., 1995). Most of these studies state that a central prerequisite for actual participation is some degree of political involvement or engagement. As Verba and his co-authors write, “It is hard to imagine that at least some psychological engagement with politics is not required for almost all forms of political participation” (Verba et al., 1995). Political involvement could accordingly be seen as a prerequisite for democracy and for fulfilment of political citizenship.

Political alienation is here presented as a qualitative concept capturing the coincidence of low political interest and low political trust, thus indicating a feeling distance or “non-includedness” to the political sphere of society. It is believed to capture the subjective cleavage to the “elite groups” or “establishment” of politics. The concept of alienation originates from the concept of entfremdung used by Marx and by Weber. In political sociology, political alienation has come to refer to the opposite of “political engagement” of any kind, and to include various aspects of inefficacy, apathy, cynicism, and displeasure (Citrin et al., 1975, Mason et al., 1985). A general definition presented by Lane in 1962 is that political alienation refers to a person’s sense of estrangement from the politics and government of his society… in this sense a disidentification. It implies more than disinterest; it implies a rejection” (Lane, 1962). In a classic article from 1960, political alienation is discussed as a consequence of inefficacy and “…involves not only apathy or indifferences // but also diffuse displeasure at being powerless and mistrust of those who do wield
power” (Thompson and Horton, 1960). In empirical analyses, mainly from the 1970s, political alienation has come to include all sorts of aspects of the relation between citizens and politics such as low efficacy, low trust, and political apathy. All these different aspects tap into concepts that could be understood as aspects of alienation from politics, but these different aspects are multi-dimensional (Mason et al., 1985). To treat political alienation as the opposite of trust does not include the involvement or participatory aspect at all, which might be misleading since lack of trust does not necessarily lead to apathy or rejection.

The argument here is that the consequences of social and economic inequalities on the relationship to politics should not be restricted to incorporating only political trust. Citizens could report low political trust, but still be interested in politics and be ready to participate, yet at the same time report a low level of political trust as a result of feelings of marginalization. To regard political alienation as solely a lack of engagement, apathy, or passivity is also too narrow, since apathy could be a result of trust in others to handle politics in which one still feels included. The multi-dimensional aspect of political alienation is vital. In line with this argument, political alienation is explicitly treated in this study as multi-dimensional by combining the dimensions of trust and interest.

To argue that political alienation is more than a lack of political trust is quite simple. To decide what is missing is more of a challenge. Some of the more elaborated efforts to define and measure political alienation has linked it to the concept of political efficacy, that is feelings of potential influence on politics (Southwell, 1985, Craig, 1990). The definition used here is closer to the definition presented by Kabashima et al (2000) which uses the dimensions political trust and civic-mindedness, where civic-mindedness is “interpreted as a measure of active psychological engagement with politics” (Kabashima, 2000) p. 786). Political interest is here treated as a main indicator for the civic-mindedness. By choosing this strategy the definition of political alienation presented here is broader than some previous definitions limited to different aspects of political trust or political trust and efficacy.
Political alienation is used as a label for the combination of low political interest and low political trust.\(^2\) This two-dimensional concept of political alienation enables us to make a distinction between the “cynical” with low political trust but high political interest, and the “alienated” who report neither political trust nor interest. The post-materialistic “low trusters” found by Dalton and others tend to be highly educated and to have fairly high efficacy, even if they tend to sometimes choose unconventional political channels for participation (Dalton, 2004, Inglehart, 1999). The alienated, on the other hand, are much less likely to engage in any form of political participation. Political interest is consequently seen as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for involvement. The argument is that the combination of both dimensions better describes different qualities in political involvement, and that the full citizen engagement builds on both interest and trust. The combination of the two dimensions forms four categories of relations between the individual citizen and the political sphere, as shown in figure 1. In order to make a distinction from the conventional use of the term “political engagement” as political interest in a wide sense, the opposite to alienation will here be labelled “political integration,” describing citizens who, by a combination of high interest and high trust, could be said to be well integrated into the political sphere of society.

\[\text{Figure 1. Four types of relations to politics}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High political interest</th>
<th>Low political interest</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High political trust</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low political trust</td>
<td>Cynic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alienated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first category, the integrated, includes politically interested citizens who also trust politicians and political institutions. The second category, the loyal citizens, comprises citizens who report political trust but take a low interest in politics. The third, cynical citizens are highly interested in politics, but report low trust. Finally, the politically alienated citizens are citizens with low interest in politics and low political trust. The combination of low or no interest in politics with low trust of political institutions and actors, here labelled political alienation, constitutes what could be termed a risk group for democracy. Citizens with low interest in politics do not seek information, and if information on political matters reaches them anyway, their low trust would lead them to disregard it as they don’t trust the messenger.

**The Two Dimensions of Political Alienation**

The first dimension of political alienation is political interest, as an indicator of political engagement. Political involvement or engagement is generally seen as an umbrella concept, indicating the psychological and emotional “link” between the individual and politics. It could be said to point to the psychological aspects of the political citizenship, and relate to the psychological feeling of being incorporated or even participating in the political sphere. Usually, political involvement is linked to interest or motivation for actual participation or the like. By political interest is usually meant “the degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity” (van Deth, 1989). Self-reported political interest, participation in discussions of politics, media usage, and, possibly, political information are considered to be main components of the internal aspect of political involvement (van Deth and Elff, 2004, Goul Andersen and Hoff, 2001, Verba et al., 1995).

Variations in political interest among different social groups, as well as any increase over time within one country, is commonly explained by “push theories,” that is, psychological and socio-psychological theories, stating that variations are due to different individual resources and skills. That political interest co-varies with social characteristics such as education, age, and gender is well proven (Verba and Nie, 1972, van Deth and Elff, 2004, van Deth, 1989, Verba et al., 1995).
Variations in the level of political interest among countries, on the other hand, are often attributed to “pull theories,” that is, the level of political interest in a country depends on the relevance of political and social arrangements (van Deth and Elff, 2004, van Deth, 1989). This means that the more interventionist politics are in daily life, the more visible and salient politics become, and political interest is thus aroused. This is supposed to explain the high degree of political interest in the Scandinavian welfare states, compared to welfare systems in other western countries. Not the least is this the case for “weaker groups” in society, since the organization of the Scandinavian welfare state is supposed to compensate for social inequalities present elsewhere. (Rothstein, 1998, Goul Andersen and Hoff, 2001). In the article “Economic Inequality and Democratic Political Engagement” Fredrick Solt (Solt, 2008) tests three theories about the relation between economic inequality and political engagement and finds that higher levels of income inequality powerfully depress political interest, the frequency of political discussion, and participation in elections among all but the most affluent citizens.

The perspective presented here claim that involvement in the political sphere of society has one more dimension, namely trust and support. In order to feel like participants and supporters of the system, one requirement is that citizens feel that the political system or sphere can be trusted to treat them as participants—that is, with respect (Rothstein, 1998). In general, political trust is included in the wider concept of political support, which is theoretically closely linked to David Easton’s classic work. Easton distinguished between support at three levels of political objects: the political community, the regime, and the authorities (Easton, 1965); and the regime level can be further divided into principles, norms and procedures, and institutions (Dalton, 2004, Easton, 1975, Norris, 1999b). The support (or lack of support) for these different political objects is usually seen as either based on actual performance at the level in question (evaluative or specific support), or based on more generalized or affective orientations (affective or diffuse support). Specific support is naturally closely linked to actual performance, and thus to whoever is incumbent. Affective support is more vague, and generally seen as rooted in political socialization and values (Norris, 1999a, Dalton, 2004, Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995). In recent studies on political trust, the opposite of political trust is usually labelled
political alienation. The debate has been whether one should incorporate trust in government, or restrict it to trust in democracy (Miller, 1974, Lockerbie, 1993, Borre, 2000). The argument in this analysis is that political alienation includes more than lack of political trust, and that this is why the marginalization hypothesis has not found support.

Political trust is more closely linked to politics at the individual level than is the case with political interest, and it is closely related to ideology or political preferences—voters tend to have more trust in the political party or the politician they have voted for than in the opposition party or candidate. This, however, could hardly explain variations in trust over time. A general conclusion from earlier research was that evaluation of policy and/or government performance was one of the strongest explanations for political support, that is, trust in politicians and in political institutions (Miller and Listhaug, 1999). When there is a continuing discrepancy between the citizens’ expectations and the actual policies implemented by the government, this situation might lead to growing distrust (Miller, 1974, Borre, 2000). There is furthermore a well proven relationship between economic evaluations and political support (Listhaug, 1995, Miller and Listhaug, 1999, Dalton, 2004). Increasing economic differences between rich and poor might result in increasing social differences also in political support or trust. Lack of political support, however, does not necessarily indicate political passivity. It is sometimes claimed to imply a well-informed and “sound” scepticism toward politics. We would accordingly need to separate this “sound scepticism” from actual marginalization or alienation, in order to be able to test the marginalization hypothesis. Since we also know that political interest varies with individual resources such as education and occupational status, the combination of low trust and low interest in politics is most probably overrepresented in weaker social groups. This combination, here labelled political alienation, is more problematic from a democratic point of view. Citizens who are politically alienated do not seek information on political matters, and even if political information reaches them anyhow, they are not receptive to the information since they do not trust the political actors.
Data and measurement

The questions and hypothesis posed here will in the following be analysed in the European context, comparing the years 2004 and 2008. The countries in Europe present a large variety in economic and social structures as well as in welfare arrangements which make them suitable for an analysis as the present. In 2004 most of Europe experienced a good economic times with high GDP growth. In 2008 the financial crisis erupted, resulting in decreasing GDP and beginning signs of depression. The assumption here is that these two years illustrate the relevant crisis factor whilst at the same time they are enough close in time to basically present the same cultural and political context.

The data used for the analysis is the European Social Survey, round 2 from 2004/5 and round 4 from 2008/9.3 Included are 17 countries that were participating in both rounds.4 France is excluded due to missing values on some central variables. The included countries are presented in table 1 below.

In the next section measurement of the central variables is discussed. The empirical analysis then proceeds in three steps, in accordance to test the hypothesis stated. The first step is to empirically evaluate the correlation between social risk position and political alienation in the seventeen countries included here. The following steps estimate the crisis effect and the impact of de-commodification respectively.

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3 The European Social Survey (the ESS) is an academically-driven social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. The survey covers up to 30 nations and employs the most rigorous methodologies. A repeat cross-sectional survey, it has been funded through the European Commission's Framework Programmes, the European Science Foundation and national funding bodies in each country. More information and data is reached from http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/.

4 The analysis is performed with the weighing procedures presented at the ESS webpage. This means that for analysis of the countries separate design weight is used, correction for national unrepresentative samples. When a pooled dataset is used, the population weight is also used, correcting for population size. This mean that number of respondents presented in tables varies due to weighing procedure.
Measurement of political alienation

The most central variable for this analysis is, of course, the variable for political alienation. As stated previously, this variable incorporates two dimensions—interest and trust—which is why we must start with the matter of measurement. Both political interest and, even more so, political trust are theoretical concepts which could be defined and measured in various ways. The analysis presented here is based on the European Social Survey, rounds 2 (2004) and 4 (2008), which means that the measurement is restricted to variables included in this study.

Political interest is measured with the single variable based on the traditional question on “subjective political interest”, standardized to range from 0 (high interest) to 10 (low interest). An alternative would be to construct an index and thereby increase the validity and reduce measurement errors. The ESS studies include some potential candidates for such an index, namely questions on how frequently the respondents follow news on politics in TV and in the newspapers. There is however strong arguments against incorporating variables measuring any kind of activity such as participating in political discussions or media usage in an index on political interest. First, these kinds of action actually could be seen as dependent on political interest. Second, the correlations between these variables and the traditional question on subjective political interest are quite modest. An alternative variable to be included in an index would be how important politics are in the respondent’s life. There is however no such question included in the ESS studies.

Political trust is actually measured with an index. The additative index is based on three items on explicit trust (in the country’s parliament, politicians, and the European Parliament). The European Parliament is included since in the countries under study here the EU is definitely a relevant part of the political system. The item values are standardized to range from 0 to 10 and added together and divided by three, giving an index ranging from 0 = extremely high political trust to 10 = no trust at all.\(^5\)

Political alienation is operationalized as a combination of the variable for political interest and index for political trust. Several strategies are possible for combining these into one variable—quantitative with some kind of multiplicative

\(^5\) Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88.
index or qualitative by combining the variables into categories. A multiplicative index is mainly relevant if it is the end points of the scale that are in focus, since the two categories “loyals” and “cynical” will not be possible to separate. A qualitative strategy where the two dimensions are combined according to “low” or “high” is of course possible. It is not self-evident, however, how best to delineate the categories, that is, to state how low political interest and political trust a person should report in order to be classified as alienated. A numerical cut-off point such as the numerical mid-value for all countries could, for example, lead to a situation where some citizens reporting higher political trust than most respondents in their particular country could still be classified as “alienated.” In the absence of any firm theoretical argument for a certain numerical cut-off point, the quantitative strategy is chosen here. A multiplicative index is constructed with 10 indicating the most alienated and 0 the most integrated.6 Table 1 below presents the mean values for the alienation index, for political interest and political trust, as well as the bivariate correlations between the two, for the included countries in 2004 and 2008.

6 The alienation index is constructed as \( PA = \left(\sqrt{PI + 10}\right) \times \left(PT + 10\right) - 10 \). PA stands for political alienation index, PI for political interest index (0-10) and PT for political trust index (0-10). The addition of 10 in the multiplicative step, and subtraction of 10 in the second step is necessary in order to handle the value 0 of PI and PT. The political alienation index ranges from 0(integrated) to 10 (alienated) and is linear (documentation could be requested from author).
Table 1. Mean values on Political alienation index, political uninterest and political distrust 2004 and 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Political alienation 10=alienated</th>
<th>Political uninterest 10=low</th>
<th>Political distrust 10=low</th>
<th>Pearson’s r uninterest and distrust</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>5.53 5.48</td>
<td>5.64 5.42</td>
<td>5.35 5.42</td>
<td>.22** .25**</td>
<td>1664 1703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>4.73 4.58</td>
<td>4.53 4.55</td>
<td>5.02 4.80</td>
<td>.07** .13**</td>
<td>1751 1487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>6.71 6.94</td>
<td>6.80 7.10</td>
<td>6.53 6.67</td>
<td>.10** .15**</td>
<td>2524 1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5.38 5.07</td>
<td>4.61 4.19</td>
<td>6.10 5.84</td>
<td>.13** .11**</td>
<td>2568 2514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>4.24 3.96</td>
<td>4.20 3.67</td>
<td>4.38 4.27</td>
<td>.18** .16**</td>
<td>1306 1445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>5.82 5.60</td>
<td>5.82 5.30</td>
<td>5.82 5.89</td>
<td>.10** .16**</td>
<td>1303 1368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5.04 4.95</td>
<td>5.34 5.15</td>
<td>4.69 4.65</td>
<td>.22** .21**</td>
<td>1906 2099</td>
</tr>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>5.88 5.56</td>
<td>5.48 4.87</td>
<td>6.20 6.17</td>
<td>.17** .20**</td>
<td>1653 2134</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
<td>5.93 6.59</td>
<td>6.28 6.49</td>
<td>5.45 6.53</td>
<td>.16** .20**</td>
<td>2106 1987</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6.02 6.63</td>
<td>5.79 6.00</td>
<td>6.12 7.15</td>
<td>.15** .15**</td>
<td>1264 1337</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>5.01 4.58</td>
<td>4.62 4.44</td>
<td>5.33 4.70</td>
<td>.19** .19**</td>
<td>1678 1663</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>5.06 4.93</td>
<td>4.94 5.02</td>
<td>5.22 4.83</td>
<td>.22** .21**</td>
<td>1520 1336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>6.56 6.24</td>
<td>5.85 5.71</td>
<td>7.08 6.73</td>
<td>.12** .17**</td>
<td>1337 1387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>6.76 6.62</td>
<td>6.84 6.86</td>
<td>6.69 6.50</td>
<td>.31** .27**</td>
<td>1775 1907</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>5.05 4.72</td>
<td>4.67 4.56</td>
<td>5.49 4.95</td>
<td>.25** .24**</td>
<td>1709 1601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>5.95 5.57</td>
<td>5.76 5.31</td>
<td>6.08 5.78</td>
<td>.25** .24**</td>
<td>1223 1156</td>
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<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>6.16 5.66</td>
<td>5.74 5.48</td>
<td>6.53 5.71</td>
<td>.22** .10**</td>
<td>1188 1669</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: Source ESS 2004 and 2008. The data is weighted by design weight. Alienation is measured with an index constructed from political interest and political trust where 0= integrated and 10=alienated. All indices are described in the text.

Table 1 shows some variation in levels of political alienation/integration. The lowest score on the alienation index is found in Denmark both 2004 and 2008, which is due to Denmark showing the lowest average values on both political interest and political trust in both years. More variation is found on the higher end of the alienation index, where Portugal have the highest average value in 2004 and the Czech Republic in 2008. In most countries the mean value on the alienation index is lower in 2008 than in 2004. The exceptions are Czech Republic, Greece and Hungary, where the populations appear to be more alienated in 2008 than in 2004. The correlations between political interest and political trust illustrates that these are two separate aspects of individuals attitude to politics. The correlations vary between r=.07 in Switzerland in 2004 and r=.31 in Portugal in 2004.
Measurement of social risk position, crisis and reduction of risk of poverty

The first and basic question for the empirical analysis to follow is how political alienation is related to social characteristics indicating various aspects of social risks. But before describing the empirical testing of the full model, we shall first discuss what is meant by social risk position. What I try to capture here is different identifiable aspects of social position and situation pointed out in the “modernisation loser” literature as creating a vulnerability of decreasing life standards and life chances. In order to avoid more cultural aspects or relative deprivation I here depart from a perspective of exposition to risk of poverty. Generally, two factors could be said to decide risk-exposure in this respect: “no or very low incomes” and “no alternative way to be supported.” All people who are not in full-time employment or self-employment could be seen as dependent on someone else for economic support (Baldwin, 1990, Svalfors, 1996). The unemployed and those with bad health are two obvious groups. Groups with very low market income or with low education are also exposed to economic risks (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2004). Two groups generally lack market income, but are still not regarded as risk groups: these are children and married women working in the home. These groups are generally seen as mainly dependent on the family, rather than on the welfare state. A common trait for all these groups is that they are more exposed than others to financial problems. The presented indicators of social risk position imply a risk of financial difficulties, but state nothing about how respondents actually evaluate their present economic situation. The analysis therefore includes a question on how the respondent “…feels about the household incomes nowadays.” The answers “finding it difficult” or “finding it very difficult” are collapsed to form “difficult to cope on present income.” Consequently, we have four independent variables indicating social risk and a weak market situation – low education, occupied as routine manual worker, a position outside the regular labour market, that is unemployed, disabled or early retirement and finally the subjective experience of having difficult to cope on present household incomes. These four indicators are added into a social risk index ranging from 0 = no risk position to 4 = all four risks, that is a highly risk exposed position. The hypothesis in focus is that the higher the risk index, the higher the risk of being alienated, that is the first hypothesis formulated earlier. Since an important
factor behind political trust as one of the dimensions in political alienation is satisfaction with government this will also be included in some of the models in the analysis. The interest is not on the effect of this variable per se, but on how it interacts with social risk position. Is it more short term dissatisfaction that is behind political alienation, or does it remain also under control for evaluation of government? Gender and age are included in all models in order to control for compositional effects.

The over-arching question here is if the financial and economic crisis that erupted in the fall of 2008 increases not only social cleavages but the cleavages in political integration (or alienation) between weaker and stronger groups. Here no more fine-tuned measures of the crisis will be employed. The expectation is that it is the general media flow and reports of the crisis that was most in focus in the fall of 2008 when the European Social Survey was in field, rather than actual consequences of the crisis on unemployment and decreasing GDP. These more manifest consequences were more visible in 2009. Of these reasons the analysis will see the comparison of 2004 with 2008 as indication of the crisis.

The consequences of the crisis on how social risk is related to political alienation is expected to vary between different welfare contexts, mainly due to varying degrees of de-commodification and social protection schemes. De-commodification is generally measured with an index constructed by Esping-Andersen, based on replacement rates and generosity in the social-insurance systems (unemployment, sickness and pensions) (Scruggs and Allan, 2006, Esping-Andersen, 1990). The database produced by Lyle Scruggs and James Allen does however not cover all European States, and is also not updated to 2008. In lack of any precise data on de-commodification the present analysis will focus on two more general aspects of welfare policies - reduction of poverty rate after social transfers and social expenditure in percentage of GDP, based on eurostats figures. Social expenditure data is not an ideal indicator, since it does not really give information on how the welfare policies affect the actual situation of the individual. Therefore the

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7 The formulation of the question is “Now thinking about the (country) government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job? Response alternatives go from 00 extremely dissatisfied to 10 extremely satisfied. For the analysis here the scale is turned and 00 is extremely satisfied.

8 See [http://cpp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu](http://cpp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu). Also see the report
Empirical analysis

The first step in the empirical analysis is to analyze how a social risk position is related to political alienation in our 17 countries, and how the crisis in 2008 is reflected in the effects of social risk. This first part of the analysis is performed on the pooled dataset, weighted in order to be representative. This means that larger countries have a higher weight in the pooled dataset than smaller. The main independent variable is the social risk index, varying from 0 to 4 social risks. In order to control for composition effects of the social risks, variables for gender and age (categorical) are included in the base model. The variable “crisis” is coded 0 for 2004 and 1 for 2008, and capture the difference between the years (model 1).

### Table 2. Political alienation, social risk and dissatisfaction with government. OLS-regression, all countries 2004 and 2008 pooled. Unstandardized B-coefficients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social risk index</td>
<td>.59***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>.52***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 15-30 years</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 60+ years</td>
<td>-.29***</td>
<td>-.28***</td>
<td>-.19***</td>
<td>-.19***</td>
<td>-.19***</td>
<td>-.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>-.05*</td>
<td>-.11***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied with</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.32***</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.01**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government * social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis * social risk</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.07***</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.44***</td>
<td>4.47***</td>
<td>2.63***</td>
<td>2.57***</td>
<td>2.64***</td>
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<td>41483</td>
<td>41483</td>
<td>41483</td>
<td>41483</td>
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</tr>
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Comment: Data ESS 2004 and 2008 pooled. Weighted by design weight and population weight in accordance with guidelines. Significance levels *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05
In model 2 the interaction term between social risk and “crisis” is added to the base model in order to capture different effects of the crisis depending on social risk position. In the following models dissatisfaction with the government is added to the model. The last three models include interaction terms between social risks on the one hand and dissatisfaction with government and crisis on the other, in order to examine to what degree the effects of the crisis and dissatisfaction with government differ due to social risk position.

It should hardly be seen as a surprise that we find a fairly clear positive effect of social risk position on political alienation. We know from earlier research that factors such as low education, working class occupations, unemployment and weak personal economy is linked to both political interest and political trust. The effect of the crisis, that is the difference between the years 2004 and 2008 is slightly negative, indicating a somewhat lower over all level of alienation in 2008 than in 2004. In the second model the interaction between social risk position and crisis is positive and significant whilst the b-value for crisis is somewhat higher than in model 1. This means that whilst the general level of alienation is lower in 2008 than in 2004, the effect of social risk is actually higher in 2008. In other words, the crisis seem to alienate those in social risk positions further, whilst citizens in less risk exposed positions seem to somewhat closer to the integrated end of the scale.

In model 3 dissatisfaction with government is added to the model. As expected, dissatisfaction is positively related to political alienation, due to the closeness between political trust and evaluation of government performance. The relevant focus here is however not on the effect per se, but on how dissatisfaction interacts with social risk position. The results show that government evaluation is somewhat related to social risk position, indicated by a slight decrease in the effect of social risk position between models 1 and 3. In model 4 the interaction between social risk position and dissatisfaction with government is added. The interaction is significant and slightly negative. However weak this means that dissatisfaction with government has a vague leveling effect of the effect of social risk position on political alienation. Also dissatisfied citizens in stronger social position tend to be more alienated than others in the same social position. Model 5 instead include the interaction term between social risk position and crisis, testing if the effect of the
crisis differs due to social risk position also under control for dissatisfaction with government. This is clearly not the case, since the interaction term is insignificant. The interaction between social risk position and crisis in model 2 was accordingly closely related to the government evaluation. This result remains in the final model with both interaction terms included.

All in all, social risk position is clearly related to political alienation. The effect of a social risk position was slightly stronger in the turbulent crisis year of 2008 than in the more stable year of 2004, mainly due to dissatisfaction with government performance. Dissatisfaction with government increases alienation, but the effect of dissatisfaction is however somewhat more pronounced in stronger social positions. However, the coincidence of a social risk position and dissatisfaction with government together have quite strong effects on political alienation, which means that when political dissatisfaction coincides with a social risk position the political alienation and thus political marginalization is the result.

The final hypothesis in this analysis is focused on how the effect of social risk on political alienation is dependent on various welfare arrangement, and most of all the assumption that de-commodifying welfare policies reduce the risk for citizens in social risk to abstain from politics all together. For this analysis the effect of social risk on political alienation will be estimated separate for the seventeen countries included in the previous analysis. The b-coefficients for social risk position is taken as an indicator of the alienating effect of social risk, and the expectation is that this should have a negative relation to the degree of reduction of poverty rate after social transfers. The second hypothesis, that the effect would increase due to the crisis most in less de-commodifying welfare states will be answered by relating the interaction terms social risk * crisis to the degree of de-commodification, where it is supposed to be significant and positive in the least de-commodifying systems. The analysis will be based on the base model in table 2 (model 2) not controlling for political dissatisfaction. Since the analysis include only 17 countries, and also is explorative rather than based on firm theoretical assumptions we will not employ statistical multi-level analysis but rather simple bivariate graphs and correlations.
Table 3 below presents the relevant variables from the regression model separate for all countries.\(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Social risk index</th>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Social risk * crisis</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>n</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>3318</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schweiz</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>3180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech rep</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>4033</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>4911</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2720</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2647</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>3980</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>3718</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.74***</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>4039</td>
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<td>Hungary</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>2839</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>2696</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.19**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
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<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment: Data ESS 2004 and 2008 pooled. Regression models include (not shown) controls for gender and age. Weighted by design weight in accordance with guidelines. Significance levels *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05.

As expected, table 3 shows clear and statistically significant coefficients between social risk position and political alienation in all countries. There are however some variation in strength of the relation between the countries, from .61 in Germany to .32 in the Czech Republic. The effect of the financial crisis, measured with the dichotomous variable “crisis”, show varieties in strength as well as in direction between the countries, as does the interaction variable between social risk position and crisis. As in table 5 a positive sign on the interaction variable between social risk position and crisis indicates that the relationship between a social risk position and political alienation was stronger in the crisis year of 2008 than in the more financially stable year of 2004. According to the results in table 6 this was the case only in four of the included countries – Switzerland, Czech Republic, the UK and Norway. In Germany and Slovenia the opposite pattern is found, that is a weaker effect of social risk position on political alienation in 2008 than in 2004. For the remaining countries the interaction effects are insignificant, indicating that there were no changes between the years in how social risk position were related to political alienation.

The general assumption presented earlier stated that the variations in

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\(^9\) Full documentation available from author.
how social risk position is related to political alienation, as well as how the financial crisis strikes, are related to welfare arrangements and more specifically to the degree of de-commodification in different countries. However, the expected direction of the relation is somewhat more uncertain. The general assumption is that the higher the degree of de-commodification, the lower the effect of social risk position would be on political alienation. However, also the opposite direction – that social risk position is more connected to political alienation in more generous and de-commodifying welfare systems, since being poor and risk exposed in a generous and protecting welfare system could be seen as somewhat of an anomaly and thereby alienate from politics to a higher degree than in a system where a person in a social risk position has lower expectations on the political sphere. As indicators for welfare generosity and level of de-commodification reduction of poverty after social transfers and social expenditure are used, as discussed above. Figures 2 and 3 below presents the general patterns.

Figure 2. Effect of social risk position on political alienation and reduction of risk of poverty in 2008. (Pearson’s r=.22)
First of all, there is no clear or strong covariance between the effect of social risk position and political alienation on the one hand, and the presented indicators of de-commodification on the other. This means that the hypothesis that the more effective reduction of poverty by social transfers, the lower the risk for social risk position to be related to political alienation, does not receive support. Nor does higher social expenditure decrease the correlation between social risk and political alienation (figure 3). Rather, there is a weak pattern pointing in the opposite direction, as some of the countries with the highest reduction of poverty and the highest social expenditure actually present quite strong coefficients between social risk position and political alienation. In figure 3 when social expenditure is used as indicator this pattern is actually quite strong.

In figures 4 and 5 the crisis effect rather than the coefficients between social risk position and political alienation is used.
Figure 4. Interaction effect of crisis on effect of social risk position on political alienation and reduction of poverty after social transfers in 2008. (Pearson’s $r=0.14$)

Figure 5. Interaction effect of crisis on effect of social risk position on political alienation and social expenditure in % of GDP in 2007. (Pearson’s $r=0.07$)
The interaction does as previously indicate to what degree the crisis in 2008 affect the alienating effect of a social risk position. A positive interaction effect means that the alienating effect was higher in 2008 than in 2004. The hypothesis is that de-commodification would ease this effect, leading to a negative effect between our indicators for de-commodification and the interaction coefficient. This hypothesis is not supported since no clear pattern is discernible in figures 4 or 5. Rather, if anything there is a weak positive effect as some of the countries with high de-commodification actually have relatively strong interactive effects.

**Conclusion**

The concept of political alienation is vague and contested, and still hard to abandon. All individuals are not integrated to the political world; everybody does not vote or feel as participants. The democratic citizenship might be equal in form and in theory, but it is not equal in practice. Some people simply turn their back to politics, and this “back-turning” is quite often linked to a weak social and economic position. The present situation in the midst of the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis actualize the question of social and political marginalization of more risk exposed groups even more. The attempt in this paper has been to return to the concept of political alienation in order to catch the political marginalization discussed in relation to globalization and development of the post-modern democracies. The argument presented is that political alienation could be defined and measured as the combination of the dimensions of political trust and political interest.

When political alienation is treated in this multidimensional manner rather than solely with lack of political trust the linkage with social risk position is found in the 17 European countries included in the analysis. The results show that social risk position is clearly related to political alienation. The effect of a social risk position was also slightly stronger in the turbulent crisis year of 2008 than in the more stable year of 2004, mainly due to dissatisfaction with government performance. Dissatisfaction with government increases alienation, but the effect of dissatisfaction is however somewhat more pronounced in stronger social positions. However, the coincidence of a social risk position and dissatisfaction with
government together have quite strong effects on political alienation, which means that when political dissatisfaction coincides with a social risk position the political alienation and thus political marginalization is the result.

The analysis of what impact welfare policies have on the relation between a social risk position and political alienation have not been able to identify the expected integrative function of generous and de-commodifying welfare policies. It is according to the analysis here not the case that a social risk position is related to political alienation to a lower degree in more generous welfare states. If anything there seems to be the opposite pattern. A provisional explanation is that in generous and more de-commodifying welfare states social risks to a higher degree than elsewhere is seen as a political responsibility, rather than solely a personal. This give rise to norms and expectations that might be unfulfilled and thus leading to political alienation. In times of financial and economic crisis the risk of unfulfilled expectations increases, and so does the risk of social marginalization also leading to political marginalization. And the higher the expectations on the political sphere to protect weaker groups, the higher the risk that unfulfilled expectations lead to increased cleavages in relation to politics between those in more risk-exposed positions and those living in secure and prosperous circumstances.
References:


