



From Class Conflict to Cultural Issues– and Back Again?

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November 10, 2014

In 1971 I argued that an intergenerational value change was transforming the priorities of the publics of advanced industrial society, making non-economic issues increasingly salient.

Intergenerational value differences in 6 West European countries, 1970

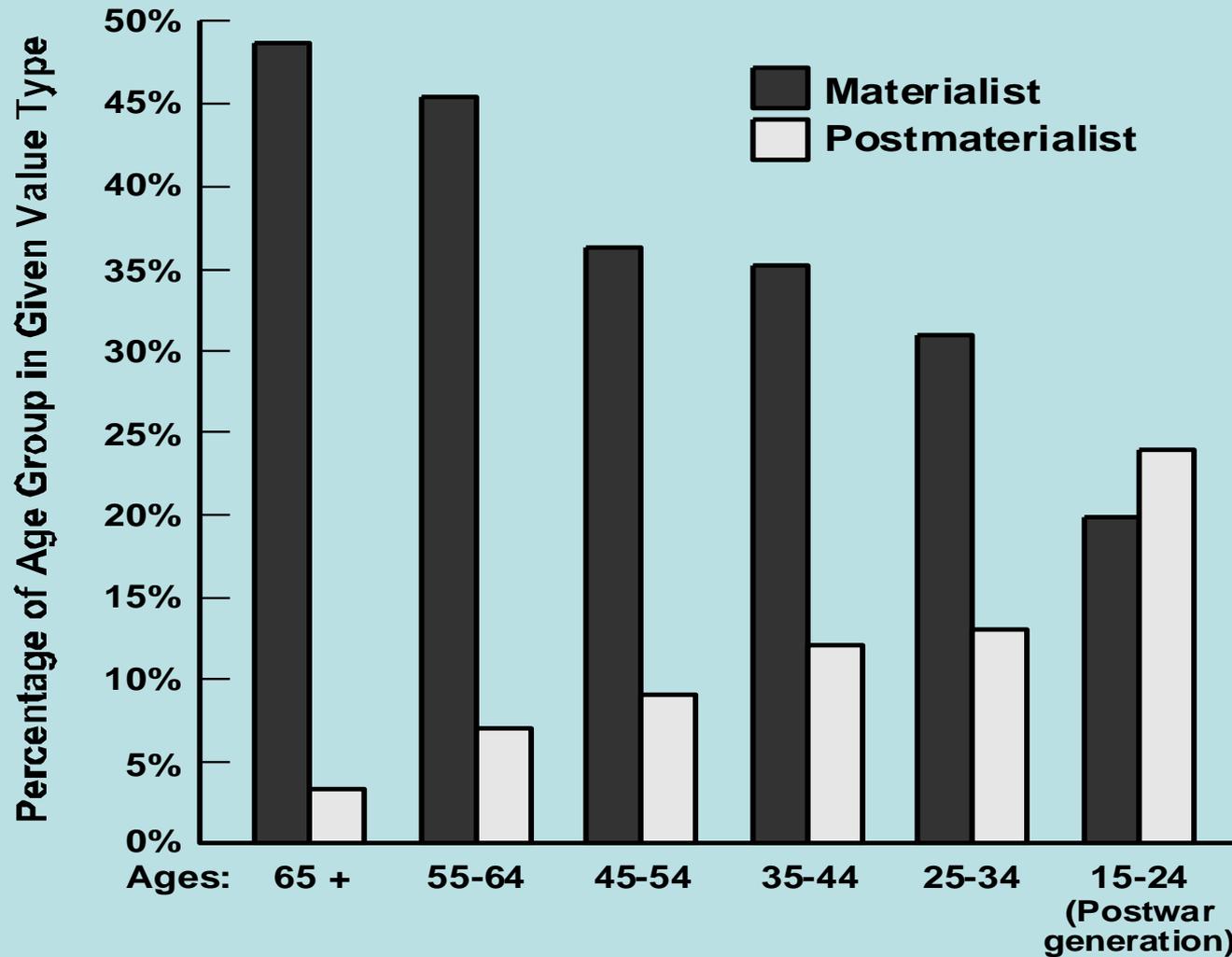
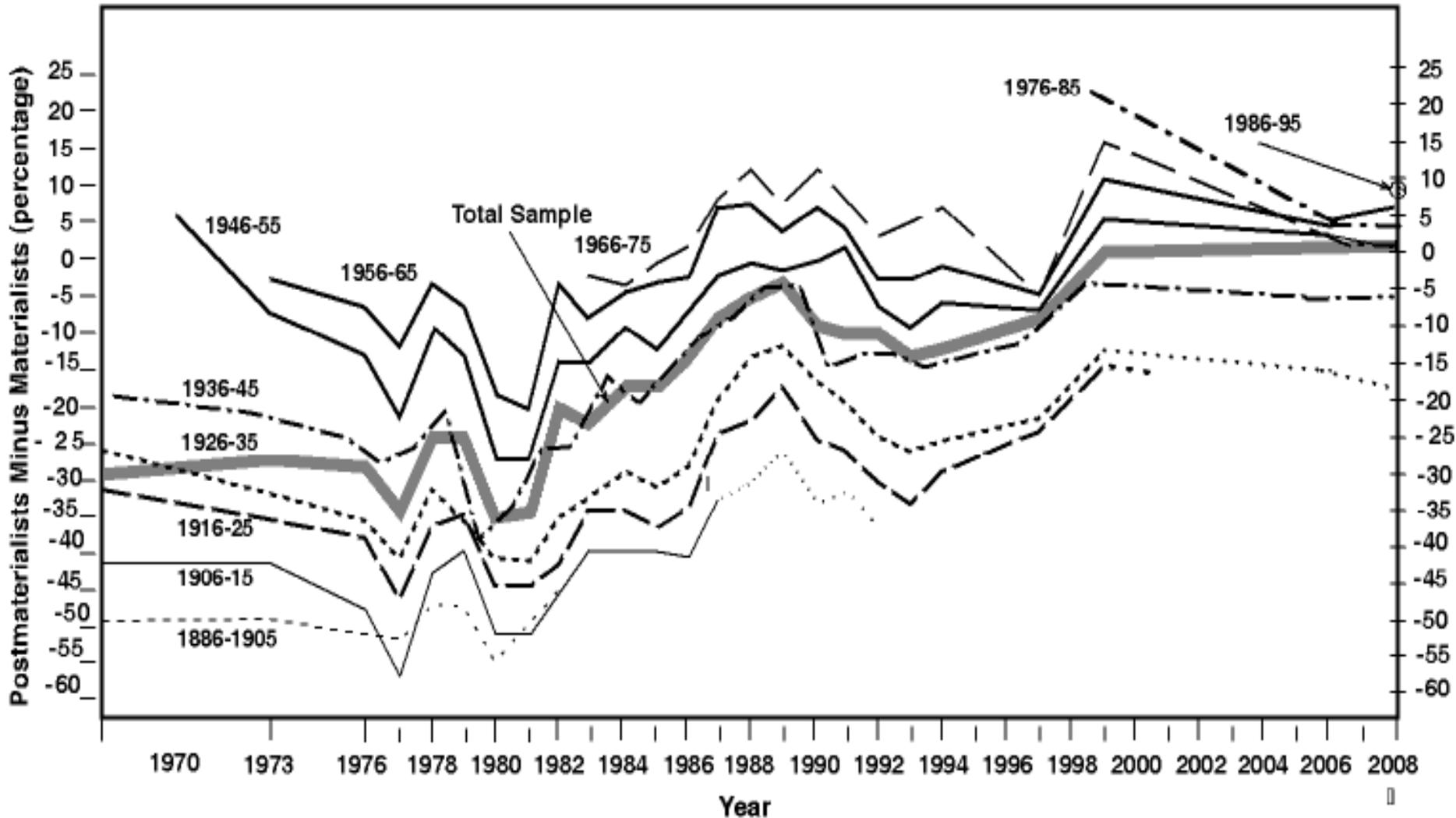
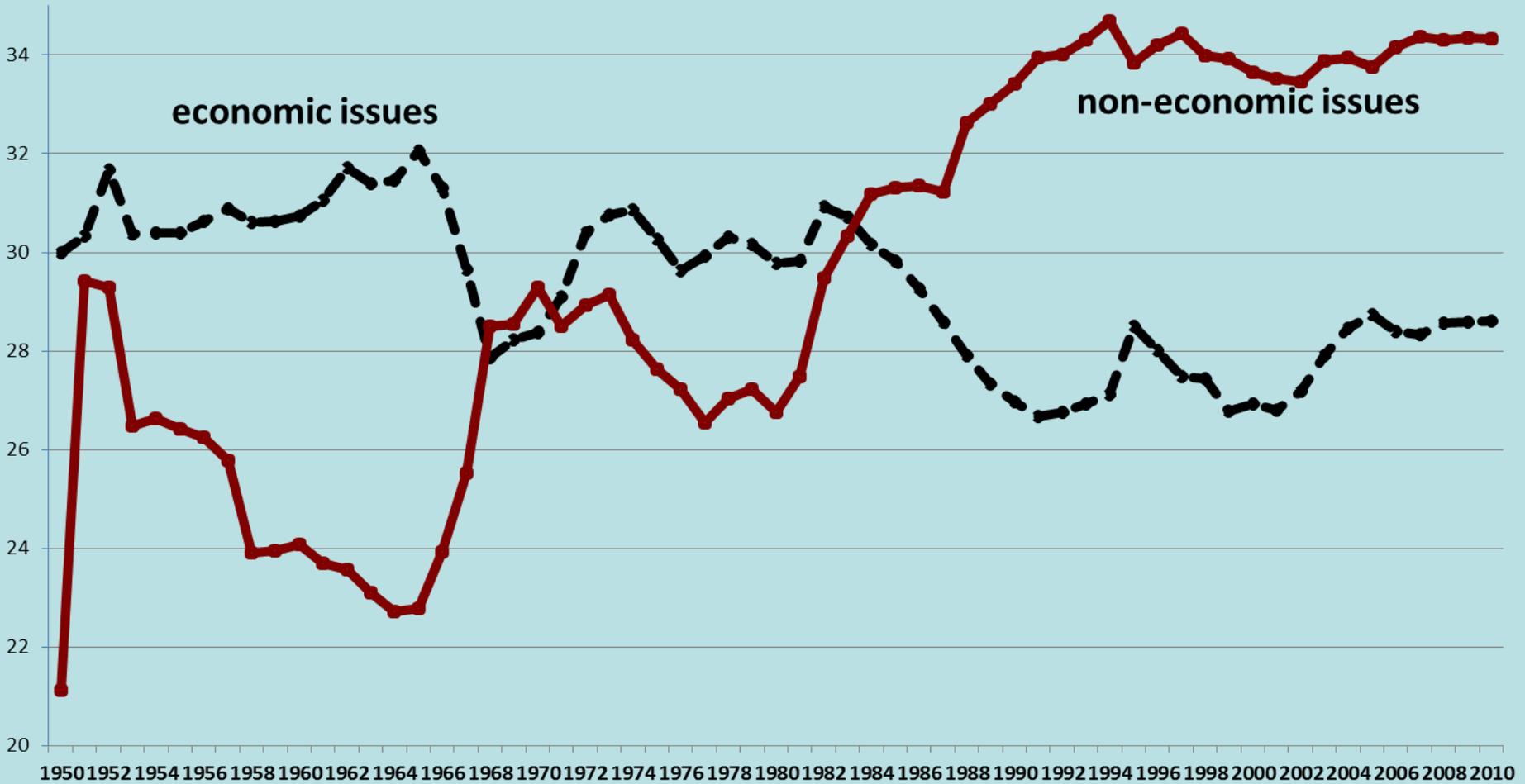


Figure 1. Value type by age group, among the Publics of Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium and The Netherlands in 1970.

Cohort analysis: % of Postmaterialists minus % Materialists in six West European countries, 1970-2008

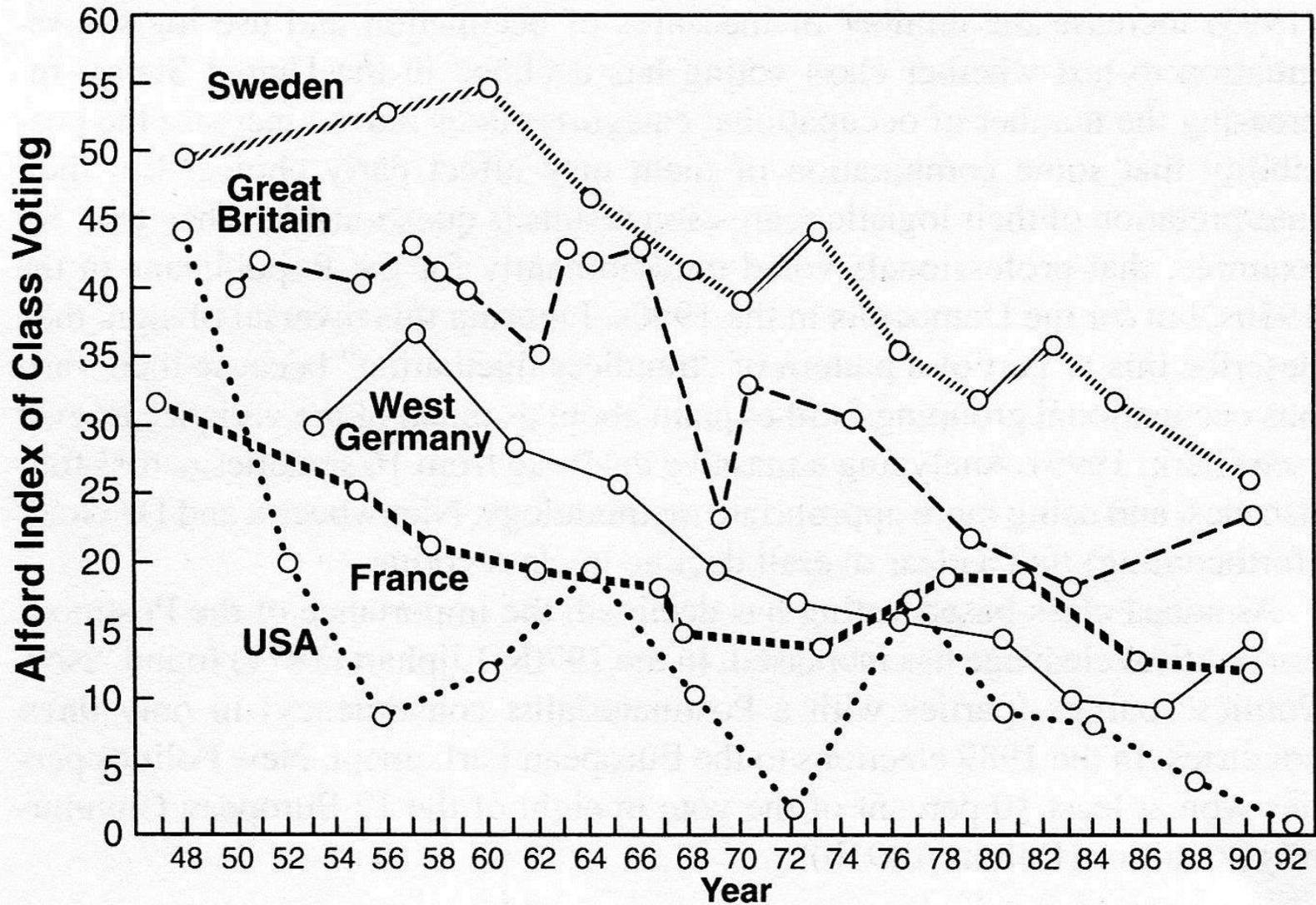


Changing salience of economic vs non-economic issues in party programs, 1950-2010



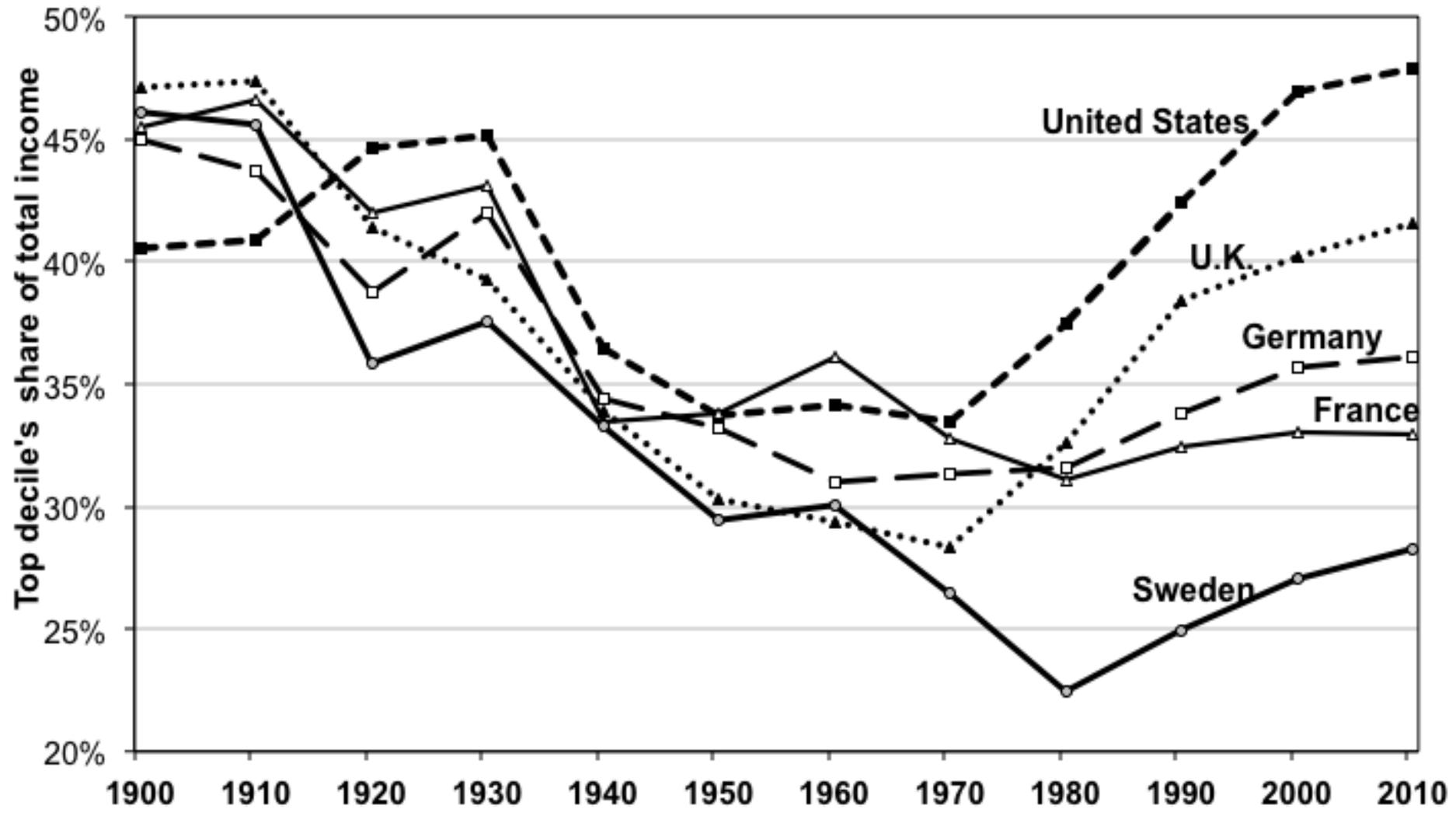
- The rise of Postmaterialist issues such as environmental protection, gender equality, cultural diversity and emancipation of gays brought new support for parties of the Left from Postmaterialists, who tended to come from middle class backgrounds. At the same time, it stimulated a conservative reaction in defense of traditional values on the part of less secure groups.
- This tended to reduce social class voting.

The decline of social class voting, 1945-1992



- Throughout most of the 20th century, the rise of organized labor and working-class parties (often Marxist inspired) led to progressive income taxation and social welfare states that helped reduce the sharp income inequality that characterized early industrial society.
- Since about 1970, this trend has reversed itself. Income inequality has been rising steeply. In the U.S. it is now even greater than it was in 1900.

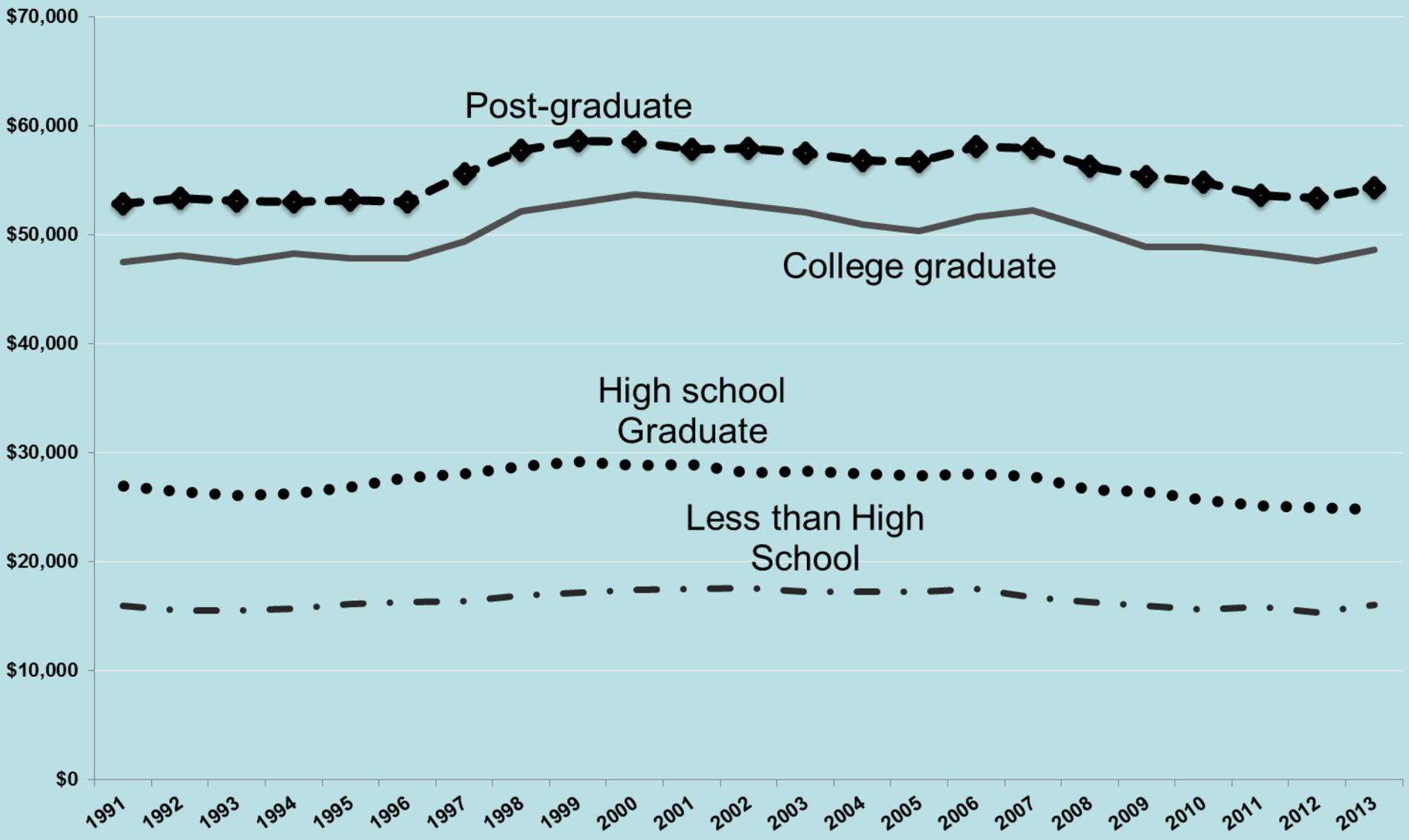
The top decile's share of total income in Europe and the United States, 1900-2010



- In the U.S. and Great Britain during the 1980s, Reagan and Thatcher fought to reduce the power of labor unions and to reduce government intervention.
- With the rise to power of the pragmatists in China and the collapse the Soviet Union, income inequality has risen sharply in former communist countries, as well as the West

- Despite massive economic growth, the working class has made little or no gains in real income in the U.S. and other Western countries since 1970, as is widely known.
- Surprising as it may seem, since 1990, this has also been true of the college-educated and even those with graduate education: except for the very top strata, the real incomes of even the highly-educated have been stagnant in the U.S. and other developed countries. Virtually all the gains have gone to the top 10%-- mainly to the top 1 percent.

Median Salary by Education Level, U.S. 1991-2013



- During industrialization, the disappearance of jobs in the agrarian sector was offset by the rise of new jobs in the industrial sector.
- Industrial jobs have given way to automation and outsourcing with the rise of the knowledge society. Employment has shifted to the service sector— but employment in the high-technology sector has not increased accordingly: during the past 20 years, it has been stagnant in the U.S.

- Unlike the rise of industrial society, the rise of the knowledge society does not seem to be producing large numbers of well-paid jobs: knowledge society has a winner-takes-all dynamic. In industrial society, there were multiple niches, from cheap to expensive products. In knowledge society, once you have produced the top product, the cost of reproduction is close to zero—so the top product tends to take over the entire market.

- Initially, only relatively unskilled workers lost their jobs to automation. Today, even highly skilled occupations are being taken over by expert systems. Computer programs are being written by computers. Doctors, lawyers and educators are being commoditized, and the real incomes even of people with post-graduate education are stagnating. Despite substantial increases in GDP, the gains are limited to the very top.



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