



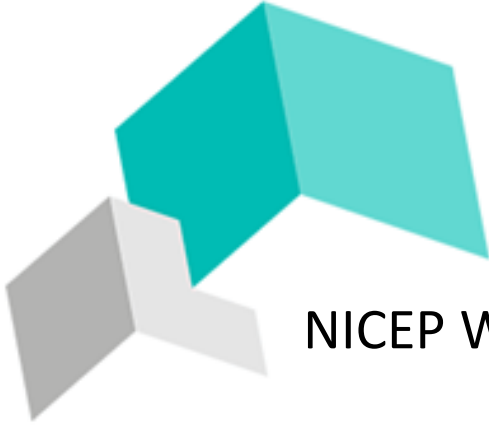
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Choosing Your Battles Wisely? Activist Preferences, Party Size and Issue Selection

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain why parties emphasize particular positional issues in their campaigns – a hitherto understudied topic. I find that the policy preferences of activists are an important influence on party platforms, and therefore, party emphasis decisions on positional issues. However, my analyses reveal party size to be a more important determinant of parties' emphasis strategies than whether a party is 'mainstream' or 'niche'. Large mainstream parties—termed 'major parties'—de-emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme, whereas both small mainstream and small niche parties—'minor parties'—emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme. Further, large niche parties appear to behave more like large mainstream parties than small niche parties in this respect. Using a variety of empirical approaches, I show that these findings can be explained as the consequence of vote-maximizing choices made by parties responding to different electorates. Conversely, they cannot easily be explained by strategic error or dogmatism on the part of some parties, or by the selection of activists into parties. These patterns hold across Western and Eastern Europe, suggesting that, in a variety of information environments, the appearance of policy moderation may be viewed as advantageous by major parties, and as potentially disadvantageous by minor parties.

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1 Introduction

Heresthetic is neither rhetoric nor magic. The heresthetician can neither create preferences nor hypnotize. What he can do is probe until he finds some new alternative, some new dimension, that strikes a spark in the preference of others.

The Art of Political Manipulation

WILLIAM H. RIKER

The 2015 General Election showed us that pursuing a centrist strategy was a catastrophic error. As former Cambridge MP and City Council Leader Professor David Howarth told us on this website immediately after the General Election last year, it is something ‘we must never do again’.

Paul Pettinger, Head of Office for the Liberal Youth

This paper investigates the determinants of party emphasis on positional issues, and finds that an important factor influencing the level of emphasis a party places on an issue is the policy distance between its activists and the average voter on that issue. Furthermore, using recent data on party and voter policy preferences and party issue emphasis in Europe, I find clear differences of strategy between traditionally large—or ‘major’—and traditionally small—or ‘minor’—parties. Major parties typically emphasize issues where the party and its activists are closer to the average voter, whereas minor parties typically emphasize issues where the party and its activists are further from the average voter. Party size emerges as a more important determinant of parties’ emphasis strategies than whether a party is ‘mainstream’ or ‘niche’, with small mainstream parties behaving like small niche parties rather than like their larger mainstream counterparts. I suggest that these findings are best explained as the result of vote-maximizing choices made by parties responding to different electorates, rather than by strategic error by parties, dogmatic adherence to particular issue profiles, or by the selection of activists into parties. These patterns hold across Western and Eastern Europe, suggesting that, in a variety of information environments, the appearance of policy moderation may be viewed as advantageous by major parties, but potentially disadvantageous by minor parties.¹

Work on ‘heresthetics’, ‘issue competition’, ‘saliency theory’ or ‘issue ownership theory’ (Robertson 1976; Budge and Farlie 1983; Riker 1993; Petrocik 1996; Green-Pedersen 2007) has long argued that parties primarily compete by drawing voters’ attention to particular issues, in an effort to alter the dimensions on which they are evaluated by increasing the salience of favorable issues.² To date, researchers have amassed considerable evidence from a wide range

¹This runs contrary to previous research, which has suggested that policy extremism may be an electorally advantageous strategy in the new democracies of Eastern Europe—by reducing voter uncertainty in a low information context—whereas policy moderation may be preferable for parties operating in the established democracies of Western Europe (Ezrow, Homola and Tavits 2014).

²A concurrent empirical and experimental literature on the importance of “priming effects” argues that political advertising has a significant effect on voters’ issue priorities (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Krosnick and Kinder 1990).

of countries that parties do focus disproportionately on issues that favor them.³ However, although positional, or non-consensual, issues are a substantial focus of parties' campaigns,⁴ standard ownership-based explanations of issue selection by parties largely deal with valence or consensual issues, and cannot explain party advantage on positional issues.⁵ In a positional context, an important determinant of a party's advantage on an issue is presumably the relative popularity of its position on the issue. Then, we must consider how parties come by particular issue positions – and in particular, what binds certain parties to winning positions, and others to losing ones.⁶

Therefore, in this paper, I study the relationship between the positions parties occupy on issues, and their decisions over which issues to emphasize in their public statements.⁷ In contrast with most previous research on parties' salience strategies, I emphasize that the position (i.e. policy platform) a party chooses on an issue, and the level of emphasis it places on the issue in its public statements are conceptually distinct. In making this distinction, I differ from work which equates a party taking an extreme position on an issue with emphasis, clarity or 'intensity' on the issue.⁸ Emphasizing this distinction allows for the possibility that parties may emphasize an extreme position, or a centrist position. Likewise, parties may de-emphasize extreme *or* centrist positions.

³For instance, Green and Hobolt (2008) observe that during the 2005 British elections, both Labour and the Conservatives campaigned predominantly on their respective 'owned' issues, while Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) note that during the period of left-wing governments in Denmark between 1993 and 2001, the right-wing opposition continually drew attention to immigration, an issue on which it was favored by voters. Other studies with similar findings include Druckman, Jacobs and Ostermeier (2004), Vavreck (2009), Dolezal et al. (2014) and de Sio and Weber (2014).

⁴In their analysis of whether issue engagement varied between consensual (or valence) and non-consensual (or positional) issues in U.S. Senate campaigns between 1998 and 2002, Kaplan, Park and Ridout (2006) found that 31 of the 43 issues addressed by candidates were non-consensual.

⁵Although there exists work—for example, Meguid (2005)—which discusses parties' ownership of positional issues like immigration, such work does not consider how a party might come to own such an issue, and how it might relate to its preferred policies on the issue.

⁶Existing research on the sources of parties' issue ownership does not address this question. Research on the sources of parties' issue ownership has identified factors such as communication by parties, party performance, and association with particular social groups—such as the poor—as important (Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch 2012; Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans 2009; Brasher 2009; Holian 2004; Stubager and Slothuus 2013). Meanwhile, on an individual level, partisanship and policy attitudes have been identified as important for explaining a party's perceived ownership of an issue by voters. None of these studies focus on positional issues per se, and none seek to explain parties' positional choices on each issue. Meanwhile, a large formal literature has identified various 'centrifugal' forces that might lead parties to take divergent policy positions, but this work, by and large, has not been integrated with the literature on issue competition and issue selection. A small but growing formal literature models parties' issue selection strategies with respect to positional issues (Amorós and Puy 2013; Dragu and Fan 2015), but these studies do not help us understand the sources of party advantage on positional issues, as they take parties' issue positions to be exogenously determined.

⁷For other work that studies the complementarity between parties' position-taking and their salience strategies, see Meguid (2008); Tavits (2008); Wagner (2012); de Sio and Weber (2014).

⁸This equivalence is implicit in directional theory (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989), and also apparent in more recent work relating to parties' salience strategies (van der Brug 2004; Rovny 2012). For instance, Rovny argues that "[o]utlying positions are more distinguishable and capture attention, making the issue more prominent and the party more visible" (Rovny 2012, 5).

I suggest that the policy preferences of a party's activists may be a critical factor in its choices of which positions to adopt and, consequently, which issues to emphasize.⁹ In particular, on each issue, the policy choices of a party may be constrained by the preferences of its activists, forcing parties to take more extreme positions on issues on which their activists are more extreme. As a result, a major party is more electorally competitive when voters' attention is focused on issues on which its activists are relatively centrist. It is on these issues that major parties are able to take positions popular with the moderate voters that are key to their continued electoral success. Then, in order to maximize their electoral performance, a major party will tend to emphasize those issues on which its activists are relatively centrist, and de-emphasize those issues on which it and its activists are more extreme, thereby deflecting voters' attention to issues where it can take more popular positions. By contrast, minor parties—parties which struggle to secure more than 10% of the vote—actually do better by emphasizing issues on which they and their activists are relatively extreme. This approach allows such parties to attract voters with extreme preferences on some issues, who are disenchanted by parties emphasizing centrist positions on those issues. Consistent with this mechanism, I show that both major and minor parties adopt more extreme policies when their activists are more extreme on an issue. However, whereas major parties de-emphasize their more extreme issue positions, minor parties emphasize these positions.

Using a variety of empirical strategies, I show that the relationships I find between party size, activist preferences and a party's issue emphases are most easily attributed to a causal effect of a party's size and activist preferences on its emphasis strategy. I discuss a range of alternative explanations for my findings, and find all wanting. For instance, although a party's issue emphases certainly influence its vote share, I show that this cannot by itself account for differences we observe major and minor parties. In particular, I show that the difference between major and minor party emphasis strategy we observe is well predicted by a party's electoral performance in 1995, and also if we instrument for each party's current categorization using its 1995 vote share, but not by the party's electoral performance today. Since parties' current issue emphases cannot have influenced their electoral performance in 1995, these results cannot be easily explained as emphasis strategy driving parties' electoral performance. I also show that the observed difference between major and minor party strategy cannot be accounted for by differences in party organizational structure or party ideology. Finally, I argue that these differences cannot merely be accounted for by activists choosing to support parties based on their issue emphases. All of this suggests that the differences I find reflect the different electoral incentives that major and minor parties are faced with, rather than strategic error or dogmatism among parties.

⁹It is not important whether parties choose their issue positions and issue emphases simultaneously or sequentially – the same reasoning will apply in both cases.

The difference in behavior I find between major and minor parties may appear similar to the distinction that has previously been made in the literature between ‘mainstream’ and ‘niche’ parties (Meguid 2005), since mainstream parties are often ‘major’ and niche parties usually ‘minor’. Existing research suggests that niche parties may be primarily beholden to their ‘non-centrist ideological clienteles’, whereas mainstream parties are more responsive to changes in the policy preferences of the median voter (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008; Ezrow et al. 2011). However, while exactly which parties should be classified as niche rather than mainstream is a matter of some debate,¹⁰ this discussion has mostly overlooked a category of parties that are frequently central players in European politics. These are parties that we might label ‘small mainstream parties’: parties that do not often obtain more than 10% to 15% of the national vote share—and so must be considered ‘minor’—but are considered ‘mainstream’ in large part due to their moderate economic platforms.¹¹ As a consequence, existing research does not generate clear expectations for the issues these parties should emphasize. Will small mainstream parties behave more like their larger mainstream counterparts, and emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are more centrist? Or will they behave like niche parties, and emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are more extreme? If the former question can be answered in the affirmative, then this suggests that what is key for a party’s emphasis strategy is whether or not it is mainstream, and not whether or not it is major. Conversely, if the latter question can be answered in the affirmative, this suggests that the major/minor distinction is more important for party emphasis strategy than the mainstream/niche distinction.

I find that, in fact, small mainstream parties consistently behave like their *niche* counterparts, rather than like larger mainstream parties – emphasizing their more extreme issue positions, rather than more centrist ones. Furthermore, I find suggestive evidence that *large* niche parties may behave more like large mainstream parties than their smaller niche counterparts, emphasizing their more centrist issue positions, rather than their more extreme ones. This suggests that minor parties, regardless of their party family or ideological background, may view policy moderation as electorally costly, whereas major parties are instead rewarded for emphasizing centrist policies – corroborating other recent research arguing for the importance of party size in shaping party strategy (Klüver and Spoon 2014).

That minor parties may benefit by emphasizing their less centrist positions is consistent with the experience of the Liberal Democratic party in the United Kingdom – a classic example of such

¹⁰While Meguid (2005) defines parties which emphasize a single non-economic issue as ‘niche’ and large established center-left and center-right parties as mainstream, subsequent researchers have considered communist parties to be niche alongside extreme nationalist (or radical right) and green parties and socialist, social democratic, liberal, conservative and Christian democratic parties as mainstream (Adams et al. 2006).

¹¹There are 23 such parties in my core sample, out of a total of 59 minor parties in Western and Eastern Europe. For this analysis, I consider liberal, agrarian, Christian and social democratic parties which obtain less than 15% of the national vote share, on average, to be small mainstream parties. Such parties are commonplace in governing coalitions across Europe, and often assume the role of kingmaker in coalition negotiations.

a party. In the 2015 general election, the Liberal Democrats lost 49 of its 57 seats in the British parliament, saw its vote share fall by two-thirds, and narrowly escaped a scalping.¹² While this electoral bloodbath must no doubt be attributed, in large part, to events during the Liberal Democrats' first experience of government since 1945, their 2015 election campaign was also notable for its emphasis on the party's 'centrism' rather than its radicalism¹³—a decision senior figures in the party later condemned as a mistake.¹⁴ Similarly, the evolution of the Freedom Party of Austria's electoral strategy over the 2000s illustrates how major niche parties may prefer to emphasize their more centrist positions – in contrast with their smaller niche counterparts. For example, in the legislative elections of 2006 and 2008, although the FPÖ maintained its traditional focus on immigration and nationalist issues, its campaign literature increasingly took on a 'welfare chauvinist' hue.¹⁵ Arguably, this constituted an increase in the FPÖ's relative emphasis on its centrist economic positions, compared to its non-centrist, non-economic, ones.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 adapts saliency theory to the case of positional issues, and discusses how emphasis strategies may vary across different types of parties. Section 3 describes the data structure and proposed empirical strategy. Section 4 presents baseline results in support of the theory from a series of cross-national analyses, as well as some robustness checks. Section 5 investigates the support for specific party-level mechanisms implied by the theory, and Section 6 examines and refutes a variety of alternative explanations. Section 7 concludes.

2 Theory

This paper considers the relationship between parties' position-taking and their emphasis strategies. In contrast with most previous research on parties' emphasis strategies, I draw a conceptual distinction between the position a party chooses on an issue, and the level of emphasis it places on the issue in its public statements. This differs from work which equates a party taking an

¹²Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, clung on to his seat with support from former Conservative voters, but saw his majority collapse by 25.7% to 4.2%.

¹³The party's campaign slogan in 2015 was "look left, look right, and then cross".

¹⁴Source: 'Why Centrism Doesn't Work for Minor Parties', last accessed 6 May 2016. The Liberal Democratic party has consistently been perceived as centrist by both researchers and the British electorate (Adams and Merrill 2006; Nagel and Wlezien 2010); in the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the Liberal Democrats were identified as the most centrist party in the British party system, with an average placement of 4.86 by experts on the left-right scale.

¹⁵This was true literally as well as substantively: the campaign graphics used by the FPÖ in the 2006 election campaign, for the first time, emphasized the color red. Meanwhile, its campaign slogans included 'Welfare not immigration' and 'Secure pensions not asylum millions', and the policies listed in its 2006 manifesto included repatriation of long-term unemployed immigrants and restricting welfare benefits to Austrian citizens. In 2008, the FPÖ increased its emphasis on economic and social policies further, advocating payments to compensate pensioners for inflation and halving value-added tax on fuel, medication and food. For further details on the FPÖ's campaigns in these two elections, see Luther (2008, 2009).

extreme position on an issue with emphasis, clarity or ‘intensity’ on the issue.¹⁶ Emphasizing this distinction allows for the possibility that parties may emphasize an extreme position, or a centrist position. Likewise, parties may de-emphasize extreme *or* centrist positions. In addition, I assume that parties take a position on every issue – even if they place no emphasis on this position. This differs from claims made by early saliency theorists like (Budge and Farlie 1983), who argue that a party might *not* take a position on an issue. However, once we separate a party’s issue positions and its emphases, it is difficult to distinguish between a party that does not take a position on an issue, and a party that has a position which it prefers not to discuss. I also assume that there is a spectrum of possible positions on each issue, with the largest group of voters locating near the center of the spectrum on each issue.¹⁷

The theory of party strategy I develop here draws heavily on saliency theory. Saliency theory has traditionally argued that parties will emphasize issues on which they are favored by voters, in an effort to increase the salience of these issues in voters’ minds, and so influence how they are evaluated by voters in elections. However, analyses of salience strategies in this literature—in which I include work on ‘issue competition’ or ‘issue ownership’—have mostly focused on ‘valence’ issues.¹⁸ These are issues on which all voters are assumed to agree, in contrast with ‘positional’ issues, on which voters, and parties, are thought to disagree as to the best policies to pursue.¹⁹ Consequently, saliency theory does not offer a compelling explanation of how a party may come to be favored by voters on a positional issue – in particular, how some parties come to have more popular issue positions than others. This is true, in spite of the fact that some parties having more popular issue positions than others is essential to apply saliency theory to positional issues. Insofar as researchers have explicitly addressed parties’ emphasis strategies with respect to positional issues, parties’ issue positions have been argued to be either fixed or enduring (Budge 1994; de Sio and Weber 2014). Meanwhile, how parties come by ‘losing’ issue positions, and why they are unable to stray from these positions in the short term, has received little attention. The possible explanations are numerous.²⁰ In this paper, I focus on the role that activists and core supporters may play in constraining parties to particular issue positions.

The channels through which activists may influence party policy are straightforward if ac-

¹⁶This equivalence is implicit in directional theory (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989), and also apparent in more recent work relating to parties’ salience strategies (van der Brug 2004; Rovny 2012).

¹⁷This assumption holds up empirically in my data.

¹⁸This is because researchers believed voters unable to discriminate between parties on the basis of their policy proposals Stokes (1963).

¹⁹Commonly cited examples of valence issues include crime and economic growth. Such issues are considered to be valence issues because, for instance, whereas all voters prefer zero crime, voters disagree as to which party has better policies on the issue. By contrast, an issue such as redistribution is positional, as voters disagree as to how much redistribution is desirable, and not simply over how redistribution is best achieved. Of late, some researchers have argued that the distinction between valence and positional issues is overstated (de Sio and Weber 2014).

²⁰For instance, following (Downs 1957, 109), we might hypothesize that party positions are stable over time as parties fear being considered “irresponsible” by voters.

tivists play a key role in the internal decision-making process of a party. In this case, the party leadership is more reliant on activist support for its survival, and may need the approval of activists when devising policy (Panebianco 1988; Schumacher, de Vries and Vis 2013). However, across parties and party systems, activists and core supporters—along with donors and civil society organizations—also provide parties with crucial financial and logistical resources.²¹ Even as party membership and activism has declined across established democracies (Dalton 1988; Katz and Mair 1994), and even with media campaigning increasingly replacing local canvassing, canvassing by activists remains an important means by which parties mobilize and persuade likely voters.²² Indeed, there is some evidence that the electoral payoff of local canvassing has either remained stable or increased over time.²³ Meanwhile, core supporters—politically engaged voters who identify with a party—provide parties with an increasingly important reservoir of volunteer campaign workers (Scarrow 2015), and may persuade their friends and family to turn out or to support a particular party. As such—and as has been argued by a large literature (McKenzie 1963; Schlesinger 1994; Aldrich 1983*a*; Miller and Schofield 2003)—we may expect that, when choosing issue positions, parties will endeavor to locate close to their activists and core supporters, leading all parties to take non-centrist positions on some issues.²⁴ The activist base of a party and the links it possesses with civil society organizations are frequently deep-rooted and may persist across decades – even if there is some annual churn in the profile of party members and donors. As a consequence, party leaders may face little choice but to take positions close to those of their traditional activist base or face significant electoral cost. For instance, parties with roots in the trade union movement may struggle to take positions on labor rights which allied unions do not support.

Drawing on saliency theory, I argue that parties will disproportionately emphasize favorable issues in order to increase the electoral salience of these issues. A favorable issue is one which, if it were the only issue on voters’ minds, would increase the party’s vote share. Then, parties targeting moderate voters will tend to emphasize issues on which their activists, and therefore their own issue positions, are relatively more centrist. By doing so, they can downplay their more extreme positions on some issues and avoid repelling moderate voters who might be put off by these extreme positions. This is of crucial importance because parties do not have free rein

²¹By activists, I refer to a party’s rank-and-file members (Aldrich 1983*b*) and campaign workers (Johnson and Gibson 1974), and by core supporters, I refer to politically engaged voters who identify with a party.

²²Numerous studies have found evidence for positive electoral payoffs from local campaigning by activists in a variety of political contexts – and especially for challenger parties or candidates (Denver, Hands and MacAllister 2004; Johnston and Pattie 2006; Karp and Banducci 2007; Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2008).

²³In part, this may be because the proportion of undecided or de-aligned voters has increased, and because innovations in campaign technology have allowed parties to target expenditure and effort to marginal constituencies more effectively (Denver et al. 2003; Whiteley and Seyd 2003; Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse 2011).

²⁴We may expect parties to respond to the policy preferences of large donors and affiliated civil society organizations in a similar manner – especially as technological changes encourage election campaigns to become capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive. Investigation of this additional channel is left to future work.

to adopt the positions most popular with voters due to the need to keep activists on side. On the other hand, parties targeting non-centrist voters will tend to emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are relatively more extreme. By doing so, they are able to attract voters who are turned off by the centrist positions emphasized by other parties on these issues.²⁵

In particular, all parties face an incentive to disproportionately emphasize the issue which, if it were the only issue important to voters, would mean the party would be preferred to all its opponents by the voters it is targeting. The implications of this incentive for parties' salience strategies are the following. On a particular issue, among parties seeking centrist voters, the party that is most centrist on the issue *relative to its opponents* will prefer to place more emphasis on that issue *than its opponents*. This may lead such a party to disproportionately emphasize an issue on which its position is more extreme than on other issues, but more centrist than its opponents on that issue. Analogously, among parties seeking extremist voters, the party with the most extreme position on the issue *relative to its opponents* will prefer to place more emphasis on that issue *than its opponents* – which may lead such a party to place less emphasis on an issue on which its position is, in absolute terms, more extreme. While some parties will be more centrist than others on average, across all issues, each party will have some issue positions which are more centrist relative to its opponents' positions on those issues, and some positions which are more extreme relative to those of its opponents. As such, parties may generally hope to gain voters from adapting their emphasis strategy accordingly.

Nevertheless, the tendency of parties to focus on favored issues is just that – a tendency. Parties may also feel compelled to address issues of importance to voters – whether because parties wish to clarify their positions on salient issues (Basu 2016), to claim or steal ownership of an issue (Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans 2009), or due to pressure to address salient issues from the mass media (Green-Pedersen, Mortensen and So 2014). Indeed, it is well-established that parties spend much of their campaigns focusing on issues which are already salient to voters, even if an issue is unfavorable.²⁶ Therefore, a party targeting centrist voters might still prefer to emphasize an issue on which its position is more extreme than on some other issues, if this particular issue is especially salient to voters.

In arguing that parties will want to emphasize their centrist positions to attract moderate voters, and their more extreme positions to attract extremist voters, I implicitly assume that voting behavior is best described by the proximity theory of voting, rather than the directional theory of voting. That is, I assume that a voter will prefer the party that is most proximate on issues important to the voter. Meanwhile, directional theory argues that a voter will prefer

²⁵This does not require that voters who are moderate on one issue be moderate on all issues, only that there a large number of voters who identify with 'moderate' positions on all issues.

²⁶This has been particularly noted in U.S. presidential and congressional campaigns (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Aldrich and Griffin 2003; Damore 2004, 2005; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Kaplan, Park and Ridout 2006; Sides 2006), but has also been observed in multiparty contexts like Austria and Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Dolezal et al. 2014; Meyer and Wagner 2015).

the party that most ‘intensely’ supports a position on her side of the issue, implicitly equating position-taking by parties with emphasis (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). This removes the possibility that parties may take a relatively extreme position on an issue while placing little emphasis on that issue in their public statements, a core assumption in the theoretical argument developed in this paper. Which of these two theories of voting behavior has more empirical support is a matter of heated and ongoing debate.²⁷ Insofar as this paper finds evidence that parties de-emphasize extreme issue positions in some cases, it lends further support to those arguing in favor of proximity theory and against directional theory as a summary of voter motivations.

2.1 Party Size, Party Family and Salience Strategies

Existing work leads us to expect that large, established, mainstream parties will focus their campaigns on obtaining or retaining moderate voters, whereas small niche parties—which rarely obtain more than 10% of the national vote—will concentrate on their ‘non-centrist ideological clienteles’ (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008; Ezrow et al. 2011; Adams 2012). Here, I consider liberal, socialist, social democratic, conservative and Christian democratic parties to be mainstream, whereas at a minimum, radical right, green and protest parties are classed as niche²⁸ Thus, we would expect large mainstream parties to target more centrist voters, and small niche parties to target more extreme voters. As such, the argument above would suggest that large mainstream parties should emphasize issues on which they and their activists are relatively centrist. On the other hand, small niche parties should emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are relatively extreme, so as to attract voters turned off by the relatively centrist positions emphasized by large mainstream parties on those issues.²⁹ If such niche parties were instead to behave like large mainstream parties, and emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are more centrist, then it is likely that they would lose the support of voters with

²⁷For a flavor of the debate, see Johnston, Fournier and Jenkins (2000), Macdonald, Rabinowitz and Listhaug (2001), Macdonald and Rabinowitz (2007) and Weber (2015). It was established that the two theories were statistically indistinguishable given existing methods and data (Lewis and King 1999), but recent experimental evidence has found greater support for proximity voting than directional voting in the lab (Tomz and Houweling 2008; Lacy and Paolino 2010).

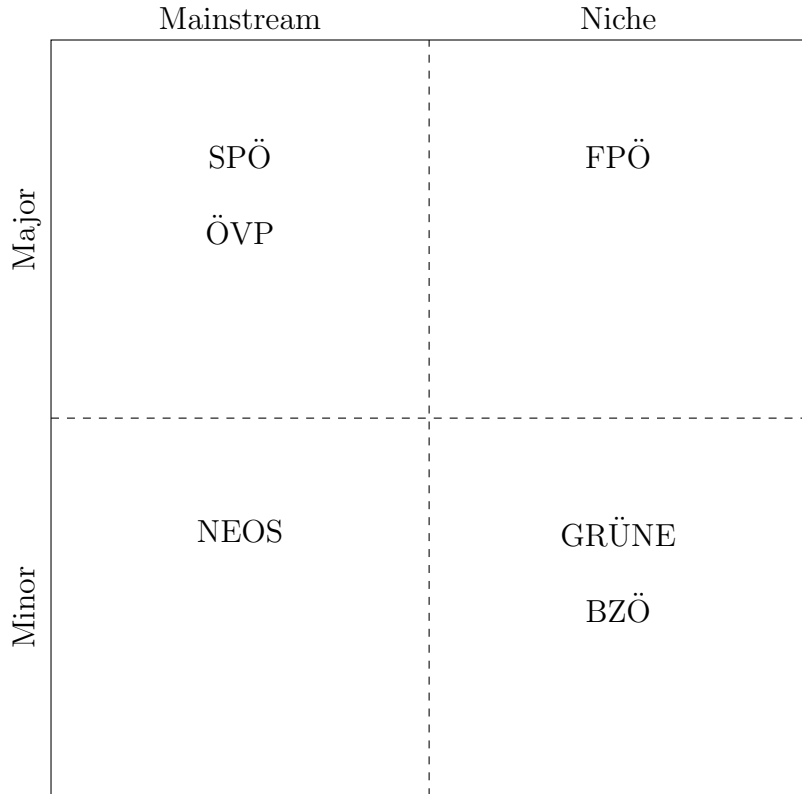
²⁸In the empirical analysis, I consider various approaches that have been used to classify parties as mainstream and niche. For a summary of the debate over classifying parties as mainstream or niche, see footnote 10 on page 5, as well as the discussion on page 17.

²⁹It is not the case that niche party activists have extreme policy preferences on all issues. For example, consider a small niche party like the Front National in France – a radical right or extreme nationalist party which received an average vote share of 9.42% in legislative elections between 2000 and 2012 (author’s calculations). Based on their responses to the 2014 European Election Study, while Front National party activists have extreme preferences on immigration relative to the average voter, they prefer relatively centrist policies on redistribution and state intervention in the economy. Even if, hypothetically, a niche party’s activists were relatively extreme on all issues, they would still be likely more extreme on some issues than others. It would be in the party’s interests to then emphasize its most extreme issue positions.

more extreme preferences on those issues, without procuring the support of more centrist voters in their place—perhaps because centrist positions on those issues are ‘owned’ by the larger mainstream parties (Petrocik 1996).

However, we lack clear expectations for how small mainstream parties and large niche parties will behave. Neither has received much attention as a distinct category of parties by researchers so far, although small mainstream parties constitute a substantial fraction of parties in most European countries, and frequently participate in government.³⁰ Small mainstream parties are mainstream parties which do not often obtain more than 10% to 15% of the vote share, but are still considered ‘centrist’ due to their moderate positions on economic issues (Adams et al. 2006). Meanwhile, large niche parties are radical right, protest or green parties which have been able to secure, on average, a comparable share of the vote to large mainstream parties in recent elections. There are only a handful of such parties in existence;³¹ however, as radical right and ethnoterritorial parties continue to gain support across Western and Eastern Europe, such parties are likely to become commonplace fixtures within European party systems. Which voters either type of party will target, and therefore which issues either type will choose to emphasize, is an open empirical question. Do small mainstream parties behave like large mainstream parties, and emphasize their centrist economic positions in order to attract moderate voters? Or do they, instead, like their niche counterparts, emphasize their more extreme positions on issues like civil liberties or immigration, in order to attract voters with non-centrist preferences on these issues? Similarly, do large niche parties like the Freedom Party of Austria continue to emphasize the extreme issue positions that helped them build a core vote base when they were small, or will they instead move to emphasizing more centrist positions, so as to improve their electoral position by attracting moderate voters? Empirically, I find that party size matters much more than a party’s ideological history for parties’ emphasis strategies in this respect, suggesting that the appearance of policy moderation is consistently viewed as advantageous by major parties and potentially disadvantageous by minor parties, regardless of whether the party is mainstream or niche. This suggests that parties’ issue emphases are not completely ‘frozen’, and not completely determined by their ideological history; instead, parties are able to adapt their emphasis strategies as circumstances change.

Figure 1: Classifying Parties in Austria



2.2 The Case of Austria

To illustrate how these various party categories may intersect, Figure 1 classifies parties in one Western European country – Austria – according to both party size and party family.³² The Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) are the major mainstream parties in Austria, and have long been the two largest parties in the Austrian party system. Meanwhile, the Greens (GRÜNE) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) are both minor niche parties, neither party having secured more than 10% of the national vote, on average, in legislative elections since 2000.³³ The New Austria (NEOS) provides an example of a minor mainstream party, as a recently founded liberal party that obtained 4.9% of the national vote in its first and only legislative election thus far. Finally, the Freedom Party of

³⁰Of course, researchers have studied the behavior and development of many of the parties in these categories in isolation.

³¹Regardless of the approach used to classify parties as mainstream or niche, we identify very few large niche parties in the core sample, with only three parties classed as large niche parties when using Meguid’s definition of ‘niche’: the Freedom Party of Austria, the New Flemish Alliance in Flanders, and the Croatian Democratic Union.

³²I only consider the parties that are included in the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey.

³³The BZÖ are a radical right or extreme nationalist party, which emerged as a ‘moderate’ splinter party from the FPÖ in 2005. The BZÖ has never surpassed the 4% electoral threshold necessary to gain legislative representation.

Austria (FPÖ) provides one of the few examples of a large niche party in Europe. Since the election of Jörg Haider as its party leader in 1986, the FPÖ has been identified as a radical right or extreme nationalist party, strongly associated with fervent opposition to immigration and Euroscepticism. Unlike most radical right parties in Europe, the FPÖ has frequently obtained more than 20% of the national vote, and was the junior partner in a coalition government with the ÖVP after the 1999 legislative election.³⁴ If, like smaller niche parties, the FPÖ were to emphasize its more extreme issue positions, then we might expect it to continue emphasizing its hostility towards continued immigration into Austria into the 2000s. On the other hand, if it were to increasingly behave like other major parties, the FPÖ might broaden its issue profile to include greater emphasis on its increasingly centrist ‘welfare chauvinist’ positions on economic issues (McGann and Kitschelt 2005).

3 Data and Methodology

The preceding discussion leads us to expect that, if able to influence the importance of issues for voters through their emphases, parties seeking to obtain the support of moderate voters will de-emphasize issues on which the preferences of their activists are relatively extreme. Likewise, parties seeking the support of voters with extreme preferences on some issues will instead emphasize the issues on which the preferences of their activists are relatively extreme. Moreover, whether a party seeks the support of moderate voters or extreme voters may depend on its historical electoral performance and whether it is mainstream or niche. To empirically investigate these claims, I estimate the effect of variation in activist extremism across parties on parties’ emphasis decisions on a range of issues.

3.1 Data Description

I combine data from the 2014 European Election Study and the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey to construct a country-party-issue level measure of activist extremism and party emphasis for eight issues. The issues are:

1. State intervention in the economy
2. Redistribution
3. Taxes vs. spending on public services

³⁴In testimony to its continuing electoral success, in the recent 2016 presidential elections, the FPÖ candidate Norbert Hofer emerged as the plurality vote winner in the first round of elections with 35.1% of the vote, but lost narrowly to an Independent candidate in the second round. The FPÖ is also currently the front-runner in opinion polls for the next legislative election.

4. Same-sex marriage
5. Civil liberties
6. Restrictions on immigration
7. EU integration
8. Environmental protection vs. economic growth

The exact wording of questions posed to survey respondents is given in Appendix A. These sources allow for a better measure of both these variables than earlier versions of the same surveys, as well as other cross-national surveys of a similar nature. First, for what seems the first time, experts were asked to classify the importance of issues for parties with reference to virtually the same issues as appeared in the European Election Study in the same year. Second, the 2014 European Election Study asks respondents to place themselves on an eleven-point scale on each issue, rather than simply asking whether, and how much, they agreed or disagreed with an issue position. The former generates a better measure of respondents' policy preferences as conceptualized here; the latter seems better suited to measuring respondents' preferences as conceptualized within a 'directional' framework (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). This is because, by the second measure, stronger disagreement may not necessarily indicate that a respondent has more extreme preferences, only more intensely held preferences. Third, the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey improves on earlier expert measures of party emphasis by asking experts to identify, and rank, the three most important issues for each party. By contrast, earlier surveys asked experts to identify the salience of an issue for each party on an eleven-point scale. This provides greater room for measurement error due to contamination, as experts, like voters, may misconstrue a party with a more extreme position as also placing more emphasis on that position. In my case, this kind of measurement error would be particularly problematic, as such contamination might spuriously imply that parties emphasize issues on which they are more extreme. Further, the new measure is more clearly zero-sum: an increase in emphasis on one issue by a party implies a decrease in emphasis on some other issue.

The main outcome of interest is party emphasis on an issue in a given country. In the absence of a continuous measure of issue emphasis, I construct an ordinal measure using data from the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey. This variable takes values between 0 and 3, with an observation coded as 3 if an expert considered the issue the most important issue for a party, 2 if it was considered the second most important issue, and so on and so forth.³⁵ Activist extremism

³⁵Alternatively, we might interpret this variable as measuring how electorally valuable an issue is for a party. However, this would not substantially change the interpretation of most of my results; my analyses would still suggest that major parties benefit electorally by emphasizing issues on which they and their activists are relatively centrist, whereas minor parties benefit by emphasizing their more extreme issue positions.

is coded using data from the 2014 European Election Study. Unlike the American National Election Study, the European Election Study does not ask respondents about aspects of their political behavior aside from voting; consequently, I cannot use indications of political activity to identify ‘activists’ among respondents.³⁶ Instead, I classify respondents who indicate a strong or moderate level of political interest, and as very or fairly close to a party as activists for that party.³⁷ Although imperfect, this is the best cross-national measure of activist preferences available. By this measure, 17.8% of respondents are classed as party activists.³⁸ I exclude parties with fewer than ten activists in the dataset from my analysis.

3.2 Empirical Methodology

I estimate the effect of activist extremism on parties’ emphasis decisions using the BUC fixed effects ordered logit estimator proposed by Baetschmann, Staub and Winkelmann (2015). The latent model that I estimate is the following:

$$Y_{ijk}^* = X_{ijk}\beta_1 + \mathbf{Z}_{ijk}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \alpha_{ik} + \epsilon_{ijk}$$

$$Y_{ijk} = n \iff \lambda_{ik}^n \leq Y_{ijk}^* < \lambda_{ik}^{n+1}$$

Here, for each country i , Y_{ijk}^* measures each party j ’s (unobserved) level of emphasis on issue k , X_{ijk} measures the extremism of party j ’s activists on issue k , and \mathbf{Z}_{ijk} is a vector of control variables. Parties’ observed level of emphasis on each issue k is measured by an ordered categorical response variable Y_{ijk} , which takes the value n when the unobserved value of Y_{ijk}^* is between λ_{ik}^n and λ_{ik}^{n+1} . In any country i , the extremism of party j ’s activists on issue k is measured as the absolute difference between the self-placement of party activists and the mean voter on that issue. Finally, in all specifications, I control for the standard deviation of activists’ preferences, as parties may wish to de-emphasize issues on which their activists are divided, even if their activists are, on average, relatively centrist on the issue.

The theory developed in Section 2 suggests that a party’s emphasis on an issue *relative to its opponents* will depend on the extremism of its activists *relative to its opponents’ activists*.³⁹

³⁶For instance, Carmines and Woods (2002) use information on the political behavior of respondents to identify ‘campaign activists’. Alternatively, researchers studying American party politics have frequently relied on conference delegate surveys to measure the preferences of delegates to the national nominating conventions in the US, a subcategory of individuals typically considered to be ‘activists’ (Carmines and Woods 2002; Stone and Abramowitz 1983; Layman et al. 2010). Of course, this approach cannot be used to measure the preferences of party activists outside the US, as I aspire to in this paper.

³⁷Specifically, I considered respondents activists for a party were asked if they were ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ interested in politics, and if they felt ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ close to that party.

³⁸My results are virtually identical in statistical and substantive significance if I exclude respondents who are only ‘somewhat’ interested in politics and ‘fairly’ close to a party – although my measure of activist preferences is likely coarser. This restriction reduces the proportion of respondents classed as activists to 4.8%. Results using this alternative measure are reported in Appendix C.2.1.

³⁹For discussion of why this is the relationship of interest, see page 9.

To assess this relationship empirically, I include country-issue fixed effects, which are denoted α_{ik} in the regression equation above. This ensures that only variation in emphasis and activist extremism *between* parties on an issue in a given country is used to identify the desired effect. Country-issue fixed effects are crucial for identifying the correct effect. Without these fixed effects, we might, for instance, spuriously identify a positive association between activist extremism and party emphasis if it is the case that all parties place more emphasis on issues on which parties' activists are, on average, more polarized in a country – even if it is the case that, in a given country and for a particular issue, the party with more extreme activists places less emphasis on the issue than its opponents. The inclusion of country-issue fixed effects also controls for country, issue, and country-issue specific factors that may lead parties to emphasize some issues more than others – such as the greater salience of certain issues to voters (Sides 2006; Kaplan, Park and Ridout 2006).

In performing this analysis, the BUC fixed effects ordered logit estimator (hereafter BUC estimator) proposed by Baetschmann, Staub and Winkelmann (2015) is preferred to an unconditional fixed effects ordered logit estimator and to a linear fixed effects model estimated by OLS. The BUC estimator generalizes the conditional logit estimator to accommodate ordered dependent variables. When group sizes are small, the conditional logit estimator (Chamberlain 1980) allows us to consistently estimate coefficients in a model with both a binary dependent variable and fixed effects, when using an unconditional fixed effects logit estimator would produce coefficient estimates that are inconsistent as well as severely biased.⁴⁰ When dealing with an ordered dependent variable in a model with fixed effects, researchers have frequently recoded the dependent variable as a binary variable and used a conditional logit estimator to obtain consistent parameter estimates (Kassenböhmer and Haisken-DeNew 2009; Senik 2004). However, this requires the researcher to arbitrarily choose a threshold above which the dependent variable takes the value one, and discards potentially important variation. A variety of approaches have been suggested for estimating an ordered logit model with fixed effects; in their survey of available estimators, Riedl and Geishecker (2014) show that the BUC estimator consistently delivers the most efficient, consistent and least biased parameter estimates. I discuss the mechanics of the BUC estimator in Appendix C.1. Regardless, an unconditional fixed effects ordered logit estimator or a linear fixed effects model produces substantively similar results to those I report in Section 4, as I show in Appendix C.2.

⁴⁰Beck (2015) observes that an unconditional fixed effects logit estimator is consistent when the number of observations per group is large, as there is no incidental parameters problem. However, when group sizes are small, the unconditional fixed effects logit estimator is inconsistent. Further, although Katz (2001) and Coupé (2005) show that the bias in unconditional fixed effects logit estimates is small when the average group size is greater than sixteen, in my analysis, the average number of observations within each country-issue group is two.

3.3 Types of Parties

Per the discussion in Section 2, in the empirical analysis, we want to distinguish between major mainstream parties, major niche parties, minor mainstream parties, and minor niche parties. I identify major parties on the basis of their average vote share in national legislative elections between 2000–2012, a period which includes at least three legislative elections in all countries considered. In the main specification, parties are classed as ‘major’ if they received at least 15% of the national vote share, on average, in legislative elections in this period.⁴¹ By the baseline measure, the median and modal number of major parties in a country is two, and the maximum number of major parties in a country is three. By comparison, the number of minor parties in a country exhibits considerably greater variance, ranging between one and seven.

This is preferred to an approach that uses current vote share to classify parties as major, due to concerns about endogeneity. In particular, we may be concerned that a finding that major parties de-emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme but that minor parties do not simply reflects that parties which are able to de-emphasize extreme issue positions are electorally successful. However, averaging parties’ past vote share over several elections mitigates this concern, because results from a regression of current emphasis on variables including an average of past vote shares cannot be interpreted as causation running from emphasis to vote share, since the latter precedes the former in time. Thus, the results can more readily be interpreted as a party’s past electoral performance influencing its current emphasis strategy.⁴²

After applying these criteria, I obtain a core sample of 116 parties from 27 Eastern and Western European countries, of which 50 are major parties, and 56 are minor parties. The full list of parties is given in Appendix B. In the main specification, I treat Belgium as two separate countries—Flanders and Wallonia—each with a distinct party system. This is because, with Flemish and Francophone parties only contesting the same seats in the Brussels Capital region, and otherwise contesting seats in Flanders and Wallonia respectively, each party’s national vote share underestimates its true electoral strength in the seats it does contest.⁴³

⁴¹In Section 4, I analyze how party behavior changes as this threshold is varied.

⁴²Averaging parties past vote shares rather than simply using lagged vote share helps mitigate a further endogeneity concern. In particular, if parties cannot freely change emphasis strategies from one election to the next then there remains the concern that a party that chose to emphasize an extreme position in an election in, say 2010, would receive a low vote share in 2010 and might find it hard to dramatically change its emphasis strategy by 2014. In that case, the party could have received a poor vote share in 2010 and emphasized an extreme position in 2014 because it emphasized an extreme position in 2010. In that case, parameter estimates in the regression would be inconsistent if 2010 vote share was used to determine whether a party was major or not. By contrast, classifying parties as major using an average of past vote shares over a much longer time span—2000–2012—is not as subject to this endogeneity concern. This is because a party that emphasized an extreme position in 2000 is rather less likely to be compelled to emphasize the same position in 2014, unless this emphasis strategy is electorally beneficial to the party.

⁴³I treat the Brussels-Capital region as part of Wallonia, as French speakers vastly outnumber Dutch speakers in this region—with only 33% of adults resident in Brussels claiming fluency in Dutch, as compared to 95.6% in French (source: ‘Language Usage in Brussels’, last accessed 2 April 2016). Consequently, Francophone parties are

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Min.	Max.
Full Sample				
Party Emphasis	0.58	0.00	0.00	3.00
Activist Extremism	0.85	0.73	0.00	4.95
Activist SD	2.70	2.65	0.00	4.50
Major Parties				
Party Emphasis	0.61	0.00	0.00	3.00
Activist Extremism	0.68	0.57	0.00	3.47
Activist SD	2.74	2.69	0.00	4.28
Minor Parties				
Party Emphasis	0.54	0.00	0.00	3.00
Activist Extremism	1.02	0.87	0.00	4.95
Activist SD	2.69	2.65	0.45	4.50

There is considerable debate as to how best to classify parties as mainstream or niche. (Meguid 2005, 347–348) first uses the term ‘niche party’ to describe parties with three defining characteristics: (1) emphasis on non-economic issues, (2) appeal to voters from ‘cross-cutting’ political cleavages, and (3) emphasis on a single issue in their platforms. When operationalizing this definition, Meguid (2005) classifies radical right, green and ethno-territorial parties as niche, and the electorally dominant actors in the center-left, center and center-right blocs in each country as mainstream.⁴⁴ By contrast, Adams et al. (2006) classify communist, green and extreme nationalist (or radical right) parties as niche parties, and socialist, social democratic, liberal, conservative and Christian democratic parties as mainstream. I use both approaches to distinguish between mainstream and niche parties in my empirical analyses.⁴⁵ As in Meguid (2005) and Adams et al. (2006), party family designations are taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project. Finally, in all specifications, the handful of parties labeled as ‘protest’ parties

overwhelmingly dominant in this officially bilingual region, procuring 84.33% of the Brussels-Capital region vote in the 2014 Belgian federal legislative election. My results are robust to treating Belgium as a single country, in which case no Belgian party crosses the 15% average vote share threshold necessary to qualify as a major party in the baseline analysis.

⁴⁴In Meguid’s analysis, what I term “small mainstream parties” are considered neither mainstream nor niche.

⁴⁵Meyer and Miller (2015) suggest yet another approach: when comparing two parties in a party system, the party whose issue profile deviates more from the average issue profile can be considered more ‘niche’ than its competitor. However, as this approach relies on parties’ emphasis decisions to classify parties as more niche or more mainstream, given that issue emphasis is the main outcome of interest in my analysis, I do not use this approach.

by the Comparative Manifesto Project are classified as niche.⁴⁶

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for party emphasis, activist extremism and the standard deviation of activists' preferences on each issue. As might be expected, major party activists are, on average, less extreme relative to the mean voter than minor party activists.

4 Results

This section presents results that, cumulatively, support the view that party size is a more important determinant of parties' issue selection strategies than whether a party is 'mainstream' or 'niche'. I find that, in both Western and Eastern Europe, major parties consistently de-emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme, whereas minor parties emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme. For ease of exposition, I first demonstrate the ability of party size to explain how activist preferences influence parties' issue emphasis decisions, before discussing why whether a party is mainstream or niche does not predict party strategy in this respect.

4.1 Comparing Major and Minor Parties

Table 2 reports parameter estimates for the ordered logit model for the case of major parties in Western and Eastern Europe.⁴⁷ For major parties, across specifications, we find that an increase in activist extremism on an issue substantially decreases party emphasis on that issue. In all specifications, we find that disagreement among activists on an issue has no statistically significant effect on emphasis by major parties.⁴⁸ Model 1 presents results for the preferred specification for major parties, and Model 2 presents results when using a more restrictive

⁴⁶Examples of parties classified as 'protest' parties by the Comparative Manifesto Project include the AFD in Germany, the Pirate Party in Sweden, PvdD in the Netherlands, and UKIP in the United Kingdom.

⁴⁷ Separate analyses of major and minor party samples—where which sample a party is included in depends on its past vote share—is preferred to an analysis that pools all parties within the same sample. This is because, by bisecting the sample, we allow our estimates for the country-issue fixed effects to differ for major and minor parties (equivalent to a pooled analysis with major and minor party-specific country-issue fixed effects). Substantively, this allows for the possibility that major parties make issue emphasis decisions after comparing the extremism of their preferred policies and those of *other major parties*, and not with all parties in the same system. Comparing AIC and BIC values for a model with country-issue fixed effects and a model with major and minor party-specific country-issue fixed effects, we find that the latter provides a significantly better fit for the data (results available on request). This is plausible, as we might expect that major parties, on average, are more concerned with seeming non-centrist relative to other major parties, rather than relative to smaller parties within the same system. Regardless, both approaches produce substantively similar results. It is possible that major parties are more concerned with the platforms of 'proximate' minor parties than 'distant' minor parties, but investigating this is beyond the scope of this paper and left to future work.

⁴⁸Results for the main explanatory variable of interest are virtually identical when the standard deviation of activist preferences on an issue is omitted as a control.

approach to code party emphasis on each issue.⁴⁹ Coefficient estimates are similar for both models. In the preferred specification, the coefficient on the main explanatory variable of interest, activist extremism, is -0.476 and statistically significant at the 1% level.⁵⁰

Interpretation of the magnitude of this effect is rendered more difficult since marginal effects cannot be recovered when using a conditional logit estimator. Nevertheless, coefficient estimates from a conditional logit estimator can be interpreted in terms of log odds ratios.⁵¹ Consider, hypothetically, a party with probability 0.5 of emphasizing an issue at level k , and probability 0.5 of emphasizing the issue at level $k+1$. Then, it turns out that, to a reasonable approximation, an increase in activist extremism by one unit raises the probability of emphasizing at level $k+1$ by $\frac{\beta}{4}$, where β is the coefficient on activist extremism.⁵² For example, suppose redistribution is the most important issue for some party with probability 0.5, and the second most important issue with probability 0.5. Then, the estimated coefficient of -0.476 on activist extremism from Model 1 implies that a unit increase in the average distance of the party’s activists from the mean voter would shift its emphasis strategy such that redistribution would be its most important issue with probability $0.5 - \frac{0.476}{4} \simeq 0.38$ and its second most important issue with probability 0.62.

Model 3 re-estimates the same specification as in Model 1 after excluding three influential observations from the analysis: the country-party-issue observations for EU integration in Poland. In this case, the major party which placed the most emphasis on EU integration, Platforma Obywatelska, had activists who were, on average, more extreme on the issue. However, it seems reasonable to conclude that its actions were driven by unusual circumstances rather than strategic considerations. In August 2014, Donald Tusk, then Polish Prime Minister and leader of Platforma Obywatelska, was elected President of the European Council, an event which prompted his resignation as Prime Minister and likely increased the prominence of the EU as a talking point for the Platforma Obywatelska. Excluding these observations results in a more negative coefficient estimate on activist extremism than in the preferred specification, implying that activist extremism may have a larger effect on parties’ emphasis strategies than in the baseline model.

⁴⁹ For example, Model 2 does not merge the issue categories of deregulation and state intervention in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, whereas the baseline model considers these to be two aspects of the same issue. Similarly, Model 2 employs a more restrictive definition when coding party emphasis on immigration and same-sex marriage from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. For details, see Appendix A.

⁵⁰ Results are substantively similar, although no longer statistically significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.06$) when all parties are included in this analysis—that is, when including parties with fewer than ten activists in the sample. Loosening this restriction brings parties like the Free Democratic Party in Germany (with only seven activists) back into the sample, increasing the number of parties in the analysis from 116 to 190; however, it produces a much coarser measure of party activist preferences on each issue.

⁵¹ That is, an increase in activist extremism by one unit entails an increase in $\exp(\beta)$ in the log odds ratio of raising emphasis from some level k to $k+1$, where β is the coefficient on activist extremism.

⁵² This comes from considering a first-order Taylor approximation of the logit function around the point $\beta = 0$. For the full derivation, see Appendix C.3.

Table 2: Major Parties

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	−0.476*** (0.169)	−0.463*** (0.171)	−0.538*** (0.166)	−0.392** (0.168)	−0.711 (0.438)	−0.998*** (0.476)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	−0.037 (0.283)	−0.055 (0.303)	−0.006 (0.304)	−0.028 (0.397)	−0.079 (0.368)	−0.006 (0.464)
Observations	448	448	445	280	168	162
Log Likelihood	−520.053	−480.366	−510.340	−366.958	−152.751	−132.648

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of major parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). Parties are classed as 'major' if they received at least 15% of the national vote share, on average, in legislative elections between 2000–2012. Models 1 and 2 present estimates using different approaches to code party emphasis on each issue. Model 3 excludes country-issue observations for EU integration in Poland. Models 4 and 5 present results after restricting the sample to Western and Eastern Europe, respectively. Model 6 presents results for Eastern Europe after excluding country-issue observations for EU integration in Poland. All models include country-issue fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

Model 4 and 5 report parameter estimates for major parties in Western Europe and Eastern Europe respectively. Model 6 replicates the analysis in Model 5 after excluding observations for EU integration in Poland. In all cases, we estimate a negative coefficient on activist extremism, which is statistically significant at conventional levels in the Western European case and in Eastern Europe when EU integration is excluded for Poland. That major parties respond similarly to activist extremism in both Western and Eastern Europe is somewhat surprising, as previous research has suggested that policy extremism may be an electorally advantageous strategy in the new democracies of Eastern Europe (Ezrow, Homola and Tavits 2014).

Table 3: Minor Parties

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	0.775*** (0.148)	0.746*** (0.114)	0.775*** (0.148)	0.852*** (0.154)	0.387 (0.416)	0.387 (0.416)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.220 (0.198)	-0.247 (0.196)	-0.220 (0.198)	-0.196 (0.222)	-0.199 (0.523)	-0.199 (0.523)
Observations	472	472	471	328	144	143
Log Likelihood	-544.441	-501.983	-544.441	-422.317	-120.944	-120.944

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of minor parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). Parties are classed as 'minor' if they received less than 15% of the national vote share, on average, in legislative elections between 2000–2012. Models 1 and 2 present estimates using different approaches to code party emphasis on each issue. Model 3 excludes country-issue observations for EU integration in Poland. Models 4 and 5 present results after restricting the sample to Western and Eastern Europe, respectively. Model 6 presents results for Eastern Europe after excluding country-issue observations for EU integration in Poland. All models include country-issue fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

Next, Table 3 reports parameter estimates for the ordered logit model for the case of minor parties in Western and Eastern Europe. For minor parties, across specifications, we find that an increase in activist extremism on an issue substantially *increases* party emphasis on the issue. This is consistent with the argument that minor parties may be more concerned with retaining the support of 'non-centrist ideological clienteles' than obtaining support from moderate voters. Again, we find that disagreement among activists on an issue has no statistically significant effect on emphasis. Model 1 presents results for the preferred specification for minor parties, and Model

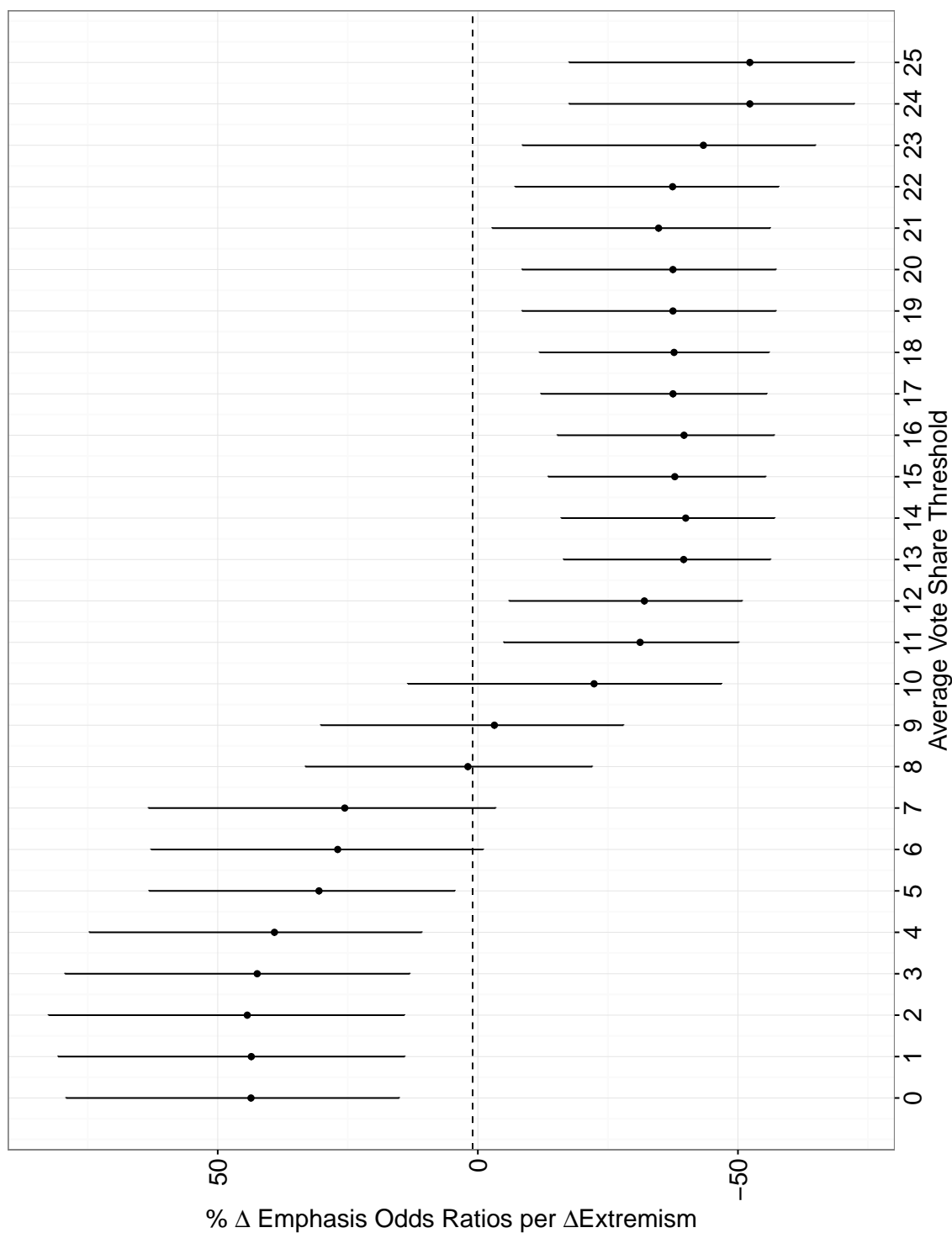
2 presents results when using a more restrictive approach to code party emphasis on each issue.⁵³ As before, coefficient estimates are similar for both models. In Model 1, the coefficient on activist extremism is 0.775 and statistically significant at the 1% level. Consider, now, a minor party—like the Front National in France—and suppose that immigration is the most important issue for this party with probability 0.5, and the second most important issue with probability 0.5. Our coefficient estimate implies that a unit increase in the average distance of the party’s activists from the mean voter would shift the party’s emphasis strategy such that immigration would be its most important issue with probability 0.69 and its second most important issue with probability 0.31. Model 3 replicates Model 1 after excluding observations for EU integration in Poland; as might be expected, the resulting coefficient estimates are identical to those in Model 1.

Models 4 and 5 report parameter estimates for minor parties in Western Europe and Eastern Europe respectively, and Model 6 replicates the analysis in Model 5 after excluding observations for EU integration in Poland. As in Models 1–3, we estimate a large, positive, and statistically significant coefficient on activist extremism for minor parties in Western Europe. Although we estimate that activist extremism has a positive effect on emphasis for minor parties in Eastern Europe, the effects are not statistically significant in either Model 5 or Model 6. However, it seems likely that this is driven by the fact that very few Eastern European countries contain more than one minor party; as such, in both models, results depend on the information contained in only four countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic), implying a small sample size and large standard errors.

The decision to classify a party as major based on a 15% average vote share threshold may seem rather arbitrary. Consequently, Figure 2 shows the robustness of estimates to varying the average vote share threshold for a party to be classed as major. The y-axis shows the estimated value of the exponentiated coefficient on activist extremism for major parties as the threshold varies, with the x-axis showing the level of the threshold. Observe that for very low thresholds, there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between activist extremism and emphasis, and the sign of this relationship reverses for high thresholds. The sign reversal appears to occur for a threshold close to 10%. Furthermore, there is some evidence that the negative association between activist extremism and emphasis is stronger for higher thresholds. This provides further support for the view that parties which have traditionally obtained higher vote shares de-emphasize extreme issue positions, whereas parties with traditionally low vote shares emphasize these positions.

⁵³See footnote 49 and Appendix A for details.

Figure 2: Effect of Activist Extremism on Issue Emphasis by Vote Share Threshold



Note: This figure plots exponentiated BUC coefficient estimates for fixed effects ordered logit model of major parties' issue emphasis decisions, while varying the average vote share threshold for a party to be classed as major (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). All models include country-issue fixed effects. Exponentiated 95% confidence intervals are reported, based on robust standard errors clustered by country-issue.

4.2 Comparing Mainstream and Niche Parties

As discussed in Section 2, it is natural to suppose that small niche parties should emphasize extreme issue positions, since these parties' electoral success depends on capturing voters far from the median voter on the issue they focus on. By contrast, large mainstream parties aiming to win a plurality of seats in the legislature must necessarily build a very broad coalition and capture voters close to the median on salient issues. Therefore, large mainstream parties can be expected to emphasize more moderate issue positions. However, this leaves open the question of how small mainstream parties, like the Democrats '66 in the Netherlands or the Free Democratic Party in Germany, should behave. Do these parties seek electoral success by trying to woo moderate voters on salient issues—like large mainstream parties—or do they behave more like niche parties and target voters who are non-centrist on some issues?

The results of my empirical analyses, presented in Table 4, strongly suggest the latter. Models 1 and 2 report parameter estimates for the ordered logit model when pooling major and minor parties, but distinguishing between mainstream and niche parties. Model 1 compares the effect of activist extremism on issue emphasis for mainstream and niche parties, using the classification suggested by Meguid (2008) – which classifies green, radical right, and ethno-territorial parties as niche, and all other parties as mainstream. The two (positive) coefficient estimates on activist extremism in Model 1 are within one standard error of each other, and so statistically indistinguishable. The estimates suggest that, on average, for both mainstream and niche parties, the more extreme are their activists on an issue, the more emphasis a party places on that issue. Model 2 repeats the same analysis using a classification scheme based on that proposed by Adams et al. (2006)—which classes communist, green, and radical right parties as niche parties, and all other parties as mainstream—and obtains similar results.⁵⁴

Models 3 and 4 compare the effect of activist extremism on emphasis for small mainstream parties and niche parties. We obtain extremely similar coefficient estimates for both small mainstream parties and niche parties—suggesting that, in both cases, an increase in activist extremism would lead parties to place more emphasis on an issue rather than less. Indeed, in Model 3, the coefficient estimate on activist extremism for small mainstream parties is 0.755 and statistically significant at the 1% level. To illustrate the magnitude of this effect, consider a small liberal party—like the Democrats '66 in the Netherlands—and suppose that civil liberties is the most important issue for this party with probability 0.5, and the second most important issue with probability 0.5. Our coefficient estimate implies that a unit increase in activist extremism would shift the party's emphasis strategy such that civil liberties would be its most important issue with probability 0.69, and its second most important issue with probability 0.31.

Finally, Models 5 and 6 compare the effect of activist extremism on emphasis for large main-

⁵⁴All results reported in Table 4 are robust to only considering Christian democratic, liberal, agrarian, socialist and conservative parties as mainstream. Results available on request.

Table 4: Comparing Mainstream and Niche Party Behavior

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism – Mainstream (1)	0.364*** (0.090)		0.750*** (0.146)		–0.438*** (0.167)	
Activist Extremism – Niche (1)	0.395*** (0.133)		0.826*** (0.177)		–0.950 (0.601)	
Activist Extremism – Mainstream (2)		0.363*** (0.117)		0.755*** (0.173)		–0.462*** (0.166)
Activist Extremism – Niche (2)		0.386*** (0.108)		0.786*** (0.155)		–0.930 (1.210)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	–0.210* (0.131)	–0.208 (0.126)	–0.205 (0.199)	–0.206 (0.215)	–0.027 (0.295)	–0.019 (0.275)
Observations	976	976	472	472	448	448
Log Likelihood	–1,520.301	–1,520.341	–544.159	–544.401	–519.297	–519.784

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). Odd columns distinguish between mainstream and niche parties using the classification suggested by Meguid (2008); even columns rely on the classification suggested by Adams et al. (2006) instead. Models 1 and 2 consider all parties; Models 3 and 4 restrict the sample to minor parties, and Models 5 and 6 restrict the sample to major parties. All models include country-issue fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

stream and large niche parties. Curiously, our estimates suggest that large niche parties—the Freedom Party of Austria or the New Flemish Alliance in Flanders—behave like large mainstream parties rather than small niche parties: for instance, the point estimate on activist extremism in Model 6 is -0.950, which implies that activist extremism may have a substantial negative effect on emphasis for such parties. Moreover, the coefficient estimate is more than two standard errors apart from that on activist extremism for small niche parties in Models 4, suggesting a likely genuine difference between the two cases.⁵⁵ Although the coefficient estimate on activist extremism is not statistically significant at conventional levels in either Model 5 or 6, we are relying on relatively few observations in these analyses, as the number of large niche parties in the sample is small.

In sum, these results strongly suggest the electoral strategy that a party chooses to adopt may depend primarily on the fraction of the popular vote the party perceives as attainable, rather than on the party’s ideological history. In particular, they support the view that major parties—regardless of whether they are mainstream or niche—will emphasize the issues on which their activists are more centrist, while minor parties consistently emphasize the issues on which their activists are relatively extreme.

5 Investigating the Mechanisms

This section presents evidence for three key assumptions underlying the theory put forward in this paper. The relationship I propose between party size, activist extremism and party emphasis in Section 2 relies on three assumptions: (1) parties take more extreme positions relative to the average voter when their activists, on average, are more extreme, (2) parties targeting moderate voters place more emphasis on issues where they hold centrist positions relative to their opponents, and (3) parties seeking the support of extreme voters place more emphasis on issues where they hold extreme positions relative to their opponents. Furthermore, the evidence presented in Section 4 suggests that major parties tend to target centrist voters, and minor parties tend to target more extreme voters. Therefore, if these three assumptions hold, we should observe, first, that all types of parties take more extreme positions on issues on which their activists are more extreme; second, that major parties place more emphasis on issues on which their positions are moderate relative to their opponents, and third, that minor parties place more emphasis on issues on which their positions are extreme relative to their opponents. I find support for all three hypotheses in the data.

Table 5 reports results from the relevant analyses. Models 1 and 2 report parameter estimates from linear fixed effects models where I regress parties’ positional extremism on the extremism

⁵⁵Naturally, this is not a rigorous hypothesis test since the two coefficient estimates result from separate regressions. Nevertheless, the results certainly suggest a difference between the two groups.

Table 5: Investigating the Mechanisms

	Dependent Variable:			
	Pos. Extremism		Issue Emphasis	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Activist Extremism	0.673*** (0.199)	0.673*** (0.183)		
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	0.870*** (0.251)	0.191 (0.288)		
Pos. Extremism			-0.126** (0.059)	0.214*** (0.056)
Observations	448	472	448	472
R ²	0.436	0.496		
Adjusted R ²	-0.024	0.145		
Log Likelihood			-521.903	-567.185

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Models 1 and 2 present coefficient estimates from linear fixed effects models for major and minor parties, respectively. Models 3 and 4 present BUC coefficient estimates from fixed effect ordered logit models of major and minor parties' issue emphasis decisions, respectively. All models include country-issue fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

of their activists, for major parties and minor parties, respectively. Here, a party's positional extremism is measured as the difference between its position on an issue, as measured by experts, and the preferences of the average voter in its country on the same issue.⁵⁶ Coincidentally, the coefficient estimates on activist extremism are 0.673 in Models 1 & 2, and both statistically significant at the 1% level. While the true parameters may not be identical, this indicates that regardless of whether a party is major or minor within a political system, it will take a more extreme position on an issue when its activists are more extreme on that issue. Further, it is suggestive evidence that major and minor parties respond equally strongly to the policy preferences of their activists. Of course, these particular results should not be interpreted causally, as it is likely that, in a given country, individuals with more extreme preferences on an issue will select into being activists for the party with more extreme platform on that issue. Nevertheless, the results reported here are consistent with the proposed mechanism linking activist preferences to parties' emphasis decisions: major parties de-emphasize an issue when their activists are more extreme on the issue *because* they espouse more extreme policies on the issue as a consequence.

Models 3 and 4 report parameter estimates from ordered logit models regressing emphasis on positional extremism using a BUC estimator, for major and minor parties respectively. The coefficient estimate on positional extremism for major parties is -0.126 , indicating that, as expected, such parties will place relatively less emphasis on an issue when their issue position is extreme relative to their opponents. Also, as expected, the coefficient estimate on positional extremism for minor parties is 0.214 , indicating that such parties will place relatively *more* emphasis on an issue when their issue position is extreme relative to their opponents.⁵⁷ In combination with our parameter estimates from Models 1 and 2, the results from these analyses cumulatively suggest that major mainstream parties—and possibly major niche parties—are seeking to reduce the electoral salience of issues on which their activists' preferred policies, and their consequently their own platforms, are more extreme. On the other hand, it appears that minor parties, whether mainstream or niche, instead prefer to increase the electoral salience of issues on which their own platforms are more extreme, possibly to attract extreme voters who are disenchanted by the more centrist positions being emphasized by some major parties on such issues.

⁵⁶This is certainly an imperfect measure, as we are forcing measures of policy preferences from different surveys onto the same scale. However, this is preferred to a measure which locates the average voter at 5 on each issue and measures a party's extremism relative to this point, as, first, this may equate the preferences of the average voter with the status quo, and second, the European Election Study survey data makes clear that the location of the average voter may deviate considerably from 5 in many cases, particularly on issues such as immigration and redistribution.

⁵⁷Surprisingly, both coefficient estimates are rather smaller than might be expected given our results from regressing emphasis on activist extremism. A possible explanation for this is that positional extremism is measured very imperfectly, as discussed in footnote 56. Consequently, the coefficients on positional extremism are likely subject to attenuation bias.

6 Alternative Explanations

This section discusses evidence that contradicts a number of alternative explanations for the findings outlined in Sections 4 and 5. Before doing so, it is convenient to review the argument so far. I suggest that the reason we observe a difference in issue emphasis strategy between major and minor parties is due to the different vote-maximizing incentives they face. In particular, I argue that one reason parties prefer to emphasize certain issues is in order to increase the importance of favorable issues in voters' minds. However, what makes an issue 'favorable' differs for major and minor parties, and is intimately related to the policy preferences of party activists on each issue. I argue that vote-maximizing incentives compel both major and minor parties to take positions relatively close to their activists on all issues, as activists provide parties with crucial resources during campaigns. However, major parties—or traditionally large parties—are more concerned with obtaining and retaining the support of moderate voters, whereas minor parties—or traditionally small parties—are more concerned with obtaining and retaining the support of extreme voters. This is rational for major parties, as the distribution of voter opinion on most issues is single-peaked, with the mass of voters located near the centre of the policy space. However, while major parties are able to obtain the support of these voters, minor parties usually cannot, and therefore may do better by targeting the support of voters with non-centrist preferences on some issues. These are voters who may be put off by the centrist positions of larger parties on those issues. As a consequence, major parties prefer to emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are relatively centrist, whereas minor parties prefer to emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are relatively extreme – as shown in Sections 4 and 5.

H1: Parties Emphasizing Centrist Positions Are More Successful

One alternative explanation for these findings might be that the parties that emphasize their more centrist positions are more likely to become major parties, and parties that emphasize their more extreme positions are more likely to remain minor parties. However, the following analyses suggest that this cannot credibly account for the findings in Sections 4 and 5. Rather, these findings can be more easily accounted for by the direction of causation I have discussed: that traditionally large parties prefer to emphasize their more centrist positions, and traditionally small parties prefer to emphasize their more extreme positions.

First, consider the results reported in Table 6. These results suggest that changes in party vote share pre-date rather than post-date the issue emphasis decisions I have highlighted. For convenience, Models 1 and 3 repeat the baseline analysis, which finds the expected relationships between party size, activist extremism and issue emphasis when using average electoral performance to classify major and minor parties. However, when these analyses are replicated using

parties' current vote share⁵⁸ to classify parties, we find no statistically significant relationship between changes in activist extremism and major parties' issue emphasis decisions (Model 2), and now find a change in activist extremism to have a smaller effect on issue emphasis by minor parties than before (Model 4).

Table 6: Classifying Parties Using Current vs. Past Vote Share

	Issue Emphasis			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Activist Extremism	-0.476*** (0.171)	-0.266 (0.176)	0.775*** (0.111)	0.595*** (0.107)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.037 (0.237)	-0.255 (0.238)	-0.220 (0.146)	-0.205 (0.141)
Observations	448	496	472	424
Log Likelihood	-520.053	-522.958	-544.441	-580.846

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). Odd columns distinguish between major and minor parties using each party's average vote share in legislative elections between 2000 and 2012; even columns rely on each party's current vote share instead. Models 1 and 2 only consider major parties, and Models 3 and 4 only consider minor parties. All models include country-issue fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

That the difference between major and minor parties we observe is better predicted by their historical electoral performance than their more recent electoral performance is corroborated by analyses which use party vote share from 1995, first, as a proxy, and second, as an instrument for current electoral performance.⁵⁹ These results are reported in Table 7. For all the analyses included in Table 7, I pool country-issue observations for minor and major parties in the same sample. This is because, while a standard method exists to instrument for an endogenous regressor, no such method exists if we wish to instead instrument for a variable that determines

⁵⁸When measuring a party's 'current' vote share, I use the legislative vote share received by each party in the election most proximate to 1 January 2014, except when the election was held after 1 January 2015. This includes elections that were held in 2014, which may have been held after the completion of fieldwork for the 2014 European Election Study and the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey. However, I contend that these figures better reflect the party's electoral position at the time of fieldwork than its vote share in an election held more than four years prior.

⁵⁹This variable is coded using the legislative vote share received by each party in the election most proximate to 1 January 1995, and includes information from elections ranging between 1993 and 1997.

whether an observation is included in the sample or not.⁶⁰ In the pooled analysis, to identify the relationships of interest, I interact all key variables with major and minor party status, and estimate separate issue-specific intercepts for major and minor parties.⁶¹

Table 7: Using Past Vote Share as an Instrument for Current Major Party Status

	Issue Emphasis			
	(1) Original	(2) Proxy	(3) 2SPS	(4) 2SRI
Activist Extremism \times Major	-0.303** (0.145)	-0.195* (0.139)	-0.292 (0.176)	-0.361** (0.167)
Activist Extremism \times FS Residual				0.293 (0.477)
Activist Extremism \times Minor	0.562*** (0.089)	0.645*** (0.086)	0.596*** (0.135)	0.528*** (0.157)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs. \times Major	-0.052 (0.195)	-0.469** (0.192)	-0.312 (0.217)	-0.198 (0.214)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs. \times FS Residual				0.347 (0.499)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs. \times Minor	-0.212 (0.123)	-0.067 (0.165)	-0.090 (0.174)	-0.067 (0.187)
Observations	976	976	854	854
Log Likelihood	-1,456.834	-1,470.578	-1,398.031	-1,386.487

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). All models include country-issue fixed effects and separate issue-specific intercepts for major and minor parties. For Models 1 and 2, robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses. For Models 3 and 4, bootstrapped standard errors are given in parentheses.

⁶⁰In the remainder of the paper, I conduct analyses after restricting the sample to either major parties or minor parties, where which sample a party is included in depends on their past electoral performance, variously measured. Although one might argue that, due to sample size, the pooled sample may produce more efficient estimates, subsample analysis is preferred for the baseline specification for the reasons discussed in footnote 47 on p. 19.

⁶¹Separate issue-specific intercepts for major and minor parties account for differences in the nature of issues favored by each type of party. This is warranted, as our estimates suggest that major parties are much more likely than minor parties to emphasize, for example, economic issues.

Model 1 in Table 7 analyses the pooled sample using the baseline measure of major party status – that is, when average legislative vote share between 2000 and 2012 is used to classify parties as major and minor. Our results are similar to those reported in Tables 2 and 3, although somewhat smaller in magnitude: we find that an increase in activist extremism leads major parties to decrease their emphasis on an issue, but minor parties to increase their emphasis on an issue. Model 2 repeats the same analysis using party vote share from 1995 as a proxy for current vote share when coding major party status.⁶² This coding decision leads parties which have only recently achieved substantial electoral success to be classed as ‘minor’ rather than ‘major’. We continue to find the same relationship between party size, activist extremism and issue emphasis, although the estimated coefficient on activist extremism is smaller and only statistically significant at the 10% level. Nevertheless, we still find a statistically and substantively significant difference between how major and minor parties, thus coded, respond to changes in activist extremism.

Models 3 and 4 move to using party vote share from 1995 as an instrument for current vote share when coding major party status. Using an instrumental variables approach allows us to tackle concerns regarding simultaneity bias: that a party’s vote share determines its emphasis strategy, and that its emphasis strategy in turn determines its vote share. In the presence of such bias, the causal effect of vote share on emphasis can still be consistently estimated using a valid instrument for current vote share. The identifying assumption here is that a party’s vote share from twenty years ago has no causal relationship with its current emphasis strategy, except insofar as it influences the party’s current vote share (due to the implications of past electoral performance for future coordination among voters and donors, party brand and name recognition, media coverage, et cetera). There are two prevailing approaches that have been used to extend the linear two-stage least squares (2SLS) approach to non-linear models: two-stage predictor substitution (2SPS) and two-stage residual inclusion (2SRI) (Blundell and Smith 1989; Terza, Basu and Rathouz 2008).⁶³ While 2SPS is more frequently used in a non-linear context, only 2SRI delivers consistent estimates in general. Model 3 presents estimates using the 2SPS approach to instrument for current major party status, and Model 4 presents estimates using the 2SRI approach.⁶⁴ Both approaches produce substantively similar results, and also similar results

⁶²In cases where a party did not contest the most proximate election to 1 January 1995 – like, for example, the Five Star Movement in Italy – its 1995 vote share was coded as zero.

⁶³Like the 2SLS approach, the 2SPS approach requires that we substitute fitted values from the first-stage regression for the endogenous regressor in the second-stage equation. However, unlike 2SLS, this does not necessarily produce consistent estimates in the non-linear case. In the 2SRI approach, we instead include the first-stage residuals as additional regressors in the second-stage equation, while retaining the endogenous regressors. To adjust for the additional uncertainty our estimates as a result of these procedures, I present bootstrapped standard errors, accounting for the dependence of observations within each country-issue cluster by randomly drawing country-issue clusters. The bootstrap procedure is repeated 5000 times using independent draws from the data.

⁶⁴The first-stage F-statistic is 618.38, suggesting that we do not have a weak instrument, and further, that a party’s vote share in 1995 is a very good predictor of its major party status today.

to the original analyses, although the 2SRI approach—the only consistent approach—produces a larger coefficient estimate on activist extremism for major parties (statistically significant at conventional levels).

The evidence presented in this section strongly counters the suggestion that party emphasis strategies are driving their electoral performance, rather than the other way around. Suppose otherwise. Then, we would expect parties' current vote share (and major party status) to be very well correlated with their emphasis strategies, but historical vote share to be less so – since parties' current emphasis decisions are likely imperfectly correlated with their past emphasis decisions. The results presented in Tables 6 and 7 show the reverse to be the case: the difference between major and minor party emphasis strategy we observe is well predicted by their past electoral performance (or that component of current electoral performance that is predicted by their past performance), but not by parties' current electoral performance. The only remaining possibility is that there exists some other extremely persistent factor that both determines a party's historical electoral performance and also its current emphasis strategy. In the next section, I show that neither party organization nor party family can fulfil this role.

H2: Major And Minor Parties Are Just Different

In the previous section, I show that the difference we have observed between major and minor party emphasis strategies is better predicted by parties' historical electoral performance than their current electoral performance, suggesting that party size determines emphasis strategy rather than the reverse. One potential alternative hypothesis is that the parties that become 'major' and 'minor' are qualitatively different in some long-lasting way, which influences both electoral performance and emphasis strategy over decades. I consider two possible factors which may play this role: party organization and party ideology.

Empirically, major parties are relatively more often leadership-dominated, whereas minor parties are more likely to be activist-dominated.⁶⁵ One possibility might be that this difference in organizational structure is the cause of their differences in emphasis strategy: leader-dominated parties might have emphasis strategies more focused on the median voter, and therefore be more electorally successful, and activist-dominated parties might have emphasis strategies that are more focused on voters similar to party activists, and so are less electorally successful. To evaluate this possibility, I incorporate party organization, as measured by Schumacher, de Vries and Vis (2013), as an additional control in my analysis. The measure they develop considers the degree to which a party is activist-dominated or leadership-dominated.⁶⁶ However, as this

⁶⁵I find this to be the case in my dataset, using the measure developed by Schumacher, de Vries and Vis (2013) to measure party organization.

⁶⁶In my sample, this measure ranges between 4.5 and 19.5 with a standard deviation of 2.51, which larger values indicating a party is more leadership-dominated. The measure is constructed using responses to expert surveys. In their view, leadership-dominated parties are characterized by “a limited number of internal veto

variable is only available for a subset of the parties in my full sample, the number of observations I rely on for my inferences shrinks considerably in the following analyses.⁶⁷ The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Party Organization, Party Size and Emphasis Strategy

	Issue Emphasis			
	(1) Activist Dom.	(2) Leadership Dom.	(3) All	(4) All
Activist Extremism	0.404* (0.178)	0.359 (0.264)		
Activist Extremism × Activist Dominated			0.385* (0.163)	
Activist Extremism × Leader Dominated			0.143 (0.201)	
Activist Extremism × Major				-0.136 (0.280)
Activist Extremism × Minor				0.707*** (0.164)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	0.285 (0.341)	0.078 (0.343)	0.302 (0.255)	0.219 (0.231)
Observations	408	384	792	864
Log Likelihood	-202.042	-155.035	-405.130	-460.401

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). All models include country-issue fixed effects, and Models 3 and 4 also add separate issue-specific intercepts for major and minor parties. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

First, using the measure of party organization provided by Schumacher, de Vries and Vis (2013), I bisect the sample of parties into those which are more activist dominated and those

players and a concentration of power among a select group of party leaders", whereas activist-dominated parties are those in which "decision-making and veto power is dispersed among large groups of party activists, organized in local, regional and national party branches or civil society organizations" (Schumacher, de Vries and Vis 2013, 464).

⁶⁷This data is available for the following countries only: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

which are more leadership dominated (Models 1 and 2).⁶⁸ We see that in both types of parties, there is no statistically significant relationship between the extremism of a party’s activists and the issues it chooses to emphasize. Moreover, though imprecisely estimated, in both cases, the coefficients on activist extremism in both cases are very similar in magnitude.⁶⁹ Next, Model 3 investigates the same hypothesis in the full sample of parties for which data on party organization is available, now interacting the extremism of a party’s activists on an issue with whether or not it is activist dominated. Again, we find that the coefficients on activist extremism for activist-dominated and leader-dominated parties are almost indistinguishable. Next, Model 4 replicates the baseline analysis in this restricted sample of parties for comparison. We continue to observe a stark difference in the effect of activist extremism on issue emphasis for major and minor parties. More formally, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients on activist extremism are the same for leader-dominated and activist-dominated parties in Model 3 ($p = 0.2$), but resoundingly reject the hypothesis that the coefficients on activist extremism for major and minor parties are equal in Model 4 ($p < 0.01$). Cumulatively, these suggest that the degree of influence activists have within a party’s organization cannot explain the difference we observe between major and minor parties’ emphasis strategies.

Next, I consider the possibility that the observed distinction in emphasis strategy between major and minor parties is a consequence of selection by party ideology into these categories. For instance, we might worry that these results are an artefact of social democratic parties in Europe being overwhelmingly ‘major parties’, emphasizing redistribution, and locating close to the median voter on this issue. To assuage this concern, for each issue, I control for an issue-specific effect of parties’ overall left-right position and also their economic left-right position, on their issue emphasis.⁷⁰ These results are presented in Table 9 as Models 1 and 2, respectively. Although we no longer find activist extremism to have a statistically significant effect on issue emphasis for major parties, the coefficients in both models are consistently negative, and are statistically different from those for minor parties ($p < 0.01$).⁷¹ Again, these results suggest that selection by ideology cannot explain the observed difference in emphasis strategy between major and minor parties.

Finally, the selection of activists into parties does not provide a plausible explanation for the difference in emphasis strategy we observe between major and minor parties. One would have to argue that, not only do activists select into parties based on the issue positions preferred by those

⁶⁸In other results, available on request, I show that variation in the continuous measure of leadership influence between parties also does not seem to affect the coefficient on activist extremism.

⁶⁹Interacting activist extremism with major party status in each subsample produces very similar results (available on request).

⁷⁰Measures of each party’s overall left-right placement and left-right placement on economic issues are taken from the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey.

⁷¹In other results, available on request, I also control for an issue-specific effect of party family on issue emphasis, for each issue.

Table 9: Party Ideology, Party Size and Emphasis Strategy

	Issue Emphasis	
	(1) Overall L-R Position	(2) L-R Econ Position
Activist Extremism \times Major	-0.084 (0.161)	-0.101 (0.163)
Activist Extremism \times Minor	0.464*** (0.095)	0.339*** (0.099)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs. \times Major	-0.180 (0.201)	-0.139 (0.205)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs. \times Minor	0.043 (0.138)	-0.069 (0.137)
Observations	976	976
Log Likelihood	-1,393.702	-1,365.225

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Cell entries report BUC coefficient estimates from a fixed effects ordered logit model of parties' issue emphasis decisions (for a discussion of the BUC estimator, see p. 16). Both models include country-issue fixed effects, as well as separate issue-specific intercepts for major and minor parties. Robust standard errors clustered by country-issue are given in parentheses.

parties, but that they do so differently depending on the size of the party. One would have to argue that, for major parties, activists with more extreme preferences on an issue tend to be more likely to support a major party that emphasizes the issue *less*, but for minor parties, activists with more extreme preferences on an issue prefer to support a minor party that emphasizes the issue *more*. This would imply, counterintuitively, that activists support major parties like the Conservative Party in the UK or the Social Democratic Party in Germany because of their centrist views on the issues these parties emphasize.

7 Conclusion

It is a well-established empirical finding that parties vary considerably in the issues they emphasize in campaigns. To explain this, researchers have long argued that parties prefer to emphasize issues on which they are favored among voters, so as to increase the electoral salience of those issues. However, how a party might come to be favored by voters on a positional issue has previously not been explained. This paper suggests that the policy preferences of a party's activists may be critical, as parties are forced to take more extreme positions on issues on which their activists are more extreme. As a consequence, a party seeking the support of moderate voters can increase its vote share by emphasizing the issues on which it, and its activists, are relatively centrist, and de-emphasizing issues on which, it and its activists, are relatively extreme. Conversely, a party reliant on the support of voters with extreme preferences on some issues maximizes its vote share by emphasizing the issues on which it, and its activists, are relatively extreme.

Significantly, I find a clear difference of emphasis strategies between traditionally large—or 'major'—parties, and traditionally small—or 'minor'—parties. I find that major parties de-emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme, and minor parties emphasize issues on which their activists are relatively extreme. I find party size to be more important than whether a party is mainstream or niche in this respect, as small mainstream parties, like their niche counterparts, typically emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are relatively extreme, and large niche parties, like their mainstream counterparts, appear to emphasize the issues on which they and their activists are more centrist. These results hold across Western and Eastern Europe, suggesting that, in a variety of information environments, the appearance of policy moderation may be viewed as advantageous by major parties, and potentially disadvantageous by minor parties. I consider a range of alternative hypotheses to account for my empirical findings, and find that the only explanation consistent with the data is that a party's size has a direct influence on its emphasis strategy.

By turning the spotlight on positional issues, this paper clarifies some of the potentially sinister consequences of salience endogeneity for the responsiveness of parties to voters' policy

preferences. The traditional focus of saliency theory on valence issues has highlighted that a party may be evaluated significantly on the basis of issues that it ‘owns’ during elections – or issues that voters believe the party, rather than its opponents, is best able to handle. However, the evidence provided here suggests the more troubling possibility that major parties may be able to take quite non-centrist positions on some issues, while de-emphasizing these issues so as to reduce their electoral salience. Consequently, governments may be able to make some policy decisions that are disliked by most voters, while facing little scrutiny. Activists, who may be unrepresentative of the population at large, may in turn exert a considerable influence on policy outcomes.

This paper opens the door to many exciting avenues for future research. While this paper relies solely on cross-sectional data, a time-series analysis would allow us to explore how the issues on which parties are favored by voters might be influenced by changing activist composition. Further, the example of the FPÖ in Austria suggests that minor parties may move to emphasizing issues on which they, and their activists, are more centrist as they become electorally established. Conversely, previously major parties might move to emphasizing their more extreme issue positions if their electoral position decays to the point that they cease to be major. Future work could evaluate the evidence for these processes, by analyzing how the emphasis strategies like the now major Scottish National Party in Scotland, or the formerly major Liberal Party in the United Kingdom, evolved over time.

Appendix A Coding Decisions

Table A.1: **Coding Issue Emphasis by Parties: Approach (1)**

EES 2014 Voter Survey ⁷²	CHES 2014 MIP Issue Category
Q17.1 You are fully in favour of state intervention in the economy.	1. State Intervention; Deregulation
Q17.2 You are fully in favour of the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor in (<i>country</i>).	2. Redistribution
Q17.3 You are fully in favour of raising taxes to increase public services.	3. Public Services vs. Taxes
Q17.4 You are fully in favour of same-sex marriage.	4. Social Lifestyle; Religious Principles
Q17.5 You fully support privacy rights even if they hinder efforts to combat crime.	5. Civil Liberties
Q17.6 You are fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration. ⁷³	6. Immigration; Multiculturalism
Q17.7 The EU should have more authority over the EU Member States' economic and budgetary policies.	7. EU Integration
Q17.8 Environmental protection should always take priority even at the cost of economic growth.	8. Environment

⁷²For each issue, respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10. The '0' end of the scale for each issue is given below.

⁷³Observations for this issue were recoded so that '10' measures the most right-wing position possible on this issue.

Table A.2: **Coding Issue Emphasis by Parties: Approach (2)**

EES 2014 Voter Survey ⁷⁴	CHES 2014 MIP Issue Category
Q17.1 You are fully in favour of state intervention in the economy.	1. State Intervention
Q17.2 You are fully in favour of the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor in (<i>country</i>).	2. Redistribution
Q17.3 You are fully in favour of raising taxes to increase public services.	3. Public Services vs. Taxes
Q17.4 You are fully in favour of same-sex marriage.	4. Social Lifestyle
Q17.5 You fully support privacy rights even if they hinder efforts to combat crime.	5. Civil Liberties
Q17.6 You are fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration. ⁷⁵	6. Immigration
Q17.7 The EU should have more authority over the EU Member States' economic and budgetary policies.	7. EU Integration
Q17.8 Environmental protection should always take priority even at the cost of economic growth.	8. Environment

⁷⁴For each issue, respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10. The '0' end of the scale for each issue is given below.

⁷⁵Observations for this issue were recoded so that '10' measures the most right-wing position possible on this issue.

Appendix B List of Parties

Table B.1: Classification of Parties in Baseline Sample

Country	Major Parties	Minor Parties
Austria	FPÖ, ÖVP, SPÖ	NEOS, GRÜNE
Bulgaria		GERB
Croatia	HDZ, SDP	ORaH
Czech Republic	ODS, ČSSD	KDU-ČSL, KSČM, ANO 2011, TOP 09
Denmark	V, SD	DF, KF, RV, LA, SF
Estonia	EK, ER, IRL	SDE
Finland	KESK, KOK, SDP	KD, VIHR, VAS, PS
Flanders	CD&V, N-VA, SPA, VB	Groen
France	PS, UMP	EELV, PG, FN
Germany	CDU, SPD	Gruenen, Linke
Greece	ND, PASOK	SYRIZA, KKE, XA, ANEL, Potami
Hungary	Fidesz, MSZP	DK, JOBBIK
Ireland	FF, FG	Sinn Fein
Italy	PD, FI	M5S, LN
Latvia	SDPS, V	NA, ZZS
Lithuania	LSDP	TS-LKD, DP, LRLS, TT
Poland	PO, SLD, PiS	KNP
Portugal	PSD, PS	
Romania	PDL, PNL, PSD	
Slovakia	Smer-SD	KDH
Slovenia	SDS, SD	DeSUS
Spain	PP, PSOE	ERC, Podemos
Sweden	M, SAP	C, KD, FI, MP, V, FP, SD
The Netherlands	CDA, PvdA, VVD	D66, GL, PVV, SP
United Kingdom	CONS, LAB, LIB DEM	Green, UKIP
Wallonia	PS, MR	ECOLO

Table B.2: Classification of Parties by Party Family and Size

Country	Large Mst.	Large Niche	Small Mst.	Small Niche
Austria	ÖVP, SPÖ	FPÖ ⁷⁶	NEOS	GRUNE
Bulgaria			GERB	
Croatia	SDP	HDZ		ORaH
Czech Republic	ODS, ČSSD		ANO 2011, KDU-CSL, KSČM, TOP 09	
Denmark	V, SD		KF, LA, RV, SF	DF
Estonia	EK, ER, IRL	SDE		
Finland	KESK, SDP, KOK		KD, VAS, PS	VIHR
Flanders	CD& V, SPA	N-VA		Groen
France	PS, UMP		PG	EELV, FN
Germany	CDU, SPD		Linke	Grunen
Greece	ND, PASOK		SYRIZA, KKE, Potami	XA, ANEL
Hungary	Fidesz, MSZP		DK	JOBBIK
Ireland	FF, FG			Sinn Fein
Italy	PD, FI			M5S, LN
Latvia	SDPS, V		ZZS	NA
Lithuania	LSDP		TS-LKD, DP, LRLS, TT	
Poland	PO, SLD, PiS		KNP	
Portugal	PSD, PS			
Romania	PDL, PNL, PSD			
Slovakia	Smer-SD		KDH	
Slovenia	SDS, SD			DeSUS
Spain	PP, PSOE		Podemos	ERC
Sweden	M, SAP		C, KD, V, FP	FI, MP, SD
The Netherlands	CDA, PvdA, VVD		D66, SP	GL, PVV
United Kingdom	CONS, LAB, LIB DEM			Green, UKIP
Wallonia	PS, MR			ECOLO

Table B.3: Classification of Parties by Average Vote Share, 2000–12

Country	0–15%	15–30%	30–45%
Austria	NEOS, GRÜNE	FPÖ	ÖVP, SPÖ
Bulgaria	GERB		
Croatia	ORaH		HDZ, SDP
Czech Republic	KDU ČSL, KSČM, ANO 2011, TOP 09	ODS, ČSSD	
Denmark	KF, DF, LA, RV, SF	V, SD	
Estonia	SDE	EK, ER, IRL	
Finland	KD, VIHR, VAS, PS	KESK, SDP, KOK	
Flanders	Groen	N-VA, SPA	
France	EELV, PG, FN	PS	UMP
Germany	Gruenen, Linke	CDU	SPD
Greece	SYRIZA, KKE, XA, ANEL, Potami		ND, PASOK
Hungary	DK, JOBBIK		Fidesz, MSZP
Ireland	Sinn Fein	FG	FF
Italy	M5S, LN		PD, FI
Latvia	NA, ZZS	SDPS, V	
Lithuania	TS-LKD, DP, LRLS, TT	LSDP	
Poland	KNP	PO, SLD, PiS	
Portugal			PSD, PS
Romania		PDL, PNL	PSD
Slovakia	KDH	Smer-SD	
Slovenia	DeSUS	SDS, SD	
Spain	ERC, Podemos		PP, PSOE
Sweden	C, KD, FI, MP, V, FP, SD	M	SAP
The Netherlands	D66, GL, PVV, SP	CDA, PvdA, VVD	
United Kingdom	Green, UKIP		CONS, LAB
Wallonia	ECOLO	PS, MR	

Appendix C Technical Appendix

C.1 The BUC Fixed Effects Ordered Logit Estimator

The BUC estimator is a binary recoded conditional logit estimator, where the original dependent variable with N categories is recoded into $N - 1$ different dichotomizations using $N - 1$ thresholds. Each observation in the original dataset is then duplicated $N - 1$ times. In this analysis, this entails recoding the original dependent variable using three different dichotomizations, and duplicating each country-party-issue observation three times. Parameter estimates are obtained by applying a standard conditional logit estimator to the new dataset, with standard errors clustered by country-party-issue, as the new observations are dependent by construction. In all specifications, I report standard errors clustered by country-issue, which allows for dependence between observations within country-issue clusters and so within country-party-issue clusters as well.

As with conditional logit estimates, it is not possible to recover marginal effects. For this reason, Angrist and Pischke (2009) suggest that practitioners use a linear probability model with a binary dependent variable in contexts where the incidental parameters problem may be a concern.⁷⁷ However, in my case, a linear fixed effects estimator assumes cardinality of the dependent variable, which seems a heroic assumption. Cardinality would require, for instance, that the gap in emphasis between a party's third most important issue and its second most important issue is the same as that between its third most important issue and any issue outside the top three. By comparison, the BUC estimator, like any ordered logit estimator, estimates values for the cutpoints dividing the latent issue emphasis scale into the emphasis categories we observe. This allows, for instance, the gap in emphasis between a party's third most important issue and its second most important issue to be smaller than that between its third most important issue and any issue outside the top three. By doing so, we address yet another potential concern: measurement error in the dependent variable, as we cannot distinguish between, for example, the fourth and fifth most important issue for a party using the available data. Although the loss of information from using a four point rather than an eight point scale means that our estimates are still inaccurate, the loss of efficiency is diminished when using an ordered logit estimator instead of OLS. Further, Beck (2015, 11-17) notes that when there are very few observations within a group fixed effect, an OLS estimator produces less accurate estimates than a conditional logit estimator.

Regardless, using either an unconditional fixed effects ordered logit estimator or a linear fixed effects model produces substantively similar results to those I report in Section 4 – as I show in the following section.

⁷⁷See Beck (2015) for a discussion of the incidental parameters problem as it is encountered in political science research.

C.2 Robustness Checks

C.2.1 Alternative Coding of Party Activists

Table C.1: Major Party Results with Alt. Measure of Activist Prefs.

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	-0.441*** (0.179)	-0.466*** (0.186)	-0.498*** (0.183)	-0.445*** (0.215)	-0.462 (0.325)	-0.700* (0.354)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.013 (0.244)	-0.057 (0.255)	-0.006 (0.252)	-0.172 (0.305)	0.282 (0.416)	0.429 (0.476)
Observations	1,344	1,344	1,335	840	504	495
Log Likelihood	-521.008	-480.706	-511.478	-366.546	-154.067	-144.290

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table C.2: Minor Party Results with Alt. Measure of Activist Prefs.

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
supporterext	0.804*** (0.113)	0.768*** (0.117)	0.804*** (0.113)	0.847*** (0.124)	0.656 (0.322)	0.656 (0.322)
supportersd	-0.244 (0.154)	-0.278 (0.157)	-0.244 (0.154)	-0.158 (0.176)	-0.478 (0.350)	-0.478 (0.350)
Observations	1,416	1,416	1,413	984	432	429
R ²	0.043	0.038	0.043	0.058	0.012	0.012
Max. Possible R ²	0.556	0.526	0.557	0.601	0.432	0.434
Log Likelihood	-543.303	-501.480	-543.303	-423.314	-119.413	-119.413

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Tables C.1 and C.2 replicate the results reported in Tables 2 and 3, respectively, using an alternative approach to code the preferences of party activists on each issue – excluding respondents who are only ‘somewhat’ interested in politics and ‘fairly’ close to a party, but

⁷⁷Here, classification of parties as mainstream or niche is based on the approach in Meguid (2008): ethnic, nationalist, green and protest parties are classified as niche, and all other parties are classified as mainstream. Party family designations are taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project.

retaining those who are only ‘somewhat’ interested in politics but ‘very’ close to a party. The results are virtually identical in statistical and substantive significance to those reported in the paper. This restriction reduces the proportion of respondents classed as activists from 17.8% to 4.8%.

C.2.2 Replication of Baseline Results by FE Logit

Tables C.3 and C.4 replicate the results reported in Tables 2 and 3, respectively, using an unconditional fixed effects ordered logit estimator in place of the BUC estimator. The BUC estimator is preferred to the unconditional fixed effects logit estimator as the latter produces estimates that are inconsistent as well as severely biased when group sizes are small (Beck 2015; Katz 2001; Coupé 2005). Regardless, the results we obtain are substantively similar: in all cases, we find a negative and statistically significant coefficient on activist extremism for major parties, and a positive and statistically significant coefficient for minor parties.

Table C.3: Major Party Results Replicated by FE Logit

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	-1.600*** (0.403)	-1.600*** (0.403)	-1.784*** (0.414)	-1.540*** (0.487)	-2.091*** (0.797)	-2.875*** (0.911)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.705 (0.556)	-0.705 (0.556)	-0.730 (0.575)	-1.332 (0.855)	-0.257 (0.757)	-0.146 (0.858)
Observations	448	448	445	280	168	165
Log Likelihood	-194.41	-194.41	-187.79	-111.51	-79.96	-72.98

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Relative to the results obtained when using a BUC estimator, the estimated coefficients on activist extremism are consistently larger in magnitude – whether for major parties or minor parties. For example, in Model 1 in Table C.3, the coefficient estimate on activist extremism is -1.600, as compared to -0.476 in Table 2. This implies an effect of activist extremism on party emphasis that is at least three times larger in magnitude than suggested by the baseline results. However, this is likely a result of bias in our estimates, as previous analyses have shown that when the number of observations in a group is 2, $\hat{\beta} \rightarrow 2\beta$ as $N \rightarrow \infty$ (Andersen 1973, 66). As previously stated, in my analysis, the average number of observations within each country-issue group is two.

Table C.4: Minor Party Results Replicated by FE Logit

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	1.653*** (0.248)	1.550*** (0.253)	1.653*** (0.248)	1.665*** (0.267)	1.313* (0.702)	1.313* (0.702)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.218 (0.305)	-0.288 (0.305)	-0.218 (0.305)	-0.126 (0.337)	-0.605 (0.699)	-0.605 (0.699)
Observations	472	472	471	328	144	143
Log Likelihood	-194.41	-194.41	-187.79	-111.51	-79.96	-72.98

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

C.2.3 Replication of Baseline Results by OLS

Next, Tables C.5 and C.6 replicate the results reported in Tables 2 and 3 using OLS in place of the BUC estimator. In cases where the incidental parameters problem may pose a concern, researchers have frequently advocated using OLS instead of a conditional logit or an unconditional fixed effects logit estimator, as this allows us to recover marginal effects uncontaminated by any inconsistently estimated fixed effects (Angrist and Pischke 2009; Greene 2005, 697). However, there are three concerns with using an OLS estimator in my case. First, when there are very few observations within a group fixed effect, it emerges that an OLS estimator produces estimates that are less accurate than those produced by a conditional logit estimator (Beck 2015, 11–17). Second, an OLS approach assumes a cardinal dependent variable – a heroic assumption in my case, as this requires, for instance, that the gap in emphasis between a party’s third most important issue and its second most important issue is the same as that between its third most important issue and any issue outside the top three. Third, as the BUC estimator estimates values for the threshold parameters in addition to the regressors, it reduces the loss of efficiency that results from using a four point scale rather than an eight point scale to measure the distribution of party emphasis across eight issues.

Still, the results we obtain using OLS are very similar to those obtained using the BUC estimator, albeit with estimates for the effect of activist extremism on parties’ issue emphasis that are smaller in magnitude for major parties and minor parties. However, this might be explained by any attenuation bias that results from assuming cardinality of the dependent variable in OLS. This seems likely, as there are several issues which both major and minor parties place little emphasis on, when emphasis is measured using a four point scale (see Figures C.1 and C.2) – for instance, civil liberties and the environment. Consequently, for some issues, there is likely

Table C.5: Major Party Results Replicated by OLS

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	-0.263** (0.130)	-0.245* (0.127)	-0.290** (0.126)	-0.237 (0.151)	-0.319 (0.250)	-0.403* (0.232)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.068 (0.159)	-0.073 (0.157)	-0.066 (0.162)	-0.088 (0.314)	-0.059 (0.148)	-0.058 (0.152)
Observations	448	448	445	280	168	165
R ²	0.734	0.737	0.742	0.799	0.586	0.608
Adjusted R ²	0.517	0.522	0.531	0.645	0.196	0.235
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Table C.6: Minor Party Results Replicated by OLS

	Issue Emphasis					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Activist Extremism	0.516*** (0.106)	0.462*** (0.107)	0.516*** (0.106)	0.579*** (0.104)	0.211 (0.308)	0.211 (0.307)
Std. Dev. of Activist Prefs.	-0.064 (0.156)	-0.071 (0.151)	-0.064 (0.156)	-0.042 (0.165)	-0.070 (0.411)	-0.070 (0.409)
Observations	472	472	471	328	144	143
R ²	0.524	0.527	0.523	0.473	0.691	0.690
Adjusted R ²	0.193	0.199	0.194	0.195	0.287	0.290
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Figure C.1: Histogram of Major Party Emphasis by Issue

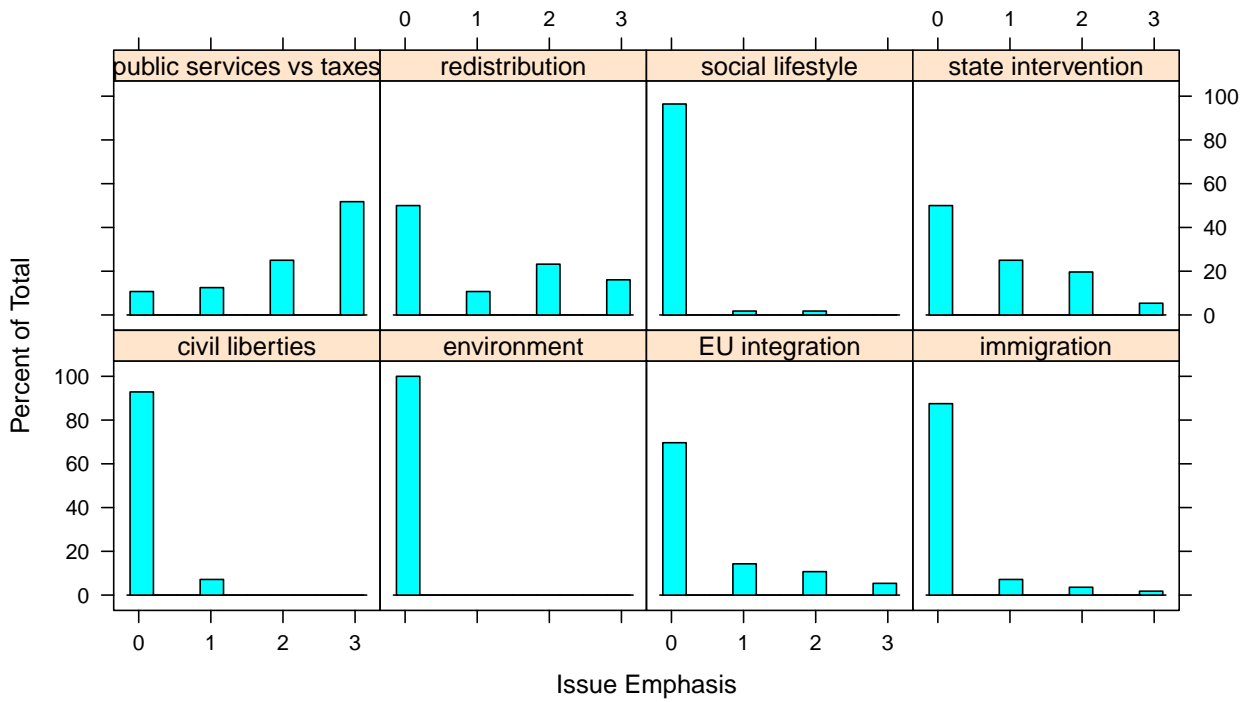
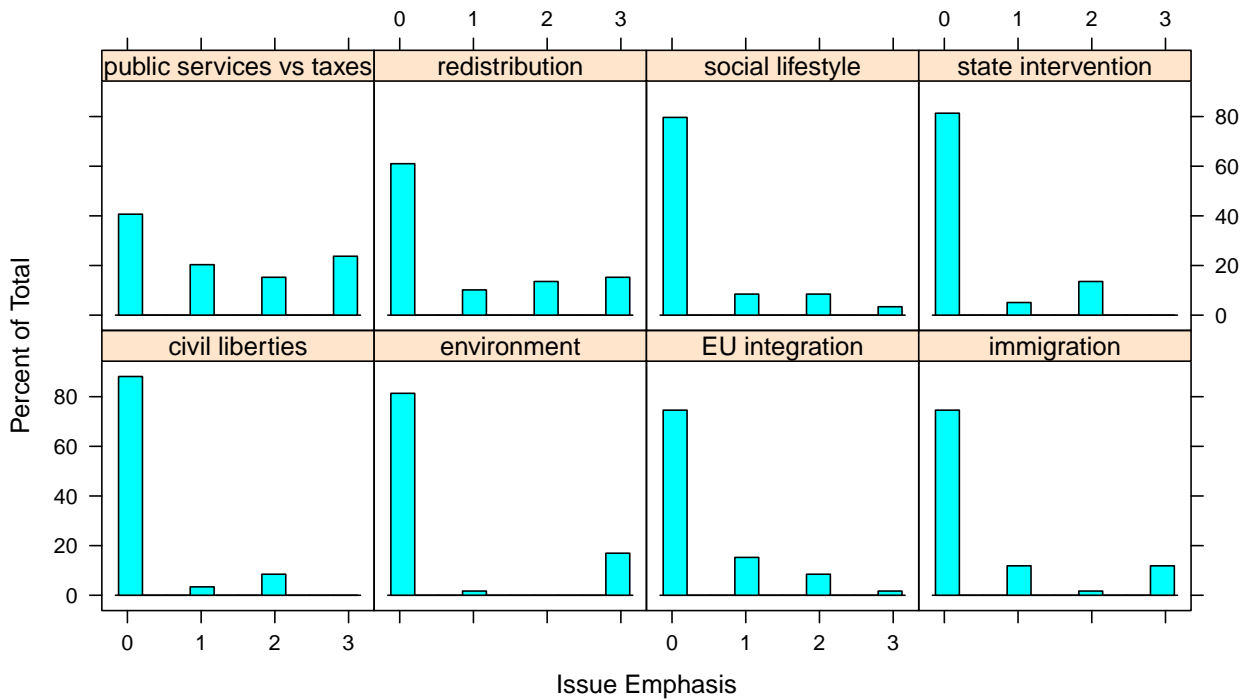


Figure C.2: Histogram of Minor Party Emphasis by Issue



considerable unmeasured variation in the dependent variable, which is accounted for to some extent by allowing the threshold parameters to vary (as in the BUC estimator).

C.3 Taylor Approximation of Predicted Probabilities from a Conditional Logit Estimator

For a conditional logit estimator, although predicted probabilities and marginal effects cannot be recovered, any estimated coefficient β can be interpreted in terms of log odds ratios. For instance, in my analysis, an increase in activist extremism by one unit entails an increase in $\exp(\beta)$ in the log odds ratio of raising emphasis from some level k to $k + 1$, where β is the coefficient on activist extremism.

Let x measure the average distance of party j 's activists on an issue from the mean voter. If p denotes the probability a party will emphasize an issue given x ,

$$p = \frac{e^{x\beta+\alpha}}{1 + e^{x\beta+\alpha}}$$

where β is the estimated coefficient on x , and α represents the sum of the relevant country-issue fixed effect and any controls. Let p_1 denote the probability that party j will emphasize the issue when $x = m$, and p_2 denote the probability that party j will emphasize the issue when $x = m + 1$. We can then write β as a function of p_1 and p_2 as follows:

$$\beta = \log \left[\frac{p_2}{1 - p_2} \right] - \log \left[\frac{p_1}{1 - p_1} \right]$$

By exponentiating both sides and rearranging, we can express p_2 as a function of p_1 and β :

$$p_2 = \frac{\frac{p_1}{1-p_1} e^\beta}{1 + \frac{p_1}{1-p_1} e^\beta} \equiv f(\beta) \tag{1}$$

where $f(\beta)$ is a function defined according to equation (1). Given p_1 and β , we can then calculate the new probability p_2 that party j will emphasize an issue when x increases by one unit.

Rather than solving for p_2 given β and p_1 , as a rule of thumb, we can also approximate the change in predicted probabilities following a one unit increase in activist extremism using a Taylor series approximation of $f(\beta)$, where β is the coefficient on activist extremism. For our purposes, it suffices to use a linear Taylor approximation of $f(\beta)$ around the point $\beta = 0$. Our estimates of β are, in most cases, sufficiently small that this provides a relatively accurate

approximation.

$$\begin{aligned} f(\beta) &\approx f(0) + \beta f'(0) \\ &= p_1 + \beta p_1(1 - p_1) \end{aligned}$$

Now, consider again the example I analyze on page 20, where a party may emphasize an issue at level k with probability 0.5 and at level $k + 1$ with probability 0.5. In this example, $p_1 = 0.5$. Then,

$$\begin{aligned} p_2 &\approx 0.5 + \beta(0.5)^2 \\ &= 0.5 + \frac{\beta}{4} \end{aligned}$$

Thus, to a reasonable approximation, an increase in activist extremism by one unit raises the probability a party will emphasize the issue at level $k + 1$ by $\frac{\beta}{4}$.

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