Who Votes for the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW)? A Policy-Space Perspective

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Abstract: This contribution studies voting intentions for the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) from a policy-space perspective. What makes the new German party special is its unusual bundling of economically left-wing with culturally right-wing positions. We turn to survey data from March 2024 (GLES Tracking T57) to assess how this bundling is reflected in the positions of their supporters. Distinguishing between an economic policy dimension, a transnational dimension and a traditional morality dimension, we find that the probability of intending to vote for the BSW increases with more left-wing economic positions and with more nationalist positions. Conservative positions on traditional morality are not meaningfully associated with the overall probability of a BSW vote but make it more likely to support BSW rather than the Greens and less likely to support BSW relative to the AfD. We conclude that the policy-space perspective holds potential to understand the party's early success, but that its voters are better characterized as 'left-nationalists' than 'left-conservatives'.

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2023, Sahra Wagenknecht—prominent German politician and former co-leader of the parliamentary group of the far-left party "Die Linke" (The Left)—resigned from her party with the plan to form a new one. Even prior to its foundation, a Wagenknecht-party was predicted to do decent at the voting booth (Focus 2023; Merkur 2023; Wagner et al. 2023). The "Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht" (BSW) was officially founded on January 8, 2024, and had its first run in the European elections in June, finishing with 6.2% of the vote. With this result, the BSW outclassed Wagenknecht's old party which only gained 2.7%. As of this writing (August 9th, 2024), the BSW stands around 7% to 9% in polls for national elections (Wahlrecht.de 2024a). Current polls also suggest that the party will fare especially well in the upcoming state elections in the Eastern part of Germany in Saxony (September 1st, 2024), Thuringia (September 1st, 2024) and Brandenburg (September 22nd, 2024) with vote shares between 11% and 19%, coming in third place behind the CDU and the AfD in each of the three Länder (Wahlrecht.de 2024b). If these projections are not entirely off, the party will be in a pivotal position for government formation. What explains the party's early success?

The literature on party emergence offers at least two plausible explanations for the good performance of the new party (Wuttke 2020). First, the empty space perspective holds that opportunities for the formation of new parties will open up if established parties leave ideological positions in the policy space empty (cf. van de Wardt and Otjes 2022). Second, the protest-based perspective argues that new parties could exploit anti-establishment resentment among the electorate, irrespective of their specific policy positions or the novelty of their program. Wagenknecht and her new party do indeed utilize populist messages which might go down well with dissatisfied voters (Thomeczek 2024). However, in this study, we want to focus on the first perspective. What is special about the

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BSW from the empty space perspective is not so much that it adopts entirely new issue positions, but rather that it seems to offer a new, unusual package: At this early stage, scholars and commentators widely perceive the BSW to be economically left-leaning while simultaneously adopting 'conservative' stances on 'cultural' issues, most prominently restrictive positions on immigration (Mudde 2024; Thomeczek 2024; Wagner 2023; Wagner, Wurthmann, and Thomeczek 2023). Thus, the party seems to close the "left-authoritarian supply gap" that characterized not only the German party system (Häfner, Landwehr, and Stallbaum 2023; Steiner and Hillen 2019; 2021), but party systems in Western Europe more broadly (Hakhverdian and Schakel 2022; Hillen and Steiner 2020; Kurella and Rosset 2018; Lefkofridi, Wagner, and Willmann 2014; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009). Its unique position may allow the BSW to attract voters whose preference bundle did not match those of existing parties, which could, in turn, account for the party's initial success at the voting booth.

Utilizing the first survey data available from the German Longitudinal Election Study from March 2024 (GLES 2024) after the launch of the BSW, we study how positions in the policy space are associated with voting intentions for the BSW. Our guiding expectation is that the BSW's unusual bundling of economically left-wing with culturally right-wing positions makes it attractive for voters who share these views. Specifically, we address the following questions: Where do voters perceive the BSW to be located in the policy space? How are BSW supporters positioned in the policy space, and where do they stand in relation to voters of other parties? Are economically left-wing and culturally conservative policy positions associated with more favourable ratings of the party and higher probabilities to vote for it in multivariate analyses? Finally, if directly measured against its contenders, do the intentions to vote for the BSW rather than a respective rival party change in ways that would be expected due to the new party's (supposedly) left-

conservative position? For example, is cultural conservativism associated with preferring the BSW over The Left?

To briefly preview the results: Distinguishing between an economic dimension and two more clear-cut cultural policy dimensions rather than just one broad cultural axis, we, first, obtain evidence that voters perceive the BSW to hold (slightly) left-wing positions on economic policy combined with right-wing positions on immigration, but not on gender equality measures. This 'left-nationalist' profile is reflected in the BSW's electorate, whose nationalist position is second only to that of the voters of the far-right AfD, but who are not particularly conservative when it comes to traditional morality issues such as gender equality or gay rights. Accordingly, our regression analysis vindicates that the more economically left-wing and the more nationalist individuals are, the higher they rate the BSW and the more likely are they to vote for it. Conservative positions on traditional morality, on the other hand, have no meaningful effect on the overall probability of a BSW vote, but increase the likelihood of preferring the BSW over the Greens and decrease the willingness to support the BSW rather than the AfD.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section sketches our conceptualization of the policy space and discusses the BSW's position towards economic and cultural policy issues in more detail. The third section introduces the data and methods that we use to answer our research questions. The fourth section presents our empirical findings. Section five concludes.

THE BSW IN THE POLICY SPACE

Our study builds on the premise that political competition in Germany, as in other Western European countries, can be usefully described with a spatial model in which key controversial issues align with overarching conflict dimensions (Dolezal 2008; Jankowski et al.

2022; Steiner and Hillen 2019). According to this conception, parties and voters can be placed in the policy space according to their stances on the relevant conflict dimensions and voters are assumed to prefer parties that hold similar positions in the policy space (Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Marks 2024; Downs 1957). But how many dimensions are needed to adequately capture political competition? Over the last decades, the rising salience of new issues has transformed politics in Western Europe. Controversial issues no longer align with a single, primarily economically imprinted dimension, dividing 'left' supporters of redistribution and state intervention in the economy and 'right' free market advocates. Instead, scholars now commonly add a second dimension that differentiates between 'liberal' attitudes, such as support for individual freedoms, cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as international political integration, and 'conservative' attitudes that combine opposition to said diversity and political integration with support for traditional values (e.g., Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Marks 2024; Hillen and Steiner 2020; Kriesi et al. 2008; Lefkofridi, Wagner, and Willmann 2014).

However, given the diverse content of these non-economic issues, some evidence also suggests that they should not be condensed into one single 'cultural' dimension (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2012; Heath et al. 1999; Mader, Steiner, and Schoen 2020; Wheatley and Mendez 2021). In their prominent model of the policy space, Kitschelt and Rehm (2014; 2018; for similar conceptions see: Caughey, O'Grady, and Warshaw 2019; Daenekindt, de Koster, and van der Waal 2017) claim that socio-cultural issues are bundled into two separate dimensions, which accompany a third economic ('greed') policy dimension: The so-called 'grid' dimension revolves around issues of traditional morality and personal lifestyle such as gay rights and gender equality. The 'group' dimension concerns matters of ethnic diversity and national belonging. It integrates issues related to immigration and

migrant integration, but also those related to the question of how much political power should be given to the supranational vs. national level.

For the present analysis, it seems informative to follow Kitschelt and Rehm (2014; 2018) and consider two rather than one cultural policy dimension. While the BSW has been particularly outspoken about group issues, especially the strain from immigration and the necessity to restrict it (e.g., Augsburger Allgemeine 2024; Frankfurter Rundschau 2024), grid issues are less prominent in the party's communication and its position towards these issues seems to be less pronounced (BSW 2024a; 2024b).[1] Figure 1 adds some evidence for this conjecture. It uses data from a recent expert survey (Thomeczek, Wurthmann, and Stecker 2024) to map the German parties' positions on economic issues (greed), immigration (group), and rights of sexual minorities (grid). The figure confirms the 'left-conservative' location of the BSW. However, while experts firmly place the BSW towards the restrictive pole on immigration policy, they see the party taking a less decisively conservative stand on the rights of sexual minorities. In combination with its economically left-leaning position, the BSW may thus cater more to 'left-nationalist' than to genuinely 'left-conservative' voters in the narrower sense.

FIGURE 1. Experts' placement of German parties in the policy space
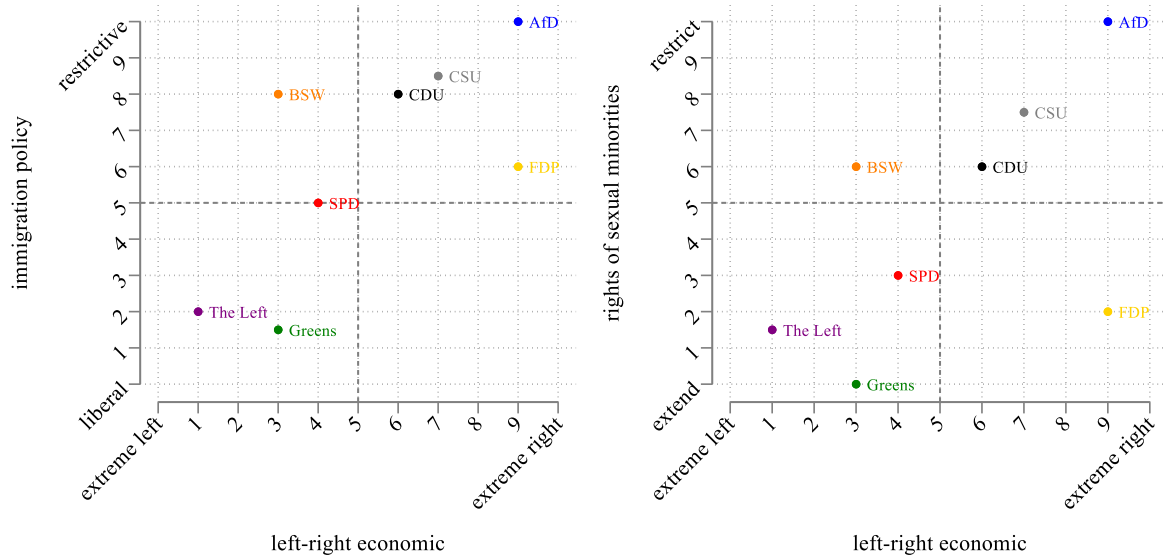
Note: Median expert placement of parties in the expert survey GEPARTEE (German Parties before the European Elections 2024) administered by Thomeczek, Wurthmann, and Stecker (2024).

Two academic studies we are aware of have already provided some evidence on who supports the BSW from a policy-space perspective. In anticipation of a potential launch of a Wagenknecht-party, Wagner, Wurthmann, and Thomeczek (2023) analysed how Sahra Wagenknecht personally is evaluated by German citizens. As expected, both self-classifying as conservative rather than liberal as well as holding anti-immigration preferences is associated with rating Wagenknecht more favourably. Yet, somewhat surprisingly, preferring more state intervention in the market is related to less favourable ratings of Wagenknecht. It is an open question how these results travel to support for the BSW as a party. It may be the case, for example, that supporters of the radical-right AfD view Wagenknecht favourably due to her populist and anti-migration rhetoric—while not being willing to vote for the BSW.

In a first working paper on individuals' propensity to actually vote for the BSW, Herold and Otteni (2024) find that both culturally conservative positions and economically left-wing positions are associated with a higher reported likelihood of ever voting for the BSW. They also demonstrate that the BSW is the only of the main German parties for which this pattern holds. For all the other parties, right-wing positions on the economic and cultural dimension affect voting propensities in the same direction. However, with the cultural dimension blending grid (gay marriage, gender self-determination) and group issues (national values) the study cannot discriminate effects of the two.

Here, we build on this initial research by studying how individuals' preferences on an economic ('greed') dimension, a traditional morality ('grid') dimension, and a transnational ('group') dimension affect the actual intention to vote for the BSW, overall and—as another innovation of our study—relative to all the other parties individually. To gain more leverage, we additionally study ratings of the BSW, which record individuals' support for the BSW on a more fine-grained level.

DATA AND MEASURES

We use data from the Tracking T57 of the German Longitudinal Election Study. This online survey was in the field from March 6 to March 15, 2024. The sample is based on an online access panel by the company Respondi and includes only German citizens aged 18 and older, with quotas for age, gender, and education and a sample size of 1,145. For the analyses, we employ a weight which adjusts the sample to the German Microcensus.

Our main dependent variable is a binary indicator recording whether individuals reported a voting intention for the BSW (=1) or intended to vote for any other party (=0) in case a national election would be held next Sunday. 80 individuals, 7.0% of all valid observations (or 10.1% with the weight), reported an intention for the BSW. Our second

outcome measure is respondents' rating of the BSW on a scale from -5 to +5 (mean: -1.4). Unsurprisingly, the two variables are closely associated with one another (see Table A1 in the appendix). We exploit the more fine-grained information contained in the ratings because of power concerns related to the somewhat limited absolute number of BSW voters in the sample.

We measure respondents' positions on the three policy dimensions through three items each (see Table1), which we combine into single scores via principal component factor analyses. To avoid cross-loadings while also not enforcing a solution with orthogonal factors, we estimated these factor analyses separately per dimension. A factor analyses with all items recovers the same three dimensions (see Table A2 in the appendix), which we label economic dimension (greed), transnational dimension (group), and morality dimension (grid). However, we note that respondents' positions on the general size of taxes and welfare benefits do not load as well with their positions on the other two economic items which are more closely related to redistribution and tax progressivity. For this reason, we will also report alternative results with disaggregated measures for the economic dimension below. Higher values on the factor scores indicate more right-wing/nationalist/conservative positions.

TABLE 1. Measurement of policy dimensions

Dimension	Economic dimension (greed)	Transnational dimension (group)	Morality dimension (grid)
Items [scale] (loading)	High-income earners should pay more tax than at present. [1-5] (0.81)	Some want to make it easier for foreigners to move here, others want to restrict the opportunities for foreigners to move here.* [1-11] (0.87)	Marriage should again only be possible between a man and a woman. [1-5] (0.84)
	The government should take measures to reduce income differences. [1-5] (0.77)	Immigrants should be obliged to adapt to German culture. [1-5] (0.77)	Abortions should be banned in Germany without exception. [1-5] (0.78)
	Some want fewer taxes and levies, even if this means	Germany should provide financial support to EU	Now we would like to know what you think

	fewer welfare state benefits, others want more welfare state benefits, even if this means more taxes and levies.* [1-11] (0.55)	member states that are experiencing severe economic and financial difficulties. [1-5] (0.70)	about government measures to promote equality for women in society. Some believe that the state's equality measures do not go far enough, others believe that they already go far too far. * [1-11] (0.60)
Eigenvalue	1.55	1.82	1.67
Explained variance	0.51	0.61	0.57

Note: Loadings from separate principal component factor analyses per dimension. The items have been rescaled such that higher values indicate more right-wing/nationalist/conservative positions. A factor analysis with all nine items leads to three similar dimensions, but with the taxes vs. transfers item loading on two dimensions (see Table A2 in the Appendix). Items also used for measuring perceived party positions (see Figure 2) marked by an asterisk (*). Weight employed.

In the multivariate models, we ran binary logit regressions for our first outcome variable (BSW voting intention) and OLS regressions for our second outcome variable (BSW rating). Our main models control for a standard set of socio-demographic variables (gender, age groups, level of formal education, living in the Eastern part of Germany). Given the limited sample and number of BSW voters and our primarily descriptive question of how positions in the policy space are *associated* with BSW support, we hesitate to include a longer list of control variables. Still, we do present results from robustness checks with satisfaction with the way democracy works included in addition to accommodate the protest-based perspective, even though lower satisfaction with democracy may be partly endogenous to holding a left-authoritarian position (Hillen and Steiner 2020; Steiner and Hillen 2019). In an additional step, we present results from multinomial logit models with the dependent variable recording *which* of the main parties respondents intended to vote for.[2] Using BSW as the base outcome, this allows us to assess how the likelihood of a

BSW vote relative to a vote for each of the other parties changes in response to a change in the policy positions (and other predictor variables).

DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE: PERCEIVED PARTY POSITIONS AND VOTER POSITIONS IN THE POLICY SPACE

Before turning to the regression analysis, we show how German voters locate the BSW in the policy space, how BSW supporters are positioned in the policy space, and where they stand in relation to the voters of other parties.

To plot perceived party positions in Figure 2, we draw on questions which asked respondents to place the main German parties on three single items that form part of our three dimensions (see Table 1): positions on higher welfare benefits vs. lower taxes (x-axis in both panels), immigration (y-axis in left-hand panel), and gender equality (y-axis in right-hand panel). The left-hand panel confirms that—in line with the experts (see Figure 1)—survey respondents perceive the BSW to be restrictive on immigration, those who intend to vote for the party a bit more so than the average of all individual. When it comes to the general level of welfare benefits vs. taxes,[3] the BSW's mean perceived position is only marginally left of centre, just barely situating the party in the 'left-nationalist' corner of the respective two-dimensional policy space. Still, the party is, on average, perceived as more in favour of higher welfare benefits than the CDU, CSU, FDP and AfD. The right-hand panel shows that only the AfD is perceived to be a clear opponent of gender equality measures. Individuals classify all other parties as relatively centrist or in favor of equality measures, including the BSW. Consequently, no party is perceived as combining a conservative position on this traditional morality issue with support for high taxes and the welfare state.

FIGURE 2. Mean perceived party positions
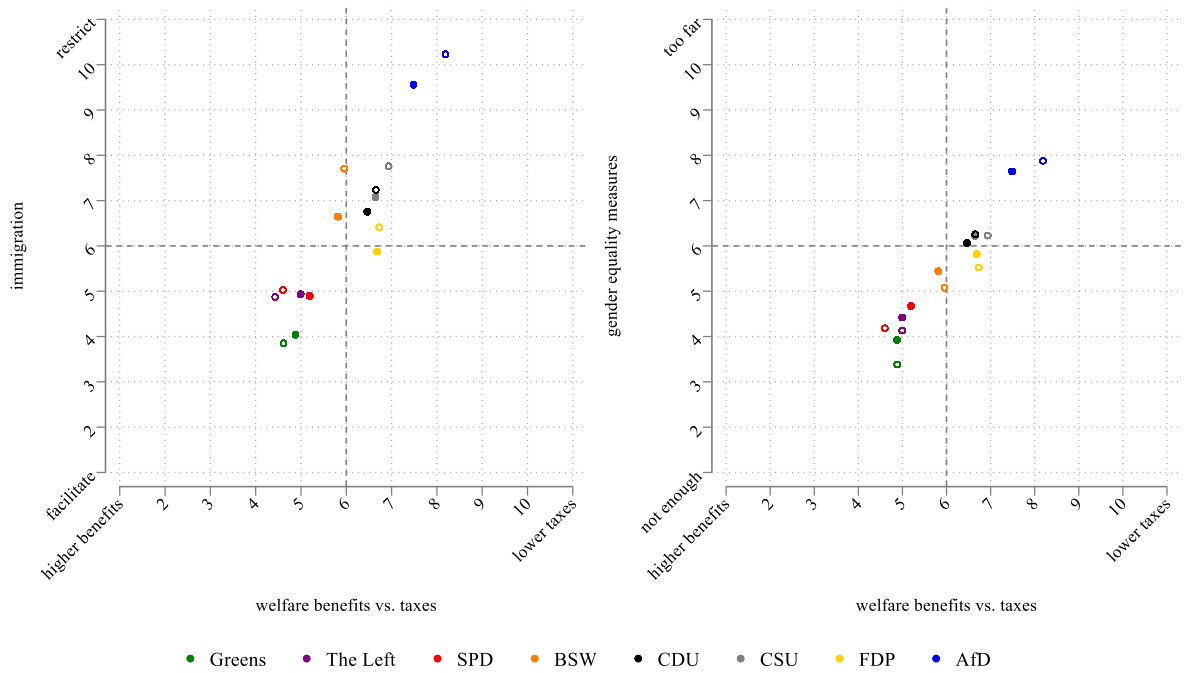
Note: Mean perceived party positions among all individuals (filled circles) and those with an intention to vote for the BSW (hollow circles).

Figure 3 uses the factor scores from the factor analyses above (see Table 1) to locate voters in the two two-dimensional policy spaces. Additionally, both panels list for each quadrant the share of BSW supporters among those respondents who reported that they would participate if an election would be held. The x-axes of both panels show each parties' supporters mean position on the economic dimension. In the left-hand panel, we plot economic positions against mean positions on the transnational dimension. The scatterplot reveals that those with an intention to vote for the BSW on average combine nationalist with economically left-leaning positions. Only the supporters of the AfD are even more nationalist. On the economic dimension, the mean position of BSW voters is close to that of SPD voters. Looking at the vote share the BSW receives in each quadrant, we see that the party is strongest in the left-nationalist quadrant and weakest in the opposite

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right-transnational quadrant. Turning to the right-hand panel, we present mean positions on the morality dimension along the y-axis. In line with how the BSW's position towards gender equality is perceived (see Figure 2), its supporters are not especially conservative on morality issues. On the contrary, their average position is firmly situated in the left-libertarian quadrant, with only the supporters of the Greens being distinctly more liberal. It is therefore not surprising that the BSW receives its strongest support in this quadrant of the corresponding policy space.

FIGURE 3. Mean positions in the policy space by vote choice
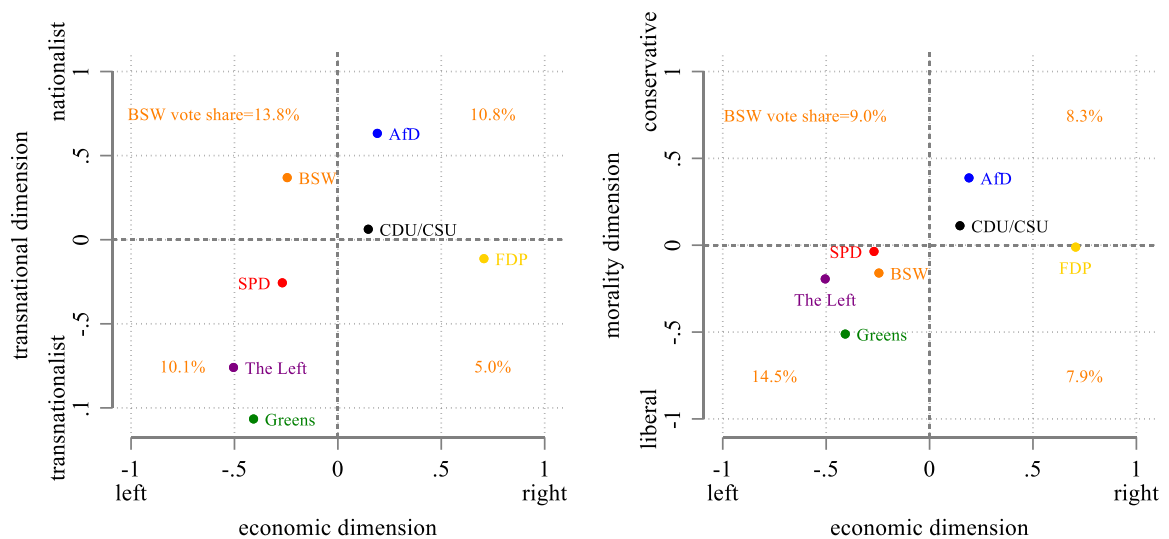
Note: Mean positions on the policy dimensions (see Table 1) by current vote intention. Numbers in orange indicate the share of BSW supporters among those with an intention to vote in each quadrant of the policy space. Weights employed.

RESULTS FROM REGRESSION ANALYSES

In Table 2, we present results from multivariate analyses. Models 1 and 2 estimate logit regressions for whether or not individuals intend to vote for the BSW. Models 3 and 4 run linear models for individuals' rating of the BSW. The main finding is that positions on the

economic and the transnational dimension always exhibit statistically significant effects in the expected directions (with at least *p<0.10*), while the morality dimension is significantly related (with *p<0.10*) to the outcome measure in only one model. The more economically left-wing and the more nationalist individuals are, the higher is their probability of intending to vote for the BSW and the higher they rate the BSW.

Interestingly, Models 2 and 4 indicate that the effect of the economic positions is driven by individuals' attitudes towards redistribution. If we combine only the first two items from Table 1, which both explicitly address income differences, into a factor score, we find that this 'redistribution score' significantly affects approval of the BSW, as opposed to individuals' stances on the level of taxes vs. transfers. Thus, support for BSW seems more related to a preference for less economic inequality, but not to a preference for a bigger government.[4]

TABLE 2. Regression results for BSW support

| | voting intention: BSW (binary logit) | | | | rating: BSW (OLS) | |
| | (1) | | (2) | | (3) | (4) |
	coef.	AME	AME	coef.	coef.	coef.
economic dimension	-0.27[+]	-0.024[+]			-0.30[*]	
	(0.14)	(0.013)			(0.14)	
redistribution score			-0.29[+]	-0.026[+]		-0.37[*]
			(0.16)	(0.014)		(0.14)
taxes vs. transfers (z-stand.)			0.020	0.0017		0.11
			(0.16)	(0.014)		(0.16)
transnational dimension	0.38[*]	0.034[*]	0.34[*]	0.030[*]	0.50[***]	0.43[**]
	(0.15)	(0.014)	(0.16)	(0.014)	(0.15)	(0.16)
morality dimension	-0.18	-0.016	-0.17	-0.015	0.22	0.23[+]
	(0.17)	(0.015)	(0.17)	(0.015)	(0.14)	(0.14)
female	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
male	-0.28	-0.024	-0.27	-0.023	-0.77[**]	-0.75[**]
	(0.31)	(0.027)	(0.31)	(0.027)	(0.29)	(0.29)
age: -29	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
age: 30-44	0.87	0.045[+]	0.88	0.045[+]	-0.17	-0.16
	(0.55)	(0.024)	(0.55)	(0.024)	(0.34)	(0.34)
age: 45-59	1.09[*]	0.062[*]	1.10[*]	0.063[*]	-0.27	-0.26
	(0.55)	(0.026)	(0.55)	(0.026)	(0.35)	(0.35)
age: 60+	1.46[*]	0.099[*]	1.48[*]	0.10[*]	-0.40	-0.39

	(0.61)	(0.039)	(0.62)	(0.039)	(0.47)	(0.47)
west	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
east	0.13	0.012	0.16	0.014	0.86**	0.87**
	(0.35)	(0.033)	(0.35)	(0.033)	(0.33)	(0.33)
education: low	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
education: medium	0.077	0.0065	0.066	0.0054	-0.17	-0.18
	(0.40)	(0.033)	(0.40)	(0.033)	(0.43)	(0.42)
education: high	0.23	0.021	0.26	0.023	-0.054	-0.016
	(0.48)	(0.042)	(0.48)	(0.043)	(0.42)	(0.42)
constant	-3.39***		-3.42***		-0.74	-0.77+
	(0.61)		(0.61)		(0.45)	(0.45)
observations	825		825		790	790
(Pseudo-)R^2	0.15		0.15		0.057	0.061

Note: Coefficients and average marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. $^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$. Pseudo-R2 for models 1 and 2 according to McKelvey & Zavoina. Weights employed.

To communicate the magnitude of the effects on vote intentions, we plot predicted probabilities of BSW vote intentions based on model 1 in Table 2 across observed positions on the three policy dimensions in Figure 4. The effects of individuals' positions on the transnational and the economic dimension are substantively relevant. The predicted probability of reporting an intention to vote for the BSW is about 12 percentage points higher for the most nationalist (15.3%) compared to the most transnationalist (3.4%) individuals (top-left panel). Similarly, the probability is about 10 percentage points higher for someone who takes the most economically left-wing (15.2%) rather than the most right-wing position (4.9%) (top-right). While the curve is also downward sloping for positions on the morality dimension, the differences are substantively smaller and statistically insignificant (bottom-left). The bottom-right panel illustrates how the predicted probability of a BSW vote peaks with over 20% among individuals who are both nationalist and economically left-wing.[5]

FIGURE 4. Predicted probabilities of BSW vote intention across positions on policy dimensions
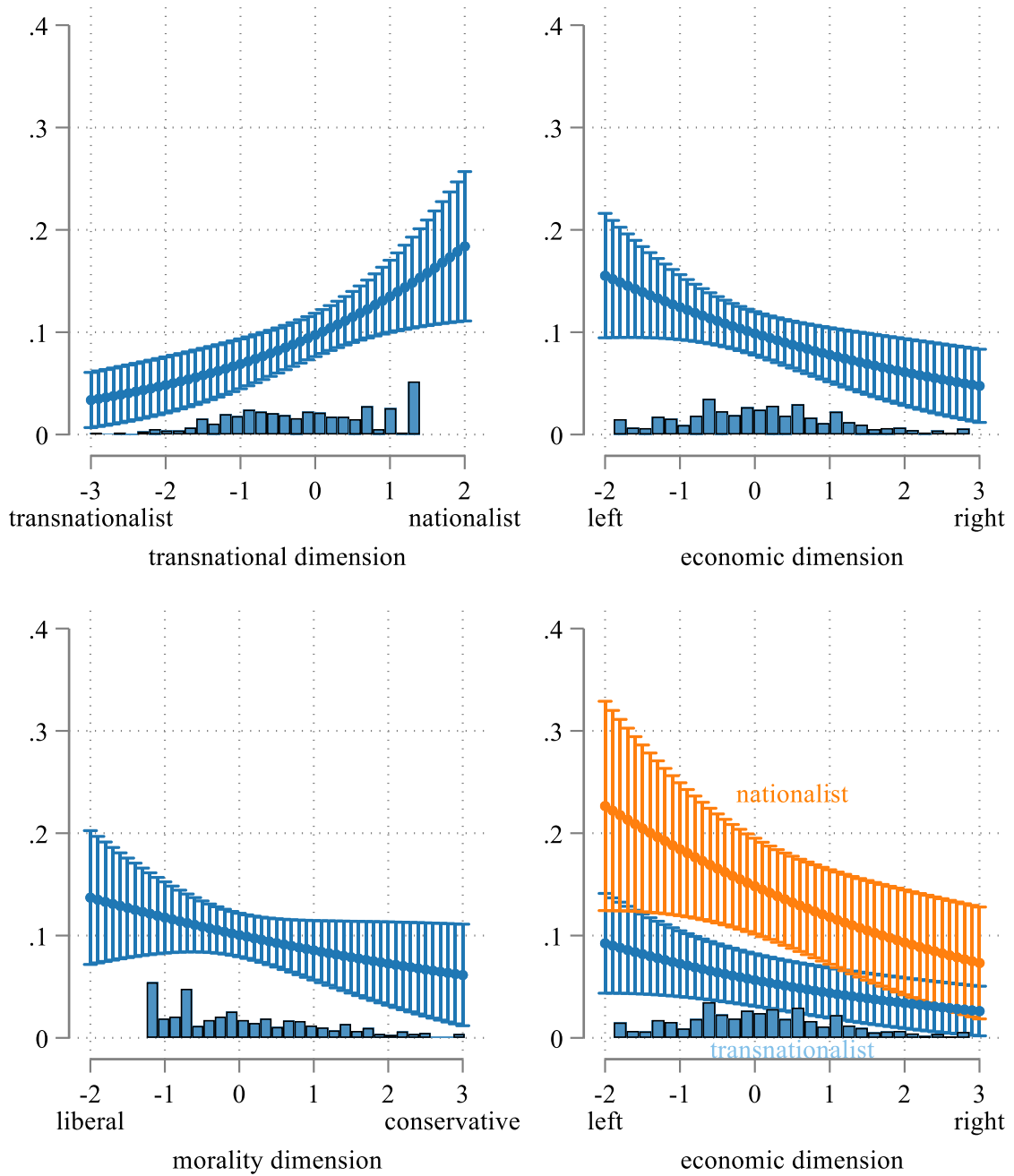

Note: Predicted probabilities (with 90% confidence intervals) based on binary logistic regression displayed as model 1 in Table 2. Binned histograms show observed positions on the dimension in the estimation sample. In the bottom-right panel, non-nativist and nativist positions refer to the 10th and 90th percentile values respectively on the transnational dimension.

Finally, we report results from multinomial logistic regressions in Figure 5 (and Table A7 in the appendix). The coefficients in Figure 5 are relative risk ratios with respect to the baseline category of a BSW voting intention. Thus positive (negative) values indicate that the probability to vote for the respective party rather than the BSW becomes more (less) likely with a one-unit increase in the predictor. The results indicate that holding a more economically left-wing position is associated with an increase in the probability of a BSW vote relative to the economically right-leaning parties (AfD, CDU/CSU and especially FDP), but not relative to the left-leaning parties (SPD, Greens and The Left). The likelihood of a BSW vote increases with more nationalist positions when compared to the three left-leaning parties but decreases when compared to the radical-right AfD. Regarding the morality dimension, the nil effect from above hides that more conservative positions set BSW voters apart from Green voters, whereas more liberal positions are associated with an increase in the relative risk of choosing the BSW over the AfD.

Overall, these results mirror the BSW's location in the policy space as perceived by experts (see Figure 1). The BSW seems to be able to attract voters who prefer a more left-leaning platform than provided by the right-leaning parties on the economic dimension while at the same time preferring a more nationalist platform than provided by the left-leaning parties on the transnational dimension. With its more centrist positions on the morality dimension, positions on this dimension are unrelated to the overall probability of a BSW vote but do discriminate—in opposite directions—between BSW and those parties which hold the most extreme positions on this dimension (Greens, AfD).

FIGURE 5. Relative risk ratios from multinomial logit regression of voting intention with BSW as base outcome
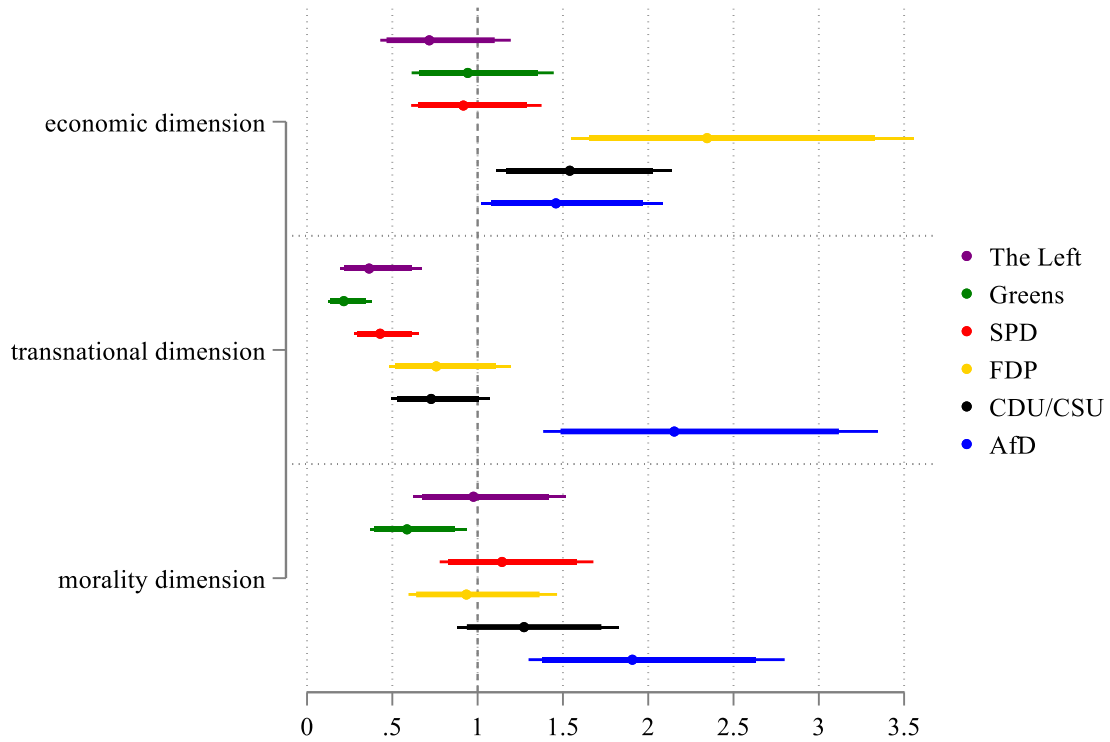
Note: Relative risk ratios from multinomial logistic regressions (with 90% and 95% confidence intervals) with voting intention for BSW as the base outcome (and vote for other parties set to missing values). The relative risk ratio for a predictor variable indicates how the probability (risk) of a voting intention for the party in question, relative to the baseline category of a voting intention for the BSW, changes with a one-unit increase in the predictor. For instance, for the AfD we have: $\frac{p(Y=AfD \mid x+1)/p(Y=BSW \mid x+1))}{p(Y=AfD \mid x)/p(Y=BSW \mid x))}$. Thus, a relative risk ratio of 2 indicates that the probability of an AfD vote relative to the probability a BSW vote becomes twice as high when the predictor increases by one unit. A full regression table, including control variables, is displayed in Table A7 in the appendix. Weights employed.

CONCLUSION

In this contribution, we have studied German voters' preferences towards the BSW from a policy-space perspective. We obtained support for the expectation that the probability of intending to vote for the BSW increases with more left-wing positions on the economic dimension—especially on redistribution—and more nationalist positions on the

transnational dimension. Conservative positions on traditional morality are not significantly related to the overall likelihood of voting BSW. In this sense, BSW voters are best characterized as 'left-nationalist' rather than 'left-conservatives'. The BSW's unique position in the policy space is reflected in the likelihood of a BSW vote increasing with more right-wing (i.e. nationalist) positions on the transnational dimension relative to all left-leaning parties—and with more left-leaning positions on the economic positions relative to all right-leaning parties.

We conclude that the policy-space perspective holds potential to understand the party's early successes, and that it proved fruitful to distinguish between three rather than just two main policy dimensions. The BSW seems to indeed attract voters with a 'left-nationalist' preference bundle who previously lacked a corresponding party platform. From a broader perspective, this study's findings thereby contribute to research on party emergence by showing that new political parties may not only profit from competing on new issues or emphasizing neglected ones but also from programmatic innovations that consist of bundling issues into a previously non-existent package.

Our results, alongside those of Herold and Otteni (2024), thus indicate that the BSW is indeed able to benefit from filling a supply gap in terms of the main policy dimensions. Arguably, this sets the party in a structurally advantageous position with regard to its long-term prospects—and contrasts with early success stories of other rising parties in Germany which seemed strongly tied to single issues. For example, the surge of the German Pirate Party in 2011 and 2012, when it managed to enter four state parliaments in a row, seemed closely connected to its focus on digitalization (Siewert and König 2021). The party's success proved short lived, arguably due to the transitory salience of its key issue and its failure to cover a broader niche.[6] While the early success of the BSW

may also be to some extent tied to single issues—in particular foreign policy positions related to the Russo-Ukrainian war (Wurthmann and Wagner 2024), the results in this study imply that it is also anchored in BSW voters holding a specific combination of positions on the main policy dimensions. This in turn may make the party less dependent on the varying salience of single issues and suggests a structural potential that remains even if particular issues fade in salience.

Nonetheless, it needs to be seen—and studied—how the BSW electorate will evolve over time. Future studies will be able to rely on larger surveys and on panel datasets which will provide more potential to discriminate between rivalling explanations of the BSW vote and for establishing causality. For now, our results have provided a first snapshot of the BSW vote from a policy-space perspective.

NOTES

[1] To be sure, Sahra Wagenknecht previously attacked "self-righteous lifestyle leftists" for leading a "culture war" against all those who do not adhere to their "left-liberal" conception of a progressive society (Wagenknecht 2021) and voted against a bill for gender self-determination (Deutscher Bundestag 2024). However, there is little evidence from the party's manifestos thus far that the BSW would aim to restrict gay rights and, especially, gender equality (BSW 2024a, 2024b).

[2] We set voting intentions for one of the "other" small parties to missing values, given that the shares are too low for a separate analysis of these parties and that it would also make little sense to put these diverse parties into one category.

[3] Note that we lack a measure of perceived party positions focused more narrowly on redistribution.

[4] This finding also holds when including the items in separate models (see Table A4 in the appendix). In Table A5, we repeat the models from Table 2 while additionally controlling for

satisfaction with the way democracy works. The more dissatisfied individuals are, the higher their inclination to support the BSW. Results for the position items remain largely similar, though the transnationalist dimension turns out statistically significant only for the BSW rating. As Table A6 shows, there is a substantial negative correlation between nationalist positions and satisfaction with democracy ($r=-0.48$). As this may reflect that holding more nationalist positions may to some extent cause dissatisfaction, we prefer to report main models without democracy satisfaction in order not to block this potential channel of influence—given our focus on the policy-space perspective.

[5] The plot looks similar when including an interaction term between positions on the economic and transnational dimension (see Figure A1 in the appendix). Predicted values for the BSW rating based on model 3 in Table 2 show a similar picture as Figure 4 (see Figure A2 in the appendix).

[6] While the AfD also emerged as a single-issue party, focused on the Eurozone bailouts, its policy platform soon transformed into those of a fully-fledged radical right party (Reinl and Schäfer 2021). It thereby filled a structural gap in the German party system (Dolezal 2009).

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Appendix to "Who Votes for the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW)? A Policy-Space Perspective"

Table A1: Two-way table of BSW voting intention and BSW rating

		BSW voting intention		
		other	BSW	Total
BSW rating	-5	249	0	249
	-4	58	0	58
	-3	54	0	54
	-2	45	0	45
	-1	40	0	40
	0	165	6	171
	1	49	5	54
	2	46	11	57
	3	42	12	54
	4	14	18	32
	5	18	28	46
Total		780	80	860

Table A2: Factor analysis with all items simultaneously included

Item (scale)	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Unique-ness
The government should take measures to reduce income differences. [1-5]			0.83	0.31
High-income earners should pay more tax than at present. [1-5]			0.80	0.37
Some want fewer taxes and levies, even if this means fewer welfare state benefits, others want more welfare state benefits, even if this means more taxes and levies. [1-11]	0.50		0.33	0.57
Some want to make it easier for foreigners to move here, others want to restrict the opportunities for foreigners to move here. [1-11]	0.83			0.31
Immigrants should be obliged to adapt to German culture. [1-5]	0.76			0.38
Germany should provide financial support to EU member states that are experiencing severe economic and financial difficulties. [1-5]	0.71			0.41
Marriage should again only be possible between a man and a woman. [1-5]		0.82		0.30
Abortions should be banned in Germany without exception. [1-5]		0.82		0.33
Now we would like to know what you think about government measures to promote equality for women in society. Some believe that the state's equality measures do not go far enough, others believe that they already go far too far. * [1-11]		0.50		0.56

Note: Loadings from principal component factor analysis with promax rotation with all items simultaneously included. Loadings below |0.3| not shown. The items have been rescaled such that higher values indicate more right-wing/nationalist/conservative positions. Weight employed.

Table A3: Factor analysis with all items simultaneously included (without taxes vs. transfers)

Item (scale)	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Unique-ness
The government should take measures to reduce income differences. [1-5]			0.84	0.28
High-income earners should pay more tax than at present. [1-5]			0.79	0.38
Some want to make it easier for foreigners to move here, others want to restrict the opportunities for foreigners to move here. [1-11]	0.86			0.27
Immigrants should be obliged to adapt to German culture. [1-5]	0.75			0.37
Germany should provide financial support to EU member states that are experiencing severe economic and financial difficulties. [1-5]	0.73	-0.30		0.38
Marriage should again only be possible between a man and a woman. [1-5]		0.81		0.30
Abortions should be banned in Germany without exception. [1-5]		0.85		0.29
Now we would like to know what you think about government measures to promote equality for women in society. Some believe that the state's equality measures do not go far enough, others believe that they already go far too far. * [1-11]		0.45	0.34	0.53

Note: Loadings from principal component factor analysis with promax rotation with all items simultaneously included. Loadings below |0.3| not shown. The items have been rescaled such that higher values indicate more right-wing/nationalist/conservative positions. Weight employed.

Table A4: Regression results for BSW support (redistribution and taxes vs. transfers included separately)

| | voting intention: BSW (binary logit) | | | | rating: BSW (OLS) | |
| | (1) | | (2) | | (3) | (4) |
	coef.	AME	AME	coef.	coef.	coef.
redistribution factor	-0.30*	-0.026*			-0.34*	
	(0.15)	(0.013)			(0.13)	
taxes vs. transfers (z-stand.)			-0.043	-0.0038		-0.000069
			(0.16)	(0.014)		(0.16)
transnational dimension	0.34*	0.030*	0.37*	0.033*	0.48***	0.43**
	(0.15)	(0.013)	(0.16)	(0.015)	(0.14)	(0.16)
morality dimension	-0.14	-0.012	-0.24	-0.022	0.22	0.21
	(0.16)	(0.014)	(0.18)	(0.016)	(0.14)	(0.14)
female	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
male	-0.29	-0.025	-0.30	-0.027	-0.77**	-0.74**
	(0.31)	(0.027)	(0.31)	(0.027)	(0.28)	(0.28)
age: -29	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
age: 30-44	0.92+	0.046+	0.98+	0.049*	-0.21	-0.18
	(0.55)	(0.023)	(0.54)	(0.023)	(0.33)	(0.34)
age: 45-59	1.18*	0.067**	1.18*	0.065**	-0.29	-0.21
	(0.55)	(0.026)	(0.55)	(0.025)	(0.35)	(0.35)
age: 60+	1.50*	0.099**	1.63**	0.11**	-0.47	-0.17
	(0.62)	(0.038)	(0.60)	(0.039)	(0.46)	(0.47)
west	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
east	0.17	0.015	0.17	0.016	0.84*	0.87**
	(0.35)	(0.033)	(0.35)	(0.033)	(0.33)	(0.33)
education: low	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
education: medium	0.094	0.0077	0.0090	0.00077	-0.19	-0.11
	(0.40)	(0.033)	(0.39)	(0.033)	(0.42)	(0.42)
education: high	0.28	0.024	0.19	0.018	-0.014	-0.061
	(0.48)	(0.042)	(0.46)	(0.043)	(0.42)	(0.42)
constant	-3.48***		-3.43***		-0.72	-0.90*
	(0.61)		(0.60)		(0.44)	(0.44)
observations	843		838		809	804
(Pseudo-)R^2	0.15		0.15		0.060	0.048

Note: Coefficients and average marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. $^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$. Pseudo-R2 for models 1 and 2 according to McKelvey & Zavoina. Weights employed.

Figure A1: Predicted probabilities of BSW vote intention across positions on policy dimensions (model with interaction term between economic and transnational dimension)
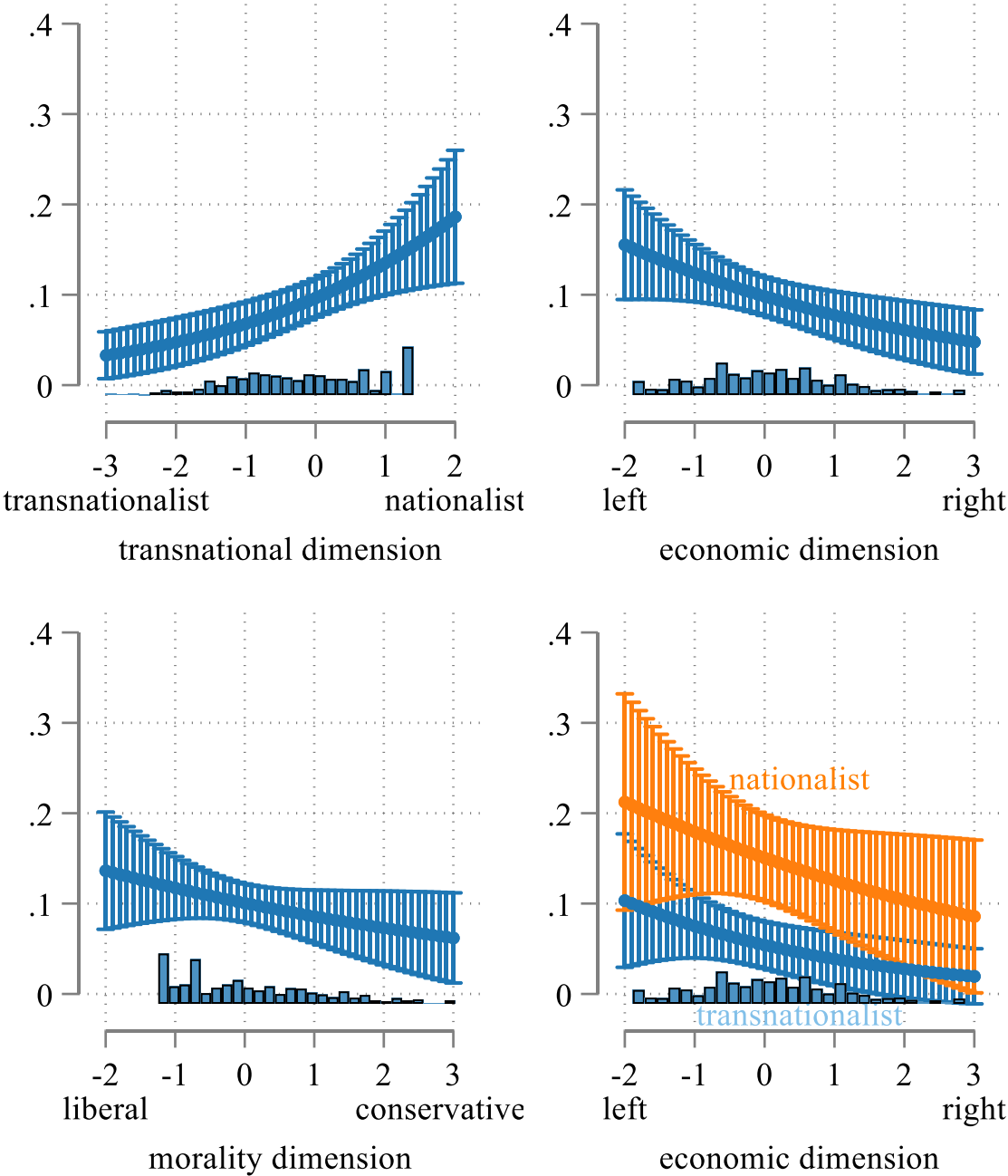
Note: Predicted probabilities (with 90% confidence intervals) based on binary logistic regression. Model specification is similar to model 1 in Table 1 but with an interaction term between the positions on the economic and transnational dimension added to the model. Binned histograms show observed positions on the dimension in the estimation sample. In the bottom-right panel, non-nativist and nativist positions refer to the 10th and 90th percentile values respectively on the transnational dimension.

Figure A2: Predicted BSW rating across positions on policy dimensions
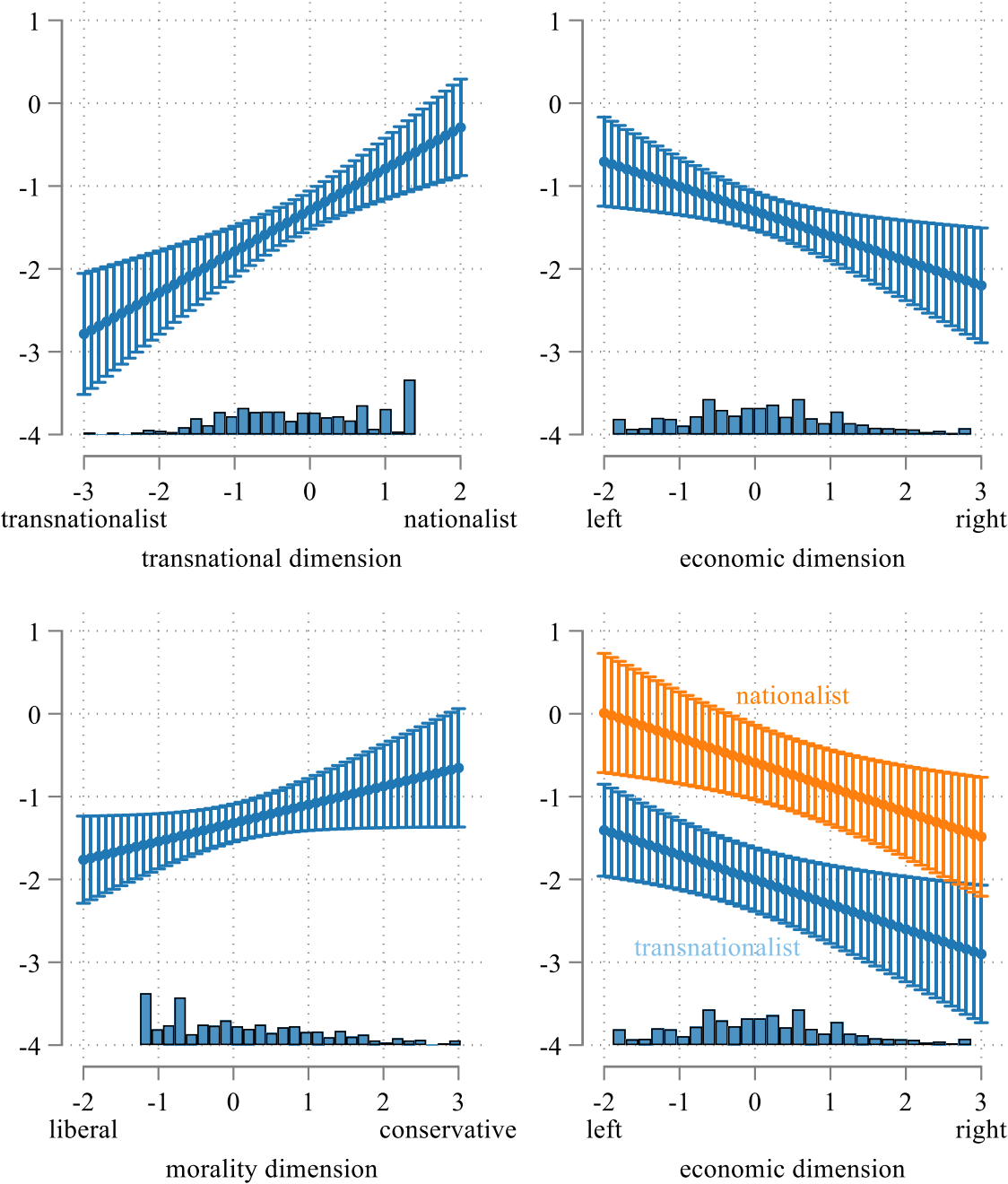
Note: Predicted BSW rating (with 90% confidence intervals) based on OLS regression displayed as model 3 in Table 2. Binned histograms show observed positions on the dimension in the estimation sample. In the bottom-right panel, transnationalist and nationalist positions refer to the 10th and 90th percentile values respectively on the transnational dimension.

Table A5: Regression results for BSW support (with control for satisfaction with democracy)

	voting intention: BSW (binary logit)				rating: BSW (OLS)	
	(1)		(2)		(3)	(4)
	coef.	AME	AME	coef.	coef.	coef.
economic dimension	-0.27[+]	-0.023[+]			-0.30[*]	
	(0.15)	(0.013)			(0.14)	
redistribution factor			-0.27[+]	-0.023[+]		-0.35[*]
			(0.16)	(0.014)		(0.14)
taxes vs. transfers (z-stand.)			-0.021	-0.0018		0.075
			(0.16)	(0.014)		(0.16)
transnational dimension	0.19	0.017	0.17	0.015	0.35[*]	0.30[+]
	(0.18)	(0.016)	(0.19)	(0.017)	(0.17)	(0.18)
morality dimension	-0.18	-0.015	-0.17	-0.015	0.23[+]	0.24[+]
	(0.17)	(0.015)	(0.17)	(0.015)	(0.14)	(0.14)
democracy satisfaction (z-stand.)	-0.36[+]	-0.031[+]	-0.35[+]	-0.030[+]	-0.31[+]	-0.29[+]
	(0.19)	(0.016)	(0.18)	(0.016)	(0.17)	(0.17)
female	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
male	-0.24	-0.021	-0.24	-0.021	-0.71[*]	-0.70[*]
	(0.32)	(0.028)	(0.32)	(0.028)	(0.29)	(0.28)
age: -29	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
age: 30-44	0.83	0.043[+]	0.84	0.043[+]	-0.18	-0.17
	(0.55)	(0.024)	(0.55)	(0.024)	(0.34)	(0.34)
age: 45-59	1.08[+]	0.062[*]	1.09[+]	0.062[*]	-0.28	-0.28
	(0.56)	(0.026)	(0.56)	(0.026)	(0.35)	(0.35)
age: 60+	1.45[*]	0.099[*]	1.46[*]	0.099[*]	-0.39	-0.38
	(0.62)	(0.039)	(0.62)	(0.040)	(0.46)	(0.46)
west	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
east	0.081	0.0071	0.100	0.0088	0.82[*]	0.84[*]
	(0.36)	(0.032)	(0.36)	(0.032)	(0.33)	(0.33)
education: low	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
education: medium	0.093	0.0077	0.081	0.0067	-0.12	-0.13
	(0.40)	(0.033)	(0.41)	(0.033)	(0.42)	(0.42)
education: high	0.26	0.023	0.27	0.024	0.031	0.057
	(0.48)	(0.043)	(0.48)	(0.043)	(0.43)	(0.43)
constant	-2.83[***]		-2.87[***]		-0.30	-0.36
	(0.64)		(0.63)		(0.49)	(0.49)
observations	825		825		790	790
(Pseudo-)R^2	0.17		0.17		0.064	0.066

Note: Coefficients and average marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. [+] $p < 0.10$, [*] $p < 0.05$, [**] $p < 0.01$, [***] $p < 0.001$. Pseudo-R2 for models 1 and 2 according to McKelvey & Zavoina. Weights employed.

Table A6: Bivariate correlations

	economic dimension	redistribution factor	taxes vs. transfers (z-stand.)	transnational dimension	morality dimension	satisfaction with democracy	voting intention: BSW	rating: BSW
economic dimension	1.00							
redistribution factor	0.94***	1.00						
taxes vs. transfers (z-stand.)	0.55***	0.23***	1.00					
transnational dimension	0.14***	0.01	0.34***	1.00				
morality dimension	0.11***	0.11***	0.02	0.15***	1.00			
satisfaction with democracy	-0.07*	0.02	-0.25***	-0.48***	-0.03	1.00		
voting intention: BSW	-0.08*	-0.10**	0.03	0.12***	-0.05	-0.14***	1.00	
rating: BSW	-0.06+	-0.08*	0.05	0.15***	0.05	-0.13***	0.52***	1.00

Note: Pairwise Pearson correlations. Weights employed. . $^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$.

Table A7: Multinomial regressions for voting intention with BSW as baseline category

	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Greens	THE LEFT	AfD
economic dimension	1.54**	0.92	2.34***	0.94	0.72	1.46*
	(0.26)	(0.19)	(0.50)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.27)
transnational dimension	0.73	0.43***	0.76	0.22***	0.36**	2.15***
	(0.14)	(0.094)	(0.18)	(0.061)	(0.12)	(0.48)
morality dimension	1.27	1.14	0.93	0.59*	0.98	1.91***
	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.14)	(0.22)	(0.37)
female	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
male	1.20	1.56	2.36*	1.52	1.23	1.22
	(0.42)	(0.60)	(1.02)	(0.67)	(0.64)	(0.44)
age: -29	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
age: 30-44	0.42	0.58	0.38	0.37+	0.23*	0.70
	(0.24)	(0.36)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.43)
age: 45-59	0.53	0.32+	0.17**	0.28*	0.13**	0.45
	(0.30)	(0.20)	(0.11)	(0.17)	(0.095)	(0.28)
age: 60+	0.43	0.53	0.15*	0.14*	0.089**	0.17*
	(0.28)	(0.37)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.083)	(0.12)
west	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
east	1.00	0.37+	0.59	0.28*	2.07	1.75
	(0.39)	(0.19)	(0.28)	(0.14)	(1.12)	(0.71)
education: low	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
education: medium	0.96	1.31	0.71	0.54	0.82	0.76
	(0.43)	(0.66)	(0.44)	(0.37)	(0.74)	(0.36)
education: high	0.89	0.72	1.62	1.06	1.20	0.33*
	(0.45)	(0.39)	(1.03)	(0.73)	(1.00)	(0.18)
Observations			790			
McFadden-R^2			0.184			

Note: Exponentiated coefficients (i.e. relative risk ratios) with standard errors in parentheses. $^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$. Dependent variables coded as missing for other parties. Weights employed.