



Gender attitudes and the new cultural divide in Europe

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1. Introduction

The political space in general, and political ideologies of the mass public, specifically, are often characterized by an economic and a socio-cultural dimension in Europe (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2008). The relevance of the economic dimension capturing conflicts centered on economic redistribution appears to have declined (Ford and Jennings, 2020). In contrast, divides on the socio-cultural dimension have gained in importance since the 1960s and are considered the central organizing force of the political space (de Vries et al., 2013; Kriesi, 2010). Scholars assume that various issues comprising the socio-cultural dimension are highly correlated as they are driven by the same mechanisms of attitude formation i.e., education (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015) and economic security (Inglehart 1977). Whereas different literatures tend to emphasize a different mechanism, each is considered to structure individual attitudes towards socio-cultural issues. Empirically, though, the organization of the socio-cultural dimension is far from understood. Two aspects are particularly unclear at present. First, we lack empirical evidence showing whether the different issues attributed to this dimension indeed align in a unidimensional way. Second, the theoretical debate focuses almost exclusively on the extreme ends of the socio-cultural dimension whereas empirical research suggests that a substantial group in Europe holds rather centrist positions on these issues. Filling these gaps will inform our understanding of how the European cultural space is structured, which mechanisms explain individual-level variation in centrist and extreme positions within the cultural space, and consequently, how political parties can address potential voters via issue packaging.

Regarding the first gap, even though most scholars tend to reduce different non-economic issues into a single socio-cultural dimension (De Vries, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019), we know little about how exactly and to what extent different issues

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connect within this dimension. Recent research has mainly focused on attitudes towards immigration and the EU as central organizing issues of the socio-cultural dimension. Attitudes toward these two issues are highly aligned and therefore, often viewed as part of a single ideological conflict – the new cultural divide (Bornschieer, 2010; Dolezal and Hutter, 2012; Teney et al., 2014). The new cultural divide has a cosmopolitan camp, with pro-immigration and pro-EU attitudes, and a communitarian camp with opposing positions.¹ How other socio-cultural issues can be integrated within the new cultural divide has received little attention so far.

This paper takes a first step in this direction by examining whether the assumption of a unidimensional cultural divide still holds – particularly regarding the placing of gender attitudes within it. Since the 1970s, gender issues have been highly politicized in the wake of the New Social Movements and are thus directly linked to the origins of the new cultural divide (Kitschelt, 1994). In particular, women’s experiences as marginalized protagonists in the political sphere and dependent unpaid workers at home pushed the struggle for gender equality as addressed in this paper (Whelehan, 1995). Due to educational and female labor force expansion, as well as increased economic security, egalitarian gender attitudes have been on the rise over the past decades (Knight and Brinton, 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In today’s politics, gender relations have reappeared as a crucial and surprisingly controversial topic with some of the largest recent protests and social movements, such as #metoo highlighting adverse consequences of male dominance in the workplace and the women’s march, advocating for gender equality and the dismantling of gender binary systems of oppression. Recent studies show that traditional gender attitudes are strongly associated with right-wing party identification and thus an important trigger of cultural backlash mobilizing radical right voters (Diabaté et al., 2023; Off, 2023). At the same time, attention for gender issues is rising on social media platforms of political parties (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021). Consequently, a multidimensional cultural divide related to attitudes towards gender equality has evolved and we do not yet know how it fits in with the new cultural divide. This is a call for studying gender attitudes alongside the key topics driving the cultural divide: immigration and EU attitudes. Our selection of immigration and EU attitudes is theoretically grounded, because the main dividing line between cosmopolitans and communitarians has been conceptualized in terms of whether they embrace or fear and reject internationalization, the opening of national borders and weakening of state power in favor of supranational governing organizations (Bornschieer et al., 2021; de Wilde et al., 2019). These divisions are considered to be fueled by the opportunities and risks arising for different social groups because of globalization, increased global mobility, educational expansion, the transformation of the economy and resulting changes in family structures (Bornschieer et al., 2021; Blossfeld et al., 2005).

Referring to the structuring mechanisms of education or economic prosperity, various theories tend to place egalitarian gender attitudes within the cosmopolitan and traditional gender attitudes within the communitarian camp (e.g. Bornschieer and Kriesi, 2012; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). However, this unidimensional notion of gender attitudes is surprisingly out of sync with the state-of-the-art in the gender ideology literature, which documented a major decline in “old-fashioned” gender traditionalism and the emergence of ambivalent, multidimensional gender ideologies over the last decades (Cotter et al., 2011; Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017; Scarborough et al., 2021; Scarborough et al., 2019). Furthermore, recent studies on populist radical right-wing parties, whose positions on immigration and EU integration highly resemble the communitarian ideology, suggest that many of their sympathizers do not hold traditional gender attitudes (Lancaster, 2020; Spierings et al., 2017). Finally, there is evidence that the correlation between attitudes towards immigration and gender attitudes is decreasing across birth cohorts (Lancaster, 2022).

The second research gap we address concerns a lack of theorizing regarding moderate political positions within the new cultural divide. Following the classic notion of cleavage theory and its more recent extensions, the European literature investigating political attitudes emphasizes the ideological extremes of the socio-cultural dimension, i.e., its “poles” (Teney et al., 2014; Teney and Rupieper, 2023) or “divides” (Dolezal and Hutter, 2012). The notion that people in Europe cluster in two opposing ideological camps has spurred concern about increasing opinion polarization and its socio-economic underpinning, dividing globalization ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (Deegan-Krause, 2007; Helbling and Jungkunz, 2020; Teney et al., 2014). In contrast, most empirical studies report low average levels of opinion polarization in Europe with mixed results for specific attitudinal dimensions (Dilger, 2023; Weßels and Strijbis, 2019) and no consistent increase in attitudinal polarization over time (Munzert and Bauer, 2013; Teney and Rupieper, 2023; Perrett, 2021; for an exception, see Jennings and Stoker, 2016). In line with these findings, gender ideologies have become more ambivalent and less polarized along the egalitarian-traditional axis (Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017). However, studies on attitudinal polarization, especially in Europe, rarely examine how individuals structure their attitudes towards different issues, including gender relations. Similarly, the gender ideology literature shows little interest in how individuals connect their complex gender attitudes to other political attitudes (but see Scarborough et al., 2021).

Hence, we lack evidence of how divided or unified Europeans are on various issues subsumed under the socio-cultural dimension, i.e., the share of people clustering at the attitudinal extremes. The relative size of these groups is important, first, to predict the spread of extreme opinions in society (Ramos et al., 2015) and second, to evaluate the systematic linkage between various socio-cultural attitudes.

Based on these research gaps, we examine the configuration of attitudes towards immigration and EU integration, and gender relations in contemporary Europe. More specifically, we are interested first, in whether a significant proportion of the population support immigration and the EU while holding traditional or ambivalent gender attitudes or reject immigration and the EU while holding egalitarian gender attitudes. Second, we assess how large the groups occupying extreme and moderate positions on this new and extended cosmopolitan-communitarian axis are. Third, revisiting the mechanisms of attitude formation, we investigate to what extent these groups vary across socio-structural characteristics.

¹ Similar unidimensional concepts are universalism-particularism, liberalism-traditionalism, or integration-demarcation, and GAL-TAN on the party level.

We make three contributions to the literature. First, we integrate insights from the new cultural divide and gender ideology literature by theorizing how ambivalent gender ideologies may fit into the new cultural divide. Following the conceptual approach of Scarborough et al. (2021), we develop a framework that allows for nine possible combinations of attitudes regarding gender and the new cultural divide, advancing earlier research that debated the relationship between different issue attitudes (Dilger, 2023; Lancaster, 2022; Mau et al., 2020; Scarborough et al., 2021). Second, using data from the European Values Study 2017 (EVS, 2022), we conduct a latent profile analysis, examining the configuration of attitudes towards gender, immigration and the EU. This analysis will reveal the relative size of the most common ideological combinations in Europe across these issues. It will further show whether centrist and ambivalent or extreme and aligned combinations prevail. Finally, to validate the interpretation of the identified latent profiles in light of the attitudinal mechanisms emphasized in the literature, we examine to what extent profile membership is associated with individuals' socio-economic characteristics and left-right party identification.

2. Background and state of research

2.1. The new cultural divide

Despite broad agreement that the socio-cultural dimension of political conflict has gained importance over the last decades, the substantive issues considered to form its center have changed (De Vries, 2018). The socio-cultural dimension first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with new social movements for minority rights, gender equality, and alternative lifestyles (Dalton, 1988; Inglehart, 1977; Kitschelt, 1994). The emergence of these topics has been considered a result of educational expansion and higher levels of economic security in western societies. In the 1990s, the content of the socio-cultural dimension shifted, most prominently driven by globalization and the strengthening of supranational governing organizations, such as the EU. However, these processes are interlinked with a global transformation of the employment sector, family structures, and the educational system, as well as intensifying global networks of communication and knowledge. Taken together, these forces create a divide between so-called “winners” and “losers” of globalization (Bornschiefer et al., 2021; Blossfeld et al., 2005). The former, cosmopolitan group considers itself benefitting from free trade and movement of persons, while the latter, communitarian group is considered to reject these elite positions, with its members feeling threatened by globalization and immigration (de Wilde et al., 2019; Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012).

This new cultural divide has brought immigration and European integration as most salient and polarizing issues (as a result of polarizing life chances) to the fore (Azmanova, 2011; Dolezal and Hutter, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2018), reflected in the rise of radical-right-wing populists across Europe, whose electoral success is partly attributed to their opposition to immigration and European integration (Arzheimer, 2009; Werts et al., 2013).

Empirical studies often conclude that people's views on immigration and the EU are aligned (Dilger, 2023; Dolezal and Hutter, 2012; Stockemer et al., 2020; Teney et al., 2014). However, correlations are rather low and empirical findings often limited to Western European countries, reflecting a research gap regarding the strength of attitudinal alignment and its magnitude in different European countries. Whereas the new cultural divide should be present across European nation-states as they all face globalization pressures and other major forces of social change (Dilger, 2023; Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012; Azmanova, 2009), national context will shape how individuals experience and interpret these forces (e.g. Zürn and de Wilde, 2016). This leaves much room for potentially cross-cutting beliefs about the EU and immigration across European populations.

It remains currently unclear what determines who identifies as “winner” or “loser” of globalization. Some scholars emphasize that shared worldviews matter more than individuals' objective position in the social structure to identify oppositional groups (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2007). But many accounts roughly describe cosmopolitans as highly educated occupational elites and communitarians as economically more vulnerable. Yet, especially the latter seem to have heterogeneous socio-structural positions. Some studies found evidence of communitarian attitudes even among high occupational groups (Oesch, 2012, 2015) and others found little or no evidence that economic vulnerability increases support for communitarian parties (Lengfeld, 2017; Schröder, 2018). We also know little about how the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide configures with the “old” cultural dimensions of minority rights, gender equality, and alternative lifestyles, some of which have regained salience over the past decade. Upon identifying attitudinal divides regarding immigration and European integration as the most salient indicators of the cosmopolitan-communitarian conflict, research remained focused on these two issues (Azmanova, 2011; Dolezal and Hutter, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2018).

2.2. Gender relations and ideologies

Gender ideologies have conventionally been understood as a unidimensional construct, ranging from “traditional” i.e., support for male breadwinning and female homemaking on the one pole to “egalitarian” i.e., joint earning and caring by both men and women on the other (Davis and Greenstein, 2009). Traditional beliefs in a strict separation of gendered spheres have been prevalent in the 1960s but are held by less than 10 per cent of the population across European countries today, whereas egalitarian ideologies have spread (Begall et al., 2023; Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017). Educational expansion and the increase in female employment are seen as drivers of this trend. Importantly, concomitant with the decline of traditionalism, multidimensional, ambivalent gender ideologies which combine traditionalist ideas about the distinct “natures” of women and men with egalitarian ideas regarding the gender division of paid or unpaid work, have spread and are now held by 50–60 percent of the population in European countries (ibid.). A widespread example of ambivalent gender ideologies is egalitarian essentialism, which combines support for gender equality in the public sphere with gender essentialist notions of motherhood and primacy of the mother-child bond (Cotter et al., 2011; Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017).

Many scholars associate the rise of this and other ambivalent gender ideologies with uneven changes in gender relations in the public and private spheres over the past decades (Scarborough et al., 2019). In the public sphere, women have gained acceptance upon entering higher education, the labor market and politics. In the private sphere, men remain reluctant to, and are rarely held accountable for, fully sharing the family responsibilities that women continue to feel, and are held responsible for (Altintas and Sullivan, 2016; Knight and Brinton, 2017).

Although similar gender ideology profiles have been discovered across European countries, their size and social composition varies cross-nationally (Begall et al., 2023; Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017). Holding egalitarian and traditional gender ideologies appears to be strongly associated with individual socio-economic traits whereas the prevalence of ambivalent gender ideologies is best explained by country characteristics (Begall et al., 2023).

Despite the major changes in gender ideologies over the last decades, and the re-emergence of gender as a political issue, this literature remains domain-specific, not showing much interest in examining how gender attitudes relate to attitudes in other domains (Halman and Gelissen, 2019; but see Scarborough et al., 2021 for an exception). In contrast, studies on the new cultural divide, have the ambition to identify the deeper roots of contemporary political conflicts. However, most of its theory and empirical analyses focus on individuals' and parties' positions towards immigration and de-nationalization. Gender ideologies, despite their political salience and increasing ambivalence, tend to be at most subsumed under the unidimensional concept of the new cultural divide.

Our brief review illustrates that the literatures on gender ideologies and the new cultural divide do not yet provide a consistent answer to the question of how these different sets of beliefs are connected within the European population. On the one hand, social change in both fields has been ascribed to educational expansion and economic development, with cosmopolitans and egalitarians sharing high levels of education and high socio-economic positions. On the other hand, the social structural foundation and relative positioning of communitarian and gender ambivalent attitudes remain particularly unclear, given the vast decline of traditionalism. In a first step, we thus need to develop alternative scenarios to fully integrate both perspectives in a potentially uni- or multidimensional framework. In a second step, we need to employ an empirical approach that allows us to capture how attitudes towards these different issues configure, allowing for various uni- and multidimensional potential outcomes.

3. Conceptual framework

Even though the literatures on the new cultural divide and gender attitudes have yet little overlap, the two different sets of ideologies eventually come together within individuals. Depending on how individuals combine the different attitudes, the outcome is consequential for cultural conflicts and social change in Europe. Our conceptual framework thus links these literatures with the aim to identify whether issues “form bundles or packages in the minds of the public thus creating a political space of more than one dimension.” (Weßels and Strijbis, 2019, p. 65). Table 1 illustrates the possible combinations of current gender ideologies and cosmopolitanism-communitarianism individuals may hold according to our framework. Research on gender attitudes emphasizes the rise of ambivalent gender ideologies as a middle category in between the extremes of egalitarianism and traditionalism. In contrast, the new cultural divide is theorized as two polarized ideological groups: cosmopolitans and communitarians. Despite its emphasis on the poles, empirical studies point to the existence of more centrist positions on the cosmopolitan-communitarian axis, concentrated in the medium and high segment of the social structure.

3.1. Aligned ideologies: cosmopolitan gender egalitarianism and communitarian gender traditionalism

From the perspective of the new cultural divide literature, cosmopolitan and gender egalitarian attitudes coincide with one another most prominently via education and socio-economic position. Vice-versa, traditionalism and communitarian orientations co-occur.

Accordingly, socio-economic opportunities and cultural norms related to globalization enhance cosmopolitan attitudes towards immigration and the EU, whereas globalization induced threats and anti-elite sentiment bring about communitarian views (Kriesi et al., 2012; Teney et al., 2014). Concomitant with this development, gender egalitarian views are generally on the rise even though they currently appear to stall in some countries (Sullivan et al., 2018). If both trends are primarily driven by educational expansion and increased economic security, as the literature suggests, gender might easily fit into the new cultural divide with cosmopolitans being egalitarian and communitarians being traditional. This idea resonates with the broader literature on cultural change, which argues that modernization has reinforced libertarian values, including gender relations and immigration, but that we are currently facing a cultural backlash of authoritarian and traditional values linked to economic insecurity (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Hence, if the new

Table 1
Hypothesized combination of cosmopolitan-communitarian and gender attitudes.

	Cosmopolitan	Centrist	Communitarian
Gender Egalitarianism	Cosmopolitan Gender Egalitarianism	Centrist Gender Egalitarianism	Communitarian Gender Egalitarianism
Gender Ambivalent	Cosmopolitan Gender Ambivalent	Centrist Gender Ambivalent	Communitarian Gender Ambivalent
Gender Traditionalism	Cosmopolitan Gender Traditionalism	Centrist Gender Traditionalism	Communitarian Gender Traditionalism

Source: Own depiction inspired by Scarborough et al. (2021, p.826) ‘Hypothesized Intersection of Racial and Gender Attitudes’.

cultural divide indeed stands for more than just the alignment of immigration and EU attitudes, we would expect to see the most sizable groups in the cells highlighted in grey at the top left and bottom right of [Table 1](#), representing aligned and polarized ideological formations on a unidimensional cultural scale.

3.2. Cross-cutting ideologies

Besides the concept of aligned attitudes across the cosmopolitan-communitarian and gender domain, the literature on gender ideologies ([Cotter et al., 2011](#); [Grunow et al., 2018](#); [Knight and Brinton, 2017](#)) as well as studies on the populist radical right ([Lancaster, 2020](#); [Spierings et al., 2017](#)) suggest that gender ideologies might as well cross-cut the new cultural divide. We might thus expect to find other cells to be meaningful and densely populated than the ones shaded grey.

3.2.1. Centrism and gender ambivalent attitudes

Centrists, i.e. those who are positioned in-between the cosmopolitan and communitarian camp, are often viewed as the largest segment of the population but ideologically among the most difficult to understand ([Knutsen, 1998](#)). On the one hand, they could be genuine moderates, i.e. actively trying to avoid attitudes perceived as politically extreme ([Rodon, 2015](#)). On the other hand, they could be politically alienated or disinterested, resulting in politically incoherent cross-cutting positions on immigration and European integration ([Treier and Hillygus, 2009](#)). The group with cross-cutting attitudes, in particular, is believed to have grown due to the emerging cultural dimensions of political conflict ([Caughey et al., 2019](#)). In both cases, the centrist position would likely appeal to those with gender ambivalent attitudes as egalitarian and traditional ideologies are typically associated with the conventional political divides ([Diabaté et al., 2023](#)). This expectation corresponds to the cell located right at the heart of [Table 1](#).

Concomitant with the emerging cultural dimension of political conflict, gender attitudes became increasingly multidimensional and ambivalent, combining support for gender equality in some aspects, with opposition to it in others. The gender ideology literature emphasizes the relevance of these gender ambivalent positions in contrast to the traditional pole, but it remains unclear whether this ambivalent category reflects (a) a new variety of egalitarianism, as suggested by [Knight and Brinton \(2017\)](#); (b) “a step forward from gender traditionalism” ([Scarborough et al., 2021](#), p 5) and thus an intermediate position in between egalitarianism and traditionalism as suggested by [Scarborough et al. \(2019\)](#); or indeed (c) traditionalism in a new guise with more disadvantages for women who are now expected to perform both paid work and care ([Levanon and Grusky, 2016](#)). These are not mutually exclusive options, but they may help interpret cross-cutting ideological profiles. Option (a) would be represented by individuals holding gender ambivalent positions and cosmopolitan attitudes, as a variant of egalitarian cosmopolitanism. Option (b) would be represented by individuals holding ambivalent gender ideologies and intermediate (centrist) position regarding immigration and the EU. We expect this latter group to be particularly sizable due to its appeal to the large group of politically alienated or disinterested. Option (c) would be represented by individuals holding gender ambivalent positions and communitarian attitudes. As agents of a new type of traditionalism, members of this group would largely replace the classic *Communitarian Gender Traditionalism* cell.

3.2.2. Communitarian gender egalitarianism and cosmopolitan gender traditionalism

Although the populist radical right is often seen as the forefront of the cultural backlash against postmaterialist values and close to the ideal type of communitarians by positioning themselves strictly and consistently against immigration and European integration, the self-portrayals of right-wing populist parties regarding gender ideologies are relatively heterogeneous ([de Lange and Mügge, 2015](#)). Many populist right-wing parties hold moderate traditional positions regarding gender relations and their opposition towards gender equality policies often expresses itself in the same anti-elite rhetoric that is a corner stone of Euroscepticism ([Kantola and Lombardo, 2021](#)). However, some express explicit support for gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities ([Akkerman, 2015](#)). This position is often communicated in the context of anti-immigrant or anti-Islam discourses, in which populist right wing politicians intend to portray Muslim immigrants as a threat to women’s emancipation and the rights of sexual minorities. Some of these parties also seem to endorse at least selected gender egalitarian policies ([de Lange and Mügge, 2015](#)). Regardless of whether or how these proclamations would translate into policymaking, the populist radical right at least intends to appeal to parts of the electorate for whom opposition towards immigration and Euroscepticism can ideologically go hand in hand with support for gender egalitarianism. Indeed, studies found that almost half of the sympathizers of new radical-right parties in Europe held rather supportive attitudes towards gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities ([Lancaster, 2020](#)), and that ‘sexually modern nativists’ make up a relevant portion of voters in some European countries ([Spierings et al., 2017](#)). This shows that opposition towards immigration and Euroscepticism, i.e. communitarianism, may ideologically go hand in hand with support for gender egalitarianism. In contrast, the cross-cutting category of cosmopolitan gender traditionalism in [Table 1](#) receives neither support in theory nor the state of research. We thus consider it an unlikely combination of attitudes.

4. Data and methods

For the empirical analysis, we use round 5 from EVS carried out in 2017. The EVS collects samples of the adult population aged 18 or older in 35 European countries applying representative multi-stage or stratified random sampling strategies. The survey contains

information on individuals' socio-economic and demographic background and attitudinal items related to immigration, European integration, and gender attitudes collected across European countries in a standardized fashion. We only included respondents from countries who were EU members in 2017 because items on EU-integration may have different meanings in non-EU European nations. This leaves us with a sample of 34,926 respondents from 21 countries.²

4.1. Measures

We include items focusing on the perceived economic threat of immigrants (*Immigration job*) and the perceived threat of immigrants increasing crime (*Immigration crime*). We also use two measures for attitudes towards the EU. The first focuses on respondents' position towards European enlargement (*EU enlarg*) and the second on relative confidence in the European Union (*EU confid*). For the latter, we account for individuals' average institutional confidence by first averaging respondents' confidence in 17 other institutions and then subtracting this average from respondents' value on the EU confidence measure. This way we make sure our measure does not conflate individuals' general institutional confidence with confidence in the EU. This means that someone who scores relatively high on the EU confidence measure (e.g. 4) and has a relatively low average confidence in other institutions (e.g. 1) receives a value of 3 (=4-1) whereas someone with high EU confidence (e.g. 4) and high confidence in other institutions (e.g. 4) receives a value of 0 (=4-4). Due to skewed distributions of the gender attitude items and resulting problems with model convergence, we decided to construct two mean indices to measure the private (*Gender private*) and public dimension of gender attitudes (*Gender public*) with overall 7 items (see [Table A1](#) in the supplementary material). The items target essentialist ideas about mothers' roles and responsibilities, the gender division at home and on the labor market as well as women's ability to be leaders in business and in politics. Both a confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis support a two-factor solution with above 0.4 factor loadings of each item on the respective factor. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 for both indices signals internal consistency (see [Tables B1-B2](#) in the supplementary material). Precise wording and original scale of all attitude items are shown in [Table A1](#) in the supplementary material. Prior to the analysis, all item scales are harmonized to 0-1.

As socio-structural variables we use the Oesch class scheme as our measure for occupational class ([Oesch, 2012](#)), employment status, education, household income, presence of children in the household, marital status, age and self-reported binary gender. Moreover, we use respondents' national political party appeal to investigate the linkage between ideologies and party identification. Detailed information and descriptive statistics of all variables are shown in section C in the supplementary material.

4.2. Analytic strategy

To examine our research question, we employ Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). LPA is a form of mixture model that extracts meaningful latent categories from observations with similar item response probabilities on a large set of continuous variables ([McLachlan and Peel, 2000](#)). Importantly, LPA is a person-centered partitioning method that models the data and allows for uncertainty of the identified groups. Whereas variable-centered partitioning methods, such as factor-analysis, extract linear and continuous variables from the data, LPA identifies categorical variables. This is particularly advantageous, because it allows the indicators to freely correlate, including in non-linear ways, leading potentially to multidimensional or ambivalent categorical latent constructs. Further, LPA is able to capture groups of individuals with no clear positions on certain issues due to its use of continuous indicators. For our purposes, this is an advantage compared to latent class analysis, which discards valuable information about respondents' attitudes by dichotomizing and forcing them into extreme positions.

All LPA models were estimated using *Mplus*, Version 8.8 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2017), applying the maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. Only observations of respondents with missing values on all six attitudinal variables were excluded from the analysis ($n = 18$), leaving us with an analytic sample of 34,908 observations. All other missing values were dealt with using the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) method. FIML uses all available information in the specified model to provide a maximum likelihood estimation and is currently the recommended and most common technique to deal with missing values in finite mixture models ([Spurk et al., 2020](#); [Little and Rubin 2020](#)). In the LPA model, we set the number of starts to 1000 to rule out that local maxima affect the results. To find the model that describes the latent profiles best, we follow a multi-step selection strategy that is equally based on statistical fit criteria and theoretical considerations. The latter is crucial to ensure meaningful latent profiles.

First, we estimate a model with means varying and variances constrained across profiles for up to an eight profile solution. We report five fit statistics across these models: Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), sample size adjusted BIC (aBIC), Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), log-likelihood (LL) and entropy values. Second, to select the best-fitting profile solution, we follow earlier research by choosing the model in which the BIC improvement becomes substantially smaller with an additional profile ([Ferguson et al., 2020](#)). Third, we take the other fit statistics into consideration and evaluate whether the aBIC, AIC and LL values decrease similarly to the BIC and whether the entropy value of the chosen model surpasses the commonly used threshold of 0.8 ([Lubke and Muthén, 2007](#)). Based on this empirically suggested model with k number of profiles, we check whether additional $k+1$ model solutions add a substantively meaningful profile that is of relevant size (i.e. represents more than 5% of the population).

Using the posterior probabilities of the previously fitted LPA model, we assess how the latent profiles are distributed across respondents' socio-structural characteristics and left-right party identification. To use the identified latent profiles as dependent

² Countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain.

variables, we need to account for the uncertainty associated with individuals' categorization into the identified latent profiles. For this purpose, we employ the currently recommended BCH approach (Asparouhov and Muthén, 2014), which consists of three steps. In the first step, the LPA model is estimated according to the procedure described above. In a second step, the model is replicated with higher starting values to ensure that the best loglikelihood is reached. The output of this model is stored, together with the weighted probability for each respondent to belong to each profile. Finally, the profile membership, weighted by the posterior probability of profile membership, serves as categorical dependent variable in a multinomial logistic regression in which we use socio-structural characteristics, party identification, and country dummies as predictors.

5. Results

5.1. Ideological profiles in Europe

We start by estimating latent profile models that include covariances between indicators within each dimension to account for local dependence. The BIC plot (Figure D1 in the supplementary material) shows that with each additional profile, the BIC value increases. After three profiles, the curve slightly flattens before increasing again with the five-profile model and ultimately flattens after the seven-profile model. The same holds true for the aBIC, the AIC and the log-likelihood values (see Table D2 in the supplementary material). With 0.932, the entropy value signals well defined profiles for the three-profile model. The seven-profile model shows additional profiles that are substantially similar except for one additional profile that has more pronounced within-issue cross-cuttingness - people with moderate traditional gender attitudes on the private and egalitarian gender attitudes on the public dimension (see Figure E1 in the supplementary material). Given that we are more interested in the relation of attitudes across issues in this analysis, and that the additional groups in the seven-profile model are relatively small, we chose the three-profile solution as our main model. To further substantiate the three profile solution, we re-estimated the three-profile solution with a set of different modelling choices, all leading to substantially similar results: First, we removed the covariances between within-issue indicators, second, used various combinations of alternative immigration items available in the data, third, used the EU confidence item without accounting for individuals' average institutional confidence, and, fourth, tested for biases through country differences in item responses by following a procedure recommended by Kantola and Lombardo (2021) (see section F in the supplementary material for more details).

The results of the three-profile LPA model are shown in Fig. 1.³ Overall, we distinguish between *centrist gender egalitarians*, *centrist gender ambivalents*, and *centrist gender traditionalists*. The *centrist gender ambivalents* make up the largest profile (47.6 percent), followed by the *centrist gender egalitarian* profile (42.5 percent) and the *centrist gender traditional* profile (10 percent). The labels of the three groups refer to the theoretical combinations of cosmopolitan-communitarian and gender egalitarian-traditionalist ideologies as outlined in Table 1.

5.1.1. Centrist gender egalitarians

Members in this group hold attitudes regarding immigration and the EU which are mostly located in the middle of the attitudinal spectrum whereas gender attitudes are clearly located at (public sphere) or close to (private sphere) the egalitarian pole. We thus decided to label this group *centrist gender egalitarian*, in line with our conceptual framework. Respondents in this group tend to disagree that immigrants take away jobs from nationals, though they neither agree nor disagree about immigrants making crime problem worse. Moreover, respondents tend to think that EU enlargement has gone too far and are neither confident nor unconfident about the EU as a whole. Yet, they display egalitarian gender attitudes, with mean support for gender equality in the public sphere being higher than in the private sphere.

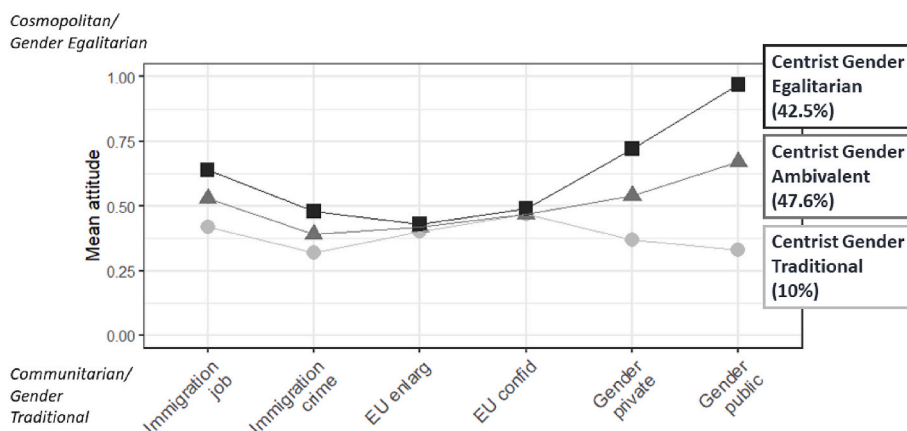
5.1.2. Centrist gender ambivalents

Members of this group hold attitudes regarding immigration and the EU which are located midway in-between the cosmopolitan and communitarian poles. We hence classify them as *centrist* regarding the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide. Mean gender attitudes also lie in-between the egalitarian and traditional extremes, though leaning towards the egalitarian pole as concerns the public sphere items. Together, this attitudinal profile fits our theoretical expectation of a *centrist gender ambivalent* group.

5.1.3. Centrist gender traditionalists

In this profile, respondents' attitudinal positions towards immigration, EU, and gender relations are slightly more communitarian and traditional, respectively, than in the other profiles. Yet, attitudinal positions towards immigration and the EU are much closer to the center of the attitudinal scales than the communitarian poles. We thus classify this profile as *centrist gender traditional*. On average, respondents in this group tend to agree that immigrants take away jobs from nationals and that they make crime problems worse. While this group also holds the position that EU enlargement has gone too far, the level of confidence in the EU is at the center of the scale. Gender attitudes related to the private and public sphere can be classified as (moderate) traditional since respondents reject egalitarian gender roles and responsibilities in both spheres. Please note though that this group is far from occupying the extreme end of the egalitarian-traditional scale.

³ For mean values per profile, see Table G1 in the supplementary material.



Note: EVS2017; N=34908; weighted by population size; harmonized attitude scales (0-1)

Fig. 1. Latent profiles of political attitudes in Europe.

Overall, attitudes towards immigration and the EU seem to be much less polarized across ideological profiles than gender attitudes which is surprising from the new-cultural divide perspective, according to which immigration and EU-integration ought to be the most polarized issues in Europe. To further explore this finding, we re-estimate the three-profile LPA model separately for each country. Even though it is often argued that the basic structure of the ideological divide should be similar across regions given that globalization pressures are omnipresent (Teney et al., 2014), political and economic development, as well as political responses to globalization vary markedly between regions and countries. This especially concerns immigration policies and gender relations, which is why our joint European model may hide regional differences. Furthermore, empirical support for the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide in public opinion was often limited to selected Western European countries.

5.2. Regional ideological divides across Europe

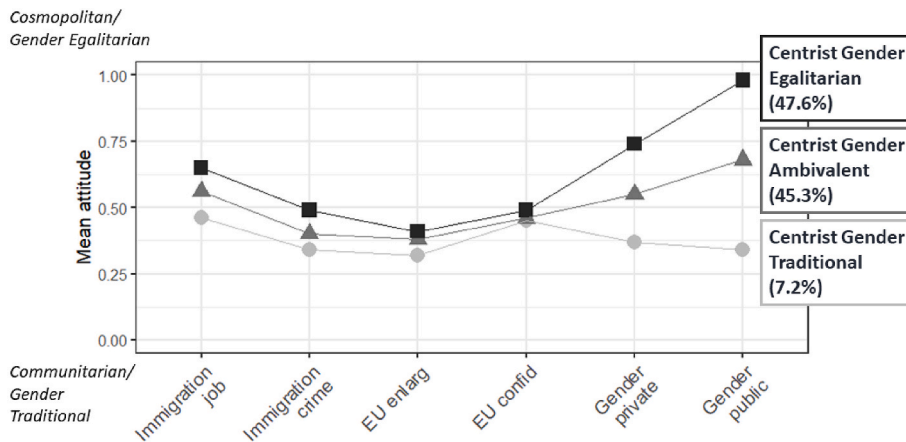
The separate LPAs for each country show that the above-described profile structure holds for most Western European countries, except for Austria, Finland, Italy and the Netherlands, which show stronger divides over immigration than gender attitudes (see Figure K1 in the supplementary material). In Central and Eastern European countries (CEE), the distinction between profiles is also more driven by immigration than gender attitudes except for Estonia, which has a rather unique divide over the question of EU-enlargement and Slovenia, which shows a profile pattern similar to the Western European countries (see Figure J2 in the supplementary material). Despite these few exceptions, we decide to broadly distinguish between Western Europe and CEE in the subsequent analysis, given that this is a common classification in the literature (Dilger 2023). However, it should be kept in mind that the result may not generalize to the above-mentioned countries that do not follow the general regional pattern. Thus, we re-estimate LPAs with up to five profiles for Western Europe and CEE. Similar to the pooled European model, the three-profile solution captures the basic structure of ideological groups and shows reasonable fit statistics in both regions. Solutions with more than three profiles identify additional small groups with within-issue cross-cutting beliefs (e.g. high concern about immigrants raising crime but no concern regarding immigrants taking jobs) but no additional between-issue configuration (see Figures H1 and H2 for Western Europe and Figures I1 and I2 for CEE in the supplementary material). We therefore continue the analysis with the three-profile solution in both regions, which also reflects our conceptual model best.

The results of the LPA for Western Europe closely match the pooled European sample (Fig. 2), except that the centrist gender egalitarian class is now the largest class, with a share of 47.6%. Similarly, gender attitudes in Western Europe appear to be more divisive than attitudes towards immigration and the EU although the group of gender traditionalists is comparatively small with a share of 7.2%.⁴

The identified profile structure in CEE looks different from the joint European model (see Fig. 3). In contrast to Western Europe, attitudes towards immigration are polarized whereas gender attitudes hardly differ across profiles. Attitudes towards the EU remain centrist. Whereas we confirm the existence of a centrist, gender-ambivalent profile in CEE (capturing 34.1% of respondents), we find two new CEE-specific profiles, which we describe below: a cosmopolitan gender-ambivalent profile representing 31.3% of respondents and a large communitarian gender-ambivalent profile comprising 34.6% of respondents.⁵

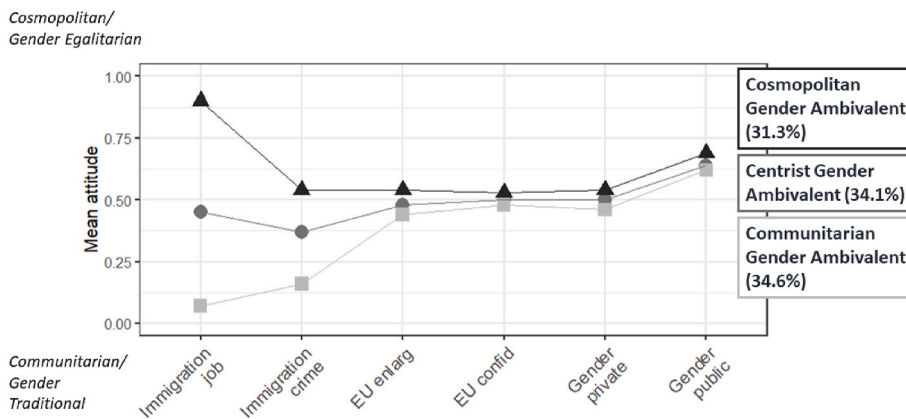
⁴ For mean values per profile, see Table J1 in the supplementary material.

⁵ For mean values per profile, see Table J2 in the supplementary material.



Note: EVS2017; N=20321; weighted by population size; harmonized attitude scales (0-1)

Fig. 2. Latent profiles of political attitudes in Western Europe.



Note: EVS2017; N=14587; weighted by population size; harmonized attitude scales (0-1)

Fig. 3. Latent profiles of political attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe.

5.2.1. Cosmopolitan gender ambivalents

Individuals in this profile disagree that immigrants take away jobs from nationals and tend to disagree that immigrants make crime problem worse. They tend to agree that EU enlargement has gone too far, but are neither confident nor unconfident about the EU as such. Members of this ideological profile have no strong egalitarian attitudes but they tend to support gender equality in the public sphere. We thus conclude that this profile captures the theoretically expected cosmopolitan gender ambivalent group, embracing a new form of egalitarianism (Knight and Brinton, 2017).

5.2.2. Communitarian gender ambivalents

In this profile, respondents hold anti-immigrant attitudes towards both immigration items, which can be interpreted as communitarianism. Yet, respondents are neither positioned against nor in favor of the EU, which is why the label communitarian mostly refers to the anti-immigrant attitudes in this group. Gender attitudes are comparable to the other ideological profiles for CEE, reflecting an ambivalent positioning.

As the identified profiles differ substantially across regions, we continue the analysis separately for Western Europe and CEE.

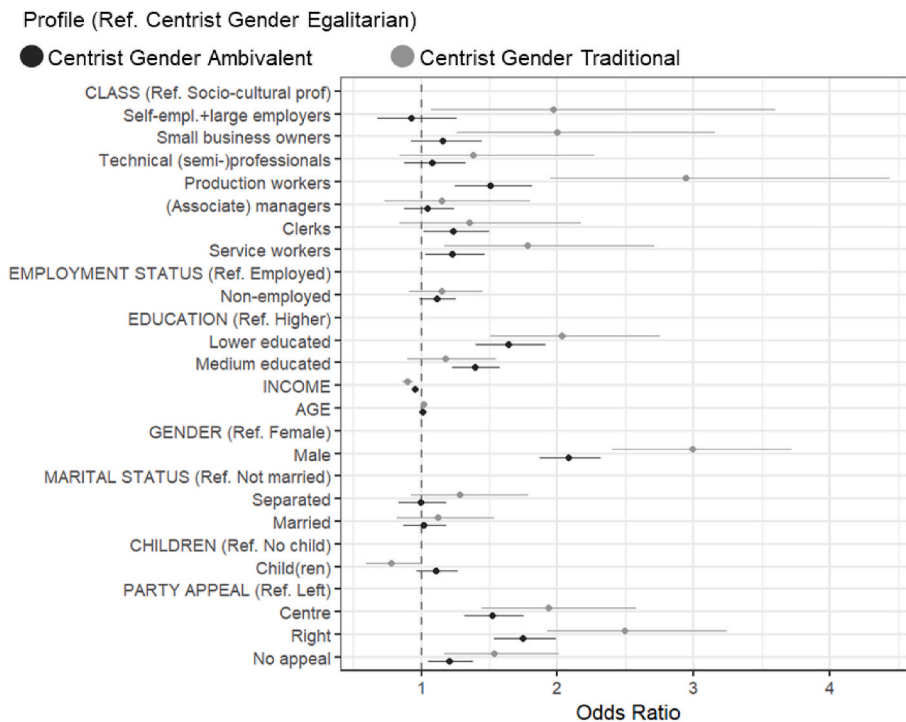
5.3. The socio-structural basis of ideological divides

Below, we present the results of a multinomial logistic regression, examining the relationship between socio-structural characteristics, party identification and latent profile membership in Western Europe and CEE. We chose this approach to assess to what extent the identified latent attitudinal profiles are socially stratified, and to better understand the nature of the ambivalent and centrist

profiles. It could be argued that, given the ideological profiles in Western Europe are more strongly shaped by variation in gender attitudes, the stratification of the profiles should mainly reflect the stratification of gender attitudes – and analogously for immigration attitudes in CEE – why it would be useful to examine the attitudinal issues separately. However, comparing results between regressions of the separate issue dimensions and the latent profiles show substantial differences (see section L in supplementary material), emphasizing the importance of focusing on the socio-structural foundation of the latent profiles.

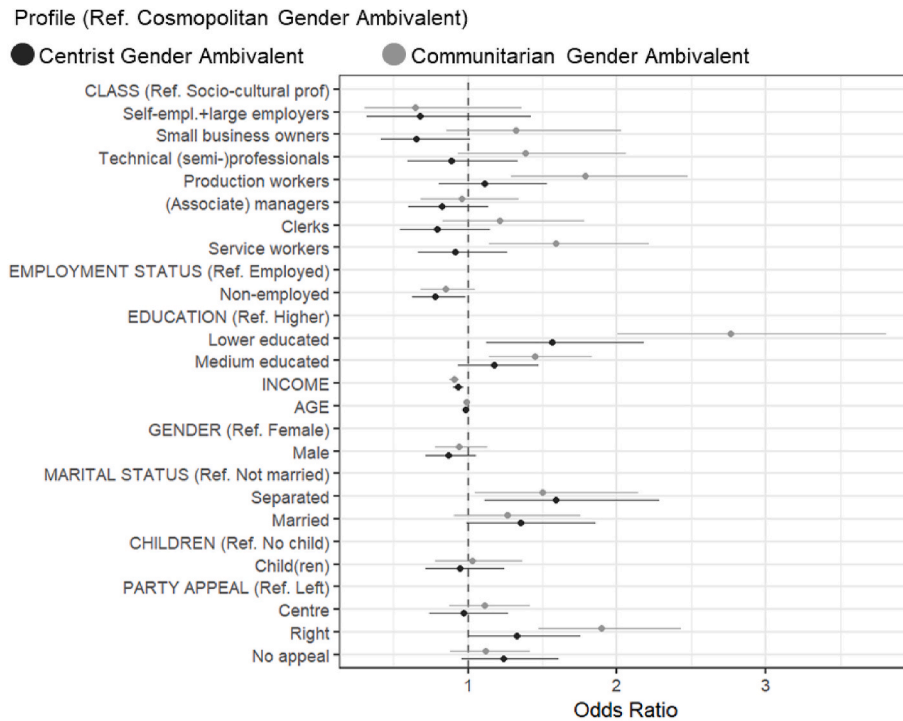
Fig. 4 presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression on profile membership in Western Europe. Positive values indicate higher odds of belonging to the respective ideology profile, compared to our reference group, *centrist gender egalitarians*. The largest observed differences in profile membership are linked to occupational class, educational attainment, income, gender, and political leanings. Individuals in lower-tier occupations (e.g. production workers, service workers, and small business owners), but also self-employed and large employers, have lower odds than socio-cultural professionals of belonging to the *centrist gender egalitarian* group. Individuals with higher educational attainment have higher odds of belonging to the *centrist gender egalitarian* profile than those with low or medium levels of education. The likelihood of belonging to the *centrist gender egalitarian* profile also increases with rising income. Women have a substantially higher likelihood of belonging to the *centrist gender egalitarian* profile than men. Finally, respondents who lean towards left-wing political parties have higher odds than respondents with right-wing, center, or no party appeal of belonging to the *centrist gender egalitarian* profile. In turn, belonging to the *centrist gender ambivalent* profile is more likely for respondents with right-wing, center, or no party appeal, suggesting a neo-traditionalist interpretation of this profile (see Fig. 4).

In CEE, differences in profile membership are related to occupational class, education and party-appeal (see Fig. 5). Specifically, production and service workers are more likely to belong to the *communitarian gender ambivalent* profile. People with low and medium-level education are more likely to belong to the *communitarian gender ambivalent* profile compared to the highly educated. Individuals with right-wing party appeal are more likely than those with left-wing party appeal to belong to the *communitarian gender ambivalent* profile (see Fig. 5).



Note: EVS 2017; N=20321; Without Portugal due to missing information about household income; Country dummies were included but are not shown; The horizontal lines show the 95% confidence interval of the point estimates; The dotted vertical line shows the odds ratio of 1. Full model results shown in the supplementary material, Table M1.

Fig. 4. Multinomial logistic regression of profile membership on socio-structural characteristics for Western Europe.



Note: EVS 2017; N=14587; Country dummies were included but are not shown; The horizontal lines show the 95% confidence interval of the point estimates; The dotted vertical line shows the odds ratio of 1; Full model results shown in the supplementary material, Table M2.

Fig. 5. Multinomial logistic regression of profile membership on socio-structural characteristics for Central and Eastern Europe.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This paper examined how Europeans combine gender attitudes with attitudes towards immigration and the EU, key indicators of the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide. To this end, we developed and tested a conceptual framework that speaks to two separate literatures, the new cultural divide and gender ideologies (Bornschieer, 2010; Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017; Teney et al., 2014). Our findings also inform the growing body of research on the organization of individuals' political attitudes (Daenekindt, de Koster and van der Waal, 2017; Scarborough et al., 2021).

We first developed a conceptual framework which integrates the literature on the new cultural divide with the state-of-the-art in gender ideology research and allows for nine combinations of both extreme and moderate/ambivalent attitudes regarding immigration, the EU and gendered spheres. Second, we applied this framework to data from 21 European countries, using Latent Profile Analysis. Table 2 displays how the results relate to the expectation of a uniform cosmopolitan-communitarian divide and its alignment with an egalitarian-traditional gender ideology axis. The grey shaded cells represent the profiles we identified in our empirical analysis.

Table 2
Empirically observed combination of cosmopolitan-communitarian and gender attitudes.

	Cosmopolitan	Centrist	Communitarian
Gender Egalitarianism	Cosmopolitan Gender Egalitarianism	Centrist Gender Egalitarianism (47.6% WE)	Communitarian Gender Egalitarianism
Gender Ambivalent	Cosmopolitan Gender Ambivalent (31.3% CEE)	Centrist Gender Ambivalent (45.3% WE; 34.1% CEE)	Communitarian Gender Ambivalent (34.6% CEE)
Gender Traditionalism	Cosmopolitan Gender Traditionalism	Centrist Gender Traditionalism (7.2% WE)	Communitarian Gender Traditionalism

Note: WE=Western Europe; CEE=Central and Eastern Europe; Source: Own depiction.

In contrast to expectations of a uniform new cultural divide across all of Europe that aligns with gender attitudes (top left and bottom right cells), we found different ideological patterns in Western Europe (centrist column, vertical axis) and CEE (gender ambivalent row, horizontal axis) and no evidence of groups clustering at the poles of cosmopolitan gender egalitarianism or communitarian gender traditionalism. Western Europeans in all three attitudinal profiles tend to hold centrist attitudes towards immigration and the EU, with attitudinal differences merely relating to gender. This finding is noteworthy, given that our data were collected right in the aftermath of mass migration to the EU in 2015-16 and the related Schengen crisis. Our findings also show that the main divide in Western Europe is not between gender egalitarian and traditional attitudes, but between egalitarian and multidimensional ambivalent attitudes (Begall et al., 2023; Grunow et al., 2018; Knight and Brinton, 2017), confirming the state-of-research in the gender ideology field. In contrast to the findings for Western Europe and in line with the new cultural divide literature, people in CEE indeed appear divided into a cosmopolitan (31.3%) and a communitarian (34.6%) camp, each covering roughly one third of respondents. Importantly, this finding is mostly driven by attitudes towards immigrants taking away jobs, not EU attitudes. The lacking variation in attitudes towards the EU in any of the identified profiles (in Western Europe and CEE) provides an important insight into political conflicts in Europe: contrary to the perspective often presented in the literature on current ideological divides in Europe (e.g. de Wilde et al., 2019), our analysis provides scant evidence for the presence of a robust overarching cosmopolitan-communitarian divide in public opinion across European countries. EU attitudes are neither extreme nor systematically related to attitudes towards immigration or gender suggestive of coherent ideological groups. Instead, most individuals appear to hold moderate or multidimensional attitudes towards the EU. Recent research highlighting the multidimensional structure of EU-attitudes would strongly support this interpretation (De Vreese et al., 2019). It also aligns with the results of Dilger's (2023) recent analysis of the European Social Survey from 2016, which shows that attitudes towards immigration are more distinctive across latent profiles than attitudes towards the EU. Hence, compared to immigration and gender relations, the contribution of EU attitudes to ideological divides in Europe is minimal. Gender attitudes held by people in CEE are mostly ambivalent, in line with previous research (Begall et al., 2023). The lack of attitudinal gender divides in CEE could be explained by the communist legacy, which resulted in several ambivalent gender ideologies but overall high support for dual earning (cp. Begall et al., 2023). Our analysis collapsed these fine-graded gender-related differences for the sake of detecting cross-dimensional similarities and differences with the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide.

In sum, gender ideologies and the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide appear to cross-cut each other in the minds of Europeans in both regions and we thus find no evidence of a single and unidimensional cultural divide in Europe. Importantly, both regions are further marked by a large *centrist gender ambivalent* group, consisting of almost half (45% WE) and one-third (34% CEE) of respondents, counterbalancing the more extreme attitudes held by some groups in both regions. Hence, future studies on intersecting attitudes need to take into account the dominance of ambivalent gender ideologies in Europe. Furthermore, if this pattern persists, it may be time to adapt items based on the new forms of gender ideologies in large scale surveys at the cost of losing some temporal comparability. Additionally, it would be important to test the ideological pattern's persistence regarding other cultural issue attitudes, such as religion, the environment, and democracy.

The finding of a large *centrist gender ambivalent* group we detected is also noteworthy given that current debates about polarization often overlook the possibility that Europeans might be undecided, neutral or ambiguous about issues subsumed under the new cultural divide. However, our analysis does not show whether these are mainly individuals with consciously centrist positions across topics, or politically alienated or disinterested individuals as those with centrist party appeal and those with no party appeal have similar ideological profile patterns. In a similar vein, the gender ideology field currently remains divided regarding how to interpret the large groups holding multidimensional ambivalent gender attitudes. In one scenario, these attitudes reflect a new type of feminism relating to post-materialist orientations that prioritizes the family over paid work and emphasizes freedom of choice in all domains of life (Knight and Brinton, 2017). On the other hand, members of this attitudinal profile may constitute a new form of gender traditionalism that now accepts maternal employment while supporting the unequal gender status quo in paid and unpaid work (Levanon and Grusky, 2016). More fine-graded gender ideology items would be needed to resolve this debate.

Our findings about the socio-structural underpinning of the ideological profiles reveal a broad foundation in Western Europe, where individuals' profile membership differs by occupational class, education, gender, income and party identification. Hence, the identified profiles in Western Europe involve a socio-structural element, a political element in the form of party identification, and importantly, a substantial division by gender. These findings suggest that gender relations should not be overlooked as a potential source of social and political conflict in Western European politics, even though recent accounts on changing cleavages seem not to consider it (Ford and Jennings, 2020).

In CEE, associations between socio-economic characteristics and attitudinal profiles are weaker, in line with earlier research (Begall et al., 2023), and linked in particular to individuals' level of education, strengthening claims that education is the primary driver of value shifts in society (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2007).

6.1. Limitations

Our study faces some limitations. First, the items available in the EVS are limited in how much we can learn about respondents' political orientation towards immigrants, the EU and gendered spheres. We have conducted additional analyses using the other available immigration items to show that our main results are not driven by a specific selection (see section E in the supplementary material). Analyses using a broader set of items that capture gender attitudes towards other realms than the labor market come to substantially similar but more nuanced results (Begall et al., 2023). Second, we do not strictly test for profile similarity across countries and social groups, because the formal procedure using multi-group analysis (Morin et al., 2016) is computationally not feasible with the relatively large number of countries. However, we have introduced direct effects of countries on the indicators to partially address

this limitation and found no indication for country-varying interpretations of the items (see section E in the supplementary material). Third, due to missing gender equality items measuring the public dimension of gender attitudes in the EVS of 2008, the analysis focuses on the most recent EVS wave.

6.2. Conclusions

Our findings show little evidence of a unidimensional cultural conflict that encompasses a diverse set of political issues. This conflicts with the notion of a new cultural divide. In Western Europe, we identify three profiles that differ in terms of their degree of support for egalitarian gender attitudes but represent rather centrist attitudes towards immigration and the EU. In CEE, we find the reversed picture in that profiles are relatively similar in their mean gender attitudes but diverge in terms of attitudes towards immigration.

The study also casts doubt on whether public opinion in Europe is highly polarized along the lines of the new cultural divide in line with recent single-country studies showing no substantial increase in attitudinal polarization regarding immigration or EU integration over the last decades (Munzert and Bauer, 2013; Teney and Rupieler, 2023). Our research has shown that the largest fraction of Europeans holds centrist or gender ambivalent attitudes across the topics investigated, adding to the growing evidence that, in contrast to the U.S., ideological polarization is not a major threat for cohesion in the European context (Weßels and Strijbis, 2019).

To conclude, it seems like there is no unidimensional cultural divide in the public opinion of the European population. Instead, Western Europe is more divided over gender attitudes than cosmopolitanism/communitarianism whereas CEE is more divided over immigration than the other examined issues. The loose alignment of gender attitudes with immigration and EU attitudes and the lack of clear-cut cosmopolitan and communitarian camps gives ample room for the formation of cross-cutting political alliances and voter volatility, and rather questions the existence of a strong cultural cleavage in Europe.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ines Schäfer: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Yassine Khoudja:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Daniela Grunow:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2024.103042>.

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