

I'm a Loser, Baby: An Analysis of Party Responsiveness to Vote Loss

Sinéad C. M. Harrington

Under the supervision of Dr Emanuel Coman

Department of Political Science

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

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Declaration of the Author

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Abstract

Understanding how parties change is fundamental to understanding their role in representative democracy, and the alternatives that are available to voters. In particular, understanding how they change in response to election results highlights the impact that voters can have on the political system beyond the direct effect of determining the next government. While many previous studies have sought to quantify the relationship between electoral performance and subsequent party platforms, the empirical approaches used do not accurately capture the specific electoral threats indicated by election results. Based on a theoretical approach that sees parties as conservative and risk-averse, I argue that in order to accurately measure responsiveness to election results, studies need to focus on the specific electoral threats indicated by the results in question. While previous studies have focused on measuring responses to the rise of competing party families or to overall vote loss, I refine this relationship by introducing a dataset that captures the extent of vote loss from the responding party to individual party families. In doing so, I measure responsiveness to the specific electoral threat posed by a given party family to the responding party. Through a quantitative analysis covering 599 instances of party responsiveness across 172 elections in 30 countries, I find that the extent of vote loss to individual party families is not a better predictor of future electoral platform than the vote share of those party families. This suggests that responding parties are more focused on the opportunities presented by the success of other parties than the threat that they pose. In order to examine the causal mechanism through which responsiveness operates, I present the results of a survey focusing on the informational environment in which parties make decisions about future electoral platforms. Finally, I use qualitative process-tracing to analyse Fianna Fáil's response to the 2011 Irish general election, and the Liberal Democrats' response to the 2015 United Kingdom general election. These cases represent instances of high- and low-responsiveness respectively. I find that responsiveness is linked to the extent of shared knowledge within the party about the reasons for vote loss, and that manifestos can be the product of simultaneous responsiveness to multiple stimuli.

1. Introduction

Elections represent the opportunity for parties prioritising vote-seeking and office-seeking to achieve their primary goals. Simultaneously, they represent the opportunity for voters to influence political outcomes in line with their own preferences. Given that elections involve voters choosing between the platforms presented by competing parties, understanding what influences the development of these platforms is central to understanding how voters come to be presented with a given set of alternatives. In other words, understanding what influences party platforms is central to understanding how elections lead to particular political outcomes.

More than simply determining the make-up of the next government and the policies it has a mandate to pursue, elections also act as an indicator of the opinion of the electorate. While the proliferation of opinion polls has provided a wealth of data regarding public political opinion, elections represent a definitive declaration of public opinion that determines parties' success in achieving their goals. Parties presenting a platform that reflects the concerns and beliefs of voters will likely succeed in achieving their aims through attracting votes and potentially winning office. When parties move away from these concerns, or adopt positions contrary to those of voters, they will likely suffer a loss of votes, with dissatisfied voters defecting to other parties that better represent their preferences. For parties prioritising winning votes and gaining office, such vote loss undermines their ability to achieve their goals.

Given that one of the main functions of political parties is to represent the interests of voters, there is an expectation that parties should respond to shifts in public opinion. This behaviour is promoted by the nature of representative democracy in which parties are rewarded with electoral spoils for convincing voters to support them. Thus, the idea of parties responding to election results as indicators of public opinion is central both to the concept of representation in party democracies, and to the success and survival of vote-seeking parties. This is particularly true in the case of vote loss at elections, where such defections indicates a failure of a party's platform to continue to represent their supporters and, crucially, to retain their votes. Because of a failure to achieve its main goal, it follows that a vote-seeking party would change its platform in order to avoid further losses, and potentially regain the support of defectors. As well as potentially explaining how parties arrive at certain electoral platforms, this theory also suggests an important indirect effect of vote choice.

Despite these intuitive ideas behind the theory of party responsiveness to vote loss, previous studies have not found consistent evidence that parties change their platforms following such instances of vote loss. While some find no evidence of responsiveness to previous elections, others find that responsiveness does occur under certain circumstances. More recent studies have found that responsiveness occurs in response to the electoral success of some types of rival parties, but not others. Thus, the existing literature is characterised both by mixed results and results that often confound theoretical expectations about how parties should behave after elections.

I argue that both mixed results and findings that contrast with hypotheses are at least in part due to issues with the empirical approaches used in previous studies. In contrast with such works, in this thesis I develop an approach that focuses on the electoral threat represented by instances of vote loss that I believe is central to provoking party change. In particular, I argue that in order to accurately capture the extent of party responsiveness, we need to acknowledge the extent of vote loss to individual party families. Thus, the overarching research question addressed by this thesis is: do parties change their electoral platforms in response to votes lost to individual party families?

There are many ways of conceptualising and measuring poor electoral performance. Previous studies predominately focus on responses to decreases in a party's own vote share, and to the increase in the vote share of others. In this thesis, I focus on party responsiveness to the share of votes that a party, A , won at a given election, taking place at time $t-1$, which were then lost to another party at the subsequent election, taking place at time t . This is reflective of the theoretical basis of the hypothesis of party responsiveness to election results, with a particular focus the existence of a perceived electoral threat in prompting party responsiveness.

Based on previous studies of the nature of political parties, I assume that they are conservative, risk-averse organisations. Because of this, parties need some certainty regarding potential outcomes in order to change their platform. Without this certainty, the risks of change are likely to be too great to justify moving away from an existing platform. Losing votes to other parties can provide the certainty needed to prompt change by indicating that the current platform is not working. The fact that voters who were formerly willing to support a given party are no longer willing to do so indicates that that party has failed to represent them, and failed to maximise its vote share. Thus, the presence of a significant number of defections indicates a need for a change in the party's platform.

Furthermore, losing votes to other parties provides a party with certainty regarding how it should change. While previous studies that measure responsiveness to any decline in vote share recognise that such a decline represents a threat posed to the responding party by its competitors, they do not recognise that responsiveness will change based on the type of party or parties that are posing the electoral threat. If party *A* is aware that it needs to change in order to regain the support of voters that have defected to party *B*, or to avoid further defections to *B*, its response will focus specifically on making its platform more appealing than that of party *B*. Thus, studies measuring responsiveness should focus on measuring platform change specifically in the issues that have attracted voters away from party *A* and towards party *B*.

Thus, by measuring vote loss in terms of defections to other parties, I am able to incorporate the theoretical concepts of certainty and electoral threat into my empirical approach. The argument at the core of this thesis is that parties will respond to election results when they are indicative both of a need for change and of the form that this change should take in order for that party to achieve its goals. As such, by focusing on responsiveness to votes lost to specific party families, one of the major contributions of this thesis is to employ an empirical approach that reflects the theoretical basis of party responsiveness to election results to a greater degree than previous studies. By developing a clear theoretical framework on which my empirical approach is based, I argue that this thesis provides a more accurate picture of party responsiveness than previous studies.

In order to capture the responsiveness of parties to specific electoral threats represented by the extent of vote loss to individual party families, I introduce a dataset that combines data from post-election surveys and the Manifesto Project (MARPOR). Post-election studies that ask respondents who they voted for at $t-1$ and who they voted for at t allow me to calculate the share of a party's voters at $t-1$ that defected to each rival party at t . By calculating the share of defections to individual party families, I am able to incorporate into my regression analyses the extent of electoral threat posed by each party family. The dataset incorporates manifesto-based measures of party platform sourced from the MARPOR dataset. By varying the dependent variable to reflect the appeal of the party family posing an electoral threat, I capture party responsiveness to electoral threats from various sources. The approach of varying the dependent variable in this way follows the approach used by recent studies, but here it is applied to a much broader range of cases with a more theoretically grounded measure of vote loss.

Another major contribution of this thesis is to examine the causal process of responsiveness. This has received little attention in previous studies, despite the existence of varying results that could be more convincingly explained if we had a better understanding on the process through which parties adapt their platform in response to previous election results. I argue that previous studies discussing party responsiveness and empirically analysing it overlook a number of assumptions that form the basis of the theory of responsiveness. In order to address this issue, I identify these assumptions in my theoretical framework. In doing so, I build a theory regarding the process of party responsiveness, and outline factors that may reduce parties' willingness or ability to respond to vote loss.

Beyond simply filling a gap in the academic literature, analysing the causal process in this way provides a basis for causal claims regarding my correlational findings on party responsiveness. Previous studies have discussed a number of potential explanations for their empirical results, particularly in the case of null findings, wherein there is no evidence that parties respond to previous election results. However, because of a lack of acknowledgement or interrogation of the implicit assumptions grounding the theory of party responsiveness, and an analysis of the causal process of responsiveness, there is little evidential basis supporting these explanations. Thus, the analysis of the causal process of party responsiveness in this thesis has practical implications for our understanding of the behaviour of political parties and their representative role. Particularly in instances of non-responsiveness, these can only be fully understood through an awareness of the theorised process of responsiveness and the relevant assumptions, and which of these are not reflective of reality.

In order to develop a better understanding of how parties make decisions regarding future electoral platforms and when these platforms are influenced by previous election results, I explicitly outline the assumptions that have heretofore been implicit in discussions of party responsiveness. These assumptions focus in particular on the informational environment of parties following elections: the information that is available to parties, how is this information perceived, and the prioritisation of this information compared to other elements that could influence a party's future platform. I test these assumptions using a survey administered to current and former parliamentarians in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, which provides an insight into the information available to parties and to their perceptions of electoral performance.

Furthermore, I use qualitative process-tracing to analyse the aftermath of two cases of significant vote loss. The first is the vote loss of Fianna Fáil in the 2011 Irish general election, which was followed by a significant shift in the party's platform. The second is the vote loss of the Liberal Democrats in the 2015 United Kingdom general election, which was followed by minimal change in the party's platform. My analysis of the Fianna Fáil case is focused on whether the party's change was indeed a response to the 2011 vote losses, and on identifying the salient factors that led to this responsiveness. My analysis of the Liberal Democrat case is focused on uncovering what information was available to the party, and why the party did not significantly change its platform following extensive vote loss. These cases allow me to test my theory regarding the process of party responsiveness, and identify factors that may affect the likelihood of a party responding to vote loss.

The thesis begins with a literature review which discusses existing studies examining party responsiveness to previous elections. I analyse the empirical approaches of such studies, noting the significant variation in the conceptualisation of poor electoral performance and of the measurement of the independent and dependent variables. While noting that these differences have likely contributed to significant variation in results, I identify issues with existing approaches that have likely failed to accurately depict parties' responses to previous election results. I discuss how the two main approaches to measuring electoral performance – one focusing on the vote share of the responding party, the other on the vote share of rival party families – overlook the importance of specific electoral threat and certainty of outcomes in provoking party change. Moreover, I identify shortcomings specific to studies of responsiveness to loss to mainstream parties, noting that overly broad measures of change do not reflect the specific ways in which risk-averse parties would change their platforms in order to address instances of vote loss.

The literature review also discusses the failure of existing literature to examine the process of responsiveness, and how this restricts our ability to make causal claims about the relationship between election results at t and party platforms at $t+1$. It then moves on to discuss how previous literature, both in the specific area of responsiveness to election results and in the more general area of party change, suggests an impact of the type of parties involved. As well as potentially explaining variation in party responsiveness, I argue that understanding the indirect impact of elections and voter choice likely vary based on the parties involved and the dynamics between them. While some studies have

controlled for variation in the ideology of responding party, I note that these measurements are not always reliable. Moreover, I argue that there is potentially variation not just between the ideology of the responding party or between the type of party posing a threat, but between *pairs* of party types involved in an instance of voter loss, and that this is an important dynamic that has been overlooked in previous studies.

Having laid out issues with previous empirical studies of party responsiveness and questions that have been overlooked in these studies in the literature review, the thesis then proceeds with the theoretical framework. In the theoretical framework, I outline how this thesis addresses the issues identified in the literature review. I begin by identifying the assumptions and scope conditions of the empirical analysis that follows in the subsequent chapters. I then develop in depth the theory that forms the basis of my argument that accurately measuring party responsiveness requires an empirical approach capturing the specific electoral threat to which parties are responding. In doing so, I outline the reasons why the approach to measuring vote loss used in this thesis gives a more accurate picture of party responsiveness than the approaches used in previous studies, focusing on how my approach acknowledges the need for parties to have certainty about the outcome in order for responsiveness to occur. I also extend this logic to the measurement of change, arguing that the measure of platform change needs to reflect the appeal of the party to which votes have been lost in order to accurately measure the responsiveness of the party that has lost votes.

I then outline my theoretical expectations regarding how mainstream parties will respond when they have lost votes to radical-right parties (RRPs), green parties, and mainstream parties. I again emphasise the need to vary the dependent variable based on the ideology of the party siphoning votes. This is particularly relevant in the case of losses to mainstream parties, where existing studies rely on an overly broad measure of party platform that does not reflect the appeal of rival parties to which parties losing votes can be expected to respond. I then outline my theoretical expectations for the moderating effect of the types of party involved. I argue that while previous studies have expected responsiveness to be moderated by the ideology of the responding because of their proximity to the party siphoning votes, there are also structural reasons to expect mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties to respond differently. Thus, even though the empirical approach used in this thesis already accounts for the difference in electoral threat posed by proximal and non-proximal parties, there is still good reason to expect a

moderating effect of the ideology of the responding party. Furthermore, I argue that the niche status of the party siphoning votes may also have a moderating effect on responsiveness because of their narrow appeal. Beyond explaining additional variation in responsiveness, this has important practical implications because of the policy focus of both niche parties and their voters, and the importance of indirect influence on policy outcomes to niche parties and their voters.

Finally, the theoretical framework discusses the process of responsiveness. I outline and justify the assumptions on which the theory of party responsiveness is based, as well as discussing potential alternative hypotheses. In doing so, I identify situations in which a party may not respond to instances of vote loss, the likelihood of these potential explanations, and how these can be tested. This discussion provides the theoretical basis for the analysis of the process of party responsiveness presented in chapter 5.

Chapter 4 introduces the quantitative dataset and presents the results of the quantitative analysis. I begin by describing the independent and dependent variables. In the case of the independent variable, I argue that measuring the extent of vote loss to individual party families accurately captures the threat that acts as a stimulus for parties to respond, as well as allowing for variation in the dependent variable. As such, I argue that this approach reflects the theoretical basis for responsiveness, outlined in chapter 3, to a greater degree than the approaches used by previous studies.

In the case of the dependent variable, I outline how the measure of responsiveness to mainstream parties differs from the use of the MARPOR *rile* score used in previous studies, and how it addresses some of the issues that have been identified with that approach. Reflecting the conceptualisation of party competition developed in the theoretical framework, I present measures of party change in terms of both position and salience. I then outline the dependent variable used in the models measuring the responsiveness of niche parties compared to mainstream parties. This variable measures change across the entirety of a party's manifesto between t and $t+1$, thus allowing comparison between instances of vote loss to different party families.

Following a brief discussion of the control variables used and an outline of the regression models, I present the results of the regression analysis. For each party-election included in the analysis, the extent of vote loss to green parties, RRP, mainstream-left parties, and mainstream-right parties is calculated. The models measure the correlation between extent

of vote loss to the relevant party family, and change in salience and position on the issue emphasised by that party family (environmentalism for losses to green parties, multiculturalism for RRP, economic or GAL-TAN for mainstream parties). These models are compared to models using vote share of the relevant party family as the dependent variable, in terms of both the regression coefficients and the overall goodness of fit of the model.

The results show responsiveness to both vote loss and the vote share of rival parties, but with responsiveness varying based on the parties involved. Similarly, I find that the effect of the ideology of the responding party varies depending on the type of party that is siphoning votes. I find no evidence that the direct loss approach is a better predictor of future party platform than the vote share model, with minimal changes in the goodness of fit between the two types of models. Indeed, in the majority of cases, models using the vote share of the relevant rival party family account for greater variation than the vote loss models. I argue that this suggests that parties are more concerned with the electoral opportunities indicated by the success of other parties than with the electoral threats posed by those parties.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the process of responsiveness. I begin by outlining the results of the survey administered to parliamentarians in 6 countries. The questionnaire focuses on gathering data regarding the information available to political parties following elections, and perceptions within parties about electoral performance. I also interrogate the factors that influence the compilation of party manifestos, and the relative prioritisation of previous election results in that process. I discuss the implications of these results for the assumptions and theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2, and how they may explain the results presented in chapter 4.

The chapter then moves onto the qualitative process-tracing of two case studies representing diverse cases: Fianna Fáil's response to the 2011 Irish general election, characterised by a high degree of platform change, and the Liberal Democrats' response to the 2015 UK general election, characterised by minimal platform change. This allows me to test the theorised process of responsiveness outlined in chapter 4. I find evidence to support the idea that a shared understanding within the party regarding the causes of vote loss is important for facilitating responsiveness to vote loss. I also find that parties can respond to more than one stimulus for change at once, and that thus hypotheses regarding the extent of party responsiveness to different stimuli are not necessarily mutually

exclusive. The results are also enlightening regarding the informational environment in which parties respond to previous elections. I find that post-election reviews are not ubiquitous, and that where they do occur, they do not necessarily make a significant impression on parliamentarians.

As well as addressing gaps in academic literature, I believe that this thesis also has some important practical implications. The main avenue through which voters can affect political outcomes is generally perceived to be by using their votes to determine the make-up of the next government. However, given the importance of parties' electoral platforms in determining political outcomes, understanding the influence that voters have over these platforms is also an important aspect of parties' representative role. Determining the extent of parties' responsiveness to vote loss is central to understanding the full impact of voters' participation in democracy. Where parties do respond to vote loss by changing their platforms, voters have had an indirect effect on the contents of party platforms. Thus, even if a given vote is not decisive in determining the outcome of an election, if it affects the platform that another party presents at a subsequent election, that vote can still affect future political outcomes. As such, the findings of this thesis indicate the impact of vote choice, giving a broader picture than an approach which just sees voters as potentially determining the outcome of elections. Even where voters are met with an election result that they do not support, understanding this additional impact of their involvement may go some way to alleviating voter disillusionment.

Moreover, this thesis has implications for how we perceive political parties. Parties that respond consistently and strongly to vote loss represent the extremes of vote-seeking behaviour, sacrificing sincere policy beliefs in order to get elected. By contrast, parties that do not respond to vote loss represent the policy-focused party, aimed at promoting certain policies even at the expense of vote and office benefits. The extent of party responsiveness thus informs our understanding of the role of parties within representative democracy. To what degree they represent voters by adjusting their platform to match voter preferences, and to what degree to they represent voters by promoting policy at the expense of votes with the aim of influencing policy outcomes indirectly? As well as speaking to the broader literature about the trade-off between policy and votes and the literature about representative parties, this research affects how we understand political parties, and how we can assess their impact.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The question of what causes parties to change their platforms over time – the issues that they emphasise and the positions they take on those issues – has been the subject of significant discussion by scholars of electoral politics (e.g. Laver, 1989; Harmel and Janda, 1994; Adams, Haupt, and Stoll, 2009; Ezrow et al. 2011; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020). This question has significant implications for the policy alternatives made available to voters and, ultimately, policy outcomes. One motivation for party change that has often been discussed and analysed is previous electoral performance, with a particular emphasis on poor electoral performance (e.g. Budge, 1994; Adams et al. 2004; Somer-Topcu, 2009). The logic behind the theory of poor performance at one election, t , leading to changes in a party's platform at the subsequent election, $t+1$, is fairly intuitive: if a party performs poorly at an election, its platform is failing to attract voters; thus, in order to avoid a subsequent poor performance, it needs to change its platform.

Yet despite the straightforward nature of this hypothesis, the existing literature has not provided a clear-cut picture of the impact of electoral performance at t on party platform at $t+1$. Results have varied significantly across studies, and the empirical designs employed often fail to accurately reflect the theory behind this hypothesis. Existing research has also tended to overlook the importance of the process by which parties adopt platforms at $t+1$, and the information that is available at and used during this process.

This literature review lays the groundwork for the subsequent analysis in this thesis by exploring existing studies on the question of party responsiveness to poor electoral performance, and identifying issues with previous empirical approaches and gaps in the literature. In doing so, it outlines the importance of the new empirical strategy used in this thesis, and highlights the areas relevant to the issue of party responsiveness to be analysed in subsequent chapters.

The literature review begins with an outline of the findings of studies on party responses to poor electoral performance, and the variation in methodological approaches employed by these studies. I interrogate the impact of this variation, and explore how different approaches to measuring both electoral performance and party change may affect results. I also highlight issues with these methodological approaches, with a particular focus on how the measurements and methodologies used do not consistently reflect the theoretical

basis of a relationship between electoral performance and future party platforms. I then give a brief overview of the approach used in the empirical analysis in this thesis, in order to highlight how I aim to address these issues and give a more comprehensive and accurate picture of party responsiveness to poor electoral performance.

I then discuss the failure of the existing literature to study in depth the process of responsiveness – in other words, how a party goes from one set of election results at t to presenting a particular platform at $t+1$. I outline the importance of understanding this process for interpreting and explaining quantitative results, and particularly for understanding why parties may not respond to poor electoral performance. Finally, I discuss how existing evidence on party responsiveness to previous electoral performance and other stimuli for change suggests an important impact of the types of parties involved. I examine the extent to which the effects of party ideology on responsiveness have previously been studied, and identify a need for more attention to this question in the case of competition between mainstream parties. I also highlight how existing literature points to the importance of distinguishing between vote loss to niche and mainstream parties, and briefly outline how this may explain further variation in party performance.

2.2. Existing empirical approaches to measuring electoral performance

The existing literature on party responsiveness to previous election results is characterised by two main approaches. The first examines whether poor electoral performance, generally represented by a decrease in vote share, leads to changes in party platforms (Budge, 1994; Janda et al. 1995; Adams et al. 2004; Somer-Topcu, 2009). The second involves examining parties' responses to the increase in vote share of rival party families, thus focusing on the electoral fortunes of other parties rather than those of the responding party (Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries, 2014; Abou-Chadi, 2016; Westlake, 2018).

Findings presented in these studies vary significantly. Budge et al. (1994) find the past results hypothesis to be a reliable explanation of party change, while Janda et al. (1995) find poor electoral performance to be a necessary but insufficient condition for change. More recently, studies have identified an effect of election results on future party platform that is conditional on other factors, such as the types of parties involved (Abou-Chadi, 2016) or the timing of elections (Somer-Topcu, 2009). However, other studies, such as Adams et al. (2004), have found no significant relationship. Thus, previous studies have not led to a clear picture about the impact of election results at t on party platforms at $t+1$.

More importantly than the variation in findings, however, are issues with the empirical designs used in these studies. Previous studies have generally failed to fully reflect the theory grounding the hypothesis of party responsiveness to prior election results, regardless of whether they measure responsiveness to a decline in the responding party's own vote share, or an increase in that of rival parties. The logic of the party responsiveness hypothesis is that poor electoral performance indicates a failure of a party to achieve its goals, and a need to alter its strategy in order to avoid further failure.¹ Particularly in an uncertain electoral environment, previous election results can reduce uncertainty and act as a signal to parties as to what the right move is (Budge, 1994; Harmel and Svåsand, 1997). However, in studies measuring the relationship between electoral performance at t and platform at $t+1$ (Budge, 1994; Janda et al. 1995), the measurements of electoral performance do not account for whether uncertainty is actually reduced by the result.

Depending on what the election result indicates, a party that has performed poorly at an election may not be in a position to respond. For example, if party a sees a reduction in its vote share at t , uncertainty is not meaningfully reduced by the election result if the voters defecting from a are sufficiently dispersed in how they vote. Suppose a system with one left-right dimension of competition with party A at the mid-point of the left-right spectrum, party B at the left-most point, and party C at the right-most point. If half of the voters defecting from A move to B and the other half move to C , A is still lacking a clear signal about how it should change its platform, despite the indication from the loss of votes that its current platform has not worked.

By contrast, studies that use as their independent variable the vote share of a particular party family at t (Han, 2015; Abou-Chadi, 2016) are measuring responsiveness to an electoral threat posed by a particular party family (Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries, 2014). This reflects the focus of Harmel and Svåsand (1997) on the electoral threat posed by new parties which they believe reduces uncertainty for established parties – though it is not clear why this logic only applies to threats posed by new parties. Crucially, Harmel and Svåsand (1997) note that in order for responsiveness to previous election results to occur, there needs to be a threat *on which the responding party can blame its own poor performance*.

¹ The hypothesis thus assumes that the responding party is focused on electoral success. This assumption is discussed further in chapter 3.

However, more recent quantitative works fail to consider in their empirical design whether the party family that is allegedly posing a threat is posing a threat to the party whose responsiveness is being measured. For example, Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries (2014) measure the change in parties' emphasis on environmentalism in line with the vote share of green parties on the basis that a green party "is a greater threat to another party if it attracts a significant share of votes" (366). Yet this idea only holds if responding party *A* is losing votes to green party *B*. If not, then *A* has no incentive to change its platform on environmentalism, because it has not received a signal that its voters are being poached by green party *B*. While the authors acknowledge that responsiveness will be greater the closer *A* and *B* are to each other ideologically because closer parties are more likely to poach votes from one another, this does not fully capture the concept of a direct electoral threat.

While it is plausible that responsiveness is affected by ideological proximity, as discussed in section 2.5, there are reasons to avoid using a measure of proximity as indicative of the extent of the threat posed by one party to another. Firstly, given the risks involved in a party changing its platform,² it is unclear why a party would respond to a platform to which it has not lost votes just because it is proximal. Secondly, there is the possibility of voters defecting from one party to another non-proximal party, as highlighted by Bale et al. (2010) in their analysis of the responses by social democratic parties to electoral threats posed by RRP (radical right parties). This is also supported by Carter's (2013) findings that a number of green parties in Europe have joined alliances with mainstream-right parties and adopt a right-wing platform on a number of issues, suggesting a capacity to attract voters away from mainstream-right parties. Thirdly, left- and right-wing parties vary in more ways than their ideology, namely organisation (Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke, 2022) and the relative prioritisation of policy-seeking behaviours relative to office-seeking and vote-seeking behaviours (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll, 2009).

Given the importance of electoral threat in provoking responsiveness, which is further discussed in chapter 3, there is a need to more accurately capture the direct electoral threat posed by *B* to *A* in order to accurately measure responsiveness. To my knowledge the only quantitative study that accounts for the direct threat posed by a party family to a given party whose responsiveness is being measured is Han (2015). Analysing mainstream

² These are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

responsiveness to RRP, the models include a variable measuring the change in the difference between RRP vote share and the vote share of the responding mainstream party. He finds that mainstream-right parties respond to a rise in RRP vote share regardless of the direct threat, but that mainstream-left parties only respond to RRP vote share when there is such a direct threat. This suggests a potentially important role for direct electoral threats in determining responsiveness, and that indeed the findings of previous studies may not indicate the full extent of party responsiveness to election results because they fail to consider electoral threat in their models. There is a need to study responsiveness to direct electoral threats outside the context of RRP.

Thus, one of the central issues with existing literature on this question is a failure to design empirical strategies that meaningfully measure the extent of electoral threat posed by one party family to another. As further discussed in chapter 3, this electoral threat is a central part of the theory of responsiveness in that it gives a party losing votes a clear signal to which it can respond. This issue with existing empirical strategies may explain some of the null results that have been reported in previous studies. In overlooking the concept of electoral threat when designing empirical approaches, or in failing to accurately capture it, studies may be looking for party responsiveness where the theory would not actually expect there to be a response. One of the major contributions of this thesis is to design an empirical strategy that more accurately captures the concept of electoral threat to which parties are expected to respond. In chapter 4, I present the results of quantitative analyses examining the responsiveness of parties to the share of votes lost to individual party families, measured using data from post-election surveys. In doing so, I capture the extent of electoral threat posed by party *B* to party *A*, and thus the signal to which party *A* is hypothesised to respond. This means that my empirical approach reflects the theory on which the hypothesis of party responsiveness is based more directly than other studies that have addressed this question, and thus provides a more accurate picture of party responsiveness to election results.

2.3. Measuring change in party platforms

Existing studies also vary in their approach to measuring the dependent variable of change in party platforms between t and $t+1$. When using the term ‘platform’, I refer to the policy profile of the party in question: the issues on which it has developed policy proposals, the relative attention devoted to those proposals, and the substance of those proposals. Parties have a number of avenues through which to communicate their

platform to voters. These include party manifestos, social media content, parliamentary speeches, and press releases (Ivanusch, 2024). All of these are used to various extents and in different ways to communicate to voters what issues are of concern to the party in question and what action they plan to take on these issues. The focus of this thesis is change in this policy profile in response to election results.

Given the different ways that parties can communicate their platform, previous studies have taken different approaches to measuring party platforms. These include analysing media coverage of parties (Helbling and Tresch, 2011), parliamentary speeches (Laver, Benoit, and Garry, 2003) and social media (Gilardi et al. 2022). The vast majority of studies measuring party platform, however, do so through an analysis of election manifestos (e.g. Adams, Haupt, and Stoll, 2009; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Abou-Chadi, 2016; Dancygier and Margalit, 2020). Most studies using manifesto-based measures of party platform do so using data taken from the Manifesto Project (MARPOR) dataset. The MARPOR dataset assigns each (quasi-) sentence of a manifesto to one of 56 categories. For each observation, which represents a given party manifesto, the proportion of the manifesto devoted to each category is calculated on the basis of those codings. While some categories have a natural opposite (e.g. *per101* Foreign Special Relationships: Positive and *per102* Foreign Special Relationships: Negative), others do not (e.g. *per408* Economic Goals). There are also some categories that are explicitly positional, but do not have a natural opposite (e.g. *per411* Technology and Infrastructure: Positive, with no equivalent 'negative' category) (Lehmann et al. 2024).

As discussed in chapter 4, there are some issues with the use of manifestos as a measure of party platform, such as the fact that voters may not engage with them, and the fact that they are not necessarily a realistic depiction of what a party plans to do in office. In addition to these issues, it is important to note that the role of manifestos varies across political contexts. In many countries, they are seen as central to the election campaign, as is the case in Ireland (Däubler, 2012), Austria (Dolezal et al. 2012), and the United Kingdom (Bara, 2006). In other countries, such as Denmark, there is no tradition of regularly publishing manifestos ahead of elections (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2019). Thus, while the use of manifestos to measure changes in party platforms may omit some parties and countries, the availability and comparability of manifesto data has led to the proliferation of manifesto-based studies of party platforms. In this thesis, I similarly

use data from manifestos to measure change in party platforms. This approach is discussed further in chapter 4.

Studies that examine responsiveness to a rise in a particular party family generally design a measure of change that reflects the major issues addressed by that party family. Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries (2014) use as the measure of attention to environmentalism the proportion of the manifesto coded as *per501* Environmental Protection. Abou-Chadi introduces a measure of environmental position, calculated as

$$\frac{per501 - per410}{per501 + per410}$$

on the basis of the idea that “an emphasis on industrial productivity and economic growth can be regarded as opposed to a focus on a pollution-free environment and more sustainable growth” (425). Following this logic, the environmentalism salience measure is calculated as

$$per501 + per410$$

In the case of multiculturalism, Abou-Chadi (2016) calculates salience as

$$per608 + per607$$

and the positional measure as

$$\frac{per608 - per607}{per608 + per607}$$

with *per608* being the proportion of the manifesto coded as Multiculturalism: Negative and *per607* the proportion coded as Multiculturalism: Positive. This positional measure is also used by Westlake (2018). Han (2022) simply uses the difference between *per608* and *per607* as the measure of multiculturalism position. Thus while there is some difference in approaches to calculation, the measures of position and salience in studies on responsiveness to niche parties are centred on the issue that represents the narrow appeal of the niche family in question (Meguid, 2005).

By contrast, where studies have examined parties’ responsiveness to their own prior electoral performance, the measure of platform change has tended to be broader. Because the response is not defined by the narrow appeal of a particular party prompting the response, there is no one issue on which the poorly performing parties can be expected to respond. Many studies (e.g. Budge, 1994; Adams et al. 2004; Adams and Somer-Topcu,

2009)³ use the *rile* measure included in the MARPOR dataset, which is compiled by subtracting the sum of (quasi-) sentences devoted to left-wing issues from the sum of (quasi-)sentences devoted to right-wing issues (Lehmann et al., 2024). The categories designated as left and right in this measure are

Left	Right
Per103: Anti-Imperialism	Per104: Military: Positive
Per105: Military: Negative	Per201: Freedom and Human Rights
Per106: Peace	Per203: Constitutionalism: Positive
Per107: Internationalism: Positive	Per305: Political Authority
Per403: Market Regulation	Per401: Free Market Economy
Per404: Economic Planning	Per402: Incentives: Positive
Per406: Protectionism: Positive	Per407: Protectionism: Negative
Per412: Controlled Economy	Per414: Economic Orthodoxy
Per413: Nationalisation	Per505: Welfare State Limitation
Per504: Welfare State Expansion	Per601: National Way of Life: Positive
Per506: Education Expansion	Per603: Traditional Morality: Positive

³ Budge (1994) uses an earlier version of the *rile* measure that is based on the same logic as that employed by the other studies mentioned and included in the current version of the MARPOR dataset, but includes fewer categories.

Per701: Labour Groups: Positive	Per605: Law and Order: Positive
Per202: Democracy	Per606: Civic Mindedness: Positive

Table 2.1: Categories used to compile the *rile* measure included in the MARPOR dataset
(Lehmann et al., 2024)

laid out in table 2.1. However, the *rile* measure has been the subject of significant criticism. One strand of this criticism focuses on the overreliance on economic issues in this measure, despite the increasing importance of what Benoit and Laver (2007, p. 100) refer to as “‘new’ dimensions of politics’. Thus, using *rile* as the measure of a party’s position overlooks issues such as euroscepticism and attitudes towards non-economic demographic groups (e.g. the LGBTQIA+ community and religious minorities). In support of Benoit and Laver’s position on this question is a body of literature demonstrating the rise of political competition outside of the economic dimension (Kriesi et al. 2006; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson, 2002). As such, one issue with using changes in a party’s *rile* position to measure responsiveness is that it does not necessarily reflect the substance of the stimulus to which the theory would expect a party to respond. If party *A* loses votes to party *B* for its support for abortion, for example, responsiveness by party *A* may not be picked up by a model using change in *rile* position as the dependent variable because *per604* Traditional Morality: Negative is not included in the *rile* measure.

While it is true that a handful of non-economic categories are included in the calculation of *rile* position, such as *per603* Traditional Morality: Positive and *per601* National Way of Life: Positive, their inclusion doesn’t helpfully address this problem. Rather, it simply subsumes two different policy dimensions – economic and GAL-TAN (Green Alternative Libertarian – Traditional Authoritarian Nationalist) – under one label. This has the potential to lead to significant measurement issues given the possibility of a party being left-wing on the economy and right-wing on GAL-TAN issues, or vice-versa. Thus, while studies examining responsiveness to niche parties have specific measures of platform change reflecting the likely reasons that voters defected to the niche party posing the electoral threat, in the case of mainstream parties losing to mainstream parties, studies use a measure that does not necessarily capture a party’s change in platform on the issues that caused them to lose votes in the first place. As discussed previously, the idea of previous

election results prompting responsiveness is based on them providing a clear signal as to how a party should change its platform. The theory is that the contents of the platform of the party that siphoned votes is indicative of the reasons for the failure of the platform of the party that lost votes. Thus, because of its lack of focus on a particular dimension of competition, the *rile* measure is likely not accurately measuring responsiveness to mainstream parties because it is not measuring change on the specific dimension on which responsiveness is occurring.

Another issue with the use of *rile* is that it is solely a positional measure, and studies using this measure as their dependent variable do not supplement it with a measure of salience. This may, in part, arise from the fact that the *rile* dimension covers too wide a range of issues for a salience measure to be meaningful. However, this comes despite the fact, firstly, that the CMP has its origins in a desire to measure salience rather than position (Budge, 2001), and secondly an increasing focus within literature on party competition on issue, as opposed to positional, competition (e.g. Green and Hobolt, 2008; De Sio and Weber, 2014; Wagner and Meyer, 2014). As noted by Green-Pedersen (2007), parties have an incentive to emphasise the issues that they wish to see dominate political competition – i.e. those issues on which they believe they can attract more votes. Thus, issue emphasis forms part of the strategic considerations of a party ahead of contesting an election. While this has been addressed in studies focusing on responsiveness to niche parties, such as those by Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries (2014) and Abou-Chadi (2016), there are to my knowledge no quantitative studies that examine how mainstream parties respond in terms of salience when they lose votes to other mainstream parties.

Thus, the reliance of studies measuring responsiveness in general (as opposed to responsiveness specifically to niche parties) on the *rile* measure points to two gaps in the literature on responsiveness that this thesis aims to address. Firstly, studies examining responsiveness to poor electoral performance in general do not take into account the specific policy areas that drove their poor electoral performance. This means that the positional measure used is likely too broad to pick up on the extent of responsiveness to poor electoral performance because that responsiveness is restricted to specific policy areas, while other areas involved in the calculation of the *rile* measure remain unchanged. In the theoretical framework in chapter 3, I expand on the importance of identifying the policy issues driving voters to defect from one party to another and thereby causing poor electoral performance. In order to address this gap, in chapter 4, I outline an approach to

measure responsiveness to vote loss to mainstream parties based on whether votes were likely lost on the economic or GAL-TAN dimension. Secondly, this focus on identifying the dimension driving vote loss also allows me to develop a measure of salience responsiveness to mainstream parties, again outlined in chapter 4. This measure allows for a fuller picture of responsiveness by mainstream parties to other mainstream parties. While the recent trend in the literature has been towards a focus on responsiveness to niche parties, I believe this fills an important gap in the literature both on party responsiveness and on party change in general. Given the dominance of party systems by mainstream parties, understanding responsiveness to vote loss to mainstream parties is central to understanding how parties change their platforms from one election to the next.

2.4. The process of (non-)responsiveness

As outlined previously, the theory of parties responding to poor electoral performance is based on the idea of parties as vote-seeking, and of election results being perceived as useful indicators of public opinion. However, there is a tendency within the literature on responsiveness to neglect studying the process that occurs within parties through which election results at t are turned into an electoral strategy at $t+1$. In studies that have observed change in parties, the lack of focus on this process means that it is not always clear that the relationship between election results at t and party platform at $t+1$ is the result of a conscious, strategic decision to respond to a perceived electoral threat. Moreover, in instances where parties do not change following poor electoral performance, the lack of study of this process means that we lack an understanding of why such non-responsiveness occurs.

The literature on party responsiveness to election results is replete with null findings. Many of these have mentioned possible explanations for the lack of evidence of responsiveness. Adams et al. (2004) note that explanations for party behaviour may lie “in party leaders’ informational environments and/or the perceived risks associated with changing policy direction” (609), and recommend that future research focus on why parties behave in this way. Abou-Chadi (2016) hypothesises that the lack of evidence found in favour of responsiveness to green parties is a result of their status as issue owners, with non-responsiveness being a strategic decision to try and defuse the issue. However, no additional analysis is done to test this idea. While Janda et al. (1995) conclude that vote loss is a necessary, but not sufficient, cause of party change, they do not look deeper into any of the cases included in the analysis to try and identify what is driving the differences

in outcomes. What sets apart cases where vote loss is followed by party change from those where it is not?

The lack of focus on this 'why' question likely results in part from the emphasis on quantitative approaches to answering this question. As time has gone on, scholars examining the question of responsiveness have begun to include more variables in their analysis, such as time between elections (Somer-Topcu, 2009), ideology of the responding party (Ezrow et al. 2011; Spoon, Hobolt, and De Vries, 2014), and government/opposition status (Somer-Topcu and Zar, 2014; van de Wardt, 2015). This has gone some way to identifying parties' considerations in deciding how to proceed following vote loss. The qualitative analysis of Bale et al. (2010) is notable for highlighting the salient aspects of the contexts in which the parties analysed made strategic decisions, such as intra-party unity and the behaviour of other parties on both the left and the right. However, there is little focus on the actual decision-making process, and little evidence to show that the positions taken by the parties studied were the result of strategic decisions in response to electoral developments. For example, discussing the case of social democratic parties in Austria, Bale et al. (2010, 81) note that "[the ÖVP's] reaction to its disastrous 1999 general election result was to abandon the strategy of isolating the FPÖ" in favour of adopting the position of the far-right. However, it is unclear what leads the authors to the conclusion that this move towards a more restrictive position on immigration was adopted specifically in response to the electoral threat posed by the far-right, rather than some other stimulus. Moreover, none of the cases analysed involve a party exhibiting non-responsiveness to the electoral threat posed.

Similarly, Harmel and Svåsand (1997) discuss strategies of mainstream parties responding to new parties in Norway and Denmark. However, again, little is done to explain the strategies adopted, or investigate the motivations or logic behind decisions leading up to the adoption of these strategies. Some hypotheses are discussed, but the lack of investigation into the decision-making process means that there is no direct evidence to support them. One of the theories proposed is that the responsiveness of the conservative parties in question to the threat from the far-right was moderated by countervailing threats posed by other mainstream parties. While they consider evidence on the extent of the threat posed by rival parties (both mainstream and far-right), there is no investigation as to whether the changes in platform that they observe were the result of concerns about such threats.

Thus, while quantitative studies have identified a range of factors that affect responsiveness and qualitative studies have produced theories explaining responsiveness in a variety of cases, little research has been done to highlight the role that election results at t play in the process of compiling a manifesto at $t+1$. Without such research, it is difficult to make causal claims about the relationship between election results and future party platforms, because we don't know whether parties do indeed consider the former when making decisions about the latter. This is particularly important given other potential explanations that could lead to a party changing its platform in a way that may look like responsiveness to prior election results, such as changes in public opinion between elections (Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow, 2011).

An understanding of the decision-making process that leads to the production of a manifesto at $t+1$ is also crucial in interpreting instances of non-responsiveness. Assuming a party is vote-seeking, if it has performed poorly, as indicated by a large number of defectors, why would it not change its platform in order to avoid similarly poor performance in the future? Again, this has important implications for the representative role of parties – namely the relative extent to which they should be perceived as seeking votes at any cost and promoting a particular ideology respectively. As mentioned previously, studies have suggested some reasons for non-responsiveness, such as a lack of party unity (Bale et al. 2010) or uncertainty about the reliability of information (Somer-Topcu, 2009). However, again because of a lack of research that investigates the motivators for decisions about party platforms at $t+1$, it is difficult to develop any strong theory about why parties sometimes do not respond as hypothesised.

Previous literature has suggested that parties vary significantly in their approach to compiling manifestos, making it difficult to develop generalisable conclusions about this process. One major point of variation is the actors involved in deciding on party platform. This ranges from highly centralised parties where the platform is almost exclusively the domain of party leadership to highly decentralised parties where leadership, parliamentarians, and the party membership have a say (Dalton, 1985). Lehrer (2012) argues that this variation comes from the difference in priorities between rank-and-file members and the parliamentary party, with the former being more policy-focused because they don't get the same utility from office benefits as the latter. The effects of the extent of party centralisation are not entirely clear, however. Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke (2022) find that a given intra-party voting mechanism does not necessarily lead to a given

developmental trajectory for that party. This again highlights variation between parties in the decision-making process surrounding manifestos, and the need for an in-depth analysis of such processes.

Literature on manifestos has, however, also identified a number of commonalities across parties in terms of how they approach manifestos. One such common thread is the importance of previously published documents. In the case of Irish party manifestos in 2007, Däubler (2012) finds that all parties relied to some extent on previous party positions when compiling manifestos, such as those outlined in press releases, European election manifestos, and party policy papers. This is in line with Dolezal et al's (2012) finding that the drafting process is not detached from parties' existing work, but rather a part of that process that intensifies ahead of an election. Kavanagh (1981) also finds that the content of manifestos is derived from documents published in previous years. A number of studies have also identified the tendency of parties to build the bulk of a given manifesto around a small number of key themes (Bara, 2006; Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al. 2012). Aside from these insights, however, there is little to be found in this literature on manifesto-writing that indicates what influences their content. Notably, none of these studies say anything about whether there is an influence of previous election results, either directly on the manifestos, or on the other documents from which much of their content is derived. This is a particularly important question given the centrality of manifestos in studies measuring responsiveness to election results.

In order to more fully understand why empirical findings on responsiveness to electoral results do not consistently match theoretical expectations, it is crucial to develop some understanding of the processes that parties go through between elections. In particular, more research is needed on what information is available to parties and how reliable this information is and is perceived to be. With regards to manifestos, there is a need for more research on what information is used to inform their contents, and in particular under what conditions the results of previous elections are likely to affect the contents of manifestos. In developing a deeper understanding of this process, we can begin to understand why parties sometimes fail to change in response to poor election results, despite the clear negative signal from the electorate.

In chapter 3, I develop a theory of the process parties would likely have to undertake in order for responsiveness to election results to occur in the way we expect. I also identify the assumptions often made – though rarely explicitly stated – in theoretical accounts of

party responsiveness. Building on this theory, another major contribution of this thesis is to test assumptions around what information is available to parties through survey data analysis and process tracing cases of manifesto compilation following instances of poor electoral performance. This qualitative research, presented in chapter 5, also looks at the process of manifesto compilation, with a focus on identifying what information and considerations influence manifesto content following poor electoral performance. This is an important step in filling in gaps in our existing knowledge about how parties perceive electoral performances, and the extent to which it influences future party platforms. Understanding the informational environment of political elites following electoral failure and when compiling manifestos is crucial for our ability to make causal claims about the relationship between election results and future party platforms.

2.5. Impact of party types

Previous studies have done some work to identify variation in how different types of parties respond to various stimuli for change, with a large amount of attention devoted to the differences between left-wing and right-wing. Adams, Haupt, and Stoll (2009) find that left-wing parties are less responsive to changes in public opinion than their right-wing counterparts. They argue that this is likely because left-wing parties tend to be more ideological, and also have formal ties to groups like trade unions, both of which restrict their ability to change, thus making them generally less responsive. Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis (2013) find that parties that are leadership-dominated tend to respond to shifts in the opinion of the mean voter, while activist-dominated parties respond to shifts in the opinion of the party's existing voter base. Again, left-wing parties tend to be more activist-dominated than the more centralised right-wing parties (Fagerholm, 2016; Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke, 2022), meaning that the impact of party organisation is a potential cause of differences between party families in terms of responsiveness.

Thus, based on these findings about variation in response to stimuli depending on party family, it is likely that parties also differ in their responses to previous election results depending on party family. This question has received some attention, though most of the focus has been dedicated to responses to RRP. Several papers have found an important effect of party ideology on responsiveness to the growth of RRP. Weeks and Allen (2022) find that parties do respond to the rise of RRP by decreasing the emphasis on non-economic demographic groups in their manifesto, and that this effect is particularly strong for social democratic parties. Similarly, van Spanje (2010) finds that while both left- and

right-wing parties respond to the rise of RRP, left-wing parties move to a more restrictive position on multiculturalism to a greater degree than right-wing parties as RRP vote share increases. By contrast, Abou-Chadi (2016) finds that parties are more responsive to RRP in terms of salience the more right-wing they are, while Han (2015) finds that right-wing mainstream parties will accommodate RRP by moving to a more restrictive position on multiculturalism.

Outside of responses to RRP, while many analyses looking at responsiveness to previous election results differentiate between left- and right-wing parties, few study how responsiveness differs between party families. For example, Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries (2014) find that left-wing parties place a greater emphasis on the environment overall than right-wing parties, but do not examine whether emphasis placed on the environment by left-wing parties is affected by the rise of green parties to a greater extent than in the case of right-wing parties. Abou-Chadi (2016) does include an interaction to measure variation in responsiveness to green parties depending on left-right placement, and finds that the further to the right a party is located, the more it de-emphasises environmental issues in response to green party success.

In their examination of responses to the positional shifts of other parties, Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) find that parties are particularly responsive to shifts by other parties that are members of the same ideological family. Similarly, Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2015) find that parties are more responsive to the issue agendas of parties of the same family than other parties. This highlights the importance of accounting for the ideological family of both the party that is responding and the party to which it is responding, which is often overlooked in studies of mainstream party competition. For example, neither Janda et al. (1995) or Budge (1994) include an analysis of the effect of party ideology on responsiveness in their studies. Similarly, neither Adams et al. (2004) nor Somer-Topcu (2009) include any measure of party ideology in their regression analyses, let alone an interaction effect between party ideology and vote loss. The absence of party ideology as a control is particularly concerning given that, by definition, different party families vary significantly in their positions on the left-right scale. Thus, any study examining changes in that position should include some measure of party ideology as a control variable, in order to ensure that our understanding of positional change is based on holding party ideology at t constant. Moreover, as discussed above, the fact that studies on responsiveness to other stimuli for change suggest an impact of the ideologies of the

parties involved, it is possible that these ideologies would also have an impact on responsiveness to previous electoral performance.

Thus, on the question of how responsiveness to vote loss differs depending on the types of parties involved, this thesis makes a number of contributions. Firstly, the quantitative analysis in chapter 4 includes interactions between the extent of vote loss to the relevant party family and the family of the party that is losing votes. This allows me to analyse the impact of party ideology on responsiveness to vote loss, rather than just the impact of party ideology on attention given to a particular niche issue, as in some of the studies mentioned above. Secondly, because of the consideration of direct vote loss between parties, the empirical approach used allows me to study how responsiveness differs across different party dyads in the context of mainstream party competition: right-wing loss to right-wing parties, left-wing loss to left-wing parties, right-wing loss to left-wing parties, and left-wing loss to right-wing parties. While previous studies on party responsiveness to general stimuli for change have given some indication of how responsiveness might vary across these dyads, this is to my knowledge the first empirical test of such variation in responsiveness to vote loss. Given the implications of party responsiveness for our understandings of the impact of voter behaviour, it is important to know what that responsiveness looks like across various contexts of party competition.

Also in terms of the impact of types of party on responsiveness, while studies have focused on both mainstream responsiveness to niche parties and mainstream responsiveness to mainstream parties, to date there are no studies that examine the variation in party responsiveness depending on whether the electoral threat is coming from a niche or a mainstream party. This is despite the fact that studies examining responsiveness to niche parties tend to find more substantively and statistically significant results than those examining responsiveness to mainstream parties (e.g. the significant findings of Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries, 2014; Abou-Chadi, 2016; Westlake, 2018; Weeks and Allen, 2022).

The lack of attention to the comparison between the impact of mainstream parties on mainstream parties and niche parties on mainstream parties may result in part from the relatively little theoretical discussion in these studies on why niche parties would be particularly likely to provoke party change. Few of these studies devote attention to how the nature of niche parties may affect the propensity of mainstream parties to respond to them. Several of them discuss the characteristics of niche parties as outlined by Meguid (2005), and the strategies available to mainstream parties seeking to compete with them

(Weeks and Allen, 2022; van de Wardt, 2015; Spoon, Hobolt and de Vries, 2014), though only a handful go further and discuss how these characteristics may bring about responsiveness. Abou-Chadi (2016) highlights the ability of niche parties to act as issue entrepreneurs due to their focus on issues outside traditional dimensions of party competition. Bale et al. (2010) do not explicitly tie the nature of niche parties to responsiveness, but the idea of the conflicting pressures faced by social democratic parties competing with RRP's reflects the fact that niche parties campaign on issues that cut across existing dimensions of political competition. Overall, however, there is a lack of explicit theoretical discussion and empirical investigation into whether and why niche parties specifically are likely to differ from mainstream parties in their propensity to provoke responsiveness by other parties.

As such, as well as accounting for differences in party ideology, this thesis also explores the impact of whether votes have been lost to niche parties or mainstream parties. Again, because of the methodological approach introduced in chapter 4 that focuses on votes lost to specific parties rather than broader measures of prior electoral performance, it is possible to separately measure the impact of mainstream and niche parties. In chapter 3, I rely on existing studies of niche parties to develop a theory of why mainstream parties should respond differently to losing votes to niche parties than other mainstream parties. I then test this assumption in chapter 4 using regression analysis with a broad measure of manifesto change that can be equally applied in cases of loss to different party families, rather than those that are issue-specific used in the regressions that focus on losses to a particular party family.

2.6. Conclusion

While many studies have previously examined party responses to poor electoral performance, many of these have been characterised by a disconnect between the theoretical basis of the hypothesis of party responsiveness and the methodological approaches used to examine that responsiveness. As outlined in this literature review, studies measuring responsiveness to a decline in vote share (or decline in another measure of electoral performance) fail to account for how much of this decline is attributable to each party family, thus overlooking the importance of a clear signal being provided by an election result in order for responsiveness to happen. Studies measuring responsiveness to the growth of a particular ideological family, on the other hand, fail to account for the extent of the threat posed by that ideological family to the party whose responsiveness is

being measured. Thus, they overlook the electoral threat that is crucial for overcoming the inherent inertia of parties and provoking response. The empirical approach of this thesis, as outlined in chapters 3 and 4, is designed to address both of these issues by measuring the loss of votes from parties whose responsiveness is being measured to each relevant party family. In doing so, I hope to give a clearer picture of parties' responsiveness to the specific signals and threats represented by election results.

This literature review has also highlighted issues with measurements of change in the case of competition between mainstream parties. A reliance on the MARPOR *rile* index as a measure of party position simultaneously overlooks certain policy issues that are key elements of party competition in many contexts, such as education limitation and a move away from traditional morality, and subsume different dimensions of competition under one label, through the concomitant inclusion of issues as different as anti-imperialism and the welfare state. I have also outlined how reliable identification and measurement of the issues provoking vote loss are central to developing accurate measurements of responsiveness. Again, as outlined in chapters 3 and 4, this thesis introduces an approach that identifies the issues most likely to have led to poor electoral performance in each case on the basis of the main aspects of party competition in that election. By doing so, the qualitative analysis in this thesis will give a more accurate picture of the responsiveness of mainstream parties to other mainstream parties.

Finally, this literature review has identified two areas that have not been studied by previous studies. The first is the process that parties undertake in order to transform one set of election results into a subsequent electoral platform. Understanding this process is crucial to an accurate interpretation of quantitative results on this question, and to explaining the variation in the behaviour of parties that is suggested by previous empirical findings. In chapter 3 I explicitly identify the often-unspoken assumptions that form the basis of the theory of party responsiveness, and develop a theory regarding the conditions under which parties may fail to respond to elections. This theory is tested on the basis of two case studies in chapter 5. The second area unaddressed by previous studies is the impact of the types of parties involved, particularly in the case of competition between mainstream parties. In this literature review I have outlined why previous work suggests that the ideological family of both the party provoking a response and the responding party itself on the one hand, and the niche party status of the party provoking a response on the other, are important in explaining variation in party behaviour. In chapter 3, I

further discuss why and how these factors are likely to impact responsiveness, before testing these hypotheses in chapter 4.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

In the literature review, I identified gaps in existing literature on party responsiveness to vote loss. I also outlined how this thesis will improve our understanding of party responsiveness. The first major contribution of this thesis is to incorporate a measure of direct loss to specific party families into the empirical strategy. Previous quantitative studies have not incorporated such a dynamic despite a general agreement in the theoretical literature on the importance of an identifiable threat in prompting a party to change following an instance of vote loss. This focus on direct loss also allows me to measure the impact of vote loss to different types of parties, namely the differing impact of losses to niche and mainstream parties. The second major contribution is to examine the process that a party undergoes between one set of election results and a subsequent manifesto. Despite the centrality of this question to the overall theory of party responsiveness, it has often been overlooked as a result of the emphasis on quantitative studies in this area.

In this theoretical framework, I establish why we should focus on party responsiveness to vote loss to a specific party family, rather than a decrease in overall vote share, or an overall increase in the vote share of a competing party family. If responding to vote loss is a mechanism for vote maximisation, it follows that the response in question should be focused on recapturing those votes and mitigating future losses. Thus, such a response can only be accurately measured if we have an awareness of the party family to which those votes were lost, and thus also an awareness of the nature of the electoral threat to which a losing party is responding. Measuring the extent of losses to different types of parties also allows for an analysis of the differing impact of loss to various types of parties. In this chapter, I also discuss the consequences for strategy of ideology of the responding party, and the potential for different levels of responsiveness of losing parties to niche parties and mainstream parties.

In this chapter I also outline a theory regarding the process of responsiveness, and identify the implicit assumptions that underpin the idea of party responsiveness, but have not been tested in previous studies examining party responsiveness. In particular, in order for a party to respond to election results in a way that we would expect, several assumptions must hold surrounding the priorities of parties, the information available to parties, and

the way that decisions are made within parties. This discussion is crucial for informing the qualitative analysis of case studies in chapter 5, and in particular in understanding why we may see variation in parties' propensity to respond to vote loss.

The theoretical framework proceeds as follows. I begin by outlining the scope conditions and some assumptions of this thesis. Secondly, I discuss the importance of focusing on the extent of vote loss to a specific party family, and outline the theoretical reasons for this approach and the implications for empirical strategy. Thirdly, I discuss the various strategic options that parties have in terms of their response to vote loss, and form hypotheses about party responsiveness that will be tested in chapter 4. Fourthly, I discuss the role of niche parties, and outline my theoretical expectations regarding how niche and mainstream parties differ in their impact in terms of prompting party responsiveness. Finally, I outline the process of responsiveness, with a focus on the assumptions central to the theory of responsiveness that are implicit in previous studies.

3.2. Assumptions and scope conditions

I make two main assumptions regarding the nature of political parties. Firstly, in order for vote loss to elicit any significant response or reaction by parties, we must assume that they are vote-seeking. The idea of parties responding to vote loss is based on the assumption that votes lost through voters defecting to another party represent a failure of the party to achieve its main goal at elections. A vote-seeking party that has lost a number of votes through defections to another party (or party family) will take this as a sign that the platform adopted at t has failed: it has failed to convince existing voters that the party continues to be preferable to its competitors. Eager to avoid further voter defections (and thus further failure) at $t+1$, vote loss becomes a stimulus for platform change for a vote-seeking party.

As outlined by Müller and Strøm (1999), parties generally pursue three distinct, but related, goals: policy, office, and votes. The relative prioritisation of these goals will affect the decisions that a party makes. It is important to emphasise that all parties generally pursue all of these goals simultaneously: the value of this framework is in characterising how parties make decisions when these goals conflict. Conflicts between office and votes often arise after elections, when parties are forced to make decisions about abandoning manifesto pledges in order to reach a coalition agreement so as to gain office. Given that this thesis is concerned with the decisions that parties make before elections at $t+1$, such

conflicts arising after elections will not have an impact on strategic decisions about manifesto contents at $t+1$.

However, a conflict between office-seeking and vote-seeking strategies can also come into play prior to the election if party *A* believes it will not secure a majority, and will need to go into coalition. In such a situation, party *A* may adapt its electoral platform not to maximise its vote share, but rather to maximise its chances of gaining office. This often involves party *A* moving away from the ideal point of voters on a given issue and towards the ideal point of another party with which it anticipates going into coalition (Kolltveit, 2023). In this case, party *A* may avoid discussing certain issues that could help it to increase its vote share, but could also cost them the support of party *B* as a potential coalition partner. This is particularly relevant given findings that manifestos are used by parties as the basis of coalition negotiations (Dolezal et al. 2012; Kropivnik and Lipicer, 2018). Thus, circumstances do arise where parties are likely to prioritise office-seeking behaviour over vote maximisation. This is especially true for mainstream parties, with many definitions of the term focusing on parties' history of government participation or propensity for future government participation (Sartori, 1976; Abedi, 2004; Moffitt, 2022).

However, vote-seeking behaviour is still central to all parties, given that it determines their ability to achieve other goals, namely office-related outcomes. Even where parties are concerned with designing a manifesto that depicts them as an attractive coalition partner, this is only helpful in achieving office if they also have sufficient votes to be a viable coalition partner. As noted by Müller and Strøm, (1999), the more competitive an election, the greater the focus of parties on vote-seeking behaviours. In cases where mainstream parties face conflicting incentives between maintaining a platform in line with voters' ideal positions and moving towards a platform that is more in line with the ideal positions of potential coalition partners, research suggests that their decision to adopt the latter strategy is influenced by current levels of voter support for the party (Kollveit, 2023). As such, while parties are not necessarily vote-maximising and will, under certain circumstances, sacrifice votes for office, I argue that they are primarily driven by vote-seeking behaviour which itself is a means to gaining office. Given that the conflict between votes and office only arises in certain circumstances in particular electoral contexts, I anticipate that greater variation in party platforms can be explained on the basis of the assumption that parties tend generally to prioritise vote-seeking.

There is likely to be more conflict ahead of elections between vote-seeking and policy-seeking behaviours than between vote-seeking and office-seeking. This conflict generally comes in the form of a party having to compromise between the policy at its ideal point on a particular dimension, and the policy at the ideal point of the general electorate on that dimension. In order to win votes, a party may have to move away from its ideal point and towards that of the electorate (Downs, 1957). This trade-off may be lessened in the case of multi-dimensional competition, however, where a party maintains its ideal position on dimension x , but reduces its salience relative to dimension y , with its position on dimension y being more popular with voters. Note that while the trade-off in terms of position is mitigated, there is still a response in terms of salience.

Because of this focus on vote-seeking behaviours and the assumption that parties will generally sacrifice policies for votes, the analysis in this thesis is restricted to studying the responsiveness of mainstream parties to vote loss. In contrast to niche parties, mainstream parties are those whose appeals are based on traditional dimensions of political conflict, such as the economy. Moreover, their platforms generally cover a wide range of issues, rather than being focused on a single issue, as is characteristic of niche parties (Meguid, 2005). There are two reasons for this restriction of analysis to mainstream parties. The first reason for this is that niche parties are likely to sacrifice vote/office goals for policy goals, in part because they are much less likely to achieve these goals than mainstream parties as a result of their smaller size (Müller and Strøm, 1999). As such, where there is conflict between these different goals, they are likely to maintain their existing policy positions rather than pursue vote-seeking behaviours, because they often achieve policy outcomes indirectly through pressuring mainstream parties to move to avoid vote loss than directly through achieving office.

The second reason for restricting the scope of this thesis to examining the responsiveness of mainstream parties is that previous research has found that sacrificing policy positions is also electorally damaging for niche parties. Doing so leads to divisions within the party and can demobilise activists, as well as potentially alienating existing voters (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011). Thus, even if niche parties do sometimes prioritise vote-seeking over policy, existing evidence shows that this would not lead them to respond to vote loss by chasing lost votes in the way that we can expect from mainstream parties. By contrast, existing evidence supports the idea that mainstream parties generally seek to appease the median voter in the electorate, rather than appeasing existing supporters (Adams et al.

2004; Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011). Given that the hypothesis of responsiveness to previous election results is based on an understanding of previous election results as an indicator of public opinion and thus likely future electoral support, it follows that responsiveness to previous election results would be similar in nature to responsiveness to changes in public opinion, with mainstream parties responding in order to maximise vote share, and niche parties remaining more policy-oriented.

The second assumption is that parties are conservative and risk-averse. Janda et al. (1995) identify three reasons for the conservatism of parties. Firstly, they become identified with issue positions that constrain their political movement. This is also highlighted by Downs (1957) and Somer-Topcu (2009), who argue that a change in ideology may damage a party's reputation if it is considered to reflect a lack of integrity or responsibility. Secondly, parties depend on the support of certain social groups that constrain their social appeals. As Somer-Topcu (2009) notes, there is uncertainty around how voters would react to change in a party's platform. Any movement potentially risks causing defections by supporters who are unhappy with the movement. Thirdly, parties are built on delicate power bases, and as such leading factions are unlikely to experiment with change for no reason. These reasons all focus on uncertainty around how a change in platform would play out, and the risk that such a change would result in vote loss. The conservatism of parties is supported by evidence showing high levels of consistency in party platforms between elections (Walgrave and Nutyemans, 2009; Dalton and McAllister, 2015), as well as analysis of the process of drafting manifestos that find a strong influence of existing programmatic documents, including prior manifestos (Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al. 2012). If a party has already lost votes, however, the need for some change in platform becomes apparent to the party, and the direction of vote loss acts as an indicator of how to change, thereby reducing uncertainty within the party.

As noted in a number of works setting out the theory of party responsiveness, the idea of electoral defeat as a source of change in party platforms is based on the assumption that parties do not change unless they have a good reason to do so (e.g. Harmel and Janda, 1994; Janda et al. 1995). For vote-seeking parties, vote loss should prompt parties to overcome their conservatism and change their platform because their existing platform has led them to fail to maximise their vote share. Moreover, as argued by Harmel and Svåsand (1997), losing votes to a particular party can reduce a party's uncertainty about whether and how to change, because the content of the platform of the party to which

votes were lost gives meaning to the loss of the focal party. In short, vote loss to a particular party family should act as a strong stimulus for change because it represents the failure of a party to achieve its main objective, and because it gives a clear sign that the party needs to change, as well as a clear sign of how it needs to change.

3.3. Theoretical expectations on responsiveness to vote loss

Having established the conservatism and risk-aversion of parties in the preceding section, here I outline the importance of an electoral threat in prompting change. I also discuss how the signals provided facilitate and shape this change. One of the main contributions of this thesis is to examine party responsiveness to the extent of vote loss to specific party families. In focusing on this dynamic, it takes the view that when parties respond to vote loss, they are in fact responding to the specific electoral threat that caused the vote loss. This emphasis on electoral threat follows the work of Harmel and Svåsand (1997), whose findings established that parties in Norway and Denmark responded to new parties specifically when those new parties began to attract the votes of established parties. I apply this framework of the electoral threat more broadly, by incorporating it into the quantitative study in chapter 4 covering 599 party-elections across 30 countries, as well as focusing on electoral threat posed by all parties, not just new parties.

There are a number of reasons why accounting for a specific electoral threat is important in accurately measuring the responsiveness of parties to vote loss. The first is the importance of certainty in driving change within parties, which has been outlined in section 3.2. Because of parties' resistance to change, driven by factors like disagreement within the party as to the optimal next move, a desire to remain consistent with previous platforms, and concern over alienating activists and dedicated voters (Janda et al. 1995; Adams et al. 2006; Somer-Topcu, 2009; Walgrave and Nutyemans, 2009), they will not move away from existing platforms unless there is a stimulus to justify such a change (Downs, 1957). The reason that there is an expectation for parties to respond to vote loss is because it is expected that, assuming parties are vote or office-seeking, the loss of votes represents a failure of the party in question to achieve its main goal. This failure in turn will act as a stimulus for change.

However, the focus of the existing literature on any vote loss as a stimulus for change in platform (e.g. Janda et al. 1995; Budge, 2001; Adams et al. 2004) overlooks the importance of certainty. I argue that in order for parties to overcome their inertia, there needs to be a reasonable degree of certainty that the change will increase their vote share – or at least

prevent further losses. Harmel and Svåsand (1997) use this argument as the basis for their focus on new parties, theorising that a new party can reduce the uncertainty of an existing party around whether and how to change because the new party can give meaning to poor electoral performances. It is not necessary, however, to restrict this logic to new parties: any party can provide meaning to the poor electoral performance of another through the issues on which it attracts voters away from that other party. The important point is that parties have an awareness of the parties to which they lost votes and why: it is this information that reduces the uncertainty around potential outcomes and what the next step should be.

Some instances of vote loss may not prompt change, for example, because the defecting voters are not unified, dispersing themselves across a range of other parties. However, if a party that suffers vote loss loses most of those votes to one particular party family, it can derive a subsequent strategy with much greater certainty, simply by paying attention to where those votes have gone, and why they were attracted to that party family. Quite simply, if the reason we expect parties to respond to vote loss is to re-attract votes, or prevent further vote loss, the focus should not just be on the fact that there is a stimulus for change. Rather, studies should acknowledge that there is a stimulus for change in a specific direction, thus overcoming the inertia and risk-aversion that characterises parties and pointing towards an optimal next step. Thus, I expect that measuring the extent of direct losses to specific party families will account for more variation in party change than just measuring the extent of vote loss in general.

As discussed in the literature review, as well as studies measuring the relationship between the extent of vote loss and future party platforms, several measure the relationship between vote gain of a particular party family, and the future party platforms of parties from other families (e.g. Abou-Chadi, 2016; Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries, 2014; Han, 2015; Westlake, 2018). The logic of this approach is that the rise of a party family represents an electoral threat to other parties because a party that is increasing its vote share has to be taking those votes from somewhere else. However, this argument is flawed. Firstly, there is the possibility that a party seeing a significant increase in support is actually mobilising previous abstainers, rather than siphoning votes from somewhere else. This is supported by empirical evidence that campaign effects do mobilise voters, including previous abstainers and intermittent voters (e.g. Hillygus, 2005; Trumm, Sudulich, and Townsley, 2017; Cantoni and Pons, 2021).

Secondly, this logic rests on the unreasonable assumption that the rise of a particular party family represents a threat – and, indeed, an equal threat – to the parties of all families. In reality, however, it is entirely feasible that a challenger party *C* could be enjoying a meteoric rise without posing any threat to the votes of established party *A*. Party *C*'s rise could be entirely due to the siphoning of voters from another established party *B*. Indeed, in some cases, it is entirely possible that both *A* and *C* could be increasing their vote share at the same time by siphoning votes from *B*. In this case, *C* poses a threat to *B*, as does *A*, but there is no threat posed by *C* to *A*.

There is also the possibility that *C* increases its vote share by attracting a handful of votes from *A* while completely decimating *B*'s voter base. In this case, *C* does pose a threat to both *A* and *B*, but measuring this threat using the increase in *C*'s vote share assumes that the threat it poses to *A* and *B* is of equal magnitude. Given the finding that the extent of responsiveness changes with the extent of the vote loss (Somer-Topcu, 2009), we should in fact expect much greater responsiveness from *B* than *A* in this case. For example, in the 2024 UK general election, while Reform UK attracted voters from both Labour and the Conservatives, the threat it posed to the Conservatives was significantly greater. With 25% of 2019 Conservative voters opting for Reform UK compared to only 3% of Labour voters (McDonnell, 2024), the vote share of Reform UK is an inaccurate measure of the threat it poses to those two parties, as it significantly overstates the threat it poses to the Labour party. These scenarios highlight the flaw in the approach taken by some previous studies, and highlight why including a variable measuring direct loss is likely to account for greater variation in parties following vote loss.

In addition, accounting for the extent of vote loss to individual party families indicates what kind of responsiveness we can expect. This has been well reflected in studies examining responsiveness to niche parties, with the measure of change varying depending on the party family to which another party is responding (Abou-Chadi, 2016). However, studies examining responsiveness to mainstream parties have not used similarly nuanced approaches to measuring responsiveness. These generally measure responsiveness as change in the party's *rile* score, a measure of left-right position included in the Manifesto Project (MARPOR) dataset (Lehmann et al. 2024). The *rile* dimension has been the subject of significant criticism since the genesis of MARPOR (Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006; Benoit and Laver, 2007; Gemenis, 2013). Particularly relevant here is the criticism that the *rile* measure excludes 'new' dimensions of politics – namely those

unrelated to the traditional socio-economic conflict – which, as noted in the literature review, some scholars argue increasingly characterise party competition (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson, 2002; Kriesi et al. 2006; Green-Pedersen, 2007). Given the increasing concern of mainstream parties with issues outside of this traditional conflict such as immigration (Green-Pedersen and Otjes, 2019; Dancygier and Margalit, 2020), focusing solely on the economic dimension of competition overlooks an important part of party strategy.

Based on the idea of parties being risk-averse and only changing in cases where there is certainty on how to respond, it is likely that they will respond by changing their platform on the issues emphasised by those parties that stole their votes. This reflects the idea that parties tend to give the greatest attention to those issues on which they are perceived as competent on, and/or where their policy proposals are in line with public opinion (Green-Pedersen, 2007; De Sio and Weber, 2014). In other words, when voters switch from party *A* to party *B*, it is likely because of the issues that party *B* has strategically chosen to emphasise, having identified them as the issues that will attract votes. Moreover, the issues receiving the greatest attention in the manifesto of party *B* will likely be the ones that are discussed to the greatest extent throughout the campaign, again because they presumably believe they will attract the most votes. Given the fact that voters generally consume the campaign through the media and from activists rather than from actually reading the manifesto (Harmel, 2018), they are likely to be most exposed to the issues that party *B* has chosen to emphasise in its manifesto and, similarly, throughout the campaign. So, voters that defect from *A* to *B* will most likely do so on the basis of those issues.

Having an awareness of the issues emphasised by party *B* informs the nature of party *A*'s response. If one of the values of the focus on direct loss is that it tells a party how to change, another is that it also tells researchers how a party should be changing if it is responding to vote loss. In the case of Abou-Chadi's (2016) work, where a mainstream party is faced with the rise of green parties, we should expect it to respond by changing its position on and attention to environmental issues. Where a mainstream party is faced with the rise of RRP, we should expect it to respond by changing its position on and attention to multiculturalism. I extend this logic to the study of competition between mainstream parties by varying the dependent variable based on the issues emphasised at *t* by the mainstream party family benefitting from the vote loss of the responding party. These measures are developed in detail in chapter 4.

Overall, I argue that direct losses to individual party families provide responding parties with a clearer signal regarding what parties pose a threat, and thus what aspects of their platform is causing voters to defect. Thus:

H1: Greater variation in party platform at $t+1$ is explained by the extent of vote loss to the relevant party family at t than by the vote share of the relevant party family at t .

I conceive of party competition as happening on both a positional and issue basis. In line with authors such as Budge (2001) and Green-Pedersen (2007), I argue that parties have an incentive to play to their strengths, and focus on the issues on which they are seen by the electorate as particularly competent. By increasing or decreasing the attention devoted to a given issue, parties can to some extent affect the attention that voters pay to that issue, and thus affect its importance for voters when deciding how to vote. As such, the emphasis that parties place on various issues is an important part of their platforms, and forms part of the strategic consideration with which the study of party responsiveness is concerned (Wagner, 2012; DeSio and Weber, 2014). Thus, measures of the emphasis that parties place on various policy issues do provide an important insight into party strategy. However, there also continues to be an important positional aspect to party competition, as has been highlighted by a number of empirical studies (e.g. Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006; Ezrow, 2007; Bale et al. 2010). As such, I include measures of both salience and position in my empirical design, as outlined in chapter 4, reflecting the theoretical position that party competition happens on both a positional and salience basis, and that both are considered by parties when deciding how to respond to vote loss.

While the theory of issue competition sees parties as emphasising the issues on which they are seen as particularly competent (Budge, 2001), as found by Bale et al. (2010) and Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010), parties only have so much control over the issue agenda. If party *A* ignores an issue that is successfully placed on the agenda by party *B* because *A* knows it is perceived as less competent on this issue than its competitors, *A* risks being perceived by voters as not caring about issues that are important to them (Seeberg, 2020). Thus, while *A* has an incentive to redirect the attention of voters onto issues on which it is perceived as more competent than its competitors, it also has an incentive to adapt its positions on issues placed on the agenda by other parties. This idea is supported by the finding of Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen (2020) that parties adjust their position on issues when other parties devote attention to them. Thus, parties are likely not

only concerned about their own reputation on an issue when deciding on salience strategy, but also on the prominence of the issue on the political agenda.

In the case of both salience and positional responses, parties have two options. When party *A* loses votes to party *B* because of a certain issue, party *A* can either increase or decrease the attention it devotes to that issue. Abou-Chadi (2016) argues that when an issue is owned outright, parties have an incentive to drop the issue, because any additional attention devoted to that issue simply increases its importance to voters, who will then become more likely to defect to the party that owns that issue. Where an issue is not owned outright, parties have an incentive to increase the salience of the issue in their own manifestos in order to convince voters of their competence on the issue, and thus attract voters. Noting that the extent of green parties' issue ownership of the environment is greater than that of RRP's ownership of immigration, Abou-Chadi (2016) hypothesises that parties will reduce the salience of environmentalism when faced with the rise of green parties, but will increase the salience of immigration when faced with the rise of RRP's. His analysis confirms these hypotheses.

By contrast, Meguid (2008) argues that parties' responses depend primarily on the extent of the threat posed by other parties, rather than the extent of issue ownership. When there is no threat, parties will adopt a dismissive strategy, decreasing the salience of the issue. When there is a manifest threat posed, parties will move towards an accommodative strategy. She finds support for this theory on the basis of qualitative analysis. Given the focus in this thesis on party responses to electoral threat, my hypotheses are in line with those of Meguid (2008). I anticipate that when responding to vote loss (in other words, when responding to a threat posed by other parties), mainstream parties will increase the salience of the issues championed by those. Thus:

H2a: Mainstream parties that lost votes to green parties at t will increase the salience of environmentalism at $t+1$.

H2b: Mainstream parties that lost votes to RRP's at t will increase the salience of multiculturalism at $t+1$.

H2c: Mainstream parties losing votes to a mainstream party family emphasising GAL-TAN issues at t will increase the salience of GAL-TAN issues at $t+1$.

H2d: Mainstream parties losing votes to a mainstream-party family emphasising the economy at t will increase the salience of the economy at $t+1$.

In terms of choosing how to respond positionally, parties' decisions are likely to be informed by the platform of the party siphoning votes. Assuming that parties take election results as a signal of the opinions of voters, I anticipate that their positional strategy will also be accommodative. In order to recapture lost votes and avoid further vote loss, I expect parties to move towards the position of the party family to which votes have been lost. As identified by De Sio and Weber (2014), parties are most likely to benefit from strategically emphasising issues when there is broad agreement between the position of the party and the position of the electorate. Thus, if party A is using signals from party B 's election performance at t to inform its own strategy at $t+1$, I expect that it will move towards party B 's position, on the basis that that position has succeeded in attracting votes. Such a strategy is similarly identified by Meguid (2005, 348) as one which "encourages voter flight" to party A . In increasing the salience of the issue previously emphasised by party B and moving towards its position on that issue, party A aims to increase the association between itself and that issue, as well as moving towards a position that has proven to be successful among voters.

By contrast, Meguid (2008) argues that in certain circumstances, it makes sense for a party to adopt an adversarial strategy. In particular, while an accommodative strategy is optimal for a party facing a direct electoral threat from another party, where a party sees its mainstream opponent being threatened by another party, it will adopt an adversarial strategy in order to exacerbate the threat to its mainstream opponent. However, the centrality of direct electoral threats to the theory presented here and the empirical strategy used in chapter 4, an accommodative strategy is most likely. The loss of votes to a particular party family gives a clear signal to the responding party about the opinions of its voter base on a given issue. An accommodative strategy represents a strategy which the responding party knows has been successful with voters. Thus:

H3a: Mainstream parties that lost votes to green parties at t will adopt more pro-environmental positions at $t+1$.

H3b: Mainstream parties that lost votes to RRP's at t will adopt a more restrictive position on multiculturalism at $t+1$.

H3c: Mainstream parties that lost votes to a mainstream party family emphasising GAL-TAN issues at t will move towards that family's position on GAL-TAN issues at $t+1$.

H3d: Mainstream parties that lost votes to a mainstream party family emphasising the economy at t will move towards that family's position on the economy at $t+1$.

As well as accounting for the ideological family of the party to which votes have been lost, previous studies suggest that there is likely to be an important effect of the ideological position of the responding party. As noted in the preceding chapter, previous studies examining responsiveness stimuli for change have often included models examining how responsiveness varies depending on the ideological position of the responding party (e.g. Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Abou-Chadi, 2016). In these cases, the expectation of an impact of ideological position is based on the idea that parties will see proximal parties as a greater electoral threat than non-proximal parties (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). Because proximal parties are generally competing for the same voters, the rise of proximal party B is more likely to come at the expense of party A than the rise of non-proximal party C . For example, in the Irish context, the left-wing Labour party is more likely to perceive left-wing Sinn Féin as an electoral threat than centre-right Fine Gael.

However, studies have also found differences in responsiveness between parties for structural reasons, such as the tendency of left-wing parties to be more ideological (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll, 2009) and activist-dominated (Fagerholm, 2016; Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke, 2022). These differences in turn lead to lower levels of responsiveness by left-wing parties to various stimuli for change. Thus, while the models presented in chapter 4 measuring responsiveness to vote loss already account for the electoral threat that explains some of the differences between mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties, there is still reason to assess the moderating effect of ideology in this context. Indeed because the models account for electoral threat separately to the ideology of the responding party, measuring the moderating effect of ideology will give a clearer picture of variation in responsiveness to vote loss than previous studies where the moderating effect of ideology could be accounted for by either electoral threat or party structure. Moreover, the evidence from previous studies on the variation in behaviour between mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties suggests that in order to develop a clear

picture of party responsiveness, studies need to account for the ideology of the responding party. Thus:

H4: Mainstream-right parties will be more responsive to vote loss than mainstream-left parties.

3.4. Theoretical expectations on impact of niche parties

As outlined in the literature review, more recent studies have focused on mainstream party responsiveness to niche parties, namely green parties and RRP (Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries, 2014; Abou-Chadi, 2016). While the focus on niche parties allows for a more specific measure of responsiveness, given the narrower focus of niche parties (Meguid, 2005), these studies have given little attention to the nature of niche parties, and how this may affect responsiveness. In particular, despite the increasing focus on niche parties in the literature on responsiveness, to my knowledge there is no study that discusses how mainstream parties and niche parties differ in their propensity to provoke responsiveness. In this section, I discuss the characteristics of niche parties, and how these are likely to affect party responsiveness.

As discussed in chapter 1, understanding party responsiveness to election results in general is important to understanding the role of parties in representative democracy and the power of voters to indirectly affect policy outcomes. This is particularly important in the case of niche parties. Because niche parties are generally smaller than mainstream parties and compete on the periphery of political competition, they have fewer opportunities to directly impact government policy by winning office. Rather, much of their impact comes from their ability to affect the agenda and positions of other parties, thus indirectly bringing about policy changes on their issue of concern (van Spanje, 2010). Given the policy-focused nature of niche parties and the fact that voters who support niche parties do so primarily for policy reasons (Adams et al. 2006; Stiers, 2024), understanding the extent of their indirect policy impact is central to understanding the place of niche parties in representative democracy.

In her work on niche parties, Meguid (2005) identifies a number of characteristics that she sees as differentiating between niche and mainstream parties. Firstly, niche parties reject the traditional, class-based orientation of politics, prioritising issues that were previously seen as being outside the dimensions of party competition. Secondly, the issues raised by niche parties often cut across traditional partisan lines. Thirdly, they limit their issue

appeals, focusing mainly on one policy stance. It is this final characteristic that has allowed studies on responsiveness to niche parties to differentiate themselves, by using a measure other than *rile* score to measure responsiveness. Because niche parties generally focus on one issue area, responsiveness can instead be measured by examining change in the platform on that issue of the party that lost votes.

I argue that these characteristics have important implications for mainstream party strategy that have been overlooked. Again, the risk-averse nature of parties is important here. As established previously in this chapter, the value of knowing to which parties votes were lost and why is that this information gives meaning to election results, acting as an indicator of the optimal strategic move (Harmel and Svåsand, 1997). While responsiveness always requires an awareness of the parties to which votes were lost, the ability of a party to establish why these votes were lost and its confidence in this information is likely to vary significantly depending on the opposing party involved. Because of the importance of this information in prompting responsiveness, as established above, responsiveness itself is also likely to vary depending on the parties involved.

When a party has lost votes to a mainstream party, establishing why these votes were lost is difficult for two main reasons. Firstly, mainstream parties cover a wide range of issues in their manifestos. This is particularly the case in recent decades, given the increasing length of party manifestos over time (e.g. Bara, 2005; Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al. 2012; Kropivnik and Lipicer, 2018). In the preceding section, I argued that parties having lost votes will likely respond by changing their platform on the issue area that received the most attention from the party that won those votes. However, given the proliferation of issues discussed by mainstream parties, it may be difficult in some circumstances for a losing party to identify the relevant issue area. While they may be aware that the main focus of an opponent's campaign was on the economy or GAL-TAN issues, it is worth noting that these dimensions cover a variety of more specific policy areas. As indicated by the quantitative measures of these dimensions introduced in chapter 4, the economic dimension, for example, includes issues as diverse as social welfare provisions, taxation policy, and import tariffs. Identifying the specific issue that has motivated voters to defect can thus be difficult in the case of losses to a mainstream party.

By contrast, niche parties generally focus on one issue area. Environmental parties are focused on policies promoting sustainability and environmental protection, prioritised ahead of economic growth. RRP's are generally focused on safeguarding a national way of

life and opposing multiculturalism, with Mudde (2019) identifying nativism as one of the defining features of RRP. In the case of losses to a mainstream party, a party must generally undergo a separate process to identify the reasons for losses to that party. In the cases of a niche party, however, the two questions are inextricably linked, given the narrowness of the appeal of niche parties. In short, because there is less information to gather, there is likely to be much more certainty around the reasons for vote loss for a party that has lost votes to a niche party than a mainstream party. For the same reasons, parties losing votes to niche parties do not face the problem outlined previously where the issue priorities of defectors are so diverse that the party is unable to change its platform in a way that meaningfully responds to the vote loss. Given these considerations:

H5: Mainstream parties that lost a plurality of votes to a niche party family will change their manifesto to a greater extent than mainstream parties that lost a plurality of votes to a mainstream party family.

3.5. Conditions of responsiveness and alternative hypotheses

The previous two sections outlined my theoretical expectations regarding party responsiveness, which will be tested using correlational studies in chapter 4. However, as identified in chapter 2, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the process of responsiveness. In order to address this, here I outline the implicit assumptions on which theories of party responsiveness are based. Identifying and analysing these assumptions is important in understanding variation in party responses to vote loss. Moreover, in order to claim a causal relationship between vote loss and party change, we need to develop a greater understanding of the information available to parties following vote loss, and how such information is perceived and used. The ideas discussed here form the basis for the analysis in chapter 5.

Existing studies examining party responsiveness have generally based their hypotheses on the idea that because of the vote-seeking nature of parties, vote loss will prompt some sort of response. For example, Adams et al. (2004) theorise that party leaders view past results as an electoral signal of the success of the current strategy, and Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries (2014) posit that the greater the vote share of an issue owner, the more likely parties are to respond on the basis of that issue. However, as demonstrated in chapter 2, there has been little focus in these studies on the process that leads parties from a certain set of results at t to a change in platform at $t+1$. This is problematic in that it involves making a number of assumptions that are rarely explicitly mentioned, justified, or tested.

Because of the current lack of detailed analysis and discussion of this process, we have no basis on which to understand the mixed results that often characterise studies on this question. Given that such mixed results are driven in part by parties not always behaving how spatial theory predicts that they should (for example, the null findings of Adams et al. (2004) and the necessary-but-insufficient hypothesis of Janda et al. (1995)), it is only by understanding what happens within parties when they do and do not respond that we can get a full picture of the dynamics of responsiveness that actually exist in contemporary political competition. In this section, I explicitly outline these assumptions by detailing the process that I theorise as taking place within political parties between elections that serves to translate results at t to strategy at $t+1$.

The first implicit assumption in the theory of party responsiveness is that parties have an awareness of the parties to which they lost votes, and what caused this loss of votes. As previously discussed, the idea of parties responding to vote loss is based on an understanding of parties seeing that loss as indicative of a current electoral strategy that is not working, with the consequent gains of other parties being a signal of what strategies are working. If parties do not have an awareness of the parties to which they lost votes, they are lacking a clear signal on what direction to move in at the following election. Given the conservative nature of parties and the potential risks of party change, it is likely that in cases where they are lacking this information, they will maintain existing policies in spite of lost votes. Change is most likely to happen where this understanding of the direction and causes of vote loss is shared throughout the party. While it is possible that change may occur as a result of the preferences of a dominant faction, the presence of divisions within a party over how it should proceed risks damaging the party's credibility and may act as an obstacle to change (Bale et al. 2010). Thus change is more likely to happen where the party is united on the reasons behind the causes of vote loss.

An alternative possibility is that where parties do not have information on the parties to which they lost votes, they move in the direction of other parties that were successful at t , regardless of whether any votes were directly lost to those parties. This strategy still meets the assumption of parties as being vote-seeking, as it involves them seeking to change their approach into something that they know, based on the previous election, will win them votes. This is similar to the 'predator' strategy identified by Laver (2005), where parties observe the sizes of all parties at t and move toward the largest party at $t+1$.

However, there are significant drawbacks to this strategy compared to a specific focus on parties to which votes have been lost. Firstly, if party *A* adopts the strategy of party *B* at $t+1$ despite the majority of its lost votes going to party *C* at t , it risks losing more votes, as there is nothing to suggest that those who stuck with party *A* at t would support the platforms of party *B*. This is to some extent true of any step *A* takes to change its strategy: voters who supported *A* at t may not be supportive of the policies that *A* adopts from *C* at $t+1$. However, assuming some commonalities across its voter base, it is reasonable to assume that if a significant number of its supporters switched to *C* at t , there are more supporters of *A* who are ideologically close to *C*, and would thus not object to *A* moving closer to that party's platform.

Secondly, there is the possibility of regaining lost votes. Given the status-quo bias of parties, they are presumably always aware of the risk of losing voters that stayed loyal at t . Even if they lost some voters at t , they know that their existing strategy was sufficient to maintain those loyal voters. Thus, we can expect responsiveness to happen only when parties are convinced that they can regain more votes than they will lose as a result of the change, or that the change will prevent more further vote losses than it will cause. Therein lies the logic of the move by party *A* towards party *C*, to which votes were lost: it allows *A* to reattract those votes. If it moves instead to party *B*, which performed well at t but did not directly attract any votes away from *A*, there is nothing to suggest that *A* will regain the votes it lost at t . Thus they not only risk losing loyal voters that supported *A* at t , but are also likely to fail to regain votes it lost to *C* at t .

Indeed, in this example, the only knowledge that party *A* has about the platform of party *B* in this scenario is that it was popular with voters who supported *B* at t . Thus, the only voters that *A* can be relatively confident in capturing with this strategy are those voters who supported *B* at t . However, there are again reasons that this strategy may not work. Because *B* was successful at t , there is nothing to suggest that its voters would defect to another party, even if that party adopted the same position as *B* at $t+1$. Assuming that at least some of voters' preferences is informed by party identification or loyalty, supporters of party *B* are unlikely to switch to another party with the same platform at $t+1$. Simply put, there is no motivation for them to switch. The reason that moving towards the platform of party *C* is likely to reattract some votes is that voters who switched from *A* to *C* likely still feel some level of identity with or loyalty to *A*, especially if they have supported them for a long time. At the very least, they are likely to feel no more loyalty to

C than A, given their previous support for A. It is their long-term affinity to A, combined with its move towards the ideal position of lost votes, that will attract voters back to A from C at $t+1$. The same dynamic does not exist in the case of a party that moves towards any party that was successful at t .

Another alternative possibility is that, rather than using previous election results as an indicator of the need for change, parties base their decisions on opinion polls, with a decline in the party's favourability or voting intention indicating a need for change. The nature of the change would in this case be determined by the current platforms of parties doing well in opinion polls, or by data on voters' prioritisation of and positions on issues. Again, this approach still meets the assumption of parties as vote-seeking, and as requiring something to indicate the need for change and the form that this change should take. It also addresses some reasons that parties may perceive election results to be unreliable indicators of public opinion at $t+1$, thus undermining their ability to reduce uncertainty about how the party should change. The most obvious of these, discussed by Somer-Topcu (2009), is that election results are likely to represent outdated information by the time the subsequent manifesto is prepared. Economic developments (Kramer, 1971), political scandals (Peters and Welch, 1980; Funk, 1996) and other exogenous shocks (Eriksson, 2016) can all affect people's liability to vote for a given party between election cycles, and are crucially not necessarily directly related to changes in party platforms. Regardless of whether a given election result at time $t-1$ is actually still a reliable indicator of public opinion at time t , if a party believes it may not be, it is unlikely to respond to it in the way the theory would expect. In the case of moving towards parties that are doing well in opinion polls, the potential downfalls of moving towards parties that performed well at t also exist here. Parties moving towards competitors that are doing well risk adopting the platform of a party that isn't actually causing their own poor performance, thus failing to gain voters at $t+1$ and risking further vote loss.

There are also further reasons to believe that a party would opt to respond to previous election results rather than to respond to inter-election polls. Firstly, there is the question of the reliability of opinion polls. Issues with low response rates and the lack of representation of certain groups can have significant impacts on the predictive power of polls (Kennett, Pfefferman, and Steinberg, 2018; Zhou et al., 2021). In certain contexts, inaccurate results can also be driven by a social desirability bias that leads voters to lie about their voting intentions (Brownback and Novatny, 2018; Zhou et al., 2021). Thus,

while opinion polls are a more recent indicator of public opinion, in many circumstances election results give a more reliable signal as to the electoral state of the parties. It should be noted that it is somewhat difficult to ascertain levels of trust among political elites in opinion polls, as elites' public statements on poll reliability are in part driven by a desire to legitimise positive poll standings and undermine negative ones (Pereira, 2019). However, these issues are likely to impact elites' perceptions of polls, particularly given that they are often highlighted in high-profile incidents of inaccurate opinion polls (Jowell et al. 1993; Cowling, 2015; Mercer, Deane, and McGeeney, 2016).

Another issue is the sheer volume of polls that are conducted between two elections, and the fact that they can often vary significantly in their findings relating to the state of public opinion (Dawson, 2024). The value of prior election results in informing future strategy is that they represent a clear, singular signal as to the electoral popularity of a party. Variation in the findings of opinion polls, which only increases with the number of polls conducted, has significant potential to introduce ambiguity. Even overlooking the other issues with opinion polls discussed above and assuming that a party is willing to rely on an opinion poll to inform their electoral strategy, the question is raised of which opinion poll they rely on. This again can undermine the usefulness of polls, and reduce the propensity of political elites to rely on them in forming strategy.

There is also the issue of timing. While it may be the case that election results are perceived to go out of date, it is also the case that parties may not have sufficient time to respond to shifts in opinion polls that happen between elections. Often, the planning, if not the writing, of party manifestos begins long ahead of the announcement of the election itself. Däubler (2012) notes that in the case of the Irish general election, which took place in May 2007, Labour, Fine Gael, and Fianna Fáil all began manifesto preparations over half a year in advance of the beginning of the campaign, as marked by the dissolution of the Dáil at the end of April 2007. Dolezal et al. (2012) similarly found that in Austria, the ÖVP and the Greens start drafting their manifestoes about one year ahead of the (presumed) election date, while the SPÖ start about months later. Moreover, manifestoes are generally based on policies that the party has been pursuing throughout the lifetime of the current parliament, rather than being compiled from scratch ahead of the next election (Kavanagh, 1981; Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012). Kavanagh (1981) notes the tendency of the UK Conservative Party to have the main points of its manifestos prepared well in advance of the election: the party's 1970 manifesto was largely based on programmes published in

1965 and 1968, while the main policy issues in 1979 were decided in documents published in 1976 and 1979. Thus, many opinion polls are conducted too late to have an impact on party manifestos, and often the documents and policies on which manifestos are based are developed relatively soon after the election to which the manifesto is responding.

In short, parties are presented with a wealth of information during and between election periods. However, I argue that election results are a uniquely reliable and high-profile source of information regarding the success or failure of a given political platform. Given the potential issues with reliability of information arising between elections and timing of such information, parties looking for a clear signal regarding how to proceed are likely to look to their own electoral fortunes compared to those of their competitors. While developments between elections may affect a party's future platform, I argue that understanding the signals provided by previous election results is core to understanding their future platforms.

Turning to the next assumption implicit in the theory of party responsiveness to vote loss, as well as an awareness of the parties to which votes have been lost, parties also need to have an awareness of *why* those votes were lost in order for responsiveness to occur. This stems from the wide-ranging nature of issues addressed by parties competing for voters. To return to the previous example, if *A* doesn't know what specific aspects of its policy led voters to switch to *C* at *t*, it will not be in a position to respond to those vote losses. Note the importance here of parties not only having accurate information in order for responsiveness to happen, but also of parties *perceiving* the available information as accurate. Given the risks involved in changing platforms, if a party is not confident in the reasons for its vote loss to another party, it may stick with its existing platform for fear of making a wrong move and losing more votes.

Once party *A* knows to which of its competitors votes have been lost, there are several potential scenarios with regards to its knowledge about the motivations of those switchers. In the first scenario, *A* does not know why it has lost votes to *C*, and is aware that it does not know why it has lost votes to *C*. In this case, *A* is unlikely to respond to vote loss, again because of the lack of certainty around how it should change. The outcome is similar in the second scenario, in which *A* has obtained some information about what motivated the loss of votes, but this information is not perceived to be accurate or reliable. Because it does not believe that this information is providing a reliable signal as to the

causes of its vote loss, it is still lacking the certainty required to motivate a change, and will likely maintain the status quo.

In the third scenario, party *A* believes it has accurate information about why it lost votes to *C*, but the information is in fact inaccurate. In this case, it may respond to vote loss by changing its platform on the issue that it believes motivated voters to switch to *C*, but this will not be picked up by empirical studies examining responsiveness by *A* on the issues that actually motivated voters to switch from *A* to *C*. For example, if *A* believes it lost votes to *C* because of the parties' respective platforms on the economy, but voters were actually attracted to *C* primarily because of their positions on GAL-TAN issues, analysis expecting *A* to respond on the GAL-TAN dimension would not identify any positional responsiveness. It may also identify salience responsiveness in the opposite direction to expectations, as the salience of the GAL-TAN dimension declines due to the increase in focus on the economy, where responsiveness is actually happening. Such instances of parties responding on the basis of inaccurate information could lead to an incomplete picture of responsiveness. In particular, they may lead to null findings as the responsiveness that is taking place here is not being measured by analyses focused on responsiveness on the 'correct' dimension. In reality, however, it is unlikely for parties to have inaccurate information given the resources available to them; it is even more unlikely for parties to be so confident in such inaccurate information as to base their strategy around it. Parties make use of private polling (Roll, 1982; Kavanagh, 1992), focus groups (Savigny, 2007; Lees-Marshment, 2009; Leahy, 2016) and internal election reviews (e.g. Liberal Democrats Campaigns and Communications Committee [2015?]; Fianna Fáil [2021?]; Australian Labor Party [2019?]). Given this range of resources, it is improbable that parties are regularly left with inaccurate or unreliable information about the causes of electoral performances.

Responsiveness which is identified by empirical studies is most likely to occur in the fourth scenario, in which parties have accurate information about why voters defected, and perceive this information to be accurate. Quite simply, in this scenario, parties' awareness of the moves and motivations of defectors gives the meaning to vote loss at *t* that Harmel and Svåsand (1997) argue should provide information as to what the optimal strategic move is. A party's confidence in its information will allow it to identify the issues that have caused vote loss, potentially overcoming its risk-averse nature with the significant potential for recapturing lost votes. The accuracy of its information means that

it is responding on the same issues on which empirical studies are measuring responsiveness. In short, in order for responsiveness to happen in the way that the theory predicts, parties need to have accurate information about the reasons for vote loss, and need to perceive this information as accurate. These scenarios are summarised in table 3.1.

	Accurate information	Inaccurate information
Information perceived as reliable	Party will respond, response will be identified in empirical studies	Party will respond, response will not be identified in empirical studies
Information perceived as unreliable	Party will not respond	Party will not respond

Table 3.1: Party responses to various information environments

Overall, given the amount of data that is available to political parties following elections, I argue that it is unlikely for a party that is vote-seeking to be unable to obtain reliable information about the parties to which votes were lost. Post-election studies are increasingly common, and generally include questions on vote choice at t and $t+1$, as well as the most important issues for voters. Parties also increasingly carry out reviews following elections, particularly in cases of vote loss.

An alternative scenario that is more likely is that parties do not respond to vote loss as hypothesised, because vote loss occurred because of non-policy reasons. Both the theory on which studies of party responsiveness are based and the empirical strategies they employ assume that parties will respond on a policy basis. However, this will not occur if votes were lost for some non-policy reason. For example, a party may lose votes on the basis of the relative unpopularity of their leader or the economic conditions in the run up to an election (Adams and Merrill III, 2005). In such cases, there is no clear signal for parties to follow regarding how to change their platform ahead of the subsequent election. Note that there may be change on some policy issues in such circumstances: a new leader may introduce policy changes and an economic crash may lead to an increase in the salience of the economy for parties and voters alike. However, given that the stimulus to which a losing party is responding in those circumstances is not related to the platforms of its competitors, we cannot predict how parties will change using the theoretical framework discussed here, given its focus on responsiveness to other parties.

The final assumption grounding the theory of party responsiveness is that parties use their results from t to inform their platform at $t+1$, and indeed that the results at t are the most important, or at least one of the most important, determinants of platform at $t+1$. As discussed above, while parties may respond instead to other signals indicating a need for change such as opinion polls, prior election results are uniquely informative in that parties can get a better idea of what parties voters are switching to based on data from post-election surveys and the vote shares of other parties in areas where the losing party was previously strong. Parties also have more time to respond to election results than inter-election polls, and election results are not subject to issues of reliability such as social desirability bias.

There are, however, some circumstances in which a party may not use previous results in this way. One possibility, as discussed in section 3.3, is that defecting voters are too dispersed in their vote choice at t to give a meaningful signal to the responding party as to where they should move next. This is accounted for in the quantitative section through focusing on the extent of vote loss to each party family. Another possibility is that the responding party itself is divided, either over the causes of vote loss, or the extent to which vote-seeking should be prioritised over policy pursuit. The precise mechanisms through which this division can affect responsiveness depends on the level of centralisation of the party's decision-making process which, as outlined in the literature review, has been identified in a number of studies as an important factor in determining responsiveness. In the case of decentralised parties, broad agreement among the actors involved in decision-making processes is needed in order for substantial change in party platform to occur. As Müller and Strøm (1999) note, the more decentralised a party is, the more policy-oriented the party is likely to be, given the greater involvement of party members and activists in decision-making. This comes at the expense of the influence of parliamentarians and other party officials, who have more of a vested interest in vote-seeking, given that they benefit directly from the spoils of office that are usually the broader goal of vote-seeking behaviour. However, even when a party is highly centralised, there is still some risk inherent in undergoing significant changes in platform. Even if party membership or even most parliamentarians do not have a say in the content of the party's platform, any change that they disagree with risks alienating them. In the case of activists, this will likely lead to demobilisation, which could have adverse effects on the very vote-seeking strategy that the party is trying to pursue through the change in question. In the case of

parliamentarians, there is a risk of defection if there is a sufficient degree of disagreement with the changes. Regardless of the specific mechanism, however, pursuing platform change in a divided party may be sufficiently difficult or risky as to outweigh the potential benefits in terms of votes.

The preceding discussion highlights several factors that can affect whether parties respond to election results as hypothesised by this and other studies. Because of the number of variables that affect a party's capacity to respond to poor electoral performance in this way, it is important to move beyond simple correlational tests to probe the causal mechanism of responsiveness. In order to understand the variation in parties' responses, it is crucial to develop a clearer understanding of the information available to parties following elections, how that information is perceived, and the extent to which it is prioritised in the development of future strategy. Chapter 5 presents the results of a survey administered to current and former parliamentarians in Australia, France, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The aim of the questionnaire is to assess the extent to which these conditions of responsiveness have been met within mainstream parties following recent elections in those countries. Was there a shared awareness throughout the parties of post-election reviews? What is the focus of such studies?

This theory of the process of responsiveness also forms the basis of the qualitative analysis in chapter 5. Two case studies are examined, one a case of high responsiveness, the other of low responsiveness. In the high responsiveness case, process tracing is used to examine whether the process outlined in this section led to the change in platform between elections, or whether one of the alternative hypotheses better explains the outcome. In the low responsiveness case, process tracing is used to establish which stage or stages of the process outlined here did not occur, leading to the lack of responsiveness. The results of the questionnaire and the qualitative analysis will give additional insight into what happens when parties don't respond to poor electoral performance, as well as further contextualising the quantitative results in chapter 4.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework grounding this work, identifying the importance of electoral threats in prompting party responsiveness, with a focus on the certainty that such threats provide as to what the optimal move is for parties following instances of vote loss. I began by discussing the assumptions and scope conditions grounding the theory. I assume that parties are vote-seeking, and prioritise vote and office

benefits over maintaining their ideal policy positions and promoting those policies from opposition. For this reason, the analysis is restricted to analysing the responsiveness of mainstream parties. I also identified the risk-averse nature of parties, which is crucial to the theory that parties will respond to electoral threats. In order to overcome this risk-averse nature, parties need to have some degree of certainty of the outcome before changing their platform.

I then discussed why this thesis departs from the methodologies used in previous studies on party responsiveness to election results and focuses specifically on responsiveness to the extent of vote loss to individual party families. I argued that when parties lose votes to a specific party family, this acts as an indicator of what platforms are successful with voters. Because of the clarity provided by this indicator, I expect parties to adjust their platforms on the dimensions that are the focus of parties to which votes have been lost. In doing so, I account for the specific signal provided by election results as to the state of public opinion, with this signal providing the certainty needed for parties to overcome their inertia. As such, I hypothesise that parties will move towards the platforms of other parties to which they have lost votes, both in terms of salience and position.

Thirdly, I discussed the unique nature of niche parties, and why they may prompt more responsiveness than mainstream parties. While mainstream parties have a broad appeal, niche parties are defined in part by their narrow focus. This allows parties to have a greater degree of certainty regarding the reasons for vote loss when it occurs at the hands of niche parties than at the hands of other mainstream parties. On this basis, I hypothesise that parties will change to a greater extent when they have lost votes to niche parties. The hypotheses outlined in sections 3.3 and 3.4 are tested in chapter 4.

Finally, I discussed the process of party responsiveness to election results, and identified the assumptions grounding theories of responsiveness that have been overlooked by previous studies. In particular, I focused on the information available to parties, and elites' perceptions of this information. Previous studies of responsiveness have devoted little attention to the informational environment following instances of poor electoral performance. Yet, we cannot claim a causal relationship between poor performance and future platforms without an understanding of this environment. I also considered alternative stimuli for party platform change, and argued that the information provided by election results is unique in its timing and reliability, and thus more likely to provoke

responsiveness. The assumptions and process outlined in this section form the basis of the qualitative analysis in chapter 5.

4. Measuring the Relationship Between Vote Loss and Party Change

4.1. Introduction

In chapter 2, I outlined the current state of the literature on party responsiveness to election results. I highlighted a number of issues with existing studies, with a particular focus on the lack of consideration for incorporating the electoral threat posed by other parties in the empirical design. I also identified additional gaps in the existing literature, notably with regards to competition between mainstream parties and how responsiveness may vary depending on the ideological position of the parties involved. In chapter 3, I discussed how developing a measure of the number of voters that defected from one particular party to another can empirically represent the electoral threat that are indicated to parties through election results. Thus, I believe such an approach will generate a more accurate picture of the extent of party responsiveness to lost votes. I outlined hypotheses relating to responsiveness to vote loss to green parties, radical-right parties (RRPs), and mainstream parties, the moderating effect of left-right position, and the impact of niche parties.

In this chapter, I seek to test these hypotheses by introducing a dataset that uses post-election surveys to measure the extent of vote loss that occurs from party a to a given party family x between an election at time $t-1$ and time t . In measuring the direction of vote loss in this way, I account for the extent of the threat posed to party a by the relevant family x , allowing for a more direct measure of responsiveness to a particular electoral threat. The results suggest that party responsiveness varies depending on the party family that is posing a threat, and that there is an important moderating effect of the left-right position of the responding party in some cases, notably when votes are lost to RRP. The results also indicate that parties exhibit a greater level of responsiveness to other mainstream parties than previous work has suggested. Overall, however, the direct loss measure does not appear to be a better predictor of future position or salience than the vote share of the relevant party family.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the quantitative methodology, including an outline of the dependent and independent variables used, and the basic structure of the models. The results of the models are then presented and discussed. The conclusion

summarises the findings of the quantitative analysis, and highlights avenues for future research.

4.2. Methodology

This project introduces a novel dataset that combines data on party positions from the Manifesto Project (MARPOR) dataset (Lehmann et al., 2024) with data on vote switches between elections from the CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) dataset (The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2023) and other post-election surveys⁴. This allows for a measurement of the precise electoral threat posed by different party families to which mainstream parties are theorised as responding. As demonstrated in figure 4.1, the hypotheses outlined in chapter 3 are all based on the theory that following a loss of votes to a particular party family between $t-1$ and t , mainstream party a will change their platform between t and $t+1$ in order to re-attract some defectors, and/or prevent further losses.

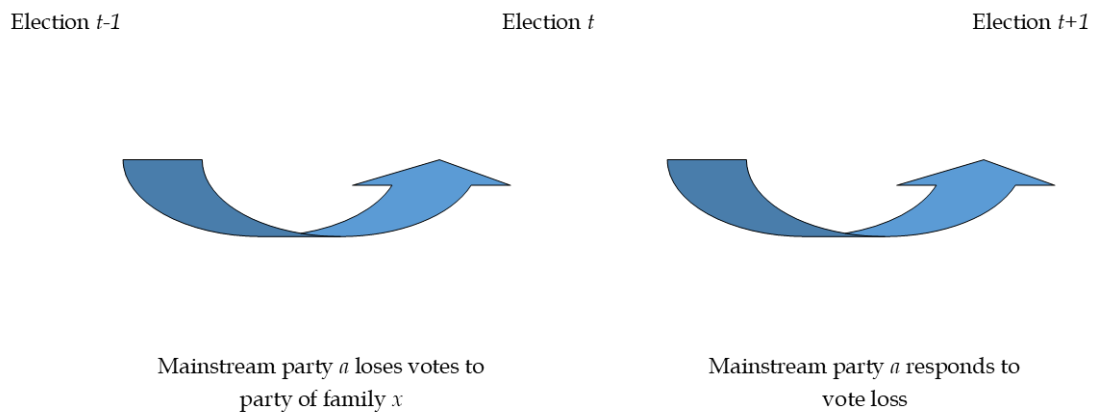


Figure 4.1: Representation of electoral responsiveness cycle

Following Abou-Chadi (2016), analyses are run separately for losses to green parties, RRP, mainstream left-wing parties, and mainstream right-wing parties. This allows me to alter the dependent variable based on what responsiveness is theorised to look like depending on the party family being responded to. In the cases of losses to mainstream left- and right-wing parties, analyses are performed separately based on the dimension emphasised by the relevant party family at t .

4.2.1. Independent variable

⁴ Details of other sources are included in appendix 1.

Two independent variables are used to measure responsiveness to poor electoral performance. The ‘vote share’ models replicate the approach of existing studies such as Spoon, Hobolt and deVries (2014), Abou-Chadi (2016), and Westlake (2018), with the main independent variable being the vote share of the relevant party family at time t to which mainstream party a has lost votes between $t-1$ and t . The ‘direct vote loss models’ use post-election surveys to measure the extent of vote loss from mainstream party a to the relevant party family x between $t-1$ and t . This measure replaces the vote share variable with a variable that more directly measures the threat posed by party family x to mainstream party a , thereby more directly measuring the stimulus for party change as outlined in chapter 3. The direct vote loss variable is measured as:

$$DirectVoteLoss_{a,t} = \frac{Vote\ switchers\ to\ party\ family\ x_{a,t}}{Votes_{a,t-1}} \times 100$$

where *vote switchers to party family $x_{a,t}$* is the number of election survey respondents who voted for party a at time $t-1$, and voted for a party of the relevant party family x (green, radical right, mainstream left or mainstream right) at time t , and *votes $_{a,t}$* is the number of respondents who voted for party a at $t-1$. Thus this measures all respondents who defected from the responding party to another party of the family of interest.

Both the vote share and direct loss models include all party elections where any voters indicated in the post-election survey that they voted for mainstream party a at t . Party vote share at t is taken from the MARPOR dataset. There are a number of sources for the election survey data. As indicated in table 4.3, in many cases the election-survey data are sourced from the CSES Integrated Module Dataset. Sources for surveys not included in CSES are detailed in Appendix 1.

Party family membership is largely based on the MARPOR *parfam* variable. As detailed in the MARPOR codebook, this variable is constant over time. However, RRP were coded based on those identified as such by Mudde (2007) and Norris (2005). Parties identified in either or both works as RRP are coded as RRP in the dataset used for the present analysis. Note that RRP coding overrides MARPOR categorisation – that is, where a party categorised by MARPOR as being conservative (*parfam*=60) but it is included in the list of RRP by Mudde or Norris, it is coded here as an RRP. Otherwise, party families are assigned based on the *parfam* variable, as detailed in table 4.1.

While MARPOR includes a *parfam* designation for “nationalist and radical right parties” (Lehmann et al. 2024), the decision to combine both nationalist and radical right parties mean that many parties are coded by MARPOR as nationalist/radical right that do not espouse nativist positions that are generally seen by scholars of the radical right as a central part of the

Regression party family	Included MARPOR party families
Green	Ecological
Centre-left	Socialist/ other left; social democratic
Centre-right	Liberal; Christian democratic; conservative

Table 4.1: Party family designation by MARPOR partfam coding

definition of RRP (Mudde, 2007; Zaslove, 2009). For example, the Irish *Clann na Poblachta* is classified by MARPOR as nationalist/RRP, but its focus was Irish republicanism and social democracy, rather than nativism (McDermott, 1998). The full list of parties coded as RRP is included in Appendix 2.

4.2.2. Dependent variable

As highlighted in the literature review, the vast majority of studies measuring party responsiveness – be it to previous results, to other parties, or to public opinion – do so through some measurement based on party manifestos, most often using data from the MARPOR database (Lehmann et al. 2024). The analysis presented in this chapter follows that trend. While MARPOR has the significant advantage of representing a large dataset that is also diverse in terms of years and countries included, it is important to establish the validity of manifesto-based measures of party responsiveness. There are two main considerations here: firstly, are manifestoes a useful and accurate representation of party positions, and secondly, are measures based on MARPOR data valid?

Relatively little research has been carried out on the subject of party manifestos, be it on how they are compiled or what purpose they serve, making it difficult to establish how reliably they indicate a party's platform. Despite the fact that parties do not generally expect voters to read manifestos, they continue to be seen as a crucial document in campaigns. This raises the question of what purpose they do serve, if they are not read by voters, and also if parties do not expect voters to read them (Däubler, 2012; Harmel, 2018).

Even if voters do not read manifestos, they are still exposed to their contents through the media, and parties are aware of this. In his case study of the approach of Irish parties to manifestos, Däubler (2012) finds that party manifestos often formed the basis of other methods used to communicate with voters, such as press releases, newsletters, and leaflets. Media outlets will also often independently produce content derived from party manifestos, such as overviews of the main points of each party's manifesto (e.g. Kelly,

2020; Le Monde, 2022; Walker, 2024; The Quint, n.d.). Thus there is some evidence to show that parties do use manifestos to communicate with voters, albeit indirectly. Given that manifesto-based measures of responsiveness assumes that manifestos are a tool used by parties in their vote-seeking strategies, this is an important point to make.

Ray (2007) outlines several types of manifestos, characterised by different functions. Manifestos viewed as a contract between parties and voters will be characterised by high levels of realism, with parties aiming to avoid being punished for unfulfilled promises. Where the manifesto is seen as advertising, they are likely to be more idealistic than realistic, with parties being held to a lower standard of accuracy. Regardless, in this case the goal is still to attract voters, meaning that while the claims may be exaggerated, their contents would still reflect the party's vote-seeking strategy. Ray (2007) argues that the manifesto that would be the closest measure of a party's ideal policy preferences would be that which acts as a statement of the party's philosophy, because it is so closely tied to the overall identity of the party. In the case of each type of manifesto however, parties are aiming to communicate a strategy that they hope will get them elected: even if the level of commitment to the promises varies, manifestos still reflect decisions made within the party about what platform to adopt ahead of an election. As noted by Budge (2001), manifestos provide the best basis for measuring party platforms at elections because they are specific to the time of the election (unlike measures such as voter surveys which can be ambiguous about timing), and they represent the message that the party is aiming to deliver at the point of the election. Given the concern of this thesis with electoral strategy and responsiveness, it follows that manifesto-based measures will provide the most valid measures of the dependent variables.

As mentioned in chapter 2, some studies have used data sources other than manifestos to measure party platforms, including social media posts and media coverage. These approaches have certain advantages over manifesto-based measures of platforms, such as the fact that the availability of such data is not reliant on a tradition of publishing manifestos, and that they are often more objective and reflective of reality than party-published manifestos (Helbling and Tresch, 2011). Yet despite these issues, the wide availability of manifesto data and the possibility of directly comparing manifesto-based measures of party platform thanks to the standardised coding approach introduced by MARPOR means that manifesto-based measures of party platform allow for the widest possible picture of party platform change, taking in a wide range of countries over a

significant period of time. Moreover, the fact that manifestos represent a more idealistic than realistic picture of the party's ambitions post-election does not take away from the fact that manifestos are still used by parties to communicate a platform that is representative of their overall electoral strategy. Given the focus of this thesis on the strategy that is driving electoral platforms, manifestos are thus a suitable tool for measuring platform change.

The MARPOR dataset is made up of over 5,000 observations, each representing the manifesto of a given party at a given election. Each sentence, or quasi-sentence, is assigned to one of the 56 categories outlined in the MARPOR codebook. Many of these are suited to calculating issue positions, being one of a pair of opposites, such as *per107* Internationalism: Positive and *per109* Internationalism: Negative. Some categories, however, seem to represent one side of a political spectrum without a corresponding opposite, such as *per605* Law and Order: Positive. There are also a number of categories that represent valence issues, on which parties are likely only to differ in their emphasis, rather than their positions, such as *per304* Political Corruption, and *per303* Governmental and Administrative Efficiency.

On the basis that the nature responsiveness of mainstream party *a* will vary depending on the party to which it has lost votes, the dependent variable changes with the party family to which votes have been lost. In the case of losses to green parties, the following measure, taken from Abou-Chadi (2016), is used:

$$EnvironmentPos_{a,t+1} = \frac{per501 - per410}{per501 + per410}$$

with environmental salience measured as

$$EnvironmentSal_{a,t+1} = per501 + per410$$

where *per501* represents the proportion of pro-environment statements in the manifesto of mainstream party *a*, and *per410* the number of pro-productivity statements. Given the status of the environment as a valence issue, there is no code in MARPOR for anti-environment statements. As such, an emphasis on productivity and economic growth is taken as opposing the prioritisation of sustainable growth (Abou-Chadi, 2016). This also reflects the measurement scale of environmental position used in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Jolly et al., 2019).

In the case of mainstream party vote loss to RRP's, the dependent variable is future position on multiculturalism, with the measure, again taken from Abou-Chadi (2016), calculated as

$$MulticulturalismPos_{a,t+1} = \frac{per608 - per607}{per608 + per607}$$

and multiculturalism salience as

$$MulticulturalismSal_{a,t+1} = per608 + per607$$

where *per607* represents the proportion of positive statements about multiculturalism in the relevant manifesto, and *per608* represents the number of negative statements about multiculturalism in the manifesto of mainstream party *a*.

Previous studies focusing on responsiveness to losses to mainstream parties rely on the *rile* measure from the MARPOR dataset, despite concerns about its validity. As noted in chapter 2, it overlooks non-economic issues that often represent an important dynamic of party competition. The use of the *rile* score to measure change in party positions overlooks the fact that the substance of political competition varies between contexts. In particular, the *rile* score as a measure of party positions is problematic in political contexts where non-economic issues are prominent (Benoit and Laver, 2007). Even when party competition mainly revolves around economic issues, the fact that the *rile* score includes some non-economic MARPOR categories (e.g. *per601* National Way of Life: Positive) means that it is also not entirely reliable as an indicator of economic position.

In order to work towards a more nuanced understanding of competition between mainstream parties, I depart from the use of *rile* that dominates previous studies in this area. Addressing the fact that responsiveness to mainstream parties will vary in its nature depending on the issues dominating competition between them, I use two different measures of position: one capturing position on the economic dimension, and the other capturing position on the GAL-TAN position. Where parties of the relevant mainstream family emphasise economic issues at *t*, responsiveness of the party losing votes will be measured on the basis of their economic position at *t+1*. Where parties of the relevant mainstream family emphasise GAL-TAN issues at *t*, responsiveness will be measured on the basis of GAL-TAN position at *t+1*. This allows me to develop models that will capture responsiveness on the dimension which has led to a party's loss of votes. I also include a measure of salience as well as position in order to account for the importance of issue

competition. While this does not solve the fact that the nature of political competition varies across countries, it does go some way towards remedying the minimal attention to the GAL-TAN dimension by the *rile* measure, and the problematic combination of the economic and GAL-TAN dimensions in one scale.

A number of recent papers have sought to address issues with the MARPOR *rile* measure by introducing separate measures for each of the economic and GAL-TAN dimensions (e.g. Lowe et al., 2011; Bakker and Hobolt, 2013; Trastulli, 2020, Koedam, 2022, Da Silva et al., 2023). However, given the sheer volume of categories included in the MARPOR dataset, and differences in opinion regarding which of these should be considered as falling under the economic or GAL-TAN label, the calculation of these measures varies significantly. The main difference is the decision to include/exclude certain MARPOR categories from calculations. Koedam (2022) for example, includes 21 categories in the calculating of his economic salience measurement, while Da Silva et al. (2023) only include 6 in their positional measurement. While studies also vary in the method of calculation (for example, Lowe et al. (2011) use a log-based approach, while Da Silva et al (2023) pair off opposing categories and divide the sum of the differences by the number of pairs).

I use a similar method to that used to calculate environmental and multiculturalism positions, in order to maintain consistency. As such, left-right positions are measured as

$$\frac{\text{right wing statements} - \text{left wing statements}}{\text{right wing statements} + \text{left wing statements}}$$

In order to adjudicate between the somewhat arbitrary decisions on categories to include in economic and GAL-TAN measures I calculated Pearson correlation coefficients between a number of MARPOR-based measures of economic and GAL-TAN positions and CHES economic and GAL-TAN positions. The MARPOR dataset was subset to all manifestos published in the same year as a CHES survey⁵, which produced a total sample of 182 manifestoes across 18 countries. The MARPOR measurements are based on those used in Lowe et al. (2011), Koedam (2022)⁶, and Da Silva et al. (2023). The measures from these studies were chosen based on the fact that they were designed specifically for

⁵ While the CHES datasets were released in 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2019, the surveys themselves were administered in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2014 and 2020 respectively.

⁶ Koedam (2022) only develops a measure of salience. However, as outlined in the appendix 3, the categories used in the salience measure can be adapted to a positional measure by assigning each category, with a few non-positional exceptions, to either the left or right side of the economic dimension.

application across a wide range of countries, rather than being used for country-specific analysis. The categories included in each of these measures are outlined in full in appendix 3. The correlation matrix for the economic left-right measures is reported in table 4.2.

DaSilva economic	0.594
Koedam economic	0.661
Lowe et al. economic	0.655
DaSilva GAL-TAN	0.584
Koedam GAL-TAN	0.495
Lowe et al. GAL-TAN	0.402

Table 4.2: Pearson correlation coefficients of manifesto-based left-right measures with CHES measures

Based on these correlation coefficients, economic position is measured as:

$$\frac{econR - econL}{econR + econL}$$

where

$$econR = per401 + per402 + per407 + per414 + per505 + per507 + per702$$

and

$$econL = per403 + per404 + per406 + per409 + per412 + per413 + per415 + per504 \\ + per506 + per701$$

GAL-TAN position is measured as

$$\frac{TAN - GAL}{TAN + GAL}$$

where

$$TAN = per410 + per601 + per603 + per605 + per608$$

and

$$GAL = per416 + per602 + per604 + per607$$

Saliency measures will be calculated respectively as

$$econR + econL$$

and

$$TAN + GAL$$

Each party-year observation is coded based on whether, at time t , other mainstream parties of the relevant party family (left or right) devoted more attention to economic issues or GAL-TAN issues. The consideration of the salience of each dimension at a given election also allows for some dynamism in the content of political competition across time and countries, while still providing a consistent measurement for the regression analyses.

4.2.3. Dissimilarity index

As well as the models where party change is measured on a specific policy issue, the models presented in tables 4.16-4.17 have as the independent variable a dissimilarity index that measures change across the entirety of a party's manifestos at t and $t+1$ respectively. The dissimilarity index is calculated as follows:

$$D_{a,t+1} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{per=per101}^{per706} \left| \frac{per_t}{x} - \frac{per_{t+1}}{x} \right|$$

where a is the share of party a 's manifesto devoted to a particular category (MARPOR per code) and x is the share of the party's manifesto that is coded (there are some sentences that do not fall under any of the MARPOR codes; the MARPOR $peruncod$ variable indicates the proportion of the manifesto that is uncoded). Thus, for each party, the dissimilarity index is calculated as the sum for each MARPOR code of the absolute difference between the proportion of the manifesto dedicated to a given MARPOR code, a , at t and the proportion of the manifesto dedicated to that MARPOR code at $t+1$. The sum of the differences is then halved. The dissimilarity index therefore allows for a comparison of the degree of change in parties' manifestos between elections. Because of this, it can be used to compare responsiveness between parties that have lost votes to niche parties and those that have not.

4.2.4. Controls

Each model includes a lagged dependent variable to control for the party platform on the relevant issue at t . By including the lagged dependent variable as a control, and thus holding it constant, the models measure the effect of the independent variables on change in the platform of party a on the relevant platform. All models also include a variable

measuring the left-right position of the responding party *a*. This reflects the possibility that responsiveness is in part dependent on party ideology, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Additional models also include an interaction effect between the main independent variable and the left-right measure to test H4. The measure used is the left-right variable from the ParlGov database (Döring et al. 2023). This is a 0-10 scale measuring left-right position, with 0 being the left-most position and 10 the right-most. It is calculated as the mean score of a number of party classifications and expert surveys.⁷ A number of other studies on party responsiveness to various stimuli use the *rile* measure from the MARPOR dataset as the measure of left-right position (e.g. Abou-Chadi, 2016; Klüver and Spoon, 2014; Farstad, 2017). However, as well as the issues with this measure outlined in section 4.2.2, the *rile* measure does not allow for the main issues of party competition to vary between political contexts (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Bakker and Hobolt, 2013; Gemenis, 2013). The categories used to calculate parties' *rile* scores are the same for all countries and time periods. This is problematic given evidence that the meaning of left and right varies significantly (Steiner, 2024). Given these issues, the ParlGov measure is used here instead. The expert surveys that form the basis of the ParlGov measure allow for variation in the issues forming the basis of political competition while maintaining the standard language and scale of the left-right measure. Appendix 6 includes as a robustness test a model that uses the MARPOR *rile* variable.

All models also include a variable indicating whether the responding party was in government immediately prior to the election at $t+1$, with this data being taken from ParlGov (Döring et al., 2023). This reflects the tendency identified by Walgrave and Nutyemans (2009) for government parties to be less responsive than opposition parties. Similarly, given the lower levels of responsiveness in multiparty systems to stimulus for change identified by Walgrave and Nutyemans (2009) and Ezrow (2007). This data is taken from Gallagher (2024), the models also control for electoral disproportionality at t . All models also control for vote share at $t+1$ as a proxy for party size on the basis of the idea that larger parties have more resources and thus might be better able to respond to election results. The environmental and GAL-TAN models also control for GDP at $t+1$, in line with the idea that voters' and parties' attention to postmaterialist issues, such as the environment, increases at higher levels of prosperity (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Grant and Tilley, 2019). The multiculturalism models control for level of immigration at $t+1$ to account for

⁷ Castles and Mair, 1984; Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Benoit and Laver, 2007; Jolly et al. 2022.

the possibility of higher levels of immigration impacting voter and party positions on and attention to multiculturalism. Finally, the multiculturalism and economic models control for GDP change between t and $t+1$, reflecting the fact that both poor economic performance and economic volatility affect the level of voter concern with economic issues (Singer, 2013) and immigration levels (Citrin et al. 1997). GDP data is sourced from the World Bank (World Bank Group, n.d.), while the sources for immigration data are detailed in appendix 4.

4.2.5. Models

The analysis presented here uses ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to measure the relationship between vote share/vote loss at t and party platform at $t+1$. While the dependent and independent variables vary across the models as indicated in the above discussions, the OLS regression models all retain the same basic forms. The models with vote share as the main independent variable take the form of:

$$DV_{a,t+1} = \alpha_1 DV_{a,t} + \beta_1 VoteShare_{x,t} + \epsilon_1 X_{a,t} + \theta + \vartheta + \varepsilon$$

and the models with vote share as:

$$DV_{a,t+1} = \alpha_2 DV_{a,t} + \beta_2 DirectLoss_{a,t} + \epsilon_2 X_{a,t} + \theta + \vartheta + \varepsilon$$

Models including an interaction effect between vote share and left-right position take the form of:

$$DV_{a,t+1} = \alpha_3 DV_{a,t} + \beta_3 VoteShare_{x,t} + \gamma_3 LeftRight_a + \delta_4 VoteShare_{x,t} * LeftRight_a + \epsilon_3 X_{a,t} + \theta + \vartheta + \varepsilon$$

and models including an interaction effect between direct loss and left-right position:

$$DV_{a,t+1} = \alpha_4 DV_{a,t} + \beta_4 DirectLoss_{x,t} + \gamma_4 LeftRight_a + \delta_4 DirectLoss_{x,t} * LeftRight_a + \epsilon_4 X_{a,t} + \theta + \vartheta + \varepsilon$$

The dissimilarity index models take the form of

$$Dissim_{a,t+1} = \alpha_5 Plurality_{a,t} + \gamma_5 PluralityNiche_a + \delta_5 Plurality_{a,t} * PluralityNiche_a + \epsilon_5 X_{a,t} + \theta + \vartheta + \varepsilon$$

and

$$Dissim_{a,t+1} = \alpha_5 Plurality_{a,t} + \beta_5 PluralityNiche_5 + \gamma_5 LeftRight_a + \delta_5 Plurality_{a,t} * PluralityNiche_{a,t} * LeftRight_a + \epsilon_5 X_{a,t} + \theta + \vartheta + \varepsilon$$

where *plurality* is a variable measuring the percentage of votes lost by *A* to the party family to which a plurality of *A*'s votes were lost at *t*, and *pluralityniche* is a dummy variable indicating whether a plurality of votes lost by *A* at *t* were lost to either RRP's or green parties.

X is a matrix of control variables, θ indicates country fixed effects, and ν indicates decade fixed effects; ε is an error term; *a* is the mainstream party whose response is being measured, and *x* is the party family to which responsiveness is being measured.

4.3. Results

4.3.1. Descriptive statistics

172 country-elections are included in the final analysis, as outlined in table 4.3. The years included in table 4.3 are those taking place at *t* – i.e. those at which votes are lost, before responsiveness happens. The elections listed are those for which an election study was available that asked about vote choice at *t-1* and *t*. 30 countries are represented, the majority in Europe. The dataset spans several decades, with the earliest election included in the analysis being the Swedish election in 1960, and the most recent being the 2020 Israeli election. The number of elections per country ranges considerably based on the availability of data. In particular, countries vary significantly in the availability of post-election survey data, with earlier elections less likely to have been the subject of such a study. Sweden is the most-represented with 16 elections included in the analysis.

Socialist	86
Social democratic	166
Liberal	134
Christian democratic	94
Conservative	119

Table 4.3: Distribution of mainstream party families in dataset

Country	Years								
Australia	1987 ^b	1993 ^b	1998 ^b	2004 ^a	2007 ^a	2013 ^a	2019 ^a		
Austria	2013 ^a	2017 ^a							
Belgium	1991 ^b	1995 ^b	2003 ^b	2007 ^b	2014 ^b				
Bulgaria	2001 ^a	2014 ^a							
Canada	1972 ^b	1979 ^b	1980 ^b	1984 ^b	1988 ^b	1993 ^b	2008 ^a	2011 ^a	2015 ^a
Czechia	2002 ^a	2006 ^a	2010 ^a	2013 ^a					
Denmark	1971 ^b	1973 ^b	1975 ^b	1977 ^b	1979 ^b	1981 ^b	1984 ^b	1987 ^b	1988 ^b
	1990 ^b	1994 ^b	2001 ^a	2005 ^b	2007 ^a	2011 ^b	2015 ^b		
Estonia	2011 ^a								
Finland	1991 ^b	2003 ^a	2007 ^a	2011 ^a	2015 ^a				
France	1997 ^b	2002 ^a							
Germany	1987 ^b	1990 ^b	1994 ^b	2002 ^a	2005 ^a	2009 ^a	2013 ^a	2017 ^a	
Greece	2009 ^a	2012 (Jun) ^a	2015 (Jan) ^a	2015 (Sep) ^a					
Hungary	2002 ^a								

Table 4.4: Elections included in regression analysis

Iceland	1991 ^b	1995 ^b	2003 ^a	2007 ^a	2009 ^a	2013 ^a	2016 ^a	2017 ^a	
Ireland	2002 ^a	2007 ^a	2011 ^a	2016 ^a					
Israel	2003 ^a	2006 ^a	2013 ^a	2020 ^a					
Italy	1972 ^b	1983 ^b	1987 ^b	1992 ^b	1994 ^b	2001 ^b			
Latvia	2002 ^b								
Lithuania	2012 ^b	2016 ^a							
Netherlands	1971 ^b	1972 ^b	1977 ^b	1981 ^b	1982 ^b	1986 ^b	1989 ^b	1994 ^b	1998 ^a
	2002 ^a	2003 ^b	2006 ^a	2010 ^a	2012 ^b	2017 ^a			
New Zealand	1987 ^b	1990 ^b	1993 ^b	2002 ^a	2008 ^a	2011 ^a	2014 ^a	2017 ^a	
Norway	1993 ^b	2001 ^a	2005 ^a	2009 ^a	2013 ^a				
Poland	2005 ^a	2007 ^a	2011 ^a						
Portugal	2005 ^a	2015 ^a							
Slovenia	2004 ^a	2008 ^a	2011 ^a						
Spain	1993 ^b	2004 ^a	2011 ^b	2015 ^b	2016 ^b	2019 (Apr) ^b			
Sweden	1960 ^b	1968 ^b	1970 ^b	1973 ^b	1976 ^b	1979 ^b	1982 ^b	1985 ^b	1988 ^b
	1991 ^b	1994 ^b	2002 ^a	2006 ^a	2010 ^b	2014 ^a	2018 ^a		
Switzerland	1971 ^b	1987 ^b	1991 ^b	1995 ^b	2003 ^a	2007 ^a	2011 ^a	2015 ^b	
Turkey	2011 ^a	2015 ^a							

Table 4.4: Elections included in regression analysis (cont.)

United Kingdom	1964 ^b	1966 ^b	1970 ^b	1974 (Feb) ^b	1979 ^b	1983 ^b	1987 ^b	1992 ^b	2001 ^b
	2005 ^a	2010 ^b	2015 ^a	2017 ^a					

Table 4.4: Elections included in regression analysis (cont)

Figure 4.2 outlines the mean percentage of votes at $t-1$ lost to green parties, RRP, mainstream left, and mainstream right parties respectively by each party family. Generally speaking, the further to the left a mainstream party is, the more votes it loses to green parties – although the mean figure for Christian democratic losses to green parties is slightly higher than for liberal parties. The data suggests that socialist and social democratic parties are the main electoral victims of the success of green parties. By contrast, right-wing parties have a greater propensity to lose votes to RRP. Turning to competition between mainstream parties, socialist parties are overwhelmingly more likely to lose votes to other left-wing parties, particularly when compared to social democratic parties. By contrast, social democratic parties face both greater losses to right-wing parties than socialist parties do, and greater losses to right-wing parties than to other left-wing parties. Vote loss by the mainstream-right to other mainstream-right parties is more evenly spread than losses between mainstream-left parties, with liberal parties losing more votes to other mainstream,-right parties than Christian democratic or conservative parties.

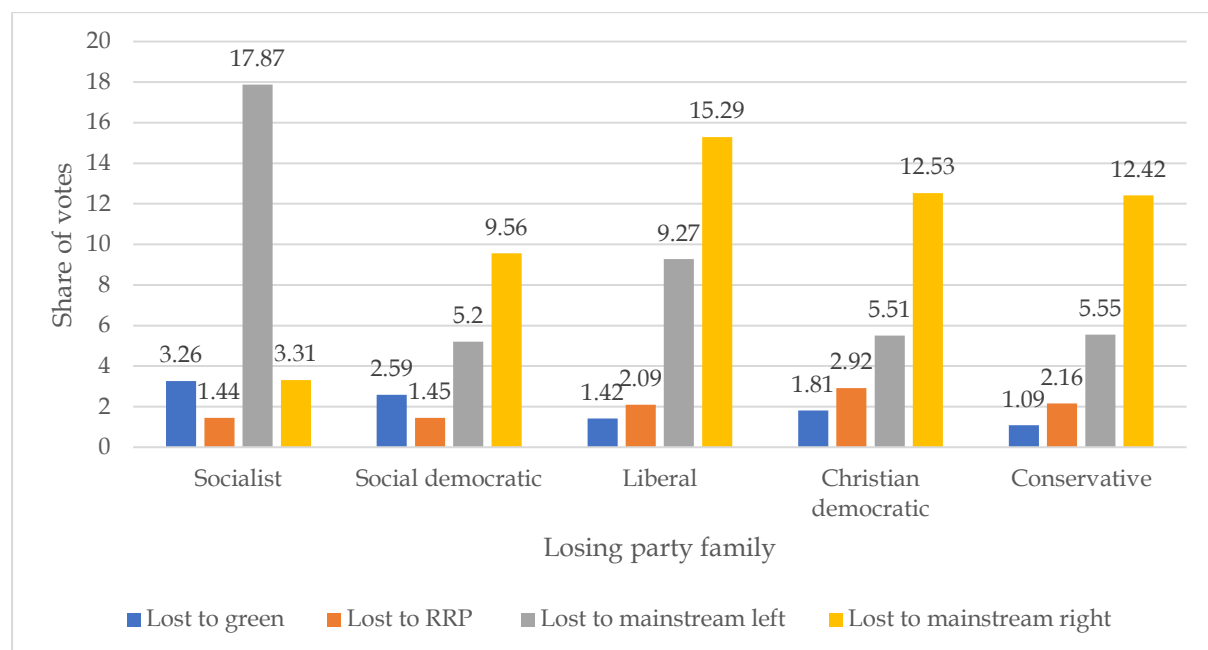


Figure 4.2: Vote loss by party family

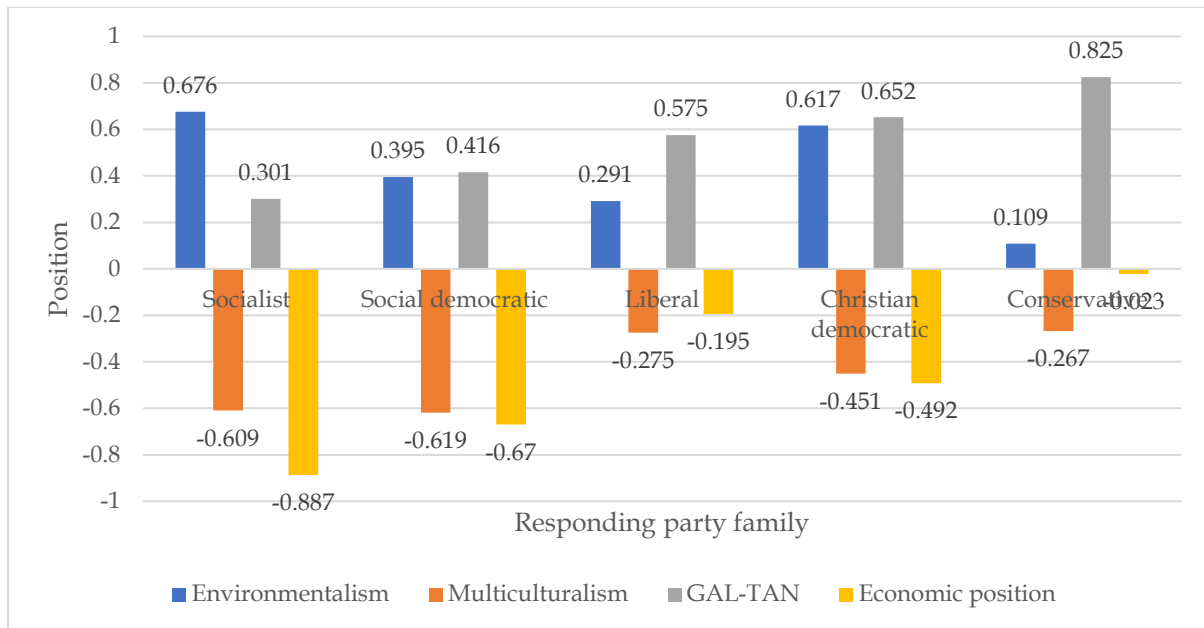


Figure 4.3: Issue positions by party family

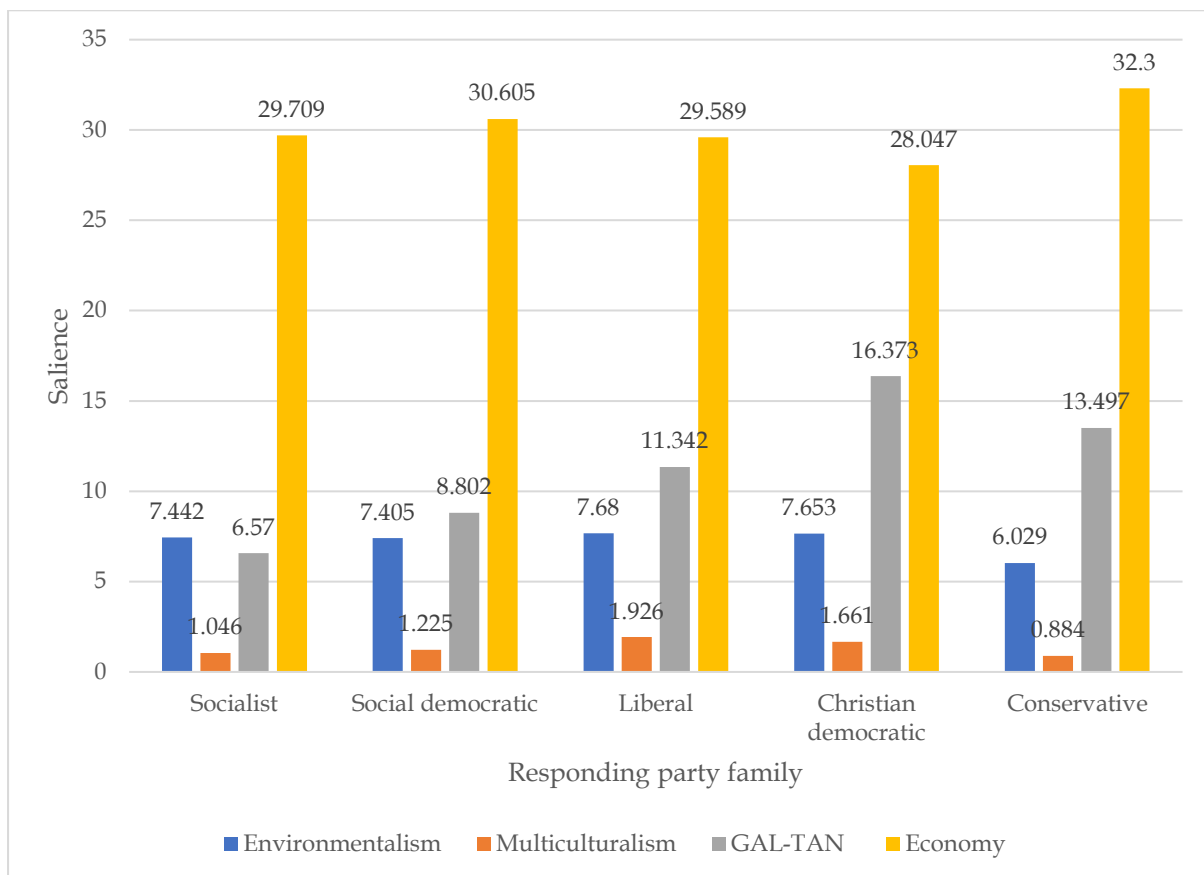


Figure 4.4: Issue salience by party family

Figures 4.3-4.4 present the mean position and salience of each party family on each dimension of responsiveness. Similarly to the figures on vote loss, the further to the left a party is, the more pro-environmental a party is likely to be. However, again Christian democratic parties are an outlier, adopting significantly more pro-environmental positions than other right-wing parties. On average, Christian democrats are also more pro-environmental than the social democratic parties in the sample. On multiculturalism, socialist and social democratic parties adopt significantly less restrictive positions than mainstream-right parties. Indeed, there is minimal difference between the two left-wing party families in terms of their position on multiculturalism. Again, Christian democrats are more liberal on the issue of multiculturalism, though the gulf between Christian democratic and other right-wing families is smaller than in the case of environmentalism.

There is a clear pattern with regards to party family positions on the GAL-TAN dimension. The further to the right a party is located, the more conservative its position. This pattern also holds for the most part in terms of the economic dimension, though again Christian democratic parties represent an outlier, adopting a notably more left-wing position on the economy than liberal parties. Thus, the distribution of positions across party families is broadly in line with expectations. Christian democratic parties, however, have a more-left wing position on average than liberal parties on all issues except for the GAL-TAN dimension.

In terms of salience, there is little difference between party families on environmentalism. With the exception of conservative parties, parties across all families devote an average of 7%-8% of their manifesto to issues relating to environmentalism. Similarly, parties of all families devote an average of 1%-2% of their manifesto to multiculturalism, with conservative parties only slightly below the 1% mark. The fact that parties across the political spectrum are so similar in this respect supports the idea that parties have limited leeway in the attention that they devote to these issues, instead following trends in public opinion or the moves of rival parties.

As well as taking up significantly more of the manifestos than environmentalism and multiculturalism, there is much greater variation between party families in terms of the attention that they devote to the GAL-TAN dimension and the economic dimension. Indeed, the socialists are the only party family that devotes more attention to a niche party issue (environmentalism) than one of the mainstream issues. The pattern of GAL-TAN salience is

similar to that of position: the further to the right a party is located, the more of their manifesto they devote to the dimension, with Christian democratic parties focusing on GAL-TAN issues to a greater extent than other families. All party families devote close to 30% of their manifestos to the economy, with the Conservatives leading in terms of emphasis on this issue.

4.3.2. Regression results

Table 4.6 shows the results of the environmentalism models, measuring responsiveness both to green party vote share at t and to votes lost to green parties at t . In the case of salience, there is a significant negative effect of green party vote share, indicating that parties facing a rise in green party support also decrease the attention that they devote to environmentalism. The salience finding is in line with that of Abou-Chadi (2016), and contrasts with that of Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries (2014). However, while Abou-Chadi (2016) did not find a significant result for positionality, the evidence from this model does support the hypothesis of a relationship between green party support and a move away from environmentalism. This relationship is also present in the positional models, indicating that parties faced with the rise of green parties move to a less environmentalist position at the following election.

Looking at the relationship between vote loss to green parties and future environmental platforms, the direct loss variable is significant in the salience model, but not in the positionality model. The coefficient in the salience model is negative, as is the green party vote share variable, and is also substantively smaller. Thus the evidence provided here does support H2a, but not H3a. Looking at the impact of the use of direct loss instead of green party vote share, in the case of the positional and salience models both measures of goodness of fit disimprove in the direct loss model. Thus even in the case of the salience model where there is a significant effect of direct losses to green parties, less of the variation in environmentalism platform at $t+1$ is explained by that model than by the green party vote share model.

	Environment salience vote share	Environment salience direct vote loss	Environment position vote share	Environment position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2701 ***	0.2717 ***	0.1905 ***	0.1999 ***
	(0.0429)	(0.0434)	(0.0501)	(0.0495)
Green vote share/lost to green	-0.2559 **	-0.0604 .	-0.0278 **	0.0038
	(0.0873)	(0.0314)	(0.0096)	(0.0032)
Left-right position	-0.2444 **	-0.2719 **	-0.0329 **	-0.0300 *
	(0.0855)	(0.0853)	(0.0127)	(0.0126)
Cabinet party	-0.0562	-0.1461	0.0218	0.0154
	(0.4405)	(0.4479)	(0.0469)	(0.0470)
GDP t+1	-0.0000 .	-0.0000 .	-0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0230 .	0.0252 .	-0.0084 ***	-0.0077 ***
	(0.0139)	(0.0143)	(0.0022)	(0.0022)
Disproportionality	0.0397	0.0907	0.0001	0.0074
	(0.0599)	(0.0640)	(0.0120)	(0.0128)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	599	599	554	554
Adjusted R ²	0.7621	0.7594	0.5663	0.5607
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.5: Explaining environment salience/position at t+1

	Environment salience vote share	Environment salience direct vote loss	Environment position	Environment position direct loss
Lagged DV	0.2704 ***	0.2717 ***	0.1897 ***	0.2000 ***
	(0.0430)	(0.0435)	(0.0498)	(0.0495)
Green vote share/lost to green	-0.3598 *	-0.0606	-0.0061	0.0008
	(0.1500)	(0.0572)	(0.0172)	(0.0057)
Left-right position	-0.2972 **	-0.2720 **	-0.0209	-0.0317 *
	(0.1025)	(0.0889)	(0.0148)	(0.0132)
Loss measure*left right	0.0201	0.0001	-0.0042	0.0008
	(0.0189)	(0.0086)	(0.0027)	(0.0012)
Cabinet party	-0.0632	-0.1461	0.0218	0.0156
	(0.4400)	(0.4486)	(0.0471)	(0.0469)
GDP t+1	-0.0000 .	-0.0000 .	-0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0247 .	0.0252 .	-0.0087 ***	-0.0077 ***
	(0.0140)	(0.0143)	(0.0021)	(0.0022)
Disproportionality	0.0424	0.0907	-0.0003	0.0074
	(0.0615)	(0.0641)	(0.0120)	(0.0128)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	599	599	554	554
Adjusted R ²	0.762	0.759	0.5674	0.56
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.6: Explaining environment salience/position at t+1 with interaction

However, as demonstrated in table 4.7, the inclusion of an interaction effect between the loss measure and left-right position of the responding party changes the interpretation of the main effects of the loss measure. The green party vote share coefficient is no longer significant in the positional model, nor is the direct loss coefficient in the salience model, thus undermining support for H2a. Following the inclusion of the interaction effect, green party vote share in the salience model is the only significant independent variable of interest. It remains negative, but with a greater substantive effect than in the model with no interaction. None of the environmentalism models have significant interaction effects. Thus, there is insufficient evidence in this sample to reject the null hypothesis that the effect of losses to green parties on environmentalism platform at $t+1$ is not moderated by left-right position.

In the case of the green party vote share positional model and direct loss salience model, the fact that the main coefficients of interest become insignificant when the interaction effect is added suggests that the effect of these variables in the previous models is limited. Thus, the most robust evidence from these models is in support of the negative effect of green party vote share at t on environmentalism platform at $t+1$. The left-right coefficient remains significant and negative across all models, as it was in the models without interaction effects. This indicates that left-wing parties tend to adopt more pro-environmental positions overall, which is unsurprising. However, effect of green party vote share on responsiveness does not vary based on the left-right placement of the responding party. The evidence presented here does not suggest that mainstream-left and right parties differ systematically in the extent or nature of their salience responsiveness to the growth of green parties. Thus while there is insufficient evidence in these models to support H4, the relationship between green party vote share and future environmental platform applies equally in the case of mainstream-right and left parties. In short, while mainstream-left parties generally adopt more pro-environmental positions and devote less attention to the issue than mainstream-right parties, they are no more responsive to the growth of green parties than their right-wing counterparts.

Table 4.8 presents the results of the multiculturalism models. Neither of the main independent variables is significant in the salience models, meaning that there is no support here for H2b. In contrast with Abou-Chadi (2016) and Westlake (2018), there is insufficient evidence here to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between RRP vote share or

	Multiculturalism salience vote share	Multiculturalism salience direct vote loss	Multiculturalism position vote share	Multiculturalism position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2638 ***	0.2638 ***	0.3784 ***	0.3839 ***
	(0.0746)	(0.0735)	(0.0730)	(0.0738)
Loss measure	0.0029	0.0047	0.0455 ***	0.0507 ***
	(0.0252)	(0.0280)	(0.0107)	(0.0113)
Left-right position	0.0829 .	0.0815 .	0.0530 **	0.0275
	(0.0475)	(0.0495)	(0.0175)	(0.0180)
Cabinet party	-0.1955	-0.1934	0.0191	0.0387
	(0.1862)	(0.1813)	(0.0602)	(0.0573)
Immigration	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP change	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000 *	0.0000 **
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0174	0.0173	0.0068 .	0.0055
	(0.0106)	(0.0106)	(0.0039)	(0.0037)
Disproportionality	-0.0285	-0.0284	0.0211	0.0194
	(0.0458)	(0.0458)	(0.0203)	(0.0211)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	490	490	273	273
Adjusted R ²	0.4921	0.4921	0.576	0.5748
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.7: Explaining multiculturalism salience/position at $t+1$

losses to RRPs and attention devoted to multiculturalism at $t+1$. Both RRP vote share and direct loss are highly significant and positive in the positional models, indicating that parties faced with a rise in RRP support and parties that lose votes to RRPs move to a more restrictive position on multiculturalism. Thus, these models do support H3b, suggesting a relationship between RRP vote share or losses to RRPs and multiculturalism position at $t+1$. This is in line with a number of previous findings that indicate the contagion of the far-right, including Abou-Chadi (2016) and Westlake (2018).

However, again the models suggest that rival party family vote share at t is a better predictor of platform at $t+1$ than losses to the rival party family. The adjusted R^2 value is slightly lower in the direct loss positional model than the vote share model, while it is the same in both salience models. Thus even in the case of positionality, while there is a statistically significant relationship between votes lost to RRPs and position on multiculturalism at $t+1$, no more variation in position at $t+1$ is explained by votes lost to RRPs at t than RRP vote share at t . As in the case of the environmentalism models, the inclusion of an interaction effect changes the interpretation of the coefficients. The interaction effect is significant in the vote share positional and salience models, and the direct loss salience model. In the case of the direct loss positional model, the interaction effect is not significant, and the direct loss coefficient also loses the significance that it had in the model that did not include an interaction effect. Again, this suggests that the effect present in the non-interaction model was relatively small, undermining evidence supporting H3b.

	Multicult. salience vote share	Multicult. salience direct vote loss	Multicult. position vote share	Multicult. position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2555 ***	0.2561 ***	0.3760 ***	0.3829 ***
	(0.0724)	(0.0725)	(0.0735)	(0.0740)
Loss measure	-0.0344	-0.1003 *	0.0206	0.0292
	(0.0324)	(0.0444)	(0.0145)	(0.0326)
Left-right position	0.0208	0.0446	0.0041	0.0190
	(0.0452)	(0.0504)	(0.0236)	(0.0219)
Loss measure*left- right position	0.0081 *	0.0198 *	0.0051 **	0.0037
	(0.0040)	(0.0077)	(0.0019)	(0.0049)
Cabinet party	-0.1770	-0.1905	0.0239	0.0381
	(0.1859)	(0.1795)	(0.0624)	(0.0571)
Immigration	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP change	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000 **	0.0000 **
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0173	0.0171	0.0074 .	0.0057
	(0.0107)	(0.0104)	(0.0040)	(0.0038)
Disproportionality	-0.0262	-0.0322	0.0257	0.0196
	(0.0455)	(0.0456)	(0.0202)	(0.0210)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	490	490	273	273
Adjusted R ²	0.4934	0.4943	0.5856	0.5743
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.8: Explaining multiculturalism salience/position at t+1 with interaction

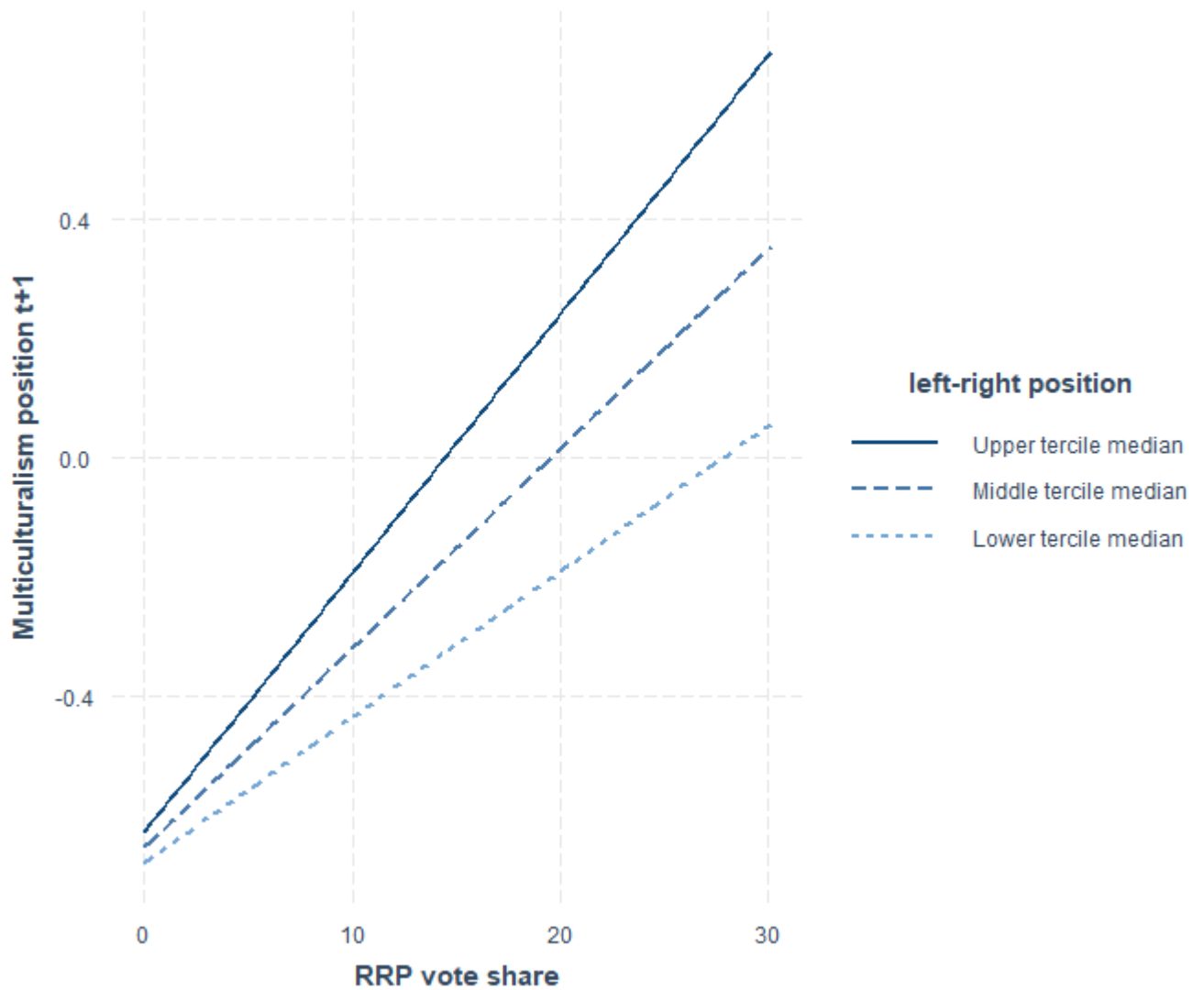


Figure 4.5: Moderating effect of left-right position on positional responsiveness to RRP vote share

Figure 4.5 shows the interaction plot between RRP vote share at t and left-right position of the responding party, with multiculturalism salience at $t+1$ as the outcome variable. Overall, both left- and right-wing parties increase the salience of multiculturalism in the face of the growth of the far-right. However, the slope is steeper for more right-wing parties. This indicates a greater level of responsiveness by right-wing parties: the greater the vote share of RRP at t , the greater the gap in responsiveness between right- and left-wing parties. This suggests that as well as adopting more restrictive positions at every level of RRP vote share, right-wing parties are more willing to move further towards restrictive positions on multiculturalism than left-wing parties when faced with higher levels of RRP success.

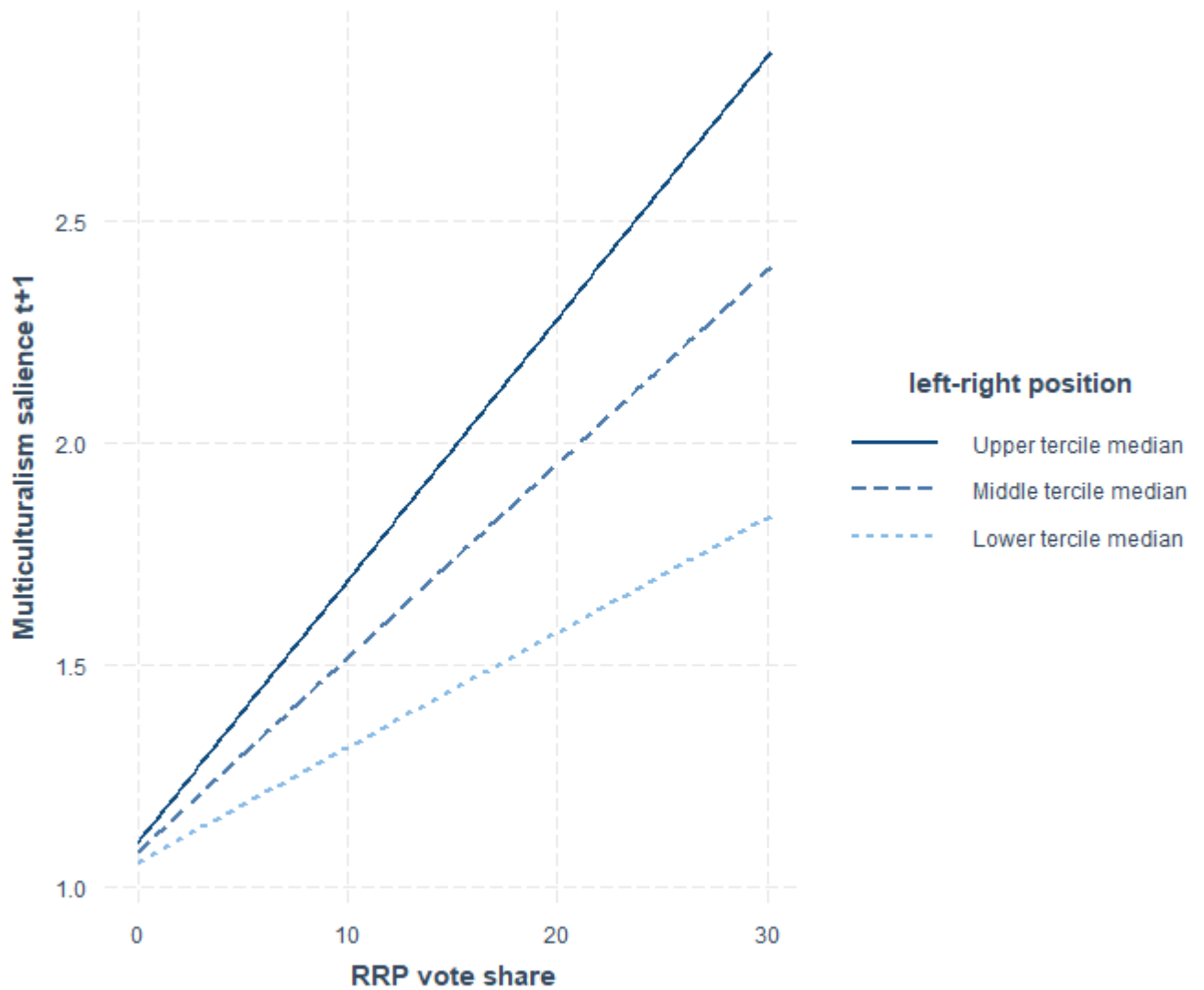


Figure 4.6: Moderating effect of left-right position on salience responsiveness to RRP vote share

Figure 4.6 shows the interaction between left-right position and RRP vote share, with multiculturalism salience as the outcome variable. The moderating effect is similar to that in the positional model, with salience levels being higher for mainstream-right parties at every level of RRP vote share, and a steeper slope for mainstream-right parties. Again, the results show that mainstream-right parties exhibit a greater level of responsiveness to RRP vote share than mainstream-left parties, with the attention devoted to multiculturalism at $t+1$ increasing relative to that of centrist and mainstream-left parties at higher levels of RRP vote share at t .

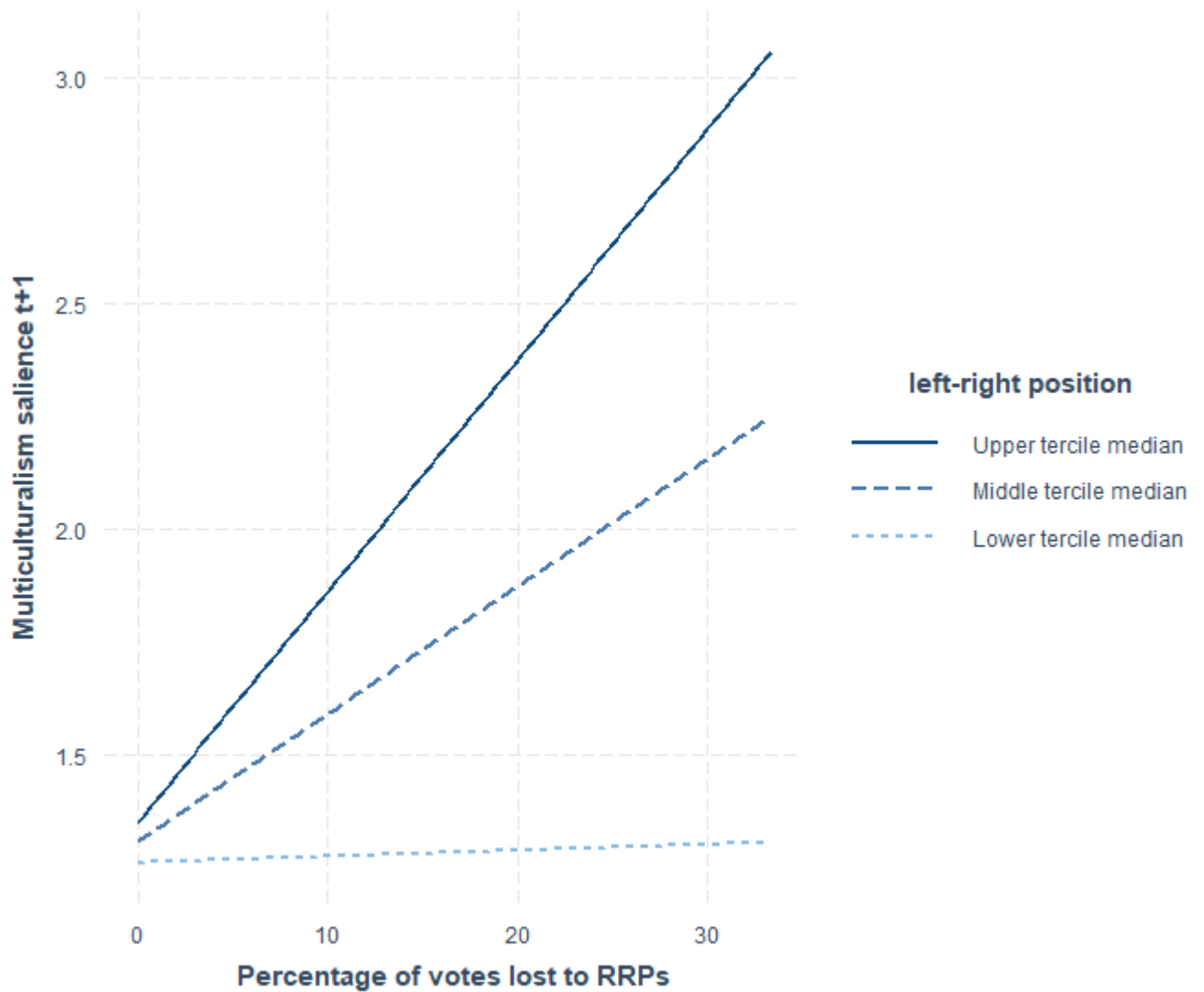


Figure 4.7: Moderating effect of left-right position on salience responsiveness to vote loss to RRPs

As figure 4.7 shows, similar to both positional and salience responsiveness to RRP vote share, the further to the right a party is, the greater its responsiveness to vote loss to RRPs in terms of salience, lending support to H4. While all lines slope upwards, the slope for the lower tercile median appears close to zero. This indicates that the mainstream-left parties in the dataset adopt minimal changes to their manifesto in terms of the emphasis they place on multiculturalism issues following vote loss to RRPs. This notably contrasts with the RRP vote share interaction plots, where there is a much more substantial trajectory of mainstream-left parties towards more restrictive positions on and more attention to multiculturalism with the rise of RRPs. The slopes are considerably steeper for the middle tercile median and upper tercile median party in terms of left-right position, with the slope again particularly steep for

the most right-wing parties. Thus, overall, mainstream-right parties in the sample exhibit a good deal of responsiveness to RRP, while mainstream-left parties appear only to respond to the growth of RRP, but not direct losses.

	GAL-TAN	Econ
Mainstream left emphasis	3	554
Mainstream right emphasis	33	547

Table 4.9: Distribution of issue emphasis of rival mainstream parties

Table 4.9 outlines the number of party-elections in which the responding party was competing with other mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties emphasising the GAL-TAN and economic dimensions respectively. Note that because the dimension emphasis of other mainstream parties is calculated by party rather than by election (in order to account for the fact that, for example, a left-wing party that loses votes to other left-wing parties would be responding to the issues emphasised by other left-wing parties but not the issues it emphasised itself), this is greater than the number of individual country-elections in the dataset. Overwhelmingly, both mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties tend to emphasise the economy. A regression could not be performed with this dataset for losses to left-wing parties emphasising the GAL-TAN dimension at t because there was only one election where this was the case – the Israeli election of 2006. While there were 3 observations from that election, because many of the controls are measured at the national level, the lack of variation did not allow for a regression.

The results of the regressions measuring responsiveness to mainstream-right parties emphasising the GAL-TAN dimension are presented in table 4.10. While there was sufficient variation to run a regression, the tendency indicated in table 4.9 of parties to emphasise the economy in their manifestos means that the sample size for these models is considerably smaller than the other models presented here. While right-wing vote share is not significant in the positional model, the coefficient for votes lost to the mainstream right is significant and positive, supporting H3c and indicating a tendency for parties to move to a more conservative position on the GAL-TAN dimension following vote loss to such parties. There is an improvement of goodness of fit in the direct loss model compared to the vote share model, suggesting that more of the variation in the GAL-TAN positions of the responding

parties is explained by direct loss. In the case of salience, neither of the independent variables is significant. Thus there is no support here for H2c.

	GAL-TAN salience vote share	GAL-TAN salience direct vote loss	GAL-TAN position vote share	GAL-TAN position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.0675	-0.0634	0.3217 .	0.3415 .
	(0.2820)	(0.2755)	(0.1812)	(0.1771)
Loss measure	0.1889	-0.2708	0.0030	0.0138 .
	(0.3207)	(0.3197)	(0.0081)	(0.0075)
Left-right position	2.7959	3.5038	0.1145 .	0.0663
	(2.4872)	(2.9835)	(0.0623)	(0.0464)
Cabinet party	-8.9800	-9.6791	0.0007	0.0317
	(8.1518)	(8.3888)	(0.2001)	(0.1573)
GDP change	0.0000 ***	0.0000 ***	-0.0000 .	-0.0000 .
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0016	-0.1995	0.0305 .	0.0363 **
	(0.2598)	(0.3774)	(0.0150)	(0.0120)
Disproportionality	0.0137	0.2621	-0.0184	-0.0345
	(1.9972)	(2.3086)	(0.0583)	(0.0526)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	33	33	33	33
Adjusted R ²	0.7804	0.7857	0.7221	0.7493
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.10: Explaining GAL-TAN platform at $t+1$ when the GAL-TAN dimension is emphasised by the mainstream-right

	GAL-TAN salience vote share	GAL-TAN salience direct vote loss	GAL-TAN position vote share	GAL-TAN position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	-0.3195	-0.4074	0.2907	0.3047 .
	(0.3548)	(0.3263)	(0.2051)	(0.1500)
Loss measure	1.2147 *	0.4633	-0.0147	-0.0330
	(0.5252)	(0.6007)	(0.0167)	(0.0198)
Left-right position	14.7499 **	7.8822 *	-0.0373	-0.0311
	(4.9195)	(3.2678)	(0.1294)	(0.0581)
Loss measure*left- right position	-0.2026 *	-0.1757	0.0030	0.0095 *
	(0.0724)	(0.1134)	(0.0023)	(0.0037)
Cabinet party	-11.2964 *	-9.1110	0.0167	-0.1008
	(5.1753)	(6.1703)	(0.1805)	(0.1484)
GDP change	0.0000 *	0.0000 **	-0.0000	-0.0000 .
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	-0.1437	-0.3767	0.0325	0.0452 **
	(0.2094)	(0.2979)	(0.0154)	(0.0113)
Disproportionality	11.8551 *	10.8047 *	-0.1303	-0.1667
	(4.2403)	(3.9753)	(0.1208)	(0.0965)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	33	33	33	33
Adjusted R ²	0.8204	0.8557	0.7128	0.8227
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.11: Explaining GAL-TAN platform at t+1 when the GAL-TAN dimension is emphasised by the mainstream right, with interaction

There is a significant interaction effect in the direct loss positional model. The impact of this interaction is plotted in figure 4.8. Unsurprisingly, more right-wing parties adopt a more conservative position on the GAL-TAN dimension at all levels of vote loss to the mainstream

right. Moreover, there is a notable difference in slopes for each tercile median. While the line for the lower tercile median slopes downwards, indicating that left-wing parties move towards a more liberal position as the number of votes lost to the mainstream right increases, the opposite is true for the middle and higher tercile median parties. Thus both centrist and mainstream-right parties respond to vote losses to other mainstream-right parties by adopting a more conservative position on the GAL-TAN dimension. In relation to H4, while mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties differ in the direction of their responses, the extent of platform change is similar. Thus there is no support for H4 in this case.

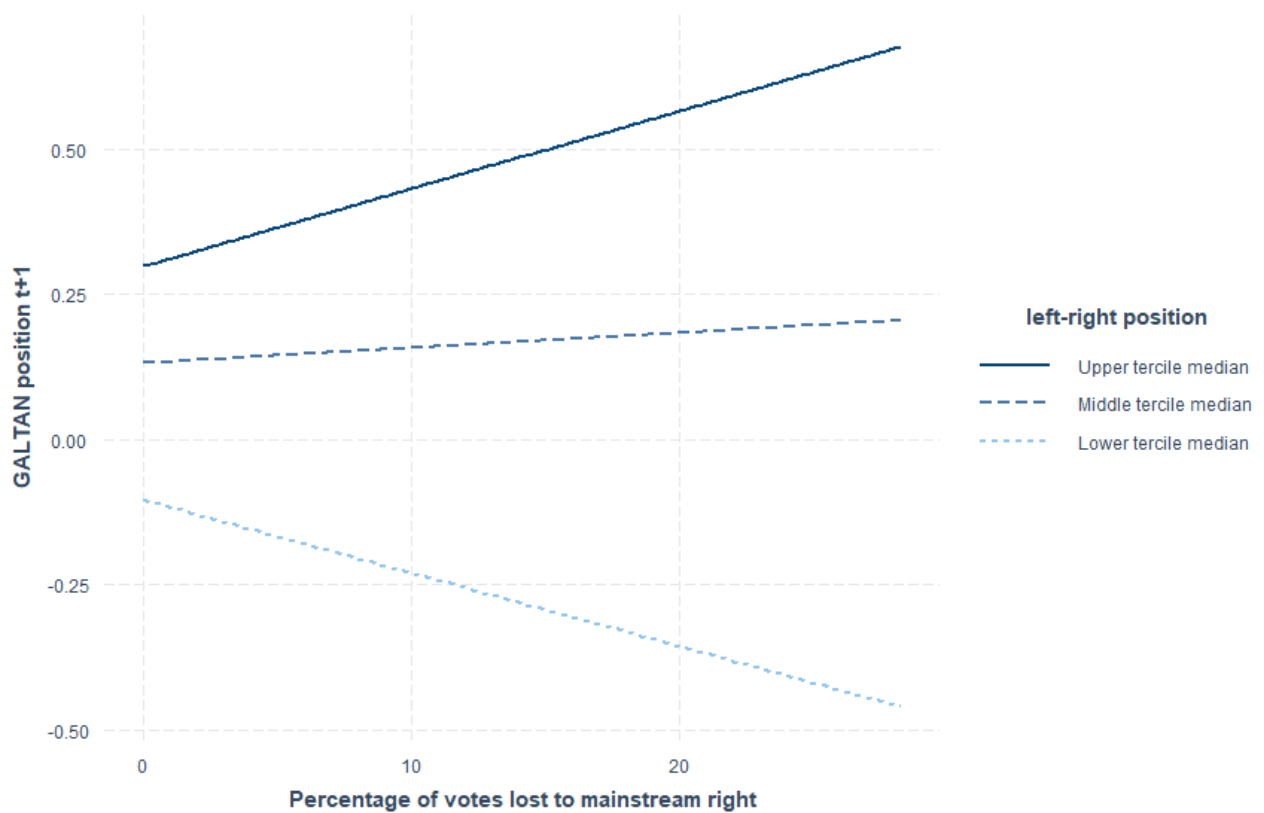


Figure 4.8: Moderating effect of left-right position on GAL-TAN positional responsiveness to vote loss to mainstream-right parties

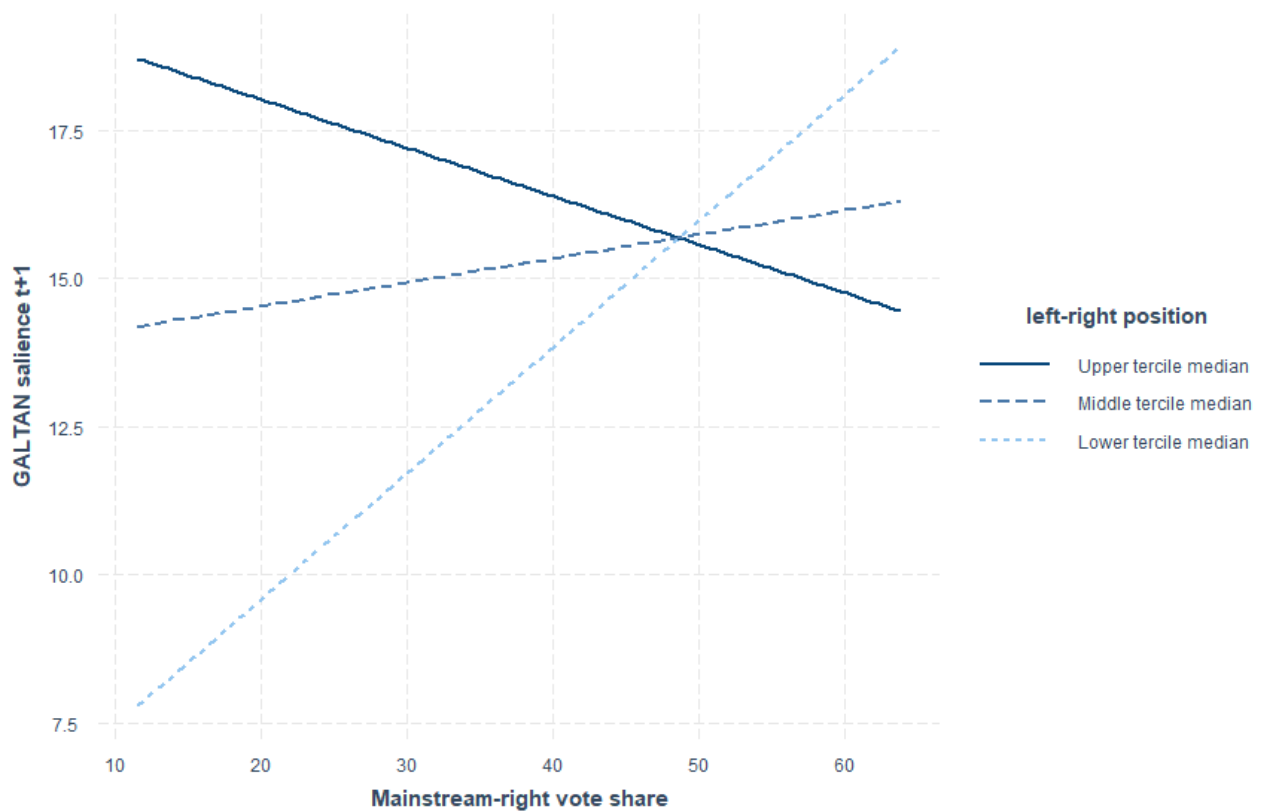


Figure 4.9: Moderating effect of left-right position on GAL-TAN salience responsiveness to vote share of mainstream-right parties

There is also a significant interaction effect between mainstream-right vote share and ideology of the responding party in the salience model. The effect is plotted in figure 4.9. Mainstream-right parties faced with the rise of other mainstream-right parties decrease their attention to GAL-TAN issues at higher levels of mainstream-right vote share, when those parties are emphasising the GAL-TAN dimension. By contrast, mainstream-left and centrist parties increase their attention to these issues at higher levels of mainstream-right vote share. The slope is steepest for mainstream-left parties, indicating a greater level of responsiveness as well as a different approach to responsiveness. While mainstream-right parties devote more attention to GAL-TAN issues at low levels of the vote share of other mainstream-right parties, the opposite is true at higher levels. In this case, the steeper slope of mainstream-left parties indicates a greater level of responsiveness on their part to the rise of the mainstream right on the basis of the GAL-TAN dimension.

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2555 ***	0.2554 ***	0.4257 ***	0.4258 ***
	(0.0552)	(0.0553)	(0.0560)	(0.0556)
Loss measure	-0.0367	-0.0123	0.0001	0.0008
	(0.0412)	(0.0430)	(0.0013)	(0.0010)
Left-right position	0.0468	-0.0788	0.0811 ***	0.0828 ***
	(0.2545)	(0.2423)	(0.0106)	(0.0102)
GDP change	-0.0000	0.0000	-0.0000 .	-0.0000 .
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.1933	-0.2182	-0.0387	-0.0385
	(0.9085)	(0.8927)	(0.0344)	(0.0343)
Vote share	0.0298	0.0493	0.0005	0.0006
	(0.0592)	(0.0502)	(0.0018)	(0.0017)
Disproportionality	-0.0911	-0.0788	-0.0035	-0.0036
	(0.2400)	(0.2381)	(0.0074)	(0.0073)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	550	550	547	547
Adjusted R ²	0.927	0.9269	0.7907	0.7909
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.12: Explaining economic platform at t+1 when the economy is emphasised by the mainstream-left

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2316 ***	0.2554 ***	0.4108 ***	0.4253 ***
	(0.0590)	(0.0553)	(0.0603)	(0.0576)
Loss measure	-0.3050 ***	0.0428	-0.0047	0.0029
	(0.0887)	(0.0694)	(0.0030)	(0.0018)
Left-right position	-1.9514 **	0.0564	0.0468 *	0.0879 ***
	(0.6894)	(0.3247)	(0.0209)	(0.0124)
Loss measure*left- right	0.0603 **	-0.0176	0.0011	-0.0007
	(0.0195)	(0.0177)	(0.0007)	(0.0005)
GDP change	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000 .	-0.0000 *
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.1410	-0.2300	-0.0378	-0.0389
	(0.8958)	(0.8953)	(0.0346)	(0.0341)
Vote share	-0.0067	0.0525	-0.0003	0.0007
	(0.0591)	(0.0501)	(0.0020)	(0.0017)
Disproportionality	-0.0513	-0.0818	-0.0030	-0.0037
	(0.2316)	(0.2400)	(0.0080)	(0.0072)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	550	550	547	547
Adjusted R ²	0.9286	0.9269	0.7918	0.7909
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.13: Explaining economic platform at $t+1$ when the economy is emphasised by the mainstream-left, with interaction

As demonstrated in tables 4.12-4.15, the number of observations included in the regressions measuring responsiveness on the economy are much larger than in the GAL-TAN models. Neither mainstream-left vote share nor votes lost to mainstream-left are significant predictors of economic salience or position at $t+1$. Thus, there is no support here for H2d or H3d.

In the interaction models, the interaction effect between measure of loss and left-right position is only significant in the economic salience model. As indicated by the significant and negative coefficient for loss measure in the model, and the interaction plot presented in figure 4.10, all parties decrease their attention to the economy when faced with a rise in left-wing vote share. The plot suggests that the further to the left a party is located, the more they emphasise the economy at $t+1$ at lower levels of mainstream-left vote share at t . However, while all parties decrease their attention to the economy as the vote share of (rival) mainstream-left parties emphasising the economy increases, the slope is considerably steeper for the lower tercile median party than the middle and upper tercile median parties. Left-wing parties exhibit significant responsiveness to the growth of other left-wing parties focusing on the economy, reducing the attention that they devote to the economy at $t+1$ to levels significantly lower than centrist and mainstream-right parties. While mainstream-right parties do trend towards lower salience following an increase in the vote share of mainstream-left parties emphasising the economy, the change is relatively small, particularly compared to more left-wing parties. This variation based on party ideology is not present in the direct loss model, however, meaning there is no evidence for H4 in these models.

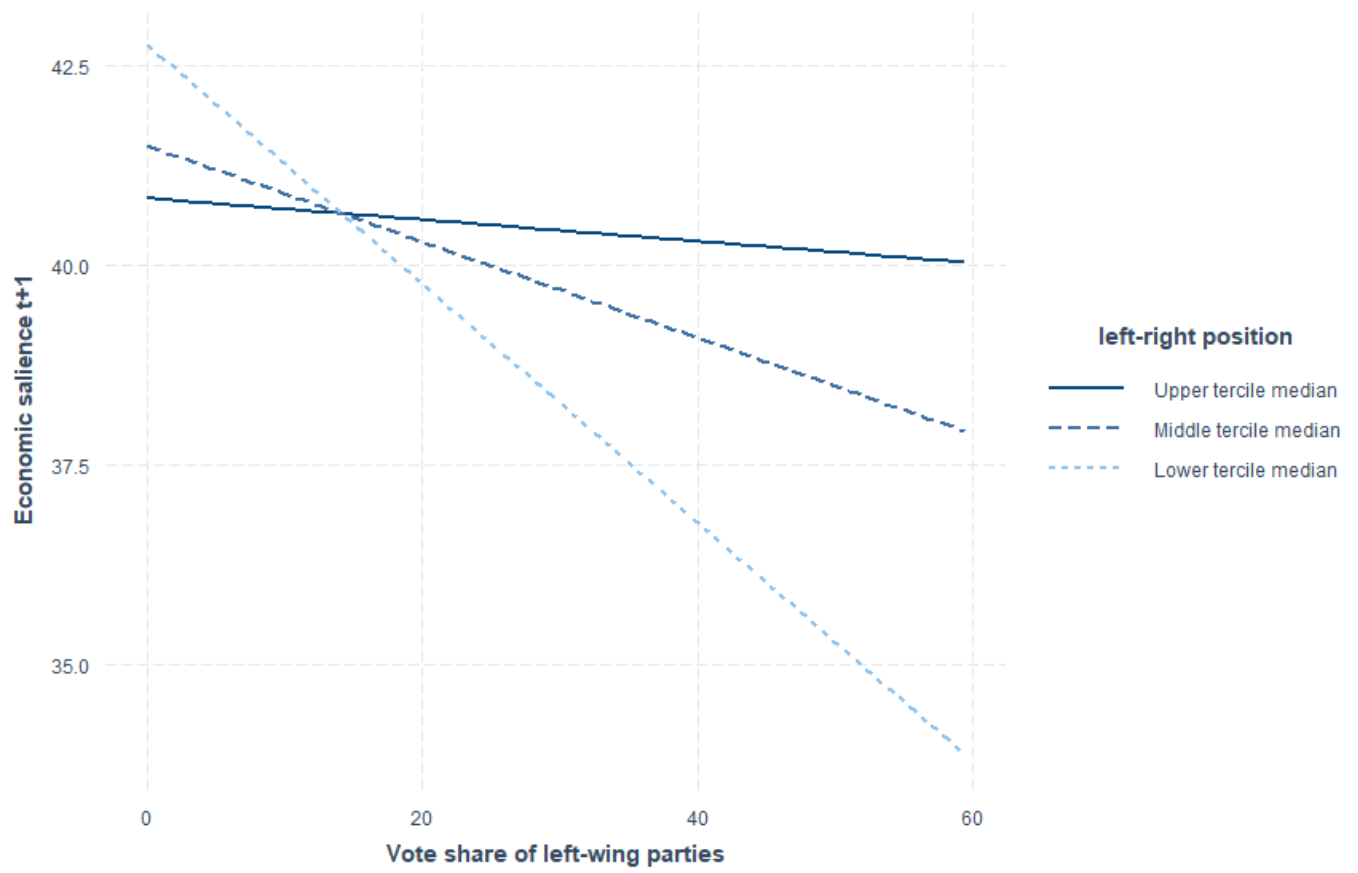


Figure 4.10: Moderating effect of left-right position of salience responsiveness to mainstream-left parties

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2385 ***	0.2371 ***	0.4339 ***	0.4376 ***
	(0.0515)	(0.0510)	(0.0555)	(0.0555)
Loss measure	0.0170	0.0523	-0.0014	-0.0010
	(0.0382)	(0.0334)	(0.0012)	(0.0013)
Left-right position	-0.0960	-0.2393	0.0760 ***	0.0822 ***
	(0.3010)	(0.2545)	(0.0111)	(0.0105)
GDP change	0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000 *	-0.0000 *
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.3241	-0.3077	-0.0145	-0.0148
	(0.8564)	(0.8620)	(0.0329)	(0.0329)
Vote share	0.0496	0.0581	0.0004	0.0005
	(0.0427)	(0.0429)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)
Disproportionality	-0.1103	-0.1199	0.0003	0.0003
	(0.1865)	(0.1906)	(0.0068)	(0.0069)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	541	543	539	541
Adjusted R ²	0.9307	0.9311	0.8029	0.8027
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.14: Explaining economic platform at t+1 when the economy is emphasised by the mainstream-right

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2354 ***	0.2372 ***	0.4338 ***	0.4401 ***
	(0.0516)	(0.0511)	(0.0558)	(0.0555)
Loss measure	0.0914	0.0647	-0.0005	0.0026
	(0.0787)	(0.1290)	(0.0027)	(0.0052)
Left-right position	0.3943	-0.2233	0.0820 ***	0.0865 ***
	(0.5854)	(0.3105)	(0.0212)	(0.0107)
Loss measure*left- right	-0.0129	-0.0020	-0.0002	-0.0006
	(0.0135)	(0.0215)	(0.0005)	(0.0008)
GDP change	0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000 *	-0.0000 *
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.2720	-0.3066	-0.0138	-0.0144
	(0.8457)	(0.8625)	(0.0329)	(0.0329)
Vote share	0.0485	0.0577	0.0004	0.0003
	(0.0422)	(0.0434)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)
Disproportionality	-0.1121	-0.1211	0.0003	-0.0000
	(0.1868)	(0.1913)	(0.0068)	(0.0071)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	541	543	539	541
Adjusted R ²	0.9307	0.931	0.8026	0.8027
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table 4.15: Explaining economic platform at t+1 when the economy is emphasised by the mainstream-right, with interaction

Finally, table 4.15 presents the results of the models measuring responsiveness to the mainstream-right on the economic dimension. Similarly to the left-wing models, neither of the

main independent variables is significant in the salience models or the positional models, again indicating no evidence to support H2d or H3d. This is the case in both the basic models and the interaction models. The interaction effect between loss measure and left-right position is also not significant in any of the models, and thus there is no support for H4 in terms of responsiveness on the economy. Again, there is minimal change in goodness of fit based on whether vote share or direct loss is used as the main independent variable.

Appendix 5 presents the results of reverse causality models for each regression to assess the possibility that the platforms of mainstream parties at one election have a causal impact on the success of niche parties at the subsequent election. There is a significant effect in three cases: there is a significant negative effect of environment position at t on green party vote share at $t+1$, a significant positive effect of multiculturalism salience at t on RRP vote share at $t+1$, and a significant effect of GAL-TAN salience at $t+1$ on the share of votes lost to mainstream right parties at $t+1$. In the case of the environmental position-vote share and GAL-TAN salience-direct loss models, the lack of significant interaction effects in the original models presented in tables 4.6 and 4.11 means that the potential for reverse causality does not undermine any of the hypotheses supported by the present analysis. However, the finding of a significant effect of multiculturalism salience at t on RRP vote share at $t+1$ impacts the effects presented in tables 4.8 and in the interaction plot presented in figure 4.7. Rather than parties responding to vote loss to RRP by increasing their attention to issues of multiculturalism, the reverse causality models suggest that the more a mainstream party talks about multiculturalism in its manifesto at t , the more likely their supporters are to defect to an RRP at $t+1$. This may arise from voters becoming more aware of or concerned about multiculturalism issues because of the emphasis placed on them by the mainstream party, and defecting to an RRP because of their perceived competence on such issues. Thus, based on the present data we cannot determine the causal nature of the relationship between votes lost to RRP and multiculturalism position. As such, these findings should be interpreted as correlational.

Tables 4.16-4.17 show the results of the dissimilarity index regression. In both models, neither the coefficient for the percentage of votes lost to the plurality party nor any of the interaction effects are significant. The lack of significance here means that there is no evidence to support H3, and insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between

the extent of vote loss to niche parties at t , or whether a plurality of votes was lost to niche parties at t , and overall change in a party's manifesto at t and $t+1$.

Vote loss to plurality	0.0001
	(0.0007)
Plurality niche	0.0439
	(0.0359)
Vote loss to plurality*plurality niche	-0.0022
	(0.0014)
Left-right	0.0120 **
	(0.0039)
GDP $t+1$	-0.0000
	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	0.0016
	(0.0138)
Vote share $t+1$	0.0002
	(0.0007)
Disproportionality	-0.0040
	(0.0028)
Country fixed effects	X
Decade fixed effects	X
N	528
Adjusted R ²	0.91
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1	

Table 4.16: Explaining dissimilarity index at $t+1$

Vote loss to plurality	-0.0002
	(0.0016)
Plurality niche	-0.0170
	(0.0704)
Left-right	0.0100
	(0.0072)
Vote loss to plurality*Plurality niche	-0.0002
	(0.0034)
Vote loss to plurality*Left-right	0.0001
	(0.0004)
Plurality niche*Left-right	0.0122
	(0.0112)
Vote loss to plurality*Plurality niche*Left-right	-0.0004
	(0.0006)
GDP $t+1$	-0.0000
	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	0.0025
	(0.0137)
Vote share $t+1$	0.0002
	(0.0007)
Disproportionality	-0.0042
	(0.0029)
Country fixed effects	X
Decade fixed effects	X
N	528
Adjusted R ²	0.9096
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1	

Table 4.17: Explaining dissimilarity index at $t+1$, with interaction

4.4. Discussion

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Greater variation in party platform at $t+1$ is explained by the extent of vote loss to the relevant party family at t than by the vote share of the relevant party family at t .	Partly supported – greater variation in party platform explained by direct vote loss model in cases of multiculturalism salience, GAL-TAN salience, GAL-TAN position, economic salience when votes lost to mainstream-right, and economic position when votes lost to mainstream-right.
H2a: Mainstream parties that lost votes to green parties at t will increase the salience of environmentalism at $t+1$.	Not supported
H2b: Mainstream parties that lost votes to RRP's at t will increase the salience of multiculturalism at $t+1$.	Supported
H2c: Mainstream parties losing votes to a mainstream party family emphasising GAL-TAN issues at t will increase the salience of GAL-TAN issues at $t+1$.	Not supported
H2d: Mainstream parties losing votes to a mainstream-party family emphasising the economy at t will increase the salience of the economy at $t+1$.	Not supported
H3a: Mainstream parties that lost votes to green parties at t will adopt more pro-environmental positions at $t+1$.	Not supported

Table 4.18: Overview of hypotheses

H3b: Mainstream parties that lost votes to RRP's at t will adopt a more restrictive position on multiculturalism at $t+1$.	Not supported
H3c: Mainstream parties that lost votes to a mainstream party family emphasising GAL-TAN issues at t will move towards that family's position on GAL-TAN issues at $t+1$.	Partly supported – response to vote loss contingent on left-right position of responding party
H3d: Mainstream parties that lost votes to a mainstream party family emphasising the economy at t will move towards that family's position on the economy at $t+1$.	Not supported
H4: Mainstream-right parties will be more responsive to vote loss than mainstream-left parties.	Partly supported – response to vote loss contingent on position of party in cases of salience responses to RRP's and GAL-TAN positional responses to mainstream-right parties, but greater responsiveness of mainstream-right parties only present in case salience responses to RRP's
H5: Mainstream parties that lost a plurality of votes to a niche party family will change their manifesto to a greater extent than mainstream parties that lost a plurality of votes to a mainstream party family.	Not supported

Table 4.18: Overview of hypotheses (cont.)

The results presented in this chapter provide a number of insights into the dynamics of party competition. Firstly, the results presented here support the idea proposed by Abou-Chadi (2016) that the responsiveness of mainstream parties to niche parties depends on the type of party posing an electoral threat. The results of the vote share models support Abou-Chadi's findings. Parties responding to RRP's move to a more restrictive position on multiculturalism regardless of their position on the political spectrum, with the effect being the largest for mainstream-right parties. However, there is no evidence here for such an effect of green parties. The rise of RRP's is also met with an increase in the attention devoted to multiculturalism by mainstream parties, with the effect again being greatest for mainstream-right parties. This does not hold in the overall loss interaction model in Appendix 7, however. By contrast, the growth of green parties is met with a decrease in attention to environmentalism, with no differentiation in the effect based on ideological position of the responding party.

The results for mainstream party competition, however, do not indicate that mainstream parties respond to electoral threats posed by other mainstream parties. There is a significant relationship between mainstream-left vote share and future economic salience. Parties in the sample tended to decrease their attention to the economy regardless of their own ideological position, though this effect is particularly strong for other mainstream-left parties. This suggests that parties do adopt a dismissive strategy when faced with mainstream-left parties that are strong on the economy. The presence of a dismissive strategy in this case would account for the lack of positional movement on the economy. As Meguid (2008) notes, given the risk involved in changing position on an issue, parties are unlikely to do so on issues whose impact on electoral outcomes they are trying to reduce. However, there is no equivalent effect for losses to mainstream-right parties.

There are a number of potential explanations for this difference. In line with Abou-Chadi's (2016) argument that dismissive strategies are more likely to be adopted when an electoral threat is posed by a party family that owns the relevant issue outright, it may be the case that mainstream-left parties have a stronger degree of issue ownership on the economy. This is unlikely, given the importance of the economy to voters: even if mainstream-left parties own the economy, it is still important enough to voters that dismissive strategies would not succeed in reducing its importance to such an extent that voters would choose between parties

on the basis of other issues. It is also possible that there is a similar effect for mainstream-right parties, but that it is not sufficiently present in this sample for the interaction effect to be significant.

The lack of cases in which mainstream parties emphasise the GAL-TAN dimension over the economy limits what we can learn about responsiveness on this dimension. In the case of mainstream-right parties, however, the results suggest some positional responsiveness to votes lost to the mainstream-right, with other mainstream-right parties moving to a more right-wing position, and mainstream-left parties moving to a more left-wing position. In this case, we see parties on both sides of the left-right spectrum doubling down on their position, moving further to the extremes of the GAL-TAN dimension. In the salience models, the interaction effect plotted in figure 4.8 indicates opposing strategies of mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties when responding to the vote share of the mainstream-right, with the former increasing the salience of the issue, and the latter decreasing the salience. However, given the small sample size for the GAL-TAN models, the estimates are likely to be imprecise.

Secondly, there is an important effect of the ideological position of the responding party in the case of losses to the far-right. While the direction of change in salience and position is the same for both mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties, the extent of change is consistently greater the further to the right the mainstream-party is located. In the case of salience, this is true for both the vote share and direct loss models. This indicates that the extent of the threat posed is not the only factor driving variation between mainstream-left and -right parties, given that the direct loss model holds the extent of that threat constant. The fact that mainstream-left parties devote less attention to multiculturalism issues regardless of the extent of vote loss to RRP's may indicate a reluctance to respond based on the ideological gulf between the mainstream-left and the far-right. Investigating the causes of this impact of ideology on responsiveness to RRP's could prove to be a fruitful avenue for further research.

In the case of mainstream party competition, there is a significant effect for left-right position in the model measuring positional responsiveness to mainstream-right parties on the GAL-TAN dimension. While the strength of the effect is similar for mainstream-left and -right parties, they adopt opposing strategies, with mainstream-left parties moving to a more liberal position, and mainstream-right parties moving to a more conservative position. In this case, we see parties on both sides of the left-right spectrum doubling down on their position,

moving further to the extremes of the GAL-TAN dimension. However, given the small sample size for the GAL-TAN models, the estimates are likely to be imprecise.

There is also a significant effect for left-right position in the model measuring salience responsiveness to mainstream-left parties on the economic dimension. In this case, all parties move further to the left, with the effect being strongest for more left-wing parties. This indicates parties attempting to reduce the role of the economy in party competition in favour of other issues, thus defusing the threat posed by mainstream-left parties seeing an increase in their vote share. Given that this effect is not present in the direct vote loss model, it is likely driven by parties' perceptions of the extent of the threat posed by the rise of the mainstream-left. This makes sense given the tendency for mainstream-left parties to decrease the salience of the economy to a greater extent, in line with the theory that parties are more likely to lose votes to other proximal parties than non-proximal parties.

Looking at the results across all models, there is no consistent evidence for H4 relating to the relative responsiveness of mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties to vote loss. While there are several cases where there is a significant moderating effect of the ideology of the responding party, the results do not suggest a greater overall level of responsiveness by mainstream-left parties. Rather, the extent and direction of responsiveness varies depending on the parties and dimensions of competition involved. In order to understand these dynamics, future research may benefit from focusing in-depth on the relationships between specific party families.

With regards to the significant effects identified in these models, it should be noted that they appear to be highly sensitive to changes in the measure of the ideological position of the responding parties. Appendix 6 presents and discusses the results of models that replace the measure of left-right position with the *rile* score from the MARPOR database. There are a number of instances of changes in significance and signs of coefficients. Indeed, the only significant findings presented in this chapter that remains significant in the *rile* models are the negative relationship between green party vote share and mainstream attention to the environment and the interaction effect indicating greater positional responsiveness to RRP vote share by mainstream-right than mainstream-left parties. This underlines the importance of researchers using valid measures when studying the impact of ideological position on party change.

Thirdly, these results are also enlightening regarding the impact of measuring poor electoral performance as the rise of other parties and votes lost to other parties respectively. In several of the models, there is a significant relationship for direct loss and the relevant outcome variable – positional responsiveness to RRP, salience responsiveness to RRP, GAL-TAN positional responsiveness to mainstream-right parties, and economic salience responsiveness to mainstream-left parties. There are also significant relationships for direct vote loss and the outcome variable in the case of salience responsiveness to green parties, and economic salience responsiveness to mainstream-right parties, though these are not significant once the interaction with left-right position is included. However, it is not clear from the present study that direct loss is a better predictor of future electoral platform than the vote share of rival parties. The only instance of models that include interaction effects with significant effects of the loss measure or the interaction effect for the direct loss model and not the vote share model is GAL-TAN positional responsiveness to mainstream-right parties. As indicated in appendix 7, there is also no variation in responsiveness to vote loss based on whether the vote share of the responding party declined at t .

There are a handful of instances where goodness of fit improves in the direct loss models compared to the vote share models. In the multiculturalism salience models, there is a slight increase in the adjusted R^2 from 0.4934 to 0.4943. The most substantial increase is in the GAL-TAN positional models, from 0.7133 for the mainstream-right vote share to 0.8076 for direct loss. There is also a slight increase from 0.8672 to 0.8676 in the mainstream-left economic positional models. All the other models either see a decrease in goodness of fit in the direct loss models, or no change. Thus it is only in the mainstream-right GAL-TAN positional models that there is any appreciable increase in the degree of variation in responsiveness at $t+1$ explained by the use of direct loss. It should also be noted that this is the model with the smallest sample size. Despite the more direct measure of electoral threat captured by the vote loss models, they do not show a greater level of responsiveness than the vote share models.

Thus, the quantitative analyses presented in this chapter provide limited support for H1. The direct loss models do not consistently explain greater variation in party platform at $t+1$. Rather, their explanatory power relative to that of the vote share models varies with the parties and issues involved. Overall, while there are certain circumstances where parties appear more responsive to vote loss than to the vote share of other parties, in general vote loss

is not a more accurate predictor of party platform at $t+1$ than the vote share of rival parties. As such, this study raises the question of why limited additional responsiveness is explained by the direct loss model.

There are several possible explanations for the fact that the direct loss models do not have greater explanatory power than the vote share models. The first is the possibility that parties do not have reliable information on where they lost votes to at t . However, as discussed in chapter 3, this is unlikely given the resources available to parties for gathering information about election results. The second possibility is that they do know where they lost votes to, but that this does not play a more significant role than the vote share of each party family in determining the content of the responding party's manifesto at $t+1$. Responding party A may choose to focus on what parties were successful at t in general, rather at the expense of party A , in order to take advantage of the opportunity indicated by the success of those parties. Whereas information about lost votes acts as an indicator of why a given platform has failed, information about the vote shares of individual party families act as an indicator of what platforms are successful with the electorate as a whole. As Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries (2014) note, the vote share of a given party family does to some extent represent the risk posed by that party family, with parties that have a greater vote share (and thus a more successful platform) at t potentially having the ability to achieve greater success with that platform at $t+1$. However in addition, a party family with a high vote share at t allows other parties to identify an opportunity to increase their own vote share by adopting the platform of that party family, regardless of whether the responding party lost votes to it. Moreover, identifying an opportunity for growth through the rise of another party allows the responding party both to protect its existing voters by neutralising the electoral threat, and appeal to new voters. This electoral opportunity theory may explain why direct loss is not a better predictor of platform at $t+1$ than vote share: responding parties are concerned with broadening their appeal as well as addressing threats.

Finally, with regards to the impact of niche parties, there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that the manifestos of mainstream parties undergo greater change when they lose a plurality of votes to a niche party family rather than a mainstream party family. Indeed, the results show that there is no significant effect of votes lost to niche parties and change in party manifestos. One possible explanation for this effect is that even when parties lose votes to

niche parties, the fact that they have usually also lost votes to mainstream parties inhibits their ability to develop a clear strategy about how to change ahead of the next election in order to attract votes. Indeed, there are only 13 observations in the dataset of parties that have lost votes to niche parties but none to mainstream parties. Thus, rather than prompting greater responsiveness by giving the responding party a clear idea of the motivations of defectors, it may be that losses to niche parties actually add uncertainty, because they generally indicate a greater dispersion of defectors than in the case of losses to mainstream parties alone. Moreover, it is possible that because the appeal of niche parties is so narrow, change in response to them is concentrated enough so as to have minimal impact on the dissimilarity index as a measure that covers the entirety of the manifesto.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I present quantitative tests for the hypotheses outlined in chapter 3 relating to responsiveness to the extent of vote loss to specific party families. The results demonstrate that the extent and nature of responsiveness varies considerably depending on the party family posing the electoral threat. Specifically, direct loss has a significant effect on attention devoted to multiculturalism, position on the GAL-TAN dimension when responding to mainstream-right parties, and attention to the economic dimension when responding to mainstream-left parties. Overall, however, the direct loss approach does not appear to be a more reliable predictor of party platform at $t+1$ than the vote share approach. Despite the empirical focus on the direct threat posed by rival party families, there are fewer instances of significant results in the direct loss models, and at best minimal improvement in the goodness of fit in most cases. Future qualitative research may shed light on why there appears to be a lack of responsiveness to vote loss to other parties compared to the vote share of other parties. The qualitative analysis in chapter 5 will also seek to contribute to understanding this dynamic.

The results also highlight the importance of the ideological position of the families involved in determining the extent of responsiveness. This is particularly the case when it comes to mainstream competition, where previous research has not differentiated between responsiveness to left- and right-wing parties. The results presented here generally suggest that when it comes to mainstream competition, parties move further towards their end of the ideological spectrum in response to the success of other parties – left-wing parties move to the

left, and right-wing parties move to the right. However, because these movements are sometimes matched by a decrease in attention to the issues involved, it is not clear that the positional movements represent a core strategy to (re-)attract voters. Again, qualitative research focusing on competition between mainstream parties and the relevant strategies adopted may further explain the present findings.

Finally, the results do not support the idea of greater levels of responsiveness to niche parties, despite their clearer appeal to voters. This result may in part be a result of issues with the empirical design, if the appeal of niche parties is so niche that responsiveness to them does not significantly affect the dissimilarity index. As such, alternative empirical designs focusing on developing a measure of responsiveness that can be used to compare responsiveness to different types of parties may produce different findings on this question. Moreover, research focusing specifically on strategies adopted to counter niche parties may highlight issues

5. Analysing the Process of Party Responsiveness

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the correlation between vote loss and party change with the aim of establishing the nature of the relationship between those two variables. This chapter focuses on analysing the process of responsiveness theorised in chapter 3. It aims to test some of the assumptions discussed in the theoretical framework that form the basis of the theory of party responsiveness to vote loss. In particular, in this chapter I analyse the information that is available to parties following instances of vote loss, and how information regarding vote loss is prioritised relative to other considerations ahead of adopting a new party platform. In doing so, I test the causal mechanisms that I have previously argued lead a party to respond to vote loss by changing its electoral platform. This contextualises the quantitative results discussed in the preceding chapter, and highlights salient factors affecting parties' propensity to respond to vote loss.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the results of a survey administered to parliamentarians. The focus of the survey is on the efforts of parties to understand the causes of electoral performance, and the awareness of parliamentarians of these efforts and their findings. As well as examining the propensity of parties to review their electoral performance, I analyse responses regarding the focus and findings of reviews. In particular, I assess the extent to which the failure of a party's electoral platform is a major aspect of these reviews, and thus an issue of central concern for the party in question. In doing so, I provide some insight into the informational environment in which parties make decisions about future platforms, and the role that previous election results play in that environment. Despite the fact that these ideas have been overlooked in previous studies, I believe that they are crucial to understanding party responses to vote loss.

I then use qualitative process tracing to analyse two instances of parties responding to vote loss: Fianna Fáil's response to the 2011 Irish general election, and the Liberal Democrats' response to the 2015 U.K. general election. The analysis of the causal processes operating in these diverse case studies allow me to identify the salient aspects affecting parties' propensity to respond to vote loss. This in course acts as a test of the theory of the process of responsiveness that is outlined in chapter 3. As well as providing important findings relating to these two cases, I believe that this qualitative analysis produces findings relating to the

process of responsiveness that are generalisable to other cases, and thus may provide meaning to other instances of responsiveness and non-responsiveness.

5.2. Survey analysis

As outlined in chapter 3, the theory that parties should respond to votes lost to other parties assumes that parties have sufficient information to overcome their conservatism and adopt the platform changes indicated by vote loss. Because of the risk-averse nature of parties, some degree of certainty regarding potential outcomes is likely needed for them to change their platforms. Despite this, studies examining responsiveness to vote loss have not focused on the information available to parties following elections, or the extent to which understanding the effect of party platform on election results is prioritised. Given the importance of information and certainty in my theory on the process of party responsiveness, I argue that in order to understand parties' behaviour following vote loss, it is necessary to understand the informational environments in which they operate.

In order to gain an insight into the extent of the concern within political parties with understanding the causes of vote loss, I administered a survey to current and former parliamentarians representing mainstream parties in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The survey focused on respondents' awareness of their parties' electoral performance at recent elections. The questionnaire is included in full in appendix 8. Respondents were asked questions relating to each election at which they were (re-)elected from 2010 to 2022. 110 responses were collected overall: 5 from Australia, 22 from Canada, 24 from France, 26 from Ireland, 9 from New Zealand, and 24 from the U.K. The elections covered by this period are outlined in table 5.1.

One of the main focuses of the questionnaire was establishing both the predisposition of parties to conduct reviews following elections, and the awareness of parliamentarians of these reviews. While decisions about party platform are in many cases ultimately made by the party leadership, the wider parliamentary party does play an important role. Given leaders' reliance on the support of their parliamentary party and the possibility of parliamentarians lobbying leadership on policies, it is important to understand how the parties as a whole perceive electoral performance.

Australia	2010
	2013
	2016
	2019
	2022
Canada	2011
	2015
	2019
	2021
France	2012
	2017
	2022
Ireland	2011
	2016
	2020
New Zealand	2011
	2014
	2017
	2020
United Kingdom	2010
	2015
	2017
	2019

Table 5.1: Elections covered by survey

The results of the survey suggest that the decision to conduct a post-election review varies significantly across parties, and there is also a significant variation in parliamentarians' awareness of such reviews. It is not possible to give a complete picture of the use of post-election reviews given the possibility that they are not made publicly available. Across the elections covered by the survey, election reviews have been published or publicly discussed in a number of cases. Reviews or details thereof were published in Australia by the Labor Party following the 2019 and 2022 elections (Australian Labor Party, [2019?], 2022) and by the

Liberal Party following the 2022 election (Loughnane and Hume, 2022), in Canada by the Conservative and New Democratic parties following the 2021 election (Thibedeau and Tasker, 2022; New Democratic Party Campaign Review Committee, 2021), in Ireland by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil following the 2020 election (McConnell, 2020; Loughlin, Hosford, and Moore, 2021), in New Zealand by the National Party following the 2020 election (RNZ, 2021), and in the U.K. by the Liberal Democrats following the 2015, 2017, and 2019 elections (Liberal Democrats Campaign & Communications Committee, 2015; Liberal Democrats, 2018; Liberal Democrats [2020?]), the Conservatives following the 2017 election (Pickles, 2017), and Labour following the 2019 election (Labour Together, [2020?]).

Of the 24 respondents who were elected at an election following which a publicised review took place, 18 were aware of the review having taken place, 4 believed that no review had taken place, 5 were unsure, and 1 did not respond. Across the other elections for which there was no publicised review, there were 11 party-elections in which respondents gave conflicting responses, some believing that a review had taken place, and others believing that it had not. There were also 11 party-elections in which some respondents reported that an election review had taken place, and others reported that they were unsure whether an election review had taken place. Thus, while a majority of those respondents who were candidates at an election which was subsequently the subject of a publicised review were aware that a review had taken place, the data suggests that such awareness is far from universal. This may suggest that reviews are not necessarily of significant concern for parliamentarians even where they do take place, something that is also highlighted in the case study of the Liberal Democrats response to the 2015 U.K. general election discussed in section 5.3.3.

The survey also focused on the aims and findings of post-election reviews. In asking respondents to discuss the main findings of post-election reviews, this data gives an indication of the priorities of political parties when analysing electoral performance. On the question of the findings of post-election reviews, responses were again varied. Across the 52 responses relating to the findings of a post-election review, the most common issue that was mentioned as having formed part of the review was campaign management, mentioned in 11 responses. Specific issues mentioned included candidate selection, resource allocation, and seat targeting. 9 responses mentioned campaign communications, including a need to target campaign messages and ensure the communication of clear policies. Issues of leadership were

mentioned in 8 responses, and incumbency effects in 6. Relatively few responses focused on the electoral platform forming the basis of the campaign in question. References to specific issue positions were only mentioned in 5 responses, and issue emphasis in 2.

The small sample size of this survey limits its generalisability somewhat. However, it does highlight two important issues relating to the process of party responsiveness to previous elections. Firstly, reviews of elections do not appear to be ubiquitous, and where they are carried out, do not necessarily make a significant impact on parliamentarians. The results show that reviews do sometimes go unnoticed by parliamentarians. It may be the case that they are given more weight by party leadership than by the members of the parliamentary party writ large. However, given the importance of the wider parliamentary party in supporting and advocating for change in party platform, it is important to note that the lessons learned by leadership from election reviews may not be widely shared.

Secondly, post-election reviews cover a wide range of issues, and at least in this sample, the impact of party platform was rarely a central focus of the reviews that were carried out. Many of the reviews focused on the design and management of the campaign rather than the positions and issues which the campaign was communicating. This does not necessarily mean that parties are unaware of the aspects of their platform that the electorate did not agree with. It may instead reflect the belief of parties that campaigns are more important for electoral success than policy, or a desire to run an improved campaign without having to sacrifice the party's ideology. While this survey has focused specifically on the perceptions that parliamentarians hold of electoral performance, future research analysing election review documents could produce more in-depth findings on parties' priorities in the wake of elections, which may in turn shed more light on the results presented here.

5.3. Process Tracing

Beyond understanding the informational environment of political parties, in order to develop a full picture of parties' behaviour following instances of vote loss, it is necessary to examine in detail the process of moving from one set of election results to an election platform. As discussed in chapter 2, previous studies on this question are largely quantitative in nature. As a result, it is difficult to make causal claims about the relationships identified in such studies between electoral performance and future platforms. In particular, previous studies have failed to provide an insight into the extent to which parties prioritise a need to address vote

loss relative to a need to respond to other stimuli. Moreover, because of a lack of concern in the literature with the process of responsiveness, we have little basis on which to interpret instances of non-responsiveness. If parties are vote-seeking and vote loss thus indicates a failure, why do parties sometimes not change their platforms following vote loss?

In order to gain greater insight into what happens within parties following instances of vote loss, I use qualitative process-tracing to analyse the behaviour of two parties following instances of vote loss. In doing so, I provide an insight into the relative prioritisation of various concerns, including vote loss, when deciding on future platform, and identify factors that can facilitate and undermine efforts to respond to vote loss. This allows me to give greater meaning to findings about party responsiveness to vote loss, and understand what drives variation in responses.

5.3.1. Case selection and methodology

Two cases are analysed in this section: Fianna Fáil's response to the results of the 2011 Irish election, and the Liberal Democrats' response to the results of the 2015 U.K. general election. In both cases, the party in question lost a significant share of the votes it had won at the previous election. In 2011, Fianna Fáil's vote share declined from 41.56% to 17.45%, while in 2015, the Liberal Democrats' vote share declined from 23% to 8%. However, in terms of overall manifesto change, the responses of the two parties varied significantly. For Fianna Fáil, the dissimilarity index introduced in chapter 4 measuring the change between its 2011 manifesto and its subsequent 2016 manifesto is 5.979. This places it in the top 10% of observations in the dataset used in chapter 4 in terms of extent of manifesto change between manifestos. By contrast, the Liberal Democrats' dissimilarity index measuring change between its manifestos in 2015 and 2017 is 0.232, placing it in the bottom 15% of observations in the dataset in terms of platform change between elections. As such, these cases represent a diverse case selection, as identified by Seawright and Gerring (2008). In analysing how causal mechanisms operated in these cases, this case selection allows me to test theories regarding what drives variation in the responsiveness of parties following vote loss.

The case studies discussed in this chapter are analysed using process tracing to determine whether the causal chain outlined in chapter 3 operates as hypothesised. Process tracing involves the "systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses" (Collier 2011, 823). In this analysis, I examine data

collected from interviews with parliamentarians and other senior figures within Fianna Fáil and the Liberal Democrats. The aim of this analysis is to uncover what information each party had about the nature and causes of its vote loss, and what role, if any, this information played in adopting its platform ahead of the subsequent election. In doing so, I test hypotheses regarding the process of party responsiveness to vote loss, with the aim of drawing conclusions that are generalisable beyond the two cases discussed here. Throughout the analysis, I rely on triangulation to ensure that my findings are valid. Triangulation involves comparison across interviews and comparison of interviews with other sources, such as news articles, so that findings are not based on data from one source (Gerring, 2006).

Process tracing is an ideal methodological approach for analysing these case studies for two main reasons. Firstly, its focus on the causal relationships between cause and outcome allows for stronger claims about those causal relationships than is often produced by quantitative analysis (Beach, 2016; Collier, 2011). While quantitative analysis can highlight the relationships that exist between variables, as demonstrated in chapter 4, process tracing focuses specifically on whether those relationships are causal in nature, and the process that occurs to lead from a cause to an outcome. This is particularly relevant in the case of party responsiveness, given the lack of focus in the existing literature on this causal process, as discussed in chapter 2. Thus in this case, process tracing can be used to determine whether the outcomes in the cases discussed here were a result of the hypothesised causal mechanism outlined in chapter 3, or the result of an alternative causal mechanism.

In the case of Fianna Fáil's response to its 2011 vote loss, process tracing is helpful in establishing whether the significant change in party platform that occurred between 2011 and 2016 was indeed a response to that vote loss. While the dissimilarity index shows that the vote loss the party suffered was followed by a significant degree of change, this does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two. As outlined in chapter 3, it is possible that the change was a response to some other stimulus, with the most likely alternative explanation being that it was a response to changes in public opinion. Thus, in analysing the causal mechanism in this case, I test two hypotheses:

H6: Fianna Fáil's high level of manifesto change in 2016 was a response to the poor electoral results of 2011.

H7: Fianna Fáil's High level of manifesto change in 2016 was a response to changes in public opinion ahead of the 2016 election.

In the case of the Liberal Democrats, the focus is on analysing why the vote loss the party suffered did not lead to a substantial change in its platform. As discussed in chapter 2 and in section 5.2, information and awareness regarding vote loss is central to a party's ability to respond. One possibility is that the party failed to respond because it lacked information, and did not have a common understanding of the causes of its vote loss. Alternatively, the party may have been prioritising other considerations over responding to vote loss, thus leading to a lack of responsiveness. In analysing the Liberal Democrats' response to vote loss, I again test two hypotheses:

H8: The Liberal Democrats' low level of manifesto change in 2017 was a result of a lack of a clear, shared understanding about the causes of the 2015 election result.

H9: The Liberal Democrats' low levels of manifesto change in 2017 was a result of a lack of concern about the causes of the 2015 election result.

In testing these hypotheses, I begin by analysing the causes of vote loss, and the change in party platform following vote loss. In order for responsiveness to vote loss to be a plausible explanation for party change, the change in platform must have occurred on the issues that were perceived as having led to vote loss. This acts as a hoop test for H6: if the change in Fianna Fáil's platform was driven by changes in the policy areas that led it to lose votes, the hypothesis is strengthened. If not, it is eliminated. This test is not relevant in the case of the Liberal Democrats given the minimal responsiveness indicated by the dissimilarity index. However, I do discuss the party's platforms in 2015 and 2017 on the most salient policy areas as an additional illustration of the party's lack of response.

I then focus on the information that was available to the relevant party following the instance of vote loss. I focus on whether the party was aware of the other parties to which votes had been lost, and the reasons driving these defections. In line with the process of party responsiveness outlined in chapter 2, the party having a shared understanding of the nature of vote loss and the causes thereof is central to provoking responsiveness. Thus, in the Fianna Fáil case, establishing that the party had a shared understanding of the nature and causes of vote loss acts as a hoop test for H6. If the hypothesis passes this test, H6 is strengthened; if it

does not, it is eliminated, as it is impossible for a party to respond to vote loss if it does not have a clear idea of the nature of loss to which it needs to respond. In the Liberal Democrats case, establishing that the party lacked such an understanding acts as a smoking gun test for H8. If the hypothesis passes this test, H8 is substantially strengthened, as it indicates that the party did not have the necessary information for responsiveness to occur. However, even if the hypothesis does pass this test, there is still the possibility that other factors may have prevented the party from responding to the election even if it did have the relevant information.

Having established the informational environment of the parties following each instance of vote loss, I focus on the decision-making process regarding the contents of the subsequent manifesto. The aim of the analysis is to understand what considerations were prioritised in compiling the manifesto. In each case, I assess the extent to which the lessons of vote loss influenced the subsequent manifesto. Whether the 2011 election had a significant influence on the 2016 manifesto acts as a smoking gun test for H6. If the hypothesis passes this test, it is substantially strengthened on the basis of evidence of a causal relationship between the 2011 vote loss and the 2016 election platform. However, passing this test does not necessarily conclusively prove the hypothesis, given that other factors may have caused the shift in platform, or at least contributed to it. If the hypothesis fails, it is eliminated, given a lack of evidence of the causal relationship between vote loss and the subsequent adoption of a given electoral platform which is central to the process of responsiveness. In the case of the Liberal Democrats, this test is relevant for identifying what influenced the party's platform in 2017, which can help to shed light on the reasons for the lack of responsiveness.

5.3.2. Fianna Fáil 2011-2016

In 2011, Fianna Fáil's vote share declined to 17.45% from 41.56% in 2007 (Döring et al. 2023). Given that the party's vote share had not been lower than 30% since 1923, this represented a significant blow to the popularity of the party. Indeed since 1923, the lowest vote share it had achieved at an election was 39.11% in 1992. This decline in votes was spread across the country: after the 2011 election, the party had no TDs in 25 out of Ireland's then 43 constituencies, and eight of its 26 counties (Döring et al. 2023). In terms of seats, the party fell from 78 to 20 in the 166-seat Dáil, representing a drop from 46.99% to 12.04% in terms of seat

share. Prior to 2011, the party's seat share had never dropped below 28%, and not below 40% since 1927.

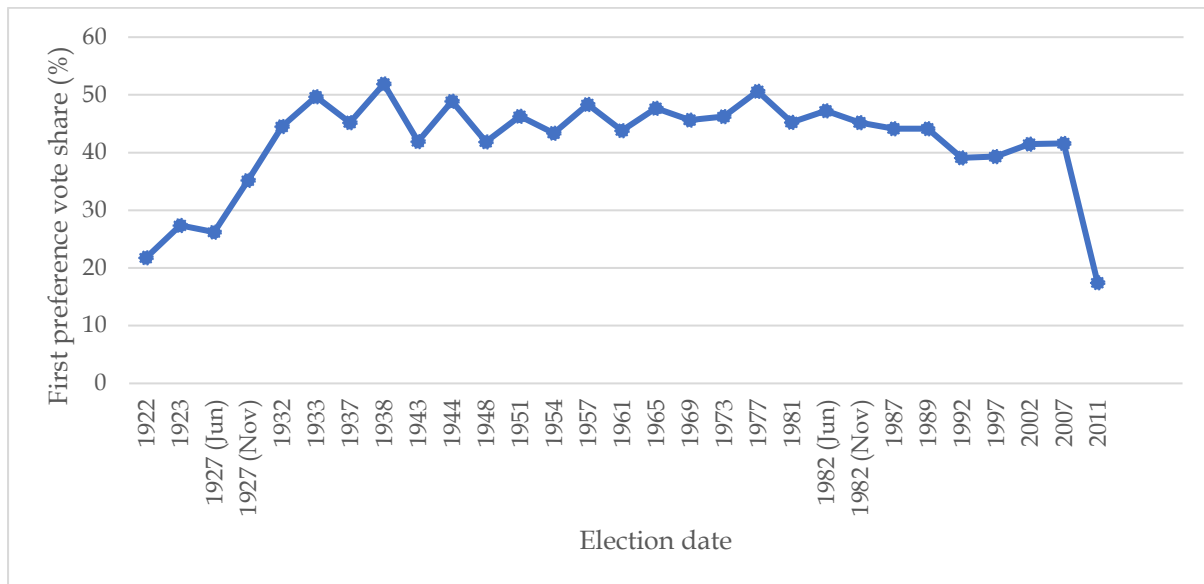


Figure 5.1: Fianna Fáil first preference vote share, 1922-2011 (Döring et al. 2023)

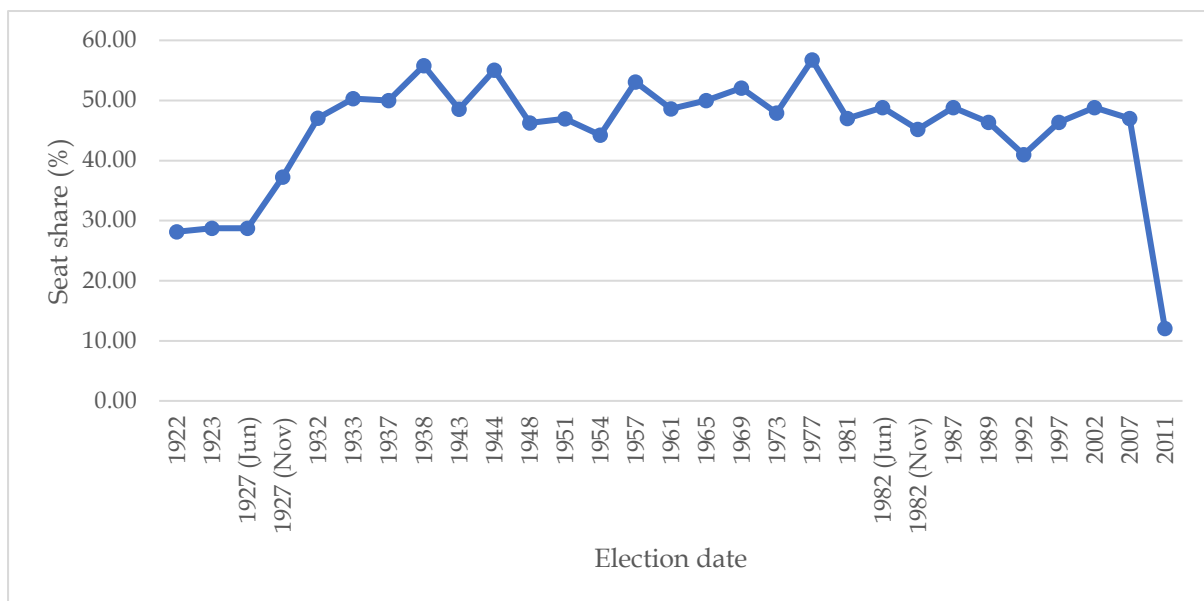


Figure 5.2: Fianna Fáil seat share, 1922-2011 (Döring et al. 2023)

Fianna Fáil lost first preference votes to every major party contesting the election. Of the 625 respondents to the post-election survey who said they had given their first preference vote to a Fianna Fáil candidate in 2007, only 193 said that they gave their first preference to a Fianna Fáil candidate again in 2011. As indicated in figure 5.3, more of those voters gave their first

preference to a Fine Gael candidate than a Fianna Fáil candidate. Labour and Sinn Féin also gained a considerable proportion of the first preferences of Fianna Fáil defectors in 2011. Thus while Fine Gael may have been the main beneficiary of the collapse of Fianna Fáil – unsurprising given its status as the other major party of government since the foundation of the Irish state – votes were lost by the formerly dominant Fianna Fáil to all of the other major parties.

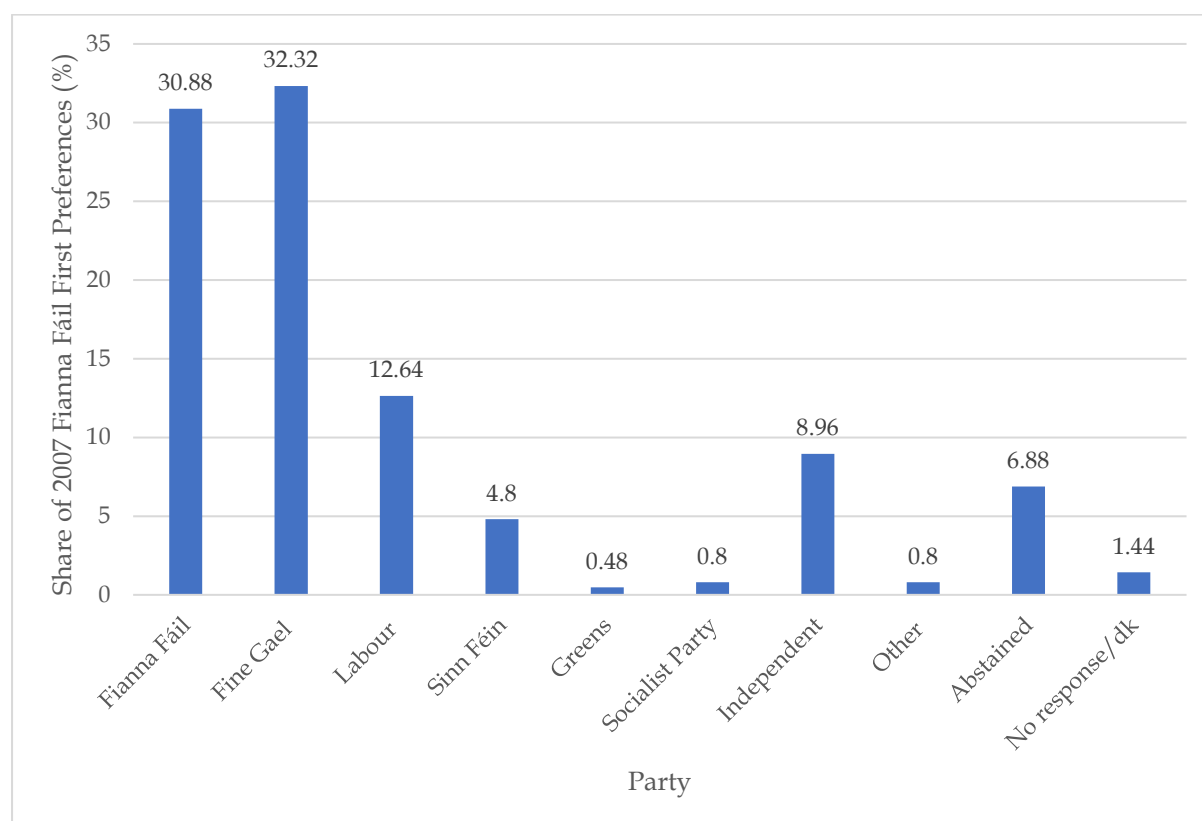


Figure 5.3: 2011 vote choice of 2007 Fianna Fáil first preference voters (*The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems*, 2023)

In order to establish what attracted voters away from Fianna Fáil and to other parties in 2011, it is helpful to look at the issues emphasised by parties in their 2011 manifestos. As discussed in the theoretical framework in chapter 3, parties generally emphasise those issues on which they are perceived as competent, and/or where their position is in line with that of the general population. As such, it is likely that voters who switched from Fianna Fáil will have been attracted on the basis of issues emphasised by the party to which they gave their first preference in 2011.

Table 5.2 outlines the emphasis on the economic and GAL-TAN dimensions respectively in the 2011 manifestos of Fianna Fáil and the main beneficiaries of its electoral collapse: Fine Gael, Labour, and Sinn Féin. The salience measure used here is the same as that outlined in chapter 4. All parties devoted significantly more attention to the economic dimension than GAL-TAN issues. This is unsurprising given the importance of the economy in the run-up to the election. The Irish economy was hard-hit by the financial crash of the late-2000s. At the end of September 2008, the Fianna Fáil-led government agreed to a bailout of the country's banks in the face of the feared collapse of Anglo-Irish bank and a subsequent ripple effect that would lead to the downfall of the whole Irish banking system (Marsh and Cunningham, 2011). Overall, this suggests that the economy was the dominant aspect of the 2011 election in Ireland. This is also supported by data from a Landsdowne/RTÉ exit poll, with 35.6% of respondents saying that the most important issue or problem in 2011 was the economic crisis, and 13.5% saying it was economic issues more generally (Marsh and Cunningham, 2011).

Party	Economic salience 2011	GAL-TAN salience 2011
Fianna Fáil	33.283	5.828
Fine Gael	32.934	12.133
Labour	31.428	12.473
Sinn Féin	45.573	15.246

Table 5.2: Salience of economic and GAL-TAN dimensions in the 2011 manifesto of Fianna Fáil and competitors (Lehmann et al., 2024)

The idea that the economy was the reason for Fianna Fáil's poor performance is reflected in the fact that few voters thought they had the best policy in place to deal with economic issues. According to a poll in early February 2011, Fine Gael, Labour, and Sinn Féin were all seen as better placed than Fianna Fáil to deal with healthcare, unemployment, and banking (Irish Independent, 2011).

The economy, then, was the big issue of the 2011 election. Given the importance of the issue to voters and their lack of faith in Fianna Fáil's ability to address the economic crisis and other economic issues, responsiveness to the 2011 election would involve some change in the party's economic platform. Thus, the first hoop test that would need to hold in order for H6 to be supported is that Fianna Fáil changed its platform on the economy between 2011 and 2016,

with a particular emphasis on economic credibility. A lack of responsiveness in this area would indicate that any overall manifesto change that occurred was not a response to the 2011 results.

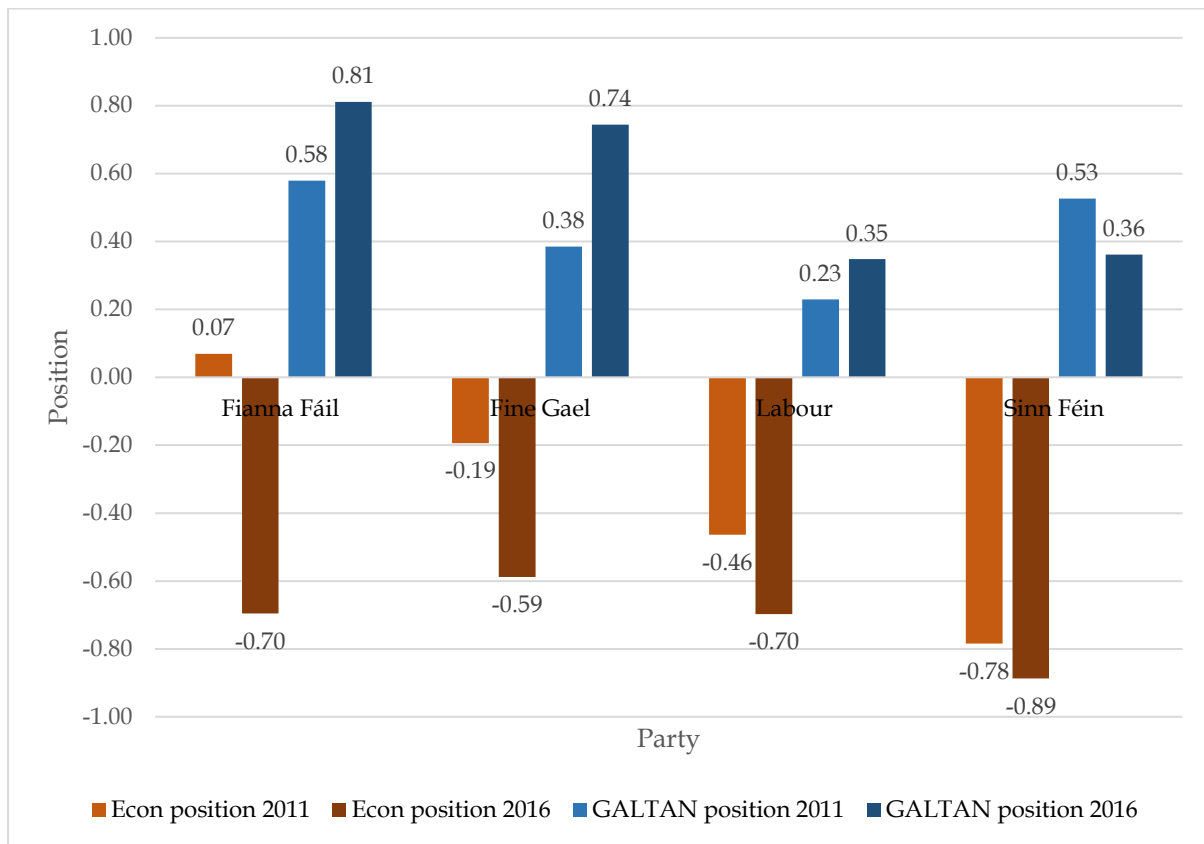


Figure 5.4.: Economic and GAL-TAN positions by party, 2011-16

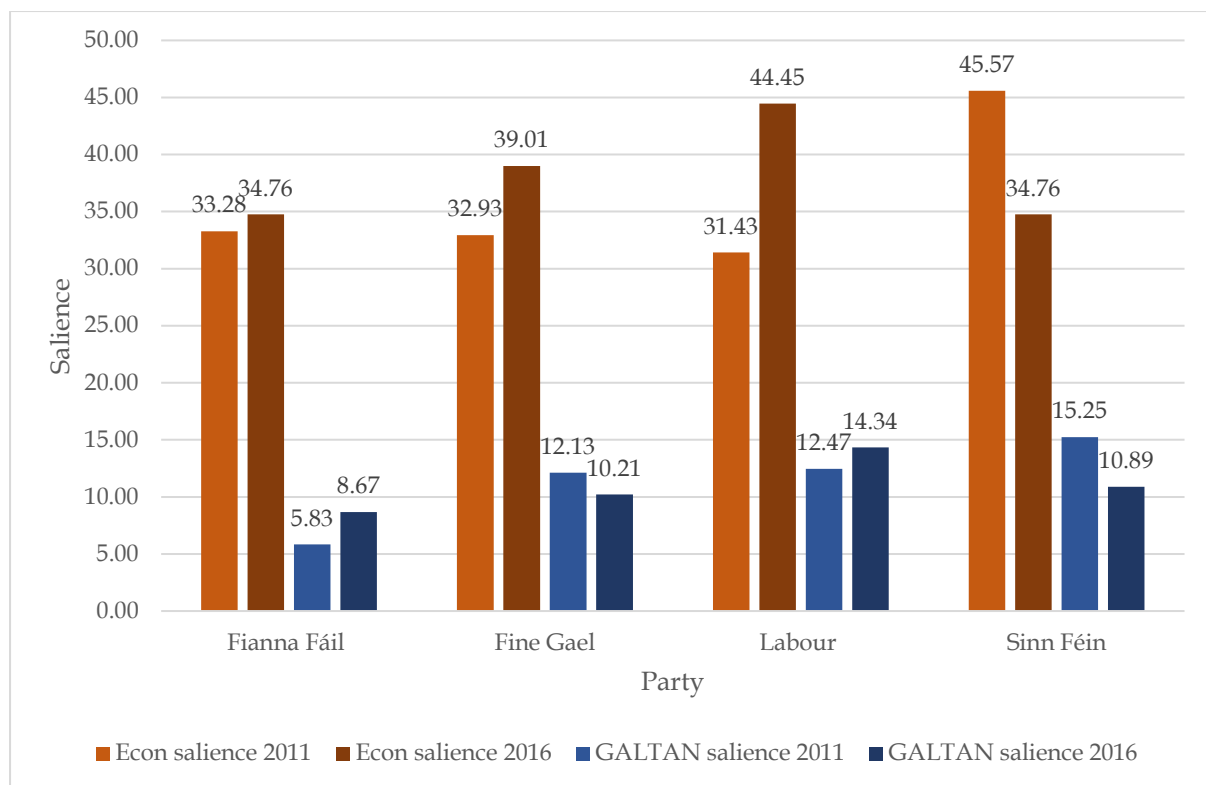


Figure 5.5: Economic and GAL-TAN salience by party, 2011-2016

Figures 5.4-5.5 show the change in economic position and salience between 2011 and 2016 of Fianna Fáil, and the main beneficiaries of its vote loss. The directions of change across all parties were largely uniform, with all parties moving to the left on the economic dimension, and all parties except Sinn Féin increasing the attention devoted to the economy in their 2016 manifesto. In both cases, the change in Fianna Fáil's manifesto is the largest by some margin, with the party moving to the left by 0.765 units, and increasing attention devoted to the economy by a magnitude of 17.329 percent of all (quasi-)sentences. MARPOR data indicates that much of the change in economic position was driven by a huge increase in attention to the welfare state, from 2.15% of the manifesto in 2007 to 28% of the manifesto in 2011. Thus, FFH1 passes the hoop test of exhibiting change in its platform on the relevant policy area – the economy – following the 2011 election.

In order for Fianna Fáil to have responded to its 2011 electoral performance in the way theorised in chapter 3, the party must also have had an understanding about why it performed so poorly in 2011. Otherwise, the responsiveness on the economic dimension is likely to have been a response to some other stimulus for change. If the party believed its performance in

2011 to be a result of issues around its economic policy and credibility on economic management, it is plausible that the responsiveness the party exhibited on the economic dimension was a direct response to the 2011 result. If not, H6 fails.

There was no formal report published on the party's performance following the 2011 election (Interview with Fleming; Interview with B). However, some steps were taken following the election to help the party in deciding how to move forward. One respondent described how Micheál Martin, as leader, undertook a "tour of the organisation" following the 2011 election, which involved meeting with members throughout the country to uncover how members felt about where the party needed to go next (Interview with Collins; Interview with B). Separately, there was also a meeting of the parliamentary party in the summer of 2011, which focused on analysing the election and the state of the party (Interview with Fleming; O'Regan, 2011). In particular, part of the meeting was dedicated to analysing why the party had performed so poorly in 2011 (O'Regan, 2011).

As such, it appears that there was an effort to identify the causes of the party's electoral collapse. Moreover, the evidence suggests that following the election and these meetings, there was a widespread acceptance within the party that the economy was central to the result in 2011. According to one of the anonymous sources in O'Regan's (2011) report on the meeting of the parliamentary party in the summer of 2011, there was unanimous agreement that the party "failed to communicate the depth of the economic crisis to the people." This reflects a sense among interviewees that there was a widespread understanding within the party that the financial crisis had played a significant role in its electoral performance. Rather than specific policy decisions, however, several interviewees mentioned the idea that Fianna Fáil had been in government at the time of the financial crash, and suffered electorally as a result (Interview with Fleming; Interview with Collins; Interview with B). "You've had a financial crisis, em, the government has to get blamed. The government gets blamed, like that's it, we just have to accept that" (Interview with Collins).

While these ideas are not directly policy-related, they do highlight the party's focus on the economy in the informal election post-mortem. Other evidence suggests, however, that some specific policies had been identified as having contributed to the 2011 result. Just over half a year after the election, the party's leader Micheál Martin highlighted the economic collapse and Fianna Fáil-Green Party government's economic policies as the main reason for the

electoral collapse: “We spent too much and we taxed too low. The tax base was reduced to a level that was not sustainable” (McGee, 2011 [b]). The role of the overly narrow tax base in the party’s downfall in 2011 was also mentioned by one interviewee (Interview with Collins), while another noted that following the 2011 election the party was keen to avoid overpromising on public spending due to a perception that it had overspent while in government (Interview with Fleming). Thus, as well as the mere presence of the economic crisis at the time that Fianna Fáil was in government, there was an awareness of specific policies that had exacerbated the economic situation, and thus driven voters away by undermining their faith in the party’s capacity to responsibly manage the economy.

Overall, then, the evidence suggests that there was a widespread belief within the party that both the state of the economy and specific economic policies that the party had pursued had led to its electoral collapse in 2011. Interestingly, this came despite the lack of a formal review culminating in a report on findings relating to the poor electoral performance. This suggests that regardless of the presence of a formal review, parties can develop an accurate understanding of the causes of their electoral performance, and that a review is not necessary for responsiveness to occur. Indeed, the confidence in the belief about the role of the economy in the 2011 result is underlined by the idea raised by some interviewees that the reason for the collapse of the Fianna Fáil vote were so obvious that there was no need for a formal review (Interview with B), with one saying that “you could nearly have analysed the results of that election before polling day” (Interview with Fleming).

Another issue that was raised in the aftermath of the election was the organisation of the party. One interviewee mentioned that one of the findings from Micheál Martin’s tour of the party in 2011 was that “there had been a disconnect between the party in government and the membership” (Interview with B). This idea that the party had lost touch with the grassroots was also mentioned in news articles covering the meetings that Micheál Martin had with Fianna Fáil members around the country (McGinley, 2011; Meath Chronicle, 2011; McGee, 2011[a]). Specifically, there was a concern among party members about the decline of the *cumann* (local branches of the organisation), with a call by many for the party to return to its grassroots.

Thus, a picture emerges of Fianna Fáil shortly following the 2011 election as a party that had a clear, confident, and widespread belief in what caused its vote loss, and the accuracy of its

perception of the causes of that loss is supported by the available data. If Fianna Fáil was focused on responding to the 2011 vote loss in its preparations for the 2016 election, it was in a good position to do so, in that it had a clear idea of exactly what it was responding to. However, it is important to note that the causes of the electoral collapse that were identified by Fianna Fáil were a combination of policy and non-policy issues. Even disregarding issues that were identified around the party's structure and the role of the *cumann*, the perception that seemed to exist within the party about the role of the economy was that this was only in part a policy issue. On the one hand, as discussed above, concrete policy issues about the size of the tax base and the nature of public expenditure were identified as reasons that the party performed poorly in 2011, and as aspects of the party's platform that would need to change. On the other hand, there are many who believe, at least to some extent, that the financial crash was a global event that was out of the control of the Government, and that the negative incumbency effect that manifested in the collapse of Fianna Fáil in 2011 was an inevitable consequence of that event. This is important for understanding what responsiveness to the 2011 vote loss looked like. As well as changing its platforms on specific areas of economic policy such as tax, Fianna Fáil may have responded by adjusting how it discusses economic competence more broadly.

As a result of the accurate information that it had on the causes of its 2011 vote loss, and the fact that this information was widely accepted in the party as accurate, Fianna Fáil, then, was in a position to respond to its 2011 performance in the way theorised in chapter 3. However, in order to determine whether its 2016 manifesto represented such a response, it needs to be established that addressing the reasons for the vote loss of 2011 was prioritised during the compilation of the 2016 manifesto.

Interviewees differed in their memories of exactly when the party began to compile its manifesto ahead of the 2016 election, but the consensus is that preparations for the election would have begun after the local and European elections that took place in May 2014 and no less than a year before the election in February 2016. Several interviewees were keen to emphasise, however, that manifestos in general, and the 2016 manifesto in particular, do not come out of the blue, but evolve out of the party's existing platforms, and have to be consistent with what the party has been doing prior to the election campaign (Interview with B; Interview with Collins; Interview with Fleming). This is in line with previous findings about

manifestos both in Ireland and elsewhere, as highlighted in the theoretical framework. (Däubler 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012). Similarly, other reports note that the main theme of the election – the so-called “fairness agenda”, had been settled on as early as the summer of 2012 (Leahy 2016, 81). This would evolve into the party’s 2016 manifesto, entitled “An Ireland for All” (Fianna Fáil, 2016). Thus the actual timeline for identifying decisions made about the manifesto ranges from mid-2012 to the publication of the manifesto in mid-February 2016 (Gallagher and Marsh, 2016).

When asked what the major considerations were for the party when compiling its 2016 manifesto, interviewees emphasised a number of things. One of the most prominent was re-establishing itself as trustworthy on the economy: “The priority was to get the public to trust us again with the economy” (Interview with Cahill). In the context of Fianna Fáil being in opposition for the first time since the 1997 election, one respondent noted that the party did not adopt what he identified as the usual opposition strategy of making extensive promises on spending because of a desire to once again seem like “responsible economic managers” (Interview with Fleming). Similarly, another (Interview with Collins) mentions the party’s concern with ensuring that the manifesto was fully costed, with that being key for establishing the party’s credibility. An interview with party leader Micheál Martin published in January 2015 suggests that this need to establish the party as credible on economic management was also acknowledged among leadership. When asked why anyone would vote for the party following the financial crash, Martin said that the party would be adopting a platform that was “realisable and credible,” and that it was “not going to promise the sun, moon and stars” (McGee, 2015).

This focus on electoral credibility is reflected at the very beginning of the Fianna Fáil 2016 manifesto, which opens with a Fiscal Responsibility Commitment – something that was not present in the 2011 manifesto. It highlights that “[t]he specific commitments in this manifesto have been costed using a triple lock of sources”: parliamentary questions, verifying measures with the Departments of Finance and of Public Expenditure and Reform, and independent assessments of accuracy and sustainability of costings.

Interestingly, however, Manifesto Project (MARPOR) data suggests a reduction in focus on economic responsibility, with the proportion of the manifesto falling under the category *per414*: economic orthodoxy declining from 6.135% in 2011 to 0.917% in 2016. However, this

may be more of a reflection of how much Fianna Fáil emphasised economic orthodoxy in 2011 as a government party facing an economic crisis, rather than a reflection of the party disregarding the issue in 2016. Indeed, both Fine Gael and Sinn Féin also reduced their attention to this issue, with the Labour Party being the only party that benefitted significantly from Fianna Fáil's collapse in 2011 to increase their attention to the issue (Lehmann et al., 2024). An exploration of the (quasi-)sentences coded under *per414* in Fianna Fáil's 2011 manifesto supports this idea, as their focus is consistently on the party's plans for economic recovery: "Our National Recovery Plan spells out in detail the measures we will take in government over the next four years to return our public finances to a sustainable position" (Fianna Fáil 2011, p. 4); "We need to show that we can meet our [EU/IMF] targets and put our house in order" (ibid., p. 11); "we believe that restoring the public finances is the essential foundation upon which recovery will be built" (ibid., p. 14). Despite a desire in 2016 to convince the public that the party could again be trusted with the economy, the decrease in focus on economic orthodoxy is not wholly surprising given the party's opposition status and the decrease in salience of economic orthodoxy following substantial progress towards EU/IMF targets.

However, data from interviews also suggest that the lack of attention to economic orthodoxy may in itself have been a strategic consideration. One interviewee mentioned that the party was keen to avoid talking about issues that had dominated the 2011 election, like banks and taxes, because its positions on those issues had been so damaging in 2011 (Interview with A). Moreover, because the Fine Gael-Labour government that was in power in the run up to the 2016 election was following the economic programme put in place by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green government in order to meet the EU/IMF targets, it was not in a position to criticise that aspect of the government's economic policy in 2016 (Interview with A; Interview with Fleming). Despite a desire mentioned by almost all interviewees to paint itself as credible on the economy, the party was limited in its ability to discuss the issue because of the reputational damage it had suffered in the run up to the 2011 election, and because it had no basis on which to criticise the government of the day. Notably, the issue of economic orthodoxy was paid less attention by Fianna Fáil in its 2016 manifesto than in any year since 1982 (Lehmann et al., 2024).

Another point raised by interviewees when discussing the considerations that influenced the 2016 manifesto is a desire to reflect the priorities of the public. As previously mentioned, the 2016 manifesto was dominated by a focus on public services. Leahy (2016) notes that this arose from a belief within the party that people were more concerned about public services than tax cuts, and that this belief was supported by “less-noticed polling results which showed that people believed that the recovery was unevenly felt” (81). Interviewees also believe that the focus on public services was in large part a response to public opinion: “that was the mood four years on [...] and people’s focus is on improved public services, which was the, the main pillar in our campaign” (Interview with B). Jackie Cahill also mentions the tendency of the party to respond to opinion polls and other data on public opinion in manifestos, both in general and in the specific case of 2016, where the focus was on housing and the health service (Interview with Cahill). This focus on public opinion was also raised by Niall Collins, who mentioned the importance of findings from focus groups and other research on public opinion in influencing manifestos (Interview with Collins).

The idea that the contents of the 2016 manifesto are a response to public opinion is highlighted by its contents. As previously mentioned, the manifesto devotes a huge amount of attention to public services under *per504* Welfare State Expansion, and the vast majority of (quasi-)sentences categorised under that label are focused on healthcare or housing (Fianna Fáil, 2016), something that was identified by a number of interviewees (Interview with A; Interview with Cahill; Interview with B). Polling data from the inter-election period suggests a growing concern with the provision of public services over time. A poll from April 2014 found that 37% of respondents wanted to see fewer spending cuts in the next budget, compared to 26% who wanted to see a cut in income tax as Ireland emerged from the financial crisis (McConnell, 2014). Eurobarometer data shows that up to autumn 2014, unemployment and the economic situation were seen as the most important issues facing Ireland (European Commission 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b). By 2015, however, the data suggests an increasing concern with social services, with the top two issues being unemployment and health and social security in spring 2015, and housing and housing and unemployment in autumn 2015 (European Commission 2015a, 2015b). Thus, it seems that it was apparent to Fianna Fáil in advance of the 2016 election that public opinion was in favour of increases in public spending, particularly in the areas of housing and healthcare.

Overall, then, the data suggests that the two main considerations within Fianna Fáil when deciding on its election platform ahead of the 2016 election were addressing voters' concerns about the party that had led to its collapse in 2011, and addressing issues that had become priorities for voters between the two elections. Evidence from polling data, interviews, and contemporary news reports show that the party had a good awareness of both why the result in 2011 had been so catastrophic, and what was concerning voters in the run up to 2016. Evidence from interviews, contemporary news reports, and the 2016 manifesto also suggests a causal link between these considerations and the platform adopted in 2016.

Assessing the evidence for H6, it seems that Fianna Fáil's 2016 manifesto was to some degree a response to its electoral failure in 2011. Based on repeated mentions by interviewees of ensuring the 2016 manifesto was fully costed, the presence of the fiscal responsibility statement at the beginning of the document was likely a response to concerns about the party's capacity to responsibly manage the economy. Yet the evidence also suggests that the avoidance of discussing economic orthodoxy and economic management throughout the manifesto may have arisen from a desire to reduce the salience of that issue in order to minimise criticism of the party for its handling of the economic crisis during its time in government.

However, public opinion also played an important role in determining the contents of the 2016 manifesto. A preponderance of evidence from various sources supports the idea that the focus on expanding the welfare state arose from indicators of public opinion that arose after the 2011 election. Thus, this case highlights the fact that the electoral responsiveness hypothesis and public opinion hypothesis are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, parties can respond to both, particularly when public opinion shifts between elections. Indeed, neither hypothesis fully explains the shift in Fianna Fáil's platforms between 2011 and 2016. The electoral responsiveness hypothesis does not explain the decision to focus heavily on the expansion of the welfare state. While other parties devoted greater attention to this issue in 2011 than Fianna Fáil, there is little evidence to suggest that it was the party's lack of focus on or position on the welfare state that drove voters to defect to other parties at that election. Equally, the public opinion hypothesis does not explain the decision to limit focus on responsible economic management in 2016, particularly given that the overall economic situation was still a priority for voters ahead of that election, being the 5th most mentioned

issue in the spring 2015 Eurobarometer, and the 6th most in the autumn survey. It also overlooks the importance of proving economic competence reported by both TDs and those involved in Fianna Fáil leadership. Overall, then, there is support for both H6 and H7, with both the previous election and contemporary public opinion having an impact on the party's manifesto in 2016.

5.3.3. Liberal Democrats 2015-2017

Prior to 2015, the vote share of the Liberal Democrats had been increasing steadily since the establishment of the party as a result of a merger of the SDP and the liberal party – in 1988, with the exception of a decline in vote share of 1% between 1992 and 1997. In 2010, it reached its highest ever vote share of 23%, and entered government as the junior coalition partner of David Cameron's first government. Following this spell in government, however, the party's vote share declined to under 8%, the lowest it had achieved since the merger that established the party. The number of MPs the party returned to Westminster also declined hugely, from 57 in 2010 to just 8 in 2015 (Döring et al. 2023).

The dissimilarity score measuring the extent of change between the Liberal Democrats' manifestos in 2015 and 2017 is relatively low at 0.276. As indicated in figures 5.5-5.6, there was minimal change in the party's position on the economy, or its attention to economic issues. There is slightly more positional movement on GAL-TAN issues, but the change in salience is minor. While the figures show that none of the three major parties changed their parties significantly between 2015 and 2017, this is particularly interesting in the Liberal Democrats' case given the massive extent of vote loss that the party suffered.

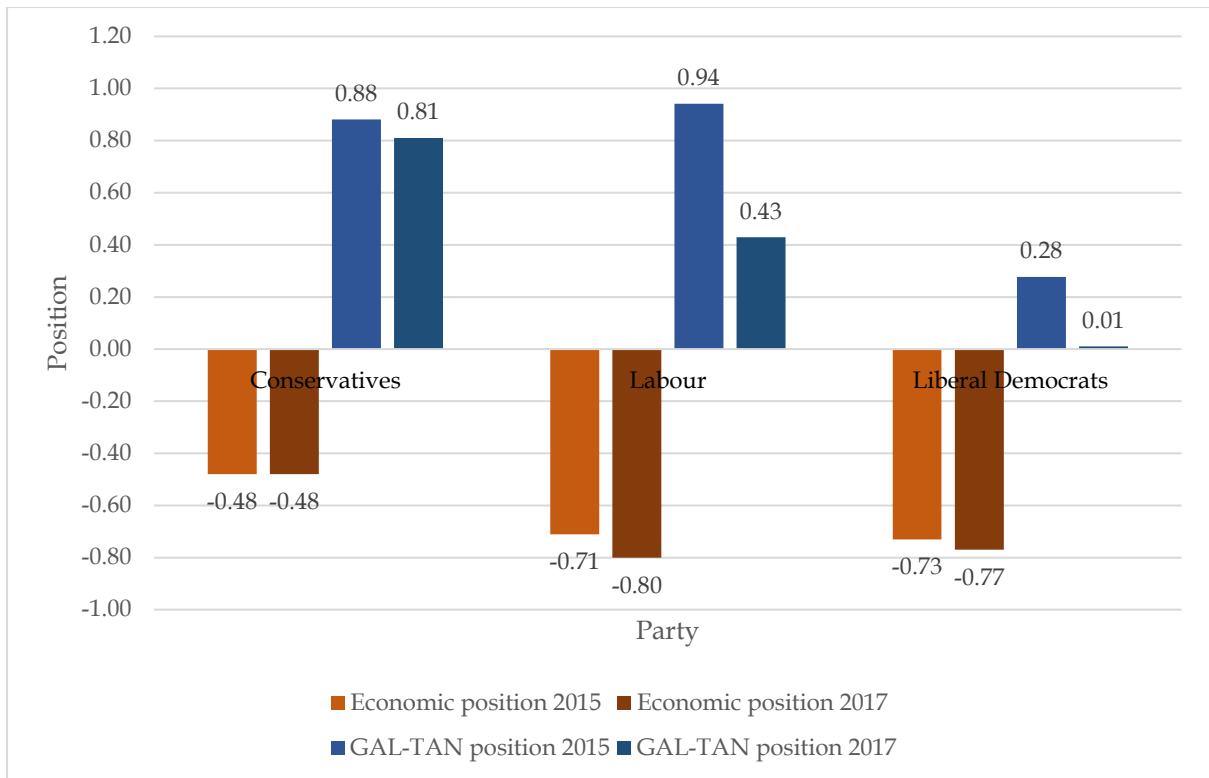


Figure 5.6: Economic and GAL-TAN position by party, 2015-2017

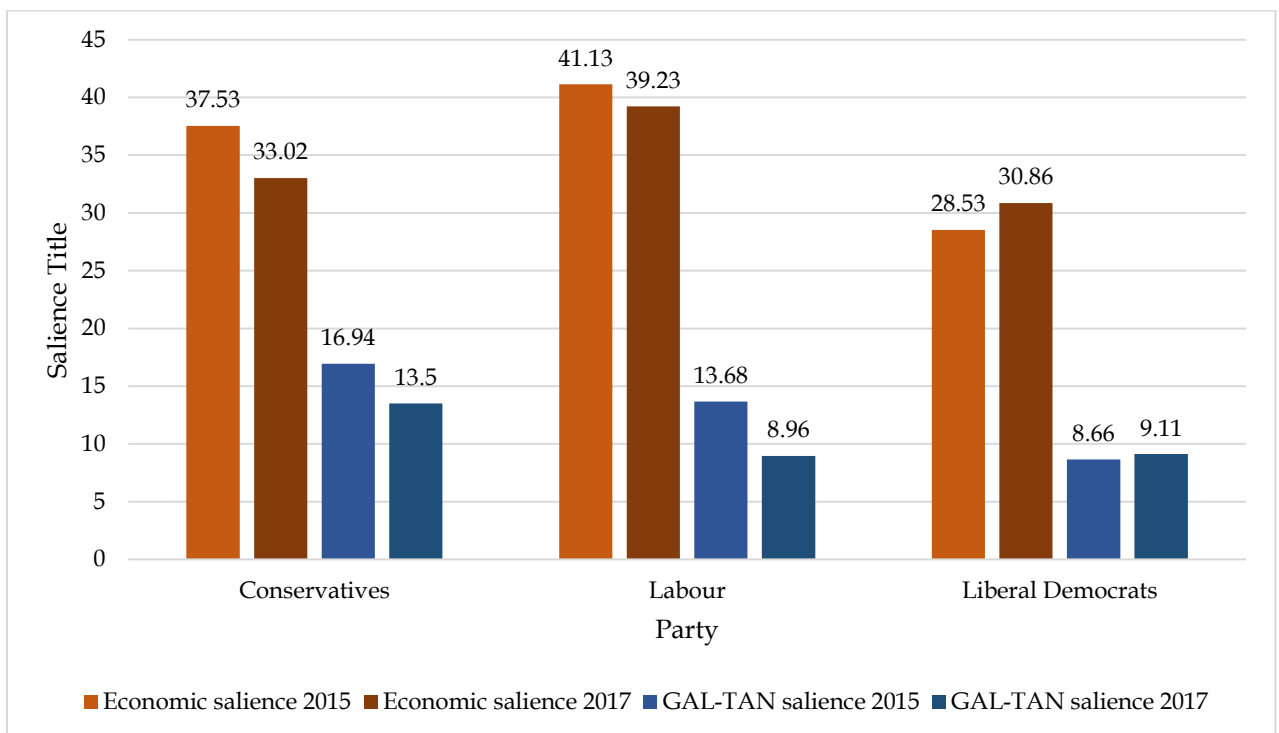


Figure 5.7: Economic and GAL-TAN salience by party, 2015-17

Based on data from the CSES, the vast majority of those who defected from the Liberal Democrats having voted for the party in 2010 switched their support – unsurprisingly given the majoritarian nature of the UK electoral system – to the Conservatives and Labour. Of the 210 CSES respondents in 2015 who said they had voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2010, only 31% said they voted for the party again in 2015. 21% said they voted for the Conservatives, 25% for Labour, 6% for the Green Party, and 9% abstained (The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2023). The situation is different in terms of seat losses. Of the 49 seats lost by the party in 2015, 27 were lost to the Conservatives, 12 to Labour, and 9 to the SNP (Leszkiewicz, 2015). This is reflective of the general tendency for the Liberal Democrats to be most competitive in seats where the Conservatives are their main competitors. This fact was also seized on by the Conservatives, whose strategists focused on targeting potential switchers from the Liberal Democrats (Cutts and Russell, 2015). In seats where Labour was the main competitor, the Liberal Democrat vote share dropped by 16.6%, compared to 17% in seats where the Conservatives were their main competitor (Cutts and Russell, 2015).

In 2015, the CMP category that received the most attention from both the Conservative and Labour parties was *per504* Welfare State Expansion. This was similarly a priority for the Liberal Democrats, in whose manifesto it was second only to *per503* Equality: Positive. As indicated in figure 5.6, the Liberal Democrats were the left-most party on the economy out of the three major parties, though only marginally more left-wing than the Labour party. The left-wing position of the Liberal Democrats was to a considerable degree driven by its attention to *per504* Welfare State Expansion which, in line with the Conservatives and Labour, received the most attention of any economic issue. Thus in 2015, there was a common focus on the economic dimension, particularly the issue of the welfare state. The parties were also fairly similar in their position on the economic dimension, with virtually no difference between the positions of Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Conservatives		Labour		Liberal Democrats	
<i>per504</i> Welfare State Expansion	8.69	<i>per504</i> Welfare State Expansion	12.79	<i>per503</i> Equality: Positive	15.23
<i>per605</i> Law and Order: Positive	8.44	<i>per403</i> Market Regulation	8.13	<i>per504</i> Welfare State Expansion	10.12
<i>per404</i> Economic Planning	5.86	<i>per605</i> Law and Order: Positive	7.73	<i>per501</i> Environmental Protection	9.86
<i>per411</i> Technology and Infrastructure: Positive	5.61	<i>per701</i> Labour Groups: Positive	6.94	<i>per201</i> Freedom and Human Rights	7.51
<i>per506</i> Education Expansion	5.16	<i>per503</i> Equality: Positive	5.75	<i>per403</i> Market Regulation	6.42

Table 5.3: Most prominent issues in 2015 manifestos of the Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats (Lehmann et al. 2024)

As indicated in figure 5.7, less attention was devoted to the GAL-TAN dimension than to the economy in 2015 manifestos. The Liberal Democrats devoted less attention than the other two major parties to this dimension, and adopted a more liberal position overall. The difference in salience is largely driven by a relative lack of focus by the Liberal Democrats on *per601* National Way of Life: Positive and *per605* Law and Order: Positive. The positional difference is a product again of a lack of attention to those issues by the Liberal Democrats as well as a greater focus on *per416* Anti-Growth Economy: Positive than the Conservatives and Labour.

The issues dominating the manifestos of the major parties appear to mirror the concerns of the electorate in 2015. According to wave 4 of the British Election Survey (BES), administered in March 2015, the economy was the most salient issue for voters, and immigration as the second most salient, with 27.89% of respondents saying that the economy was the most

important issue facing the country, and 24.96% believing it was immigration. While there is no MARPOR category covering specifically the issue of immigration, an examination of the annotated manifesto shows that most references to a need to control for immigration are coded under *per601* National Way of Life: Positive,⁸ as well as a number of references to enforcing immigration law and border controls under *per605* Law and Order: Positive.⁹ The lack of attention by the Liberal Democrats on these two issues in their 2015 manifesto thus represents a potential reason for defection by people who had voted for the party in 2010. Moreover, the Liberal Democrats were not perceived as being particularly strong on immigration, being consistently seen as less capable than both the Conservatives and Labour of handling immigration in the period between the 2010 and 2015 elections (YouGov, 2014).

Yet the opinions of Liberal Democrat voters on immigration suggests that the issue was not the main driver of defections in 2015. In wave 4 of the BES, administered in March 2015, of those respondents who voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2010 and intended to vote for the Conservatives in 2015, 21.74% believed immigration to be the most important issue facing the country, compared to 38.26% naming the economy. Of those who voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2010 and intended to vote for Labour in 2015, immigration was named as the most important issue by just 7.58% of respondents, compared to 30.3% most concerned about the economy, 19.7% about health, and 14.53% about inequality. This likely arises from the pro-immigration stance of the Liberal Democrats compared to other parties in the U.K. – it is unlikely that many of those who voted for the Liberal Democrats prior to 2015 did so mainly because of their position on immigration. Moreover, regardless of voting intentions, BES

⁸ E.g. “Our plan to control immigration will put you, your family and the British people first” (The Conservative Party 2015, 29); “Conservatives believe in controlled immigration, not mass immigration” (Ibid., 29); “Immigration has made an important contribution to our economic and social life, but it needs to be properly controlled” (The Labour Party 2015, 11); “We will: Complete the restoration of full entry and exit checks at our borders, to rebuild confidence in immigration control, and allow targeting of resources at those who overstay their visas” (Liberal Democrats 2015, 126); codings by Lehmann et al. 2024.

⁹ E.g. “[W]e will continue to strengthen our borders, improve the enforcement of our immigration laws and act to make sure people leave at the end of their visas” (The Conservative Party 2015, 30); “We will [...] clamp down on illegal immigration” (The Conservative Party 2015, 29); “We need much stronger action to stop illegal immigration” (The Labour Party 2015, 50); “We will enforce immigration rules humanely and effectively” (The Labour Party 2015, 50); “We have begun to tackle abuse in our immigration system” (Liberal Democrats 2015, 118); “We will build on this record to rebuild confidence in our borders and immigration system” (Liberal Democrats 2015, 118); codings by Lehmann et al., 2024.

respondents did not generally see the Liberal Democrats in government as having been responsible for levels of immigration in 2015, as indicated in figure 5.8.

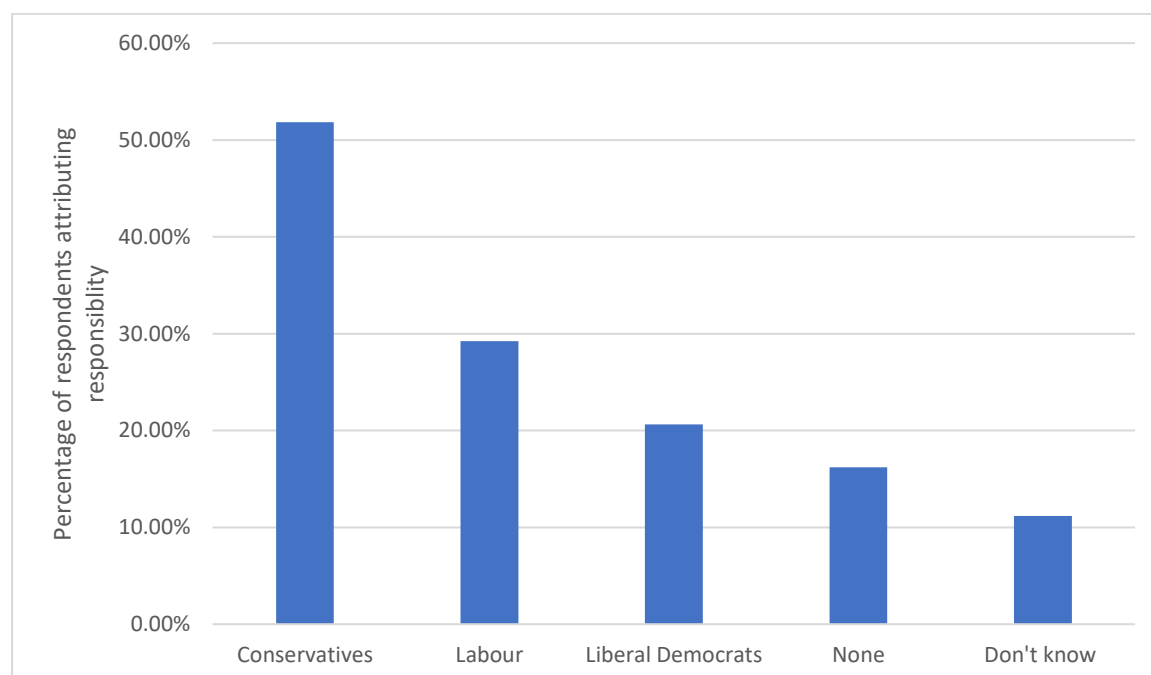


Figure 5.8 Perceived responsibility for levels of immigration, March 2015 (Fieldhouse et al. 2015)

Thus, despite generally high levels of concern with immigration among the population of the UK ahead of the 2015 election, the fact that this concern was lower among previous supporters of the Liberal Democrats suggests that it did not play a significant role in the party's electoral collapse. The party's position on the economy also fails to explain the extent of defections, given that its position was so close to that of the Labour party, to which the Liberal Democrats lost a sizable proportion of votes.

The evidence thus suggests that the Liberal Democrats' result in the 2015 was not clearly the outcome of the party's platform on any particular issue. In fact, as in figure 5.9, the party was performing poorly in opinion polls as early as late-2010, suggesting that the reason for its poor electoral performance emerged long before any decisions were made about the 2015 manifesto. By September 2010, four months after the election that saw it enter into Government as the junior coalition partner of the Conservatives, the party had dropped from 23% of the vote share to 18% in opinion polls, and it would not move higher than that at any point prior to the 2015 election.

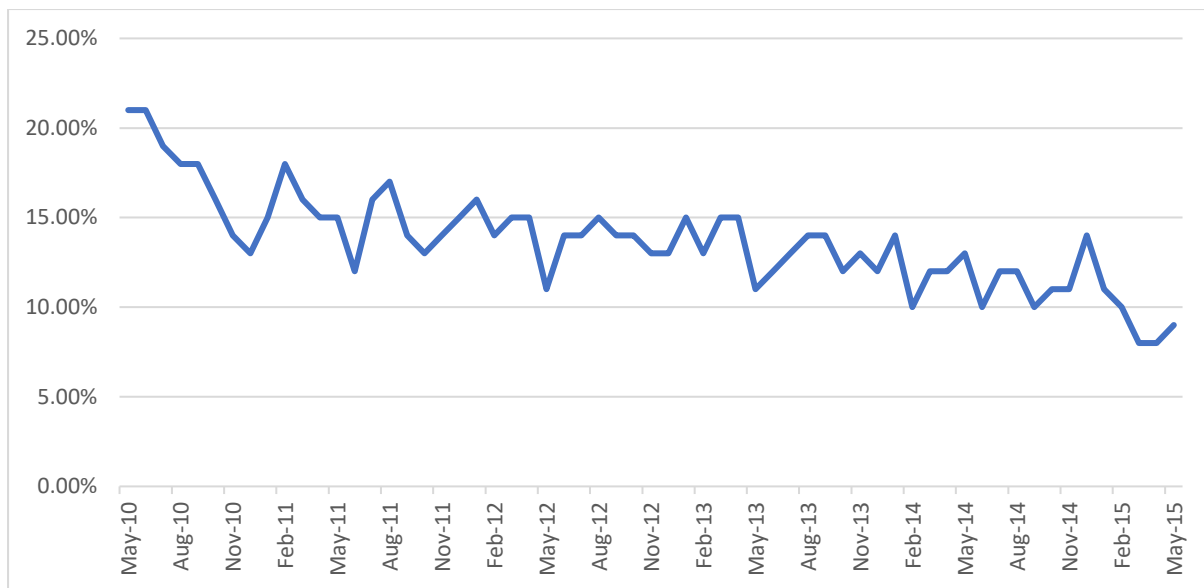


Figure 5.9: Liberal Democrats Voting Intention, 2010-2015 (Sedghi and Rogers, 2015)

Central to testing H8 is establishing whether the party had a shared understanding of what caused its vote loss in 2015. In contrast to Fianna Fáil following the 2011 election, the Liberal Democrats did undertake a formal review of the 2015 election, culminating in the publication of a report on the request of the Federal Executive (Liberal Democrats Campaigns & Communications Committee, 2015). Per the introduction, the aim of the review is “to maintain Party accountability by identifying root causes and [...] recommending actions that the Party can take to minimise the chances of a similar result” (Liberal Democrats Campaigns & Communications Committee 2015, 2). This aim is reflected in the contents of the review, with the executive summary outlining findings on why the party struggled in the short campaign in 2015, and the overall decline in support that the party suffered between 2010 and 2015 (Liberal Democrats Campaigns and Communications Committee, 2015). In short, it seems then that the Federal Executive of the party was keen to identify and highlight the causes of the result.

One of the main focuses of the election review was the decision following the 2010 election to go into coalition with the Conservatives. The review does not identify the decision to go into coalition itself as the cause of the substantial losses – indeed, it notes: “Our members have been very clear with us – we did the right thing for the national interest by going in to coalition” (Liberal Democrats Campaigns & Communications Committee, 2015, 3). This was also the case at the time of the coalition agreement, with an overwhelming majority of activists

at a special conference in May 2010 voting in favour of the coalition (Interview with Newby; Curtis, 2010). Rather, the problem lay in the party's messaging around the coalition. The review notes that those members who said they supported the coalition also believed that the party "failed at using [its] new position to garner support, retain and communicate [its] vision, or maintain a unique offer" (Liberal Democrats Campaigns and Communications Committee 2015, 3). It reports that in setting aside a narrative focusing on the national interest for one focusing on proving that coalitions can work, the party "unwittingly manoeuvred [themselves] into a position of appearing content to be willing appendages to [their] coalition partners" (Ibid). Also regarding messaging around the coalition, the review reports that not enough was done to either distance the party from Conservative policies that Liberal Democrat ministers disagreed with, or to take credit for blocking certain Conservative policies (Ibid).

This concern with messaging around the coalition was shared by some of the interviewees. Vince Cable believes that while the coalition may have led to some losses of votes and seats, the magnitude of the loss was driven by the lack of a clear message by Nick Clegg ahead of 2015 "other than that, [the Liberal Democrats] wanted to continue the coalition" (Interview with Cable). He also noted the eclipsing of the Liberal Democrats' message about the coalition – which he describes as a successful period of government, by the Conservatives' claiming of all of the positive policy outcomes of coalition, and the message by Labour that the Liberal Democrats had been captured by the Conservatives throughout the coalition, and were at least in part responsible for austerity. Indeed, there is an agreement both across interviewees and in the party's post-election review that the actual policies pursued by the Liberal Democrats in office were not themselves problematic. Even in the case of the u-turn on tuition fees, former Liberal Democrat MP Vince Cable agreed that the decision was the right decision, and that it was necessary (Interview with Cable). Similarly, the party's then-leader Nick Clegg apologised in 2012 for having made the pledge not to increase tuition fees and the subsequent u-turn, but not for the decision to support the fee increase (Wintour and Mulholland, 2012). Speaking about the policies of the coalition more generally, Alistair Carmichael expressed his belief that the post-election review wasn't driven by policy-based analysis because the policies themselves were not the reason for the massive loss the party suffered: "the policies are all good, but they were drowned out by the politics, which was entirely negative" (Interview with Carmichael).

The election review also devotes a good amount of attention to the decision shortly after the election in 2010 to abandon its promise to oppose increases in university tuition fees. It should be noted that prior to the 2010 election, there had been some disagreement between the Federal Policy Committee (FPC) and Conference on one hand, and the leadership on the other. Where maintaining a commitment to abolishing tuition fees was favoured by the FPC and Conference, a number of senior figures including Nick Clegg and Vince Cable wanted to drop the pledge, arguing that it was not sustainable in a post-crash economy. In the end, the party entered the 2010 campaign with a promise to abolish tuition fees over 10 years, and the review notes that this high-profile line resulted in a sizable increase in support among younger voters (Liberal Democrats Campaigns and Communications Committee, 2015). Six months into the coalition, Parliament voted in favour of increasing tuition fees to a maximum of £9,000 a year, with 27 Liberal Democrat MPs supporting the motion and 21 rebelling (BBC News, 2010). The review highlights this point in the coalition as a significant contributor to the 2015 result: “Polls which had languished in the low twenties since coalition was formed [...] dropped to around 14%” in the wake of the tuition fees vote. This perceived importance of the tuition fees decision is reflected in other analyses of the 2015 election. Cutts and Russell (2015) note that between the parliamentary vote on tuition fees in December 2010 and the election in May 2015, the Liberal Democrats only occasionally exceeded 10% in polls on voting intention. Notably, ahead of the Liberal Democrat conference in 2012, Nick Clegg apologised for having made a pledge on tuition fees that the party was not sure it could keep. In this speech, Clegg was keen to emphasise that the apology was for making a pledge that they couldn’t stick to, rather than the actual decision on tuition fees itself (Wintour and Mulholland, 2012). Again, there is an emphasis on messaging rather than policies.

The lack of concern with policy-driven analysis identified by Alistair Carmichael (Interview with Carmichael) and the belief expressed elsewhere (Clegg, 2016) that the cause of the Liberal Democrat collapse was not an issue of policy is reflected in the review itself. Looking again at the u-turn on tuition fees, none of the review’s recommendations in the section discussing the u-turn are about the policy decision itself – there is nothing to suggest a belief by those involved in the review that the party should not have voted to increase tuition fees. Rather, the recommendations focus on party governance and decision-making, and communication. The review recommends that a clear protocol be drawn up to outline how the party should be governed in and out of government, that the interests of the wider party be represented by a

specific member in any future coalition negotiation team, that it should be made clear in future that the party will only automatically vote for legislation covered by the coalition agreement and not by any legislation brought forward by the government, and that the Party President explain parliamentary positions taken internally and externally. In short, the review focuses on how the party can address future disagreements between the leadership and the wider party, and how parliamentary decisions should be communicated, rather than any specific policy recommendations.

Thus, regarding the question of whether the party had an accurate and shared understanding of what caused its electoral collapse, it is important to note in this case that the main causes do not appear to have been strictly policy-related. Regarding the coalition, the fact that the idea of coalition became so unpopular among both Liberal Democratic voters and the electorate as a whole despite broad support prior to the agreement suggests that indeed the issue was not with the principle of coalition, but with its execution. This reflects the idea suggested in section 5.2 that parties are not necessarily concerned with policy responsiveness following election loss. In this case and in others covered in the survey discussed above, much of the focus appears to have been on campaign management.

Moreover, despite the presence of the review and the general agreement between those interviewed for this study and the conclusions of the review, it appears that overall the impact of the review was very limited. While interviewees either knew that there had been a review (Interview with Cable) or assumed that there had been because the party always carries out reviews following elections (Interview with C), they report that it was not held in high regard or given substantial attention by those in the party. One interviewee noted that the review wasn't a priority in the midst of significant downsizing follow the election, and also that the review "wasn't taken very seriously" (Interview with C). The same interviewee also recalled their belief that the review was not particularly thorough, and Alistair Carmichael similarly believed that there was little appetite for analysing the 2015 election, and that the party could have spent more time on the review (Interview with Carmichael). While there was a review, then, that focused on identifying the causes of the 2015 result, this was not a particularly high priority for senior party figures, who did not report being particularly invested in the results of the review.

It also appears that despite the review, the party may not have been united on the reasons behind the results of the 2015 election. The majority of interviewees (Interview 5, Interview 7, Interview 8) did not agree that the party had a shared understanding of the causes of the significant defeat. Indeed, some reported that the party still does not have such a shared understanding (Interview with Carmichael; Interview with Cable). Much of this division related to the decision to go into coalition. Vince Cable recalled a division between on one hand those who believed the party should not have gone into coalition with the Conservatives, and that the party should not have broken its promises on tuition fees, and on the other hand those who believed that the party had done the right thing on both of those issues, and that the result was driven by a poor campaign characterised by a lack of clear messaging. Others also reported a vocal minority within the party who opposed the coalition (Interview with C; Interview with Newby).

Some interviewees also reported division and dysfunction within the parliamentary party more generally, with Alistair Carmichael reporting that following the decline from 57 MPs to 8, “there wasn’t a great deal of coherence” (Interview with Carmichael). Vince Cable noted that the parliamentary party following the election was “highly dysfunctional [...] the people who were left disliked each other and had a very bad relationship with each other” (Interview with Cable). Carmichael and Cable also cite this issue as one of the reasons that the party was not primarily focused on analysing the results of the election. Rather, the leadership was focused on rebuilding the party ahead of the next election (Interview with C; Interview with Carmichael).

Thus, while interviewees were all supportive of having gone into coalition with the Conservatives, and while this was also found to be the majority position of party activists in the review, there was some level of division within the party about the role of the coalition in the electoral collapse. More generally, despite an effort by the party’s Executive Committee to uncover the causes, its findings did not make a significant impact on the parliamentary party, with some not being aware that such a review had even taken place. Thus, H8 passes the smoking gun test, meaning that there is substantial support for the idea that the party failed to respond to its losses in 2015 because it lacked a strong, shared understanding regarding the causes of this vote loss.

However, the interviews also suggest that the party may have been limited in its ability to respond to its losses in 2015 even if it did have a shared understanding of why it lost votes to such an extent. In discussing the process leading up to the 2017 election, a number of interviewees mentioned that any strategic considerations were eclipsed by the unexpected nature of the election, and the short time-frame for preparing the manifesto. The 2017 election was announced by Prime Minister Theresa May on 18th April 2017, less than two years after the 2015 election (Asthana, Mason, and Elgot, 2017). Moreover, given her repeated statements that she was against the idea of an early general election, the announcement likely came as a surprise to the other parties (e.g. Helm, 2016; Hughes, 2017). One interviewee, noting the “emergency nature” of the election, believed that the party had not done any preparation of its manifesto prior to the election being announced (Interview with C). Vince Cable similarly noted that “the party wasn’t prepared for another election,” and that the party hadn’t had time to absorb the lessons of 2015 in order to incorporate them into the 2017 manifesto (Interview with Cable). Lord Newby recalled that the manifesto “was all done in a terrible rush because [they] weren’t expecting an election, and to a certain extent, it was cobbled together because nobody expected an election at that point” (Interview with Newby). The 2017 Liberal Democrat manifesto was launched in mid-May, less than a month after the election had been announced, and less than two years after the 2015 election (BBC News, 2017).

When asked what considerations influenced the manifesto’s content in 2017, interviewees noted the importance of the Brexit referendum in June of 2016 in galvanising the party and giving it a focus. Lord Newby noted that this was an issue on which the party was united and had a clear policy stance in the form of a second referendum (Interview with Newby). Another interviewee agreed with idea of the importance of Brexit in the 2017 manifesto, noting that it became a point of focus for the party and the main policy goal going into the 2017 election (Interview with C).

EU membership had long been a core issue for the Liberal Democrats, with the same interviewee describing it as “something which was fundamental to [their] values, as well as politically expedient (Interview with C). In describing the 2017 manifesto, Lord Newby noted the prioritisation of issues on which the party had been particularly strong, with EU membership being the dominating issue. This, he says, reflected a feeling among activists of

a need to “get back to what had been [the party’s] mainstays” (Interview with Newby). This focus on the issue of EU membership is reflected in MARPOR data. As demonstrated in figure 5.10, the Liberal Democrats broadly maintained the same level of attention to EU issues in 2017, whereas both the Conservatives and Labour reduced their emphasis on this issue.

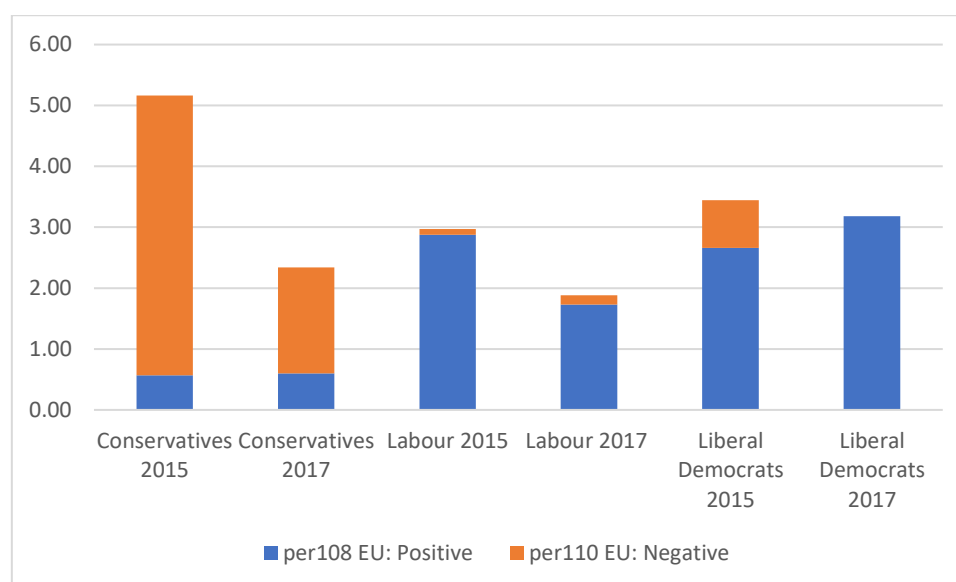


Figure 5.10: Proportion of party manifestos devoted to EU issues, 2015-17

Looking at the manifesto in more detail, the issue of EU membership is prominent throughout. The introduction describes Brexit as “the biggest question facing all of us, which has such huge implications for our young people and our future” (Liberal Democrats 2017, 4). The first main section of the manifesto is dedicated to Brexit, outlining the party’s plans for a second referendum on the final Brexit deal. Sections throughout the manifesto that focus primarily on other issues also contain references to the benefits of EU membership, such as pledges to guarantee the right of EU nationals working in health or social care to stay in the UK, to “reverse the damage to universities and academics” by moving away from a hard Brexit (Ibid, 31), and underwrite funding for EU-backed scientific projects (Ibid).

Thus, data from interviews and the manifesto suggests that the priority of the Liberal Democrats ahead of the 2017 election was emphasising their pro-EU position. Following the 2016 Brexit referendum, this had become one of the most prominent issues in British politics, and the Liberal Democrats had a unique appeal in their second referendum platform. The fact that the party undertook a review following the 2015 election indicates that there was a desire to identify the reasons for the electoral collapse. This is also supported by the belief of

interviewees, reflected in other sources, that there were internal debates regarding the causes of the vote loss. However, divisions within the party hampered its ability to coherently respond to this vote loss. In the absence of a clear view of what had happened in 2015, and with limited time to compile a new manifesto for 2017, the party focused on its core issue of the EU, which resonated strongly with voters.

For both Fianna Fáil and the Liberal Democrats, the current concerns of voters and the issues on which the parties were traditionally strong had an important influence on the manifesto presented at the election following vote loss. However, the parties differed significantly in the extent to which their manifesto represented an effort to convince voters that they had learned from past mistakes and changed their platforms to address the reasons that they had previously failed to win over voters. Data from interviews and other sources paint a picture of Fianna Fáil as a party that was keen to address a lack of fiscal responsibility that it believed had led to its electoral collapse. By contrast, the Liberal Democrats were a divided party that was unable to address the reasons for its electoral collapse because of disagreement on what those reasons were.

Beyond the findings relating specifically to these cases, there are two major points that arise from the analysis presented here that are relevant to our understanding of party responsiveness. Firstly, more than parties simply having information regarding the reasons for vote loss, party unity appears to be important in facilitating responsiveness to vote loss. While there was strong agreement throughout Fianna Fáil on the need to address its perceived lack of credibility on the economy following the 2011 election, there was no such tendency within the Liberal Democrats following the 2015 election. Because the party was divided on what had caused its vote loss, it was unable to create a coherent response to that vote loss. There was thus minimal change in its manifesto in 2017, with the party instead homing in on issues that had been mainstays of the party.

Secondly, parties can and do respond to multiple stimuli simultaneously. In the case of Fianna Fáil, while there was a desire to address its reputation for fiscal responsibility, the party also felt a need to address the issues of the day. Responding to previous vote loss and responding to current voter concerns are not mutually exclusive. Thus, studies examining the formulation of party platforms should allow for the possibility that they are addressing multiple concerns at once, rather than simply representing a response to one particular stimulus.

5.4. Conclusion

Following the examination in chapter 4 of the relationship between vote loss and party change, this chapter has sought to analyse the processes occurring within parties between elections in order to better understand the nature of this relationship. In particular, in focusing on the information available to parties and the relative prioritisation of addressing vote loss compared to other considerations, this analysis has highlighted various factors that affect parties' propensity to respond, and explain variation in responsiveness to vote loss.

The analyses presented in this chapter have produced a number of insightful findings. Analysis of surveys administered to parliamentarians indicates that the practice of conducting post-election reviews remains relatively opaque. The fact that the findings of such reviews are sometimes not published and that parliamentarians are not necessarily aware of them is an obstacle to developing a full picture of the information that parties have following elections. Moreover, the fact that parliamentarians are often unaware of reviews suggests that their impact may be limited, particularly in less centralised parties where leadership is more reliant on the broader parliamentary party. Future research examining the decision-making process within party leadership may produce additional insights into the behaviour of leadership following vote loss.

Analysis of these surveys also demonstrated that issues with a party's electoral platform are not necessarily the central focus of electoral reviews. Responses indicated that much of the focus is instead on the management of the campaign and the messaging around these policies. This finding was also mirrored in the Liberal Democrats' case study, where both the review and interviewees focused much more on issues with messaging and the presentation of policies than with the policies themselves. This highlights an important limitation to manifesto-based studies of responsiveness. In focusing solely on policy, such studies may overlook important other aspects of responsiveness which are more evident through an analysis of the campaign than of party platform.

In process tracing two instances of party responsiveness to vote loss, this chapter aimed to identify the salient factors that lead a party to change its platform in response to vote loss. One such factor, as has been highlighted by previous work, is party unity. In the case of Fianna Fáil there was a clear and widespread understanding of what had gone wrong for the party in 2011. This allowed for decisions to be easily made about how to address these problems,

with these decisions generally being supported by interviewees. By contrast, following their 2015 loss, the Liberal Democrats were divided over what had led to the party's electoral collapse, and whether it had made the right policy decisions. As a result, the party was not in a strong position to respond, because there was no clear agreement on exactly what it was responding to.

This analysis has also highlighted the fact that parties are capable of responding to more than one stimulus for change at a time. In both the case of Fianna Fáil and the Liberal Democrats, the state of public opinion prior to the election following vote loss played an important role in influencing their electoral platforms. In the case of the Liberal Democrats, this became the main basis of their campaign, with a lack of agreement on the reasons for vote loss mitigating the party's ability to respond to that stimulus for change. In the case of Fianna Fáil however, responsiveness to public opinion existed alongside responsiveness to vote loss. The platform presented in the party's 2016 manifesto sought both to address its previous failures and to continue to engage with the public's concerns. Indeed, the fact that the Liberal Democrats held a review that was concerned with identifying the reasons for vote loss suggests that had there been a greater degree of agreement on those reasons, the party may similarly have responded both to vote loss and to contemporary public concerns. Thus, when discussing the influence of various factors on party platforms, it is important to acknowledge that such factors are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can and do have a simultaneous effect.

6. Conclusion

The fundamental basis of democracy is the involvement of the people in determining political outcomes. In party democracy, this takes the form of voters choosing between parties that present different platforms which they hope will form the basis of future government policy. In this way, parties are core actors in the democratic process, offering voters alternative visions of government that differ based on their positions and priorities. Given this, understanding the factors that influence parties' electoral platforms is central to understanding how voters come to be presented with a certain range of alternatives at elections.

This thesis has examined the role of past electoral performance in determining future party platforms. Specifically, it has measured the relationship between the extent of a party's vote loss and the change in its political positions and priorities following that loss. It has also sought to analyse the process through which parties respond to vote loss, with a focus on the information available to political parties and the extent to which they prioritise addressing the causes of vote loss over other considerations when deciding on an electoral platform. In examining how parties respond to losing votes to other parties, this thesis has not only examined an important factor that potentially influences party platforms, but also highlighted the indirect impact of voters' electoral choices.

The relationship between election results and future party platform has previously been the subject of a number of studies. These have used a variety of approaches to empirically assess this relationship, producing a similar variety of results. However, I argue that the empirical approaches used in these previous studies have failed to accurately reflect the theoretical basis of the hypothesis of party responsiveness. At the core of the theory that parties respond to vote loss is the idea that this loss acts as a signal that the platform presented at the relevant election has failed. Moreover, when voters defect to another party, the other parties to which they defect can provide meaning to such vote loss by indicating what platforms are more attractive, and the specific aspects of a losing party's platform that have been unsuccessful.

However, the majority of existing empirical studies have not reflected these theoretical ideas in their empirical approach. In particular, measures of previous electoral performance do not reflect the need for parties to have a clear signal regarding the need for a certain type of platform change in order for change to occur. Furthermore, measures of responsiveness to

mainstream parties are overly broad and fail to reflect the fact that the nature of responsiveness will vary depending on the issues emphasised by successful parties. This thesis has sought to address this by designing an approach to measuring responsiveness to vote loss that more accurately reflect the theoretical basis of the responsiveness hypothesis.

Moreover, the existing literature has neglected to examine in depth the process through which parties respond to vote loss. In particular, the theory of party responsiveness rests on a number of assumptions regarding the priorities of and information available to political parties following elections which have rarely been explicitly acknowledged, and have not been empirically tested. In order to develop a clearer understanding of the propensity of parties to respond and the salient aspects that affect their ability to respond, this thesis moves beyond a correlational study to empirically examine this process. In doing so, it has produced findings that allow for a clearer picture of the nature of the relationship between vote loss and party change, and contextualise quantitative results.

Following an introduction which gave an overview of the thesis and outlined some of its academic and practical implications, in chapter 2, I reviewed the existing literature on the issue of party responsiveness to previous electoral performance. I argued that these studies have not accurately measured the extent of party responsiveness because of a failure to ground their empirical approach in the theoretical basis of the idea of party responsiveness. Measuring party responsiveness to any change in their own vote share or the vote share of others does not reflect the fact that in order for parties to change, they need to experience an electoral threat and have a clear sign as to the optimal next step. I also argued that the measure of change needs to reflect the nature of the threat to which a party is responding in order for any measure of responsiveness to be accurate. This is particularly relevant for competition between mainstream parties, where change has generally been measured using the Manifesto Project (MARPOR) *rile* measure, with no variation to account for the policy issues that have caused vote loss to occur. Thus, I argued that there is a need for a new approach to analysing party responsiveness that is more clearly grounded in theory.

In the literature review I also discussed the fact that previous studies have overlooked the process of responsiveness. Because of the lack of data and analysis relating to the information that parties have and their prioritisation of different considerations when deciding on party platforms, previous work has been unable to make convincing causal claims regarding the

relationship between electoral performance and future platform. The lack of focus on the process of responsiveness also means that there has been no basis on which to understand cases of non-responsiveness. I argued that in order to fully understand what determines whether a party responds to vote loss, there needs to be a greater focus on studying this process.

Finally, in the literature review I noted that there is also a gap in the existing literature on party responsiveness regarding the impact of party family. I argued that while some studies have included some measure of ideology in their empirical approach, they do so on the basis that variation in proximity between the responding party and the party posing a threat will affect the extent of threat posed and thus the need to respond. As such, we do not have a clear picture of the variation in responsiveness caused by structural aspects of parties involved. This is something that this thesis aims to address by including measures of party ideology in an empirical approach that separately accounts for the extent of threat posed by one party to another.

Chapter 3 introduced the theoretical framework that outlines how this thesis aims to fill the gaps in the literature on party responsiveness, and address issues of measurement outlined in chapter 2. I began by outlining the assumptions and scope conditions of this thesis, namely the assumption that parties are vote-seeking, which justifies the restriction in scope of this thesis to the responsiveness of mainstream parties. I then outlined the theoretical basis for parties to respond to vote loss, focusing on a need for parties to have a strong stimulus for change, and arguing that in indicating a failure to achieve the goal of vote maximisation, vote loss represents such a stimulus. I also noted that because of parties' risk aversion, change is most likely to occur when they have some certainty regarding the outcome of that change. Thus, I argued that measuring the extent of vote loss to specific party families is a more accurate measure of the threat to which parties can be expected to respond following vote loss. This is because the platforms of parties to which votes have been directly lost indicate the aspects of the losing party's platform that is failing, thereby highlighting the nature of change that needs to occur. On this basis, I outlined my theoretical expectations regarding party responsiveness to vote loss, with parties moving towards the positions of other parties to which votes have been lost, as well as increasing the focus on their core issues.

Having established a gap in the existing literature regarding the impact of niche parties in chapter 2, I then preceded to argue why niche parties may provoke greater responsiveness than mainstream parties. While recent studies have shifted attention to mainstream responses to niche parties, these studies have not discussed the nature of niche parties and how their unique characteristics may encourage mainstream parties to respond to vote loss to a greater extent than other mainstream parties. Noting the narrow appeal of niche parties and thus the greater clarity that vote loss to niche parties can provide regarding the positions and concerns of votes, I theorised that vote loss to niche parties will prompt greater responsiveness than vote loss to mainstream parties. Thus, I argued that accounting for the niche party status of the party siphoning votes may explain greater variation in responsiveness.

I then developed a theory of the process of responsiveness. This focused on the information available to parties and the extent of their concern with previous election results when making decisions about electoral platforms. I argued that the idea of parties responding to vote loss rests on the assumptions that parties are aware of the parties to which they have lost votes and the reasons behind this loss. I also noted that the theory of responsiveness assumes that the lessons learned from previous vote loss is one of the primary considerations when parties are making decisions about future platforms. In this discussion, I identified alternative hypotheses and discussed their likelihood, arguing why there is good reason to believe that parties do have accurate information and that they do consider this a useful signal indicating the optimal next move following vote loss.

Chapter 4 presented the results of quantitative analysis measuring the relationship between vote loss at t and party platform at $t+1$. This analysis took the form of ordinary least squares regression using a dataset covering 599 party-elections across 172 elections in 30 countries. Following the discussion in chapter 3 on the need to focus on the clarity of signal provided by vote loss when measuring responsiveness, I began this chapter by introducing the independent variable measuring the extent of vote loss to individual party families. This approach has the advantages of quantifying the threat posed from one party to another, and allowing for a variation of the dependent variable depending on the issues emphasised by the party siphoning votes. I then outlined the dependent variables measuring the platform of the responding party on the issue emphasised by the parties to which votes have been lost in terms of both position and salience. I then discussed the dissimilarity index as a measure of

change across the entirety of a party's manifesto, which is used to compare responsiveness to niche parties and to mainstream parties.

Following the presentation of the regression results, I discussed the implications for the hypotheses presented in chapter 3 and the implications for our understanding of party responsiveness more broadly. Firstly, while the regressions found some significant relationships between vote loss and party platform, both the extent and direction of these varied depending on the parties and issues involved. This supports previous findings regarding the varying impact of different party families on the platforms of rival parties. Moreover, the results are highly sensitive to variations in the measure of left-right position, as indicated by the robustness tests included in appendix 6, underlining the importance of selecting a reliable and valid measure of ideology in the context of the research question.

Secondly, the regressions did not find consistent evidence for the support of the idea that mainstream-right parties are more responsive to vote loss than mainstream-left parties. There were significant interaction effects between vote loss and ideology in the models measuring salience responsiveness to radical right parties (RRPs), and GAL-TAN positional responsiveness to losses to the mainstream-right. However, only in the case of losses to RRP were mainstream-right parties more responsive. This is an important finding in itself: given the fact that the vote loss models account for threat, this finding suggests that difference in the extent of threat posed by RRP alone does not account for the difference in responsiveness between mainstream-left and mainstream-right parties. The results also did not find evidence of an effect on responsiveness of the niche party status of the party siphoning votes.

Finally, the results show that the extent of vote loss to a given party family is not a better predictor of future platform on the relevant issue than the vote share of that party family. Overall, there is little difference between the goodness-of-fit measures of the vote share models and the vote loss models. In the majority of cases, the vote share models explain more variation in responsiveness than the vote loss models. This suggests that parties may be more concerned with the opportunities indicated by the success of a given party family than the threat posed by that party family. This is an important finding that provides an insight into the focus of political parties when deciding on electoral strategy.

Chapter 5 analysed the theory regarding the process of responsiveness outlined in chapter 3. I began this chapter by presenting the results of a survey administered to parliamentarians in

6 countries regarding the information available to parliamentarians and the relative prioritisation of lessons from previous elections when deciding on electoral platform. I then presented the analysis of two cases of party responsiveness using qualitative process tracing. In analysing one case of high responsiveness and one case of low responsiveness, I tested hypotheses relating to the causal mechanism of responsiveness. The analysis also allowed me to identify the salient factors that contribute to determining whether a party responds to vote loss.

Both the survey analysis and process tracing produced a number of findings regarding the process of responsiveness to vote loss. Firstly, the results of the survey suggest that post-election reviews are not ubiquitous, and moreover that parliamentarians are often not aware of their occurrence. While the findings of post-election reviews may make a greater impression on those within party leadership, the findings here suggest that they do not necessarily have a significant impact on parliamentarians. The effect of this fact is likely to vary significantly depending on the internal democratic structures of the party and the strength of the party leader. However, it is important to note that parliamentarians have an important role in supporting and lobbying for policy, and thus the possibility of their distance from election reviews can mitigate the ability of a party to respond to vote loss.

Secondly, the results of the survey and the case studies suggest that issues relating to a party's electoral platform are not necessarily the central focus of election analyses within parties. While future studies covering a larger sample may provide additional insights on this question, the results presented in chapter 5 found that much of the focus of election reviews is on campaign management, messaging, and leadership. This highlights the fact that party responsiveness to vote loss is not just restricted to the electoral platform, and indeed that the electoral platform may not be the main focus of responsiveness.

Thirdly, the case studies highlight the ability of parties to respond simultaneously to different stimuli. The analysis shows that Fianna Fáil's 2016 manifesto represents a response to both its vote loss at the previous election and to contemporary issues of public concern. This has important implications for the study of party responsiveness. It emphasises the fact that change following vote loss is not necessarily a response to that vote loss, and thus the need for a greater focus on causal analysis. It also raises the question of how parties address potential conflicts between responding to election results and responding to public opinion,

for example where these point to a need to emphasise different issues or adopt different positions on issues.

Finally, the case studies also underline the importance of information and party unity in facilitating responsiveness. In the case of the Liberal Democrats response to the 2015 election, evidence from interviews points to a divided party that did not meaningfully engage with the findings of the review conducted by the party. Because of divisions within the party about what caused its electoral collapse, little was done by the party to address its failings in 2015. Moreover, this case also again highlights the possibility that studies on responsiveness should also acknowledge the possibility of non-policy responsiveness, given the focus within the party on non-policy issues.

This thesis has a number of implications for our understanding of party responsiveness to vote loss. Firstly, the quantitative results support the idea that the degree of responsiveness varies depending on the parties involved. Significant results indicating responsiveness to vote loss were found in the case of RRP's and the mainstream-right emphasising GAL-TAN issues. There is also evidence of responsiveness to the vote share of green parties, RRP's, mainstream-right parties emphasising the GAL-TAN dimension, and left-wing parties emphasising the economy. However, the presence of null findings in the remaining models indicates that party responsiveness is not consistent.

Secondly, the quantitative results also indicate that slightly more variation in parties' electoral platforms is generally explained by the vote shares of other parties than by the extent of their vote loss. This points to the opportunity hypothesis identified by Spoon, Hobolt, and deVries (2014), which argues that election results act as an indicator of what platforms are successful with voters, regardless of whether those platforms represent a threat to the responding party. This in turn indicates that parties may be more concerned with maximising their vote by expanding their voter base rather than by winning back defectors.

Thirdly, the results presented in chapter 5 highlight some important aspects of party responsiveness that should be used to inform future analysis. Firstly, the information available to parties varies significantly, as does the level of concern with this information within parties. This means that party responsiveness will also vary between parties, given the centrality of the informational environment to facilitating responsiveness. Secondly, the

perceived causes of electoral failure are not necessarily policy-related, and thus in turn responsiveness may not occur through a change in party platform.

Thirdly, while sometimes presented as competing hypotheses (e.g. Adams et al. 2004), party responsiveness to election results and party responsiveness to public opinion are not mutually exclusive. As demonstrated by the desire within Fianna Fáil to use its 2016 manifesto both to address the reasons for its vote loss in 2011 and to reflect more recent shifts in public opinion, parties can respond to multiple stimuli at once. This has important implications for future studies given the possibility that these two goals might conflict, and research on the question of responsibility should acknowledge this when interpreting results.

This thesis has some limitations which point to avenues for further research. Firstly, while the results of the quantitative analysis in chapter 4 indicate a greater concern with the opportunities indicated by election results than the threats, more research is needed to give empirical support to this idea. In particular, in-depth research focusing on parties' analyses and reviews of election may provide some fruitful data here. This question is fundamental to understanding the role of parties as vehicles of representation and the decisions that they make on party platforms. Thus, it has important practical implications as well as addressing gaps in the academic literature.

Similarly, the findings of variation in the degree of responsiveness presented in chapter 4 also merit further research. Are the null results of responsiveness both to vote loss and to the vote share of rival parties found in certain models driven by a difference in the approach that parties take to the threat or opportunity posed by such parties? What drives this difference in approach? Similarly, the results also point to a variation in the effect of the ideology of the responding party that merits further investigation. Again, the correlational study presented here cannot answer causal questions about variation in responsiveness. Nonetheless, these questions have important findings for our understanding of the role and behaviour of political parties.

Secondly, the analyses presented in chapter 5 are focused on the impressions of parliamentarians in general, rather than the impressions of those involved in party leadership. While the results of the survey and the case study analysis have produced some useful and interesting findings, there is a strong possibility that leaders behave differently in this area to parliamentarians more generally. Given the central role that party leaders have in making

decisions about party platform, future research focusing specifically on leadership is important to understanding what influences such decisions. While this thesis has gone some way to addressing the gap in the literature regarding the process of responsiveness, future research can make additional contributions in this area with a greater focus on diverse actors within parties.

Thirdly, this thesis is focused on changes in party platform. As previously noted, the results presented in chapter 5 suggest that response to vote loss often relates to issues with the campaign and leadership rather than a party's electoral platform. As such, the fact that the quantitative analysis presented in chapter 4 has focused on manifesto-based measures of change means that it may be overlooking some important aspects of responsiveness. Future research may benefit from taking a broader view of responsiveness. Moving beyond a focus solely on platforms may give a broader idea of how parties respond to election results.

Finally, the finding that parties can respond to multiple stimuli for change with one manifesto also points to opportunities for future research. As noted above, there is the possibility of a party receiving conflicting signals between elections. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis may produce useful findings on how parties approach such conflicts and trade-offs. How do they decide which of these signals to prioritise? Is there a general tendency for parties to focus on certain signals to a greater degree than others? How should the potential for conflicting signals inform our approach to measuring responsiveness to election results and other stimuli for change?

Appendices

Appendix 1: Post-election Survey Sources

Australia 1987: McAllister and Mughan, 2017.

Australia 1993: Jones et al. 2017.

Australia 1998: Bean, Gow, and McAllister, 2017.

Belgium 1991: Billiet et al. 2016a.

Belgium 1995: Billiet et al. 2016b.

Belgium 2003: Swyngedouw, 2004.

Belgium 2007: Swyngedouw, 2008.

Belgium 2014: Swyngedouw, 2014.

Canada 1972: Market Opinion Research (Canada) Ltd. 2006.

Canada 1979: Clarke et al. 1992.

Canada 1980: Clarke et al. 1992.

Canada 1984: Lambert et al. 1992.

Canada 1988: Johnston, 1992.

Canada 1993: Johnston et al. 1995.

Denmark 1971: Borre et al. n.d.-a.

Denmark 1973: Borre et al. n.d.-a.

Denmark 1975: Borre et al. n.d.-a.

Denmark 1977: Borre et al. n.d.-a.

Denmark 1979: Borre et al. n.d.-a.

Denmark 1981: Borre et al. n.d.-a.

Denmark 1984: Borre et al. n.d.-b.

Denmark 1987: Borre et al. n.d.-c.

Denmark 1988: Nielsen, Sauerber, and Worre, n.d.

Denmark 1990: Borre et al. n.d.-d.

Denmark 1994: Andersen, n.d.-a.

Denmark 2005: Andersen, n.d.-b.

Denmark 2011: Stubager, Andersen, and Hansen. n.d.

Denmark 2015: Hansen n.d.

Finland 1991: Pertti, Sänkiahho, and Borg, 1999.

France 1997: Sciences Po, Centre d'Études de la Vie Politique Française (CEVIPOF) CNRS, Sciences Po Grenoble Centre d'Informatisation des Données Socio-Politiques (CIDSP) CNRS, and Université de Lille Centre de Recherches Administratives Politiques et Sociales (CRAPS) CNRS, 2020.

Germany 1987: Berger et al. 2012.

Germany 1990: Werner, 1991.

Germany 1994: ZUMA et al. 2012.

Iceland 1991: Harðarson, Önnudóttir, and Karólínudóttir, 2014a.

Iceland 1995: Harðarson, Önnudóttir, and Karólínudóttir, 2014b.

Italy 1972: Barnes and Sani, 1972.

Italy 1983: Sani, Santamaria, and Mannheimer, 1985.

Italy 1987: Parisi and Schadee, 1990.

Italy 1992: Corbetta and Parisi, 1992.

Italy 1994: Corbetta and Parisi, 1994.

Italy 2001: Caciagli and Corbetta, 2001.

Latvia 2002: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences Riga Latvia, 2006.

Lithuania 2012: Ramonaitė, 2021.

Netherlands 1971: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1972: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1977: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1981: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1982: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1986: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1989: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 1994: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 2003: Aarts, Todosijevic, and van der Kaap, 2010.

Netherlands 2012: Van der Kolk et al. 2013.

New Zealand 1987: Vowlers et al. 2019a.

New Zealand 1990: Vowlers and Aimer, 2019.

New Zealand 1993: Vowlers et al. 2019b.

Norway 1993: Statistics Norway, 2022.

Spain 1993: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1993.

Spain 2011: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2011.

Spain 2015: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2015.

Spain 2016: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2016.

Spain 2019 (Apr): Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2019.

Sweden 1960: Särilvik, 1984.

Sweden 1968: Särilvik and Statistics Sweden, 1984.

Sweden 1970: Särilvik and Statistics Sweden, 1986.

Sweden 1973: Petersson, Särilvik, and Statistics Sweden, 1984.

Sweden 1976: Petersson and Statistics Sweden, 1984.

Sweden 1979: Holmberg and Statistics Sweden, 1986a.

Sweden 1982: Holmberg and Statistics Sweden, 1986b.

Sweden 1985: Holmberg, Gilljam, and Statistics Sweden, 1991a.

Sweden 1988: Holmberg, Gilljam, and Statistics Sweden, 1991b.

Sweden 1991: Holmberg, Gilljam, and Statistics Sweden, 1995.

Sweden 1994: Holmberg, Gilljam, and Statistics Sweden, 1997.

Sweden 2010: Holmberg and Ekengren Oscarsson, 2017.

Switzerland 1971: Tresch et al. 2021.

Switzerland 1987: Tresch et al. 2021.

Switzerland 1991: Tresch et al. 2021.

Switzerland 1995: Tresch et al. 2021.

Switzerland 2015: Tresch et al. 2021.

United Kingdom 1964: Butler and Stokes, 1992.

United Kingdom 1966: Butler and Stokes, 1992.

United Kingdom 1970: Butler and Stokes, 1992.

United Kingdom 1974 (Feb): Crewe, Sarilvik, and Alt, 1976.

United Kingdom 1979: Crewe, Robertson, and Sarilvik, 1981.

United Kingdom 1983: Heath, Jowell, and Curtice, 1983.

United Kingdom 1987: Heath, Jowell, and Curtice, 1993.

United Kingdom 1992: Heath et al. 1993.

United Kingdom 2001: Clarke et al. 2003.

United Kingdom 2010: Whiteley and Sanders, 2014.

Appendix 2: Parties coded as Radical Right Parties (RRPs)

Country	Party	MARPOR code
Austria	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich	42710
	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	42420
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	21917
	Vlaams Blok	21914
	Stranka demokratske akcije	79951
Bulgaria	Nacionalno Obedinenie Ataka	80710
Canada	Reform Party of Canada	62621
Czechia	Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana	82710
Denmark	Fremskirdspartiet	13951
Estonia	Valimisliit 'Eesti Kodanik'	83712
France	Front National	31720
Greece	Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós	34710
Israel	Miflege Ha'poalim Hamuedet	72311
Italy	Alleanza Nazionale	32710
	Lega	32720
Latvia	Tautas Kustība 'Latvijai' - Zīgerista partija	87722
Netherlands	Centrumdemocraten	22711
	Centrumpartij	22710
	Lijst Pym Fortuyn	22720
New Zealand	New Zealand First	64621
Norway	Fremskrittspartiet	12951
Poland	Liga Polskich Rodzin	92713
	Partia X	92712
	Ruch Odbudowy Polski	92621
Slovenia	Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka	97710
Sweden	Ny Demokrati	11951
	Sverigedemokraterna	11710

Switzerland	Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union/Union Démocratique Fédérale	43711
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Country	Party	MARPOR code
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Switzerland	Freiheitspartei der Schweiz	43951
	Lega dei Ticinesi	43901
	Nationale Aktion gegen die Überfremdung von Volk und Heimat/ Action nationale contre la surpopulation étrangère	43710
	Schwizerische Bauern-, Gewerbe-, und Bürgerpartei/Parti suisse des paysans, artisans et bourgeois	43810
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party	51951

Appendix 3: Alternative left-right measurements

Da Silva economic measure

Right	Left
Per505: Welfare state limitation	Per504: Welfare state expansion
Per401: Free market economy	Per403: Market regulation
Per402: Incentives: positive	Per409: Keynesian demand management

Koedam economic measure¹⁰

Right	Left
Per401: Free market economy	Per403: Market regulation
Per402: Incentives: positive	Per404: Economic planning: positive
Per407: Protectionism: negative	Per406: Protectionism: positive
Per414: Economic orthodoxy	Per409: Keynesian demand management
Per505: Welfare state limitation	Per412: Controlled economy
Per507: Education limitation	Per413: Nationalisation
Per702: Labour groups: negative	Per415: Marxist analysis
	Per504: Welfare state expansion
	Per506: Education expansion
	Per701: Labour groups: positive

¹⁰ As the Koedam measures are not assigned to right or left because of the focus on salience, their assignment here is based on their assignment in the other measures presented.

Lowe et al. economic measure

Right	Left
Per401: Free market economy	Per403: Market regulation
Per402: Incentives: positive	Per404: Economic planning: positive
Per407: Protectionism: negative	Per406: Protectionism: positive
Per414: Economic orthodoxy	Per412: Controlled economy: positive
Per505: Welfare state limitation	Per413: Nationalism: positive
	Per504: Welfare state expansion: positive
	Per506: Education expansion
	Per701: Labour groups: positive
	Per415: Marxist analysis

Da Silva GAL-TAN measure

Right	Left
Per410: Economic growth: positive	Per416: Anti-growth economy: positive
Per601: National way of life: positive	Per602: National way of life: negative
Per603: Traditional morality: positive	Per604: Traditional morality: negative
Per605: Law and order: positive	Per607: Multiculturalism: positive
Per608: Multiculturalism: negative	

Koedam GAL-TAN measure

Right	Left
Per104: Military: positive	Per105: Military: negative
Per109: Internationalism: negative	Per106: Peace
Per110: EC/EU: negative	Per107: Internationalism: positive
Per201: Freedom and human rights	Per108: EC/EU: positive
Per601: National way of life: positive	Per202: Democracy
Per603: Traditional morality: positive	Per416: Anti-growth economy
Per605: Law and order: positive	Per501: Environmental protection
Per606: Civic mindedness	Per602: National way of life: negative
Per608: Multiculturalism: negative	Per604: Traditional morality: negative
	Per607: Multiculturalism: positive
	Per705: Underprivileged minority groups

Lowe et al. GAL-TAN measure

Right	Left
Per104:Military: positive	Per103: Anti-imperialism
Per201: Freedom and human rights	Per105: Military: negative
Per203: Constitutionalism: positive	Per106: Peace
Per305: Political authority	Per107: Internationalism: positive
Per601: National way of life: positive	Per202: Democracy
Per603: Traditional morality: positive	
Per605: Law and order: positive	
Per606: Civic mindedness: positive	

Appendix 4: Sources for control data

Immigration

Australia: Phillips and Klapdor, 2010; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010.

Austria: Eurostat, 2024.

Belgium: Eurostat, 2024.

Bulgaria: Eurostat, 2024.

Canada: Statistics Canada, 2016.

Czechia: Eurostat, 2024.

Denmark: Eurostat, 2024.

Estonia: Eurostat, 2024.

Finland: Eurostat, 2024.

France: Eurostat, 2024.

Germany: Eurostat, 2024.

Greece: Eurostat, 2024.

Hungary: Eurostat, 2024.

Iceland: Eurostat, 2024.

Ireland: Eurostat, 2024; Central Statistics Office, 2007.

Israel: Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.

Italy: Eurostat, 2024.

Latvia: Eurostat, 2024.

Lithuania: Eurostat, 2024.

Netherlands: Eurostat, 2024.

New Zealand: Stats NZ, n.d.

Norway: Eurostat, 2024.

Poland: Eurostat, 2024.

Portugal: Eurostat, 2024.

Slovenia: Eurostat, 2024.

Spain: Eurostat, 2024.

Sweden: Eurostat, 2024; Statistics Sweden, n.d.

Switzerland: Eurostat, 2024.

Turkey: Eurostat, 2024.

United Kingdom: Eurostat, 2024; Office of National Statistics, n.d.

Appendix 5: Reverse causality tests

Vote share models

	Green party vote share $t+1$	Green party vote share $t+1$	RRP vote share $t+1$	RRP vote share $t+1$
Radical right/green party vote share t	0.5124 ***	0.5321 ***	0.2699 **	0.3007 ***
	(0.0837)	(0.0823)	(0.0930)	(0.0851)
Environment position t	-0.4100 *			
	(0.1624)			
Environment salience t		-0.0150		
		(0.0171)		
Multiculturalism position t			0.1008	
			(0.3518)	
Multiculturalism salience $t+1$				0.1975 **
				(0.0667)
Controls	X	X	X	X
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X

Table A1: Reverse causality models – niche party vote share

	Right MSP vote share $t+1$	Right MSP vote share $t+1$	Left MSP vote share $t+1$	Left MSP vote share $t+1$	Right MSP vote share $t+1$	Right MSP vote share $t+1$
MSP left/MSP right vote share	-0.0302	-0.0191	0.0780 ***	0.0788 ***	0.1153 ***	0.1150 ***
	(0.0410)	(0.0585)	(0.0195)	(0.0194)	(0.0239)	(0.0243)
GAL-TAN position t	-1.4519					
	(0.8554)					
GAL-TAN salience t		0.0139				
		(0.1160)				
Economic position t			0.4259		-0.3093	
			(0.7844)		(0.6326)	
Economic salience t				0.0192		0.0287
				(0.0218)		(0.0199)
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table A2: Reverse causality models – mainstream party vote share

Direct loss models

	Lost to green <i>t+1</i>	Lost to green <i>t+1</i>	Lost to RRP <i>t+1</i>	Lost to RRP <i>t+1</i>
Lost to green/RRP <i>t</i>	0.2611 **	0.2717 **	0.0584	0.0466
	(0.0863)	(0.0841)	(0.0957)	(0.0849)
Environment position <i>t</i>	-0.2754			
	(0.2199)			
Environment salience <i>t</i>		0.0232		
		(0.0332)		
Multiculturalism position <i>t</i>			0.3564	
			(0.2768)	
Multiculturalism salience <i>t+1</i>				0.0279
				(0.0664)
Controls	X	X	X	X
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X

Table A3: Reverse causality models – direct loss to niche parties

	Lost to MSP right $t+1$	Lost to MSP right $t+1$	Lost to MSP left $t+1$	Lost to MSP left $t+1$	Lost to MSP right $t+1$	Lost to MSP right $t+1$
Lost to MSP left/right t	0.4819	0.6396	0.2427 ***	0.2401 ***	0.2393	0.2197
	(0.4578)	(0.4153)	(0.0715)	(0.0698)	(0.1345)	(0.1315)
GAL-TAN position t	7.3309					
	(5.5666)					
GAL-TAN salience t		1.0796 *				
		(0.3916)				
Economic position t			-0.0333		-1.8126	
			(1.4107)		(1.7770)	
Economic salience t				0.0693		0.0868 .
				(0.0436)		(0.0508)
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table A4: Reverse causality models – direct loss to mainstream parties

Appendix 6: *Rile* robustness tests

	Environment salience vote share	Environment salience vote loss	Environment position vote share	Environment position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2393 ***	0.2411 ***	0.1731 ***	0.1876 ***
	(0.0440)	(0.0440)	(0.0489)	(0.0486)
Green vote share/lost to green	-0.2373 **	-0.0511 .	-0.0283 **	0.0052
	(0.0839)	(0.0294)	(0.0091)	(0.0040)
Rile position	-0.0336 **	-0.0277 **	-0.0032 *	-0.0042 **
	(0.0104)	(0.0103)	(0.0015)	(0.0014)
Loss measure*left right	0.0036 *	0.0006	-0.0003	0.0002
	(0.0017)	(0.0015)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Cabinet party	-0.1705	-0.2497	0.0168	0.0130
	(0.4442)	(0.4532)	(0.0472)	(0.0468)
GDP t+1	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0214	0.0194	-0.0093 ***	-0.0084 ***
	(0.0148)	(0.0148)	(0.0021)	(0.0021)
Disproportionality	0.0150	0.0600	-0.0039	0.0033
	(0.0620)	(0.0627)	(0.0119)	(0.0125)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	594	594	552	552
Adjusted R ²	0.7639	0.7599	0.5771	0.5702
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A5: Explaining environment position/salience at t+1 with interaction

	Multiculturalism salience vote share	Multiculturalism salience direct vote loss	Multiculturalism position vote share	Multiculturalism position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2616 **	0.2619 ***	0.3681 ***	0.3738 ***
	(0.0801)	(0.0763)	(0.0731)	(0.0738)
Loss measure	0.0055	0.0116	0.0495 ***	0.0504 ***
	(0.0273)	(0.0260)	(0.0104)	(0.0119)
Rile position	-0.0002	-0.0000	0.0028	0.0040
	(0.0056)	(0.0048)	(0.0027)	(0.0025)
Loss measure*rile position	0.0004	0.0019	0.0004 *	-0.0002
	(0.0005)	(0.0014)	(0.0002)	(0.0004)
Cabinet party	-0.1314	-0.1266	0.0311	0.0462
	(0.1867)	(0.1771)	(0.0606)	(0.0566)
Immigration	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP change	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000 *	0.0000 **
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	0.0180	0.0171	0.0081 *	0.0061 .
	(0.0113)	(0.0110)	(0.0036)	(0.0035)
Disproportionality	-0.0275	-0.0305	0.0219	0.0179
	(0.0452)	(0.0459)	(0.0192)	(0.0201)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	490	490	273	273
Adjusted R ²	0.4886	0.4903	0.5853	0.5753
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A6: Explaining multiculturalism position/salience at t+1 with interaction

	GAL-TAN salience vote share	GAL-TAN salience direct vote loss	GAL-TAN position vote share	GAL-TAN position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	-0.3227	-0.1179	0.1937	0.2479
	(0.5931)	(0.4922)	(0.2092)	(0.2024)
Loss measure	-0.0088	-0.0907	0.0046	0.0141
	(0.4154)	(0.2131)	(0.0067)	(0.0106)
Rile position	0.6176	0.4662	0.0090	-0.0016
	(0.5108)	(0.3395)	(0.0082)	(0.0057)
Loss measure*rile position	-0.0078	-0.0169	0.0000	0.0005
	(0.0071)	(0.0121)	(0.0002)	(0.0003)
Cabinet party	-3.5830	-4.5580	0.1564	0.1369
	(5.8882)	(5.8432)	(0.2410)	(0.1822)
GDP change	0.0000 .	0.0000 .	-0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share	-0.0782	-0.1215	0.0317	0.0393 *
	(0.3104)	(0.3124)	(0.0189)	(0.0144)
Disproportionality	7.5345	6.6570	-0.1322	-0.1646
	(5.0191)	(4.3684)	(0.1175)	(0.1008)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	33	33	33	33
Adjusted R ²	0.7321	0.7647	0.696	0.7699
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A7: Explaining GALTAN platform at t+1 of parties competing with mainstream right parties with interaction

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2365 ***	0.2433 ***	0.5290 ***	0.5364 ***
	(0.0589)	(0.0567)	(0.0727)	(0.0714)
Loss measure	0.0025	-0.0388	0.0055 **	-0.0035 .
	(0.0480)	(0.0596)	(0.0018)	(0.0018)
Rile position	-0.0851	-0.0024	0.0007	0.0036 **
	(0.0580)	(0.0264)	(0.0017)	(0.0014)
Loss measure*rile	0.0023	-0.0012	0.0000	-0.0001 .
	(0.0015)	(0.0014)	(0.0001)	(0.0000)
GDP change	0.0000	0.0000	-0.0000 .	-0.0000 .
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.1541	-0.2215	-0.0118	-0.0056
	(0.8943)	(0.8791)	(0.0359)	(0.0355)
Vote share	0.0273	0.0500	0.0037 *	0.0006
	(0.0609)	(0.0494)	(0.0017)	(0.0015)
Disproportionality	-0.0678	-0.0907	-0.0006	-0.0026
	(0.2397)	(0.2399)	(0.0085)	(0.0069)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	550	550	547	547
Adjusted R ²	0.9273	0.9269	0.7632	0.7593
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A8: Explaining economic platform at t+1 of parties competing with mainstream left parties with interaction

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2224 ***	0.2273 ***	0.4901 ***	0.5172 ***
	(0.0497)	(0.0497)	(0.0673)	(0.0675)
Loss measure	0.0040	0.0449	-0.0058 ***	0.0014
	(0.0360)	(0.0310)	(0.0014)	(0.0015)
Rile position	0.0962	-0.0227	0.0017	0.0049 **
	(0.0509)	(0.0280)	(0.0026)	(0.0015)
Loss measure*rile	-0.0030 *	0.0004	0.0000	-0.0001
	(0.0015)	(0.0014)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
GDP change	0.0000 .	0.0000	-0.0000 *	-0.0000 *
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.2762	-0.3971	0.0122	0.0212
	(0.8222)	(0.8367)	(0.0341)	(0.0347)
Vote share	0.0388	0.0563	-0.0001	0.0013
	(0.0383)	(0.0433)	(0.0014)	(0.0013)
Disproportionality	-0.1334	-0.1266	0.0037	0.0017
	(0.1891)	(0.1931)	(0.0072)	(0.0076)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	541	543	539	541
Adjusted R ²	0.9312	0.9309	0.7822	0.7747
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A9: Explaining economic platform at t+1 of parties competing with mainstream right parties

The results of the robustness tests that are presented in tables A5-A9 suggest that the models are sensitive to changes in the measurement of the left-right position of parties. There are a number of instances where coefficients which were not significant in the models using the Parlgov left-right measure become significant in the models using the MARPOR *rile*

measure, and vice versa. Looking at responsiveness to green parties, the coefficient for green vote share is not significant in the ParlGov positional models, but is significant in the *rile* models, indicating a tendency for parties to move to a less environmental position as green parties earn more votes. Similarly, the coefficient for vote loss to green parties is significant in the *rile* salience model but not the ParlGov model, indicating that parties losing votes to green parties reduce the salience of the environment in their subsequent manifestos. The interaction effect in the vote share salience model also becomes significant in the *rile* models, with mainstream-right parties increasing attention to the environment at higher levels of green party vote share, and mainstream-left parties decreasing attention at higher levels. It should be noted that the coefficients all have the same sign in both the *rile* and ParlGov models; the changes are restricted to significance levels.

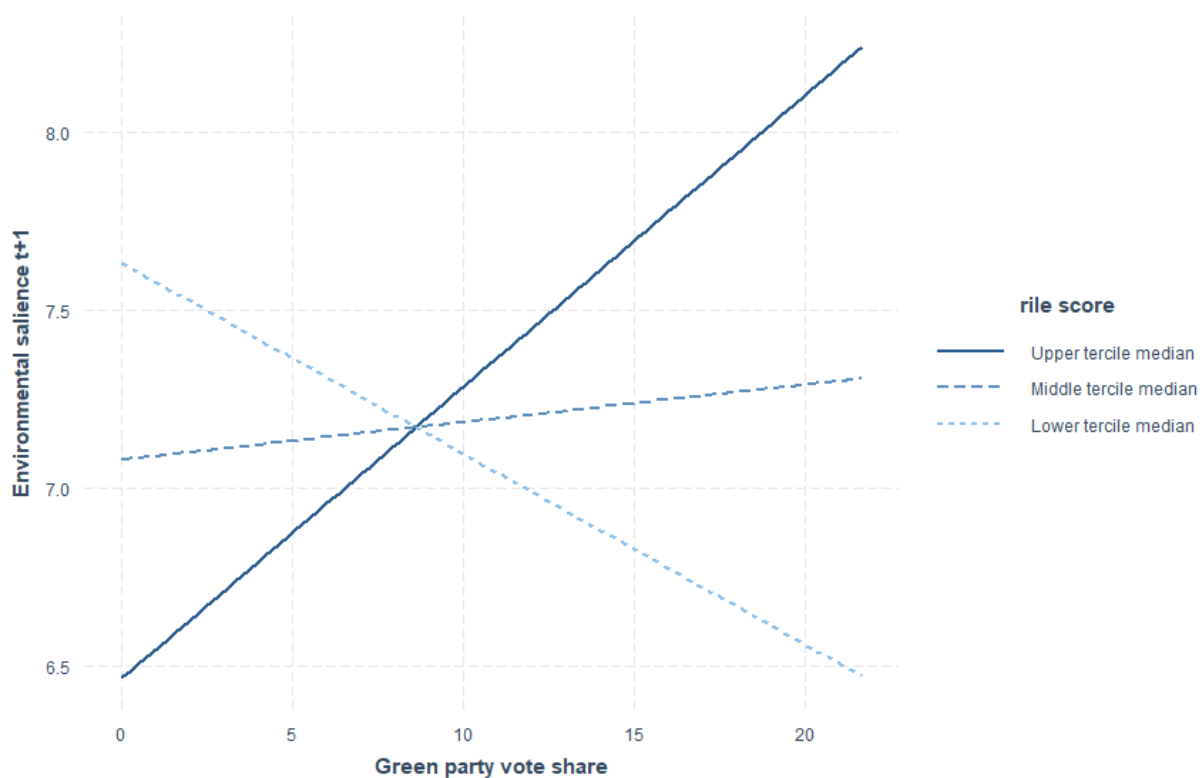


Figure A1: Salience responsiveness to green party vote share, with interaction

On multiculturalism, the vote share and direct loss coefficients become significant in the *rile* positional models, having been insignificant in the ParlGov models, indicating that parties move towards a more restrictive position on multiculturalism when RRP's succeed

electorally, and when they lose votes to RRP. By contrast, the direct loss moves from being significant in the ParlGov salience model to insignificant in the *rile* model. While the coefficient signs are the same across the positional models, the direct loss coefficient in the ParlGov salience model is negative, but positive in the *rile* model. The interaction effects between vote share and left-right position and between direct loss and left-right position also become insignificant in the salience models when *rile* is used instead of the ParlGov left-right measure.

Turning to the mainstream models, the results are again sensitive to the measure of ideological position used. In the GAL-TAN models, the only instance of change in significance of the independent variables is in the direct loss GAL-TAN positional, where the effect of votes lost to the mainstream-right on economic position is not significant in the *rile* model. The interaction between vote loss to mainstream-right parties and left-right position becomes insignificant in the *rile* models. This is also the case in the salience vote share models. In the models measuring the responsiveness to mainstream-left parties on the economy, both the vote loss coefficient and the direct loss coefficient become significant when *rile* is used, suggesting that parties move to a more right-wing position when left-wing parties win more votes, but that they move to a more left-wing position when they lose votes to left-wing parties. Notably, the signs in the *rile* models are the opposite to those in the ParlGov left-right models. In the salience models, the left-wing vote share coefficient becomes insignificant when *rile* is used, and there is also a change in sign. The interaction between left-wing vote share and left-right position of the responding party also becomes insignificant. In the right-wing economic models, the vote share coefficient becomes significant in the *rile* models, indicating a tendency for parties to move to the left on the economy when the mainstream-right wins a higher vote share having emphasised the economy. The direction of change here is the same as indicated in the ParlGov left-right models. Finally, the interaction effects between mainstream-right vote share and left-right position and between vote loss to the mainstream-right and left-right position become significant in the *rile* models, though as demonstrated in figure A2, the effect is relatively small. Here, the sign is the same in both the ParlGov left-right and *rile* models.

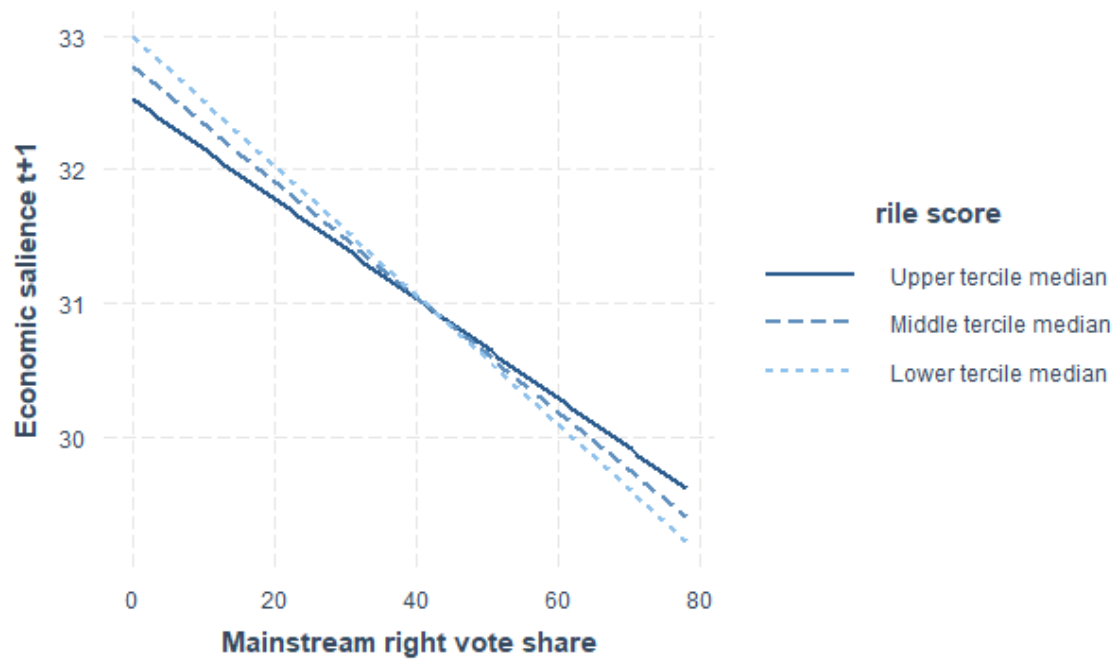


Figure A2: Economic salience responsiveness to mainstream-right vote share when the mainstream-right emphasises the economy

There are also some instances where the goodness of fit is better in the direct loss models than the vote share models in the *rile* models and vice versa. However, the difference between the goodness of fit between the vote share and direct loss models remains minor regardless of whether *rile* or the ParlGov left-right measure is used.

Appendix 7: Overall loss interaction models

	Enviro. salience vote share	Enviro. salience direct vote loss	Enviro. position vote share	Enviro. position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2427 ***	0.2389 ***	0.1734 ***	0.1841 ***
	(0.0471)	(0.0467)	(0.0448)	(0.0452)
Loss measure	-0.2534 **	-0.0595	-0.0188 .	0.0036
	(0.0975)	(0.0396)	(0.0113)	(0.0054)
Left-right	-0.2834 **	-0.3337 ***	-0.0305 *	-0.0290 *
	(0.0897)	(0.0931)	(0.0127)	(0.0128)
Overall loss	-0.3782	-0.0663	0.0627	0.0209
	(0.5781)	(0.4588)	(0.0517)	(0.0397)
Cabinet party	-0.0741	-0.1417	0.0208	0.0120
	(0.4440)	(0.4465)	(0.0461)	(0.0458)
GDP $t+1$	-0.0000 *	-0.0000 .	0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share $t+1$	0.0220	0.0249	-0.0078 ***	-0.0073 ***
	(0.0148)	(0.0156)	(0.0022)	(0.0021)
Disproportionality	0.0562	0.0911	0.0009	0.0087
	(0.0658)	(0.0677)	(0.0118)	(0.0128)
Loss measure*overall loss	0.0623	-0.0819	-0.0146	-0.0035
	(0.1216)	(0.0745)	(0.0111)	(0.0061)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	582	582	539	539
Adjusted R ²	0.7627	0.762	0.5663	0.5587
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A10: Explaining environmental platform at $t+1$

	Multiculturalism salience vote share	Multiculturalism salience direct vote loss	Multiculturalism position vote share	Multiculturalism position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2486 **	0.2496 ***	0.4045 ***	0.4024 ***
	(0.0776)	(0.0752)	(0.0688)	(0.0721)
Loss measure	-0.0001	-0.0190	0.0404 **	0.0503 *
	(0.0286)	(0.0431)	(0.0126)	(0.0249)
Left-right	0.1001 *	0.0994 *	0.0453 *	0.0241
	(0.0481)	(0.0500)	(0.0186)	(0.0186)
Overall loss	-0.1940	-0.1406	0.1108	0.1561
	(0.2480)	(0.1957)	(0.1186)	(0.0959)
Cabinet party	-0.1959	-0.1950	0.0507	0.0516
	(0.1837)	(0.1788)	(0.0635)	(0.0602)
Immigration $t+1$	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP change	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000 *	0.0000 **
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share $t+1$	0.0161	0.0162	0.0070 .	0.0058
	(0.0110)	(0.0110)	(0.0038)	(0.0036)
Disproportionality	-0.0001	-0.0026	0.0201	0.0157
	(0.0433)	(0.0443)	(0.0210)	(0.0214)
Loss measure*overall loss	0.0173	0.0376	0.0097	-0.0041
	(0.0278)	(0.0605)	(0.0102)	(0.0293)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	477	477	265	265
Adjusted R ²	0.4922	0.492	0.5834	0.5734
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A11: Explaining multiculturalism platform at $t+1$

	GAL-TAN salience vote share	GAL-TAN salience direct vote loss	GAL-TAN position vote share	GAL-TAN position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	-0.0644	-0.0432	0.4209 *	0.4361 *
	(0.4000)	(0.2776)	(0.1666)	(0.1842)
Loss measure	0.0243	-0.5869	0.0077	0.0158
	(0.3570)	(0.4969)	(0.0115)	(0.0136)
Left-right	2.7474	3.9606	0.1285 *	0.0518
	(2.4762)	(2.6518)	(0.0514)	(0.0487)
Overall loss	3.7824	-1.7871	-0.4671	-0.2585
	(15.5241)	(5.2718)	(0.6226)	(0.3037)
Cabinet party	-9.7594	-11.3352	0.0174	0.0495
	(7.9428)	(7.8495)	(0.2224)	(0.1890)
GDP change	0.0000 ***	0.0000 ***	-0.0000	-0.0000 .
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Vote share $t+1$	-0.0207	-0.2879	0.0266	0.0340 *
	(0.2732)	(0.3563)	(0.0231)	(0.0150)
Disproportionality	0.6643	0.7209	-0.0475	-0.0721
	(2.6111)	(2.5084)	(0.0809)	(0.0704)
Loss measure*overall loss	-0.0035	0.4273	0.0051	0.0030
	(0.3350)	(0.4458)	(0.0114)	(0.0205)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	32	32	32	32
Adjusted R ²	0.7652	0.7977	0.7408	0.7709
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A12: Explaining GAL-TAN platform at $t+1$ when the GAL-TAN dimension is emphasised by the mainstream right

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic position direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2528 ***	0.2517 ***	0.4233 ***	0.4242 ***
	(0.0580)	(0.0589)	(0.0581)	(0.0575)
Loss measure	0.0113	-0.0134	0.0008	0.0001
	(0.0562)	(0.0586)	(0.0016)	(0.0024)
Left-right	0.1213	-0.0739	0.0815 ***	0.0829 ***
	(0.2763)	(0.2635)	(0.0111)	(0.0108)
Overall loss	3.9022 *	0.6326	0.0423	-0.0151
	(1.8706)	(1.1346)	(0.0580)	(0.0350)
GDP change	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000 *	-0.0000 *
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.0935	-0.1848	-0.0378	-0.0384
	(0.9250)	(0.9304)	(0.0348)	(0.0349)
Vote share $t+1$	0.0204	0.0491	0.0003	0.0005
	(0.0619)	(0.0542)	(0.0018)	(0.0017)
Disproportionality	-0.0776	-0.0860	-0.0042	-0.0046
	(0.2514)	(0.2539)	(0.0076)	(0.0075)
Loss measure*overall loss	-0.1143 *	-0.0032	-0.0015	0.0014
	(0.0549)	(0.0696)	(0.0018)	(0.0027)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	534	534	531	531
Adjusted R ²	0.9265	0.9258	0.7879	0.7879
Significance: *** < 0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A13: Explaining economic platform at $t+1$ when the economy is emphasised by the mainstream

left

	Economic salience vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss	Economic position vote share	Economic salience direct vote loss
Lagged DV	0.2425 ***	0.2405 ***	0.4267 ***	0.4326 ***
	(0.0547)	(0.0545)	(0.0579)	(0.0576)
Loss measure	-0.0370	0.1137	-0.0009	0.0022
	(0.0466)	(0.0768)	(0.0017)	(0.0040)
Left-right	-0.0352	-0.2039	0.0780 ***	0.0815 ***
	(0.3211)	(0.2636)	(0.0119)	(0.0114)
Overall loss	-3.6165	0.9845	0.0192	0.0189
	(1.9407)	(1.0829)	(0.0744)	(0.0391)
GDP change	0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000 *	-0.0000 *
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Cabinet party	-0.3129	-0.2754	-0.0131	-0.0144
	(0.8871)	(0.9017)	(0.0333)	(0.0335)
Vote share $t+1$	0.0516	0.0636	0.0003	0.0007
	(0.0460)	(0.0462)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)
Disproportionality	-0.1617	-0.0913	0.0004	0.0010
	(0.2033)	(0.1950)	(0.0071)	(0.0073)
Loss measure*overall loss	0.1200 *	-0.0704	-0.0008	-0.0031
	(0.0505)	(0.0756)	(0.0020)	(0.0041)
Country fixed effects	X	X	X	X
Decade fixed effects	X	X	X	X
N	527	527	525	525
Adjusted R ²	0.9313	0.9309	0.8009	0.801
Significance: *** <0.001; ** < 0.01; * < 0.05; . < 0.1				

Table A14: Explaining economic platform at $t+1$ when the economy is emphasised by the mainstream right

The models in tables A13-A14 presents the results of regressions including an interaction effect between the loss measure and a dummy variable indicating whether the vote share of the responding party decreased at t . The interaction is only significant in the case of salience responsiveness on the economy. In the case of direct loss, there is no evidence to suggest that parties are more responsive to vote loss when their overall vote share has decreased.

Appendix 8: Questionnaire

In which country do/did you serve as a parliamentarian?

Which party did you represent in the [House of Representatives/House of Commons/Dáil]?

In which year(s) were (re-)elected?

Did the vote share of your party decline at the 20[xx] election? ^a

To which party/parties did your party lose votes at the 20[xx] election? ^b

Did your party carry out a post-election review following the 20[xx] election? ^a

What were the main findings of this review? ^c

Dans quel pays êtes-vous/étiez-vous parlementaire ?

Quel parti représentez-vous/représentiez-vous dans [la chambre des communes/l'assemblée nationale] ?

En quelle(s) année(s) avez-vous été (ré-)élu(e) ?

Est-ce que le score obtenu par votre parti a baissé à l'élection en 20[xx] ? ^a

Face à quels partis est-ce que votre parti a perdu des voix à l'élection en 20[xx] ? ^b

Après l'élection en 20[xx], est-ce que votre parti a passé en revue l'élection ? ^a

Quelles étaient les principales conclusions de cette revue ? ^c

[^a Question asked in relation to elections at which the respondent was (re-)elected.

^b Question asked to respondents who said that their party's vote share had declined at the election in question.

^c Question asked to respondents who said that their party conducted a post-election review.]

Appendix 9: Interview schedule

Thinking about the [2011/2015] election, do you know if your party carried out a post-election review?

Who was involved in the process of carrying out that review?

What was the aim of that review?

What did this review find?

Did you believe that the findings of the review were reliable?

[If review not carried out] Was the decision not to carry out a review a conscious decision, or was a review never considered?

Why do you think this was?

After the [2011/2015] election, do you think the party had a shared understanding of what led to its results?

[If yes] what was that understanding? // [If no] why do you think it lacked that understanding?

In the aftermath of the [2011/2015] election, how important was it for the party to establish which parties it lost votes to?

Were the findings of this party useful for informing future decisions made by the party?

[If yes] what decisions? // [If no] why do you think they were not useful?

Ahead of the [2016/2017] election, when did your party start preparing its manifesto?

Who was involved in the process of preparing the manifesto?

Could you tell me a bit about the process of compiling this manifesto?

What kinds of considerations informed decisions that were made when this manifesto was being compiled?

How were decisions made about what issues to focus on in the manifesto for the [2016/2017] election?

To what extent did the party's performance in the [2011/2016] election influence the writing of the manifesto for the [2016/2017] election?

Appendix 10: List of Interviews

Fianna Fáil

Interview with A. 24/04/2024. Dublin.

Interview with Sean Fleming. 14/02/2024. Dublin.

Interview with Jackie Cahill. 01/05/2024. Dublin.

Interview with Niall Collins. 14/02/2024. Dublin.

Interview with B. 15/05/2024. Dublin.

Liberal Democrats

Interview with Alistair Carmichael. 28/05/2024. Online.

Interview with C. 14/05/2024. London.

Interview with Vince Cable. 09/05/2024. London.

Interview with Dick Newby. 09/07/2024. Online.

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