

Saving Democracy from Politicians. Do We Need Professional Representatives?

#LSEdemocracy

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Saving Democracy from Politicians

On populism and inexperienced legislators

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London School of Economics and Political Science

"Indirect despotism occurs when the people are no longer truly represented or when the legislative body becomes too unequal to them"

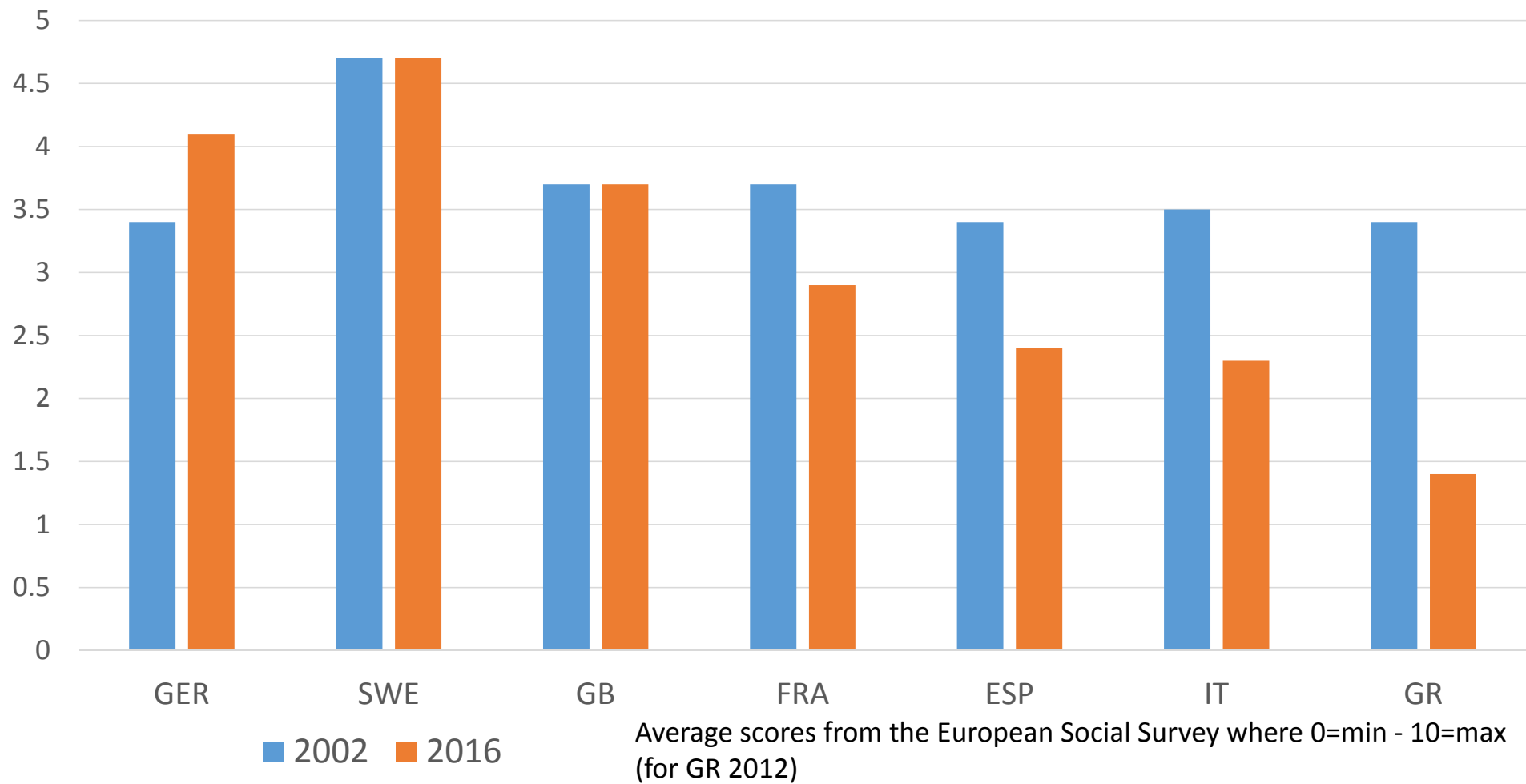
[Condorcet 1789]



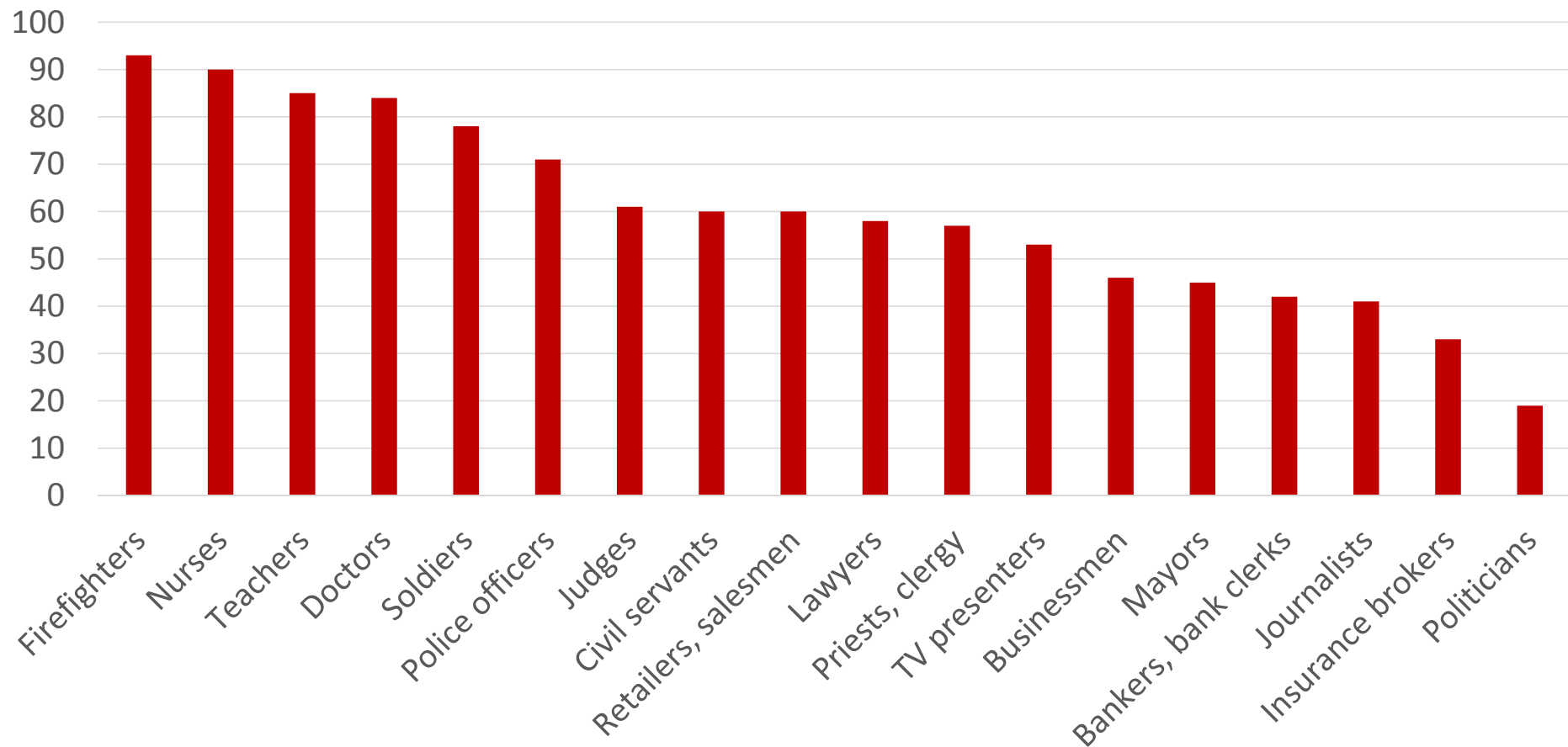
Pietro Chiesa, member of the Italian parliament 1900-1915

Do you trust the politicians of your country?

Trust in politicians has been plummeting in Southern Europe

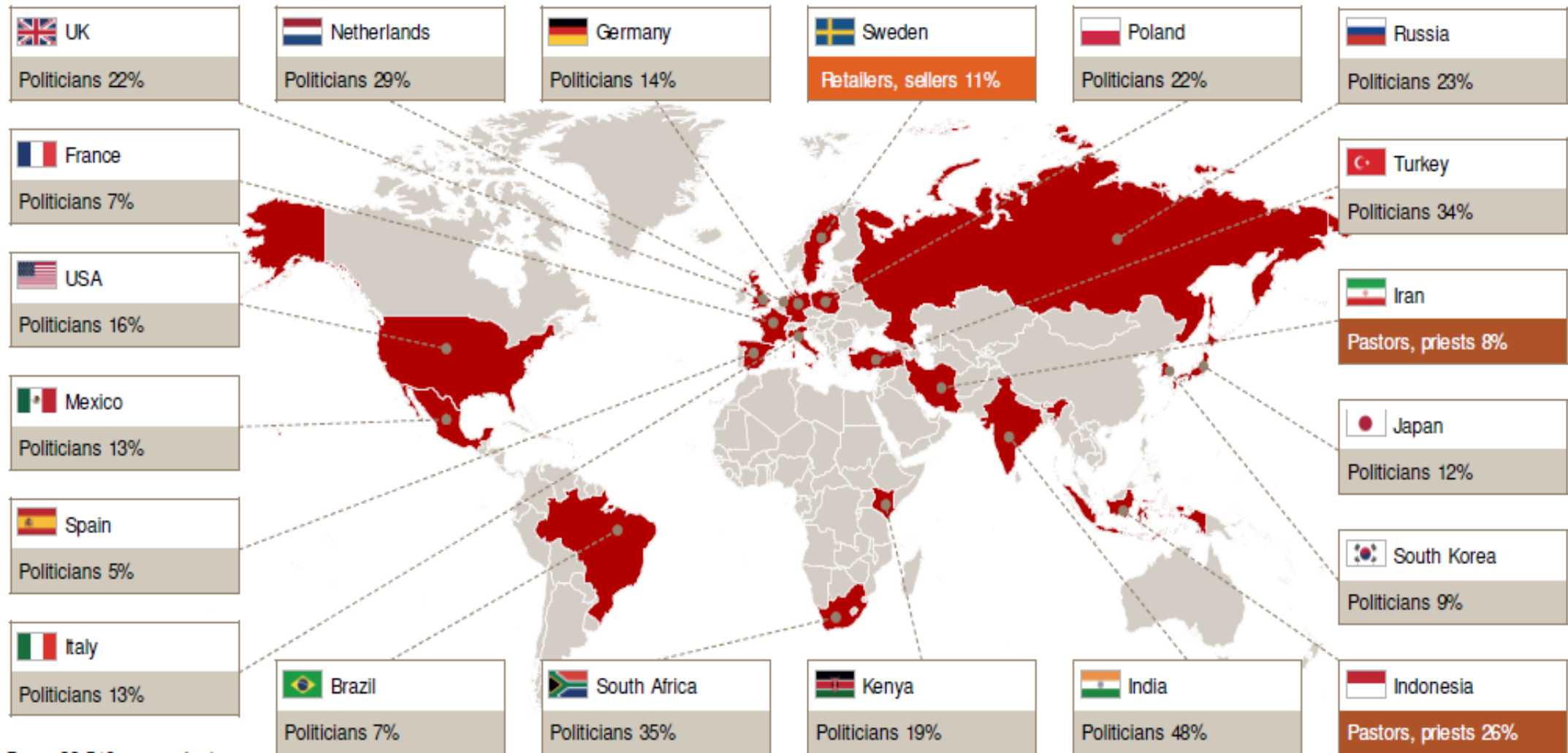


Trust in professions in 11 European countries



(Data from GFK-Verein 2016)

Politicians are the least trusted profession everywhere



Base: 23,519 respondents

France's Macron announces gender equal list of political outsiders



The Big Read **Labour Party UK**

UK politics: An outsider inside



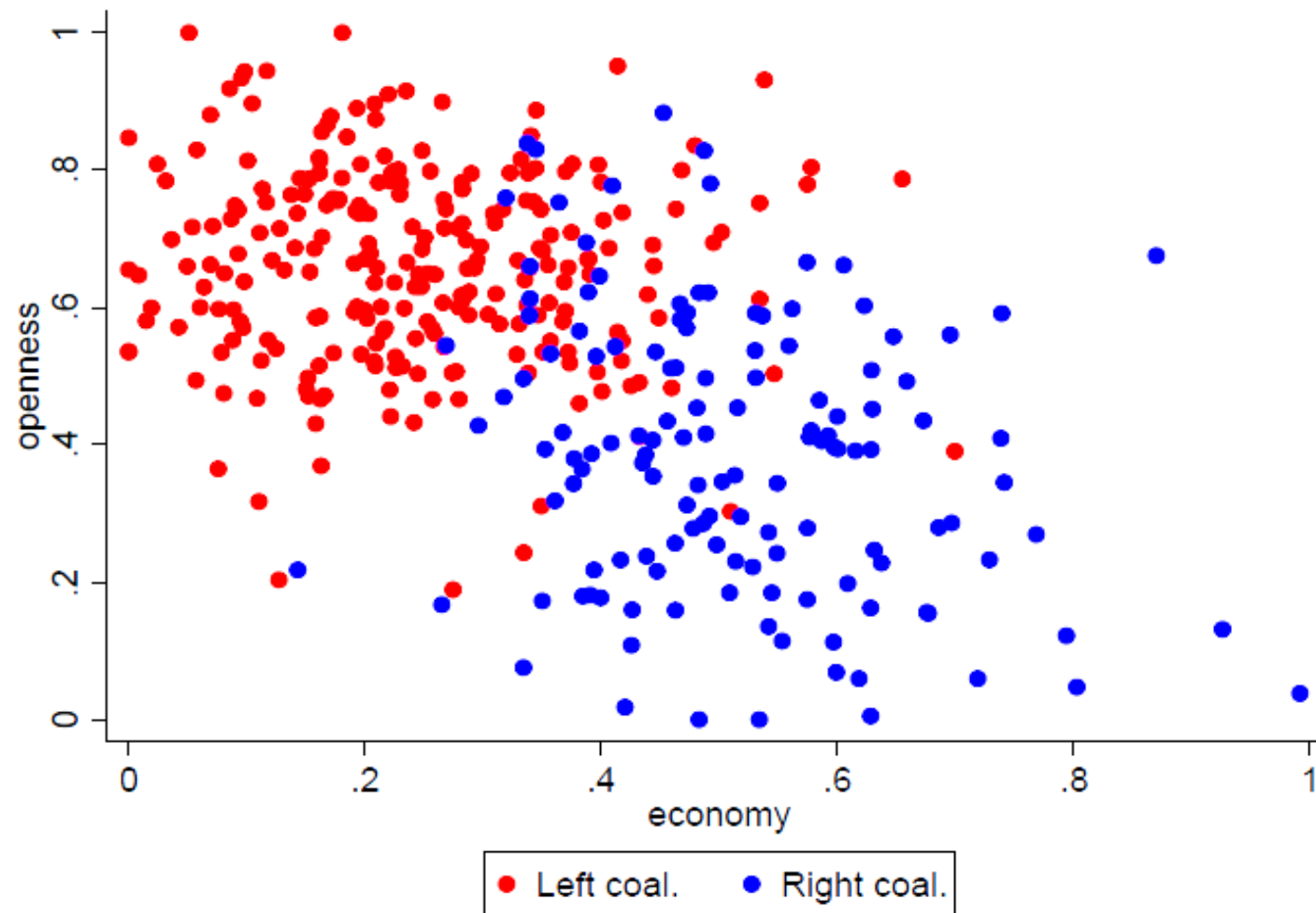
Where does the revolt come from?

- Legitimacy of elites is questioned when things do not go well
- Deteriorated economic conditions and emerging demand for protection by losers of globalization & technological innovation
 - protectionism
 - control of immigration
 - new role for the State in the economy

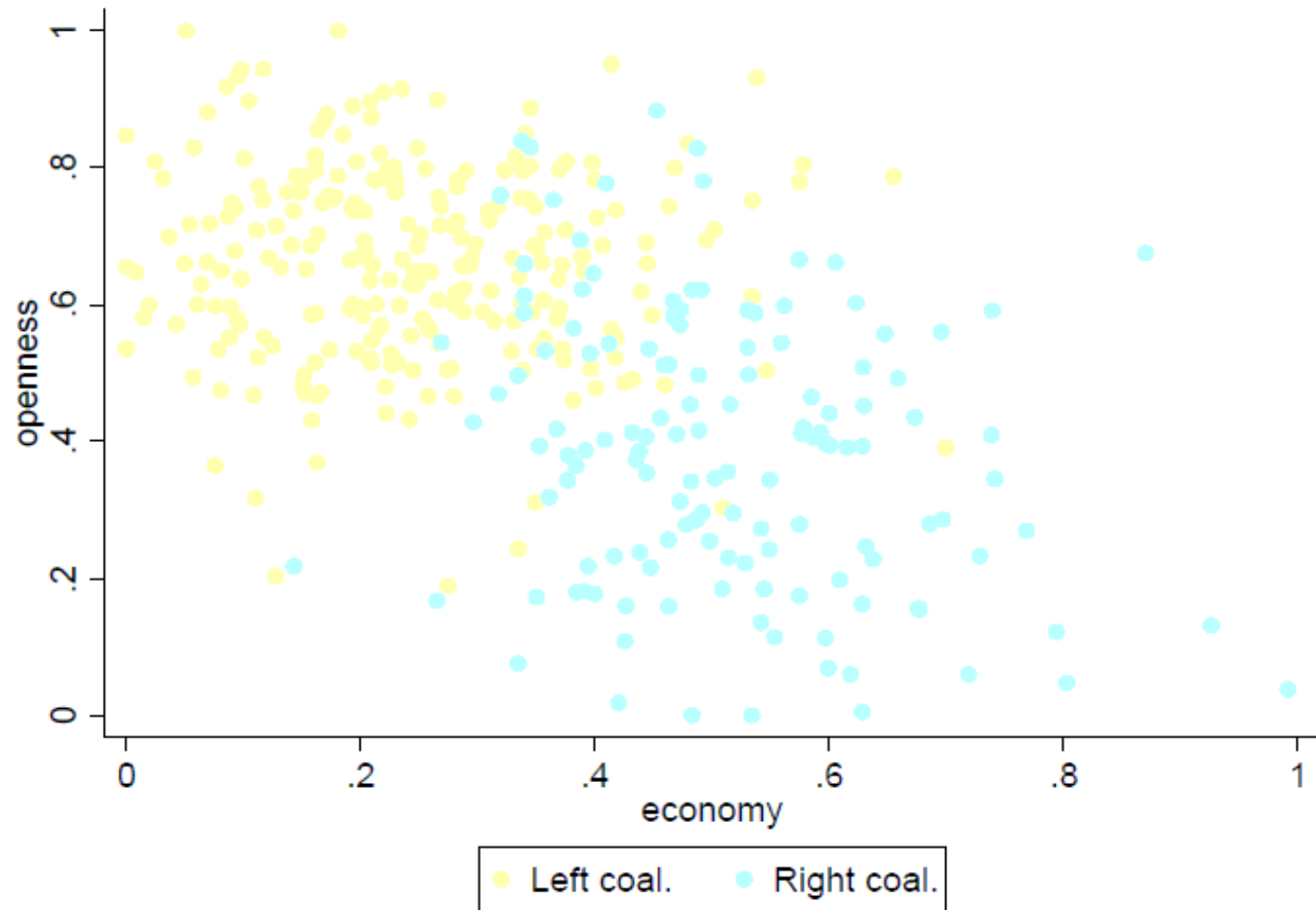
But economics does not explain..

- why existing political elites are not delivering these policies
- why distrust of mainstream politicians has led to the rise of both populist and technocratic parties

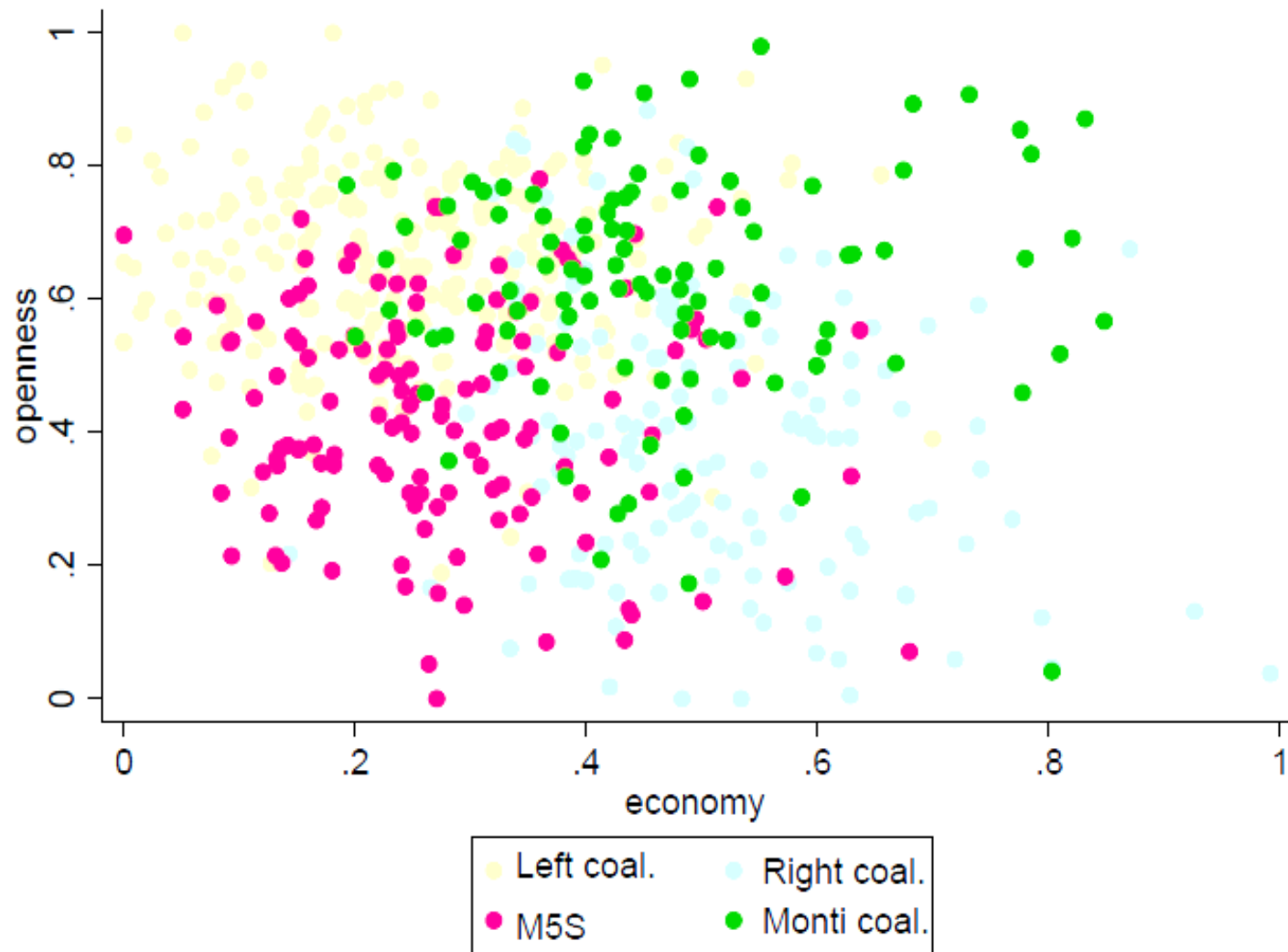
Mainstream parties, Italy 2013



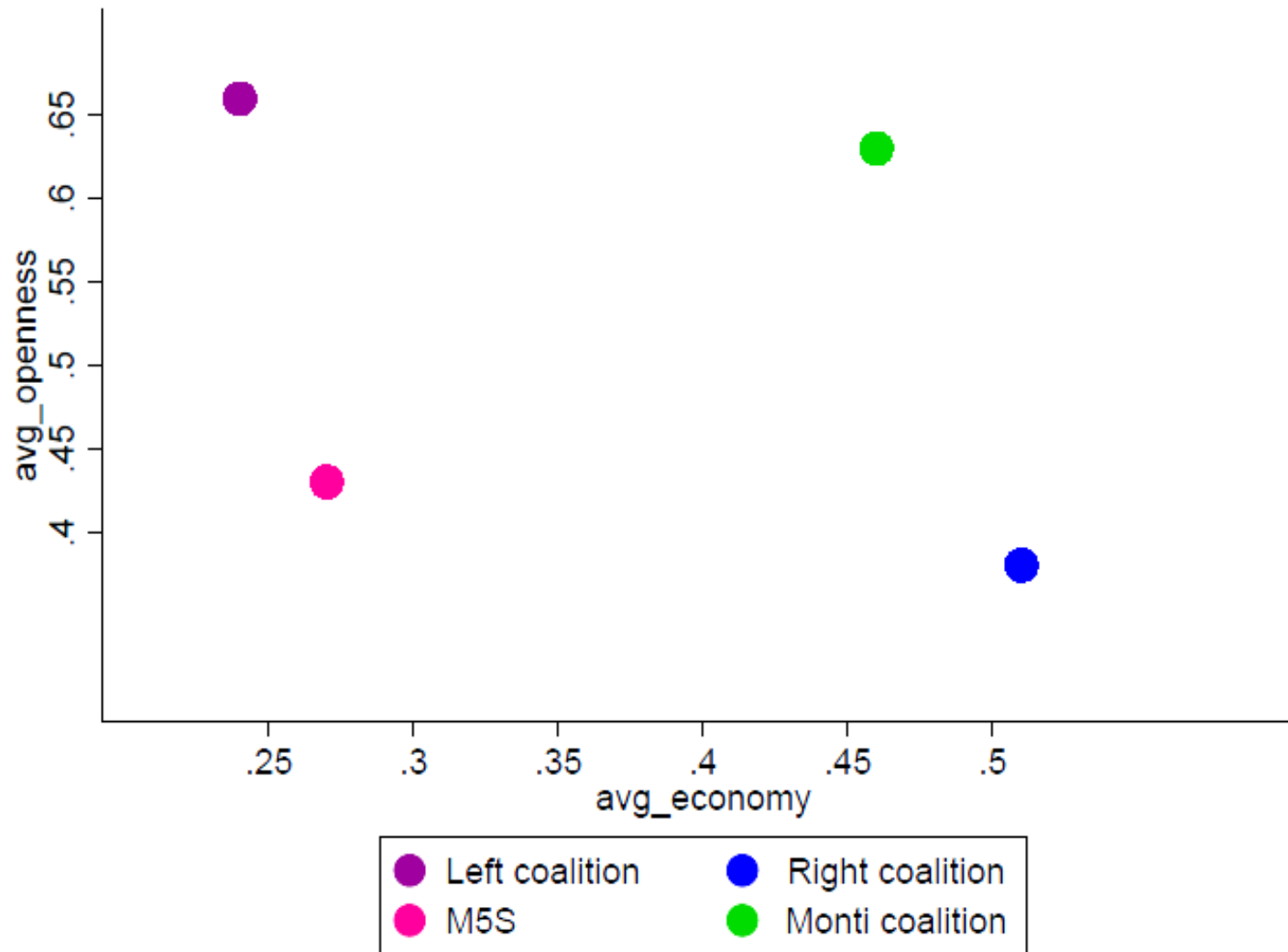
Mainstream parties, Italy 2013



New entrants, Italy 2013



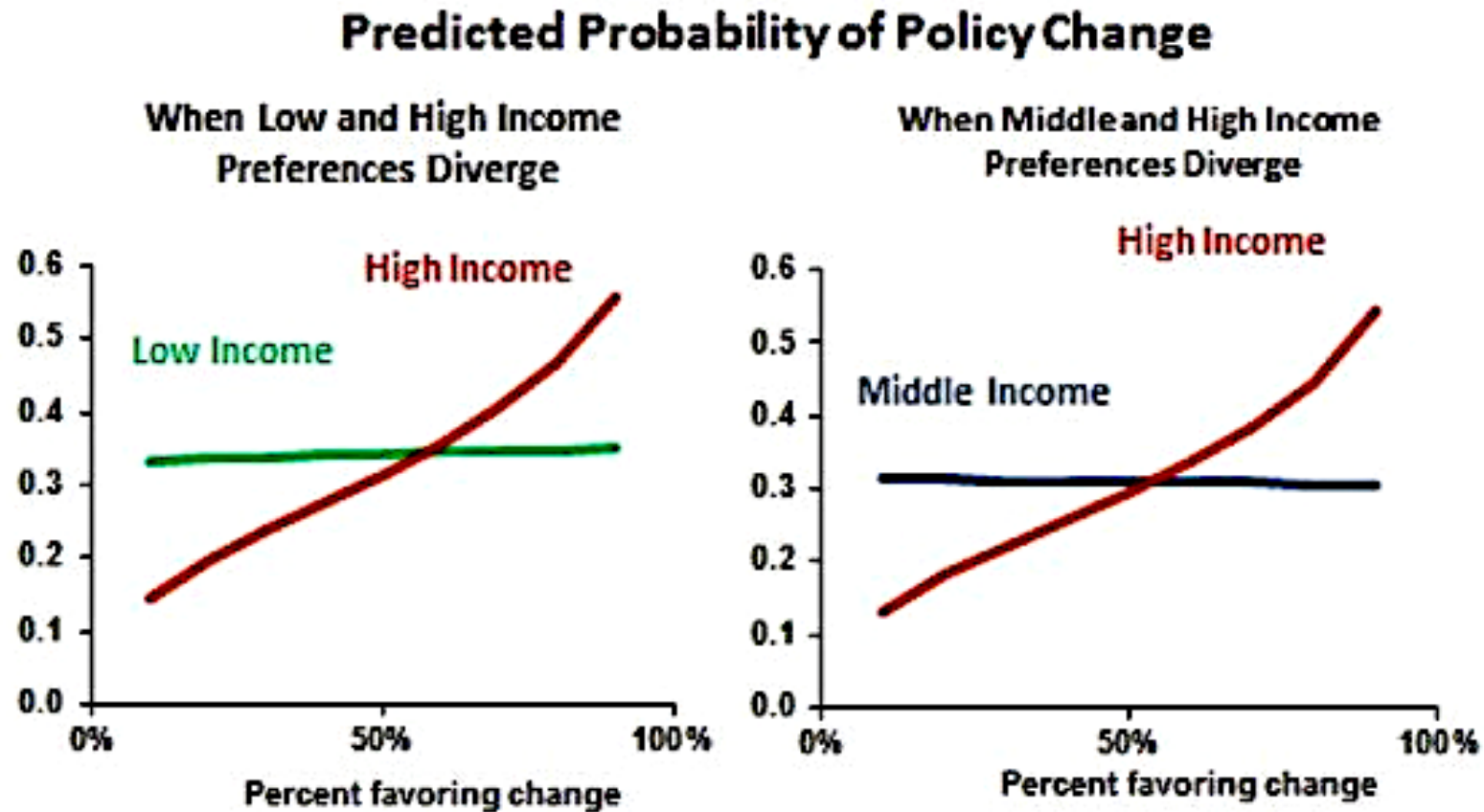
Average ideological positions by group



The political market

- Anthony Downs' *economic theory of democracy*:
 - demand and supply of policy
 - **competition** generates **responsiveness** to demand
- For Downs the politician is a specialist in "*discovering, transmitting and analysing popular opinion*"
- Advantages of professionalization:
 - labour division
 - experience - learning by doing
 - incentives & career concerns

Responsiveness to whom?



(source: Martin Gilens, The Monkey Cage)

The populist view

- Politicians not responsive to the majority of the electorate.
- Elites collude instead of competing: the establishment
 - *the people vs the elite*
 - politicians should be replaced by "*common people*"
 - all policy should be directly accountable to "the people"
 - distance between citizens and policy-makers should be minimized

Responsiveness ≠ representation

*Your representative owes you, not his industry only,
but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving
you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion*

[Edmund Burke 1774]

Responsiveness $\neq$ representation

- **Representation:** the representative acts in the interest of the represented
- A representative often has superior competence and better information than the represented

=> it is possible to act in the best interest of the represented by NOT responding to their demands

- But then how do I know if my representative is working for me?

The technocratic view

- Politicians excessively responsive to the electorate
 - they *pander* to the demands of misinformed/short-sighted voters
 - experts preferable to politicians
 - insulation from the electorate is desirable (for some policy areas)
 - distance between citizens and policy-makers is positive

Knowledge and democracy

- Elitist approach (Plato). Knowledge is concentrated. A trade off between representativeness and competence.
- Information aggregation approach. *"There is this to be said for the Many. Each of them by himself may not be of a good quality; but when they come together it is possible that they may surpass - collectively and as a body - the quality of the few best"* [Aristotle]

Credibility and descriptive representation

Representatives cannot commit to act in the interest of the represented

We want representatives “*like us*”

Generates demand for *descriptive representation*

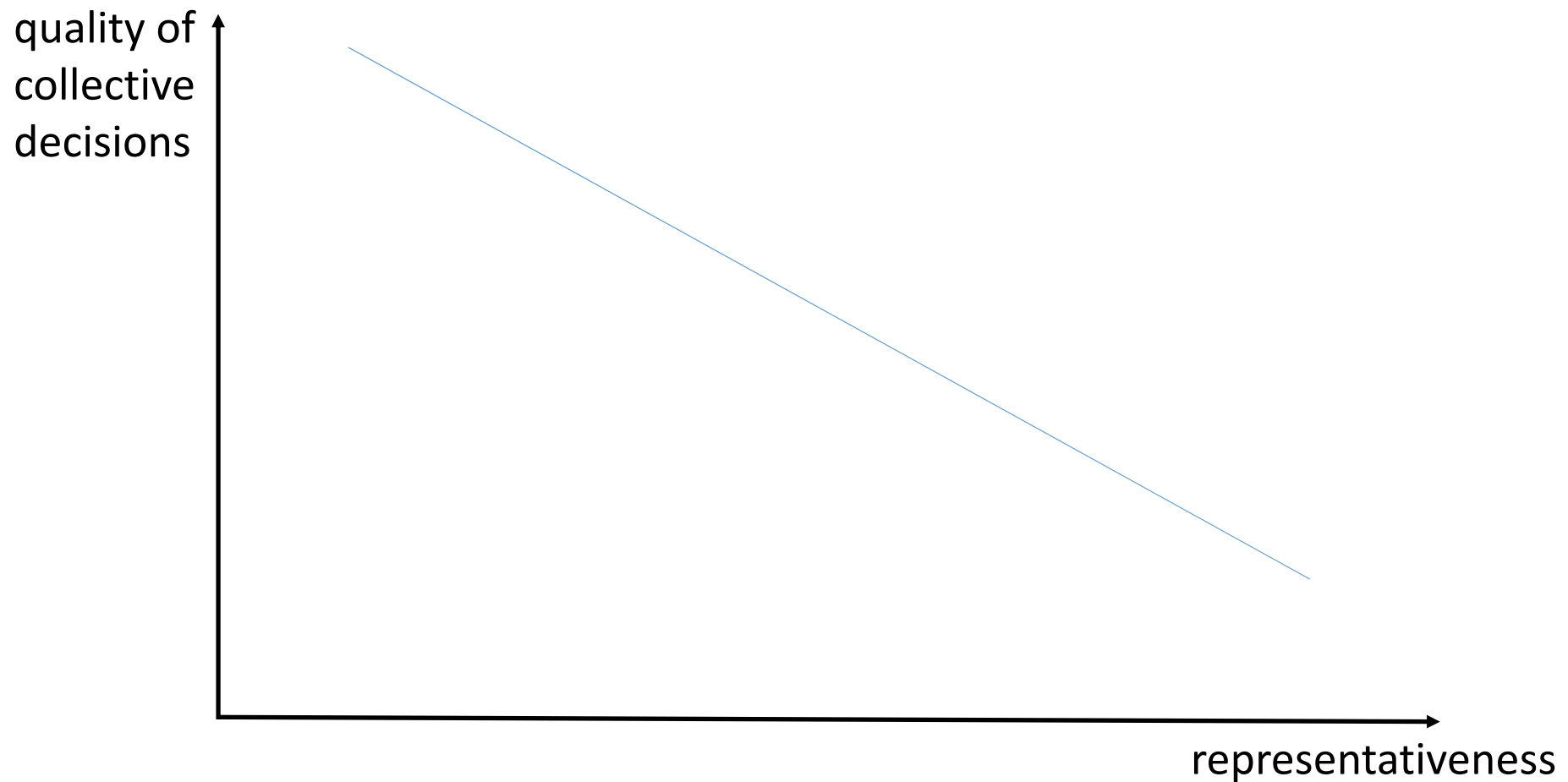
But what is “*like us*”?

What is "like us"?

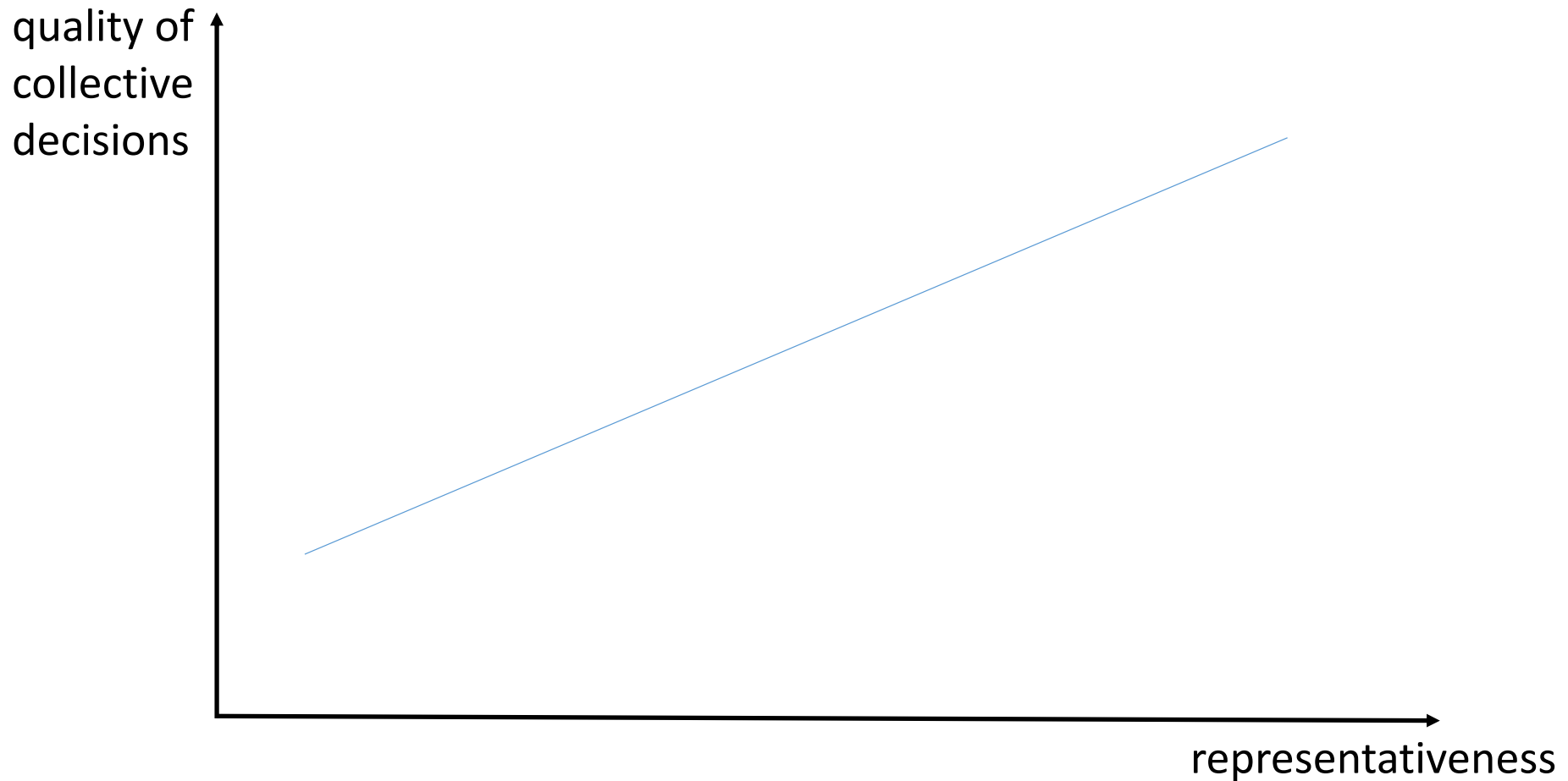
- Political parties simplify descriptive representation by reducing it to ideological representation
- But when the ideological link between voters and politicians is weak we look for "*someone like us*" in socio-demographic dimensions



Representativeness and competence: the Plato trade-off



Representativeness and competence: the Aristotle win-win

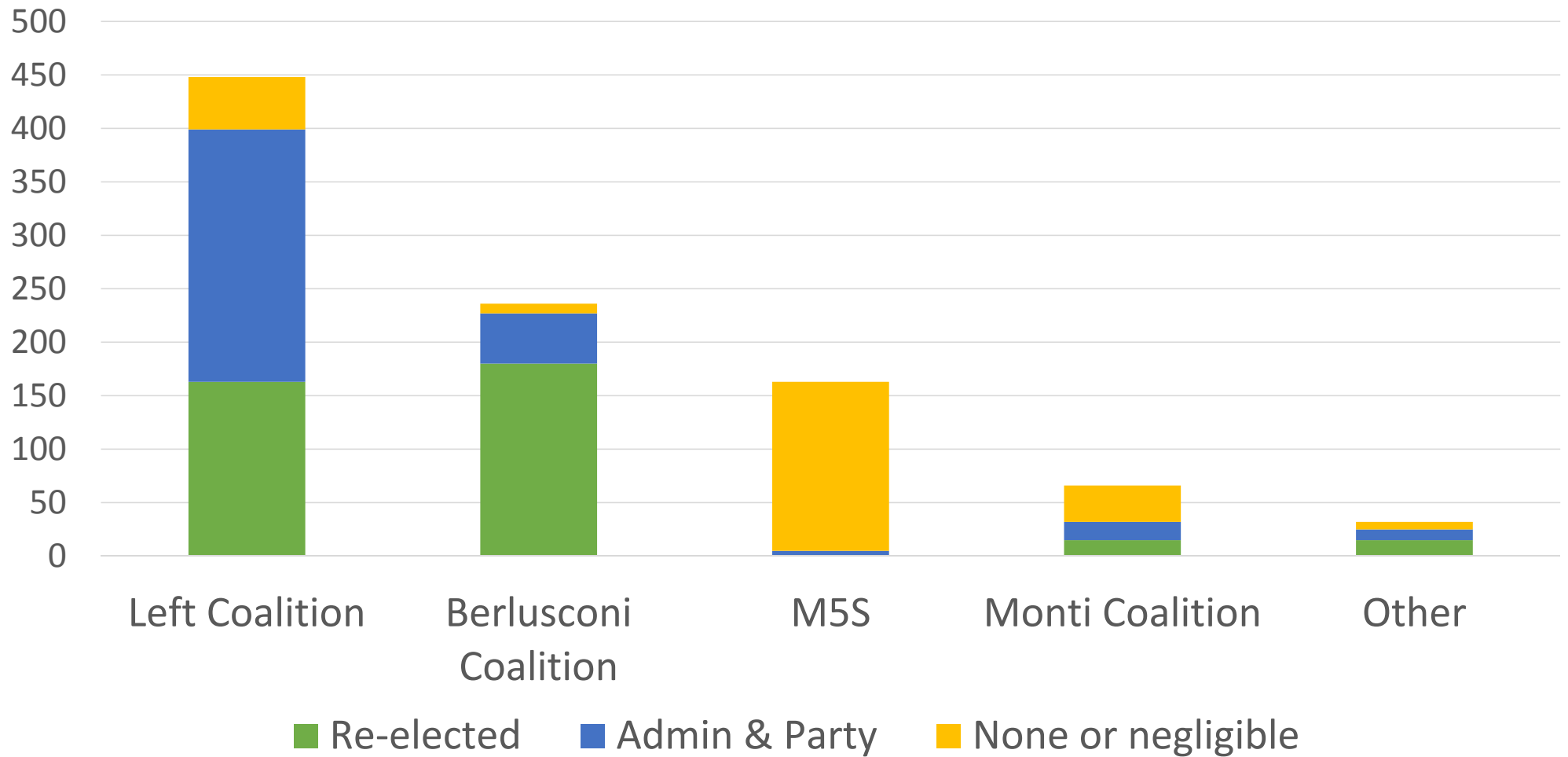


Are you Platonic or Aristotelian?

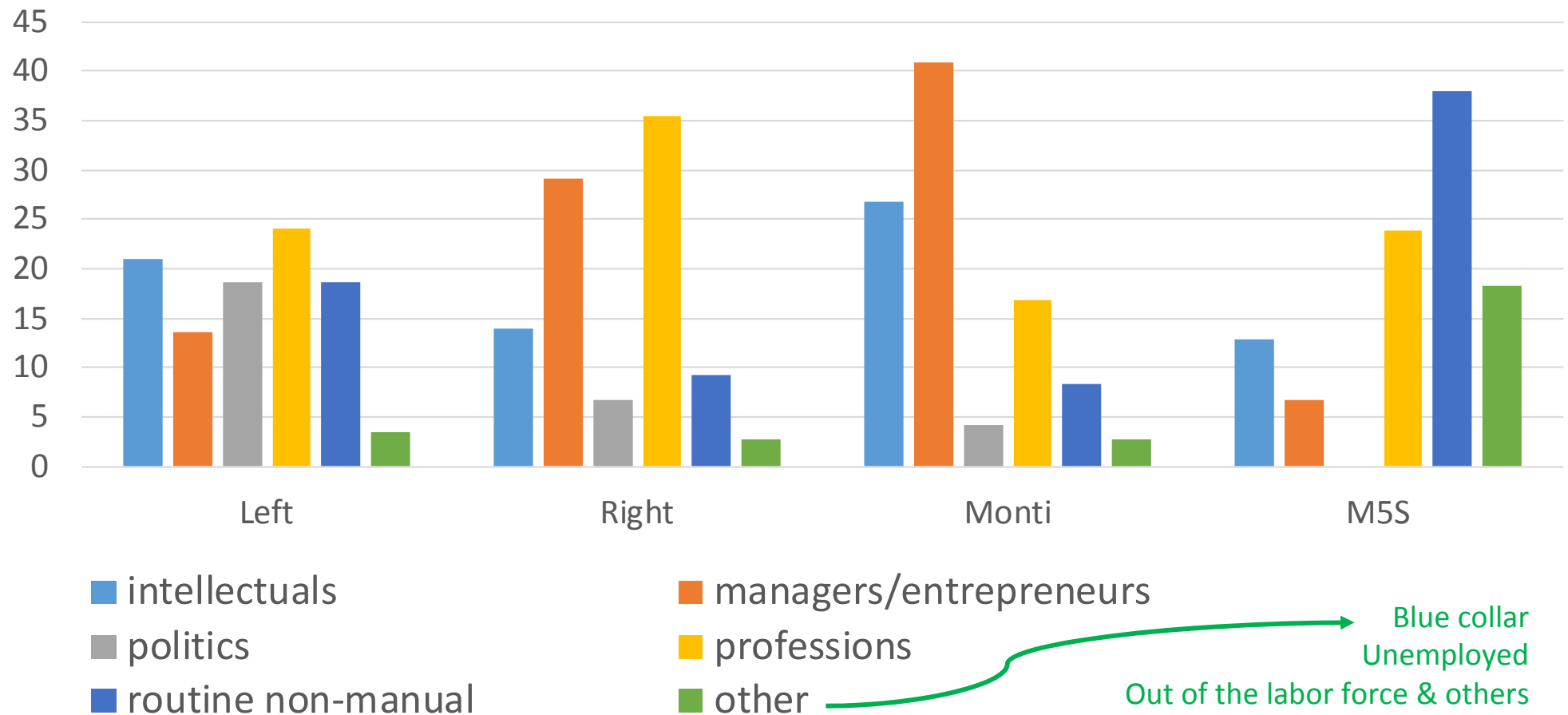
Inexperienced politicians in parliament: Italy 2013-18

- New MPs usually selected from a pool of potential candidates with substantial political experience
- Founded in 2009, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* came out as the largest party in the 2013 election.
- M5S candidates selected through online primaries
- Unexpected success propelled into parliament completely unknown MPs with very diverse professional experiences
- Almost none of the M5S MPs had any political or admin experience
- Highly unusual composition of the 2013-18 Italian parliament

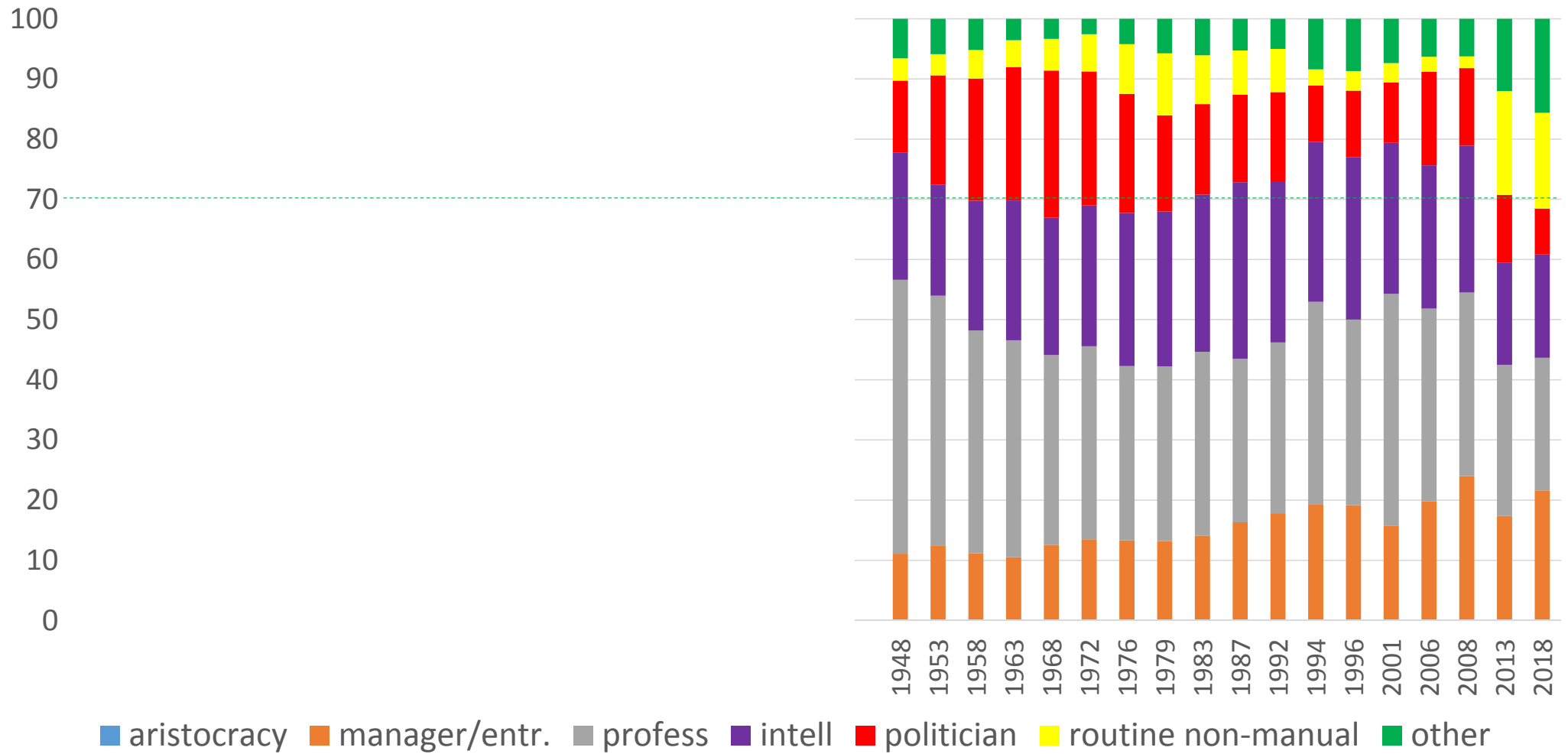
Political experience of elected MPs (Italy 2013)



Profession of MPs in the Italian Parliament (2013-18)

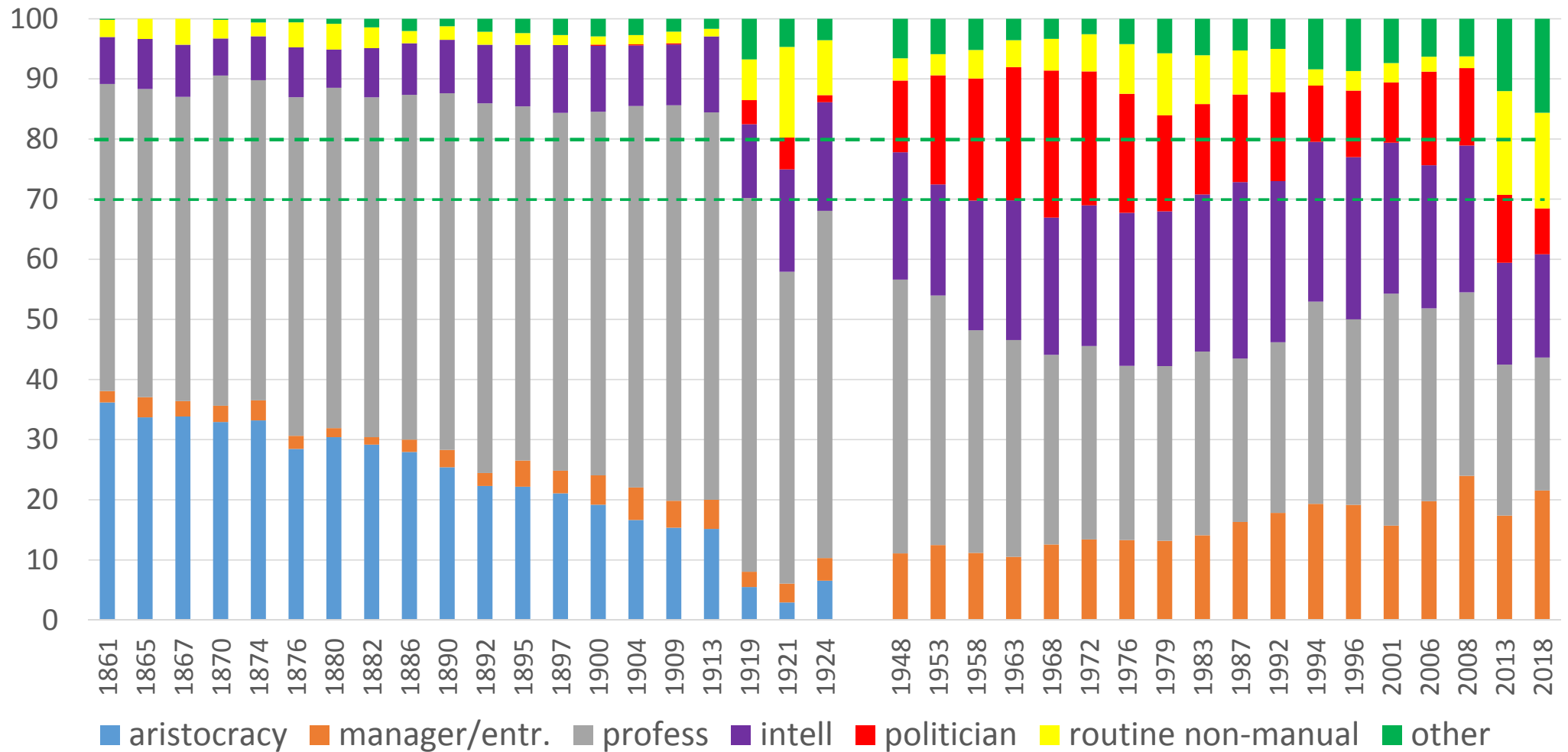


Profession of Elected Legislators



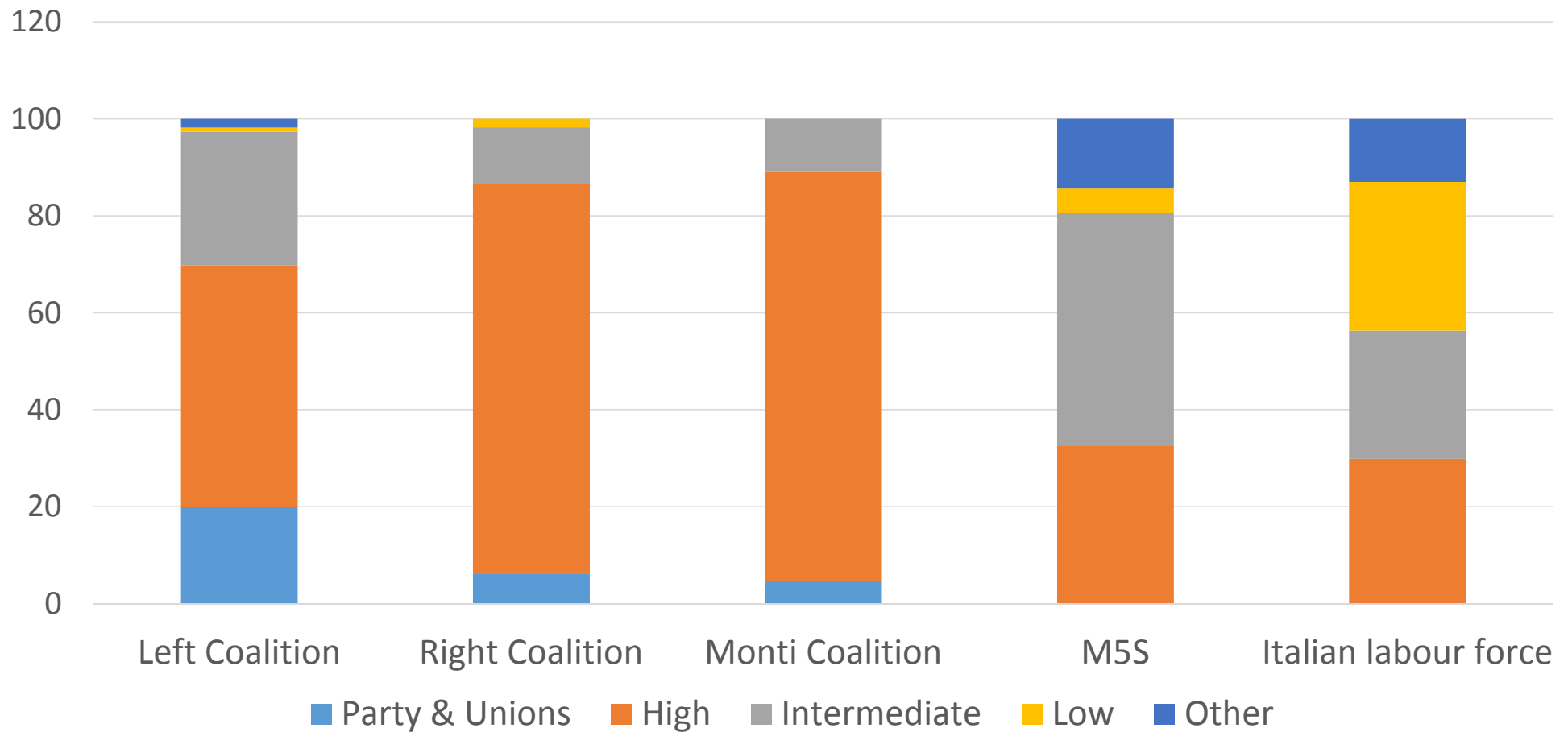
Data collected by the author, except 1948-1992, made available by CIRCaP

Profession of Elected Legislators: Italy 1861-2018

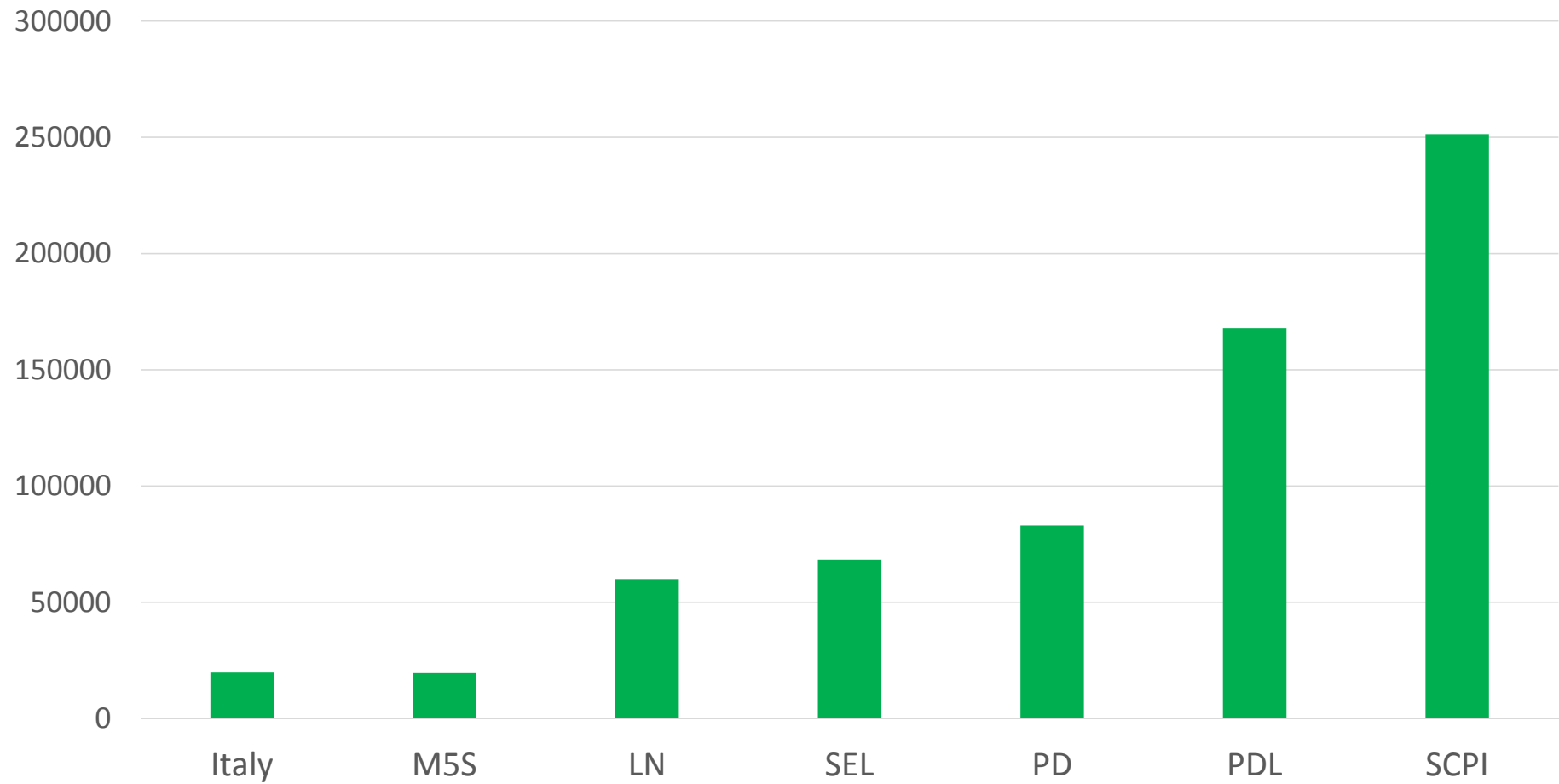


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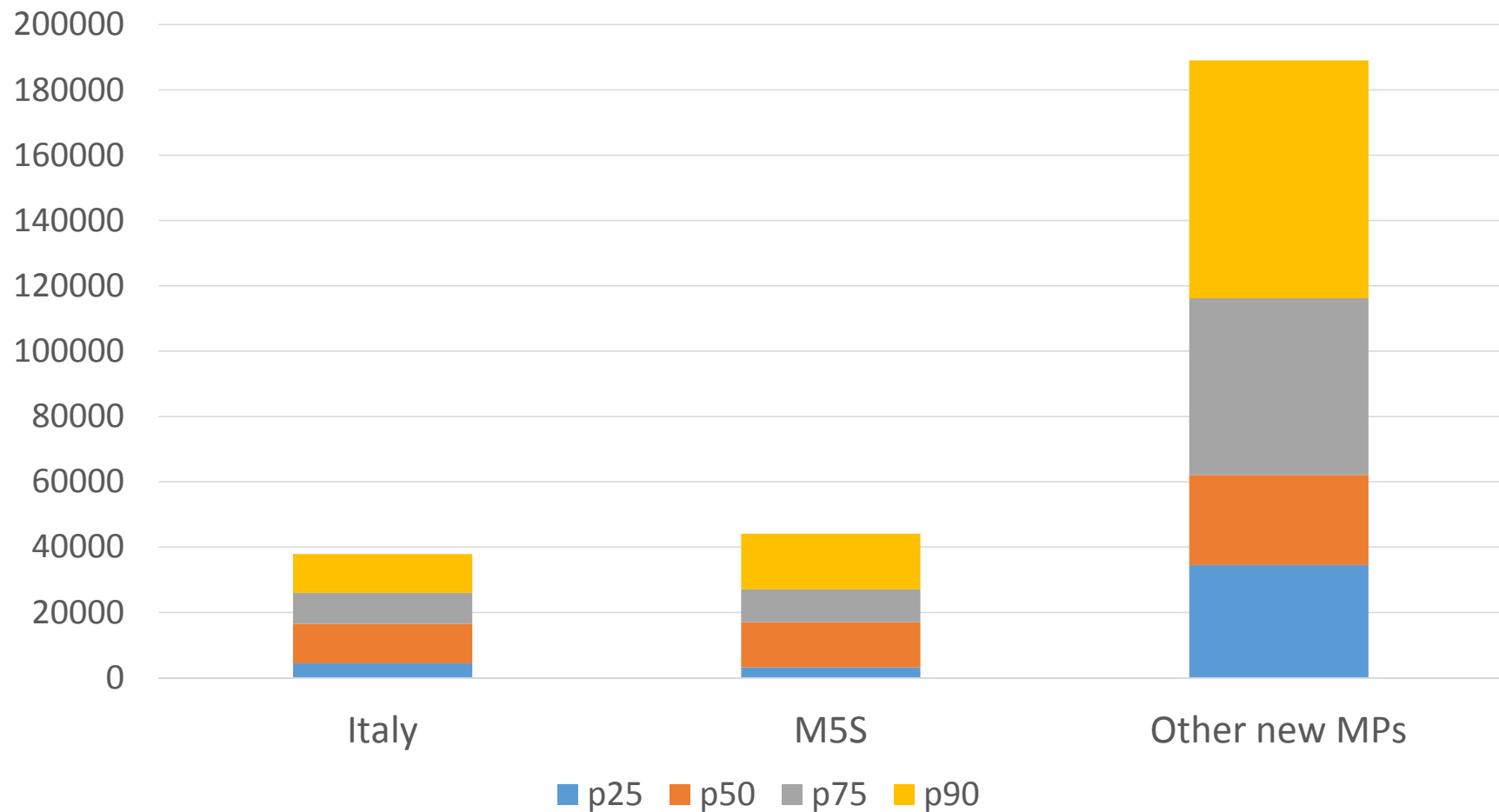
MPs' occupational status



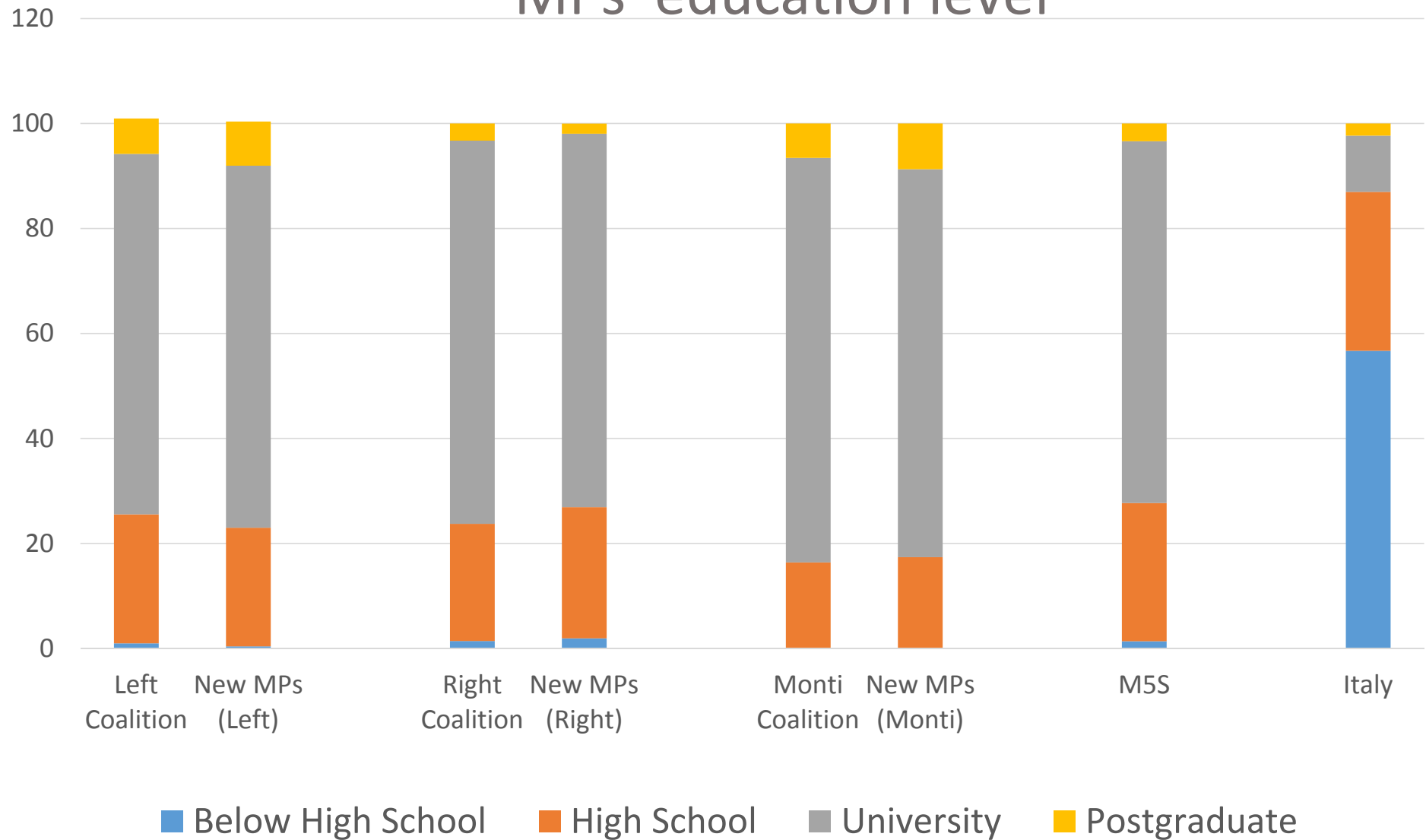
Mean income of newly elected MPs



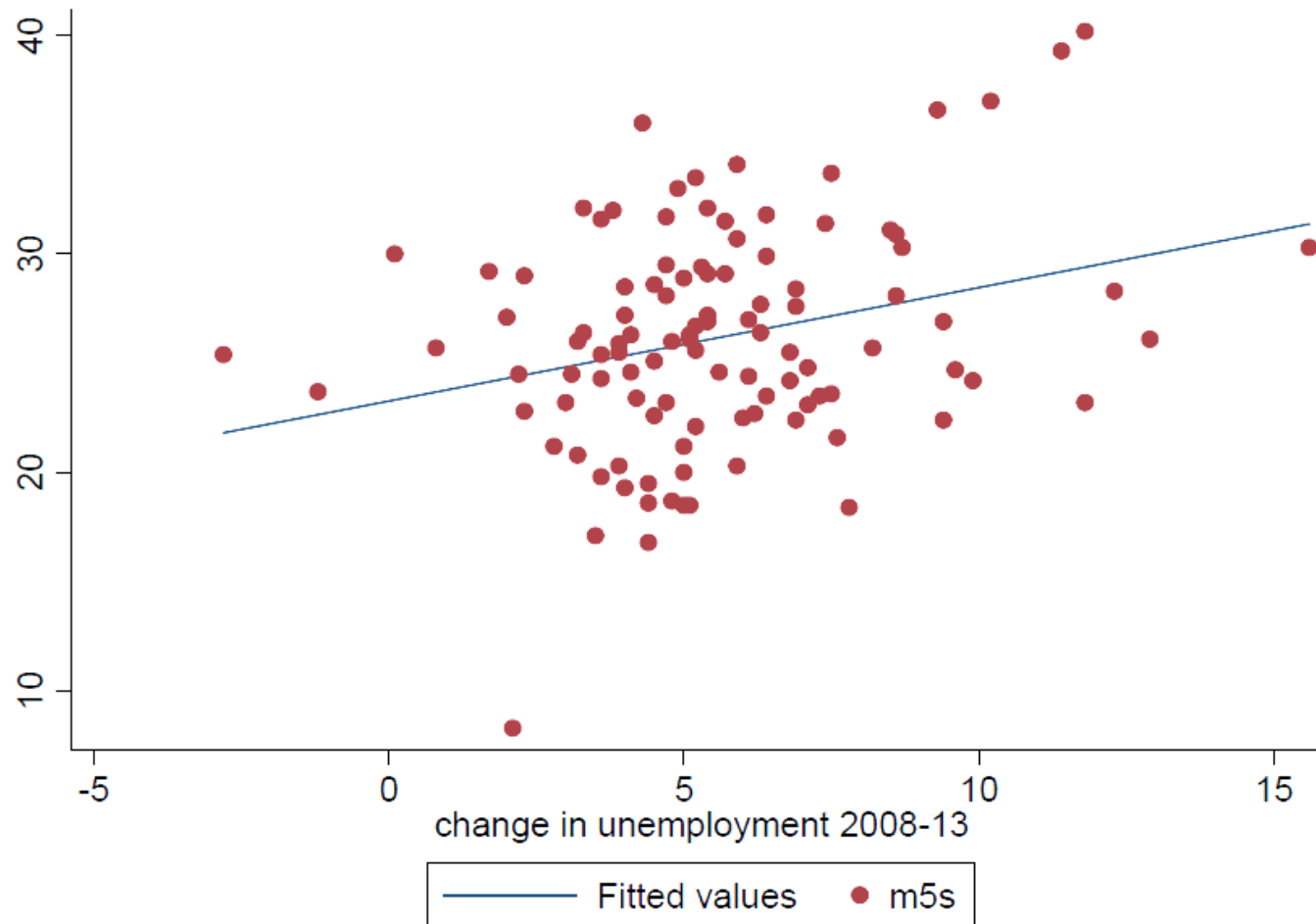
MPs' gross income: percentiles



MPs' education level



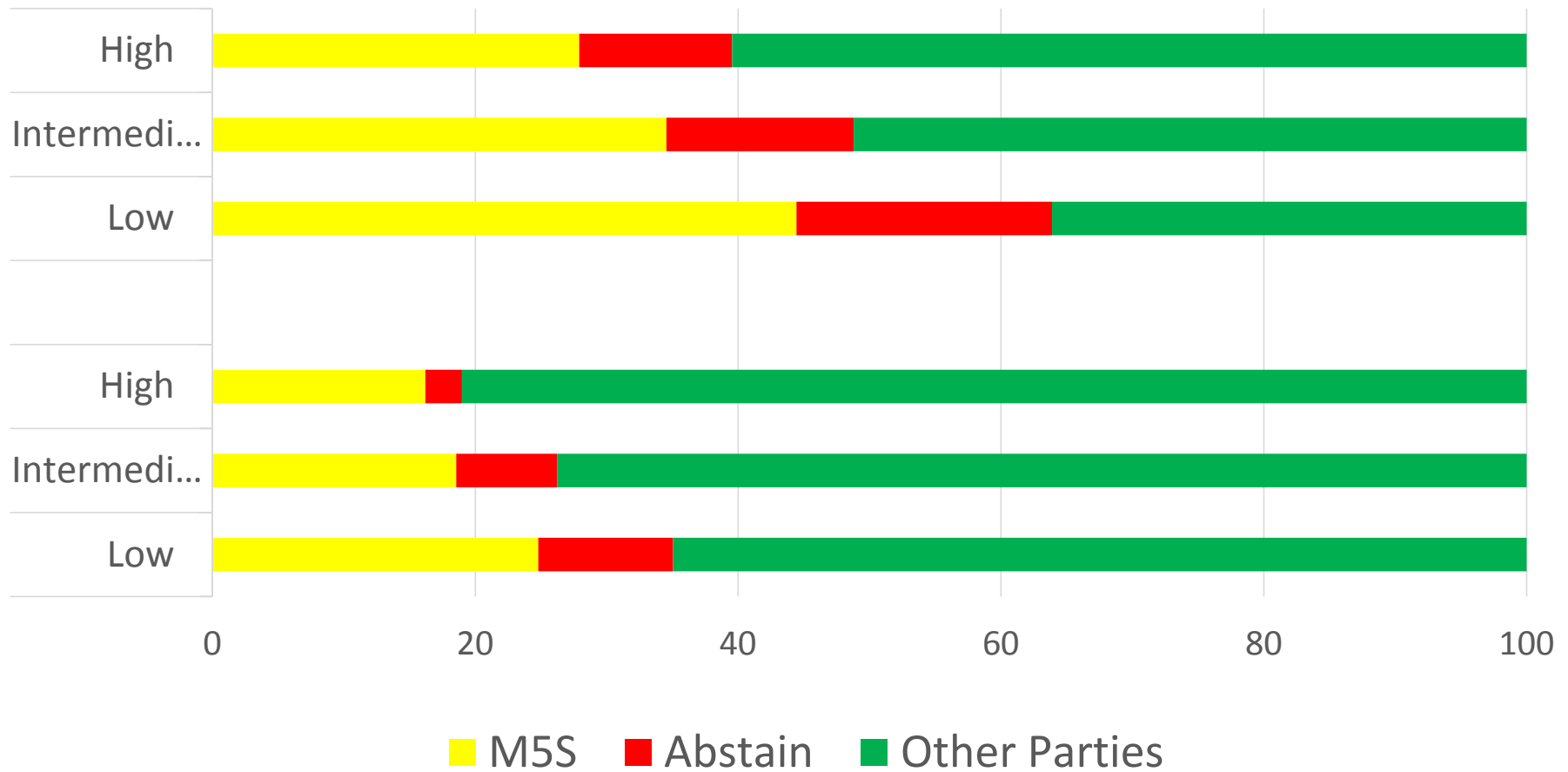
Unemployment (2008-13) and M5S voting



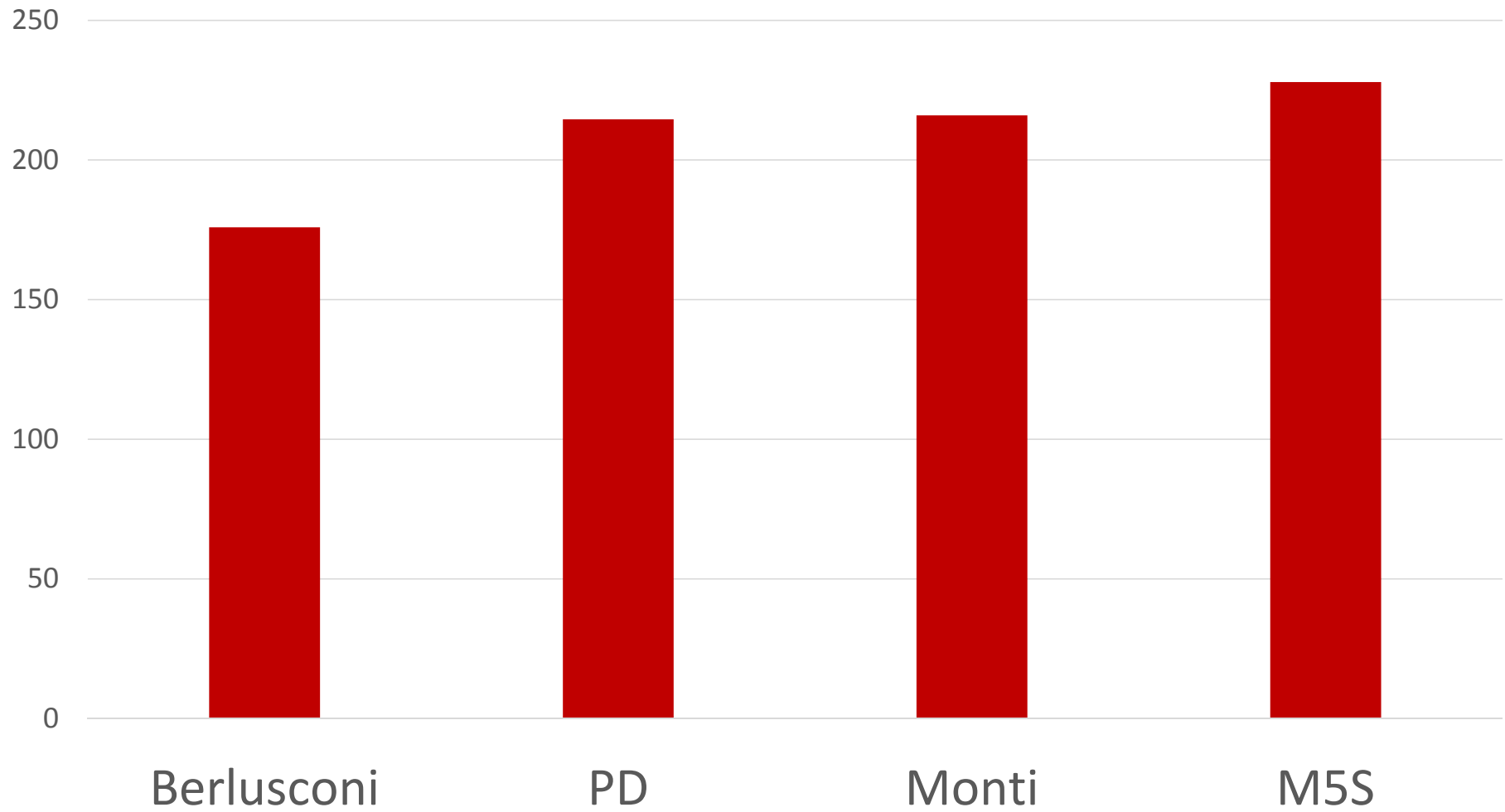
Income per capita (2008-13) and M5S voting



Voting by occupational status and age

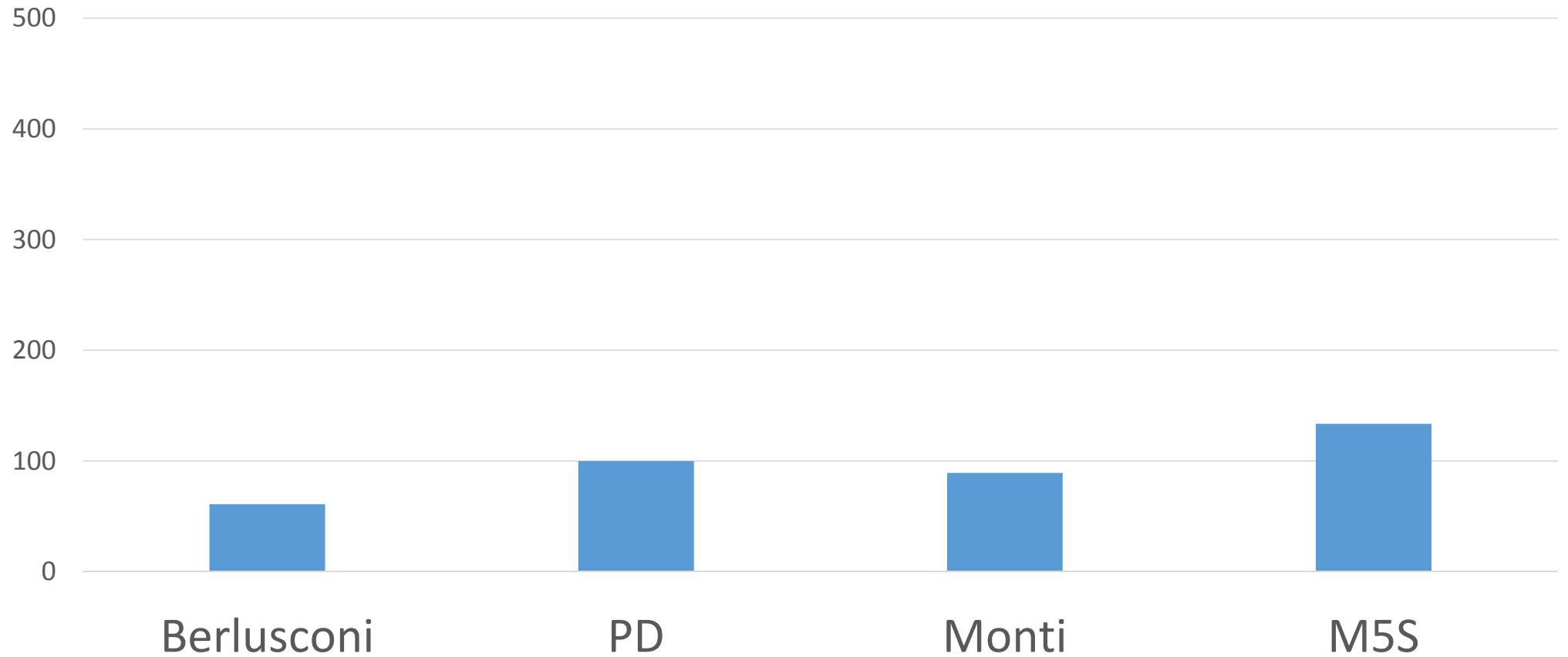


Average MPs' legislative activity

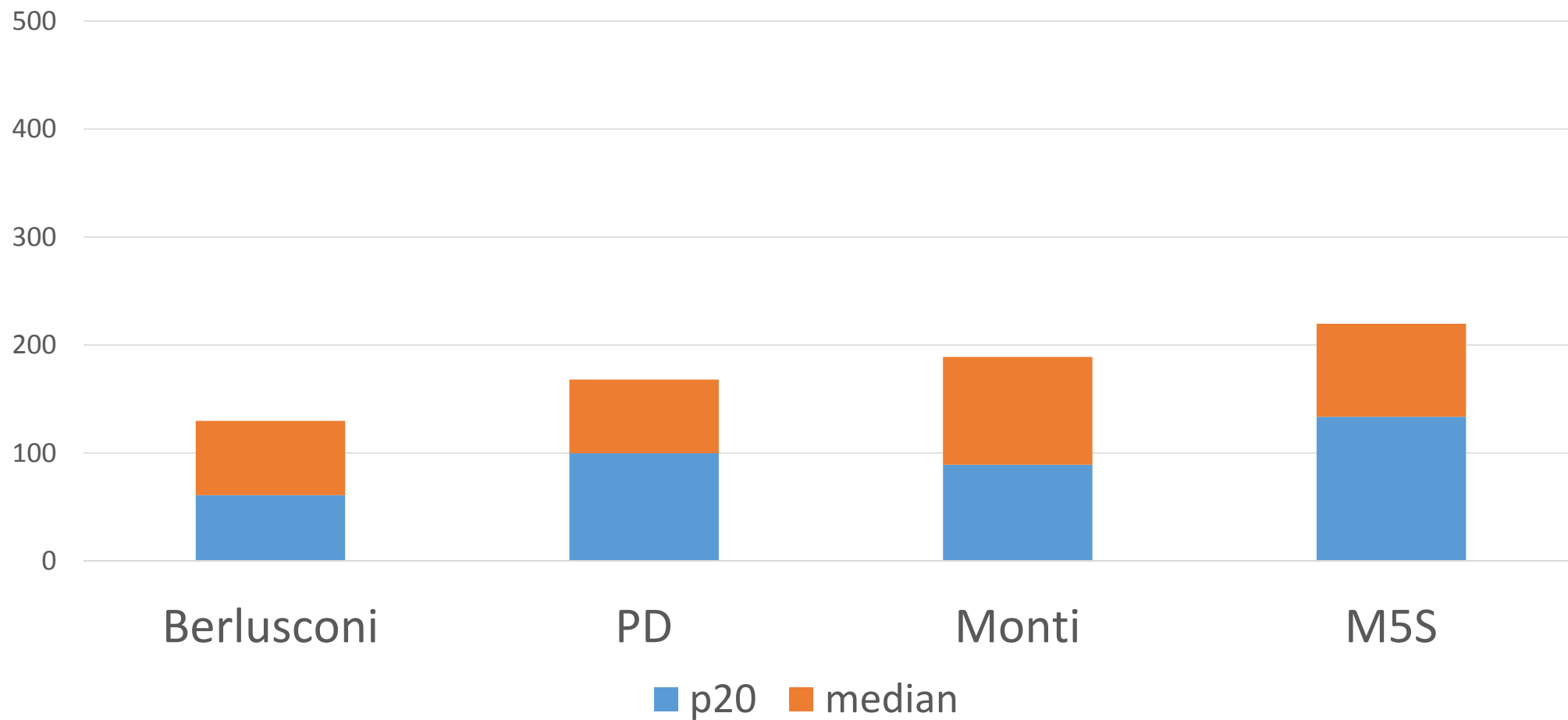


(Activity measured using Openpolis productivity index)

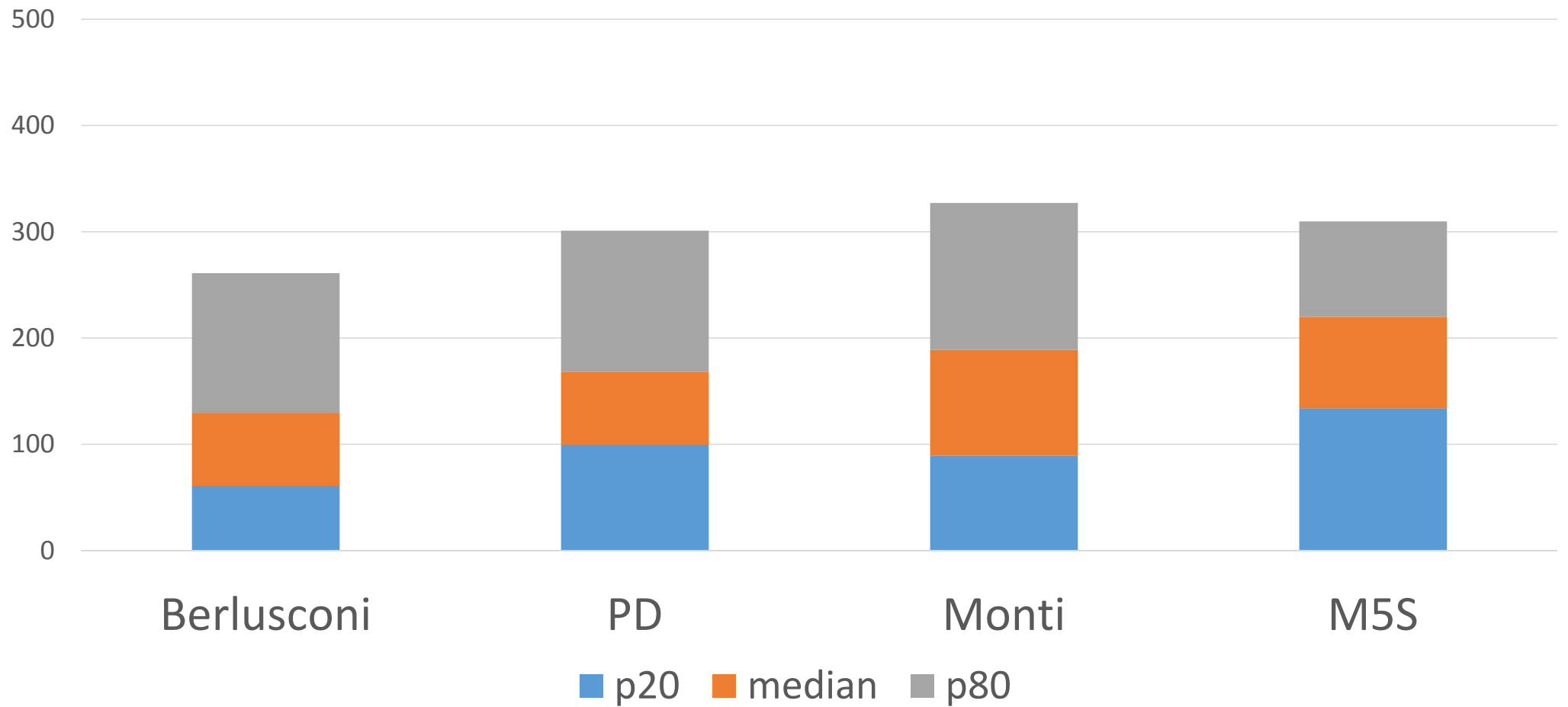
MPs' legislative activity: 20th percentile



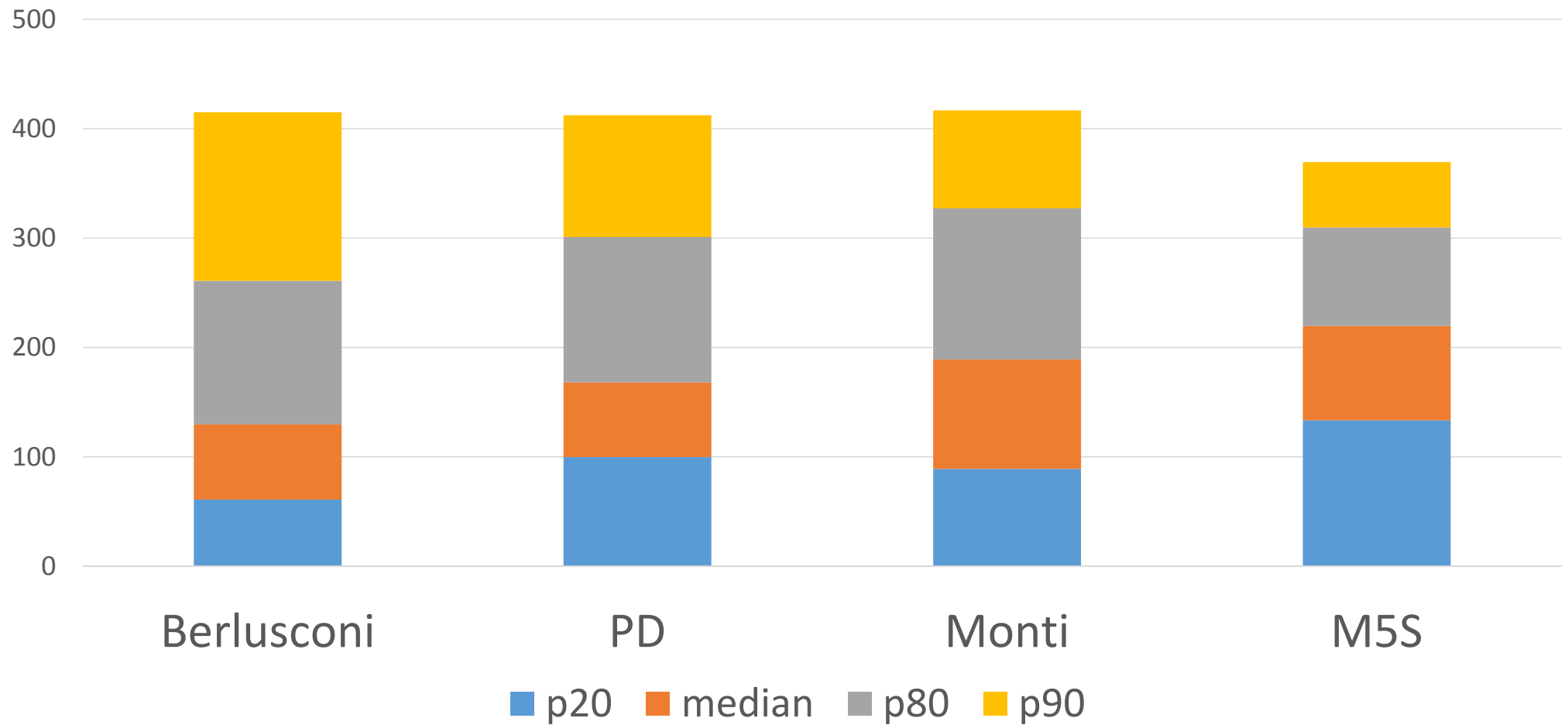
MPs' legislative activity: median



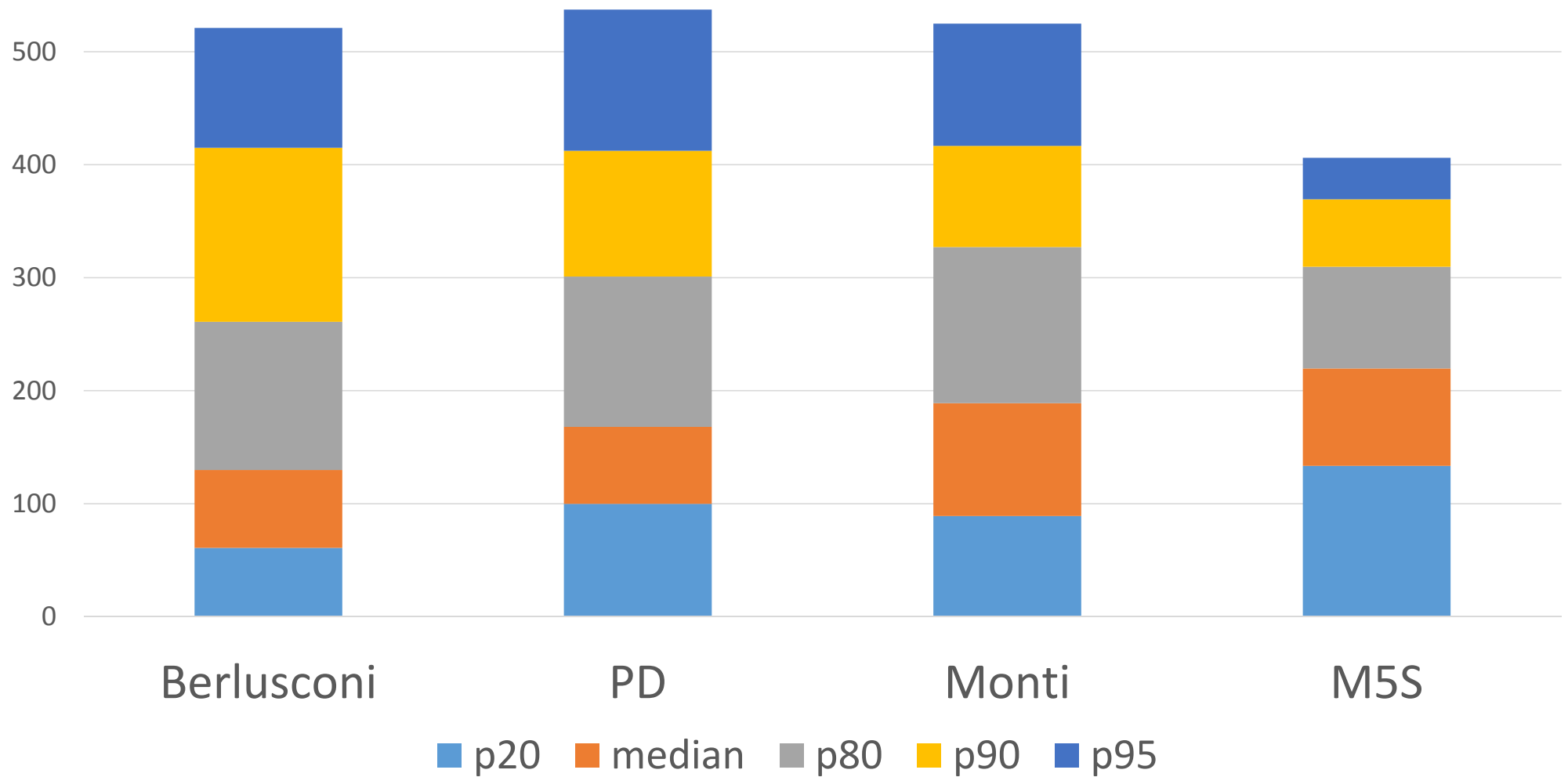
MPs' legislative activity: 80th percentile



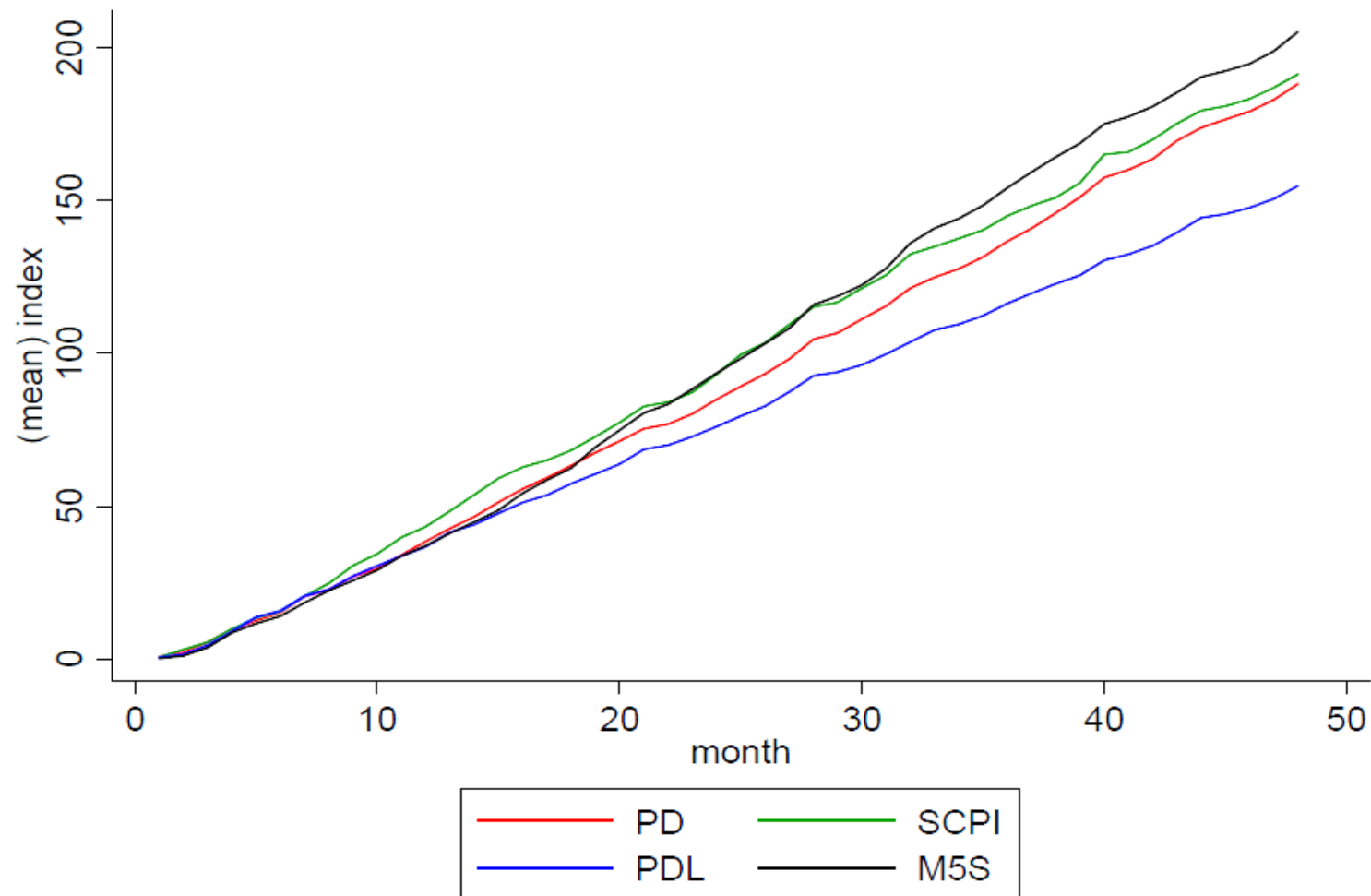
MPs' legislative activity: 90th percentile



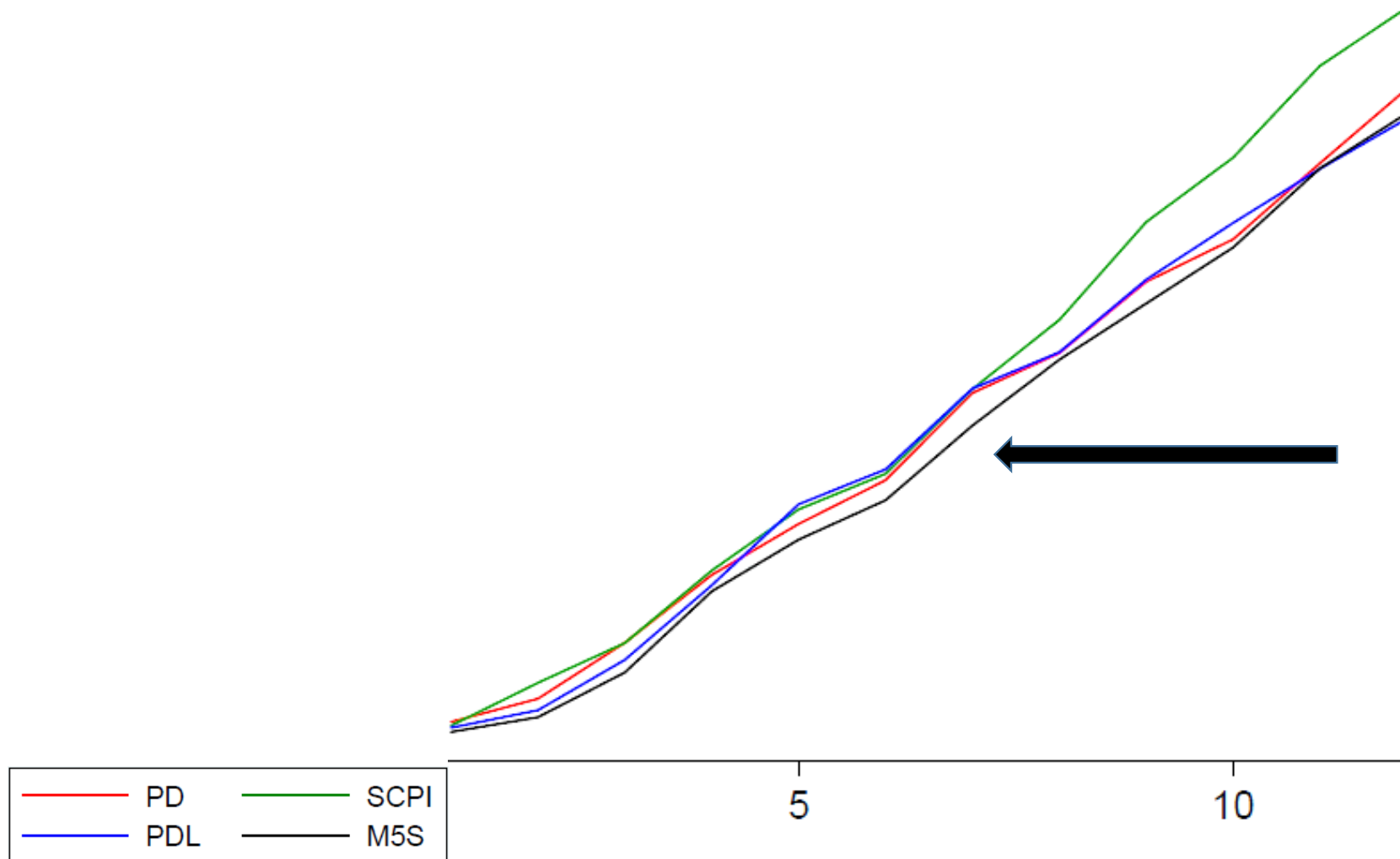
MPs' legislative activity: 95th percentile



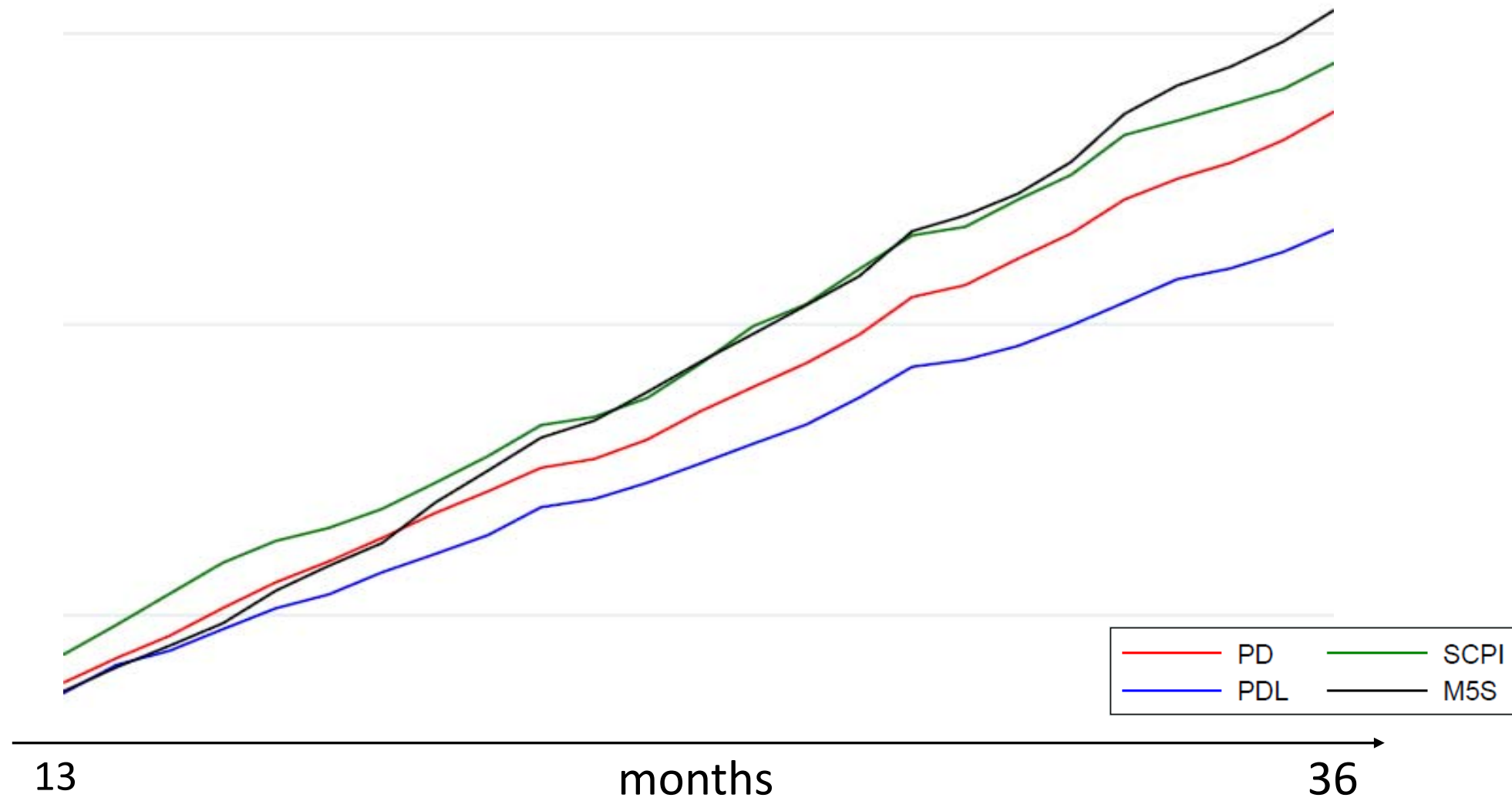
Cumulated legislative activity over time

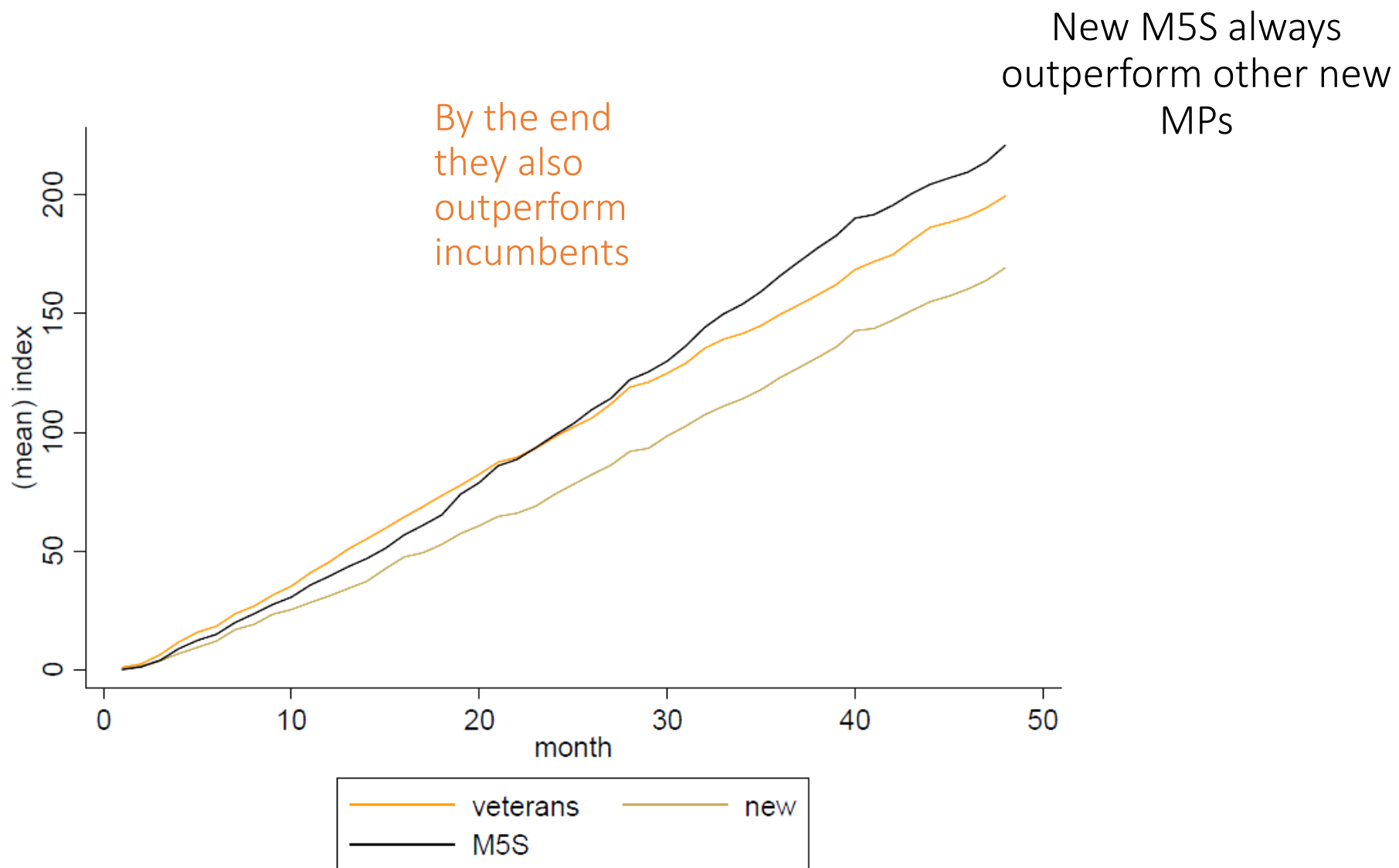


In the first year, M5S lags behind



After that, they catch up





Amateurs-turned-politicians: what do the data say?

- Many indicators suggest that the amateurs-turned-politicians didn't do too bad as legislators, relative to other parliamentary groups
- However, we do not know if this holds for other roles, in particular the executive

Is populism a threat to democracy?