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Education and elections: a comparative analysis of party manifestos in OECD countries

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Education and Elections: A Comparative Analysis of Party Manifestos in OECD Countries

Anja P. Jakobi

No. 88

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Education and Elections:
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ABSTRACT

New institutionalism has repeatedly shown that education has become a common institution in current world society, but so far parties have not been the subject of inquiry. This is surprising, given the fact that institutionalization processes relevant to politics should be well observable in political statements. In this article, I compare the political aim to expand educational opportunities in party manifestos of 25 OECD countries. The research question is whether or not there are significant differences in favoring educational expansion over time, across countries and political positions. The article is structured as follows: In a first step, I present the theoretical background of new institutionalism, concluding with three hypotheses related to political parties and educational expansion: We should be able to observe a growing consensus on educational expansion over time; we should able to observe this development across countries; and we should be able to observe such institutionalization in manifestos with different political positions. In a second step, I present data and methods. In the third to fifth steps, I test each of the hypotheses, differentiating the institutionalization of education over time, across countries and across different political wings. The results strongly support the theoretical assumption of new institutionalism.

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Political Parties and the Institutionalization of Education: A Comparative Analysis of Party Manifestos

INTRODUCTION

New institutionalist theory has repeatedly analyzed the diffusion of world cultural principles across countries and time (e.g., Meyer 2000; Meyer et al. 1997a): Countries have introduced laws that respect human rights and empowered women, or regulations and organizations responsible for social welfare or environmental concerns (Ramirez et al. 1997; Meyer et al. 1997b). In particular, education systems and policies have been analyzed and convergence was found in curricula or the length of schooling (Meyer and Ramirez 2005; Meyer et al. 1992). Moreover, a growing acknowledgement of education as a central value in society and a rise in graduation rates can be found across the world (Meyer et al. 1977; Ramirez and Riddle 1991).

While research based on this tradition often focuses on cross-national policy outcomes – such as the introduction of laws or ministries – political parties as important actors in the political process have not been investigated. However, if institutionalization takes place across the world, parties should obviously be part of this development, and institutionalization should have consequences on their political aims. In this article, I examine the political will to expand education in party manifestos across 25 countries and from 1945 to 2003. The underlying question is whether new institutionalism is correct in assessing a worldwide institutionalization in education independently of the national culture and context.

The article is structured as follows: In a first step, I present the theoretical background of new institutionalism, its work on world culture’ and on education. I conclude with three hypotheses linked to the institutionalizations of education: First, there should be a growing consensus on educational expansion over time. Second, this development should take place across countries, and should not be restricted to specific nation states or groups of countries. Third, the institutionalization of education should be observable in manifestos with different political positions. In a second step, I present the data and methods on which this article is based: I rely on the so-called Manifesto Data set, well-known political science data collected for the inquiry of parties and elections. It contains more then 2000 coded election manifestos of elections in 25 OECD countries, most of

them beginning in 1945. I particularly rely on the indicator that assesses a party's reference to 'the need to expand/and or improve educational provision at all levels'. In three further steps, I present the evidence based on descriptive statistics. I differentiate the institutionalization of education over time, across countries and across different political wings. The results strongly support the theoretical assumption of new institutionalism, even if some limitations can be identified. In the concluding section, I outline further areas of research linked to institutionalization and political parties.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN WORLD SOCIETY

The theoretical tradition of new institutionalism underlines the role of institutions in modern society. Institutions are defined as a 'social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property' (Jepperson 1991, 145). This order represents a standardized form of interaction, produced by routines and taken-for-granted beliefs. As Jepperson furthers the argument: Institutions are 'those social patterns that, when chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes'; they 'are not reproduced by "action", in this strict sense of collective intervention in a social convention. Rather routine reproductive structures support and sustain the pattern, furthering its reproduction […]' (Jepperson 1991, 145). In consequence, institutions are seldom questioned and widely perceived as positive and something desirable. Although many contemporary institutions are rather closely linked to a Western cultural account, they have been disseminated across countries, constituting a 'world culture' in which many of the central ideas are shared (Meyer et al. 1997a).

Education is a prominent example of such an institution: Education systems have become increasingly similar across countries and contain many standardized procedures, beginning with classroom teaching but going far beyond (Meyer and Ramirez 2003): Mass schooling and common curricula are disseminated across the world (Fuller and Rubinson 1992; Meyer et al. 1992). University systems have been established and identified as important elements of national development (Ramirez and Riddle 1991). In education, schooling is successively introduced all over the world, and school curricula often follow the logic of universalism and are detached from local circumstances. Over time and space, the value of education has been acknowledged widely and became something taken for granted. At the same time, educational targets have been pursued across countries in an increasingly similar way.

Education is also closely linked to other central institutions, such as the idea of the individual, his or her life-course, and collective progress: Individual actors as basic elements of society are most often the crucial factor for explaining social structures, activities or results, and the existence of actors is an axiomatic assumption for a large part of social theory (see Esser 1999). In that sense, society is thus aggregated individual activity. Institutionalists conceive this agency of individuals or organizations a social construct, because society creates and legitimizes these entities defined as actors (Meyer et al. 1994, 9). From this perspective, the idea of the individual, its ‘actorhood’ and interest is a further world cultural model. Consequently, actors’ characteristics and choices are not internally generated but an enactment of cultural scripts (Meyer et al. 1994, 10). Social structures channel and enable individual preferences. A ‘disembedded’ individual with free choices is more a theoretical construct than a social reality, since individuals are obliged to choose between given alternatives: ‘Modern systems are organized so that individuals must choose, and must often give reasons for their choice in terms of motives of the self’ (Meyer 1986, 205). Education can enable them to make good choices and to give good reasons for them. The linkage of individual development and collective progress is strong: Analogous to the idea of a society as aggregated individuality, collective progress results from individual progress, and thus, in reverse, collective problems might be overcome by individual solutions (Meyer 1992, 19-20).

These ideas explain the central value that education has in modern society – it is the means by which individual development and collective progress can be ensured, and by which actors are assumed to gain a position from which they can choose between different ways of life, creating a common good. While these institutions mainly relate to the individual level, several others are linked to statehood: Most importantly, institutionalists assess an expansive structuration within and across the different nation. Statehood itself is socially defined status that is linked to structures as a constitution, but countries tend to see themselves as becoming responsible for more and more areas of life (Meyer and Hannan 1979; McNeely 1995). Examples are the world-wide establishment of welfare arrangements, globally spread environmental policies or science bureaucracies (Collier and Messick 1975; Meyer et al. 1997b; Finnemore 1996a). Also, the quest for progress and individual rights and development is a universal characteristic of statehood in world society, as increasing collective income and guaranteeing justice (Meyer et al. 1997a). Modern societies intend to secure progress and justice (Finnemore 1996b) and the idea of rights is continuously expanded. More and more entities are defined as being

eligible to make receiving rights-based claims, either themselves or their representatives (Meyer 2000, 239). The nation state is thus an important addressee for establishing collective institutions and for ensuring collective progress. Comparable to the orientation of individuals on institutions, nation states react to institutions new demands in the surrounding environment – here: world culture – through the establishment of something formally responsible for the demand, such as ministries, schools and so on.[1] This means that supporting institutions has become part of governmental responsibility, and that this responsibility is widely perceived as obvious across countries.

In sum, institutionalist theory thus describes education as an institution in modern society, widely known and accepted and positively attributed across countries. While most of the research carried out in an institutionalist framework deals with organizational and societal developments – such as participation rates in education, the number of graduates, the number of ministries and the like – institutionalization of education should also have consequences in daily political life. It is only reasonable to assume that widely shared cultural principles, in particular if they represent institutions as taken for granted assumptions, should represent a rather consensual issue in politics. They can be expected to form a common ground across different countries and political directions, and they can be assumed to become even more so over time – parallel to institutionalization in world society.

These assumptions are particularly relevant for examining party manifestos. Party manifestos are those documents published before elections in which the party program, its political emphasis and its envisaged activities are presented. They have a double-role to play in politics: On the one hand, they express the opinion of the respective party, presenting its decision on what seems to be important and worth campaigning for it. On the other, the party intends to use these statements to persuade voters. The opinions expressed are therefore targeted at a specific audience, of which the party assumes that it represents their potential voters. Statements can be expected to be carefully selected, given the restrictions of space and the will to avoid as much conflict with potential voters as possible – to prevent them from turning away. These characteristics make them particularly eligible for showing institutionalization processes, since institutions are

[1] However, this does not mean that the inception of new organizational forms necessarily solves the problem the way it is expected. Like structures of other organizations, they often are ‘myth and ceremony’, possibly remaining an empty shell for the societal demand (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer et al. 1997a).

likely to be dealt with in a party as consensual, and they are also likely to be seen as shared with a large number of voters – in that sense, they constitute a sort of ‘safe ground’. Against the background of institutionalist theory, three hypotheses can be derived for the analysis of party manifestos:

(a) First, we should be able to observe a growing consensus on educational expansion, observable by a growing number of supporters, as well as by a rather consensual position on education.
(b) Second, from a cross-national perspective, the idea of ‘world culture’ and institutionalized education would mean that the expansion of education should be a wide-spread element in party manifestos, irrespectively of their national origin.
(c) Third, if institutionalists are right, it should be commonplace to increase and expand educational opportunities. Political positions, as being a left-wing or right wing party, would be unlikely to determine a position on education. Education should be a rather consensual issue, independent of political positions on other topics.

In particular the latter assumption at first sight runs against many political scientist assumptions and results of political positioning. It is often the case that political parties differ on the spending that they dedicate to education. For example, social democrats used to spend more money on higher education than conservative parties (see Busemeyer 2007). However, election manifestos are more closely linked to the ‘talk’ about institutions than corresponding ‘action’, as represented in public educational spending (Brunsson 1989). The new institutionalist assumption on a rather consensual opinion on educational expansion thus does not exclude different activities once the respective parties are in office. It is particular the focus on promises, perceived expectations and the like that should make party manifestos a particularly suitable source for inquiring institutionalization.

AN ESSENTIAL SOURCE OF POLITICAL STATEMENTS: THE MANIFESTO DATA SET

Methods of analysis in this article are descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies, means or cross tables. The data used are nearly exclusively based on the so-called ‘Manifesto dataset’, two datasets constructed and published by the manifesto research group, an international collaboration of political science scholars interested in party positions and

electoral outcomes. The data consist of two sets, the first covering OECD countries from 1945 to 2003, the second covering members of the European Union and eastern European countries from 1990 to 2003. Without some few exceptions, the dataset covers the manifestos of all parties campaigning for seats in national parliaments during that period (see Budge et al. 2001:229-232; Klingemann et al. 2006:236-237). The datasets are publicly available on two CD-ROMS, attached to books presenting the dataset, its construction and usage as well as some findings based on it (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). My following analysis covers 25 OECD members from 1945 to 2003, which means that I merged data on manifestos from the first data set with those from the second.[2]

The data set is based on qualitative sources, the texts of the party manifestos, but it is itself a purely quantitative source. The research group collected and analyzed 2232 election manifestos from parties in 25 OECD-Countries (see Table 1).[3] The manifestos were divided into ‘quasi-sentences’ as the smallest unit of meaningful political statement on an issue (Volkens 2001). In total, the group was interested in 56 different items, that range from categories as ‘External Relations’, to ‘Freedom and Democracy’, ‘Economy’ or ‘Welfare and Quality of Life’. Quasi-sentences on a specific issue were counted and afterwards related to the total number of ‘quasi-sentences’ in the corresponding manifesto. The outcome is a number on a metric scale that theoretically ranges from 0.00 to 100.00. It represents a relative number, calculating the space of an item against the space provided to all items. A high number thus means that the party places much emphasis on the issue, while qualitative differences – as a more or less extreme wording – disappear. The coding of several items is also linked to whether the manifesto supports the item or not: For example, the coding of ‘multiculturalism’ contains information on how far the emphasis is on ‘multiculturalism positive’ or ‘multiculturalism negative’, while items like ‘political corruption’ are only coded according to the extent to which they are mentioned at all.

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[2] The second manifesto dataset also contains more recent OECD members. To enable a longitudinal analysis of all countries over more than two decades, they were left out since they are only included from 1990 – 2003. Thus, the countries analyzed in the following are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United States.

[3] See Budge et al. (2001, 193-228) and Klingemann et al. (2006, 138-237) for more details.

Table 1. Number of countries, elections and manifestos in the dataset

Decade	Countries	Number of Elections	Manifestos
1945 – 1949	20	31	144
1950 – 1959	21	63	287
1960 – 1969	22	63	306
1970 – 1979	25	74	431
1980 – 1989	25	74	455
1990 – 1999	25	69	443
2000 – 2003	23	25	166
All		***399***	***2232***

Notes: Some countries were non-democratic until the 1970s. Israel and Luxembourg had no elections in the period 2000-03; Source: Manifesto Dataset, own calculations

Among the items coded is ‘expansion of education positive’ (Item code: per506) and, as a control item, ‘expansion of education negative’ (per507) (see Volkens 2001, 107-9). ‘Expansion of Education’ is understood as the ‘need to expand and/or improve educational provision at all levels’ (Budge et al. 2001, 228). Most of this article will be based on an analysis of this item.[4] It actually represents a very general definition of a complex phenomenon – educational expansion can relate to diverse issues as expanding access or to hire more teachers – but given the fact that it is a quantitative indicator that needs to be applicable to all years, countries and manifestos available, a lower level of generalization is unfeasible.

Besides the single items, the original dataset contains five indices on the programmatic position of a manifesto, among them the position of a specific manifesto on a continuum from right to left wing positions, represented by the item code ‘rile’ (Budge et al. 2001, 228, for a detailed discussion see Klingemann et al. 2006, 63-85). This additive index encompasses several single items of the database, including ‘expansion of education positive’ as an indicator for a left-wing manifesto. The index theoretically ranges from ‘-100’ to ‘+ 100’, whereby negative values signify left-wing parties and

[4] However, ‘education’ in this case does not include technical training, which is coded under the item ‘Technology and Infrastructure’ (per411). This encompasses ‘Importance of modernisation of industry and methods of transport and communication; importance of science and technological development in industry; need for training and research’ (Budge et al. 2001, 225). Accordingly, this category is too broad to take it as an indicator only for technical training, so that the following analysis relies on the items linked to ‘expansion of education’ only. As a consequence, whenever I refer to ‘education’ in the context of the manifesto database, technical training is excluded. This does not affect the conclusions drawn from the data, since my main emphasis regarding the database is on questions about education in general, not on whether a manifesto supports technical training.

positive values signify right-wing parties. I use the data base to examine the extent to which educational expansion is consensual across countries and political wings.[5]

However, in the original dataset, the variables of educational expansion and the political wings are not totally independent since ‘expansion of education’ (per506) is included in the index as an indicator for a left wing position (Budge et al. 2001, 228; also Klingemann et al. 2006, 5-9).[6] To avoid endogeneity, I recalculated the left-right position by taking ‘educational expansion’ out of the index. Moreover, as a result of the calculation process ‘rile’ also includes negative numbers for left-wing manifestos, it originally ranges from -100 to +100. For descriptive purposes all numbers were transferred into positive values by adding ‘100’ and by dividing the result by ‘2’. The new scale therefore ranges from 0 to 100. In short, the new index ‘Left-Right-Position’ (rile_new) is thus calculated as:

$$\text{Rile_new} = (\text{rile} - \text{per506} + 100)/2$$

The result is an index that categorizes manifestos on a right-left scale without including any response on ‘expansion of education’. Theoretically, it ranges from 0 to 100, representing the political position from the extreme left to the extreme right. For improved understanding of the spectrum and better description, I fixed and labeled six categories of political orientation (see Table 2).

Additionally, analyses partly also use other variables of the dataset, which are marked as such, and have not been subject of recalculations. It is most important to note that the essential unit of analysis described here and used in this article is the party manifesto, not the party itself. This is due to the fact that in many countries, party names change, parties become more or less important and the like. The number of cases would decrease sharply, if focusing on parties instead of manifestos. Moreover, given the fact that parties can change their position across the right-left continuum over time, it seems inadequate to conceive them as a constant over time (see Budge and Bara 2001, 52-58). Besides, it is important to bear in mind that ‘left’ and ‘right’ are categories derived from the quantitative index ‘rile’ and ‘rile_new’, respectably. So, there is no ‘right’ or

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[5] To give an – oversimplified – example of the construction principle of the index: The value of the item ‘political authority’ and the value of ‘traditional morality positive’ (indicate a right-wing position) are summed up and reduced by the value of ‘Marxism’ (indicates a left wing position). A manifesto that scores ‘50’ for the authority, ‘30’ for the morality and ‘0’ for Marxism thus ends up with a value of ‘80’, representing a fairly strong right-wing position, while a manifesto that scores ‘20’ for authority, ‘20’ for traditional values and ‘50’ for Marxism would be summed up as ‘-10’, representing a moderate left position.

[6] The original index is calculated as: Rile = (per104+per201+per203+per305+per401+per402+per407+per414 +per505+per601+per603+ per605+per606) – (per103+per105+per106+per107+per403+per404+per406+per412 +per413 +per504+per506+per701+per202), see Budge et al. (2001, 228).

‘left’ position with regard to education, but there are right-wing or left-wing manifestos that do or do not support educational expansion and other items.

Table 2. Categories of political orientation, based on the index ‘rile_new’

Political Orientation	Index right-left (rile_new)	Number of manifestos
Extreme left	0 to 19.99	13
Modest left	20 to 39.99	647
Middle Left	40 to 49.99	717
Middle Right	50 to 59.99	492
Modest right	60 to 79.99	339
Extreme right	80 to 100	24
All		2232

Source: Manifesto Dataset, own calculations

Besides, I also coded countries according to whether they have a centralized of decentralized education system. In fact, most of the education systems have decentralized elements, as local school boards or regional administrative capacities. Nonetheless, some countries, as Switzerland, do not have any federal education ministry at all. Information on the structure of an education system is important since widely decentralized education systems could be expected to place less emphasis on educational issues in national elections. However, comparative data on centralization and decentralization is hard to find, in particular over time. To obtain estimates for the status of centralization, I recoded qualitative data from the ‘World Data on Education’ (UNESCO/IBE 2006/7) to a dichotomous dummy-variable, containing the information on whether a national body has wide-ranging responsibility for educational laws, financing and programs (see Table A1). However, the data only represents the status around the years preceding the publication of the databank. Given that education systems rarely change substantially within a short time, we can reasonably assume that it represents the status from 2000 on, so that at least manifesto data from that decade can be related to what extent it stems from a centralized or decentralized education system.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION OVER TIME

In a first step, I will evaluate whether there is a growing consensus on educational expansion. This should be observable by a growing number of supporters, as well as by a rather consensual position on education: A first comparison of mean values across different items in the dataset shows that education is indeed rather consensual. Table 3 presents the mean percentages on items whose coding includes positive and negative attitudes. In comparison to other items, as ‘Military’, ‘European Union’ or Multiculturalism’, to name a few, the support of educational expansion is clearly a leading issue in

election manifestos, and only the expansion of social services is mentioned more often. This shows a wide-spread concern for education. In this context, it is important to realize that public choice theory could, in principle, explain strong support for welfare programs, education and the like: From such perspective, it is reasonable to promise a lot before elections – independent of what will be realized afterwards. However, such account cannot explain why education is seen particularly positive compared to other welfare-related expenditures. Institutionalist theory, in contrast, assumes that education is a central institution and thus more likely to be linked to political consensus.

Table 3. Mean values of support of educational expansion in comparison to other policy fields 1945 - 2003

Topic	Positive	Negative	Degree of dissent*
Educational Expansion	3.33	0.04	0.01
Foreign Relations	0.94	0.38	0.40
Military	1.61	1.07	0.66
Internationalism	2.47	0.5	0.20
European Union	1.18	0.35	0.30
Constitutionalism	0.81	0.41	0.51
Protectionism	0.38	0.24	0.63
Welfare State	6.46	0.38	0.06
National Way of Life	1.53	0.19	0.12
Traditional Morality	2.51	0.26	0.10
Multiculturalism	0.84	0.32	0.38
Labor Groups	2.55	0.18	0.07

* Relation of Negative Attitudes To Positive Attitudes; Source: Manifesto Dataset, own calculations, rounded figures

Additionally, the expansion of education is an issue that is often mentioned, but rarely questioned compared to the other topics: Education is the issue that is at least opposed in manifestos, and across countries the mean value of ‘educational expansion negative’ is only 0.04 per cent. This becomes even more visible when the negative attitudes are set in relation to the positive ones, resulting in a metric scale on which a low value represents a rather uncontroversial issue. Educational expansion is again represented by the lowest value. On a very general basis, and compared to other topics in the manifestos, we can thus conclude that education and its expansion are indeed a very consensual issue.

Table 4. ‘Expansion of education’ in manifestos, 1945 – 2003

	1945 – 49	**1950 – 59**	**1960 – 69**	**1970 –79**	**1980 – 89**	**1990 – 99**	**2000 – 03**	**All**
Educational Expansion Positive								
– Mean percentage	2.01	2.56	3.64	2.91	3.25	3.95	4.82	3.33
– Standard deviation	2.66	3.26	3.90	3.00	3.32	3.54	3.46	3.42
– Coefficient of variation	1.32	1.27	1.07	1.03	1.02	0.90	0.72	1.03
– Number of manifestos with positive view on educational expansion	77	170	216	291	337	352	149	1592
– in percent	53.47	59.23	70.59	67.52	74.07	79.46	89.76	71.37
Educational Expansion Negative								
– Mean percentage	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.1	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04
– Standard deviation	0.08	0.14	0.77	0.56	0.09	0.15	0.08	0.39
– Coefficient of variation	8.00	14.00	12.83	5.60	9.00	7.50	8.00	9.75
– Number of manifestos with negative view on educational expansion	1	3	5	20	4	7	1	41
– in percent	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
No Statement on Educational Expansion								
– Number of manifestos that do not contain any statement on educational expansion	66	116	87	132	118	90	17	626
– in percent	45.83	40.42	28.43	30.63	25.93	20.32	10.24	28.00

Source: Manifesto Dataset, own calculations, rounded figures

While these values represent mean values pooled across countries and time, the institutionalization of education as understood in institutionalist theory would also mean a growing consensus on education over time. Table 4 shows how Pros and Cons on educational expansion have developed over seven decades. As we can see, the positive mentioning of educational expansion has gained more and more space in manifestos over time: The 1960s constitute an early peak with 3.64 percent, which was followed by a decline in the 1970s. From then on, however, the issue again increased in the manifestos, reaching new peaks in the 1990s (3.95 percent) and again increasing to 4.82 percent in the 2000s. Although the relative importance of positive statements on educational expansion still varies widely across manifestos, the variation of values has decreased continuously across the decades: The coefficient of variation dropped from 1.32 in the 1940s to 0.72 in the 2000s. In the meantime – with an outlier in the 1970s – the percentage of manifestos that contain such statements at all has increased from 53.47 percent to 89.76 percent, signifying that across countries and political positions, nearly one out of ten manifestos does not contain a positive statement on educational expansion.

Quite the reverse can be observed when analyzing negative statements on educational expansion. Here, values as mean percentages are very low, reaching their peak in

the 1970s with 0.1 percent. The variation is high across all decades, resulting from the low number of relevant cases: In the 1970s, the decade in which most manifestos with a negative statement on educational expansion could be found, only 0.05 percent did contain such statement. In all other decades, the percentage is either 0.01 percent or 0.02 percent, representing an extremely low value compared to the positive statements. Consequently, the number of manifestos that do not contain any reference to educational expansion, either positively or negatively, has also dropped considerably over time: in the 1940s more than 45 percent did not consider educational expansion being an issue important enough to be mentioned, while in the 2000s only around 10 percent do so.

In sum, the analysis shows that education has indeed become an increasingly important part in party politics – the institutionalization of education in this field can thus be assessed so far. However, it also seems to follow trends: The 1970s, probably influenced by the oil crisis and first restrictions of expanding welfare services, have been an exceptional decade in the data: It is likely that any expansion of governmental responsibility and spending was more difficult than in other decades and that this fact is mirrored in the decrease of positive statement on educational expansion over the decades.[7] However, it is clear that the 1970s represent an outlier and not a finding that runs against the theoretical assumptions. In fact, all of the trends presented so far – the general support of education compared to other policy fields, the increasing importance of education in manifestos, and the decrease of parties that do not deal with the issue – support the hypothesis of a general institutionalization of education in political life. As becomes visible in the manifestos, education has indeed become an increasingly important field, and parties are regularly mentioning it. However, these descriptions do not say much about which countries or parties support such an expansion and if the expansion of education is an issue of particular countries or groups. National differences are often assumed, however, they should be subject of investigation to test if institutionalist theory is right in its emphasis on a ‘world culture’.

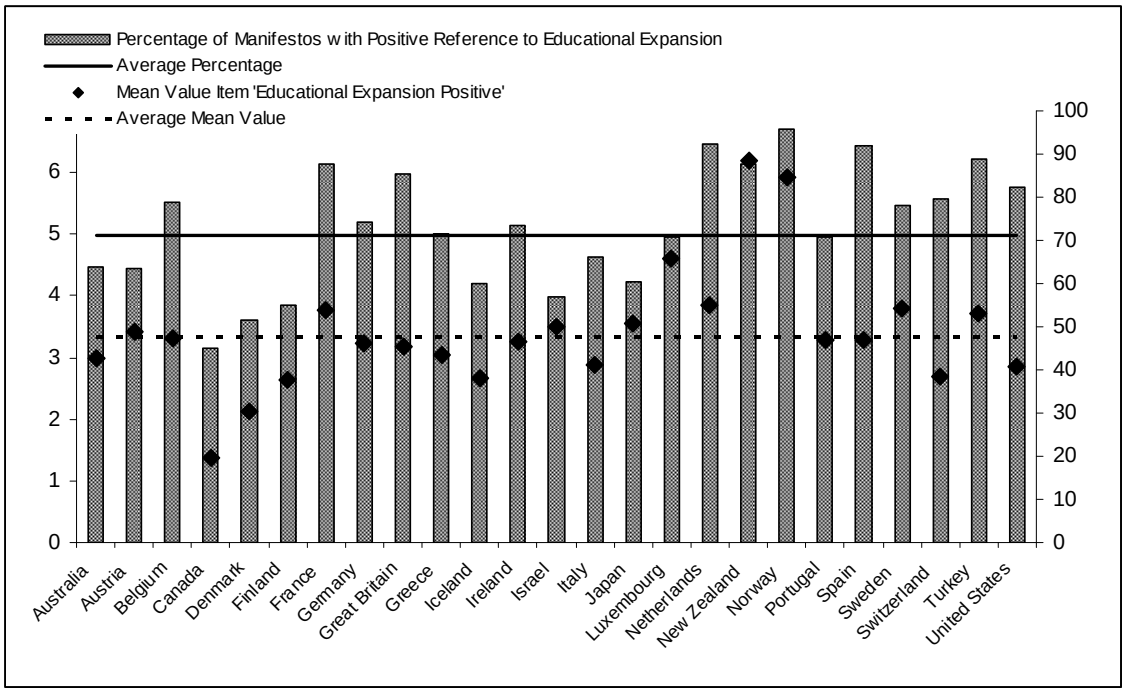
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION ACROSS COUNTRIES

While so far I only analyzed mean values, manifestos of specific countries can be more or less likely to address educational expansion. As stated above, from a cross-national perspective, the idea of ‘world culture’ and institutionalized education would mean that

[7] This view is supported by an analysis of the item ’welfare state expansion positive’. Although the decrease is only low, the 1970s are the decade in which the continuous growth of space dedicated to a positive view on welfare state expansion is interrupted. Additionally, that decade is also the only one in which there is a decrease in the percentage of manifestos that refer to this item (own analyses based on manifesto data).

the expansion of education should be a wide-spread element in party manifestos, irrespectively of their national origin.

Figure 1. Mean values of and percentage of manifestos containing 'Educational Expansion Positive' across OECD countries 1945-2003



Source: Manifesto Dataset. own calculations

A first look at mean values shows that a positive statement on educational expansion can be found in any country (see Figure 1. also Table A-2 in annex): Nonetheless, the mean values – the average percentage of space dedicated to a positive statement on educational expansion in a given manifesto – differ across countries, with an average of 3.33 percent: Manifestos in New Zealand and Norway on the average dedicate most content to educational expansion (6.2 percent and 5.93 percent). Norway additionally has the lowest coefficient of variance in the dataset, scoring at 0.48, which means that the length of statements there is most equivalent across manifestos. Countries that dedicate the least space are Canada with an average of 1.37 percent and Denmark with an average of 2.14 percent. They also show the highest coefficients of variation, signifying that the length of statements differ largely among the manifestos.

While these differences refer to the share of the item 'educational expansion positive' in manifestos, the percentages of manifestos that mention educational expansion at all also differs widely: On the average, 71.33 percent of the manifestos contain this item. In Norway, nearly all manifestos refer positively to this item (95.96 percent) which is more often than in any other country. With 87.88 percent, New Zealand is only the fifth, following Netherlands, Spain and Turkey (92.45 percent, 92.11 percent, 88.68

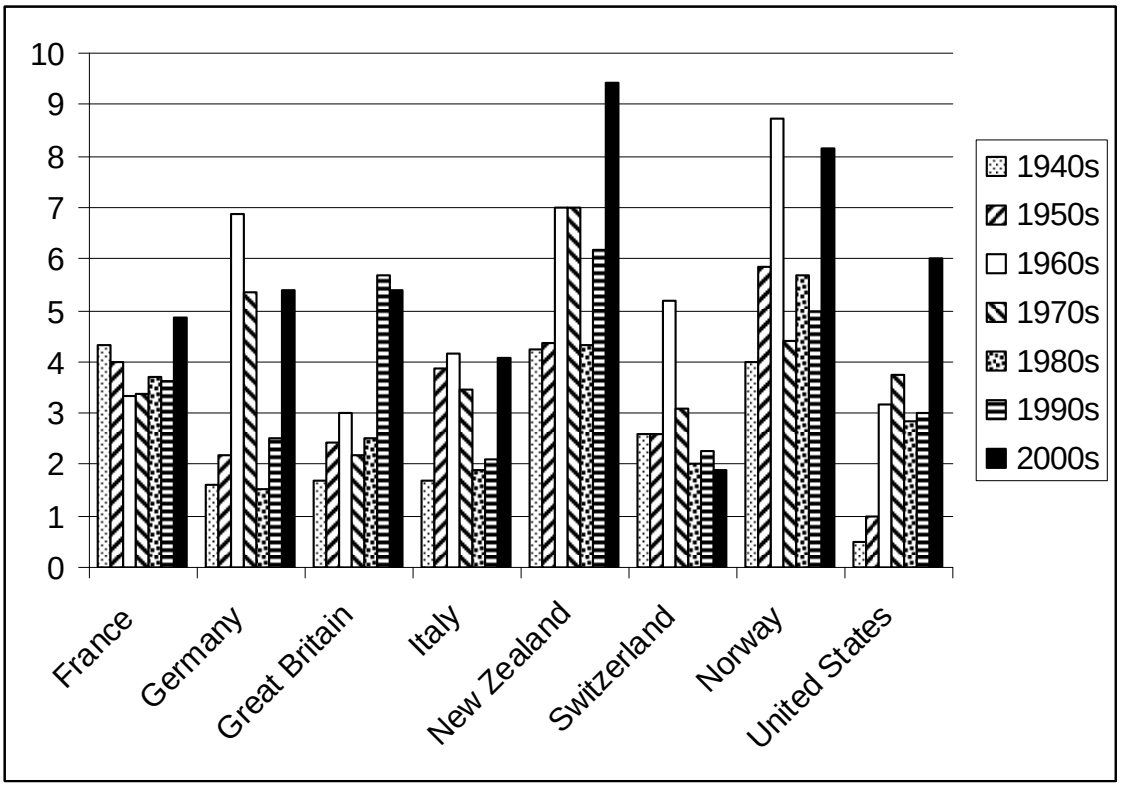
percent). Again, Canada is at the end of this list, representing the country where only 45.07 percent of all manifestos mention educational expansion.

A correlation analysis of countries and the item ‘educational expansion positive’ has shown no significant effect, so that we can conclude that despite differences across countries, the national origin of a manifesto does not determine the extent to which educational expansion is seen positively. The differences, however, are also unlikely to result from geographic-cultural categories or ‘welfare models’ (Esping-Andersen 1990). When categorizing the countries to groups as ‘Nordic Countries’, Anglo-Saxon or German-Speaking, some minor differences are seen, but these remain rather small: German-Speaking countries dedicate an average of 3.04 percent to positive statements on educational expansion, Benelux countries 3.74 percent, the other groups lie in between (see Table A-3. annex). Further analyses of national conditions could reveal important national determinants for the observable differences, but so far remain beyond the aim of this paper.

Analyzing selected countries over time shows that the mean emphasis on education used to vary largely across countries and years. However, a positive view on educational expansion has become increasingly common: In 13 of the 25 countries, the mean value concerning ‘educational expansion positive’ peaks in 2000-03, in seven other cases in 1990-99. Four countries have their peak in the 1960s, only Japan in the 1980s (see Table A-4). Figure 2 shows a more detailed analysis of the EU Big-4 countries – Germany, UK, France and Italy – as well as Switzerland, Norway, New Zealand and the US as Non-EU members with very different economic, social and cultural conditions: In France, New Zealand, Norway and the United States, the item ‘educational expansion positive’ peaked in the 2000s. In Germany and Italy, the item ranks comparably high, in the UK both the 1990s and the 2000s ranked exceptionally high. Only in Switzerland a rather small share of manifestos dedicate space to educational expansion with a slightly decreasing trend. As we can see, there is no evident cultural or economic national background that seems to condition a positive statement on educational expansion.

However, if not due to specific cultural or geographical factors, a potential influence on the mentioning of educational expansion can be related to whether the elected body can actually deal with educational topics: It is not unusual for federal countries that education remains on the local or state level. This is, for example, the case in Canada and in Switzerland. Nonetheless, countries with a comparable structure, like the US, do not seem to be influenced by this factor, and they even emphasize educational expansion more often.

Figure 2. Mean emphasis on ‘Expansion of Education’ in manifestos in eight countries over time



Source: Manifesto Dataset. own Calculation

A systematic comparison of centralized and decentralized education systems does not result in a clear finding (see Table A-1 for coding): In the 2000s, manifestos of centralized systems indeed contain a positive reference to educational expansion more often than decentralized systems (59.57 percent vs. 40.27 percent). Moreover, the mean value of ‘educational expansion positive’ is higher in centralized systems than in decentralized ones (5.23 percent to 4.18 percent). However, a positive correlation could not be found. Additional information supports these mixed findings: Manifestos in the UK have often emphasized educational expansion, which is coherent with the campaign of Tony Blair and the Labor Party that had identified education as being a key issue for economic development – even if the country has a decentralized education system.[8] The federal government of the United States has also increasingly gained competence in and paid attention to education policy – despite its decentralized structure where even the inception of the federal Department of Education was highly contested (Davies 2007; McGuinn 2006).

[8] ‘Education, education, education’ is a well-known mantra of Tony Blair and is used regularly (see Manchester Evening News 2005). Other statements are, for example, ‘Our number one Priority for investment is education’, a quote by Tony Blair in 1999 or ‘Education remains top priority’, as stated in the 2001 Labor Party Manifesto (quoted in Wolf 2002: ix).

In sum, analyzing manifestos over time thus reveals a common growing emphasis on educational expansion, while analyzing manifestos across countries shows that there is no clear pattern of where such statements are more likely to be found – even if national differences clearly exist. We can nonetheless conclude that educational expansion is a wide-spread issue in election campaigns around the world. It is not restricted to a specific cultural or geographic group of countries, nor does the constitutional structure of an education system necessarily determine whether or not educational issues are part of an election campaign. So far, the assumption of a common world culture, in which educational expansion is widely institutionalized, is still supported. However, it is still plausible to assume that political differences are a major cause for differences related to the expansion of education, and the following section is concerned with this assumption.

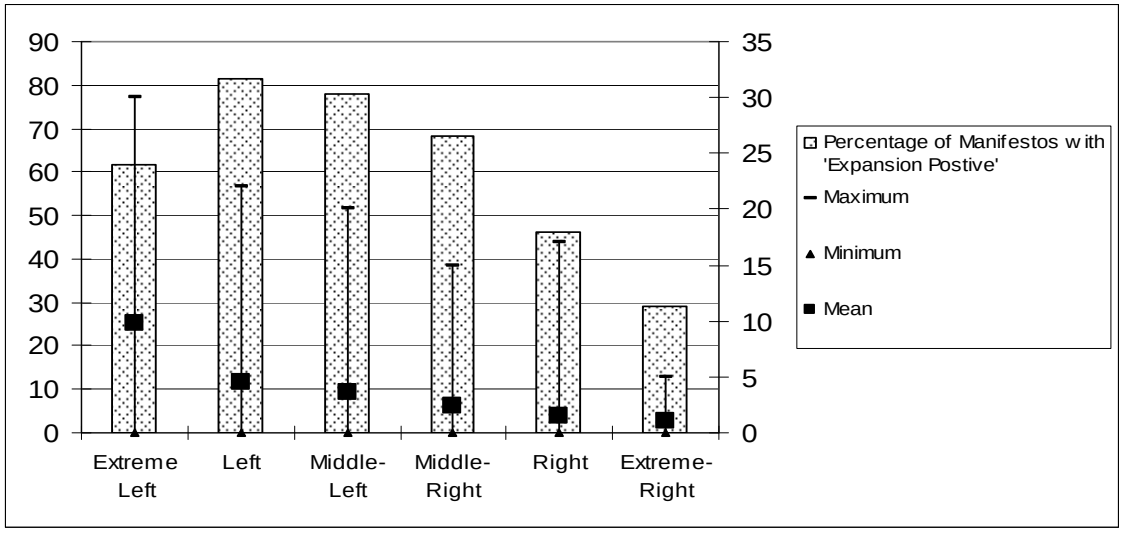
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION ACROSS POLITICAL POSITIONS

Parties in democratic polities are marked by divergent opinions on given issues. In education policy, findings show that social-democratic governments (left-wing) are more likely to dedicate budgets to educational issues than are conservative parties (right-wing) (see Busemeyer 2007). Also the creators of the Manifesto Dataset used ‘expansion of education positive’ as an indicator on the right-left scale of political positions (Budge et al. 2001. 228).[9] The idea of a world society and its institutionalized education, however, runs contrary to such an approach. From that point of view, it is a matter of common sense to increase and expand educational opportunities. Consequently, a political position, such as being a left-wing or right wing party, would thus be unlikely to determine a position on education.

A first analysis of the mentioning of ‘educational expansion positive’ across the political spectrum shows that on the average, left-wing parties indeed dedicate more space to positive statements on education than right wing parties (see Figure 3). They also have higher mean values and higher maximums: The mean value of the extreme left is 9.77 percent, while the mean value of the extreme right is only 1.13 percent. Additionally, the number of manifestos that mention educational expansion positively is higher on the left than on the right: 61.54 percent of manifestos categorized as extreme left mention educational expansion positively, while only 29.17 percent of the extreme right manifestos do so. Educational expansion is most common in manifestos which are categorized as left, with 81.45 percent. A correlation analysis further verifies the positive relation of left wing manifestos and educational expansion, resulting in a Pearson-Coefficient of 0.35 (significant at 0.01, two-tailed test).

[9] That is why I recalculated the index; see the section on data and methods.

Figure 3. ‘Expansion of Education’ in manifestos of different political wings. 1945 – 2003



Source: Manifesto Dataset. Own Calculations

So far, the institutionalization of education thus seems to be strongly influenced by political directions. However, these values only present averages over time, and a possible counter-argument is that the support of ‘expansion of education’ has changed over time, which would not be visible so far. As a consequence, education today could not be linked to a specific group but was it a few decades ago. Or the reverse: parties today can be distinguished by their statements on expansion of education, but they could not before. Institutionalists would opt for the first version, arguing that education became institutionalized. But in both cases the above analysis of all manifestos does not reveal such findings only a longitudinal analysis does.

Table 5 shows the result of such an analysis: Due to very small case numbers, manifestos categorized as extreme right and extreme left are taken out of the sample.[10] The remaining political manifestos again show the already known distribution: right-wing manifestos support educational expansion less often than left-wing manifestos do. All minimums listed in fact refer to the mean values of right-wing manifestos, all maximums to the left-wing manifestos. Only between 2000 and 2003, middle-left manifestos dedicated more space to ‘educational expansion positive’ than left-wing manifestos. The distance between the minimum and maximum does not show any clear trend; after a decrease from the 1960s to the 1990s, it has become larger in the 2000s. Manifestos are thus not converging in that respect.

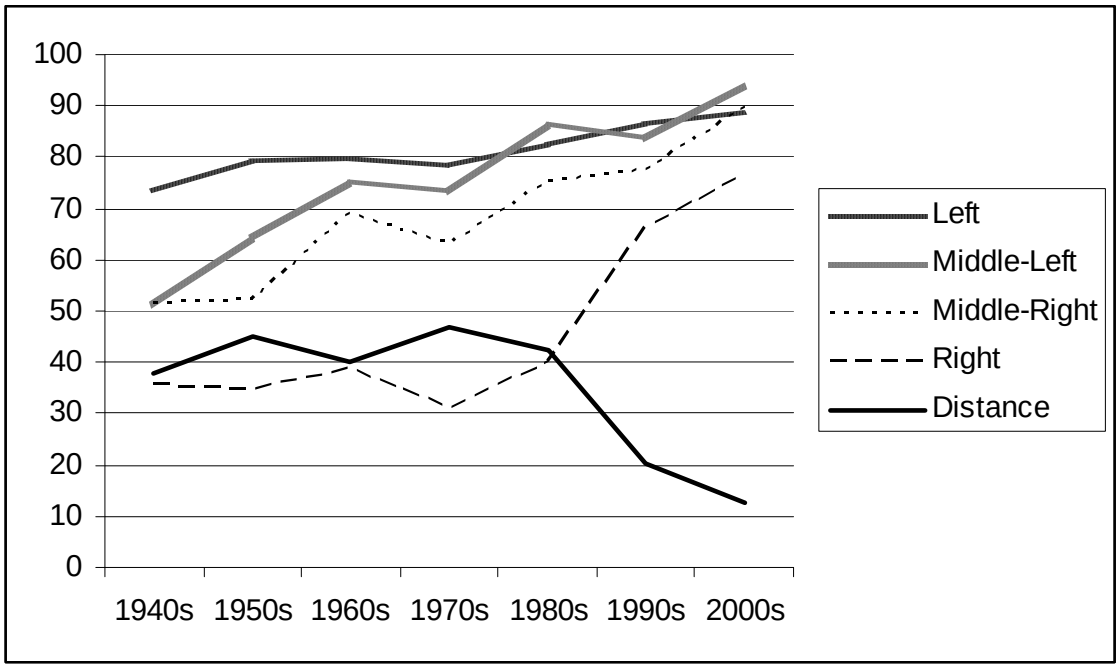
[10] They showed extreme mean values, partly based on n=1, additionally, they have not existed in each decade.

Table 5. Variance in mean percentages of ‘Expansion of Education’ in Manifestos, 1945 – 1998

Decade	Min	Max	Distance
1940-1949	1.43	3.32	1.89
1950-1959	0.85	4.05	3.20
1960-1969	1.10	5.2	4.10
1970-1979	0.67	4.3	3.63
1980-1989	1.00	4.58	3.58
1990-1999	2.72	5.12	2.40
2000-2003	2.12	5.65	3.53

Source: Manifesto Dataset, own calculations

Figure 4. Percentage of manifestos containing positive statement on educational expansion of different political positions over time



Source: Manifesto Dataset. own calculations

However, analyzing whether or not a positive statement on educational expansion is part of a manifesto reveals a slightly modified picture. Although left-wing manifestos more often contain such statement than do right-wing manifestos, we can observe a clear convergence over time towards a high rate of mentioning this goal (see Figure 4. also Table A-5 in the annex): In the 1940s, more than 70 percent of manifestos from the left mentioned educational expansion positively, while only 35.71 from the right did so. The distance increased unsteadily in the course of the following years and reached its peak in the 1970s, when 78.23 percent of left manifestos mentioned the item, but only 31.25 percent of the right did. From then on, the percentage of manifestos containing a positive view on educational expansion increased steadily, reaching its peak with 93.94

percent of middle-left manifestos mentioning it and 76.47 percent of right-wing manifestos. Thus, middle-left manifestos nowadays represent the category of manifestos that refers most often to educational expansion. The distance of the lowest and highest value has just decreased sharply and is now nearly one fourth of its maximum in the 1970s. In consequence, although manifestos differ along the left-right scale in whether or not they mention educational expansion positively, they are converging: Over time, the share of manifestos that dedicate any space to educational expansion has become higher, and the difference between right-and left wing manifestos has widely decreased.

In sum, the findings of this section show that the importance of educational expansion compared to other items is higher in left-wing manifestos, although the space dedicated to educational expansion grows across all political positions. Correlation analysis has underlined this finding. However, there is an obvious convergence across political positions in whether or not party manifestos mention educational expansion at all: The percentage of manifestos that do so has increased sharply and the percentage of right-wing manifestos that contain such references has extra-proportionally increased, leading to a sharply decreasing distance between right and left-wing manifestos (see table A-5). The findings presented in this section reveal that educational expansion has indeed become a common feature across political positions, even if it is a – relatively – more important issue in the context of left-wing manifestos.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I examined the question of whether education has become a more consensual issue in politics, more specifically among parties. This research question was drawn from a background of new institutionalist theory and its idea on the institutionalization of education. Following this argument, we should expect a growing consensus on educational matters and a decreasing variation in the support for education across countries and political positions. The analysis indeed shows that educational expansion is a very consensual item compared to other political issues. Also, the analysis of time shows a growing support for educational expansion: Manifestos put an increasing relative emphasis on educational expansion and they also increasingly mention educational expansion altogether In the 2000s, around one out of ten manifestos did not refer positively to educational expansion at all. Parallel to this development, negative statements on educational expansion are hard to find. While these figures refer to an analysis across countries and over time, the analysis of manifestos categorized by countries has revealed a large variation. However, most of the countries have recently reached a peak in the mean average of space that manifestos dedicate to a positive view on educational expansion. Analyses of different regions or different education systems have not shown a clear distribution of the item ‘educational expansion positive’ to specific types of

countries. We can thus conclude that, despite the variance found, educational expansion is not restricted to specific countries, groups or areas. Finally, I analyzed whether specific political positions are more likely to support educational expansions than others. I found that left-wing parties dedicate more emphasis to educational expansion than right-wing parties do and this fact remains constant over time. However, when analyzing whether or not a manifesto mentions educational expansion positively, left-wing and right-wing manifestos converge over time, so that a large share of both groups today refers to this aim.

In sum, the fact that around 90 percent of all manifestos contain such statements shows that this issue is widely shared, and the growing space dedicated to educational expansion also shows that it is becoming more important. This supports the first hypothesis derived from new institutionalism. The analysis of countries – related to the second hypothesis – has shown that national differences exist, and there is no clear pattern of countries that support educational expansion or do not. The second hypothesis is thus still supported, but future research could be dedicated to the analysis of additional factors that determine the extent of positive statements concerning educational expansion. The third hypothesis was related to the political positions that can be found in democracies. Arguing counter-intuitively that educational expansion should be supported across political wings. This hypothesis can only partly be confirmed: Left-wing manifestos put more emphasis on educational expansion than do right-wing manifestos, and this remains constant over time. However, both wings regularly include educational expansion in their manifestos, and only a diminishing share of both does not deal with this issue. Future analyses with more recent data could analyze whether this trend continues.

Party manifestos still have a lot to tell. For example, it would be interesting to treat them as a dependent variable, linking them to specific national conditions in education as well as to international trends. Researching manifestos on educational matters or other institutions promises fruitful further results: It would be interesting to see to what extent institutions as human rights are equally consensual, and which fields are more contested. This paper is only a first step in applying this data to education and new institutionalist theory.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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ANNEX

Table A-1. Centralized and decentralized education systems in the 2000s

Country Name	Centralized	Country Name	Centralized
Australia	0	Italy	0
Austria	1	Japan	1
Belgium	0	Luxembourg	1
Canada	0	Netherlands	1
Denmark	1	New Zealand	1
Finland	1	Norway	1
France	1	Portugal	1
Germany	0	Spain	0
Great Britain (UK)	0	Sweden	1
Greece	1	Switzerland	0
Iceland	1	Turkey	1
Ireland	1	USA	0
Israel	1		

Source: WDE 2006/7, own account

Table A-2. Additional data figure 1

Country	Mean Value Item 'Educational Expansion'	Percentage of Manifestos with Positive Reference	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variance
Australia	3.00	63.86	3.77	1.26
Austria	3.43	63.33	4.03	1.17
Belgium	3.30	78.87	2.90	0.88
Canada	1.37	45.07	2.00	1.46
Denmark	2.14	51.50	3.23	1.51
Finland	2.64	55.04	3.24	1.23
France	3.76	87.78	2.68	0.71
Germany	3.24	74.24	3.28	1.01
Great Britain	3.18	85.45	2.47	0.78
Greece	3.05	71.42	3.08	1.01
Iceland	2.67	60.00	3.01	1.13
Ireland	3.27	73.42	2.79	0.85
Israel	3.49	56.85	4.83	1.38
Italy	2.87	66.17	2.76	0.96
Japan	3.56	60.23	4.48	1.26
Luxembourg	4.60	70.69	4.47	0.97
Netherlands	3.84	92.45	2.44	0.64
New Zealand	6.20	87.88	4.11	0.66
Norway	5.93	95.96	2.86	0.48
Portugal	3.29	70.83	4.10	1.25
Spain	3.28	92.11	1.91	0.58
Sweden	3.80	78.22	3.30	0.87
Switzerland	2.69	79.63	2.56	0.95
Turkey	3.72	88.68	2.52	0.68
United States	2.86	82.14	2.52	0.88
All	*3.33*	*71.33*	*3.42*	*1.03*

Source: Manifesto Dataset, own Calculations

Table A-3. Cultural and geographic regions and their support for educational expansion

Category	Countries	Mean
Nordic/Social Democratic	Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland	3.20
Benelux	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg	3.74
Mediterranean	France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal	3.23
German-Speaking	Germany, Austria, Switzerland	3.04
Liberal Anglo-Saxon	UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand	3.32
Other	Japan, Turkey, Israel	3.55

Source: Manifesto Dataset, Own Calculations

Table A-4. Additional data Figure 2: Mean values in countries over time

	Decade						
	1945-49	**1950-59**	**1960-69**	**1970-79**	**1980-89**	**1990-99**	**2000-03**
Australia	0.17	0.71	4.69	3.13	3.17	3.13	7.00
Austria	0.00	2.00	4.17	5.17	2.71	2.89	6.00
Belgium	2.33	2.27	1.75	1.84	4.06	5.10	6.00
Canada	0.75	0.42	0.69	0.00	2.33	3.00	4.80
Denmark	0.08	1.73	2.26	1.25	2.54	4.08	3.88
Finland	2.50	2.42	2.67	2.50	0.82	3.58	4.76
France	4.33	4.00	3.33	3.37	3.71	3.62	4.84
Japan	n/a	n/a	2.61	3.44	8.70	0.50	1.67
Luxembourg	0.88	2.92	6.25	5.25	5.67	6.50	n/a
Netherlands	2.70	2.60	2.27	5.14	2.70	4.00	6.06
New Zealand	4.25	4.38	7.00	7.00	4.33	6.18	9.43
Norway	4.00	5.83	8.72	4.40	5.67	5.00	8.14
Portugal	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.05	3.03	4.00	3.80
Spain	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.05	3.56	3.64	2.36
Sweden	4.60	4.53	4.00	3.55	3.53	2.86	5.57
Switzerland	2.60	2.60	5.20	3.09	2.00	2.28	1.90
Turkey	n/a	1.33	4.91	4.00	3.29	3.33	6.67
United States	0.50	1.00	3.17	3.75	2.83	3.00	6.00

Source: Manifesto Dataset. own calculations

Table A-5. Percentages of manifestos that contain positive statement on educational expansion over time and across political positions

Category	**1940s**	**1950s**	**1960s**	**1970s**	**1980s**	**1990s**	**2000s**
Left	73.53	79.46	79.61	78.23	82.44	86.67	88.89
Middle-Left	51.28	64.56	75.00	73.38	86.33	83.87	93.94
Middle-Right	51.22	52.05	68.75	63.04	75.00	77.42	89.66
Right	35.71	34.62	38.71	31.25	40.26	66.28	76.47
Distance of highest and lowest value	37.82	44.84	40.09	46.98	42.18	20.29	12.42

Source: Manifesto Dataset. own calculations