Supplementary Information

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

Table A.1. Descriptive statistics of variables included in the analyses

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Incumbent vote	318	39.95	14.14	2.63	81.70
Incumbent vote e-1	318	44.98	12.97	6.90	84.40
GDP growth t-1	318	2.79	3.83	-32.10	12.90
Δ Gini t-1	318	0.05	0.40	-2.00	1.70
Left-right position government	318	5.52	1.57	0.00	8.66
Majoritarian electoral system	304	0.22	0.41	0.00	1.00
Regional authority index	229	11.70	9.80	0.00	36.18

Note Descriptive statistics of variables included in the main analyses and in the additional robustness tests.

Figure A.1. Distribution of the dependent variable

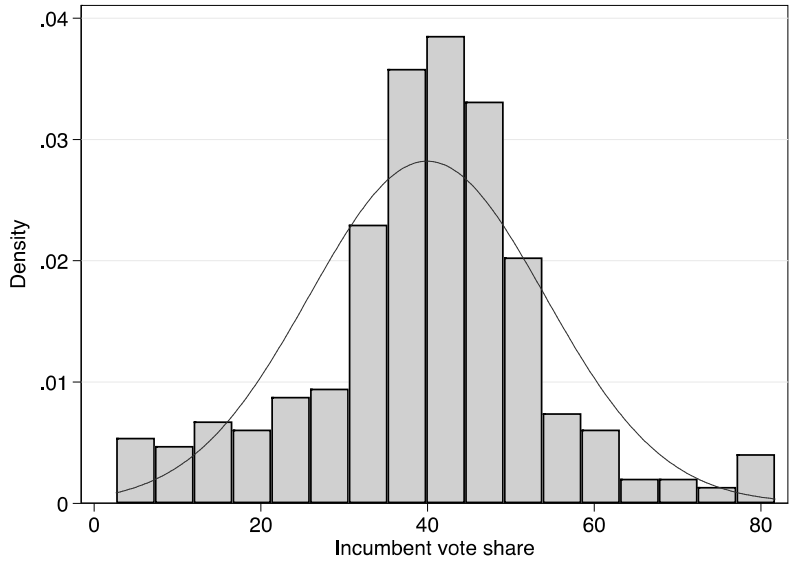


Figure A.2. Distribution of the GDP growth (t-1) variable by country

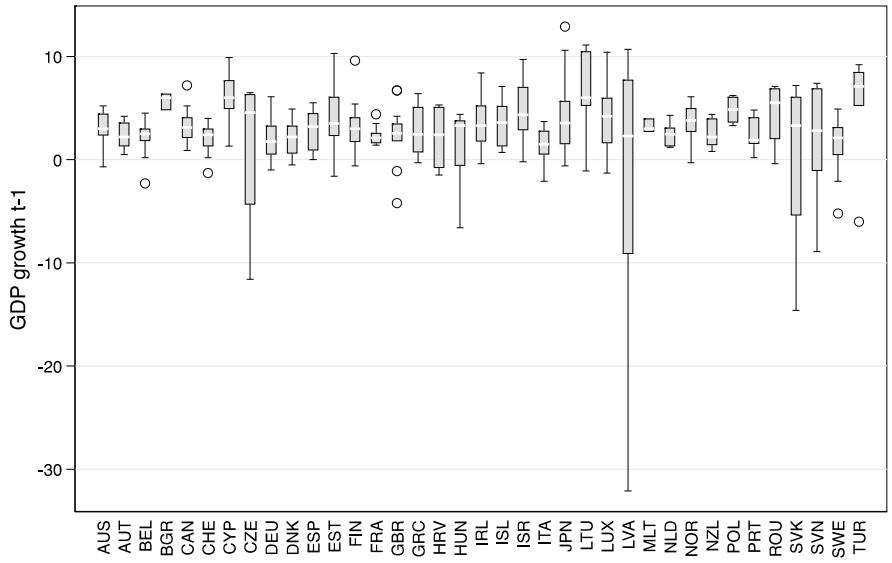


Figure A.3. Distribution of the Δ Gini (t-1) variable by country

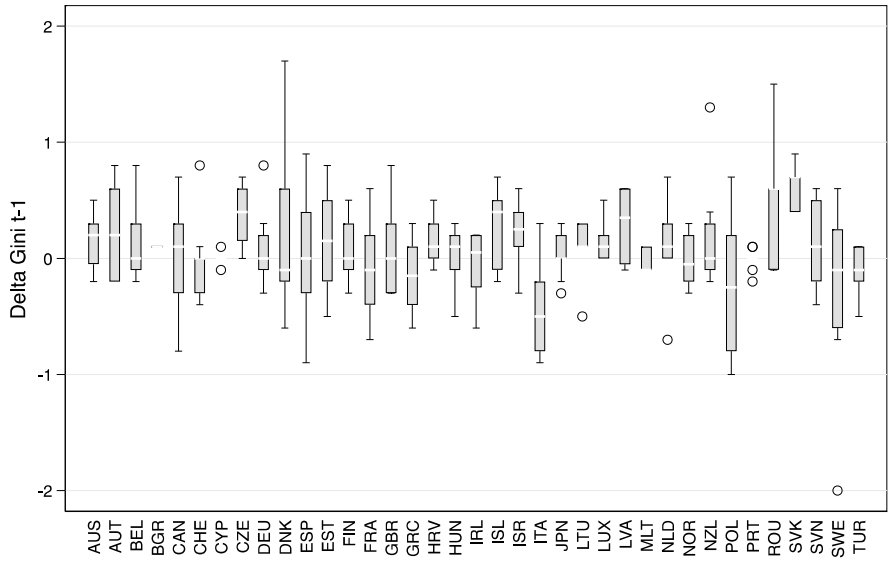


Table A.2. Countries and time periods covered by the analyses

Country	Time period
Australia	1969-2013
Austria	1986-2013
Belgium	1981-2014
Bulgaria	2001-2009
Canada	1974-2015
Croatia	2003-2015
Cyprus	1991-2011
Czech Republic	1992-2006
Denmark	1979-2015
Estonia	1995-2015
Finland	1970-2015
France	1973-2012
Germany	1965-2013
Greece	1977-2015
Hungary	1994-2010
Ireland	1977-2016
Iceland	1995-2013
Israel	1981-2013
Italy	1976-2008
Japan	1963-2014
Lithuania	1996-2012
Luxembourg	1989-2009
Latvia	1993-2014
Malta	2003-2013
Netherlands	1981-2002
Norway	1977-2013
New Zealand	1984-2014
Poland	1997-2015
Portugal	1987-2015
Romania	1996-2012
Slovakia	1992-2010
Slovenia	1992-2014
Spain	1979-2015
Sweden	1964-2014
Switzerland	1983-2015
Turkey	1991-2015
United Kingdom	1966-2017

Appendix B. Alternative time structure for economic variables

Table B.1. Change in economic growth in and Gini over the government term (from start cabinet until t-1)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Incumbent vote e-1	0.656***	0.650***	0.665***	0.710***
	(0.121)	(0.135)	(0.119)	(0.099)
Δ GDP growth term	0.409		0.409	1.207**
	(0.329)		(0.326)	(0.360)
Δ Gini term		-1.335	-1.332	0.496
		(0.793)	(0.813)	(2.692)
Left-right position government				0.316
				(0.381)
Left-right × Δ GDP growth				-0.179*
				(0.074)
Left-right × Δ Gini				-0.383
				(0.584)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	13.032*	13.573*	12.851*	9.070*
	(5.497)	(6.190)	(5.436)	(4.469)
(N)	311	311	311	311
R^2	0.672	0.665	0.675	0.693

Note Results of OLS regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election.
Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table B.2. Quarterly GDP growth

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Incumbent vote share e-1	0.657***	0.657***	0.660***
	(0.119)	(0.119)	(0.118)
GDP growth -1/-2 quarters	0.466	0.430	0.441
	(0.240)	(0.243)	(0.658)
Δ Gini t-1		-3.153*	-1.306
		(1.174)	(3.281)
Left-right position government			0.154
			(0.555)
Left-right × GDP growth -1/-2 quarters			-0.002
			(0.088)
Left-right × Δ Gini t-1			-0.353
			(0.658)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓
Constant	11.371*	11.894*	10.920
	(5.453)	(5.482)	(5.472)
(N)	283	283	283
R^2	0.716	0.723	0.723

Note Results of OLS regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix C. Alternative model specifications

Table C.1. Alternative model specifications

	Model 1		Model 2	
Incumbent vote e-1	0.653***	(0.105)	0.666***	(0.101)
GDP growth t-1	0.997***	(0.166)	0.920***	(0.150)
Δ Gini t-1	-2.055	(2.229)	-2.464	(3.278)
GDP growth t-1 × Δ Gini t-1	-0.353	(0.605)		
Left-right position government			0.243	(0.341)
Left-right × Δ Gini			-0.117	(0.643)
Country FE	✓		✓	
Constant	10.508*	(4.767)	8.819*	(4.064)
(N)	318		318	
R^2	0.736		0.735	

Note Results of OLS regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix D. Alternative coding of the government ideological position variable

As an alternative to the weighted CMP-based measure of the government's left-right position, we also verified whether results hold when relying on a measure that is based on the distinction between traditional left-wing parties and all other parties. As 'traditional' left-wing parties, we coded all parties that the ParlGov project coded as members of the social-democratic, socialist, or communist party families. We then calculate an index that corresponds to the weight of left-wing parties in the government, that is based on their seat-shares in parliament. More specifically, we apply the following formula.

$$\text{Left-wing incumbent (legislative seat) share} = \frac{\textit{Legislative seats for left-wing government parties}}{\textit{Legislative seats for all government parties}}$$

As evident from the results in Table D.1, replacing our original ideological measure for this measure does not substantively alter our conclusions. That is, we still do not find indications that the effect of inequality on the incumbent vote share is conditional on the ideological position of the government.

Table D.1. Alternative coding of government ideological position variable

	Model 1	
Incumbent vote e-1	0.660***	(0.097)
Left-wing incumbent share	2.541	(1.821)
GDP growth t-1	1.065***	(0.123)
Left-wing incumbent share × GDP growth t-1	-0.757	(0.408)
Δ Gini t-1	-3.313	(1.905)
Left-wing incumbent share × Δ Gini t-1	0.370	(2.265)
Country FE	✓	
Constant	9.806*	(4.628)
(N)	318	
R^2	0.739	

Note Results of OLS regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election.
Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix E. Conditional effects: electoral systems and federalism

Table E.1. The conditional effects of electoral systems and of federalism

	Model 1		Model 2	
Incumbent vote e-1	0.832***	(0.078)	0.567***	(0.112)
GDP growth t-1	0.795**	(0.258)	0.874***	(0.213)
Δ Gini t-1	-3.031**	(0.986)	-3.444	(3.556)
Majoritarian electoral rules	2.235	(1.351)		
Majoritarian × GDP growth t-1	-0.305	(0.304)		
Majoritarian × Δ Gini t-1	1.630	(2.810)		
Federalism (RAI index)			0.011	(0.223)
Federalism × GDP growth t-1			-0.003	(0.028)
Federalism × Δ Gini t-1			0.019	(0.171)
Country FE	✓		✓	
Constant	0.070	(2.989)	15.285*	(5.899)
(N)	304		229	
R^2	0.621		0.695	

Note Results of OLS regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix F. Voting for the PM party

Table F.1. Explaining the vote share of the party of the Prime Minister

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
PM party vote e-1	0.529***	0.522**	0.535***	0.563***
	(0.086)	(0.161)	(0.086)	(0.095)
GDP growth t-1	0.822***		0.794***	-0.041
	(0.147)		(0.153)	(0.560)
Δ Gini t-1		-3.492**	-2.851*	-2.071
		(1.212)	(1.124)	(2.400)
Left-right position PM party				-0.466
				(0.432)
Left-right × Δ GDP growth t-1				0.116
				(0.079)
Left-right × Δ Gini t-1				-0.165
				(0.508)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	14.797***	18.107*	15.026***	17.037**
	(3.710)	(6.699)	(3.730)	(5.720)
(N)	285	285	285	284
R^2	0.639	0.593	0.648	0.645

Note Results of OLS regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix G. Established democracies only

Table G.1. Focus on established democracies only

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Incumbent vote e-1	0.749***	0.774***	0.754***	0.754***
	(0.095)	(0.089)	(0.095)	(0.094)
GDP growth t-1	0.535*		0.475*	0.590
	(0.202)		(0.201)	(0.561)
Δ Gini t-1		-2.137	-1.797	-2.488
		(1.183)	(1.066)	(3.229)
Left-right position government				0.026
				(0.474)
Left-right × GDP growth t-1				-0.019
				(0.081)
Left-right × Δ Gini t-1				0.132
				(0.651)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	7.190	7.964	7.400	7.217
	(4.230)	(4.036)	(4.232)	(4.816)
(N)	249	246	246	246
R^2	0.711	0.706	0.714	0.714

Note: Results of linear regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Countries included in the analysis: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, German, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden, Cyprus, Malta.

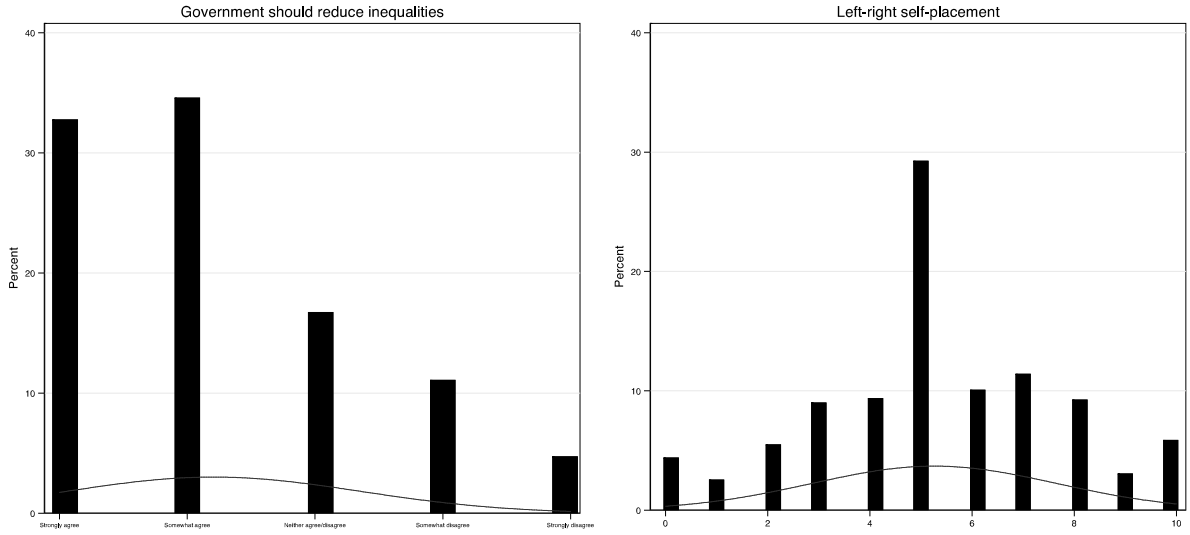
Appendix H. The positional and valence traits of preferences on income inequality

The fourth module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project included a question on income inequality, in which voters were asked to take a position. The question wording was "Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels." The answer options for this question were: "Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree".

We limit the dataset to countries included in our macro-analysis[1] and evaluate the distribution of responses on this inequality-question. The distribution of this variable in Figure H.1 (left panel) shows that answers to this question are clearly skewed. Of all respondents in the sample, about 67% somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. This strong skew in the data is in contrast to what can be observed when analyzing the distribution of respondents' ideological self-placements (right panel in Figure H.1). The distribution of ideological positions shows roughly equally sized groups to the left and to the right of the ideological spectrum, with around 30% of the respondents placing themselves to the left of the ideological center (i.e., a score of 4 or less on the 0-10 left-right scale).

[1] This implies we analyse the data from 29 election studies in 26 different countries; Australia 2013, Austria 2013, Bulgaria 2014, Canada 2011, Canada 2015, Switzerland 2011, Czech Republic 2013, Germany 2013, Finland 2015, France 2012, Great Britain 2015, Greece 2012, Greece 2015, Ireland 2011, Iceland 2013, Israel 2013, Japan 2013, Latvia 2011, Latvia 2014, Norway 2013, New Zealand 2011, New Zealand 2014, Poland 2011, Portugal 2015, Romania 2012, Slovakia 2016, Slovenia 2011, Sweden 2014, Turkey 2015.

Figure H.1. Distribution of opinions on government action on reducing income differences (left panel) and left-right self-placement (right panel)



Note Data from CSES, module 4.

A preference for government action on the issue of income inequality hence does not equal a more left-wing ideological position, an observation which is further corroborated by the overall low correlation between the two items (a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.202).

In addition, we can use the CSES-data to evaluate to what extent the *positions* on the income inequality-question are correlated with vote choices. If inequality indeed is a positional issue, as we assumed, we should see that those who agree with the statement are more likely to vote for left-wing parties, while those who disagree should be less likely to vote for left-wing parties. To investigate this possibility, we have coded the vote choices of respondents in the CSES dataset as a dummy-variable, distinguishing between those who vote for a left-wing party (a party with a left-right position of 4 or less)[2] and those who do not vote for a left-wing party. Of all respondents in the dataset who voted, and for which we have information on the ideological position of the party they chose, 31.7% casted a vote for a left-wing party.

Table H.1 presents the results of a fairly basic vote choice model, in which we predict voting for a left-wing party, by means of basic socio-demographic controls (sex, age, education and income), a respondent's ideological self-placement, and their opinion on the income-inequality item. We also include election fixed effects to the model and cluster the standard errors by election. For comparability, we have standardized (by election) the two main independent variables – left-right self-placement and the income inequality item – to ensure they have a mean of ca. 0 and a standard deviation of 1. As such, the coefficients can be interpreted as the effect of a standard deviation increase on the response scales.

[2] To determine a party's ideological position, we make use of respondents' assessments of the ideological positions of parties, on a left-right scale. We take as the value of a party's position, the mean ideological position of a party, as perceived by all respondents in a particular election sample.

As can be seen from the results that are reported in Table H.1, both the ideological self-placement item and the income inequality-item have the expected negative sign (indicating that as respondents move to the right on the ideological scale, or are more likely to disagree with the statement that the government should intervene to reduce income inequalities, their likelihood of voting for a left-wing party decreases). The estimated effect of both variables is significant, though it should be pointed out that the effect of the left-right position is more than five times the size of the effect of the income inequality item.

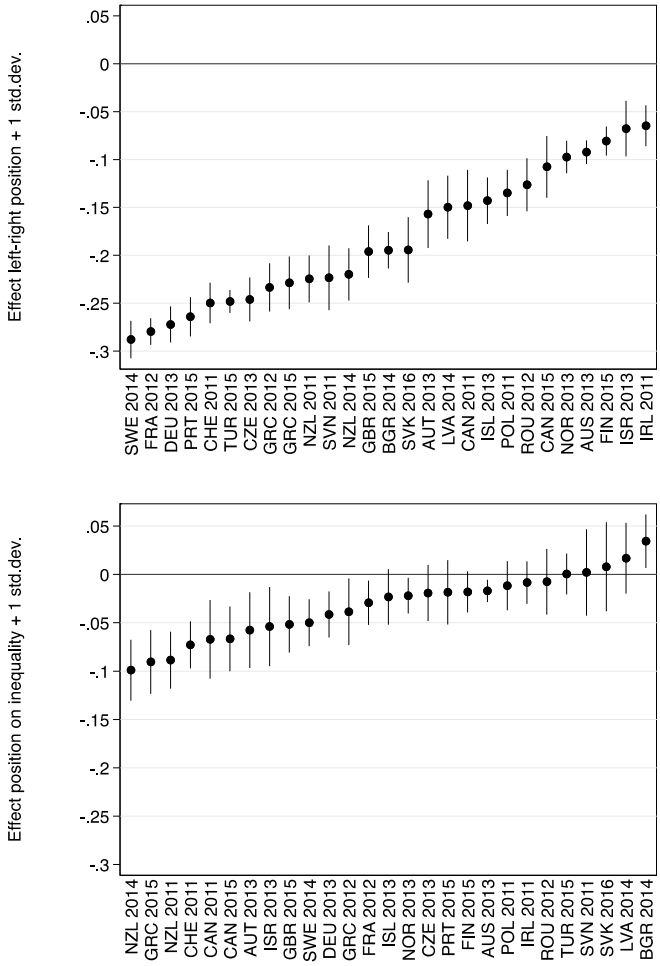
Table H.1. Explaining voting for a left-wing party

	(1)	
Female	0.002	(0.040)
Age	-0.006*	(0.002)
Education	0.055**	(0.018)
Income	-0.065	(0.033)
Left-right self-placement (standardized)	-1.429***	(0.117)
Government should reduce inequalities (standardized)	-0.281***	(0.039)
Country FE	✓	
Constant	-2.762***	(0.267)
(N)	21061	
Pseudo R^2	0.354	

Note Results of logistic regression model. Standard errors are clustered by election module. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Data: CSES 4.

The overall rather weak effect of the income inequality-item, in particular in comparison to the positional left-right self-placement item, is even more obvious from the graphs in Figure H.2 in this note. These plots show the estimated marginal effect of a one standard deviation shift in left-right self-placements (upper panel) and the income inequality item (lower panel) respectively, for each of the election samples included in our analyses. These estimates are derived from a series of election-specific logistic regression models, in which we include the same control variables as those included in the pooled model (Table H.1). While the estimated effect of the income-inequality item is negative in most election samples (with four exceptions), its effect is clearly weaker than the effect of a respondent's left-right self-placement, and often does not attain statistical significance.

Figure H.2. Marginal effect of left-right self-placement (upper panel) and opinions on government role in reducing inequalities (lower panel), estimates from election-specific analyses



Overall, the results of these additional analyses give further credence to the thesis that inequality is *not* a positional issue. Not only does a large majority of respondents clearly want the government to act to reduce income inequalities, positions on this issue also appear to only marginally influence voters' choices.