• Social democratic governments profoundly shaped Norway from 1935 onwards
  • new institutions based on macroeconomic management, collective bargaining, fiscal redistribution and publicly provided education, social insurance, health services...
  • radical break from what prevailed earlier
    ▶ high inequality, low levels of intergenerational mobility
    ▶ high levels of industrial conflict
• "Patient Revolution": gradual reforms through peaceful and democratic means
  ▶ the legacy of these reforms is now widely supported

• The broad questions
  • what were the impacts of these reforms?
  • what enabled the social democrats to carry them out?
This paper

• The impact of the 1936 Law on Rural Primary Schools
  • the first reform of Norway’s first social democratic government
  • harmonization of school quality across geographical areas
  • starts a series of reforms eventually leading to comprehensive school system

• Main results
  • increased long-term income and post-mandatory education
    ▶ likely spillovers on the next generation
  • increased social democratic vote share
    ▶ rule out direct education effect and increased political participation as channels
    ▶ proposed mechanism: changes in perceptions and/or gratitude towards the Labour Party
Contribution

• Origins of social democracy in Europe
  • classic work emphasizes the role of labor unions and coalition with agrarian interests
  • we highlight the role of education reforms

• Successful political reforms
  • institutional reforms within democratic political systems
    (Fernandez and Rodrik 1991, Strulovici 2010, Grossman and Helpman 2001)
  • no earlier work examining the impact of schooling reforms on institutions

• Education and democracy
  • ideological differences in education policies (Ansell and Lindvall, 2013)
  • our argument different: fulfilling an electoral promise increased support for the Labour Party
Background and the reform
Norway’s social democrats

- A typical Western European socialist party
  - founded in 1887, in Parliament since 1904
  - characterized by internal conflicts between the revolutionary and reformist factions
    - member of the Comintern in 1919–23
      → split of the party → reunited in 1927
  - strong revolutionary wing, ambivalent attitude towards parliamentary democracy
Norway’s social democrats

- A typical Western European socialist party
  - founded in 1887, in Parliament since 1904
  - characterized by internal conflicts between the revolutionary and reformist factions
    - member of the Comintern in 1919–23
      → split of the party → reunited in 1927
  - strong revolutionary wing, ambivalent attitude towards parliamentary democracy
- The reformists win in the early 1930s
  - context: election loss in 1930, severe recession in late 1920s, threat of fascism
  - appeal beyond core supporters
  - strongly parliamentarist party ever since

Election poster from 1933
Nygaardsvold’s cabinet

- Form a minority government in 1935 (with the support of the Agrarian Party)
  - committee work on school reform started almost immediately → the Law passed in June 1936
• Mandatory education since 1739; minimum of 7 years since 1889
  • separate legislation for rural and urban areas
• Calls to increase instruction time in rural areas already in 1902
  • third objective of Labour’s 1936 program (after democratic rights and equal justice)
1936 Law on rural primary schools

- New minimum weeks in rural areas
  - 16 in grades 1-3 (increase of 4 weeks)
  - 18 in grades 4-7 (increase of 4 weeks)
  - corresponds to 30% increase in minimum requirements

- Other components
  - maximum class size
  - minimum teacher salaries
  - barring physical punishment
  - more central government funding

- Implementation
  - launched in July 1937 with a transition period
  - transition period ends in July 1942
  - German occupation between 4/1940-5/1945
    - does not seem to affect implementation
Data and measurement
Data

• Human capital and income
  • 1960 census, the population registers, tax register
  • information on annual income 1967-2010
  • final educational attainment
  • military data on cognitive ability test scores
    ▶ available only for the second generation men

• Elections
  • municipality-party level vote counts at national elections
  • candidates in national elections (Fiva and Smith, 2017)
  • survey on individual level voting (Valgundersokelsene, 1957)

• Schools
  • digitalized municipal level school information from 1930s onwards
  • tons of information, but content varies across years
  • key variable: distribution of children by weeks of education in 1935
Treatment intensity

- For each municipality $j$, we use 1935 data to calculate the **pre-reform distance from the post-reform minimum requirements**

$$Z_j = \frac{3 \sum_b s_{bj} \max(16 - b, 0) + 4 \sum_b S_{bj} \max(18 - b, 0)}{28}$$

- $s_{bj}$: share of 1–3 graders getting $b$ weeks of education
- $S_{bj}$: share of 4–7 graders getting $b$ weeks of education
- denominator: the change in minimum requirements was 28 weeks

- Proxy for how much "bite" the reform had on each municipality
  - more than just weeks, correlated with the other components of the reform
Figure 3. Treatment intensity. Panel (a) presents the geographical distribution of the treatment intensity, $Z_j$, see equation (1). Panel (b) shows the average income and share of the labor force in agriculture and fishing in 1930 by deciles of the $Z_j$ distribution; see Online Appendix Figure A2 for corresponding scatterplots.

The reform is naturally associated with pre-reform municipality characteristics. Panel (b) of Figure 3 illustrates these differences by plotting municipalities' average income and share of the labor force working in agriculture and fishing in 1930 by deciles of $Z_j$. It shows that municipalities that were providing the minimum (or less) pre-reform instruction time in 1935 ($Z_j = 1$) were substantially poorer and had a much larger share of the labor force working in the primary sector. These differences motivate the differences-in-differences approach we discuss next.

4.2. Specifications

We start our analysis by asking how the reform impacted human capital and income of the directly affected individuals. Our first approach is to estimate event-study regressions of the form:

$$ y_{icj} = X_k \sum_{k=2}^{K} (Z_j \times 1[c = k]) + X_j 0 \times 1[c = k] \times \beta_k + \mu_c + \mu_j + \epsilon_{icj} $$(3)

where $y_{icj}$ is the outcome of interest for individual $i$ born in year $c$ in municipality $j$. On the right-hand-side, $K$ is a set of birth years ranging from 1917 to 1940 (apart from the omitted category), $Z_j$ is the pre-reform distance from the new requirements as defined in equation (1), $1[c = k]$ is an indicator function taking value one if the individual was born in year $k$, $X_j 0$ is a vector of municipality characteristics measured.
Event-study estimates for instruction time and class size

Panel (a) reports estimates when using weeks of education during an academic year as an outcome variable; panel (b) reports the estimates for average class size, approximated by dividing the number of students by the number of teachers at the municipality level. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. Information on class size was not collected in 1933, 1934, 1936, 1937, and 1939.

Exposed municipalities. In addition, they also significantly reduced class size, as shown in the bottom panel of Figure 4.

Results

This section presents our main results. We start by examining the impact of the Folk school reform on human capital and long-term income. This analysis is motivated by the reform’s primary objective of harmonizing the standards of primary education across municipalities. Hence, if the reform was successful in increasing resources

16. Online Appendix Figure A3 presents a complementary analysis by plotting the average instruction time and student-teacher ratio as functions of treatment intensity in the years 1930, 1935, 1938, and 1940-1944. It shows that the pre-reform values of all inputs were highly correlated with our treatment intensity variable, but this correlation clearly declined after the reform was implemented in 1938.
Human capital and income
Specifications

- Specification 1: Event-study

\[ y_{ijc} = \sum_{k \in K} \beta_k (Z_j \times 1[c = k]) + \sum_{k \in K} (X_{j0} \times 1[c = k]) \theta_k + \mu_c + \mu_j + \epsilon_{icj} \]

- \( y_{ijc} \): outcome of individual \( i \), born (or parent born) in municipality \( j \) in year \( c \)
- \( K \): set of birth years ranging from 1917 to 1940 (apart from the omitted category)
- \( Z_j \): pre-reform distance from the new requirements for municipality \( j \)
- \( X_{j0} \): municipality characteristics measured before the reform (some specifications only)
- \( \mu_c \): year of birth fixed effects
- \( \mu_j \): municipality of birth fixed effects
Event-study estimates for first generation’s years of education
Specifications

- Specification 2: Differences-in-differences

\[ y_{ijc} = \beta Z_{jc} + \sum_{k \in K} (X_{j0} \times 1[c = k])\theta_k + \mu_c + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ijc} \]

\[ Z_{jc} = \sum_c \pi_c Z_j, \text{ where } \pi_c \text{ is the share of years birth cohort } c \text{ studied under the new requirements (assuming that the reform was implemented in 1938)} \]
Table 2. Differences-in-Differences Estimates for the First Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>(3)</th>
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<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
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<td>-0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.078)</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log income (age 50–64)</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlling for:
- Region: no, yes, yes, yes, yes, no, yes, yes, yes, yes
- Income: no, no, yes, no, no, no, yes, no, yes
- Industry: no, no, no, yes, yes, no, no, yes, yes

Note: Estimates for $\beta$ from regression $y_{icj} = \beta Z_{jc} + \sum_{k \in K}(X_{j0} \times 1[c = k])\theta_k + \mu_c + \mu_j + \varepsilon_{icj}$, where $Z_{jc}$ is treatment intensity in municipality $j$ for birth cohort $c$, $X_{j0}$ is a vector of pre-reform covariates, $\mu_c$ is a vector of cohort fixed-effects, and $\mu_j$ is a vector of municipality of birth fixed-effects. Each regression stems from a separate regression, which differ in the dependent variable (rows) and specification (columns). Columns (2) to (5) and (7) to (10) condition on trends by 20 regions; columns (3) and (8) add controls for trends by quintiles of municipality’s 1930 average taxable income and income growth between 1915 and 1930; columns (4) and (9) for quintile dummies of municipality’s labor force shares in agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, and services in 1930; and columns (5) and (10) for income and industry structure. Each entry is from a separate regression. Number of observations: 164,286 (men) and 179,685 (women) for years of education; 161,924 (men) and 156,092 (women) for log income.
Interpretation

- Intention-to-treat effect of a "full exposure" to the reform ($Z_{jc} = 1$
  - men: education increases by $\approx 0.3$ yrs (baseline 9 yrs), income by $\approx 4$ log points
  - women: education increases by $\approx 0.1$ yrs (baseline 8.2 yrs), income by $\approx 7$ log points
  - positive, but mostly insignificant intergenerational estimates

- Tempting to interpret $\beta$ as a reduced form of an IV design
  - BUT: it is unclear what the treatment exactly is
  - full exposure predicts: weeks of education increase by roughly 20 weeks, student/teacher ratio decreases by roughly 10...
  - unlikely that our data captures all dimensions of the reform
Elections
Impact on elections

- Similar as above, but now using calendar year variation, i.e., event-study:

\[ y_{ptj} = \sum_{h \in H} \beta_h Z_j \times 1[t = h]) + \sum_{h \in H} \theta_h (X_{j0} \times 1[t = h]) + \mu_t + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ptj} \]

and differences-in-differences specifications:

\[ y_{ptj} = \beta (1[t \geq 1945] \times Z_j) + \sum_{h \in H} \theta_h (X_{j0} \times 1[t = h]) + \mu_t + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ptj} \]

\( y_{ptj} \): vote share of party \( p \) in municipality \( j \), year \( t \)

\( H \): set of election years between years 1927 and 1965

\( Z_j \): pre-reform distance from the new requirements

\( X_{j0} \): other pre-reform characteristics

\( \mu_t \): year FEs

\( \mu_j \): municipality FEs
Event-study estimates for the vote shares of the Labour Party

Figure 7.

Controlling for:
- Nothing
- Region
- Region and income
- Region and industry
- Region, income, and industry

The vote share of the Norwegian Labour Party in year \( t \) at municipality \( j \), \( y_{ptj} \), is estimated as:

\[
y_{ptj} = P_h^2 H_h(Z_j \times 1[t = h]) + P_h^2 H_h(X_j0 \times 1[t = h]) + \mu_t + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ptj},
\]

where \( y_{ptj} \) is the vote share of the Labour Party in year \( t \) at municipality \( j \), \( H \) is a set of election years, \( Z_j \) is our treatment intensity measure and \( X_j0 \) is a vector of pre-reform observable characteristics that vary across specifications. All background characteristics are entered in the form of quintile dummies and are interacted with year fixed effects. Municipality's industry structure is measured by the labor force shares in agriculture and fishing, manufacturing, and services. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. Online Appendix Figure A7 reports similar estimates for the other major parties.

The first row of Table 4 summarizes the effects on the Labour Party's vote share using standard differences-in-differences regressions (equation (6)). The point estimates for the Labour Party vary between 2.3 and 7.0 percentage points in municipalities that were fully exposed to the reform. These gains appear to be largely driven by losses of the Liberal Party, the Conservatives and the Communists, even if these effects are not as robustly significant as those for the Labour Party. We do not find any consistent pattern for the Agrarian Party.

To put these results into context, we estimate their implications for the overall vote share of the Labour Party in rural areas. A simple back-of-an-envelope calculation suggests that the Labour Party's rural vote share grew by 1.4–4.6 percentage points between 1933 and 1945 due to the reform.

For comparison, Figure 8 shows that the support for the Labour Party in rural Norway increased and caught up with its vote share in urban areas precisely after the school reform was enacted. For example, between 1933 and 1945, the party gained 3.9 percentage points in rural areas, while it lost 3.8 percentage points of its support in the cities. As a consequence, the traditionally higher support the Labour Party enjoyed in cities disappeared and...
Table 4. Differences-in-Differences Estimates for the Vote Shares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agrarian</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
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<td>-0.027</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
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<td>(0.012)</td>
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<td><strong>Time trends by:</strong></td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Point estimates and standard errors (in parentheses) for $\beta$ from regression $y_{ptj} = \beta(1[t \geq 1945] \times Z_j) + \sum_{h \in H} \theta_h(X_{j0} \times 1[t = h]) + \mu_t + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ptj}$, where $y_{ptj}$ is the vote share for party $p$ in municipality $j$ in year $t$, $Z_j$ measures treatment intensity (see equation (6)), $1[t \geq 1945]$ is an indicator variable taking the value one for post-war and zero for pre-war years, $X_{j0}$ is a vector of pre-reform characteristics, and $\mu_t$ and $\mu_j$ are year and municipality fixed-effects. Each regression stems from a separate regression, which differ in the dependent variable (rows) and specification (columns). Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. Number of observations: 6,590.
• Back-of-an-envelope calculation: Labour Party’s rural vote share grew by 1.4–4.6 percentage points faster between 1933 and 1945 due to the reform
  • baseline: 3.9 percentage points increase in rural areas; 3.8 decrease in cities
Mechanisms

- Unlikely: direct education effect
  - directly affected individuals too young in 1945
  - strong negative correlation between education and support for social democrats
- Also unlikely: increased political participation
  - no impact on turnout
  - or local candidates
- Likely: changing perceptions of the Labour Party
  - electoral effects coming from municipalities that have no previous experience with Labour rule
  - directly affected, and their parents, more likely to vote Labour in 1957
Labor vote share estimates by earlier exposure to local Labour rule

Figure 11. Labor vote share estimates by earlier exposure to local Labour rule. This figure reports results from regression
\[ y_{tj} = Z_j t + W_j t + (Z_j \times W_j) t + X_{j0} \mu t + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ptj}, \]
where \( y_{tj} \) is the vote share of the Norwegian Labour Party in year \( t \) at municipality \( j \), \( Z_j \) is the treatment intensity, \( W_j \) is an indicator for the municipality having a Labour mayor in 1934, \( X_{j0} \) is a vector of pre-reform observable characteristics that vary between specifications (see figure legend), and \( \mu_t \) and \( \mu_j \) are year and municipality fixed effects, respectively. Panel (a) reports estimates for \( t \), i.e., the impact of the reform on municipalities with no prior exposure to Labour rule. Panel (b) reports estimates for \( t + t \), i.e., effects for other municipalities that had a Labour mayor in 1934. See Online Appendix Table A8 for a differences-in-differences version of these results.

We employ three strategies to validate the robustness of our findings and the credibility of our interpretation. First, we demonstrate that the results are robust for utilizing data on the affiliation of municipalities’ mayors from 1928, either in conjunction with or as an alternative to 1934, and when applying a lagged dependent variable specification (Appendix Figures A11 and A12; Appendix Table A8). Second, we assess the possibility that the differential effects of the reform in municipalities with and without a Labour mayor might arise from the Labour Party typically losing votes in areas where it held local authority. We find no signs that local Labour governance led to a decline in the party’s vote share prior to the reform, but, in line with our proposed mechanism, local Labour rule predicts a subdued rise in the party’s vote share between 1936 and 1945 (Online Appendix Table A9 and Online Appendix Figure A9, panel (b)).

6.4. Support for the Labour Party among the directly affected and their parents

Finally, we use individual-level data from the 1957 election survey, the first of its kind conducted in Norway, to investigate whether those who directly benefited from the schooling reform, or their parents, were more likely to support the Labour Party.

Journal of the European Economic Association
Preprint prepared on 25 February 2024 using jeea.cls v1.0.
Electoral Survey, 1957

Using the 1957 survey, we estimate

\[ y_i = \alpha + \beta A_i + \gamma R_i + \delta(A_i \times R_i) + \epsilon_{ptj} \]

\( y_i \): voted for Labour in 1957

\( R_i \): lives in low density (rural) area

\( A_i \): affected by the reform
  - under 35 years old
  - has children younger than 25 years

Limitation: treatment intensity variation within rural areas not observed

Table 5. Support for the Labour Party in the 1957 Election Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voted the Labour Party in 1957</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A: Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.624</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low density</td>
<td>-0.133</td>
<td>-0.160</td>
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<td>(0.034)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low density (\times) Young</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>0.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
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</table>
Table 5. Support for the Labour Party in the 1957 Election Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voted the Labour Party in 1957</th>
<th>Voted the Labour Party in first elections</th>
<th>Labour has implemented its agenda</th>
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<td><strong>A: Children</strong></td>
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<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.624</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low density</td>
<td>-0.133</td>
<td>-0.160</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.034)</td>
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<td>Young</td>
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<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.047)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low density × Young</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.153</td>
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<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B: Parents</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>(0.049)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young child</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
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<td>(0.046)</td>
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<td>(0.043)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low density × Young</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.034</td>
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Conclusions
Conclusions

• The transformation of social democratic parties from revolutionary to reformist movements is a major political development

• This paper examined the first major reform Norway’s social democrats launched once gaining power: improving primary education in rural areas

• Take-aways
  • increased long-term income and post-mandatory education
  • increased social democratic vote share in the next elections
  • proposed mechanism: changes in perceptions and/or gratitude towards the Labour Party