ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Education as a tool of social equality?

Jane Gingrich[1] | Anja Giudici[2]

[1]Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

[2]School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Correspondence
Anja Giudici, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.
Email: anja.giudici@newcastle.ac.uk

Abstract

Do political parties approach education with different social policy aims? We argue that while parties have adopted a common language of equality as an aim of education, they draw on different conceptions of it linked to diverging social projects. To make this argument, we first normatively distinguish education as a tool for creating equal opportunity, equal outcomes, and representational diversity. We then draw on an original dataset coding the educational content in the political manifestos of the largest center-left and center-right party across 19 Western democracies from 1950 to present. The analysis shows that left parties emphasise more equality of outcome than rightwing parties and pay less attention to equality of opportunity, and that they associate equality-related aims more extensively with promises of resources. These findings suggest that there remain critical differences in parties' understanding of education as a tool of social policy.

KEYWORDS
educational equality, meritocracy, party manifestoes, politics of education, social policy

1 | INTRODUCTION

Do political parties present education as an instrument for achieving equality? Do they do so differently? In the 19th century, the answer to the latter question was clearly yes. Political parties debated educational reform as part of

vociferous, and often violent, struggles over the boundaries of basic political equality, state responsibility, and whether to stabilise or upend traditional hierarchies (Ansell & Lindvall, 2021; Green, 1990; Paglayan, 2021). In the post-war period, this overt conflict subsided: most political actors today accept a central role for public funding of education and the principle of equal access to compulsory education. However, does that broad acceptance translate into a common understanding of the role education in producing equality? The academic literature points to contrasting answers.

Much work on the social and political dynamics of educational expansion finds a growing post-industrial *consensus* on the core tenets of education policy. Sociologists of education argue that the global diffusion of liberal values led to the de-politicisation and cross-party adoption of social mobility as an educational goal (Furuta, 2020). In particular, UN treaties define a core concept of equal access in education, creating a common normative frame around equity that transcends domestic political conflict. Moreover, the twin needs to address voters' demands and develop a skilled workforce gave actors across the political spectrum incentives to support the expansion of educational opportunities (Jakobi, 2011). Where variation emerges, it is largely across national contexts rather than within them, with different skill regimes resting on cross-class coalitions amongst economic producers (Hall & Soskice, 2001).

Other parts of the political economy literature, however, find that partisan control of government has been important in shaping institutional variation (Busemeyer, 2014; Giudici et al., 2022; Wiborg, 2009), as well as spending and enrolment in education (Ansell, 2010). This work stresses the ways in which parties used education reform as critical components of larger welfare projects (Busemeyer, 2014; Iversen & Stephens, 2008), projects that in turn, drew on fundamentally different aims with regards to class equality and the structure of state-market relations (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Some of these differences may have narrowed over time, but growing attention to 'supply side' investment policies means that parties continue to approach education with differing egalitarian aims (Boix, 1998; Gingrich, 2011).

This paper focuses on one aspect of this debate: attention to equality as an educational goal. We argue that varying understandings the kind of equality that education systems should produce are deeply linked to partisan *social policy* projects. To develop this claim, we build on work in social theory to argue that there are three contrasting understandings of equality: one perspective sees education as an instrument of equal opportunity defined in terms of merit, a second views education as a tool to achieve equality of outcome, and a third defines equality in terms of representational diversity. We hypothesize that while the left and the right both value "equality" as an educational outcome, they emphasise varying aspects of equality as part of their different approaches to welfare. The left emphasises equality of outcome, stressing a complementarity between its redistributive goals and educational policy, while the right draws on equality of opportunity, seeing expanded education as complementary to either a more limited or stratified welfare state. As new post-materialist movements grew, particularly in the post-1968 period on the left, both party families had to address non-class based inequalities, leading to more attention to diversity.

Examining variation in how parties talk about education requires detailed data on political speech, which existing datasets largely do not provide. As such, we develop an original dataset of education content in party manifestos in 19 Western polities—the *Education Politics Dataset*. This dataset covers the largest center-left and center-right parties in each polity, and we manually code education content from 1950 to present. While labour intensive, this effort provides the *first* large scale education-specific coding of political manifestoes, allowing us to distinguish core differences in how parties talk about equality in education over time.

To preview the findings. In line with expectations, we show that left parties emphasise more equality of outcome and, to a lesser extent, representation than right parties, with the right emphasising merit-based opportunity claims. Over time, absolute education manifesto content has grown, leading to *bigger gaps* between the left and the right in the number of sentences devoted to equality, but stable relative proportions. To see whether these differences are just "cheap talk" we then examine whether parties explicitly mention financial and human resources in referencing educational equality. Here we find that the left talks more about spending relative to equality of outcome, but there are fewer other differences. Finally, we look at whether these differences vary across different social

policy regimes, which the literature suggests condition partisan conflict over education (Busemeyer, 2014). We find mixed results, with partisan differences largely holding up across place in terms of both types of equality and funding.

These findings suggest that there remain critical differences in the ways in which parties define equality rhetorically. Stone (2002, p. 380) describes policy-making as a struggle over "how we do and should categorize in a world where categories are not given." In speaking about equality in education in varying ways parties construct linkages to different social policy platforms.

The article is structured as follows. Section 1 conceptualises educational aims with regard to equality in theoretical and historical terms. Section 2 introduces our dataset, explaining its theoretical underpinnings, categories, and coding protocol. We then move to the presentation (Section 3) and discussion (Section 4) of the results.

2 | EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND PARTISANSHIP

What does equality mean in the context of education? Educational systems are institutions that both shape citizens' future opportunities and reflect existing inequalities. Political theorists and sociologists have long debated how to *normatively* define equality, *empirically* delineate what forms of inequality abrogate these norms, and *causally* link education systems to social equality. This work identifies three normative concepts to equality (Anderson, 2007; Baker et al., 2006; Boudon, 1974; Brighouse et al., 2018; Swift, 2003).

A first normative conception of equality defines it in terms of *equality of opportunity*. This view postulates that institutions should offer citizens an equal chance to develop their talents and achieve high-status positions. In this framing, just educational systems do not need to be institutionally homogenous, but differentiation should ensure pupils are allocated to opportunities based on merit (i.e., talents and effort) rather than background (Baker et al., 2006). The role of education systems is not to reduce absolute inequality, since "perfect equality of opportunity will give rise to very striking inequalities of results" (Joseph & Sumption, 1979, p. 30).

A second conception emphasises the normative desirability of greater *equality of outcome*. This perspective challenges the notion that meritocratic allocation can occur under unequal conditions, as pupils' resources shape their ability to succeed. Inequalities in educational performance, then, are evidence of systemic biases, not a justification for social stratification (Boudon, 1974; Swift, 2003). The "tyranny of merit", in the words of philosopher Michael Sandel (2020), recasts structural inequalities as individual failings (Mijs, 2022). Institutional differentiation is viewed as less desirable in this framework, as education should play a role in reducing, not enhancing, social inequality.

A third, and more recent concept of equality defines it in terms of *representational diversity*. This work emphasises the centrality of culture in normative justice (Patten, 2014; Taylor, 1992). Equal institutions should ensure the recognition of (historically relevant) collective identities, such as ethnicity and gender. Recognition implies safeguarding the substantive representation of people and the symbolic representation of their identities through policies such as quotas or diverse curricula (Napier & Majhanovic, 2013) – even if these policies undermine equality of outcome or opportunity.

These conceptions of equality provide fundamentally differing visions of educational institutions, differing attention to social inequalities, and ultimately rest on different understandings of the relationship between education systems and social inequality. Do post-WWII political actors, however, actually draw on these varying understandings?

Much literature on the politics of education suggests that they do not. In his early work, Wilensky (1974, p. 6) argues that in contrast to distributive conflict over welfare programs, education "is only a peripheral contribution to absolute equality" and thus less contested. Like Wilensky, others have argued that, after 1945, parties have moved towards common understandings of education, and that these understanding are distinct to those they advance with respect to social equality in the welfare state.

Sociologists of education pinpoint the diffusion of liberal norms as a driving force behind the increasing isomorphism of educational institutions across countries and of understandings of education within them. This literature

contends that the growing influence of international organisations and inter-state emulation de-politicised equality of opportunity, and more recently representational diversity. These concepts thus turned into widely accepted norms that states and political actors of all colours rhetorically embrace to gain international respectability (Dale, 2000; Furuta, 2020). This institutionalisation of education-related norms, Jakobi (2011, p. 190) argues in her analysis of manifestoes, explains why education has become "an increasingly salient, but also rather consensual, issue in party politics and elections."

Scholarship in the 'Varieties of Capitalism' framework challenges this interpretation. This work argues that education is integrally linked to social policy, as varying social policy institutions underpin different forms of skill provision and consequent models of economic production (Hall & Soskice, 2001). However, in linking education and social policy via a productive—rather than an egalitarian—logic, this literature theorises the centrality of cross-class coalitions in shaping outcomes, suggesting less contestation on questions of equality.

By contrast, scholars of welfare and education policy find conflicts over social and educational equality to be deeply connected. As Esping-Andersen (1990) argues with respect to welfare policy, parties represent different constituencies in the population and the labour market, and look to achieve distinct social aims with regards to economic equality. The left historically sought more equality of outcome, while right parties' support for more stratified or limited state structures is grounded in their acceptance of (some forms of) inequality. Where the left was more politically powerful it institutionalised its aims in different ways than the right.

Busemeyer (2014) extends this line of enquiry to incorporate education, theorising how the productive aspects of education intersect with parties' varying distributive aims to shape both conflict over educational institutions and the linkages between educational and productive aims. He argues that left and right parties historically maintained different goals with respect to enhancing working-class social mobility, but that the political manifestations of this conflict depended on the nature of regime-specific skill coalitions. In the Nordic countries, successful left parties concerned about absolute equality pushed for educational reforms that reduced selection, but also drew on broader cross-party support for expanding quality. In contrast, in the coordinated market economies of Continental Europe, the dominant Christian-democratic parties were less concerned with social mobility but supported high-quality vocational skill provision. In these contexts, conflict focused on institutional stratification, with greater consensus over resources. Finally, in the Anglo countries with less specific systems of skill provision, parties on the right were neither concerned about mobility nor skills, leading to more open conflict over both resources and structures. In other words, Busemeyer predicts both cross-party variation in distributive goals, and cross-regime variation in economic goals—which shapes the extent of right-wing parties' willingness to resource their vision of educational equality.

We build on Busemeyer's work, arguing that parties' varying links to constituencies and ideologies produced different understandings of *equality* as an educational aim that were part of distinct post-WWII partisan social policy trajectories. We draw on literature on parties' changing links to constituencies and producers to add a temporal dynamic to this story. As we argue below, starting in the 1950 s, the right increasingly used equality of educational opportunity as a way to contrast equality of outcome and expansive welfare agendas, whereas the left moved towards seeing equality of outcome in education as central to its more egalitarian social policy aims. Considering work on social movements and changing partisan cleavages, we also argue that the rise of new social movements outside of parties' traditional class/religious bases put pressure on both conceptions, leading to more attention to representation.

To start with the political right. In the 19th century, parties on the right, especially conservative parties often explicitly advocated the need to limit educational access to maintain social stratification (Ansell & Lindvall, 2021). By the post-WWII period, this position became untenable. Center-right parties transitioned into mass-based parties that drew on broader constituencies, including middle- and working-class voters calling for educational expansion (Ansell, 2010).

By the 1950s, right-wing parties had largely pivoted towards supporting the expansion of educational opportunities across classes (Giudici et al., 2022). As the welfare state literature shows, however, their aim was not to increase absolute equality (Jensen, 2014). Conservative and denominational right parties joined liberal parties in embracing

equality of opportunity as a way of reconciling educational expansion with their broader social policy projects. Christian democrats promoted educational (and welfare) expansion within stratified structures (Österman, 2018). Liberal and conservative parties were more open to de-tracking, but supported limiting state intervention to encourage schools to diversify their offer and match individual needs and talents (Giudici et al., 2022). Both visions were underpinned by meritocratic ideals. Providing individuals with opportunities they must seize or streaming them based on their abilities should reward talent, wherever it may come from (Sandel, 2020).

Initially, the left also endorsed equality of opportunity. In the mid-20th century, tertiary (and secondary) education remained the privilege of small aristocratic elites. Distributing opportunities based on merit, rather than background, promised a huge leap forward for the left's core constituencies (Baldi, 2012). In 1944, for instance, UK Labour joined the Conservatives in supporting the Education Act, justifying the introduction of test-based selection at age 11 as means to provide talented working-class students access to elite grammar schools (Chitty, 2014).

By the 1950s, however, the left began to move to a notion of more equality of outcome in education, thus integrating education into its larger social policy vision. This moved reacted, first, to research casting empirical doubt on the effectiveness of merit-based allocation in improving the condition of working-class and other disadvantaged pupils (Boudon, 1974; Durkheim, 2013). Intellectuals advanced a second, normative, type of criticism. In 1958, Hannah Arendt (1994, 216) accused the UK's 11-plus examination of "breeding an oligarchy, this time not of wealth and birth, but of talent." UK left intellectuals were pushing in the same direction when they contended that devising "bigger and better 'sieves' ('equality of opportunity') to help the clever boys get to the top and then pile rewards on them" could not be a left-wing goal (Fox, 1956, p. 13; Young, 1958). Leading figures within the Nordic school reform movement also cited concerns about social mobility in promoting the reduction of selection (Paulston, 1968; Rothstein, 1996). As Lipset argued in 1972, the traditional "notion of equality opportunity has to a large extent given way to a newer, more radical version" (p. 91)—equality of outcome. Social democrats began to combine advocacy for education expansion with support for resource-intensive equalising structures (Rothstein, 1996; Wiborg, 2009).

Left and right strategies came under renewed pressure in the post-industrial era. On the one hand, in the wake of the 1968 student protests, questions of participation and representation emerged on the agenda. Second-wave feminists and groups representing minorities argued that since more opportunities were not solving the historical under-representation of disadvantaged groups, the system must become more representative in itself. Female and minority perspectives must be brought into institutions and the curriculum (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). By 1971, Inglehart was pointing to a 'silent revolution' in social attitudes towards more 'post-materialist' values represented in new social movements, with left parties in particular facing internal pressure from these movements.

On the other hand, the successes of mass educational upgrading altered the class structure, leaving both sides with more heterogenous support bases (Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015). Coupled with growing fiscal constraints and changing labour market structures, this dynamic forced parties across the spectrum to reevaluate their social policy programs. In this environment, 'social investment' approaches to welfare governance promoted educational opportunity as a tool for enhancing growth and reducing marginalisation that found cross-class support (Garritzmann et al., 2022; Hemerijck, 2018). In an era of growing educational salience, both left and right felt under pressure to display support for expanding and diversifying educational provision, and reappraise the connection between education and their broader social policy aims.

In the face of these competing pressures, we hypothesize that left parties followed a strategy of *layering* of educational equality claims. In other words, they melded outcome, representational, and opportunity-based understandings of equality. The latter became especially prominent in the 1990s, when third-way representatives such as Anthony Giddens (2002) considered that "a meritocratic approach to inequality is inevitable" (38), and German Chancellor Schröder (2002) declared that "being social" meant ensuring "that everyone has the same opportunities. But it also means that everyone has a duty to make the most of their opportunities." However, even as the left picked up aspects of equality of opportunity, it remained attentive to education as a strategy for promoting increased productivity amongst the bottom half of the skill distribution as a both growth and absolute equality producing strategy (Boix, 1998; Gingrich, 2011; Hemerijck, 2012; Nikolai & Rothe, 2013; Powell, 2000).

Center-right parties initially took a different path. Many strengthened their commitment to equality of opportunity in education as a *substitute* to expanding welfare to foster equality of outcome. Conservative intellectual Daniel Bell argued in 1972 that the right should respond to calls for absolute equality and representation by turning meritocracy, "the necessary foundation for a productive—and cultivated—society" (67), into its main axiom. This suggestion resonated with an increasingly culturally sensitive right-wing electorate, parts of whom took the streets to protest equality-enhancing policies such as busing and comprehensive schooling (Hanselman & Fiel, 2017; Mason, 2011). Sandel (2020) finds this substitutive rhetoric in the programs of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, both of whom relied on equality of opportunity to justify the need to eliminate privileges ingrained by state support. Like them, liberal and conservative parties across the West paired arguments about education systems rewarding talent with restrictive notions of social policy (Ball, 2008; Lundahl, 1990). As left calls for social investment grew in the 1990s, right parties moved away from this rhetoric, also engaging in more layering of educational rhetoric, but in linking a more pro-market agenda for the state generally to educational reform they maintained a focus on equality of opportunity.

2.1 | Expectations

The above section made three arguments. First, distinct understandings of educational equality exist and are historically linked to partisan views of social policy. Second, the nature of the partisan conflict over educational equality changed in the 1980s, due to shifting voter bases and social policy orientations. These shifts increased the prominence of education but also led to less distinct partisan equality-social policy linkages. Third, building on Busemeyer (2014), because left and right aims with respect to overall equality vary, the left is more likely to support equality aims with greater resources, but that left–right differences will vary across economic-welfare regimes.

These claims lead us to three testable expectations.

1. Rather than convergence, we hypothesize ongoing divergence in the type of equality left and right parties emphasise. Concretely, we expect left parties to rhetorically prioritise equality of outcome and representational diversity more than parties on the right, and the latter to be more supportive of equality of opportunity.
2. We hypothesize that starting in the 1980s, parties (a) pay more attention to educational equality generally, but (b) do so in different ways. We expect left parties to embrace an increasingly additive understanding of equality which layers equality of opportunity with representational diversity and equality of outcome. In contrast, we anticipate right-wing parties to be more exclusive in focusing on equality of opportunity.
3. We expect left parties across welfare regimes to associate claims about equality with more resource-intensive policies. Building on Busemeyer (2014), due to varying welfare legacies and social policy orientations within the right, we expect spending preferences of left and right to diverge more in the liberal Anglo regimes than in continental conservative regimes where Christian-democrats dominate on the right.

3 | OPERATIONALIZATION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To assess these claims, we construct a novel dataset of the main left- and right-wing party manifestos in 19 Western democracies since 1950. Manifestoes provide a particularly valuable data source to compare parties' public or expressed aims. First, in contrast to other sources documenting party politics (e.g. speeches, media), manifestoes have a similar structure and function across contexts, which make them suitable for systematic comparisons. Second, manifestoes represent the temporary consensus on how parties wish voters to perceive them, providing insight into parties' official positions (Spoon & Klüver, 2014).

The Manifesto Project (MARPOR) constitutes the most extensive effort to gather and code party manifestoes to date (Volkens et al., 2020). MARPOR assesses the salience of issues by parsing manifestoes into quasi-sentences (statements), and assigning each statement to one of more than 50 categories. Regarding education, the MARPOR distinguishes two codes: per506 Education Expansion Positive and per507 Education Limitation.

Three issues convinced us to embark on the labour-intensive effort to re-code party manifestoes, rather than using the existing data. First, MARPOR codes are designed to measure how much parties talk about specific issues, not *how* they talk about them, meaning that the existing codes cannot capture different conceptions of equality. Second, the per506/507 codes exclude specific types of education, namely vocational training (coded as per411 Technology and Infrastructure) and childcare (coded as per504 Welfare State Expansion). Third, MARPOR often codes education-related sentences in non-education categories. Indeed, where a sentence expresses two aims or policies, the MARPOR approach prioritises broader aims over policy areas – leading to an undercount of education-related content.

To make this point more concretely, we turn to British Labour's 1997 manifesto. In this manifesto, Tony Blair famously called for 'Education, education, education'. However, the MARPOR only codes 3.85% of total manifesto sentences as education related – lower than the 1992 or 2001 manifestos. Of the 113 coded sentences in the 'Education' section, MARPOR assigns 23 (19.6%) to the per506/per507 codes. Instead, MAPOR assigns many sentences to governance codes—such as those relating to federalism (per301, "All local education authorities (LEAs) must demonstrate that every school is improving") or political authority (per305, "Schools that are grant maintained will prosper with Labour's proposals").

Confronted with similar issues in other policy areas, several recent studies have reanalysed manifesto data applying conceptually-grounded coding schemes to specific policy areas such as immigration (Dancygier & Margalit, 2020) or welfare (Enggist & Pinggera, 2021). We also develop an original system to code education-related statements.

To discern the nuance of political rhetoric we rely on human coders, whom we chose based on their country-specific expertise. This approach is time intensive – each country-party taking upwards of 40–50 hours of coder time, with additional time spent on preparing and verifying the coding—meaning that we were restricted in the number of parties and countries we could cover. We follow Dancygier and Margalit's (Dancygier & Margalit, 2020) strategy and examine the largest left and right parties. This approach allows us to examine variation amongst the large competitive parties who play a critical role in government formation. On the left, these are mostly social-democratic parties, whereas on the right we include conservative and liberal parties (Nordics and Anglo regimes) as well as Christian-democratic parties (continental Europe). A list of parties can be found in Online Appendix S1C.

Our sample includes larger Western European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK), Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US. We rely on national manifestoes in the assumption that, regarding general goals, state parties will generally follow the lead of their umbrella organisations. We provide evidence for this claim in Online Appendix S1E, comparing the manifestos of the German federal SPD and CDU and Bavarian SPD and CSU.

We coded the manifestoes in three steps. First, we isolated education-related text. Education-related text is defined as either: (a) entire sections introduced by an education-related title or (b) text units of two or more sentences referring to formal education. We restrict coding to mentions of formal education, from pre-primary to higher education. Coders coded the original language, but we translated the non-English language manifestoes using online tools (deepl and google translate) and tasked the coders to check the translations for accuracy.

Second, we classified the identified sentences into categories based on our coding schema. For this step, we built on the MARPOR approach (Volkens et al., 2020), asking coders to first parse the text into quasi-sentences including single statements. Coders then categorised each statement based on (a) the level of education as well as, if mentioned, (b) the expressed aim and (c) the supported (or opposed) policy (Appendix S1A includes detailed information on coding procedures).

Third, to ensure reliability, coders began by coding one historical manifesto (from 1945 to 1955) and one contemporary manifesto (post-1990). We then double coded these documents to check for systematic errors and ensure coding calibration. Coders then coded all country-party manifestos. On completion, we double-checked each statement to ensure reliability and consistency across countries in the application of the codes.

3.1 | Coding education-related aims and policies

Our coding schema distinguishes aims from policies. We code a statement as having an "aim", when it explicitly states an objective that should be reached, a problem that should be solved, or includes a statement of values. We code statements as expressing a "policy" when they include an actionable argument. To reduce subjectivity in applying the coding schema, we did not impute aims to policies, and only coded an aim if it is explicitly stated. Following this logic, the sentence "Education expansion is an economic necessity for the nation" is coded as stating an aim (economy-skills) and a policy (increase expansion), whereas "Cut class sizes to 30 or under for 5-, 6-, and 7 year-olds" (both UK-Labour 1997) is only assigned a policy-code (reduce class sizes). As such, not all coded statements have aims. Across the 52,101 coded sentences, the majority 30,397 are not attached to an aim.

Our interest here is in aims regarding equality, which we distinguish based on the conceptual discussion in Section 1. We operationalise the concepts in the following way:

- *Equality of opportunity* includes statements referring to the role of education in supporting procedural fairness, meritocracy, or the unfolding of individual talent, as in "A young person's ability to achieve in school must be based on his or her Godgiven talent and motivation, not an address, zip code, or economic status" (US-Republicans 1988) or "because it is the future of each individual, the ambition assigned to education will never be high enough" (FR-UDF 1993).
- *Equality of outcome* includes statements referring to education as a means to decrease social inequality and marginalisation, to re-qualify low-status positions, or framing education as a right or compensatory mechanism, as in: "We insist upon the right of every American child to obtain a good education" (US-Democrats 1948) or "Higher education is not, and cannot be seen as, the preserve of the elite, let alone a privilege" (PT-Social Democrats 2019).
- *Equality of representational diversity* includes statements mentioning the need to promote the substantial or symbolic representation of groups in sentences that mention two groups or less. If more groups are mentioned, we assume that sentences are not about specific groups, and use one of the other categories. The equality of representation code includes further sub-codes for (a) gender ("Girls and young women should in principle receive half of all training places", DE-SPD 1998); (b) cultural minorities ("We must recognise that for too long we have neglected the abilities and aspirations of Spanish-speaking Americans", US-Democrats 1968).

We then look at aim-resource combinations. These combinations involve one of the equality aims in conjunction with a promise of *resourced policies*. Resourced policies designate actionable statements that express either support for increasing educational budgets (in general or for specific purposes such as infrastructure or salaries) or statements in favour of socialising or redistributing education-related expenses. Note that we only consider resourced policies that are mentioned in connection with equality-related aims, as in "To help eliminate sex role stereotyping, a resource centre will be established and funded" (NZ-Labor 1990).

Our coding scheme also includes a code for statements referring to special needs and regional inequalities. However, these discussions sometimes follow non-equality related logics, for example, when addressing regional mismanagement or specific forms of disability-related support. We therefore did not consider these two codes in the analysis. Their inclusion does not alter the results.

After coding the manifestos, we collapse the raw data to a single country-party-year observation, with an absolute count variable for each of the above three types of aims, and policy-aim combinations. We then consider

reference to aims as a share of the total education text in manifestos. We further link each manifesto to the macro-economic context in the election year and to whether the party holds the office of prime minister at the time of the election, allowing us to distinguish incumbent from opposition (or junior partner) speech.

4 | RESULTS

We begin descriptively, asking, how often do parties mention an egalitarian aim in connection to formal education? Figure 1 shows the distribution of mentions across party families and over time. The first three images show, for each category individually, that many parties on both the left and the right did not mention an egalitarian aim. Of the 757-party-election combinations, 43 left parties did not mention any of the three types of equality and 85 right parties did not. Of the three types of mentions, equality of outcome is the most common. For the left, 294 manifestoes mentioned an equality of outcome aim, 187 mentioned an equality of representation claim and 213 mentioned an equality of opportunity claim (out of 373 left observations). On the right, 166 manifestoes mentioned an equality of outcome claim, 143 a representational diversity claim and 265 an equality of opportunity claim (out of 384 observations). The fourth panel plots the rising absolute count of the three types of equality claims over time.

Clearly, no party family exclusively mentions one type of equality, but there appear to be partisan and temporal differences. Left parties devote more absolute text to education over time. In the 1950s, the left averaged 16.9 education sentences and the right 16.4 education sentences, in the 2010s, the left averaged 146.5 sentences and the right 129.1. As manifestos have become longer and more detailed, parties are devoting more attention to all three types of claims in absolute terms.

The following examples provide some qualitative grounding for these equality-related statements. Left-wing statements categorised as equality of outcome include fundamental attacks against social stratification. According to the Portuguese socialist party, "We must counter the powerful factors that favour the reproduction and worsening
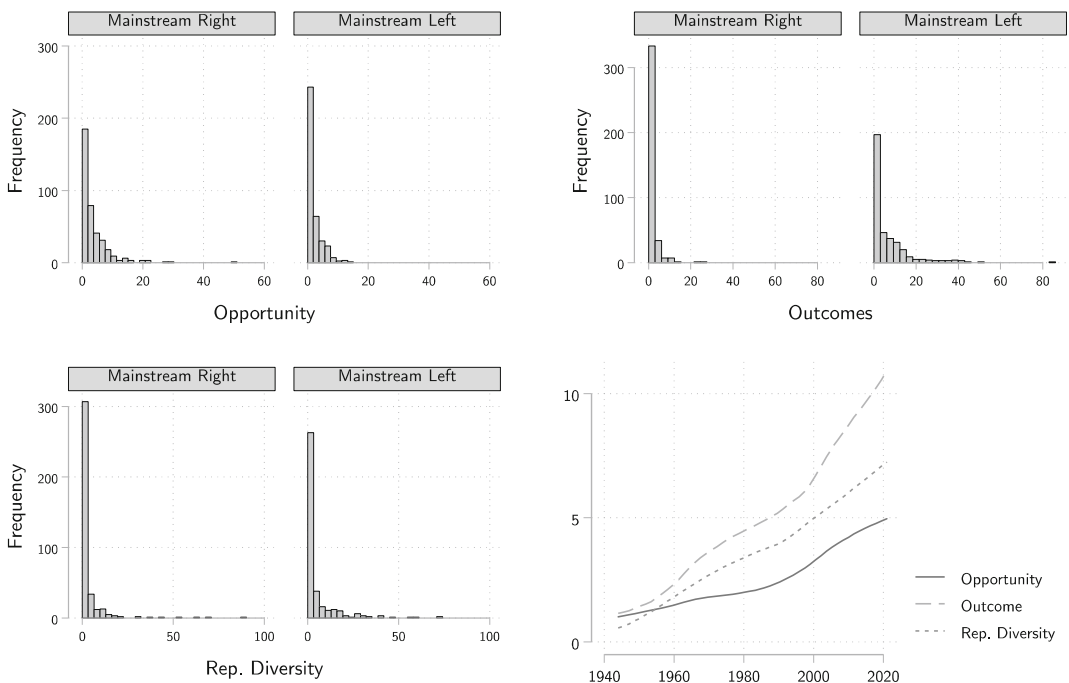

FIGURE 1 Distribution of mentions

of inequalities in education starting with compulsory education" (1995), and the French Socialists consider that "The fight for educational success for all is therefore a priority in the general fight against the reproduction of social inequalities" (1988). The right too, sometimes justifies reforms with respect to absolute egalitarian frames, but these statements largely target more narrowly defined forms of inequality, as in the French UMP's 2007 statement on abolishing catchment areas "not because we are against social mixing, but on the contrary because we think it is urgent to re-establish it", or the US-Republican's support for converting "Chapter One grants to vouchers, thereby giving poor parents the ability to choose the best schooling available" (1984).

Right-wing manifestoes sometimes explicitly contrast different conceptions of equality. The 2013 Austrian ÖVP, for instance, clarifies that "We do not want an ideologically motivated education system that aims at equal outcomes. We want an education system [...] in which the interests, inclinations and talents of each individual pupil are taken into account", whereas the 2004 Greek ND supports schools "that develop personality without artificial egalitarianism". Sentences contrasting different types of inequality are less common in left-wing manifestoes, which sometimes combine equality of opportunity with statements supporting equality of outcome within the same paragraph, as when the Portuguese PS (2015) declares that "Compulsory schooling should be inclusive and promote success for all. It is up to the school to promote the development of the talents of all children and young people".

Our first two expectations involved (a) systematic partisan differences in support for equality of outcome and representation (more likely to be mentioned by the left) and opportunity (more likely to be mentioned by the right) and (b) an overall increase in attention to all three over time, particularly on the left. Thus we predict systematic partisan differences over time in absolute and relative attention to education, but rising absolute attention—particularly on the left—to all three types of equality in the post-1980s period.

To analyse our hypotheses results systematically, we run simple inferential models regressing the absolute/ relative share of mentions on the equality aims of the interaction between party family (mainstream left/right) and decade dummies. We include country fixed effects, a control for whether the party controls the prime ministers' office, and GDP per capita and GDP growth (Feenstra et al., 2015), as attention to education may vary systematically with the business cycle. All models include standard errors clustered by country-year. These models examine the average effect of partisanship in each decade, net of country effects.

We begin with the absolute sentence counts. Figure 2 shows the predicted number of absolute mentions for left and right parties by decade (we show the average marginal effects of left partisanship in Appendix S1D). The first panel shows that the left is less likely to mention equality of opportunity than the right – there are statistically significant differences across left and right in all decades except the 2000s (when the differences are significant at the 10% level). The second panel shows absolute differences in mentions of equality of outcome. Here we see strong and *growing* partisan differences. In the 1950s, the average marginal effect of moving from right to left on equality of conditions mentions was 1.2 sentences, whereas by the 2010s, it was 11.9 sentences—close to 1.5 of standard deviation. The third panel shows representational diversity mentions. There are no partisan differences in the 1940s through 1980s. In the 1990s and 2000s, there are significant differences as the left mentions representation aims more. The basic trend is the same in the 2010 s, however, the standard errors are larger.

As Figure 1 shows, there are some large outliers with extremely long manifestos. In some countries, manifesto length expanded in the 1990s and 2000s as parties looked to maximise positive scores from interest groups rating manifestos.[i] When we use a logged measure of absolute mentions, rather than the raw count, to address these differences, and the basic patterns are largely the same (see Appendix Figure S1D2). Collectively, these results suggest that on aggregate the left does mention equality of outcome—and in some decades representational diversity—more in general, and equality of opportunity less.

Does the upward trend in mentions represent greater relative attention? We measure relative attention by looking at each aim as the percentage of total *education related* statements (not the manifesto as a whole) in Figure 3. Here we see similar partisan effects. Through most of the period, the left devotes relatively less attention to equality of opportunity (panel a), more attention to equality of outcome (panel b) but there are less clear left–right differences in relative attention to representational diversity (panel c). Left attention to equality of outcome dips in the 2000s, as
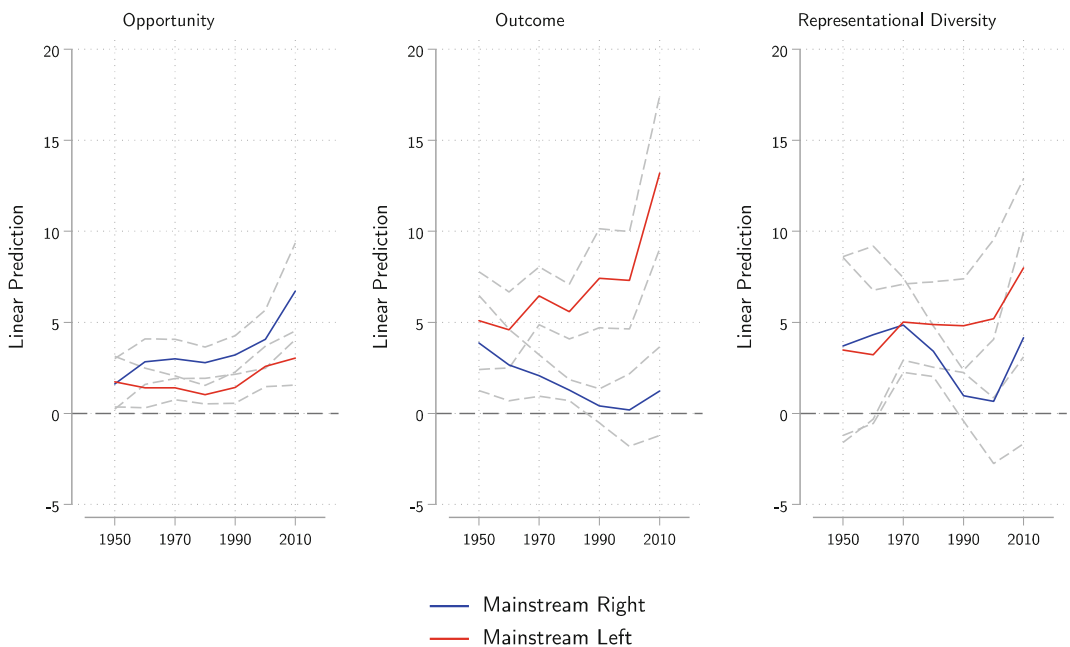
FIGURE 2 Predicted left and right absolute mentions [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

right parties in some regards converge on left attention to education, but rises again in the 2010s. Attention to representational diversity, while growing in absolute terms, falls in relative terms after expanding dramatically in the 1970s. Here we see the complexity of partisan rhetoric in more recent years—as education content is expanding, parties (particularly on the left) are talking more about everything, giving them less distinct stances. Collectively, these results are largely in line with expectations. We see both systematic partisan differences and growing total attention over time; however, over time "layering" leads to less distinct temporal patterns in terms of shares of attention. Contra expectations, layering is not exclusively the preserve of the left, we see the right pay more absolute attention to all three types of education as well—but partisan differences remain.

We next look to see if discussion of aims is just 'cheap talk' or associated with calls for more resources. To examine this question, we create a secondary indicator of aim-related claims that come with a resource claim. In other words, an aim is coded as 1 if attached to a resource-related policy and 0 if not. We then look at the absolute count, and relative share, of the total education content in the manifesto that is *resourced* equality claims. We choose to use total education content as a baseline for calculating share to avoid 'penalising' parties that talk more about equality in general. We follow the same strategy as above, regressing the share of aims with a resource policy attached on party type interacted with decade, incumbency, macro-economic conditions, and with country fixed effects and country-year clustered standard errors. Our initial expectation was that the left would make more resourced claims.

Figure 4 shows the results combining all aims. In absolute terms, the left is more likely to make resourced equality claims—except in the 2000s when right attention to equality grows. In relative terms, the point predictions on left attention are positive, but only significant in 1980s, 1990s and 2010s, where the left is likely to devote a larger share of attention to resourced equality claims. When we look at equality aims separately (Appendix S1D5/D6), we see that there is little difference between left and right in the propensity to make a resourced opportunity based aim—however, this non-difference is important, because as Figure 3 shows, the left is less likely to mention opportunity overall. The left does make more resourced equality of outcome claims, but the size and significance of the effect varies over time. The left is only more likely to make resourced representational diversity claims in the 1990s and 2000s. In other words, there is evidence that the left mentions resources and equality more than the right in absolute terms, but that for any given equality claim the left and right the differences vary over time.
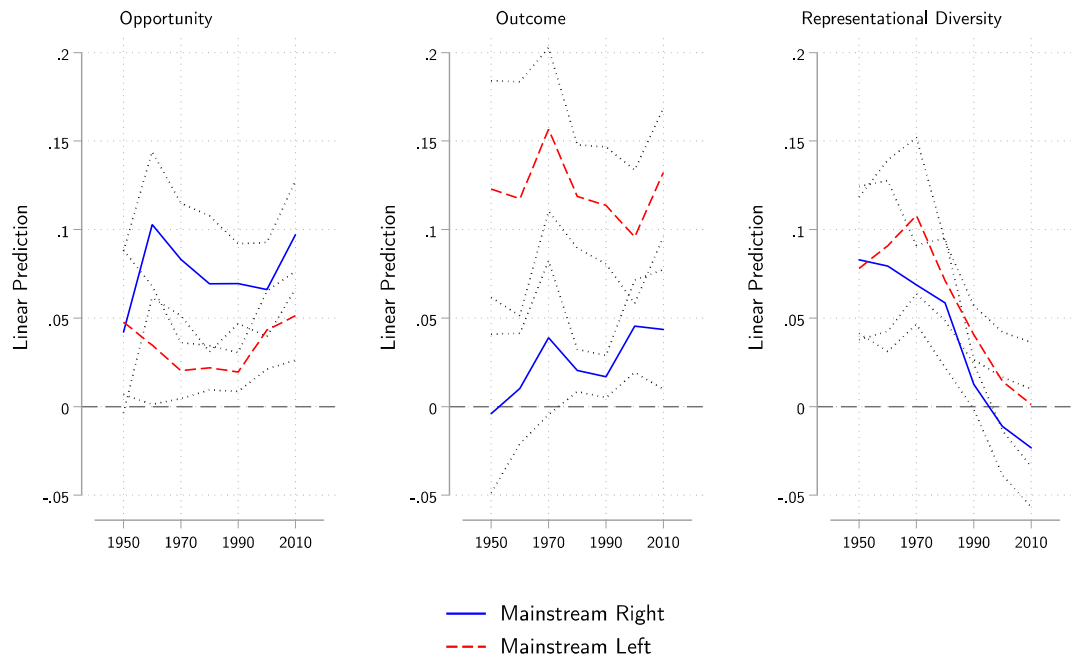
FIGURE 3   Predicted relative mentions [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
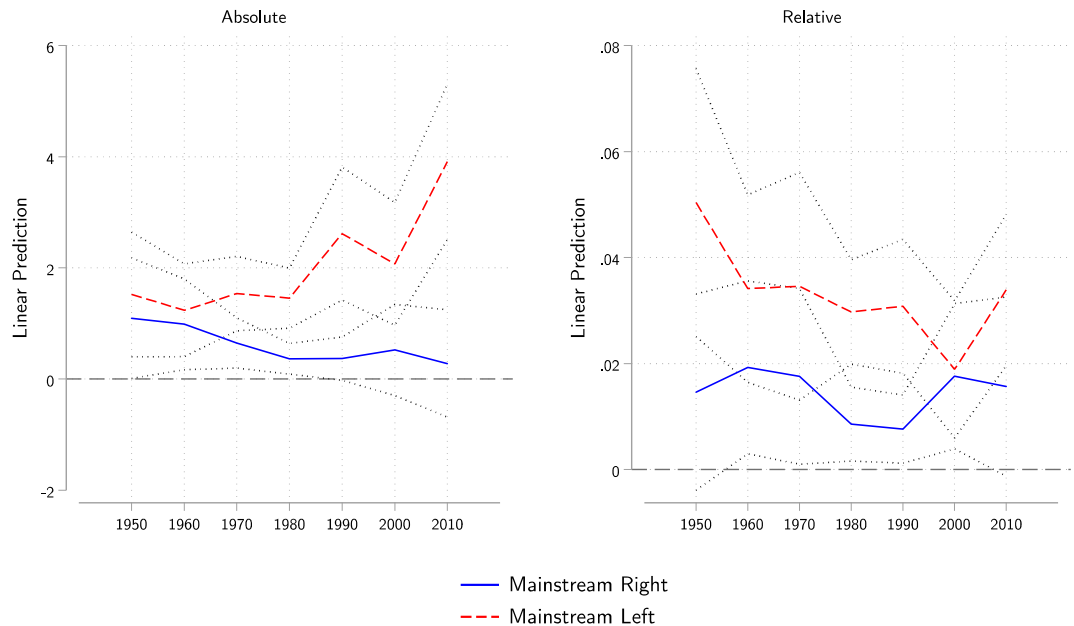
FIGURE 4   Resourced equality aims [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Finally, does this partisan behaviour vary by welfare regime? As Busemeyer (2014) hypothesizes, the left and right may adopt different equality aims across regimes, but a less conflictual stance towards resources in Continental and Nordic welfare states as compared to Anglo countries. As such, we look at the same dependent variables as

FIGURE 5 Regime differences [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

above—equality aims generally and resourced equality claims—looking at predicted left and right *relative* attention across welfare regimes (the average marginal effects of partisanship on absolute and relative mentions are in Appendix S1D7/8).[ii] These models are estimated interacting regime and partisanship, with decade dummies and controls. Figure 5 shows the results. The results on the left-hand side show relative mentions of all equality aims, and those on the right show relative mentions of resource-based claims. The axes vary across the two sides, because the share of resourced claims is much lower.

We see that in all regimes, the left is more likely to mention equality of outcome and the right is more likely to mention equality of opportunity, but that these differences are more pronounced in Nordic and Continental countries. There are no differences between left and right in Nordic or Southern countries on representational diversity, but there are in Anglo and Continental countries. When it comes to resourced claims, partisan differences look largely similar to overall claims, with the exception that the Anglo-left makes many more resourced representational claims. These results suggest, that at least rhetorically, regime differences are less significant than party differences in the area of equality claim making—both overall and in terms of resources. In Appendix S1F, we further show that these results hold up if we split the sample across types of right parties, distinguishing Christian Democratic competitors from others.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Do parties bring different understandings of equality to education? The answer here suggests that the answer is largely yes, at least in terms of educational rhetoric. All parties mention equality as an educational goal, which might testify to the power of global norms about education being a universal right. However, the type of equality they want education systems to produce is different. While the temporal patterns vary across models, there is substantial

evidence that the left talks more about equality of outcome, and in some time periods more about representational diversity, while talking less about opportunity. The left is more likely to make absolute equality of outcome related statements with resourced policies.

Has this rhetoric shifted over time? Here our results are mixed. There is some evidence of convergence in rhetoric in the decade of the 2000s—however, this follows as much by the right moving to more equality of outcome mentions as the left adopting opportunity rhetoric. We do see evidence of layering, as attention to all three forms of equality grows in absolute terms, particularly on the left, which can create a less distinct partisan approach. However, we can say that there is little overall evidence that parties have substantially converged over time.

These results suggest that, while the increasing salience of education is cross-partisan, parties continue to pursue different aims through education policy—at least in part. The left presents education as a means to compress social differences, whereas the right remains more sceptical about this goal. In other words, the left is more likely to present education policy as a complement to social policy in reducing inequality of outcome. In a long section addressing education as social policy, the Finnish Social Democrats, in 2011, for instance, start with the observation that: "About 200 young people are left without a primary school leaving certificate each year, and about 8,000 young people of each age group are left without further education". To address the resulting marginalisation, they suggest a variety of policies. Some are clearly educational (expand the compulsory schooling period), others are related to welfare (increase mental health services within and outside schools). The right on the other hand, is more likely to see education as an alternative to other forms of social inclusion, arguing that fair processes create long-run opportunities.

Cross-partisan differences are less pronounced regarding representational equality. This finding suggests that, while left parties facing internal pressure from new social movements did integrate cultural claims into their understanding of educational equality to a larger extent then the right, representational equality does not constitute a core line of inter-partisan conflict. Several reasons could account for this finding. First, international norms might incentivise rhetorical alignment. Since 1945, international treaties have addressed the specific educational needs of women and ethnic minorities. Following a logic of appropriateness, or for strategic reasons, parties might therefore feel compelled to mention these groups. Second, this is the understanding of equality that most directly addresses specific, circumscribed groups. Strategic reasoning and specific electoral constellations might therefore play a role in determining this type of speech, in addition to general class dynamics theorised in this paper.

Of course, party rhetoric should not always be taken at face value. Manifestoes are strategic documents used to signal support for specific policies, in defence of which parties might recur to generally accepted goals or values—even if existing evidence might cast doubt on whether these policies actually serve achieving the chosen goals. However, as argued by Stone (2002), categorization and framing matters for the selection, design, and assessment of specific policy measures. Different understandings of equality thus might also be important in terms of policies, including for seemingly consensual issues (e.g. the expansion of pre-primary or further education). Research on the politics of comprehensive education shows that reforms designed by conservative parties in the first post-war period—many of whom openly rejected equality of outcome in the realm of education at the time—looked very different from the comprehensive schools implemented by the left—who framed this policy as a way to decrease societal inequality (Giudici et al., 2022). Further research is needed to better understand the link between aims and policies, and rhetoric and action in education and social policy.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the authors.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethics approval was not required for this study of party manifestoes, which did not involve human subjects. Research for this study is supported by the ERC Starting Grant, which received approval by the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (Politics & International Relations, University of Oxford).

ORCID

Anja Giudici https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8238-7859

ENDNOTES

[i] We thank Tor Dahl, one of the project research assistants, for attention to this point.

[ii] We consider Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden as Nordic; Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland as Continental; Australia, Canada, NZ, the US and the UK as Anglo; Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy as Southern.

REFERENCES

Anderson, E. (2007). Fair opportunity in education: A democratic equality perspective. *Ethics*, *117*(4), 595–622.

Ansell, B. W. (2010). *From the ballot to the blackboard. The redistributive political economy of education*. Cambridge University Press.

Ansell, B. W., & Lindvall, J. (2021). *Inward conquest. The political origins of modern public services*. Cambridge University Press.

Arendt, H. (1994). *Übungen im politischen Denken*. Piper.

Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S., & Walsh, J. (2006). Equality: Putting the theory into action. *Res Publica*, *12*, 411–433.

Baldi, G. (2012). Schools with a difference: Policy discourses on education reform in Britain and Germany. *West European Politics*, *35*(5), 999–1023.

Ball, S. J. (2008). *The education debate*. Policy Press.

Baxandall, R., & Gordon, L. (2002). Second wave feminism. In N. A. Hewitt (Ed.), *A companion to American Women's history* (pp. 414–432). Blackwell.

Bell, D. (1972). On meritocracy and equality. *The Public Interest*, *29*, 29–68.

Boix, C. (1998). *Political parties, growth and equality*. Cambridge University Press.

Boudon, R. (1974). *Education, opportunity, and social inequality*. Wiley.

Brighouse, H., Ladd, H. F., Loeb, S., & Swift, A. (2018). *Educational goods: Values, evidence, and decision-making*. University of Chicago Press.

Busemeyer, M. R. (2014). *Skills and inequality*. Cambridge University Press.

Chitty, C. (2014). *Education policy in Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Dale, R. (2000). Globalization and education: Demonstrating a "common world educational culture" or locating a "globally structured educational agenda"? *Educational Theory*, *50*(4), 427–448.

Dancygier, R., & Margalit, Y. (2020). The evolution of the immigration debate: Evidence from a new dataset of party positions over the last half-century. *Comparative Political Studies*, *53*(5), 734–774.

Durkheim, E. (2013). *Éducation et sociologie* (10th ed.). Presses Universitaires de France.

Enggist, M., & Pinggera, M. (2021). Radical right parties and their welfare state stances—Not so blurry after all? *West European Politics*, *45*(1), 102–128.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Feenstra, R. C., Inklaar, R., & Timmer, M. P. (2015). The next generation of the Penn world table. *American Economic Review*, *105*(10), 3150–3182.

Fox, A. (1956). Class and equality. Socialist. *Commentary*, May, 11–13.

Furuta, J. (2020). Liberal individualism and the globalization of education as a human right: The worldwide decline of early tracking 1960–2010. *Sociology of Education*, *93*(1), 1–19.

Garritzmann, J., Häusermann, S., & Palier, B. (2022). *The world of politics of social investment* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.

Giddens, A. (2002). *Where now for new labour?* Polity Press.

Gingrich, J. (2011). *Making Markets in the Welfare State*. Cambridge University Press.

Gingrich, J., & Häusermann, S. (2015). The decline of the working-class vote, the reconfiguration of the welfare support coalition and consequences for the welfare state. *Journal of European Social Policy*, *25*(1), 50–75.

Giudici, A., Gingrich, J., Chevalier, T., & Haslberger, M. (2022). Center-right parties and post-war secondary education. *Comparative Politics*. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041523X16570701392481

Green, A. (1990). *Education and state formation*. St. Martin's Press.

Hall, P. A., & Soskice, D. (2001). An introduction to varieties of capitalism. In P. A. Hall & D. Soskice (Eds.), *Varieties of capitalism* (pp. 1–69). Oxford University Press.

Hanselman, P., & Fiel, J. E. (2017). School opportunity hoarding? Racial segregation and access to high growth schools. *Social Forces*, *95*(3), 1077–1104.

Hemerijck, A. (2012). *Changing welfare states*. Oxford University Press.

Hemerijck, A. (2018). Social investment as a policy paradigm. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *25*(6), 810–827.

Inglehart, R. (1971). The silent revolution in Europe: Intergenerational change in post-industrial societies. *American Political Science Review*, *65*(4), 991–1017.

Iversen, T., & Stephens, J. D. (2008). Partisan politics, the welfare state, and three worlds of human capital formation. *Comparative Political Studies*, *41*(4–5), 600–637.

Jakobi, A. P. (2011). Political parties and the institutionalization of education: A comparative analysis of party manifestos. *Comparative Education Review*, *55*(2), 189–209.

Jensen, C. (2014). *The right and the welfare state*. Oxford University Press.

Joseph, K., & Sumption, J. (1979). *Equality*. John Murray.

Lipset, S. M. (1972). Social mobility and equal opportunity. *The Public Interest*, *29*, 90–108.

Lundahl, L. (1990). New variations on old themes: The Swedish conservative party and the battle over comprehensive education 1900–1985. *Journal of Education Policy*, *5*(2), 157–166.

Mason, C. (2011). *Reading Appalachia from left to right*. Cornell University Press.

Mijs, J. B. (2022). Merit and ressentiment: How to tackle the tyranny of merit. *Theory and Research in Education*, *20*(2), 173–181.

Napier, D. B., & Majhanovic, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Education, dominance and identity*. Springer.

Nikolai, R., & Rothe, K. (2013). Konvergenz in der Schulstruktur? Programmatik von CDU und SPD im Vergleich. *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, *23*(4), 545–572.

Österman, M. (2018). Tracking Detracking reforms. [Unpublished PhD thesis], Uppsala University.

Paglayan, A. S. (2021). The non-democratic roots of mass education: Evidence from 200 years. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(1), 179–198.

Patten, A. (2014). *Equal Recognition*. Princeton University Press.

Paulston, R. G. (1968). *Educational change in Sweden*. Teachers College Press.

Powell, M. (2000). New labour and the third way in the British welfare state: A new and distinctive approach? *Critical Social Policy*, *20*(1), 39–60.

Rothstein, B. (1996). *The social democratic state. The Swedish model and the bureaucratic problem of social reforms*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Sandel, M. J. (2020). *The tyranny of merit*. Penguin.

Schröder, G. (2002). Neujahresansprache von Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder. *Die Zeit, December 31*.

Spoon, J.-J., & Klüver, H. (2014). Do parties respond? How electoral context influences party responsiveness. *Electoral Studies*, *35*, 48–60.

Stone, D. (2002). *Policy Paradox*. Norton.

Swift, A. (2003). *How not to Be a Hypocrite*. Routledge.

Taylor, C. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the "politics of recognition"*. Princeton University Press.

Volkens, A., Burst, T., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., & Zehnter, L. (2020). The manifesto data collection. In *Manifesto project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2020a*. WZB.

Wiborg, S. (2009). *Education and social integration*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilensky, H. L. (1974). *The welfare state and equality*. University of California Press.

Young, M. (1958). *The rise of the meritocracy*. Thames and Huchson.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.