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No More Mr. Niche Guy: Multidimensional Issue Voting in Proportional Electoral Systems

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science by Matthew Edward Bergman

Committee in charge:
Professor William Chandler, Co-chair
Professor Matthew Shugart, Co-chair
Professor James Adams
Professor Maureen Feeley
Professor Isaac Martin

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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Professor Ellen Comisso. She was devoted to making the radical seem mundane, imbuing the controversial with an air of normalcy. It is with this spirit that the dissertation presented here so continues.

In addition, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents: Irene & Eugene Citerman and Eileen & Norman Bergman. I cannot help but wonder if the intellectual spark that has driven my research is rooted in genetics. As they have shared and dedicated their support, commitment to education, and inquisitive minds with me, I, in return, dedicate this dissertation to them.
EPIGRAPH

“He will find that as he alters his thoughts toward things and other people, things and other people will alter towards him.”

- James Allen, British Philosopher
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History is written on the sands of Arrakis.

One chapter has ended, swept away by the whirlwind.

One door has closed, but another has opened, and on the other side, our future.

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Survey have had larger impacts on my theory development than any sort of reading from a distance could have produced.

I again give one last appreciative thanks to all those that helped to bring this project to completion and look forward to the future now open in front of me.
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Studies in Religious Belief, Institutions, and Generosity
Professor Carolyn Warner

Studies in Electoral Systems and Party Personnel
Professor Matthew Shugart

Studies in European Politics and Political Economy
Professor William Chandler

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

No More Mr. Niche Guy: Multidimensional Issue Voting in Proportional Electoral Systems

by

Matthew Edward Bergman

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor William Chandler, Co-Chair
Professor Matthew Shugart, Co-Chair

The past forty years has seen a notable increase in the number of issues on the political agenda of established democracies. These new considerations enter the political marketplace through new parties that focus on specialized issues, such as the environment, immigration, or regional autonomy. The success of these parties has been attributed to how existing mainstream parties engage with these new issues. Yet across
the developed world, these parties continue to make electoral and government inroads. Instead of attributing these niche party's success to their unique agendas, the inability of competitors to successfully engage with their issues, or socio-economic reasons, this dissertation explores these parties as the mainstays of political competition that they have become. In effect, this amounts to examining how these newer parties engage with existing mainstream issues.

Analyses are performed on the macro and micro level that examine whether voters reward niche parties for their engagement in mainstream issues. Cross-nationally, as nationalist parties engage with a broader set of issues, they are rewarded at the polls. Case studies of Italy and Finland are used to examine if voters for nationalist parties do indeed attribute to them competence in economic areas. When the Italian Lega Nord offered a platform similar to its mainstream competitors, voters did not distinguish it from its mainstream rivals on economic stewardship. Similarly, evidence from Finnish post-election surveys indicates that voters who were highly concerned about economic issues supported the nationalist True Finns both in election and government participation. Such findings suggest that understandings of how parties compete on multiple dimensions are ready for an update.
Chapter 1

Mainstreaming The Agenda

1.1 Preface

The “normal pathology” thesis holds that the nationalist radical right is an ailment of post-war western society – an aberration whose symptoms are driven by crisis (Mudde, 2010). Other, less physiological, characterizations of the radical right ascribe to it ideological extremity (Adams, et al. 2006) and limited issue appeal (Meguid 2005). This appeal, even as recent as 2015 (Budge 2015) is discriminated from those of other parties by its national orientation, militarization, and centralization of political power. By this proposition, contemporary Europe is very sick.

Matteo Salvini, of the nationalist Lega Nord, has polled as the second most popular politician in Italy (Associated Press 2015). Nationalists won a plurality of the votes in the UK and France in the European Elections of 2014, are currently the second largest parties in Denmark and Finland, and the third largest party in Sweden, Norway, Austria, and the Netherlands.

Timo Soini is currently Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Finland, the highest post held by any nationalist party member. His True Finn party also holds the ministries of defense, justice and employment, and social affairs and health. The current finance minister of Norway, Siv Jensen, along with ministers of transport, communication, agriculture, justice, children, equality, and social inclusion, petroleum and energy, and labor and social affairs are all members of the Progress Party – a nationalist party. Outside Scandinavia, in addition to posts related to immigration and
assimilation, nationalists have controlled a variety of cabinet portfolios including Roberto Maroni serving as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and Roberto Castelli serving as Minister of Justice from 2001-2006 in Italy and Roelf de Boer and Herman Heinsbroek serving, respectively, as Minister of Transport and Water and Minister of Economic Affairs and External Trade in 2002 in the Netherlands.

Instead of achieving these levels of popularity and prosaic executive appointment as an affliction of voters and governments\(^1\), what if nationalist parties were to be analyzed as just another “normal” political party? Instead of a pathology, how can the radical right be understood as a “pathological normalcy” (Mudde 2010)? Could the nationalist radical right move beyond the lunatic fringe and mutate into a political challenger able to compete over voters and issues like mainstream parties? Do voters respond by treating these parties as part of the “normalcy” of political competition?

This dissertation argues answers to the above questions in the affirmative and thus existing literature that focuses on ideological competition between distinct party types is insufficient in explaining how these parties could attain the popularity and government status that they have. Previous research that has found that voters do not respond to the ideological positions that parties take (Adams, et al. 2011, 2014). While radical right and green parties have been found to have stronger linkages to ideologically extreme voters (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow, et al. 2011), this literature does not attempt to measure reactions to the range of issues these parties discuss – in fact this literature pays little attention to issues discussed by non-mainstream parties at all, instead remaining focused on their ideological positions.

\(^1\) A malady serving in the health or social affairs ministry would certainly be dangerous for the citizenry.
The voting public may be more non-ideological in nature (Converse 1964) than assumed by the above literature due to the variety of considerations on its mind due to party campaigns and the media (Zaller 1992). The difficulty in processing positional shifts of parties can be distinguished from the easier task of having an awareness of the number and types of issues a party emphasizes, especially with the media reinforcing these issue-based campaigns (Walgrave and De Swert 2007; Walgrave, et al. 2009; Tresch, et al. 2015).

Voters have been shown to be sophisticated in their understanding of electoral rules and how these translate votes to seats (Meffert, et al. 2011) and affect government formation in systems that have a history of coalition governance. Downs (1957) pessimistic conclusion that voters in multiparty systems do not vote as if elections were government-selection mechanisms has been demonstrated to be unfounded, with evidence for coalition targeted voting has been found in a variety of countries (Blais, et al. 2006; Powell 2006; Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Duch, et al. 2010; Meffert, et al. 2011; Falco-Gimeno 2012). Thus, with voters aware that post-election government formation is where the vote gets translated to policy, the more favorable a party is in this negotiation process, the more likely that policy will be directed to that party's favor than when serving in opposition (Bargsted and Kedar 2009). When a party abandons a narrow platform and begins to address a greater number of issues to be potentially compromised upon in government formation negotiations (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014), it makes itself more attractive as a candidate, and thus more popular among voters in these systems. In this manner, as radical right parties incorporate greater issues onto their agenda, they can both attain greater electoral success and greater potential for government participation.
Put more contentiously, if a radical right or green party presents a catch-all agenda, voters could view them as a “normal” mainstream party, like those more typically associated with government participation.

1.2 Introduction

The “frozen cleavages” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) that developed during nation-building and industrialization in the late 1800s have melted away. Voting structured along socio-economic cleavages of social class, industrial sector, religiosity, and region no longer predict election outcomes. The passing of this ideological “golden age” in the late 1970s has given way to newer value-laden issues that have entered into the arena of political contestation. The generational replacement of those with strong links between their social groups, ideological orientations, and electoral behavior (van der Brug 2010) has resulted in an electorate that is de-aligned, volatile, and floating in its electoral persuasions (Dalton 1984).

Post-material values (Ingelhart 1984) based political movements emerged out of a rising middle class of “socio-cultural professionals” who expressed themselves in New Left (Kriesi 1989) and Ecological parties. On the other hand, the losers in the processes of modernization and globalization found themselves as supporters of a populist, authoritarian, nationalist, radical right (Ignazi 1992; Kriesi, et al. 2006) who rejected the libertarian unilateralism of the New Left (Kitschelt 1994; Bornscheir 2010).

Existing parties did not fully integrate these new values into their ideologies, and as such, the new agendas brought by these parties remain a part of political competition. Three decades into this era of novel issue competition, this dissertation extends the frame
of examining these parties as less of an error in the political system to be explained away
and to treat these new parties as a “pathological normalcy” (Mudde 2010). Previous
research has tried to explain what is different about these parties and which of their
characteristics leads to electoral support from a set unique voters. Such perspectives
focus directly on the 'pathology' nature, viewing these parties as anathema to politics as
normal in advanced industrial societies.

Instead, this research presumes the 'normalcy' of these parties and asks the
question, “how can established research on 'normal' political competition elucidate
contemporary European trends?” The answer lies in notions of issue competition. While
ideology is often assumed to be the strongest predictor of vote choice, recent findings
suggest that ideology is a heuristic label that links several underlying issue positions (van
der Brug 2004). The issues that voters find important and which parties are best poised to
address these issues can be thought of the fundamental basis for political competition.

With this frame in mind, this dissertation proceeds to examine issues over which
political parties have contested elections in the post-war era with a focus on the advanced
capitalist industrial powers of Western Europe. The primary dimension of political
contestation remains economic in focus (Bornschier 2010; Stoll, 2010). Parties of the
economic left focus on wage equality and employment expansion often involving the
public sector, economic liberal parties seek reduced regulations on business and espouse
the benefits of the free market, and economic conservative parties seek price stability and
conditions that often favor banking and large manufacturing interests (Hibbs 1977).
These economic-focused – 'mainstream' – parties that focus on class conflict and the
distribution of wealth have led governments for the past 70 years with alternations
between these aforementioned groups and the differing economic foci of their administrations.

New challenger parties (Hino 2012) began to disrupt this equilibrium in the 1970s, consolidating their position in European political systems by the 1990s, and become part of the 'normalcy' of politics by the late '00s. These parties presented new post-material issues and values (Inglehart 1990) unaddressed by economic-focused parties. Green/ecological parties focus on environmental and social justice issues while nationalist parties defend a national way of life in light of the increasing salience of immigration and European Union issues. Cleavage based politics has a difficult time incorporating these new parties into existing models, and as such framing political competition as over a set of issues (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petroick 1996), both new – i.e. environmental protection, social justice, and multi-culturalism - and old – i.e. taxation, business incentives, and social policy - can better integrate these new actors, preferences, and ideas into political research (Green-Pedersen 2010).

Mainstream parties have not been passive observers of the decline of class-based voting. At the expense of ideology, they have become larger and more vote-driven with “catch-all” platforms designed to appeal to broad audiences (Kirchheimer 1966). The arrival of the New Politics agenda brought with it “niche parties” determined to stake out and maintain an ideological claim (Spoon 2009), providing alternative forms of political expression to hitherto mainstream voters that felt betrayed or unrepresented in the direction their party was moving. These “new challenger parties” were committed to

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2 Kriesi et al (2006, 2008) suggested a new cleavage based on the “winners” and “losers” of globalization has become embedded into existing political spaces, but the results of van der Brug and van Spanje (2009) suggest that this cleavage is a result of the methodology used by those studies. While the editorial content of newspapers might provide evidence for a new structural conflict, party positions as determined by experts provide no such evidence of a reorientation of political space.
issues of immigration, the environment, and regional autonomy that were not on the agenda when party structures “froze” around existing post-war social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Hug 2001; Hino 2012), and campaigned in a manner that appeared to be less vote-seeking and more policy-seeking than the contemporaneous agendas of established “catch-all” mainstream counterparts. Ecologism/environmentalism, libertarianism, multiculturalism, pacifism, nationalism, populism, neo-fascism, and ethno-regionalism are all ideologies that emerged as “anti-system” given the original characteristics of “postwar settlement” norms of political contestation (Ignazzi 1992; Betz 1993; Taggart 1995; Hino 2012).

In response to the emergence of these non-economic, post-material issues offered by 'niche' parties, the hitherto economic-focused mainstream parties faced a decision: dismiss these new issues, accommodate these new issues into existing party platforms, or take an adversarial stance and counter these inroads by advocating issues counter to the “niche” interests. How mainstream parties respond to niche issues has dominated the literature that explains the success or failure of niche parties (Meguid 2005, 2008; Bale, et al. 2010; Spoon, et al. 2014; Han 2015; Prados-Prado 2015; Abou Chadi 2016).

This dissertation explores the opposite view: instead of attributing niche party success to socioeconomic factors or the actions of mainstream parties, niche parties are granted agency in their own success via their issue agendas (Spoon 2011). As opposed to viewing niche issues as “pathological” to traditional party competition (Mudde 2010), all issues are treated as a “normalcy” of political competition. Specifically, macro-level cross-national time-series analysis and micro-level voter surveys will examine the effects of hitherto niche parties shifting to address mainstream economic issues. The rest of this
introductory chapter briefly outlines the significance of this research program and the discussions that follow in subsequent chapters.

1.3 Argument, Significance, and Contributions

The primary argument of this dissertation is that just as mainstream parties have the ability to compete on niche issue dimensions, niche parties can compete on mainstream economic dimensions. The above cited studies posit that mainstream parties can use their size, resources, and governing experience to their advantage to gain credibility on niche issues. Smaller, niche parties lack these and can best utilize their finite resources by focusing their agenda on unaddressed issues.

Such traditional arguments fail to understand the complexity of voting in multiparty systems. In countries that use proportional electoral systems with multi-member districts, a greater number of parties gain representation in parliament. Thereafter, a greater number of parties become involved in post-election coalition governing negotiations (Lijphart 1999). Systems with a greater number of parties, thus allow a greater opportunity for the political representation of voter preferences (Ezrow 2010). While book length works on the UK and France (Meguid 2008; Spoon 2011) – both single member districts – are certainly insightful, the hypothesized micro-level mechanisms might not be generalizable. The voting calculus of citizens varies in meaningful ways between systems with single and multi-member districts (Cox 1997).

With little hope of affecting governance via the difficulties of achieving representation in single member districts, factions within parties face multiple disincentives from running independently of a larger group and rely on intra-party
channels for issue expression and change\textsuperscript{3}. Representation is more easily gained for narrower interests in multi-member districts, and inter-party competition is the mechanism through which issue agenda change can be affected (Adams 2012). Mechanics of issue voting and party electoral success should also thus vary between systems where parliamentary representation is difficult and where it is more feasible.

While niche parties may face scarce internal or public resources to draw upon, they can utilize external opportunity structures provided by the electoral system and electoral context to their advantage. The multiparty context provides niche parties with incentives they lack in two-party systems. In smaller party systems, political competition is more easily identifiable as uni-dimensional, with a proximal competitor easily identifiable. In larger party systems, competition is more multidimensional (Benoit and Laver 2006). Thus a party's mainstream economic agenda is of greater independence from its alternative agendas as the party system size increases. A party can maintain a position or emphasis on a niche dimension while altering its mainstream characteristics towards the median voter – an act that increases vote share, even in systems with a high number of parties (Ezrow 2005). \textit{In this manner, niche parties in multiparty systems are able to engage with economic dimensions to increase their their vote share.}

The significance of this approach is what distinguishes this from early studies of niche parties that utilized a dichotomous measure of party nicheness (Adams, et al. 2006, Meguid 2008, Ezrow, et al. 2010; Adams, et al. 2012; Wagner, 2012; Meyer and Wager, 2013). Instead, this dissertation conceptualizes nicheness as a continuous measure. A party need not be wholly concerned with new or mainstream issues; parties are

\textsuperscript{3} See Hino (2012) for a statistical analysis of institutional and socioeconomic conditions that lead to the emergence and success of “New Challenger Parties”.
recognized as offering a mix in their agenda profile. Thus, parties associated with both economic and niche dimensions are conceptualized as having a certain degree of new issue specialization and relative issue uniqueness that can vary over time.

This dissertation examines such concepts with both micro-level and macro-level designs. On the level of individual voters, this dissertation's argument would suggest that voters are able to detect these intermediate agendas. If parties traditionally associated with a niche issue incorporate economic issues into their agenda, their supporters should not be distinguishable from their mainstream counterparts on these economic dimensions. This contributes to a burgeoning research program that examines how niche party supporters are more attentive to party shifts than mainstream parties (Ezrow, et al. 2011; Adams, et al. 2012; Kluver and Spoon 2014). At noted above, previous research focusing on niche party success has focused on countries with single member districts and a low number of parties: both France and the UK have an average between 2 and 2.7 effective number of parliamentary parties in last three decades. In order to crucially examine if dynamics differ in multiparty systems, countries with a highly proportional and high effective number of parties are selected for study. Indeed, this hypothesis finds support in the two case studies of this dissertation on elections in Italy and Finland, both of which average around 5 effective parliamentary parties for the past 30 years.

The macro-level contribution is more dynamic. Here the argument would imply that as parties shift their focus and incorporate greater economic issues into their agenda, they are able to reach more mainstream voters and subsequently receive increased vote share. The cross-national chapter analyzes how a party's vote share is affected by shifts along the niche continuum and finds support for this phenomenon. This contributes to
furthering the literature that hypothesizes the incentives parties face in shifting the focus of their agenda (see Adams, 2012 for a review of existing literature; Wagner and Meyer 2013; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016). The empirical findings of this chapter support the argument that in multiparty systems, as nationalist parties broaden their agenda to include a greater set of issues, they can gain a greater vote share.

1.4 Dissertation Outline

Chapter 2 constitutes a theoretical overview of the literature, providing further explanation behind the development of the main argument of the dissertation. The theoretical overview focuses on three strands of related literature: issue competition, mainstream-niche distinctions, and voting in multiparty democracies. In short, the issue competition literature contends the core of political competition to be issue based. That's not to say that ideology has no place when trying to understand how voters select a party to represent them. Ideology does in fact often serve as a signal for which issues a voter is most concerned about. For example, far left voters are often concerned with government ownership and privatization, while mainstream-left voter are concerned about the provision of welfare services. Voters that identify with the far right often have concerns over national identity, while more mainstream-right voters might be concerned with a balanced budget and pro-business initiatives.

The description above highlights what is known as the “issue salience” approach (Budge and Farlie 1983). This posits that most voters are motivated by the issues that are important to them and vote for the party that represents those issues. Two forms of representation exist in this approach: electorate representation and partisan representation.
(Ezrow, et al. 2011). The former suggest that parties seek to represent issues and positions held by the general electorate while the latter suggest a focus on just a party's voters. Literature will be reviewed that connects the former to mainstream parties and the latter to niche parties.

Another form of issue competition is the “issue ownership approach” (Petroick 1996). Recent advances in this literature will be reviewed that distinguishes two forms: competence ownership and associative ownership (Walgrave, et al. 2012). Theories related to the former suggest that voters select a party based on how well they can deal with politically important issues. For example, should a party mismanage government finances, an opposition party might highlight such failings in its campaign and suggest it could do a better job at managing the economy. Economic issues are usually contested by mainstream parties, while niche party campaigns focus on their solutions to non-economic considerations, such as green parties arguing they can best deliver policies that generate a renewable energy economy. Associative issue ownership, relatedly, is a mental connection between specific issues and a specific party. Mentioning the environment, independent of any policies regarding it, often elicit thoughts of green parties (Walgrave, et al. 2012). In a similar vein, economic issues usually trigger a connection to mainstream parties while non-economic issues trigger connections to niche parties.

Chapter 2 then reviews theories of how voters make decisions in proportional systems, as opposed to single-member districts. This leads to the main argument of this dissertation: that voters in multiparty systems respond positively when niche parties embrace more mainstream agendas. The chapter concludes by highlighting specific voting segments that could respond positively to nationalist parties embracing a broader
set of issue considerations.

The empirical sections then each test an aspect of issue competition theory with the driving hypothesis in mind. Each of the three start by reviewing the relevant literature and developing these into testable hypotheses, which are then operationalized and tested. A discussion of results concludes each chapter, tying it back to the main arguments put forth in chapter 1 and chapter 2.

Chapter 3 explores associative issue ownership via a cross-national time-series analysis of 23 parliamentary democracies from 1970-2013. The continuous measures mentioned above are introduced that capture the (1) non-economic specialization a party's agenda and (2) how unique their non-economic agenda is related to other parties in the system. Party vote share is then related to dynamic trends in a party's association with a narrow or broad range of issues. Two-party systems are compared to multi-party systems, with niche parties hypothesized to capture more votes as they broaden their agenda in the latter. The findings of this chapter support this hypotheses, conditional on the multiparty - as opposed to two-party - nature of the system, but only for nationalist parties. The discussion of this chapter highlights the distinctions between issue competition on the left versus issue competition on the right, suggesting the presence of micro-level effects only on the latter.

Chapter 4 and 5 are, respectively, micro-level studies of elections in Italy and Finland. Both of these countries exhibit a high number of parties represented in parliament, including both nationalist parties and at least two other parties associated with the conservative end of the spectrum. The unique electoral characteristics of these nations allow for clear testing of the two other facets of issue competition.
Italy in the 2000s is examined in Chapter 4. During this period, the two main salient issues of contestation were the economy and immigration. Parties formed into a left pre-electoral coalition and a right pre-electoral coalition. Like other studies of issue ownership (Bélanger 2003; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008; Spoon 2011; Green and Jennings 2012; Bélanger and Nadeau 2015), this provides for a clear analysis of competence issue ownership (Petroick, 1996; Arndt, 2012), distinguished from these previous studies, crucially, in its usage of proportional representation. If voters pick up on the convergent agendas offered by both nationalist and mainstream parties, it is argued, that they too should then no longer attribute competent economic ownership solely to mainstream parties. Conversely, when agendas diverge, voters should also distinguish the parties in assessments of immigration ownership, attributing this to the nationalist party. Three post-election surveys validate these hypotheses.

Finland in 2011 is explored in Chapter 5. In contrast to the Italian case, there are no left and right blocs to vote for as the system is tri-polar, with large left, right, and center parties that coalesce to form a stable government and often do so in over-sized coalitions. This makes competence ownership difficult for voters to discern, but does provide an excellent test for issue salience. As the nationalist party broadens its agenda, voters should pick up on this, and those who find the economy salient should find them no different from other mainstream parties on measures of economic salience. Analysis of this election finds that indeed voters for the nationalist True Finns find the economy as salient as voters for other mainstream parties.4

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4 The argument makes no assumptions regarding the salience of nationalist issues in the eyes of voters. The empirics presented in chapter 5 suggest that not only do voters attribute economic salience to the nationalist party, but also that voters holding nationalist issues with high salience select the nationalist party to represent them.
A conclusion summarizes the main parts of the empirical analyses. On both the macro-level and micro-level, as nationalist parties address more mainstream issues, they attract a vote base more characteristic of mainstream voters. Parties can thus alter the form of representation – niche/partisan or mainstream/mean voter (Ezrow, et al. 2011) – they offer by altering the issues they address. Key to future research and observers of political competition in Western European nations, especially those with a great number of parties represented in parliament, is that nationalist parties do have strategies at their disposal to attract previously mainstream voters. The implications and future research suggested by these findings in areas related to niche-mainstream issue competition and the effect of electoral systems conclude this section.
Chapter 2

The Electoral Effects of a “Normal” Niche Party

This chapter serves to develop the theory that will be tested empirically in subsequent chapters. First, existing models of voting will be reviewed, specifically those related to issue ownership and its connection with party identification and vote choice. Then the literature relating to the electoral effects of a party shifting its issue emphasis will be explored, along with the key finding of previous research – niche parties behave and are effected differently than mainstream parties. Next a more fluid measure of a party's nicheness will be discussed and a theory of electoral competition will be developed around this assumption. Voters are then identified that could be potential new constituents for niche parties behaving in such a manner. Finally, the empirical tests, which could validate this hypothesis are introduced and developed, with the following chapters of this dissertation implementing these designs.

2.1 Valence Issue Voting

In recent years, the explanatory power of sociological based models of voting developed out of cleavage structures (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) have decreased in explanatory power (Dalton, 1996). Increasing international competition through lowering trade barriers, cultural competition from migrants, and political competition between national and supra-national powers can be thought of yet another “critical juncture” further dividing existing partisan loyalties and forcing parties to abandon positions and to reconfigure themselves into multiple dimensions (Kriesi, et al. 2006). These more recent
multidimensional models, like those of Kitschelt and Rehm (2008) suggesting a transformation of the economic and socio-cultural dimensions that developed out of historical and economic developments associated with modernization have been critiqued as having just as strong as prior on simplifying elite competition as previous models (de Vries and Marks 2012). It is difficult to place newer left and right parties within existing cleavages when taking into account their names, transnational linkages, and ideology (Mair and Mudde 1998).

This dealignment and decreasing ideological divide has led to the suggestion that more short-term factors are guiding voters' decisions (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Issue voting has now taken the place of previous cleavage models (Rose and McAllister 1986; Alvarez and Nagler 1995; Alvarez and Nagler 1996; Belanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008). Studies explore to what extent voters take into account the policies of parties on specific issues when deciding which party to vote for and how an individual's issue preferences translate to an eventual vote choice. Evaluations of competence, corruption, and effectiveness of political leaders, parties, and the government (Clark 2009) go far beyond structural cleavages of competition between labor and capital, church and state, or urban and rural divides.

These types of studies all trace their underpinnings to Stokes' (1963) response to Downs' (1957) spatial proximity model of voting. In this latter model, voters and parties are represented by positions in a policy space and voters optimize their utility by selecting the party they perceive to be the closest to their position. Empirical work in trying to quantify such positions in policy space has been problematic. In an attempt to place British parties from 1922 to 1974, Robertson (1976) found that very few pro or con
positions were articulated in 22 policy areas of analysis. Instead, emphasis was on a policy's importance and the party's record on it. Stokes's model argues that not all political conflicts are necessarily *positional* issues. Instead, there are some issues that have *valence* characteristics, which are generally desirable goals including decreased unemployment, honest government, and a clean environment. By this argument, parties all hold similar positions in policy space, they just differ on how to achieve said goals. Budge and Farlie (1983) support this empirically noting that direct confrontations between opposing policy stands are rare.

2.2 Issue Salience & Associative Issue Ownership

Instead, Budge and Farlie suggest that parties selectively emphasize those topics where they have a good reputation and de-emphasize other topics. Parties thus raise the salience on policy issues that they *own* and can gain electoral support by increasing the salience of these issues during a campaign. This salience theory of competition explains party behavior in it's use of manifestos, public statements, political debates, and campaign ads. By raising the salience of owned issues, voters can be primed to think of a specifics party's agenda. Discussing nuclear power during a debate or crime during an advertisement leads voters to focus their attention and judgment on a party's relevant issue agenda. These issues then help voters prioritize among various problems they want politicians to address and decide which parties will address that issue (van der Brug 2004). If crime is a major issue in the media during a campaign, parties that have a reputation for caring the most about crime will become more attractive (Lachat 2014). Indirectly, the emphasis of certain issues also alters how voters perceive the ideological
positions of parties. Britain's New Labour emphasis on crime, a traditionally right-wing topic, in the 1990s led to an ascription of the party being more centrist (Klingemann, et al. 1994; van der Brug 2004). The issues a party emphasizes affects how they are seen by the electorate, and thus has an indirect effect on Down's ideological proximity model.

Empirical testing of these models notes significant results, but with little predictive power on the individual level. While aggregate party support based on salient issue competition is substantial (Budge and Farlie 1983), an individual's salience of an issue and their perceptions on parties salience can explain only about 1% more variance in vote choice than sociological and ideological predictors alone (van der Brug 2004). That said, the emphasis or de-emphasis of issues can result a perceived ideological shift, an effect much more substantial when it comes to electoral support.

Associative issue ownership, however, is not without its own utility. This consequence of party attention to an issue and the identification of parties with issues in the minds of voters does have an independent determinant of voting behavior (Walgrave et al 2012). “The reputation for policy and program interests, produced by a history of attention, initiative, and innovation towards these problems, leads voters to believe that one of the parties … is more sincere and committed to doing something about them (Petrocik 1996, 826). Even the “mere association” of an issue with a party is some indicator of the party's ability to implement superior policies (Petrocik, et al. 2003). Experimental evidence suggests that parties are unable to steal issues from parties deemed associative issue owners, and in fact may be counterproductive by increasing the salience of a non-owned issue. Similarly, parties have little to gain if they are already deemed the associative issue owner with further emphasis on the owned issue (Tresch, et
al. 2015), even though the media is likely to report on a party regarding its owned issue (van der Brug and Breckert 2015). Parties can, over time, become associative owners of issues that have not been a part of it's program through consistent efforts. The Swiss People's Party, for example, has transformed from an agrarian party into the associative owner of immigration in Switzerland (Varone, et al. 2014).

Oftentimes, content analysis of party manifestos is used to assess associative issue ownership via attention to issues (Budge and Farlie 1983). Associative ownership is a connection made regardless of party preference and could serve as a filter on how parties are perceived. If an issue is salient to voters, party-issue associations draw attention to some parties and not to others (Walgrave, et al. 2012). When voter issue salience has been modeled on the individual level as varying depending on the level of party-issue attachment, the explanatory power of models has been shown to increase (Mauerer, et al. 2015). Ascribing associative issue ownership to a party with positions similar to the voter increases the likelihood of voting for that party by up to 5% while having no effect on voters far from an associative issue owners position (Lachat 2014).

2.3 Translating Issue Ownership to Vote Choice

2.3.1 Competence Issue Ownership

The goal of raising the salience of an issue is ultimately for voters to believe that a party is “best able” to deal with certain problems in society (Petrocik 1996). This short-term competence is conceptually different than a long-term attention towards and focus on issues like morality and religion, law and order, or the expansion of welfare (Bellucci 2006). Long-run focus on welfare and unemployment has led to an association with the
left, while conservatives are thought to be more concerned with defense (Hibbs 1977). In this manner, a party's record of associative ownership can eventually lead to this competence issue ownership (Petrocik, et al. 2003).

Yet just as associative ownership can vary over time with selective emphasis of certain issues to increase their salience in party competition (Budge and Farlie 1983), so too can competence ownership. Long-run competence can develop from a party's constituencies and the electoral bases to which parties respond and who they represent (Petrocik 1996). Historically mainstream parties have been found to represent the general electorate, while niche parties focus on their partisans (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow, et al. 2011). However, a more dynamic side to competence issue ownership is more closely attached to a party's reputation for problem solving, the record and performance of the incumbent party, and the competence of specific party leaders or candidates (Petrocik 1996).

Although they likely reinforce one another, there need not be a strict correspondence between long-term and short-term issue ownership. Theoretically, parties can be associated with any problem, and competence can even be expressed on issues outside traditional preferences of parties (Bellucci 2006, 551). From this perspective, competence can be framed as one of Stokes's “valence” issues (Stokes 1963), as parties and leaders that achieve results by effectively dealing with issues and bringing about positive outcomes does not necessarily suggest a specific policy dimension nor direction (Clarke, et al. 2004).

Just as associative ownership had both long-term and short-term determinants, so too does competence issue ownership. Most studies of competence ownership consist of
single election studies, but recently attempts have been made at tracking this over time. Long-run changes in issue ownership have been documented in Canada (Belanger 2003), Britain (Green and Jennings 2012), and Sweden (Martinsson 2009), which substantiate claims that competence ownership is something that can be altered in the eyes of the public. Some believe this effect is exogenous to parties as a sign of the times and parties can reinforce tenuous ownerships via campaign communications (Tresch, et al. 2013). Others suggest that a key function of campaigns is for parties to accentuate their competence or downplay failures (Petrocik 1996) either by re-emphasizing old ownerships or attempting to gain competence via emphasis on new free-floating issues (Klingemann, et al. 1994). Media portrayal of these efforts can affect voter ratings of parties on these issues (Walgrave. et al 2009).

2.3.2 Party Identification

The measure of competence issue ownership is more closely tied to partisanship and vote choice than associative ownership. As an issue becomes more important for a voter, and salient during a campaign, a voter will consider which parties have traditionally be associated with the issue, but then also those that could prospectively competently deal with it. The latter effect is independent from the former, and empirically, competence ownership exerts a greater influence than issue salience priorities, leader evaluation, ideology, and retrospective evaluation of government performance, although the relative impact of these variables varies cross-nationally and temporally⁵ (Bellucci, 2006). Interviews with survey respondents suggest that voters take

⁵ For example in the 2001 elections, holding conservatives to have economic competence depresses Labor support in the UK by 90% while only depressing Italian support for the conservative coalition by
into account associative ownership, party-level salience, and party position when deciding between a “best at” issue handler (Wagner and Zeglovits 2014). Thus, a voter would select a party they believe will handle an issue in a way the voter prefers, perhaps for positional, ideological, directional, historical, and candidate-specific reasons (Rabinowitz and MacDonal 1989; Stokes 1992; Lachat 2014).

Party identifiers are more inclined to name their preferred party as the most competent. Holding constant party identification, a Canadian is 15% more likely to vote for the Liberal party should she find this party to be the most competent on taxation, an effect size that jumps to 31% should she find the taxation issue to be highly salient (Belanger and Meguid 2008). Relatedly, preexisting party preference is tied to how successful parties are at manipulating competence ownership. Extending earlier studies on party identification as a perceptual screen (Campbell, et al. 1960), parties are better able to reinforce their standing on issues when they are liked, while their efforts are in vain when trying to convince voters who have a dislike of the party to begin with (Walgrave, et al. 2014), which is in line with previous work that has found that parties can gain votes by presenting policies that appeal to voters who already support them for non-policy reasons (Adams, et al. 2005).

The differences between competence and associative ownership are stark. Voters are able to distinguish between the importance of issues and the capacity of parties to deliver on issues, with the greatest electoral impact falling on the latter (Bellucci 2006). For example, while the Flemish Greens are clear associative owners of environmental issues, with 95% of respondents indicating an association of that party when presented

50%.
with environmental issues their competence ownership is about half of that, with Liberals and Christian-Democrats also being identified by 30% of voters as the most competent on environmental issues. There is only a .02 correlation between the measures of associative and competence ownership. Associative ownership is correlated with vote choice much at a much lower correlatation of 0.05 as compared to competence's correlation of 0.68; additionally, the later has a direct effect on potential vote choice, while the former is conditional on the issue being salient to a voter (Walgrave, et al. 2012). Furthermore, the correlation between competence and associative issue ownership is likely higher on purer valence issues like the environment than on positional and controversial issues like immigration. On the other hand, in two-party systems correlation is likely to overlap moreso than in multiparty systems, as long-standing associations may be difficult to transfer into competence by being in opposition or lacking appropriate ministerial appointment (Walgrave, et al. 2015).

2.3.3. Varying Ownership Claimants

Once a party is deemed to be a competence issue owner, the distance from a party to voter has negligible impact on affecting the vote choice. That said, the most frequent response to questions of competence issue ownership is “don't know”, indicating competence remains much more contestable than associative ownership (Lachet 2014). Interestingly in this same Swiss study, the effect associative ownership of “foreigners” is negligible while the competence ownership of the variable results in a further policy distance being more predictive of a higher party favorability, suggesting the unique place this issue has in political competition.
Central to a party being able to claim competence or dislodge a previous owner is the use of objective performance indicators. Performance-related issues include the economy, taxes, and employment rates (Petrocik 1996). A party's claims of combating corruption, helping the environment, or protecting civil liberties are more contentious than claims or reducing unemployment, overseeing economic growth, or cutting taxes. While in an era of mass parties serving a “natural” social constituency, ideological concerns could guide policy; in the era of catch-all parties, constituents interests are best served with favorable outcomes (Mair 1997). Such a transition can be found in the aforementioned study of Britain from 1979 to 1997 (Green and Jennings, 2012). This suggests that competence ownership of economic issues are more volatile, free-floating, and sensitive to capture than those without reliable performance metrics (Christensen, et al. 2014).

That said, voters appear not to always utilize these metrics of past party performance in their assessments of issue ownership (Egan 2013). An incumbent party can still hope to gain re-election if it enjoys a reputational advantage from historical or past performance (Belanger and Nadeau 2015). In this manner, good management of the economy is the “valence issue par excellence” in that it is both consistently a top priority of voters in almost every electoral contest and could be a quality that is established after consistency of previous emphases (Snyder and Ting 2002; Schofield and Sened 2005).

Indeed, analysis of competence ownership in Italy and Britain in 2001 on issues of health, immigration, taxation, education, unemployment, judicial issues, public services, criminality, infrastructure, and Europe, finds that only competence on economic issues had an effect on voting for an incumbent or challenger (Belluci, 2006). In an
analysis of 16 issues of competence ownership in Sweden from 1979 through 2010, not only was it rare to find any party having a strong competence ownership on any issue, but also every issue under study switched ownership at least once, with the exception of the Green party strongly and securely owning the environmental dimension (Christensen, et al. 2014). Furthermore it is 26% more likely that there will be a change in ownership on economic issues - an effect that has increased over time – and throughout the period, the two most important issues were employment and the economy. Temporal aspects of economic issue competence ownership are also explored in the Canadian case (Belanger and Nadeau, 2015). Economic competence ownership is found to have an influence across elections, outweighing other measures related to the economic vote, such as retrospective economic evaluations, with an effect size greater by a factor of five.

2.4 Party Policy Shifts and the Static Niche Party Assumption

The following section discusses what is known about how voters react to parties altering their message. Key to this research is the distinction between types of party – mainstream and niche. First the niche party concept will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the consequences of policy shifts. It should be noted that most of these studies a focus on positional shift, as opposed to emphasis shift. Finally, recent advances in relaxing the niche discussion will be discussed. Such a relaxation is necessary to examine if hitherto niche parties are in fact able to gain ownership over mainstream issues.
2.4.1 The Niche Party Families

Parties do not compete and campaign on identical issues (Budge and Farlie 1983). While one party may focus exclusively on the environment, taxation, or social welfare, others may focus on immigration and defense. Parties vary in the emphasis they place on political issues, and in turn, adopt an issue profile that they hope will translate into electoral success. Some parties will form around a distinct, specialized set of issues largely ignored by their competitors, which Meguid (2005, 2008) has defined as “niche” parties.

Meguid (2005) set forth the first definition of a niche party with three criteria: (1) it rejects the standard class-based division of politics, instead focusing on issues largely untouched by party competition; (2) issues raised by a niche party are not only novel, but also they seldom coincide with existing lines of political division, appealing to voters based on issues that cut across standard partisan boundaries; (3) a niche party campaigns on a uniquely narrow set of issues, appearing to most voters as a primarily single-issue party. Meguid formally includes green/ecological, nationalist, and ethno-territorial/regional parties in her definition of niche party. Green/ecological parties are those that focus on environmentalism and sustainability as a general aim (Müller-Rommel 1985; Lowe et al. 2011). Many scholars identify ethno-territorial parties as those who focus chiefly on an ethnic identity or territorial agenda (Müller-Rommel 1998; Brancati 2006). Nationalist parties are concerned about cultural homogeneity and issues of law and order (Mudde 1999).

Not only is Meguid’s (2005, 2008) seminal work important because it identifies the niche party profile, but it also throws light on niche party success and failure. She
identifies circumstances that have a major electoral effect, such as when a mainstream party adopts part of a niche party’s chief issue profile. Moreover, niche parties are not electorally rewarded for targeting the Downsian (1957) median voter (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008). Adams and his coauthors (2006) conclude that niche parties are penalized for moderating their positions because many voters perceive their policy shifts as “selling out” or “pandering” to earn additional votes at the expense of ideological purity. It is the distinctiveness of left-right positions that enable niche party success because their unique party profile enables clear issue differentiation from issues addressed by mainstream counterparts (Kitschelt 1988). Kitschelt (1994) sees this ‘product differentiation’ as a key component in achieving electoral success, increasing perceptions of issue ownership (Petrocik 1996). These parties are much more likely to emphasize extreme positions and issues ignored by their competitors to strengthen the contrast with their opponents, and to carve out of a ‘niche’ that ensures party survival (Wagner 2012a, 2012b).

2.4.2 Consequences of Policy Shifts

Recent developments in voter reactions to party policy shifts has lead to a distinction between niche parties and mainstream parties. The primary differences are on the issues and constituencies of these parties. In general it is found the niche parties and their voters are more attentive towards each other’s shifts in position, specially on the left-right dimensions. There is little evidence that parties and mainstream voters react to or perceive such shifts (Adams, et al. 2011). This literature will be reviewed below. Notably missing from this literature, however, are explorations on the effects of emphasis shifts – the type of research that will be empirically examined in throughout this dissertation.
Parties have been found to shift their policy positions to implicitly attract additional electoral support based on voters' policy preferences (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011), rival party policy shifts (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), past election results (Somer-Topcu 2009), and government or opposition status (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012) in order to attract additional electoral support. Mainstream parties – Social Democratic, Labour, Liberal, Christian Democratic, and Conservative – shift their left-right position in response to the mean voter (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011). In contrast, niche parties – green, communist, and nationalist – shift their positions based on the positions of their supporters (Ezrow et al. 2011). Because their core supporters are more ideologically oriented than mainstream voters, these voters punish niche parties for shifts towards the mean (Adams et al. 2006). Again, these studies measure a shift as an overall left-right movement, not a selective emphasis of niche or mainstream issues.

The early studies of niche parties suggested that while mainstream parties were more free to explore marginal alterations to their agendas without electoral failure, niche parties were beholden to their partisans at the extremes of their party systems and were beholden to their radical activists (Adams et al. 2006, Ezrow et al. 2011; Kluver and Spoon 2014). Mainstream parties alone possessed the agency to weaken their electoral success via strategic incorporation of their unique agendas (Meguid 2008).

Recent advances in niche research have begun to focus on different types of niche parties separately, and focused on issue agendas as opposed to ideology, though agency is still lacking. Niche parties are assumed to be the issue owners given their definedly high salience on alternative dimensions; research questions focus on how mainstream parties react to this challenge (Abou-Chadi 2016), such as engaging with environmental (Spoon
et al 2014), multicultural (Han 2015), and welfare chauvinistic issues (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2014). Spoon (2011) uniquely suggests agency on the behalf of green parties in their ability to maximize votes by altering their green agenda to be close to, but not too close, to their nearest mainstream competitor.

Of the above studies, Meguid and Spoon are alone in considering an agenda shift, as opposed to a positional shift. This distinction is important and should be reiterated. Positional shifts can signal that a party lacks a strong underlying ideology and has an ambiguous character, which has the dual effect on voters discounting their message in identifying their ideology and casting doubt on whether it will carry out its promises once in government (Tomz and van Houweling 2012). Empirical evidence of an electoral loss resulting from a positional shift and induced ambiguity is limited, with evidence suggesting, on the contrary of potential electoral gains to be had (Tomz and van Houweling 2009), and thus incentives remain for parties to not necessarily have clearly identifiable positions (Rovney 2012, 2013).

On the other hand shifts in emphasis might not have a great theoretical cost (Meyer and Wagner 2016). Position shifts could alienate activists and party members as an alternation of party identity (Janda, et al. 1995) that would likely be covered by the media, leading to, in the extreme, an airing of grievances to the public or a party split (Adams, et al. 2004), or, in the least, reduced financial or organizational support. Maintaining positions and simply shifting issue salience is less likely to anger activists, as such, adding new issues and discarding others may be a more strategically attractive policy (Meyer and Wagner 2016). Furthermore, voters might not even notice subtle changes or the addition or removal of issues unless they are broad in scope (Adams, et al.
2011). By simply talking about issues more or less while maintaining a reasonable amount of emphasis on them, a party can subtly alter its perceived position (van der Brug, 2004) without having to contradict any previous statements – if the issue is completely new for a party, it even has leverage of establishing the popular position on the existing issue. Previous findings have suggested that parties that alter their economic/pragmatic saliences gain electoral votes while those that alter their values/principled saliences are punished (Tavits, 2007). This suggests a greater opportunity for non-economic based niche parties to take advantage of such a mechanism.

This dissertation follows from this discussion and argues that just as mainstream parties are pressured to engage in niche issues due to past niche electoral success (Meguid 2008; de Vries and Hobolt 2012; Spoon, et al. 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016), so too can niche parties face electoral incentives to engage with mainstream issues. It goes a step further than suggesting such a pressure to engage with economic issues (Meyer and Wagner 2013) and examines the electoral impacts of such engagement. Discussions of niche parties placing both economic and their niche concerns on their agenda, has thus far been limited (Rovney 2013).

2.4.3 The Niche Continuum

Most of literature hitherto cited utilizes the party family convention in discussing whether a party is niche (Adams, et al. 2006, 2012; Meguid 2008; Ezrow, et al. 2011). The first article in a 2015 special edition of West European Politics on issue ownership continues this tradition (Budge 2015). In looking at how uniquely a party emphases
certain issues, an expected pattern arises. Traditionally mainstream parties uniquely place a high emphasis on economic issues: Social Democrats/Labour, Liberal, and Conservative Parties emphasize welfare state, economic infrastructure, and market issues; Agrarians emphasize agriculture, Ecological parties emphasize environmental protection and peace, Ethno-Regional parties emphasize decentralization and special social groups, and Nationalists emphasize military strength, centralization, and national orientations. Thus, Budge (2015) concludes that niche parties will emphasize their issues without regard to how the electorate will evaluate them, as if they alone, cannot shed historical origins and support groups.

This study, however has two notable failings. First, it fails to look at parties over time in their emphasis. While in the post-war period, these emphases may be true, it cannot be discerned if this emphasis has changed. This leads into the second issue – the study doesn't examine the issues that party emphasize the most, only which they uniquely emphasize. In this manner, if an ethno-regional party is the only one discussing devolution, it will score high, even if that party is addressing welfare and regulatory issues.

A step towards relaxing that assumption is attempted by Meyer and Miller (2013). They create a continuous measure of how uniquely a party addresses twelve issue dimensions. Using this measure, it is found that parties do change their salience strategies from niche to mainstream after electoral defeats in opposition (Meyer and Wagner 2013). Bischof (forthcoming) applies a similar uniqueness metric and adds to it a measure of

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6 Bischof (forthcoming) eliminates economic dimensions in order to better construct the Meguid (2005, 2008) non-economic part of the definition resulting in 5 dimensions: environmental, agrarian, nationalist, Europe, and ethno-regionalist.
how narrows a party's issue appeal is. Such an addendum, in effect, addresses the second critique to Budge (2015) as it captures how much of a party's agenda is focused on its niche issue. Over time, it is found that parties in all party families have become increasingly less niche. That is, parties have been addressing more issues and more of each other's issues\(^7\). Thus, just as parties can adjust their position on issues, empirical evidence suggests that all parties also can alter the issues they deem salient.

2.5 A New Interpretation - A “Normal” Niche Party that can compete on the Economic Dimension

This type of shift in assumptions of niche party dynamics is an attempt to treat these parties as a normal part of political competition. Mainstream engagement with niche issues runs the risk of politicizing the issue to the extent that it could drive voters towards those parties as the owners of a now more salient issue (Meguid 2008; Abou-Chadi 2016). This would suggest an equilibrium on the niche dimension. In order to gain electorally then, niche parties might then be incentivized to engage with mainstream issues (Meyer and Wagner 2013) as a new electoral strategy.

Such a proposition is a novel hypothesis. The primary framing of niche parties has been that of a party competing on its own issues on the extremes of political space (Adams, et al. 2006). Research focused on why these aberrational pathologies appeared and challenged the existing the political system (Hino, 2012). Treating them as actors with agency grants to them the status of a “pathological normalcy” (Mudde 2010), and as normal actors, they too can gain and lose votes through shifting issue agendas and

\(^7\) Chapter 3 will update some of these measures and present both this uniqueness and specialization measure descriptively and use it in analysis of vote changes.
gaining and losing issue ownership. Research has already demonstrated that these peripheral niche parties are not the single-issue champions as construed by scholars, but make electoral appeals on a variety of dimensions of competition with a diversified issue portfolio (Alonso, et al. 2015). Thus, this dissertation will explore the effects of niche parties acting like typical vote-maximizers.

With this frame in mind, this dissertation proceeds to examine issues over which political parties contest elections in the post-war era with a focus on the advanced capitalist industrial economies of the OECD. Post-war political competition has always been structured around multiple dimensions, the primary of which remains and is increasingly economic in nature \(^8\) (Stoll 2010; Bornschier 2010), which has hitherto not been incorporated into niche party research.

Empirically, issue ownership has been shown to be much less stable than originally theorized (Budge and Farlie 1983), especially in multi-party systems (Christensen, et al. 2014). A temporal change of economic issue ownership has already been empirically demonstrated in Canada (Belanger and Nadeau 2015), the United Kingdom, and Italy (Bellucci 2006), where economic competence was found to be the only issue – including immigration, taxation, health, education, the judiciary, public services, criminality, and the European Union – that could both drive voters towards and away from specific vote choices. As opposed to shifts on social issues, voters have also been found, in the aggregate, to react favorably on party shifts on economic ones (Tavits 2007). While the direct effect of altering issue salience is small, increasing emphasis on centrist economic issues, even for parties extreme on alternative dimensions, could

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\(^8\) Stoll (2010) finds that a secondary axis has been present since the 1950s consisting of issues related to foreign-policy, ethnic diversity, and quasi-post-material values of anti-militarism and peace.
indirectly alter voter perceptions of their ideological position towards the median voter, and thus have a substantial impact on election outcomes (van der Brug 2004). The empirical portions of this dissertation examine exactly that. What are the effects of niche parties engaging in mainstream issues in the electoral aggregate and on individual’s issue assessments? Counter to previous understandings of niche parties, the tentative theoretical prediction is for an increase in votes and opinions in economic issue stewardship.

2.6 The Not-So-Radical Right: From Demand to Supply-Side Explanations

The literature suggests a latent demand for niche parties to engage with economic issues, specifically nationalist parties engaging with economic issues. The discussions above have focused on which issues voters often attach to specific parties. Driving assumptions center around parties and voters for mainstream parties ascribing an issue focus on the economic dimension while voters and parties for niche green and nationalist parties focusing more on alternative dimensions of competition. What is lacking in the literature are theories and empirics on when these dimensions interact. As the above literature has suggested greater issue competition on conservative and nationalist issues (Walgrave, et al. 2012; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016; Bischof forthcoming), the focus of the rest of this section will focus on the development of theories and hypotheses that explore that area of political competition.

Voters for the radical right have been found to be primarily distinguished by

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*Chapter 3 empirically tests the contestation of environmental political competition in comparison to nationalist and conservative competition. The results suggest that indeed the electoral effects of issue competition are stronger on the conservative side of the political spectrum.*
extreme positions on a cultural dimension of political competition. This dimension has been characterized by holding authoritarian (Kitschelt 1999) political values and a belief in a national monoculture (Mudde 1999). Party messages cut across class lines (Meguid 2008) and recently voters for these groups have been noted to come not just from previous conservative movements, but also from previous working class center-left voters (Bale, et al. 2010). Ignazzi (2003) and Kitschelt (1997) have suggested that this is a culturally reactionary “silent revolution” of political protest from the “losers of modernization” expressing their discontent with new societal values expressed by left-libertarian ecological movements and increasingly distressful economic conditions brought about by globalization.

An alternative explanation could be that these parties have platforms that sincerely represent the political preferences of their voters. Whereas demand-side explanations such as Ignazzi's and Kitschelt's would suggest increasing electoral success as societal conditions increase the share of the electorate affected by these conditions, a supply-side explanation, such as the one offered here, would suggest that these parties increase their vote share as they offer platforms more in line with a greater share of the electorate.

Should this mechanism be validated, it would suggest first that nationalist parties have shifted their issue agendas over time and that, second, voters have noticed this and responded in kind. This is not to suggest a position shift, as discussed earlier, that is a move that can be costly and alienating towards longtime supporters. Instead, just as mainstream parties can successfully take on the agenda of niche parties (Meguid 2008), a niche party can also take on issues new to it. In this manner, nationalist parties could gain
the electoral support of hitherto mainstream voters. By de-emphasizing their alternative
dimension facets and emphasizing mainstream economic concerns, nationalist parties can
electorally appeal to a broader set of voters.

2.7 Potential New Constituents

The latent demand for this type of message is not simply assumed, but has had
previous precedents in the literature. Three groups in particular that may face conflicting
views on alternative dimensions include employed women, left-authoritarians, and
welfare-chauvinists. Each of these groups have facets that place them center-left
economically but on the right culturally.

2.7.1 Employed Women

In a seminal work, Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) investigate whether the
constellation of different policy preferences between men and women lead to differences
in voting. In nations where women have the greatest structural and cultural opportunities
for independence - due to for example, the availability of jobs and societal acceptability
of divorce - women tend to vote for parties of the left and are in favor of increased public
expenditures. This result conforms with the hypothesized longitudinal shift of gender
roles in society (Giger, 2009), whereby now it is in a women's personal interest to
maintain support for government jobs that favor women and family-oriented expenditures
such as paid leave and public child and elder care. Finseraas, et al. (2012) directly test
these policy orientations in the Norwegian case and find support for a gender gap in
policy preferences on elder-care, child-care, and left voting, although the former two are
not found to drive the third. Such a finding suggests the independence between issues relating to public expenditures and the overall agenda of center-left parties.

Further support for the independence of tax and spend issues from the general ideology of the political left are found in gendered responses to the best use of a financial surplus (Alvarez and McCaffery 2003) - men support reductions in taxation while women request child-care relief – and the gendered difference in levels of salience attached to the tax dimension has impacts on a candidate’s or party’s voter appeal (McCaffery and Alvarez, 1999). Jelen, et al. (1994) go further, suggesting a gendered interpretation of the overall left-right spectrum concluding that women have more liberal policy preferences but tend to view themselves as more conservative. This is attributed to women viewing the left-right spectrum as one of preservation and culture while men view it economically and with an eye towards progressivism. The “ethic of caring” and altruism are assumed by women to be apolitical. Cross-nationally, controlling for employment and religiosity, the ideological self-placement of men and women disappears (Inglehart and Norris 2000) as well as the voting behaviors in specific case studies (Barisone 2013).

Traditional radical right parties often had ultraconservative and anti-feminist messages, which create a tension between traditional female support for conservative politics and these particular entities. Women’s employment circumstances are often less threatened by immigrants; “equal pay, child care, and education, may be more important issues for women than men, thus making them less likely to be attracted to the appeal of radical right parties” (Givens 2004). Cross-national data suggests that while women may be less likely to have a negative attitude toward immigrants, they are no less likely to have nationalistic nor strong law and order preferences, which are often espoused by

What if radical right parties began to address mainstream issues like childcare, eldercare, and education? In recent years, for example, the True Finns have taken on eldercare and the Dutch Party for Freedom has removed confidence from governments over healthcare budget cuts. As of 2010, previous findings of a statistical gender gap against radical right parties only exists in 7 of 12 European nations examined, dropping to 5 after the introduction of attitudinal controls (Immerzeel, et al. 2011). This marks a statistical shift in women voters to the Radical Right, at least in France and Denmark (Givens 2004). They along with Finland, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands show little evidence of a radical right gender gap.

2.7.2 Left-Authoritarians

While not necessarily differing greatly from other European electorates on stances to immigration, countries with a large presence of leftist welfare policies like Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands have less distrust of politicians and political institutions (Ketsila 2006). As such, anti-establishment appeals would hold less sway in the eyes of these voters. Similar opinions on xenophobia and the EU, exist in Sweden (Rydgren 2002), although there, too, is a high salience on the economic dimension of voting. Rydgren (2002) suggests that a party could mobilize recent abstainers in the political process – unemployed and working class – with appeals that don't focus too greatly on anti-democratic ideologies. The potential of a radical right party becoming mainstays of political competition has since been realized with the entry of the Sweden Democrats and the True Finns into parliament and governing coalitions.
In general, the ideology taken by these and other successful parties can be thought to be appealing to left-authoritarians. While there has been talk of a new “cleavage” in European politics between the winners and losers of globalization along a socio-cultural dimension (Inglehart 1977; Kitschelt 1994; Kreisi, et al. 2006), parties have not yet systematically taken up such positions and political competition remains primarily unidimensional with high correlation between left-right positions on economic and cultural issues (van der Brug and van Spanje 2009; Bakker, et al. 2010). On the supply-side, this cultural dimension has been subsumed into the economic dimension, which thus remains the primary dimension of political competition (Stoll, 2010).

However, media (Kreisi, et al. 2006) and voter survey's (Lefkofridi, et al. 2014) suggest greater competition in public's eye. Those on the left-wing of economic issues and right-wing on cultural issues are left unrepresented in most democratic polities and face attitudinal cross-pressures on which dimension to privilege in their voting calculus (Brader, et al. 2013). In a multidimensional analysis of voters and parties in the late 2000s, no European political party fits unequivocally in the left-authoritarian quadrant. These findings are surprising given that at least 20% of voters in most European countries have clear opinions that would place them in such a region based off their views of the role of the state in the economy and their opinions on immigration, respect for authority, and law and order. It is thus concluded that these cross-pressured left-authoritarians must be privileging economic concerns in their voting habits to prefer left-liberal parties over right-authoritarians (Lefkofridi, et al. 2014). In salience terms, 67% of left-

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10 The Danish Social Democratic party was the only borderline case, although also the country with the least amount of survey respondents falling into that quadrant.

11 The countries with less are Austria (13.8%), Denmark (7%), Germany (8.8%), and Sweden (15.9%).

12 It might seem slightly less surprising given that the most populated quadrant is that of right-authoritarians, so if a single dimension were forced, a party would likely choose to place itself there.
authoritarians are concerned about the economy, while 43% are concerned about immigration.

It has been suggested that voters for radical right parties depend on voters granting preeminence to socio-cultural over economic issues (Ivarsflaten 2005; Rydgren 2007) as these issues are more accessible in the minds of these voters and they place greater importance on them. Should socio-cultural salience increase among the population these voters might alter their vote choice (Lefkofridi, et al. 2014). Yet, if authoritarian parties increased their economic salience, as suggested by the hypotheses presented above, they too could place themselves in a better position to capture these voters.

2.7.3 Welfare Chauvinists

On expert surveys, radical right parties are often placed on the far right of not only cultural-authoritarian issues, but also on the economic dimension – a placement that suggests a naivety among experts in their comparisons between traditional right and those with more populist inclinations. While indeed these parties may espouse “welfare populism”, with rhetoric suggesting entrenched civil servants dole out public funds to freeloaders, this ignores their simultaneous “welfare chauvinism” and their strongly egalitarian stances among the native born (de Koster, et al. 2013). Should parties place greater emphasis on their “common man” redistributive agenda, voters on the left side of the spectrum may respond with electoral support. In the past decade and a half, evidence has been accumulating that the former condition has been occurring on both the continent (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2014) and Scandinavia (Jungar and Jupskas 2014) with
nationalist parties transforming their agenda to combine socio-cultural authoritarianism and economic centrism. The electoral consequences of this newer agenda has not yet been empirically tested.

2.7 A Multiparty Caveat

Along with the assumption that voters are weighing issues when it comes to their voting, so too comes the assumption that voters are purposeful and strategic. Classical Downsian theory suggests that the complexity of post-election bargaining dynamics removes the government selection factor to an individual’s vote, and thus elections in multiparty proportional systems would appear more sincere (Downs 1957). This assumption, however, lacks empirical support. Strategic voting, that is, voting for an other than most preferred party, has been found to be more evident than expected, suggesting that the presence of a party representing an ideal point is not a sufficient condition to receive a vote. In fact, voters appear to vote strategically more frequently in multiparty proportional systems, moreso than in countries with norms of single-party governance (Bargsted and Kedar, 2009).

Just as in two-party systems, voters take the likelihood of government participation into account and adjust their vote accordingly. They are aware of sophisticated rules regarding their understanding of electoral thresholds and can form reasonable expectations about which parties will earn seats in parliament and how likely they are to be in government (Gshwend, 2007; Meffert, et al. 2011). When voters believe potential coalition members to be too ideologically incompatible or hold a coalition member in low esteem they might alter their vote away from a preferred party, while a
strong candidate or leader preference of a potential coalition member can lead even those initially not amenable to the coalition parties to support it (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008).

Bargsted and Kedar (2009) find that in Israel’s 2006 elections, for example, expectations of future government coalition weakened the propensity of selecting an ideologically preferred party unlikely to participate in government, even though that party would likely be represented in parliament. On the other hand, coalition-directed voting induces voters to select non-proximal parties in an attempt to make the expected governing coalition more ideologically proximal than a sincere party vote would predict (Powell 2006; Duch, et al. 2010), as policy outcomes are ultimately a factor of the relative seat sizes of coalition members (Schofield and Laver 1985). This substantiates earlier studies of the Israeli 2003 election (Blais, et al. 2006) that found voter views on coalition potential had a decisive independent effect on up to 10% of voters beyond their own views about parties, leaders, ideology, or level of political information.

The restrictive situation in single-member districts varies from patterns in multi-seat districts. Larger district magnitudes lack psychological and mechanical centripetal forces (Cox 1997) and are much more amenable to the electoral success of smaller and niche parties (Ezrow 2010). Restrictive plurality systems dissuade voters from casting votes on marginal issues whereas parties with narrow appeal can succeed in these more proportional systems (Riker 1982). Voters assess both overall ideological proximity and alternative issue considerations in weighing their coalition preferences (Falco-Gimeno 2012).

Much of the literature on issue ownership has been empirically tested on electoral systems with single-member districts where single party governance is the norm
In two-party systems, parties are more likely to compete on the same issues when they think they have a realistic chance of gaining votes or office by doing so. Only when they anticipate winning or losing by large margins do they emphasize their owned issues so as to either enact a mandate of their preferred program in government or buttress a defeat by not betraying core principles (Robertson 1976; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Budge 2015). These findings fall in line with the theoretical underpinnings of salience theory, which is developed from understandings of majoritarian systems and the prevalence of valence politics in the UK and US (Gemesis 2013).

This dynamic, however, would theoretically play out differently in multi-party coalition governments, where margins of victory and defeat are less prescient and a greater number of issue dimensions exist (Lijphart, 1999). Every marginal increase in support makes a party a more desirable coalition partner (Dumont and Back 2006), and proportional systems allow for such representations. Indeed, all of the cases in Western Europe with a nationalist governing coalition member – Austria, Finland, Italy, and the Netherlands, and Norway – and most of those with ecologist governing coalition members – Austria, Belgium, France, Finland, Ireland, Italy, and Sweden – can easily be classified as multi-member district proportional systems.

With little hope of attaining ministerial experience in a state of near perpetual opposition, it would be difficult for a niche party in a two-party system to credibly claim it had competence issue ownership, as there would be little chance it could enact such

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13 For an explanation of the French case, see Spoon (2011).
policies (Walgrave, et al. 2015). As such, it need not concern itself with broad issues agendas. Abandoning a focus on specific issues for a broader catch-all agenda provides a party greater flexibility in negotiations for subsequent government policy and increases their potential for government participation (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014).

While reasonable in two-party systems, should a party in a multi-party system focus on isolated issues, it makes it difficult to be considered an office-seeking coalition partner (de Lange 2009). Similarly, should it be overly extreme, then only proximal parties could reasonably coalesce with it, and thus hold exaggerated power in the post-election bargaining process (Smith 1990; Isakkson, 2005). Thus, while a party may be historically associated with certain issues, it can hope to gain votes by emphasizing a variety of popular issues or taking fresh positions on non-policy or strategic alliances while maintaining a minimal emphasis on its issues. Voters may in fact give parties credit for emphasis on new issues that are pragmatic in nature (Tavits 2007; Budge 2015).

To put all this into the context of this study, once a niche party has established an electoral base, it could emphasize “good” mainstream economic issues without completely abandoning its core agenda. Engaging in these peripheral issues - from its perspective - and core issues – from the mainstream perspective – niche parties create a space for government coalition compromise. With no hope gain power – as is the case in two-party systems – emphasizing their core issues and not betraying their cause remains the best option. Parties in multiparty systems, thus face greater strategic incentives to stress issues similar to future governing coalition partners.
2.9 Testing the “Normal” Niche hypothesis

Should this reinterpretation of niche parties be validated, there are specific expectations that would conform to this theory, and run counter to previous understandings of these parties. Evidence that these parties look like other “normal” parties would be the most telling. Thus, the purpose of empirical tests should be to validate that voters react to niche parties that have engaged with mainstream issues as they would to other mainstream parties – specifically being no less concerned about the economy than voters for mainstream parties. This is not to say, that these voters might not have piqued salience and ownership considerations for non-mainstream issues, just that voters for niche parties that engage with mainstream issues like other parties should be indistinguishable on mainstream dimensions.

Cross-nationally we should expect to see a difference between niche parties that shift their emphasis to mainstream issues and those that do not. The former should see an aggregate vote increase. While they certainly remain committed to their core issues, emphasizing a diverse set of issues allows parties to gain the support of those hitherto not confident in the governing ability of niche parties on the primary economic dimension. Given that government effectiveness is central to the argument, such strategies should only be found to be advantageous in systems with numerous parliamentary parties vying for government inclusion. These expectations can best be tested via a cross-national time-series analysis of countries representing a variety of party systems and examining the electoral impact of niche parties shifting their issue profiles. Chapter 3 of this dissertation does just that.

An underlying mechanism of the above is that niche parties that address
mainstream issues should also begin to have voters believe them to be more economically competent. An ideal case would be if such a party did indeed become part of a governing coalition. If such a niche party did gain economic competence comparable to mainstream parties, then the mechanisms described above are indeed a plausible incentive for niche parties to engage in a diverse set of issues. Italy in the 2000s provides an excellent case to test such mechanisms. The ethno-regionalist/nationalist Lega Nord entered into governing coalition with the mainstream center-right. Voter surveys should clarify if voters of the Lega Nord and it's mainstream allies were any different when it comes to economic confidence. While one should expect the Lega to be distinctive on immigration issues, if it is indistinct on economic issues, this suggests that niche parties can gain mainstream reputations in the eyes of the citizenry. Chapter 4 explores the Italian case in the three elections of the 2000s.

Taking this back a step further is the assumption that voters for niche parties that have engaged with mainstream issues do indeed have those same issue concerns. Thus they should be both concerned about the niche issue, as well as the economy. It is only then that a niche party could even hope to gain economic associative or competence ownership. An ideal test would be a multi-party country with little ideological contamination tying a voter to a specific set of parties or issues. Finland fits this ideal quite well. It's party system includes 8 parties represented in parliament. Its pattern of oversized coalitions makes isolating competence issue ownership difficult. It's tri-polar history with three large centrist parties has meant that these mainstream parties have had to engage in broad issues, leaving the variety of niche parties to focus on their own issues: beyond the three large parties, the Finnish parliament has representation of an
ecological party, an ethno-regionalist party, a communist party, a nationalist party, and a religious party. In 2011, the nationalist True Finns jumped from becoming the smallest party to the third largest; after 2015, it served in the governing coalition. An explanation in line with the argument above would be that this niche party started addressing a broader set of issues and that its voter base became more diverse as well, both with niche immigration/EU importance, but so too holding economic considerations just as important as other mainstream parties. This is what is to be tested in Chapter 5.
Chapter 3

Issue Mainstreaming and Niche Party Success

3.1 Introduction

A decade ago the literature was rife with projects examining the rise of radical right voting (Givens 2005; Norris 2005; de Lange 2007). This followed a decade's prior research on the rise of green parties (Müller-Rommel 1985). The influence of these parties (Akkerman 2012; Zaslove 2012; Mudde 2013) has now been well documented. What has been less explored is how these party's specific agendas relate to their electoral success. This chapter examines such topic through analyses of issue salience strategies of these and competing parties.

In reviewing the literature on the niche party concept, a key characteristic of these parties is their unique extremism. The extreme profile captures both an extreme positioning on the left-right spectrum yet paradoxically suggests an extreme placement on an alternative dimension. Previous works (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008; Ezrow, et al. 2011; Adams, et al. 2012) have tested niche party effects utilizing an left-right placement while others (Meguid 2005, 2008; Meyer and Miller 2013; Meyer and Wagner 2013; Han 2015) stress emphasis on alternative dimensions. Bridging these literature's are concepts of uniqueness. A refined measure is constructed to capture a party's unique emphasis of an alternative non-economic dimension that is used to explore whether theories developed from these alternative conceptualization carry onto an approach that quantifies issue and uniqueness and specialization.

Two measures are utilized that capture a party's specialization and system-wide
uniqueness of its emphases on an ideologically non-economic issue dimension. “Extreme” parties can be thought as “highly specialized” on one of these dimensions. Ecological parties for example, are highly specialized on the green dimension while nationalist parties can be extreme in their focus on national way-of-life and law and order policies. Similarly, mainstream parties may alter their issue profiles and emphasize these alternatives to economic dimensions, demonstrating an ability to increase their non-economic specialization and decrease the unique offerings of niche parties. Previous work on issue competition is used to hypothesize that green parties can no longer gain votes through specialization strategies, while nationalist parties can successfully engage in issue competition with the mainstream right. An analysis of 43 years of elections in 23 countries validates these predictions with results that open the door for future research on the micro-dynamics of issue competition on the right, a highly relevant topic given the increase in salience of immigration and law and order issues.

3.2 Literature Review and Hypotheses

3.2.1 The Niche Party Profile

Parties strategically select the issues addressed in their campaigns as a base matter of political competition (Budge and Farlie 1983). While one party may focus exclusively on the environment, taxation, or social welfare, others may focus on immigration and foreign relations. Thus, parties vary in the emphasis they place on political issues, and in

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14 The radical left, such as Syriza and Podemos, have recently been receiving high levels of electoral support. Since 1990 in West and Eastern Europe, past electoral success, unemployment, euroskepticism, anti-globalization sentiment, electoral thresholds, and competition from radical right and green parties have all had an impact on radical left success (Mudde 2014). At this time, the data on these new groups has not yet been available in a systematic and comparable dataset. Future research should look to incorporate these, as well as agrarian and ethno-regional parties into analyses similar to those presented below.
turn, adopt an issue profile party leaders hope translates into electoral success. Some parties will form around a distinct, specialized set of issues largely ignored by their competitors. The term “niche” parties identifies these (Meguid 2005, 2008; Meyer and Miller 2013; Meyer and Wagner 2013; Han 2015).

Meguid (2005, 2008) set forth the first definition of a niche party with three criteria: (1) it rejects the standard class-based division of politics, instead focusing on issues largely untouched by party competition (2) issues raised by a niche party are not only novel, but also they seldom coincide with existing lines of political division, appealing to voters based on issues that cut across standard partisan boundaries (3) a niche party campaigns on a uniquely narrow set of issues, appearing to most voters as a primarily single-issue party. Meguid formally includes green/ecological, nationalist, and ethno-territorial/regional parties in her definition of niche party. Green/ecological parties are those that focus on environmentalism and sustainability as a general aim (Müller-Rommel 1985; Lowe, et al. 2011). Many scholars identify ethno-territorial parties as those who focus chiefly on an ethnic identity or territorial agenda (Müller-Rommel 1998; Brancati 2006). Nationalist parties are concerned about cultural homogeneity and issues of law and order(Mudde 1999). Indeed, the classification as niche is largely dependent on issue salience and policy differentiation from its competitors.

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15 Some (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow 2010; Ezrow, et al. 2011) also include communist parties in this definition due to their extreme position on the economic dimension suggesting a fundamental transformation of the economic system.

16 This is slightly different from a “single-issue party”, which by definition lacks an electorate with a particular social structure, is supported primarily due to one issue, lacks an ideological programme, and addresses only one all-encompassing issue (Mudde 1999). The measures introduced below capture how many issues a party addresses and the analysis will address the electoral impact of increasing or decreasing the number of issues. While Mudde’s ideal case seemed to be that of nationalists, descriptive statistics show that green and agrarian parties might better fit this designation.
3.2.2 Niche Party Success

Not only is Meguid’s (2005, 2008) seminal work important because it identifies the niche party profile, but it also sheds light on niche party success and failure. She identifies circumstances that have a major electoral effect, such as when a mainstream party adopts part of a niche party’s chief issue profile. Moreover, niche parties are not electorally rewarded for targeting the Downsian (Downs 1957) median voter (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008). Adams and his coauthors (2006) conclude that niche parties are penalized for moderating their positions because many voters perceive their policy shifts as “selling out” or “pandering” to earn additional votes at the expense of ideological purity. It is the distinctiveness of left-right positions that enable niche party success because their unique party profile enables clear issue differentiation from issues addressed by mainstream counterparts (Kitschelt 1988). Kitschelt (1994) sees this ‘product differentiation’ as a key component in achieving electoral success as it increases perceptions of issue ownership (Petrocik 1996). Parties are more likely to emphasize extreme positions and issues ignored by their competitors to strengthen the contrast with their opponents, and to carve out of a ‘niche’ that ensures party survival (Wagner 2012a, 2012b).

As the political climate changes and the public shifts its attention to different issues, serious parties should attempt to make the most potent issues ‘their own’ to achieve the best electoral results (Budge and Farlie 1983). For niche parties, this often means a narrow issue profile to ‘owns’ that part of the campaign; if its narrow issue profile is downplayed, the likelihood of it winning is seriously diminished. Although parties may pursue different goals and have different strategies for implementing their
policies, gaining votes is a key objective for all parties who seek elected office (Strom 1990).

Wagner and Meyer (2013) argue that the strategy of modifying a party’s profile to gain a competitive advantage can occur when parties strategically switch between niche and mainstream status. Specifically, parties may decide to increase their unique issue offerings or broaden their agenda because it may be electorally beneficial. Niche parties are much more likely to emphasize extreme positions because this carves out a unique, specialized issue set that ensures party survival and competitiveness (Wagner 2012b). Voters may support parties that offer policy programs much more extreme than their own because it is expected that these radical parties will pull policy in a given direction in a multiparty context (Kedar 2005). If these extremist niche parties can demonstrate electoral success, then mainstream parties may be dragged toward their positions to acquire proximal voters (Han 2015). On the other hand, parties that offer too unique an issue offering may benefit from addressing more mainstream issues should their current agenda prove unpopular (Meyer and Wagner 2013). Previous literature would thus suggest the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a (Mainstream Strategy Hypothesis)
Mainstream parties will benefit electorally by addressing issues that are being emphasized by niche parties.

Hypothesis 1b (Niche Strategy Hypothesis)
In comparison to their mainstream counterparts, niche parties are penalized
electorally for emphasizing mainstream policy positions. The most extreme niche parties, however, can moderate their emphases for electoral gain.

3.2.3 The Competitive Issue Market

Meguid (2005) considers niche parties to be mainly characterized by emphasis on a limited number of issues that their mainstream opponents largely ignore. Thus, what distinguishes niche from their mainstream counterparts is the salience of certain issues, not the distinctive positions the parties take. Early on, niche parties were first identified by unique party families and platforms, such as Green, Radical Right/Nationalist, Communist, and ethno-territorial parties (Meguid 2005, 2008; Adams, et al. 2006). The problem with this metric is that the niche status is seen as a rigid dichotomous classification without any middle ground; a party simply is or is not a niche party. As Wagner (2012a) notes, this early method of identifying niche parties ignores the programmatic offer all parties present to perspective voters because the “niche” classification is binary. This method fails to capture how much competitor parties address niche issues and subsequent electoral impacts.

While shifting issues and ideology may theoretically cast doubt on whether a party will carry out its promises once in government (Tomz and Van Houweling 2012). Empirical evidence of an electoral loss resulting from a positional shift and induced ambiguity is limited, with evidence suggesting, on the contrary of potential electoral gains to be had (Tomz and Van Houweling 2009), and thus incentives remain for parties to not necessarily have clearly identifiable positions (Rovny 2012, 2013).

Mainstream parties also address issues associated with the niche concept in efforts
to dismiss, become adversarial towards niche positions, or accommodate and co-opt the issue (Meguid 2005). The data on competition on regional issues appears to be the most muddled. Some argue that it is center-left parties that take on regionally decentralizing issues (Mazzoleni 2009). Expanding analysis cross-nationally over a longer time period, the Mazzoleni parties appear to be uniquely placed. The economic right and socially liberal are found to be the most likely to compete on the regional dimension, even in the presence of a specialized ethno-regionalist party (Toubeau and Wagner 2015).

Competition on the green dimension is more clear-cut. As green parties are the archetypical “associative issue owners” (Walgrave, et al. 2012) and are generally located on the left side of the ideological spectrum. They pose a larger threat to center-left parties (Meguid 2008), who are then induced to compete more strongly on the ecological dimension than other parties (Spoon, et al. 2014). However, given the associative status, mainstream parties have an incentive to depoliticize ecological issues thereafter, lest they lose further electoral support (Abou-Chadi 2016).

Scholars have determined that nationalist parties acquire votes due to at least three groups of attitudinal positions17 (Ignazi 1992; Billet and De Witte 1995; Mudde 1999; Lubbers and Scheepers 2000): anti-immigrant sentiments, a desire for cultural homogeneity, and authoritarianism. Large mainstream parties face incentives to ignore these issues as they 'attempt to maintain their power by being associated with winning

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17 This is not to suggest that certain classes are more or less likely to support a specific niche party. Socio-cultural professionals and those in service sector positions, for example, are more likely to support left-libertarian/green parties than manual workers. However, niche parties face criticism should their appeals become too class-focused. See Betz and Meret (2013) for a discussion of the reaction to the French National Front and Danish Progress Party in their attempted alignment with the working class. Ideology seems to trump class in analyses of voting for niche parties. Once attitudes towards ethnocentrism are introduced into regression analyses, working class variables predicting National Front voting lose their statistical significance (Gougou and Mayer 2013), as does voting for the Sweden Democrats with the inclusion of authoritarian ideology (Oskarson and Demker 2013).
issues' (Carmines and Stimson 1993, 154) and to 'stay put' (Spoon, et al. 2014, 367), focusing on their historical economic issues out of inertia (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Wagner and Meyer 2014). Thus, when political and societal conditions are met and the established parties are ignoring these key issues, nationalist parties have an increased likelihood for electoral success as “issue entrepreneurs” when engaging with these new issues (De Vries and Hobolt 2012).

However, in contrast to green issues, the issues of immigration and Europskepicism lack clear associative issue ownership of nationalist parties (Walgrave, et al. 2012; Abou-Chadi 2016), and issue competition is still contested. While a full commitment to these issues would risk alienating business and civil society supporters, European liberal, Christian democratic, and conservative parties have genuine ideological and practical concerns for engagement with these dimensions either in the presence of (Han 2015) or even lacking a nationalist competitor (Bale 2008). By maintaining ownership of these dimensions parties of the mainstream right can limit nationalist success (Pardos-Prado 2015), while center-left parties face difficulties embracing these issues, as it undermines the coherence of platforms aimed at promoting the interests of all workers, economic growth facilitated by the entry of skilled labor, and the legitimacy of its own internationalist and humanitarian values (Bale, et al. 2013).

While not denying that mainstream parties have their own set of differences and idiosyncrasies, the discussion above suggests that the competition on nationalist dimensions specifically differs from others. While large established parties may face difficulty engaging with green (Spoon, et al. 2014) and other non-economic dimensions (Meyer and Wagner 2013), they are best poised to engage with nationalist parties on their
issues. First, noting their “catch-all” characteristics (Kirchheimer 1990), large established parties have greater access to resources in activists and donors. Second, they receive greater media attention (Greene 2002; Meguid 2005) thus allowing them time to explain their policy program. Third, their long-time supporters are aware of the variety of issues these parties must address to remain as large as they are. Lastly, indecisive voters lost to encroaching nationalist parties can be recaptured by addressing the key issues that led to their initial abandonment (Vliegenthart, et al. 2011; Tresch, et al. 2015). Smaller and new mainstream parties lack these organizational resources and “historically rooted organization” (Marks and Wilson 2000), and thus may confuse voters by focusing heavily on nationalist issues. Party competition on the left can thus be thought of as having characteristics distinct from the political right.

H2a (Mainstream Issue Ownership Hypothesis): Among established parties, the mainstream-left lacks electoral incentive in focusing on niche issues, while the mainstream-right can gain votes by contesting ownership of niche issues associated with the far right.

H2b (Niche Issue Ownership Hypothesis): Green parties can gain votes via a focus on niche issues while nationalist parties must compete on multiple issue dimensions for the same effect.

3.2.4 Party System Size

Early studies of niche parties noted that electoral success tended to be greater in
less restrictive electoral systems (Ezrow 2010). The mechanical and psychological effects of Duverger's law favor a two-party system in simple-majority, single-ballot systems (Duverger 1954, 217). In multi-seat districts, where multiple parties are able to represent a district, a voter's calculus can incorporate greater complexity and need not focus on the coordination efforts of others onto a single mainstream party. In order to ensure a government closest to a voter's ideological composition, a voter can select a more extreme party knowing her views could be watered down (Kedar 2005) in the post-election government formation process (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008; Duch, et al. 2010; Hobolt and Karp 2010). Voters have also been found to be strategic in deciding to vote for a non-preferred party when such a party might not pass an electoral threshold (Gschwend 2007) or might not be welcomed into a governing coalition (Blais, et al. 2006; Abramson et al. 2009).

The mechanics behind voting in systems with single member districts and those with multimember districts can thus be thought to have differential effects on the number and types of parties that receive votes and representation in that system (Cox 1997; Lijphart 1999; Ezrow 2010). While previous case studies of single-member districts (Green and Hobolt 2008; Meguid 2008; Spoon 2011) suggest an ideal level of differentiation between niche and mainstream parties is needed for niche success, patterns in multi-seat districts, lacking psychological and mechanical centripetal forces (Cox 1997) are much more amenable for the electoral success of smaller and niche parties (Ezrow 2010). Restrictive plurality systems dissuade voters from casting votes on marginal issues whereas parties with narrow appeal can succeed in more proportional systems (Riker 1982). The permissiveness of the electoral system thus makes niche
parties more of a threat to established parties. As such, niche parties in two-party systems may suffer credibility if they incorporate mainstream issues into their platform, whereas in systems with greater numbers of parties, niche parties can better threaten their mainstream competitors by engaging on a varied set of issues. The proportionality of a system has no effect on the extremity of party positioning, as all parties gain when they are closer to the mean voter (Ezrow 2010):

H3 (Party system size hypothesis): A party is better able to threaten others by engaging in issues salient with competitors in larger party systems.

3.3 Data & Operationalization:

Key to the conception of a niche party is a limitation of issue appeals (Meguid 2005) to “a narrow set of issues that other parties pay little attention to” (Meyer and Wagner 2013). Issue salience data is provided by MARPOR (Volkens et al. 2015), which has hand-coded election manifestos by assigning each “quasi-sentence” into one of 56 issue categories. This dataset provides researchers with the most comprehensive time-series measures of party's issue emphasis using a universal coding scheme across time and space.

Two continuous measures are used to capture the “nicheness” of a party's issue offering: specialization and uniqueness\(^{18}\). Both of these operationalizations have recently been introduced to the study of party competition (Bischof forthcoming). Specialization identifies the focus of a party message with the physical concept of entropy – the amount

\(^{18}\) Bischof (forthcoming) calls the later measure nicheness. Naming it “uniqueness” better captures what is being measured by his algorithm. The calculation of specialization is in appendix 3.A.2
of “disorder” in a system: a highly focused issue agenda would lack disorder while a broad set of issues would amount to high levels of disorder. MARPOR issue categories associated with nationalist, European Union, agrarian, ethno-regionalist, and ecological dimensions\(^\text{19}\) are utilized as non-economic niche dimensions. The inversion of this the entropy score is used in order that higher values indicate a more specialized niche issue profile. With this methodology, a party would have a maximum score if it concentrated solely on one niche dimension, a minimum score if it concentrated on all issues equally, and an intermediate score should it focus a mixture of niche and economic dimensions\(^\text{20}\).

The *specialization* measure is calculated from the agenda of just the party of interest. It is independent of what other parties emphasize in their campaigns. Another factor in the niche concept was that these issues are unaddressed by other parties in the system. The *uniqueness* measure is thus used to capture how unique a party's offering is in relations to the others contesting the election. The mean issue emphasis of each dimension in each election is subtracted from a party's individual emphasis and then squared. After taking the average over the five dimensions, a party that is distinctly above the mean on these non-economic issues will have a higher value while focusing on just economic issues would produce a score of zero. To harmonize the measure between countries and elections, the mean score in each election is subtracted from that party's. Thus a party that has more unique issue offerings than its competitors will have a *uniqueness* greater than zero while those that emphasize commonly addressed issues will be less than zero.

\(^{19}\) See Appendix 3.A.1 for Bischof (forthcoming) categorization of MARPOR categories into these issue dimensions

\(^{20}\) By this measure, parties addressing a variety of “cross-cutting” niche issues (Meguid 2005, 347) will be scored lower than a party that just addresses one niche issue dimension as this party lacks a unique issue specialization.
Since perceptions of party issue salience do not completely change from one election to the next, the issue emphasis in election $t$ is the average emphasis of the manifesto at election $t$ and $t-1$ so as to limit the impact of noise in the data and to account for the path-dependent nature of party issue appeals. Additionally, these issue segments were then logged following the suggestions by Lowe, et al. (2011) to better account for the psychological perceptions of party change of voters across time. The dimensions are identical to those used by Bischof (forthcoming) who selected them based off 3 criteria: 1) the issues were initially on the periphery of party systems with mainstream attention only after introduction by a niche party; 2) the issues destabilize entrenched industrial era party-voter alignments; 3) the issues are non-economic in nature.

These measures appealing for four reasons. First, this measure is continuous thus allowing the capture of the effects of a less costly issue salience shift (Meyer and Wagner 2016) beyond the more “risky” party strategy of completely altering a dichotomous party profile from niche to mainstream or vice-versa (Meyer and Wagner 2013). Second, like previous measures, this construct produces low niche specialization value for parties that emphasize mainstream economic issue discussions (Meguid 2005, 2008; Meyer and Wagner 2013), as economic policy is the central debate that structures most party systems. Third, while previous scholars focus on a party's niche segment differentiation, the additional specialization measure better captures a more understudied side to the niche party phenomena – the condensed message offered by a party in light of scarce issue dispersion (Bischof, forthcoming). Finally, alternative continuous measures utilize vote-share as weights (Wagner 2012a; Meyer and Miller 2013), which induces an endogeneity into the analysis with vote share appearing in both the dependent and
independent variables. As the hypotheses model the effects of change, a first difference model is used as the variables represent a change in nicheness from one election to the next.

The extremity hypotheses can thus be tested by lagging the above mentioned nicheness measures and interact it with the first difference of the same measure to observe how a given party’s vote share changes as its issue profile becomes more extreme conditional on it's prior nicheness. This allows for the evaluation a party that already possesses a unique, specialized issue profile that continues to narrow its issue profile between elections. High lagged nicheness scores indicate extreme or unique focus on a non-economic dimension while low lagged nicheness scores conform to parties that have broad and/or primarily economic foci.

The key dependent variable is much more straightforward. *Vote share change* is measured as the difference in the party's parliamentary vote share between the general election of interest, \( t \), and the one immediately preceding it, \( t - 1 \). Positive values indicate a vote gain, while negative a vote loss. This data is obtained directly from the MARPOR data. An *incumbent* dummy is used to indicate if the party was participating in government the year before the election \( t \) from the ParlGov database (Doring and Manow 2015)

Incumbency has been found to be an electoral liability, with incumbents twice as likely to lose votes than opposition (Rose and Mackie 1983; Powell and Whitten 1993) for several reasons beyond policy shifts (McDonald and Budge 2005, chap. 6). Explanation for this vote loss by those in office include demonstrated unreliability in fulfilling past campaign promises (Downs 1957, 104–5), disgruntled hitherto supportive

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21 The dataset was updated by hand using government websites.
interest groups, a perception of abuse of office, and increased media attention and scrutiny (Rose and Mackie 1983).

The commonly used RiLe value from the CMP dataset that measures what percent of a platform is devoted to issues of the left and issues of the right is used to distinguish parties that compete on issues associated with the left or those on the right. The value hypothetically ranges from -100 to +100. Mainstream center-right parties are operationalized as the interquartile maximum excluding nationalist parties - a RiLe value of 9 - and those on the center-left with those of an interquartile minimum excluding green parties of -19.

Following Ezrow (2010) the effective number of parliamentary parties ENPP (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) measures party system size, also calculated from the MARPOR dataset. ENPP is used as a control in the models to account for a greater dispersion of vote loss in systems with multiple parties, whereas a greater concentration of vote share change in two-party systems with one party’s full loss necessarily the other’s full gain. To assess the conditional party system size hypothesis, an interaction

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22. This operationalization best conforms with the conceptualization of competition being primarily between proximal parties. Alternative operationalizations were attempted and minimally alter the findings presented hereafter. These included using the party-family approach with mainstream left being coded as socialist or socialist and communist parties and mainstream right as liberal, christian democrat, and conservative parties. In many systems, especially those with a high number of parties, socialist and liberal parties might not be proximal to ecology and nationalist parties. Other rile based cut points used included using the mean nationalist party median score of 8.2 and ecology median of -14.2. The mean mainstream-right parties have a mean rile score of 8.3 while the mean mainstream left parties have a mean of -17. These values shed light on why altering precise operationalizations had little substantive effect on the statistical outcomes presented below, and further supports the operationalization as capturing the competition between proximal parties that the hypotheses demand.

23. In general, a greater number of parties represented suggests a greater number of channels for political representation, independent of the potential effects that specific electoral institutions may have (Ezrow 2010). In systems with less representation of alternative parties, voting for increased or decreased policy distinctiveness has less of a payoff. For this reason, this measure is superior to the closely related effective number of elective parties.

24. The models have also been run with effective number of elective parties, which correlates at a .96 level in the data, and unsurprisingly does not alter substantive findings. For presentation the effective number of parliamentary parties as the concept is conceptually clearer when thinking of policy influence.
effect between ENPP and the change in nicheness is utilized.

As discussed above, larger parties tend to have an association with winning issues on dominant dimensions (Carmines and Stimson 1993). They might face public displeasure and negative side-effects for advocating new issues (Spoon, et al. 2014), while smaller parties have greater strategic incentive to engage with and manipulate alternative dimensions (Meyer and Wagner 2013). In other words, just as parties may be more or less responsive based off party size (Klüver and Spoon forthcoming), so too might their voters.

The sample consists of all advanced industrial parliamentary democracies contained in the MARPOR dataset with the exclusion of Switzerland, which lacks alternation in government, and includes all elections after 1970\textsuperscript{25}. Because of the construction of the independent variables and the first difference approach, a party needs to be in the dataset for three consecutive elections to be included. For this reason, Malta is dropped from the data as there are only 2 coded elections in the dataset. This leaves us with 23 countries containing 350 parties in 206 elections, for a total of 1820 party-elections for analysis.

The dataset constitutes a typical cross-section longitudinal dataset. Elections and parties are nested within countries. As noted above, a party’s vote share change is dependent upon other party’s vote share changes in a given election. Because of the non-independent nature of the dependent variable, errors are clustered on the election date in the linear regression models. The first difference approach to the dependent variable

\textsuperscript{25} The dataset has been criticized for untrustworthiness especially before 1970 (Pennings 2006; Hansen 2008) and previous work has demonstrated that established and older parties are less susceptible to incentives of altering their issue profile (Meyer and Wagner 2013). The sample of Green and Nationalist parties is also noticeably lacking before the 1970s.
performs the same effect as introducing a lagged dependent variable to control for autocorrelation between vote shares over time (Beck and Katz 1995; Plumper and Troeger 2007). An additional benefit of the first difference approach is that the analysis focuses on change in electoral strength rather than the level of vote share, which better fits with the hypotheses than a measure of levels. Furthermore, the first difference approach, like lagged dependent variable models, incorporates the effects of other party-level independent variables that may impact party success such as strength of partisanship, historical civil society connections, and institutional factors. To the extent that these mostly time-invariant variables matter for the strength of parties, their effects are captured by the first difference approach (Kittel 1999; Plumper, et al. 2005). Since many of the models include the use of interaction and conditional effects, all base terms are included to discern whether a measured effect can be attributed to the conditional relationship or to a constituent term (Brambor, et al. 2006).

26 Models were also run with a lagged dependent variable. The direction of effects discussed later in the analysis section did not change, however some coefficients changed significance. Post-regression analysis of this later model detected the presence of autoregressive terms, as such the models without this lag are presented.
3.4 Descriptive Statistics

Figure 3.1 – Box Plot of Nicheness by Party Family

Figure 3.1 displays the distribution of the key measures of nicheness. These are ordered from lowest to highest of the interquartile range. The specialization measure captures how narrow a party's agenda is. From the displays above, parties associated with the mainstream-right - conservatives, market liberals, and christian democrats - have the broadest agendas, with nationalist parties appearing next. The trend of nationalists being less focused over time was something mentioned by Bischof (forthcoming), and the inclusion here of subsequent years of analysis than those previously examined suggests this trend has not decreased – a trend with electoral effects as analyzed in the next section. In line with the earlier discussion, the parties engaged with competition on the
left rarely cover a variety of new issues – likely just the ecological dimension. Thus we see the interquartile range of the mainstream-left – socialists and communists - and especially ecology and agrarian parties distinctly engaging more heavily with narrow issues. Additionally, the variance in distribution is noticeably greater for mainstream parties, indicating that indeed, as reviewed above, some of these parties face incentives to focus on ethno-regional or agrarian issues.

While the specialization distribution was able to identify how many and what types of issues parties address, the uniqueness distribution informs how many of the parties are addressing niche issues as compared to others in the same election. The two archetypal mainstream parties – social democrats and conservatives – rarely emphasize niche issues more than their competitors. The other parties associated with mainstream economic competition – communists, liberals, and christian-democrats are also scarcely the largest proponent of niche issues within their systems\(^27\). Instead, those parties that are traditionally associated with non-economic dimensions of competition – ethno-regionalists, agrarians, nationalists, and ecology parties – are those that statistically place the greatest emphasis on the niche issues within their own electoral contests. While these results are not surprising, Figure 1 does quantify the discussions of the literature addressed earlier in this chapter: (1) mainstream parties have a broader issue profile in comparison with their niche competitors; (2) niche parties more strongly emphasize new issues dimensions than mainstream competitors; (3) there are a greater number of issues contested on the right than on the left.

\(^27\) These mainstream parties are also those most affiliated with pillarization, best exemplified by the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria. Some have suggested that depillarization opened up a political space for niche parties in Flanders (Coffé 2008) and Austria (Mudde 2014).
Figure 3.2 – Specialization Over Time by Party Family

Figure 3.2 demonstrates the specialization measure over time for each party family. For all the mainstream parties—Social Democrat, Liberal, Christian Democrat, and Conservative—there is a trend of issue broadening as time progresses. The long whiskers on the liberal, conservative, and communist families of Figure 1 thus all fall in the early portion of the dataset. Put differently, as parties become established and gain name recognition, it appears that the vast majorities of them broaden their issue profile and do not focus on a single novel issue, instead focusing increasingly on a wide range of issues, especially economic ones. The broader the agenda of old and new issues, the smaller the specialization score. Conservative and Nationalist parties appear to have complementary curves for their specialization scores over time, suggesting that Nationalist parties become increasingly narrow in their issue offering as Conservative parties become less focused in their issue offerings. The ideological proximity of the Nationalists and Conservatives makes this finding particularly fascinating because they
are targeting similar voting bases.

Figure 3.3 – Uniqueness Over Time by Party Family

Figure 3.3 depicts the uniqueness measure over time for each party family. The green and left issue competition is made clear. Indeed, while for a time Ecological parties might have uniquely placed strong emphasis on green issues, over time that issue dimension has decreased in uniqueness for a single party. A general trend of decreasing uniqueness over time is also apparent for the mainstream parties, indicating that any new issues being addressed are not done so exclusively or extensively by these groups. Finally, turning attention to nationalists, a steady increase in uniqueness can be seen. This is not to say that all individual nationalists parties increasingly and extensively are the sole actors in their party system that address non-economic issues. Combining trends
from Figure 2 and 3 do suggest, however, that overall, nationalist parties over the past 30 years, have both broadened their issue profile, while having a stronger claim and emphasis over the non-economic issues they contest.

Figure 3.4 – Vote Share Over Time by Party Family

Figure 3.4 displays the percentage vote received for each party family from 1970 to 2014. In general, mainstream social democratic, conservative, Christian Democratic, and liberal parties are larger than the other parties traditionally focused on non-economic dimensions. There has been a steady rise in the popularity of ecologist, ethno-regional, and nationalist parties with their non-economic focus over the past 43 years. As noted earlier, the nationalist rise seems to have reached an apex around a decade ago. Excluding Christian Democratic Parties, which have seen a recent increase in support over the last decade, mainstream vote share has remained rather constant for the last forty years.

Comparing Figure 3.2 with Figure 3.4 shows two corresponding trends pertaining
to nationalist and mainstream right parties. As nationalist parties began to offer a less specialized issue offering at the turn of the 21st century, their vote share briefly peaked and subsequently declined in tandem with their issue broadening approach. Christian Democrats saw the opposite trend, as an increasingly narrow profile championed in the early 2000s saw a steady increase and subsequent peak in votes share, which is our most recent observation. Conservative parties similarly have turned their electoral fortunes around in the early 2000s.

3.5 Empirical Results

Results will be presented first for the specialization measure then the uniqueness measure. Coefficients can be understood to mean one of two things. Positive effects for the former indicate that a narrowing focus is associated with increases in vote share and a broadening focus is associated with decreases in vote share. Negative effects for the former indicate that a broadening focus is associated with increases in vote share and a narrowing focus is associated with decrease vote share. For the uniqueness measure, positive effects indicate that an issue agenda that becomes more uniquely non-economic is associated with an increase in vote share, while an agenda that becomes more commonplace is associated with a decrease in vote share. Negative uniqueness effects indicate that an issue agenda that becomes more commonplace is associated with an increase in vote share, while an agenda that becomes more uniquely non-economic is associated with a decrease in vote share.
3.5.1 Specialization Results

The first test is the unconditional model: those hypotheses that do not depend on extremity, party characteristics, or party system. As noted in model 1.1 on Table 3.1 no statistical effects are found for altering the focus of a party's agenda. Including in a niche/mainstream differentiation in model 1.2 does not add significance to results. While mainstream parties – social democrat, market liberal, conservative, christian democrat - statistically gain 0.5% greater voteshare between elections than their competitors, this effect is independent of their change in specialization. Thus, broadly speaking, mainstream parties do not gain by increasing their focus on a non-economic issue, which means that hypotheses 1a is unsupported. The control variable of incumbency, however, is in the right direction and statistically significant, indicating a vote decrease of 2-3%, which is consistent with previous literature. Larger parties statistically lose a greater number of votes between elections. This is consistent across models, that suggest a party that has had 10% larger vote share in a previous election lose 0.4% more. This is unsurprising, as larger parties have a larger amount of the electorate to potentially lose.

The next set of hypotheses tested are those related to extremity, in that most extreme niche parties are expected to gain votes through broadening their agenda in hypothesis 1b. Model 1.3 present results unconditional of party family, while models 1.4-1.7 bring in the party family hypothesis. No effects are found independent of party family or ideology. The party family hypotheses in regards to nationalist parties appears to be supported – that is extremely issue focused nationalist parties are unique in their ability to increase their vote share by broadening their issue appeals. To better understand the implications of interaction effects, marginal effects graphs are produced and examine
under which conditions an effect statistically discernible from zero can be observed (Brambor, et al. 2006). While a regression coefficient for an interaction may be

### Table 3.1 – Conditional and Main Effects of Altering Highly Specialized Agendas on Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>All Parties</th>
<th>Party Type</th>
<th>Extremity Condition</th>
<th>Mainstream Right</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>Mainstream Left</th>
<th>Ecology</th>
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<td>(0.295)</td>
<td>(0.301)</td>
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<td>(0.292)</td>
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<td>Nationalist*specialization (t-1)</td>
<td>-7.949**</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.836)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist*∆-specialization*specialization (t-1)</td>
<td>-35.09***</td>
<td></td>
<td>(5.54)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.379)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left*∆-specialization</td>
<td>-2.061</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2.105)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left*specialization (t-1)</td>
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<td>(0.755)</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(2.204)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.446)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology*∆-specialization</td>
<td>-3.666</td>
<td></td>
<td>(4.66)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecology*specialization (t-1)</td>
<td>1.425*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.825)</td>
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<td>Ecology*∆-specialization*specialization (t-1)</td>
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<td>(5.857)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>1.102***</td>
<td>1.494***</td>
<td>1.430***</td>
<td>1.486***</td>
<td>1.462***</td>
<td>1.517***</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
statistically significant, the marginal effect graph clarifies where on the range of the conditioning variable an effect can be thought of as statistically significant from zero. Figure 3.5 presents these marginal effect plots.

**Figure 3.5 – Marginal Effects of Change in Specialization Conditional on Previous Specialization**

Indeed, the most specialized nationalist parties decrease in vote-share as they further specialize and gain votes if they broaden their issue profile. This effect becomes statistically significant beyond a lagged specialization of approximately 0.3 – the mean specialization for nationalist parties is 0.25. Parties that this applies to include Italy's *Allenza Nationale* before 1994 and the Danish People's Party before 2005. Examining the other parties of both left and right, there is no effect of altering specialization conditional on level of extremeness. Likewise, the marginal effect of altering the narrowness of focus does not have a statistical effect on voteshare for ecology parties as presented in Figure 5.
However referring back to model 1.7, there is a statistically significant relationship between green parties that do present more focused agendas, receiving, in the aggregate, greater vote-shares, which partially validates hypothesis 2b. Unlike nationalist parties, however, this is not a dynamic effect tied to a change in specialization.

Hypotheses 3 regarding the size of the party system are tested in Table 3.2 with the marginal effects calculated in Figures 3.6 and 3.7. Model 2.1 reports opposite effects for mainstream and non-mainstream parties narrowing their agenda as party size increases. Narrowing the non-economic agenda has an increasingly positive effect for mainstream parties (and negative for non-mainstream parties) as system size increases, with the converse effect of broadening an agenda: in larger party systems, non-mainstream parties gain votes as they broaden their issue agenda. However, in plotting the marginal effects in Figure 6, at no point is there a statistically significant marginal effect related to party system size for mainstream party families, while non-mainstream parties do have a statistically significant effect on party systems larger than 5.5 ENPP. Focusing on specific non-mainstream party families, this effect is driven by nationalist parties, with no discernible effect for green parties. As depicted in Figure 3.7, as nationalist parties in systems with a few members of parliamentary parties further specialize, they increase their vote-share. Should they broaden their issue package, they decrease in vote-share. This is in line with previous findings on systems with a low number of parliamentary parties such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and France.28

28 The average ENPP for these countries are 2.1, 2.6, and 2.9, respectively (1970-2013).
Table 3.2 – Conditional Effects of Altering Specialization with Party System Size on Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) Mainstream Party</th>
<th>(2) Mainstream Right</th>
<th>(3) Nationalist</th>
<th>(4) Mainstream Left</th>
<th>(5) Ecology</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>incumbent</td>
<td>-2.164*** (0.299)</td>
<td>-2.143*** (0.3)</td>
<td>-2.111*** (0.294)</td>
<td>-2.131*** (0.297)</td>
<td>-2.143*** (0.298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Size (t-1)</td>
<td>-0.0714*** (0.0113)</td>
<td>-0.0463*** (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.0455*** (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.0449*** (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.0460*** (0.001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENPP</td>
<td>0.221*** (0.0764)</td>
<td>-0.00555 (0.0581)</td>
<td>-0.0849 (0.0558)</td>
<td>-0.109* (0.068)</td>
<td>-0.073 (0.0619)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ-specialization</td>
<td>3.474* (1.97)</td>
<td>-2.097 (1.741)</td>
<td>-2.12 (1.642)</td>
<td>-1.668 (2.111)</td>
<td>-1.054 (1.777)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENPP*Δ-specialization</td>
<td>-0.967** (0.458)</td>
<td>-0.00555 (0.0581)</td>
<td>-0.0849 (0.0558)</td>
<td>-0.109* (0.068)</td>
<td>-0.073 (0.0619)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>3.303*** (0.642)</td>
<td>-0.530*** (0.143)</td>
<td>-0.708** (2.858)</td>
<td>-0.530*** (0.143)</td>
<td>-0.708** (2.858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream*ENPP</td>
<td>0.365 (0.438)</td>
<td>0.571 (0.41)</td>
<td>0.457 (0.511)</td>
<td>0.265 (0.446)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream*Δ-specialization</td>
<td>-0.77 (1.08)</td>
<td>1.377* (0.833)</td>
<td>5.717 (4.542)</td>
<td>-0.282 (0.174)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream Right</td>
<td>1.377* (0.833)</td>
<td>5.717 (4.542)</td>
<td>-0.282 (0.174)</td>
<td>-0.77 (1.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Right*Δ-specialization</td>
<td>26.35*** (7.305)</td>
<td>0.31 (0.319)</td>
<td>-5.421*** (1.292)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Right*ENPP</td>
<td>0.31 (0.319)</td>
<td>-0.836 (0.759)</td>
<td>2.779 (2.899)</td>
<td>0.247 (0.161)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Right<em>Δ-specialization</em>ENPP</td>
<td>-0.934 (0.696)</td>
<td>-1.097 (1.611)</td>
<td>0.142 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.264 (1.326)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>-2.164*** (0.299)</td>
<td>-2.143*** (0.3)</td>
<td>-2.111*** (0.294)</td>
<td>-2.131*** (0.297)</td>
<td>-2.143*** (0.298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist*Δ-specialization</td>
<td>26.35*** (7.305)</td>
<td>0.31 (0.319)</td>
<td>-5.421*** (1.292)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist*ENPP</td>
<td>0.31 (0.319)</td>
<td>-0.836 (0.759)</td>
<td>2.779 (2.899)</td>
<td>0.247 (0.161)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist<em>Δ-specialization</em>ENPP</td>
<td>-0.934 (0.696)</td>
<td>-1.097 (1.611)</td>
<td>0.142 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.264 (1.326)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left</td>
<td>-2.164*** (0.299)</td>
<td>-2.143*** (0.3)</td>
<td>-2.111*** (0.294)</td>
<td>-2.131*** (0.297)</td>
<td>-2.143*** (0.298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left*Δ-specialization</td>
<td>26.35*** (7.305)</td>
<td>0.31 (0.319)</td>
<td>-5.421*** (1.292)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left*ENPP</td>
<td>0.31 (0.319)</td>
<td>-0.836 (0.759)</td>
<td>2.779 (2.899)</td>
<td>0.247 (0.161)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left<em>Δ-specialization</em>ENPP</td>
<td>-0.934 (0.696)</td>
<td>-1.097 (1.611)</td>
<td>0.142 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.264 (1.326)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>-0.076 (0.34)</td>
<td>1.123*** (0.322)</td>
<td>1.470*** (0.328)</td>
<td>1.555*** (0.362)</td>
<td>1.472*** (0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology*Δ-specialization</td>
<td>-1.044 (0.895)</td>
<td>-1.565 (5.656)</td>
<td>0.142 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.264 (1.326)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology*ENPP</td>
<td>0.142 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.264 (1.326)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology<em>Δ-specialization</em>ENPP</td>
<td>0.142 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.264 (1.326)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations 1462 1462 1462 1462 1462
R-squared 0.105 0.09 0.09 0.088 0.086

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
However, this effect becomes ambiguous beyond 3.5 effective parties and has the opposite direction once the effect number of parties is greater than 5, calling into question existing literature in systems with highly fragmented parliaments - such systems include Italy, Israel, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Finland\textsuperscript{29}. The results indicate that a successful party strategy for nationalist parties in nations with a large number of parties would be to increase the emphasis of issues it addresses beyond it's core, whereby a narrowing focus would decrease vote-share. There is no such dynamic among other types of parties.

![Marginal Effects of a Change in Specialization with 95% CI](image)

**Figure 3.6 – Marginal Effects of Change in Specialization Conditional on Party System Size by Party Type**

\textsuperscript{29} The average ENPP for these countries are 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.1, and 5.2, respectively (1970-2013), after green and nationalist parties become mainstays in these parliaments through the 1980s, the average ENPP increases approximately 0.5, placing these nations in regions with statistically significant marginal effects for the timeframe of focus.
3.5.2 Uniqueness Results

The hypotheses are now tested with the key independent variable capturing how unique to a specific party are the salience of non-economic dimensions, that is in relation to the other parties contesting the election. The unconditional models again return no statistical results. As noted in model 3.1-3.2 on Table 5.3, no statistical effects are found for altering the uniqueness of a party's agenda in the aggregate. Similar to the models presented above, while mainstream parties – social democrat, market liberal, conservative, christian democrat - statistically gain 0.5% greater voteshare between elections than their competitors, this effect is independent of their change non-economic offerings. Still, mainstream parties do not gain by increasing their focus on non-economic
issues, which means that hypotheses 1a is unsupported. The control variable of incumbency, however, is in the right direction and statistically significant, indicating a vote decrease of 2-3%, which is consistent with previous literature.

The next set of hypotheses tested are those related to existing uniqueness of party offerings, in that most extreme niche parties are expected to gain votes through addressing more mainstream issues in hypothesis 1b. Model 3.3 present results unconditional of party family, while models 3.4-3.7 bring in the party family hypothesis. No effects are found independent of party family or ideology. From the results presented in section 2.5.2, while highly focused nationalist parties were found to broaden their electoral appeal with a broadening agenda, here it can be observed that should this broadening be relative to other parties, the effect is no longer present. Instead, the party family hypothesis that is supported with the use of the relative measure is that of ecological parties in model 3.7. Figure 5.8 presents these conditional relationships graphically, whereby now it can observed that in systems where ecological issues are contested between multiple parties, a vote loss is suffered by ecological parties after more further uniquely addressing non-economic dimensions. In systems where ecological parties uniquely address their issues, a vote loss is not observed, even achieving electoral gains when they further their unique emphasis of that dimension. This further confirms hypothesis 2b.
Table 3.3 – Conditional and Main Effects of Altering Highly Unique Agendas on Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>All Parties</th>
<th>Party Type</th>
<th>Extremity Condition</th>
<th>Mainstream Right</th>
<th>Nationalists</th>
<th>Mainstream Left</th>
<th>Ecology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>-0.294</td>
<td>-0.302</td>
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<td>-0.298</td>
<td>-0.297</td>
<td>-0.298</td>
<td>-0.301</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party size (t-1)</td>
<td>-0.0447***</td>
<td>-0.0605***</td>
<td>-0.0436***</td>
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<td>-0.0435***</td>
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<td>-0.0441***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-0.00997</td>
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<td>-0.0103</td>
<td>-0.0101</td>
<td>-0.0103</td>
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<td>-0.0103</td>
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<td>ENPP</td>
<td>-0.0999</td>
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<td>-0.067</td>
<td>-0.0723</td>
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<td>-0.0645</td>
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<tr>
<td>Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>0.966</td>
<td>1.131*</td>
<td>0.513</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>1.407*</td>
<td>1.270*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.611</td>
<td>-0.648</td>
<td>-0.622</td>
<td>-0.744</td>
<td>-0.647</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream Party</td>
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<td>(1.900)</td>
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<td>(t-1)</td>
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<td>Δ-uniqueness*uniqueness (t-1)</td>
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<td>Nationalist*Δ-uniqueness</td>
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<td>-1.561</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecology<em>Δ-uniqueness</em>uniqueness (t-1)</td>
<td>-4.664**</td>
<td>-2.206</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>1465</td>
<td>1465</td>
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<td>1465</td>
<td>1465</td>
<td>1465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Hypotheses 3 regarding the size of the party system are tested in Table 3.4 with the marginal effects calculated in Figure 3.9. Model 4.1 reports opposite effects for mainstream and non-mainstream parties having a more unique issue offering as party size increases, a pattern similar to model 2.1. Engaging with non-economic agendas has an increasingly positive effect for mainstream parties (while increasingly negative effects for non-mainstream parties) as system size increases, with the converse effect of addressing issues addressed by other parties: in larger party systems, non-mainstream parties gain votes as they engage with mainstream issues. Focusing on specific non-mainstream party families, this effect is again driven by nationalist parties, with no discernible effect for
green parties. As depicted in Figure 3.9, as nationalist parties in systems with a few members of parliamentary parties become more unique in their issue offering, they increase their vote-share. Should they engage in issues that other parties address, they decrease in vote-share. This is in line with previous findings on systems with a low number of parliamentary parties. While the marginal effects do not reach traditional levels of significance, model 4.3 indicates that these statistical patterns do not hold in systems with a greater number of parties. The results indicate that a nationalist party would be more successful in a system with a greater number of parties, than in a system with a few parties, were it engaged in issues traditionally associated with other parties.

3.6 Discussion

The findings for Green/Ecological parties consistently returned significant electoral effects for altering their party agendas at high levels of specialization and uniqueness. The concept of associative issue ownership introduced earlier provides a possible explanation for this (Walgrave, et al. 2012), as most prospective voters view Ecological parties as single-issue parties concerned with the environment. When they lose such uniqueness, as when an established party incorporates a strong environmental message into its platform, voters could reassess the need to vote for a small party because the mainstream party has absorbed its key issue of differentiation. The conservative platform in Britain in 2006 changed its logo to a tree and added a slogan “Vote Green, Go Blue” to better attract such potential green voters (Spoon 2011, 10). However, as long as Green parties maintain a specialized focus on ecological issues, they serve to gain independent of marginal broadening or narrowing of that agenda.
### Table 3.4 – Conditional Effects of Altering Uniqueness with Party System Size on Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>incumbent</td>
<td>Party Type</td>
<td>Mainstream Right</td>
<td>Nationalists</td>
<td>Mainstream Left</td>
<td>Ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.299)</td>
<td>(0.296)</td>
<td>(0.294)</td>
<td>(0.295)</td>
<td>(0.296)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party size (t-1)</td>
<td>ENPP</td>
<td>Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>ENPP*Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>mainstream*ENPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.0709***</td>
<td>0.228***</td>
<td>3.472*</td>
<td>3.312***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0113)</td>
<td>(0.00982)</td>
<td>(1.812)</td>
<td>(0.657)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>mainstream*ENPP</td>
<td>mainstream*Δ uniqueness</td>
<td>mainstream<em>ENPP</em>Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>Mainstream Right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.324</td>
<td>-0.542***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.829)</td>
<td>(0.147)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>Nationalist*Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>Nationalist*ENPP</td>
<td>Nationalist<em>Δ-uniqueness</em>ENPP</td>
<td>Mainstream Left</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.678</td>
<td>16.14**</td>
<td>0.437</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.567)</td>
<td>(7.673)</td>
<td>(0.323)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>Ecology*Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>Ecology*ENPP</td>
<td>Ecology<em>Δ-uniqueness</em>ENPP</td>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.152</td>
<td>-2.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.867)</td>
<td>(3.939)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Left</td>
<td>Mainstream Left*Δ-uniqueness</td>
<td>Mainstream Left*ENPP</td>
<td>Mainstream Left<em>Δ-uniqueness</em>ENPP</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.644</td>
<td>0.264*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.379)</td>
<td>(0.152)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1465</td>
<td>1465</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.093</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Figure 3.9 – Marginal Effects of Change in Uniqueness Conditional on Party System Size by Party Family

I ideologically, Greens exist on the left end of the political spectrum nearest the Socialist and Communists, with whom they frequently enter into coalitions (Spoon 2011, 67). Joining a coalition would have similar effects in the minds of voters in regards to expanding a legislative the issue agenda, and voters do take into account pre-electoral coalitions when casting their ballot (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008). As such, finding little empirical evidence of any left-wing party narrowing or broadening its issue profile with electoral effects is not unexpected. Ideologically leftist voters will be rather indifferent towards specific party profile specializations because parties on the left already align on a variety of issues including engaging in environmental issues and often prefer to govern with green parties, thereby taking on the green agenda anyway, rather than go into
opposition.

In contrast to the models exploring issue competition on the left, were consistent and often statistically significant results on the right side of the spectrum. Issues affecting nationalist and mainstream right parties are more fluid. As opposed to a history of cooperation in governing coalitions, with the exception of a few cases, nationalists have been often isolated from the reigns of power. Still, they do not lack influence. Indeed, others have found that as nationalist parties gain influence, they pull the agendas of conservative parties to the right (Han 2015). Yet when nationalists agendas lose their specialization, they in fact, appear to do better electorally. On the hypotheses developed earlier above, should parties be viewed as offering similar packages, voters may strategically select the more extreme (Duch, et. al. 2010; Kedar 2005), which gives great incentive to nationalist parties, especially the most extreme ones in multiparty systems, to address a greater variety of issues beyond core mono-cultural ideologies. These dynamic results supplement previous research, which finds that nationalist parties can better attract proximate electorates as economic and cultural dimensions misalign (Pardos-Prado 2015).

Alternatively, this dynamic is demonstrated by the analysis of the mainstream right. These parties have the power to increase or decrease the uniqueness offered by nationalist parties. In two-party systems, if nationalist issues becomes less unique, these parties will lose support, as has been found in previous studies. The findings here not only suggest a greater issue interplay on issues associated with nationalists (Bale 2008; Bale, et al. 2010; Bale, et al. 2013; Pardos-Prado 2015), but also a greater vote exchange between parties engaging with these issues.
Chapter 3 utilizes data from the Comparative Manifestos Project. The DFG-funded MARPOR project continues the work of the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) and the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP). I am grateful for their collection and distribution services free of charge. I also wanted to acknowledge the research assistance of Henry Flatt, the Sandford Lakoff Fellowship, and Professor Jae-Jae Spoon for her early comments on this chapter and the Prestage-Cook Award from the Southern Political Science Association that made such conference attendance possible. In the spirit of great scientists before him, Daniel Bischof provided the code he used to create his variables of niveness that were utilized in this study. I thank you for your belief in this project.
3.A Appendix

3.A.1 Table of Issue Categories (Bischof forthcoming)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party family</th>
<th>Defining criteria</th>
<th>MARPOR codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>main focus on environmentalism</td>
<td>Per501 (Environmental Protection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sustainability as a generalizable aim</td>
<td>Per416 (Anti-Growth Economy: Positive)+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pacifism</td>
<td>Per106 (Peace: Positive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>Per703 (Farmers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>urban versus rural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>regionalism, autonomism or separatism of region of origin</td>
<td>Per301 (Decentralization)+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>focused on issues affecting the region of origin</td>
<td>Per302 (Centralization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Per706 (Non-economic Demographic Groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Right</td>
<td>nationalism: congruence between state and nation</td>
<td>Per601 (National Way of Life: Positive)+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“mono-culturalism”: homogenization of nation and xenophobia</td>
<td>Per602 (National Way of Life: Negative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>belief in law and order</td>
<td>Per607 (Multiculturalism: Positive)+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Per608 (Multiculturalism: Negative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Per605 (Law and Order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurosceptic</td>
<td>opposition to EU</td>
<td>Per406 (Protectionism: Positive)+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>protectionism of own market</td>
<td>Per407 (Protectionism: Negative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Per108 (European Community/Union: Positive)+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Per110 (European Community/Union: Negative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.A.2 Figure for Calculating Specialization (Bischof forthcoming)

\[ SEs = - \sum_{i=1}^{5} x_{ip} \ln(x_{ip}) = - \sum_{i=1}^{5} \ln(x_{ip}) = -\ln \prod_{i=1}^{5} (x_{ip}) = (-1) \ln \prod_{i=1}^{5} (x_{ip}) = \ln \left( \prod_{i=1}^{5} (x_{ip})^{-1} \right) = \ln \left( \frac{1}{\prod_{i=1}^{5} x_{ip}} \right) \]
Chapter 4

A (Minor) League of Their Own: Partisan Sorting of Conservative Italian Voters

The purpose of this chapter is to test competence issue ownership. A case is presented whereby voters selecting a party within a coalition can use niche or mainstream competence issue dimensions in their choice or recognize that niche parties also have concerns for mainstream issues and act on both dimensions in their vote decision. Traditional theory would expect voters for mainstream parties to be motivated by economic conceptions of competence with less concern for niche issues; voters for nationalist parties should be motivated by concerns for immigration and less concerned about economic competence. The Italian case minimizes concerns for post-government formation while still captures dynamics of a multiparty system. The electoral system presents voters with a choice between large coalitions. As such, they need not worry that a vote for a non-mainstream member could result in a defeat for the party representing their preferred mainstream prime minister candidate. The relevant literature will be reviewed, followed by a description of the electoral and party system. Empirical results show that, while indeed traditionally niche voters are still motivated by competence ownership of niche dimensions, they also are no less motivated by economic concerns then voters for mainstream competitors.

4.1 Introduction

The decision criteria that voters use to select their preferred party has been a fundamental question challenging political scientists for over a half-century. Various
explanations have each been able to explain some part of this phenomenon: voters, it has been suggested, vote for a party based on socio-cultural reasons, because they feel particularly close to a party, to attempt to bring policy in a specific direction, or because they deem it the most competent at addressing the issues of the day.

In proportional multiparty government systems, however, current theories do not have the explanatory power of simpler systems. Pessimistically, it has been thought that the complexities involved with post-election government formation were too difficult for voters to accurately digest; as such, voting in proportional systems is considered fundamentally different (Downs 1957).

Recent work, however, has suggested that voters do take account of post-election coalitions in their voting calculus for a preferred party. These studies further suggest that voters go beyond just recognizing the post-election bargaining processes and strategically modify their vote. This study suggests that within coalition contexts, voters can use the same heuristics of ideology and issue-voting used in simpler systems and vote sincerely on their issue or ideological concerns.

This hypothesis is tested in the three Italian elections in the 2000s using a sequential logistic regression model. This context best typifies a coalition situation analogous to the two-party voting literature from which many theories are derived. In these years, Italian voters faced a clear choice between a coalition representing the left and a coalition representing the right. Within the coalitions, parties stressed different issues and advocated distinct ideologies. In this manner, both ideological and issue-based voting could be brought into the coalition context.
The main findings are as follows: (1) voters systematically ascribe an ideology and economic competence to a coalition-at-large; as such, left-right ideology is the strongest predictor of coalition, not party, vote; (2) when there is a stronger link between a vote and government formation, voters sort within coalitions based on niche issues concerns; (3) niche voters, while distinct from the national mean voter on niche issue competencies, are not necessarily be statistically distinct on mainstream issue competence from coalition mainstream parties.

This chapter begins with a review of theories of voting behavior. After findings from voting literature are integrated in the context of coalitions, a series of hypotheses are developed. The Italian case and sequential logistic regression are then introduced along with a description of the dependent and independent variables. Findings from the models are presented followed by a discussion that situates these findings in context of previous theories and the hypotheses of the dissertation.

4.2 Models of Voting Behavior

Downs (1957) provides the canonical explanation for voting — ideology. In short, voters perceive the positions of parties on a left-right continuum dominated by economic issues (Green-Pedersen 2007). A party is then selected based upon “proximal” voting to that individual’s position in policy space, whereby the voter selects the closest party (van der Brug 2004), or “directional” voting, whereby the voter selects the party in her preferred left or right direction (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). An early critique of this model, as advocated by Stokes (1963), argues that voters are motivated by non-

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30 The analysis presented later in this chapter controls for a variety of factors found to be important in Italian elections: party identification, party leader assessment, and socio-demographic controls.
ideological concerns as well: party or candidate character valence and issue competence. These two will be discussed in turn.

4.2.1 Valence Considerations: Party and Leader Characteristics and Issue Ownership

Valence concerns of desirable non-policy-related party and candidate characteristics include honesty and trustworthiness (Stokes 1963). Politicians can employ valence-related tactics during campaigns to shift the focus away from ideological or positional dimensions of evaluation (Clark 2009). Parties that appear more united and leaders that act with integrity have valence advantages. Parties that are affected with decreasing valence are found to subsequently lose vote share in European elections (Clark 2009). Cross-nationally, as parties and their programmatic offerings become more ideologically dispersed, these character-based attributes are found to have a greater impact (Clark and Leiter 2014), and as such, when parties lose said valence, they tend towards ideological moderation (Clark 2014). Alternatively, when political supply is too limited via party policy convergence, voters turn towards valence issues to guide their selection (Green and Hobolt 2008; Hellwig 2012). Likewise when political demand, i.e. the electorate, converges, as in Britain, parties are limited in their available positional strategies, and voters then rely on these non-policy features to direct their vote (Green 2007). Party elite character-based valence effects are also found to impact political support, especially in time periods surrounding elections (Abney et al. 2013).

party and leader favorability are theoretically the most important non-policy-based character-valence concerns in their theory of party competition. Walgrave, et al.'s (2014) experimental findings support this contention by arguing that political information and opinions are mediated through one’s preferred partisan “perceptual screen.” Similarly, leader evaluations have empirically been found to mediate partisan attachments across Europe (Garzia 2013).

The second facet of non-ideological valence concerns are considerations of party competence: how well parties can “handle” the important issues of the day. In their theory of party competition, Budge and Farlie (1983) argue that parties selectively emphasize issues, specifically those for which they believe they can enjoy a reputation of issue-handling competence (Walgrave, et al. 2014). Thus, voters can be modeled as taking into consideration the reputation of a party in its ability to sincerely resolve a problem of concern and deliver on salient issue dimensions (Green and Hobolt 2008). What shapes elections are not, therefore, the long-run problem concerns of voters, but beliefs regarding who can best allay these concerns. While indeed voters may have ideologically preferred solutions to problems, they are also pragmatic and instrumental in seeking out parties to fix these problems (van der Brug 2004; Petrocik 1996). An example of this direct effect of “owning” the agenda occurs when a voter is concerned with crime levels and thereafter finds attractive the party perceived to be credibly toughest on crime (van der Brug 2004). Clarke, et al. (2004) and Bélanger (2003) have found that issue ownership forms the foundation of contemporary British and Canadian politics, respectively. Belluci, et al (2015) have found that issue considerations outweigh leadership character effects in the Italian case.
Ideology, too, can be found to indirectly mediate issues ownership, whereby a voter’s ideological position on an issue can lead her to believe who is best poised to resolve it. This is similar to the directional voting of Rabinowitz & McDonald (1989), and these effects are found to dominate in the Dutch case (van der Brug 2004). While left-right positions may remain stable, the issue agenda of electoral campaigns can alter so as to activate this issue-based voting mechanism (van der Brug 1999).

4.2.2 Voting for Niche Parties

Party-voter issue linkages and ideological shifts affect party behavior and popularity based upon a party’s type (Meguid 2005, 2008; Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow, et al. 2011; Adams, et al. 2012; Abney, et al. 2013). Mainstream conservative, liberal, and labour/social democratic party families are primarily concerned with the economic dimension of competition and have broad catch-all issue agendas. Consequently, they have been found to be electorally rewarded when they follow the left-right shifts of the general electorate. In turn, niche parties, with narrow agendas focused on a salient non-economic dimension, are electorally rewarded when they follow the left-right shifts of their core partisans (Adams, et al. 2006) and when they maintain extreme positions as opposed to embracing moderation (Ezrow 2008).

These ideologically “non-centrist” (Adams, et al. 2006) niche parties traditionally include those of nationalist/radical right, communist, green (Ezrow 2008; Adams, et al. 2012), and ethno-regional (Meguid 2005, 2008) character. Meguid characterizes niche parties as: (a) an extreme party, (b) a party whose primary issue is off the primary left-right dimension and cross-cuts traditional class and partisan boundaries, and (c) a party
that competes on a small number of non-economic issues. Meyer and Miller (2013) reduce this to a minimal definition of a party that emphasizes non-economic (Bischof, forthcoming) policy areas neglected by competitors, consequently noting that the niche definition is context specific; even Christian Democratic parties, for example, can meet this criteria when other parties ignore religiously motivated issues.\footnote{In some countries, notably Belgium, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, Christian Democratic parties serve as the mainstream conservative party, as was the case in Italy pre-1992. In Scandinavia, and Italy post-1992, the party representing Christian Democratic values is smaller and addresses concerns about morality, for example, that do not figure prominently on the agendas of larger parties. Section 4.4 discusses the Italian case and measures of agenda focus that suggest the Christian Democratic party in Italy post-1992 could be considered more niche than its more mainstream catch-all German equivalent.}

The success of niche parties has been found to have both issue-based and Downsian causes. Ezrow (2008) finds that extreme positions lead to increased voter support. Meguid (2005, 2008) argues that their success is greatest when the party’s issue has national salience and a non-proximal party’s adversarial tactics are more successful than the proximal party’s accommodating actions; in the context of issue ownership, this could be rephrased as the niche party having issue ownership on its side of the political spectrum (Spoon, et al. 2014; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016). Similarly, Spoon (2011) concludes that small niche parties do best when they distinguish, but not extremely so, their position on their issue dimension from their nearest mainstream competitor.

Schofield and Sened (2005 also (Schofield 2003)) provide a justification for such findings in that extreme parties are by nature “low valence” and therefore must differentiate themselves from mainstream alternatives. By continually stressing an alternative dimension, Snyder and Ting (2002) argue that the constancy produced by a party's continual emphasis on an alternative dimension could, in fact, provide a sense of
certainty on position. This could lead voters to ascribe competence ownership to a niche party, believing that the party will try to enact its longstanding position (Tomz and Van Houweling 2012), even if she more greatly prefers positions taken by a mainstream party that face greater incentives to alter positions based on the mean voters (Adams, et al. 2006).

These explanations of issue ownership and niche success assume independently acting niche and mainstream parties engaged in political competition. While they do account for diverse strategies employed by mainstream and niche adversaries, they do not take into account the common occurrence of coalition governance in democratic politics. These two literatures have developed independently, and the case presented here seeks to bridge this gap, as distinct ideological positions become more difficult in coalitional contexts, which suggests the usage of alternative vote mechanisms. The next subsection highlights main findings in explaining voter behavior in the context of government coalitions.

### 4.2.3 Voting in Context of Coalitions

Much of the literature on issue ownership has been empirically tested on electoral systems with single-member districts (Bélanger 2003; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008; Bélanger and Nadeau 2015). Arndt (2014) and van der Brug (2004) test issue ownership on Denmark and the Netherlands, respectively, but focus on parties as independent entities. Likewise, Kedar's (2005) multi-country study concludes that voters take into account a watering down of policies during government formation in

---

32 These models also do not take into account a continuum of nicheness presented in Chapter 2.4.3, an understanding of which motivates this dissertation.
proportional systems; however, it too overlooks voters' concerns about potential coalition partners.

Voters, however, have been shown to take government coalitions into account when they vote in proportional systems with pre-electoral coalitions (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008). Classical Downsian theory suggests that the complexity of post-election bargaining dynamics removes the government selection factor from an individual’s vote, and thus elections in multiparty proportional systems would appear more sincere. Strategic voting, that is, voting for an other than most preferred party, has been found to be more evident than expected, suggesting that the presence of a party representing an ideal point is not a sufficient condition to receive a vote. Just as in two-party systems, voters take the likelihood of government participation into account and adjust their vote accordingly. When voters believe potential coalition members to be too ideologically incompatible or hold a coalition member in low esteem they might alter their vote away from a preferred party, on the contrary, a strong candidate or leader preference of a potential coalition member can lead even those initially not amenable to the coalition parties to support it (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008).

Similarly, Bargsted and Kedar (2009) find that in Israel’s 2006 elections, for example, expectations of future government coalition weakened the propensity of selecting an ideologically preferred party unlikely to participate in parliamentary government, even though that party would likely be represented in parliament. On the other hand, coalition-directed voting induces voters to select non-proximal parties in an attempt to make the expected governing coalition more ideologically proximal than a sincere party vote would predict (Duch, et al. 2010). This substantiates earlier studies of
the Israeli 2003 election (Blais, et al. 2006) that found voter views on coalition potential had a decisive independent effect on up to 10% of voters beyond their own views about parties, leaders, ideology, or level of political information. Similarly, some voters feel incentives to vote strategically in Germany to counteract electoral rules that restrict representation to those parties that meet a 5% electoral threshold or are non-competitive in single-member districts (Gschwend 2007) and choose parties other than their most preferred that would potentially join the governing coalition.

While empirically uncontroversial and rationally sound to suggest that future-oriented voters have coalition preferences in mind while voting (Hobolt and Karp 2010), little is known about how voters then select within that potential governing coalition. Understanding this intra-coalition voting serves as the motivation for subsequent analysis. In other words, what drives voters to sort between coalition members, as opposed to sorting in or out of that coalition?

4.3 Hypotheses

When theories on issue ownership and coalition voting are combined, a variety of outcomes could result. As this is one of the first attempts at such an analysis, instead of presenting a single directional hypothesis, a variety of potential outcomes are hereafter presented that will then be tested against recent electoral data. Note that, lacking previous research of this type, no assumptions are made as to whether voters differentiate between coalition members primarily on the basis of ideology, character valence, or issue

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It is also uncontroversial to suggest a difficulty in assigning blame when holding coalitions electorally accountable. Empirically, the coalition leader faces the greatest blame (Fisher and Hobolt 2010; Duch, et al. 2015).
differentiation. Instead, this is left to the data to elucidate. The hypotheses are presented in descending order of the weight the coalition could have in the minds of voters.

*Coalition-as-party hypothesis:* Voters explicitly select a governing coalition, not a single party. As such, voters that better conform with a coalition ideologically or based upon the issues it owns will be more likely to select that coalition. Due to the collective government responsibility ascribed to members of a coalition, “then, substantively, the voters view these parties as being interchangeable, in the sense that the coalition members no longer represent distinct alternatives to the voters” (Adams, et al. 2013).

*Mainstream-niche sorting sub-hypothesis:* Since voters cannot select-out members of a coalition based on ideology or party type, if a coalition contains both centrist and extreme parties then voters ascribe a median ideology to the coalition and ignore ideological difference between the parties; in terms of issue-ownership voting, if a coalition contains both mainstream and niche members, then voters can ascribe issue ownership to the coalition and ignore differences between the parties. In this manner, the mechanics described in section 2.4.3 come to the fore. Joining a coalition signals a joint governing agenda, which can ascribe both mainstream and niche competence to the coalition at large.
**Party-within-coalition hypothesis:** Voters select a party knowing they cannot ignore the eventual post-election coalition. As such, voters will be drawn towards the coalition for either ideological or issue-based concerns and then utilize criteria to decide within that coalition. If these criteria are the same, then a specific party can be viewed as the epitome of that particular aspect of voting, such as the most ideologically extreme on one side of the political spectrum. Voting criteria could also be different for the coalition and party, whereby voters vote for a coalition ideologically and then select a party based on issue-based concerns, or vice versa. This latter version conforms best with the notion that competitors viewed as similar on non-policy grounds — i.e. responsible for policy as members of the same coalition — have an incentive to differentiate themselves in policy space so as to not split the vote of the same group of supporters (Adams 1999).

**Mainstream-niche sorting sub-hypothesis:** If both mainstream and niche parties are present within a coalition, then voters can vote sincerely on their preferred dimension within the coalition without wasting a vote. Thus, voters can sort into coalitions and then use mainstream-niche issue differentiation to distinguish themselves as either finding mainstream economic issues or niche issues like immigration and the environment more or less salient. One can thus expect higher issue effects for these more “polarizing parties” (Mauerer, et al. 2015).
Coalition-ignorance hypothesis: Voters ignore the coalition and vote based on specific party ideology or issue-ownership characteristics. It is the parties, be they centrist or extreme, mainstream or niche, that have specific characteristics that appeal to voters. The most extreme parties will attract the most extreme votes while centrist parties will attract centrist voters. Parties that own mainstream issues will receive votes when voters believe as such, and niche parties will likewise receive votes when voters believe niche issue competence ownership belongs to them with no ascription of ideology or valence to the coalition at large.

4.4 The Italian Case

Italy in the 2000s provides an excellent case to test these hypotheses. As opposed to most multiparty systems that rely on post-election bargaining for parliamentary majorities, the Italian electoral system has been structured to incentivize pre-electoral coalitions. While voters have been shown to vote with potential post-election coalitions in mind, pre-electoral coalitions more directly capture the voting mechanisms this study seeks to explore. With pre-electoral coalitions, voters can select either a niche or mainstream party, knowing that their overall left-right ideological or valence preference will be represented. Pre-electoral coalitions reduce the uncertainty of government formation inherent in post-election coalition bargaining. As such, should this phenomenon exist in countries prone towards coalition governance, such patterns should exist in circumstances with the least ambiguity. As such, the Italian case serves as a crucial test of the hypotheses developed above.
The Italian Second Republic — that is, the party system after 1994 — exemplifies an alternational style of governance with a clearly defined cabinet of either the left or right, which stands in contrast to the pivotal centrist nature of the Christian Democratic hegemony of the post-war Italian First Republic and other proportional systems. Taking advantage of this type of system is ideal when testing joint ideological, issue, and valence effects on voting. Just as previous studies utilized the clarity of choice in single-member districts to discern between ownership and ideological voting, so too can the Italian case provide clarity between two government coalitions in a multiparty context.

While six elections have occurred in Italy since 1994, only three exemplify the clarity of a left-right choice for subsequent governance. The 1994 election had two major coalitions on the left, the 1996 election involved an attempt at a centrist “third pole” gaining over 10% of the vote, and the 2013 election included an independent center coalition – With Monti For Italy – and a special interest outsider – Five-Star Movement – running in addition to the main center-left and center-right blocs. In the elections of 2001, 2006, and 2008, not only were there only two significant pre-electoral coalitions, but also voters concentrated their votes on these blocs, with a joint popularity of over 80%. These three elections will be the subject of this study: Table 4.1 presents the popularity and left-right position of constituent parties as rated by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey experts (Bakker et al. 2012).
Within those three elections, Italy altered its electoral system to further enhance the decisiveness of elections. From 1994 to 2001 Italy utilized a mixed member system (Giannetti and De Giorgi 2006). Three-fourths of both chambers were elected in single-member districts, and the remaining quarter was filled on a second proportional ballot with a 10% coalition threshold. Pre-electoral coalitions were also incentivized in the single-member districts, whereby the coalition would choose a candidate from one of its constituent parties to run under the banner of the whole coalition: in 2001 House of Freedoms was the coalition of the right, while the Olive Tree was the coalition of the left. Cooperation is made quite evident by the fact that while the Lega Nord failed to pass the national 4% threshold for proportional seats, the party earned 30 single-member district seats as fronting the candidate for the House of Freedoms coalition.

A 2005 referendum attempted to increase governability via the decisiveness of elections. In the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house, the coalition with a plurality of nationwide votes, automatically received 55% of the seats to be distributed proportionally within its coalition. Parties within a coalition face a reduced 2% threshold, providing an even stronger incentive for smaller niche parties to link with, or remain linked with a
larger mainstream collective. The persistence of coalitions between 2001 and 2006, even through the elimination of single member districts, demonstrates this coalition incentive remained. Under these rules, a small party could be greatly over-represented by joining a coalition and gaining the majority bonus. In fact, the 2006 election saw all parties join either the center-left Olive Tree coalition or the center-right House of Freedom coalition.

The party system adapted to this change in electoral rules via party and coalition consolidation as visualized in Figure 4.1. In 2001, the center-right House of Freedoms coalition was led by Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia {FI} party. Other members of the coalition included the National Alliance {AN, Allenza Nationale}, representing reformed neofascist elements; the Whiteflower, a joint list of the Christian Democratic Center and the United Christian Democrats {UDC}; and the Northern League {LN, Lega Nord}, a populist radical right party. The Olive Tree {L’Ulivo} coalition consisted of a variety of parties representing left and center-left ideologies: the Democrats of the Left, The Daisy, The Sunflower, and the Party of Italian Communists. Over two dozen other parties contested the election outside the two coalitions, but only one — the Communist Refoundation Party {PRC}— passed the required 4% threshold for representation.

34 By 2001, specifically, it appears that the Lega Nord does fit this position quite well with its voters radicalized on a variety of dimensions (Passarelli 2013).
As previously stated, the 2005 electoral law provided a coalition bonus to the plurality. As such, all parties contesting the election joined either the 12-party House of Freedoms or 13-party Union {Unione}: the latter led by Romano Prodi and his party, the Olive Tree — now a single party formed from the 2001 coalition — joined in coalition by the Communist Refoundation Party and Italy of Values {IdV}, who had both run outside coalitions in 2001. These left-leaning parties were able to benefit from the majority bonus awarded to the Union upon victory, something they could not have benefited from outside a coalition. Although 12 parties joined the House of Freedoms coalition, only the four parties\textsuperscript{35} in the 2001 coalition passed the 2% threshold to gain representation.

By 2008, although five coalitions contested the election, the intra-coalition party system had greatly simplified. The Rainbow Left coalition and Tricolor Flame Right party did not pass the 10% and 4% thresholds required for coalition or sole party

\textsuperscript{35}The Whiteflower joint list became a single party known as the Union of Center and Christian Democrats.
representation. The Union of the Center, former UDC, ran alone and did gain representation with 5% of the vote. However, the main contenders were the center-left coalition, composed of only the Democratic Party and Italy of Values due to party mergers, and Berlusconi’s center-right coalition of the People of Freedom {PdL} Party (merging FI and AN) and the Northern League\textsuperscript{36}.

The issues of contention play a major role in the hypotheses presented above. Fortunately for this study, Italy in the 2000s experienced a remarkable consistency of the primary issues of political contention. In 2008, general economic issues and social policy reform along with immigration of foreign workers were the primary issues concentrated upon by the national parties (OSCE 2008; Wilson 2009). Two years prior, the joint coalition manifestos in 2006 emphasized immigration and fiscal, labor, and economic reform (Giannetti and De Giorgi 2006; OSCE 2006), marking little departure from the importance of fiscal and immigration issues in the 2001 election (Benoit and Laver 2006; Giannetti and De Giorgi 2006).

\textsuperscript{36} The Movement of the Autonomies (MpA) took the place of the Lega in some constituencies, although this earned less than 1% of the national vote.
Figure 4.2 – Niche Measures of Conservative Parties

Figure 4.2 introduces the continuous measures of a party's nicheness as discussed in Chapter 3. The 2000s saw a convergence of the issues offerings of the conservative parties. As compared to the previous election, the Allenza Nationale and the United Christian Democrats can be seen to have decreased their specialized agendas and broadened their messages beyond single niche issues. By the 2006 election, all parties of the House of Freedoms coalition were presenting a similar level of issue focus to the public. A similar pattern can be observed for the uniqueness measure. Before joining the coalition, the Lega Nord, United Christian Democrats, and Allenza Nationale could be seen as addressing issues that were uniquely salient in their agendas. The 2001 through 2008 period saw a notable convergence in issues they were all addressing. As such, not only were the issues addressed in the 2000s common through the decade, but so too were the level of attention conservative parties gave to this issues. Such a convergence of issue

37 Author's own calculation
profiles and constancy of nationally salient issues offers a great opportunity for an analysis of the extent to which conservative voters are making their choice off economic versus non-economic niche considerations.

4.5 Data and Method

Given the aforementioned context, an analysis of vote choice will be conducted on the center-right parties. The Italian left of the second republic has been highly fractionalized. The political supply of parties catering to left voters is quite saturated, and it was not until 2008 with the creation of the Democratic Party that center-left voters had a clearly identifiable, large mainstream party to support. As such, ideological, valence, and issue-based voting mechanisms would be difficult to discern from other party-choice mechanisms.

The center-right, on the other hand, has quite fortunately maintained a comparably stable membership with parties that have clearly identifiable leaders, core supporters, and ideals. Silvio Berlusconi led the coalition though the mainstream conservative Forza Italia/People of Freedom parties. Gianfranco Fini led the former neofascist extremists in the Allenza Nationale. Pier Ferdinando Casini’s Christian Democrat Centrists prioritized Christian values and centrist. Umberto Bossi led the Lega Nord with its milieu of niche concerns, including Northern regional autonomy, with nationalist views on multiculturalism, immigration, and the European Union38. While vote choice among left-leaning voters is no less a worthwhile question, this chapter utilizes the right’s stability in an often chaotic system to provide some constancy for the hypotheses at hand. Thus, the

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38 These broad issues explain why in Figure 2, the Lega Nord does not appear to be highly specialized (graph on the left), while does address a unique set of niche issues (graph on the right).
“time adjustment” voters may need to adjust their mental map of policy space does not induce temporal effects to this analysis (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008).

4.5.1 Method – Sequential Logistic Regression

Given the electoral system, a sequential logistic regression model will be utilized. In the Italian case, unlike other multiparty proportional systems where a vote for a party does not directly translate into a vote for prime minister, coalitions state beforehand who their premier candidate is (Giannetti and De Giorgi 2006). One cannot vote for the Allenza Nationale without also voting for Berlusconi as prime minister. Crucially, ballot structure reinforces this aspect of the system presenting allied lists in proximal locations with coalitions clearly distinguished from others. Previous research has found that Italian voters do base their voting decisions on coalition or leader, moreso than effects associated with individual parties (Bartolini, et al. 2004).

Sequential logistic regression - sequential logit - takes this into account as voters select a party conditional upon its coalition and premier candidate. Sequential logistic regression models assume that one can be “at risk” of passing a “transition” only if one has passed, or “survived,” previous transitions (Fullerton 2009; Buis 2010). To rephrase the above example, a voter can only be “at risk” of voting for the Allenza Nationale once they have passed the “transition” of selecting a party of the Berlusconi-premier coalition over other coalitions or independent parties. Similar results can be attained by running separate logistic regressions on each choice set on the appropriate sub-sample (Mare 1981). The sequential logistic model has the added benefit that it can estimate varying effects of variables across multiple stages (Albert and Chib 2001; Fullerton 2009).
Another benefit of sequential logit as compared to a series of sub-sample logistic regressions is that influences of explanatory variables on the final outcome can be more easily calculated, as the multiple sample procedure produces results that are “too complex’ to be of practical use” (Mare 1981; Buis forthcoming). Thus, sequential logit can go beyond producing coefficients for each transition, that is, inter-coalition choice and intra-coalition choice, to calculate the effect of an explanatory variable through the entire party selection process (Buis forthcoming).

The SEQLOGIT package in STATA (Buis 2013) allows for such decomposition and recombination of a variable’s effect on categorical dependent variables following (Buis forthcoming) suggested coding schema. A discussion of marginal effects associated with each variable in each step and in total thus provides a more insightful discussion than just analyzing a vote for a single party or coalition alone. The choice of sequential logistic regression thus allows for an analysis of both the effect of a variable on each transition, inter-coalition and intra-coalition, and the effect on the final outcome: party choice (Buis forthcoming).

### 4.5.2 Data and Measurement

The dependent variable is party vote choice for the Chamber of Deputies as reported in ITANES post-election surveys. For the 2001 election, the proportional ballot was used as only coalitions, not parties, were options for the district vote. The major parties represented in parliament in the years of interest discussed above are each

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39 When measuring the effects of a variable on a specific party choice, that party is assigned the value 1, while all other outcomes are assigned a value of 0.

40 Data comes from ITANES — the Italian National Elections Studies — post-electoral surveys. These large sample surveys, conducted immediately after parliamentary elections, are available online for free at http://www.itanes.org/en/data.
categorically coded. The sequential logit model first estimates the effect of explanatory variables on the choice of pre-electoral coalition, and then which party within that coalition. For example, in 2008, the center left coalition consisted of the Democratic Party and Italia dei Valori, both coded as 1, while the center-right coalition consisted of the PdL, coded as 2, and Lega Nord, coded as 3. Sequential logistic regression first calculates logit coefficients comparing 1 versus 2/3, then directly compares 2 versus 3. In presentation of results, the inter-coalition coefficients, listed first, have the left coalition as the base, with independent variables coded so as to produce positive values to indicate a greater likelihood to vote for Berlusconi’s right coalitions. Intra-coalition logistic coefficients follow with Berlusconi’s party’s (FI or PdL) as the base, whereby positive values indicate a greater likelihood to vote for a non-Berlusconi party.

While question continuity is notably lacking on ITANES surveys, key questions do reappear that enable an investigation comparing ideological, valence, and issue-ownership explanations. In each of the years of study, respondents were asked to place themselves on the ideological spectrum on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being most left and 10 being most right. These scores were scaled down to vary between -1.4 and 1.4 to better accord with the variance of the issue-based variables described below. In the 2001, 2006, and 2008 ITANES surveys, respondents were asked which coalition would best be able to manage specific problems facing Italy. This ownership variable is standard in election research (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008; Arndt 2014). In all years of interest, immigration — a typical niche issue — and the economy — the

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41 Multinomial logistic coefficients are used in 2001 and 2006 with Forza Italia as the base.
42 Worded as “taxes” in the 2001 survey, which better conforms to the salient economic issue of that election.
stereotypical mainstream issue — were asked. As mentioned earlier, these issues dominated the political debate surrounding the election. Following Arndt's (2014) coding schema\(^{43}\), those that believe the center-right best able to handle the issue were coded with a 1, those responding that the center-left was best able to handle the issue were coded with a -1, and those who believed there was no difference or no solution were coded with a 0. These three key variables capture the two types of non-valence competition — ideological and issue-based — without conflating the two analytically or empirically\(^{44}\).

The inclusion of party closeness\(^{45}\) and leadership evaluations\(^{46}\) not only allows for results comparable to other similar studies, but also these two factors have been found to have an acute importance in the Italian context (Garzia and Viotti 2011). Beyond their utility in ensuring that results are not biased towards coalition considerations, comparing the effect of these variables over time provides insight into the effect of party and leader attachments as the electoral and party system change. The inclusion of these variables thus isolates direct effect of an individual’s ideology and belief of ownership variables (Arndt 2014) from the indirect effect of parties being associated with promoting the issues and interests of their constituents (Petrocik 1996; Walgrave, et al. 2014) and thus

\(^{43}\) ITANES does not ask party-specific ownership questions. Thus, the coding scheme from a similar study analyzing issue ownership in Denmark (Arndt 2014), which also asked ownership questions at the level of coalitions, was implemented.

\(^{44}\) It has been suggested the inclusion of a “salience” variable or a salience-ownership interaction to best test the ownership effect. While ideal, ITANES does not provide a large enough sample size to include the Most Important Issue Questions nor does it contain ordinal measures of salience as common in some other post-election surveys. However, even under these ideal situations, when salience has been utilized in proportional systems, its direct effect has been minimal: “issue priorities have little power to explain individual party preferences” due to their ephemeral nature, whereas indirect salience effects of longer-term left-right placement and party loyalties, as captured in this model, has been found more consequential (van der Brug 2004).

\(^{45}\) Respondents were asked their likelihood of voting for a specific party in the future; a score of 0 signified “not at all” likely while a 10 signified “definitely will.” In the 2001 data, this was asked on a 1–3 scale which was then rescaled to 1–10 to conform with the other years.

\(^{46}\) Respondents were asked to score their positive or negative judgments of party leaders on a 1 (completely negative) to 10 (completely positive) scale.
the causal arrow being reversed (Evans and Andersen 2004).

Standard control variables in Italian electoral studies are also included. Given the anti-clerical nature of some leftist parties as well as the presence of specifically religiously influenced parties on the right, religiosity is included as a 1 to 4 scale of how important religion is to one’s life, ranging from “not important at all” to “very important.” Previous findings on Italian voting behavior (Corbetta and Cavazza 2008) and Berlusconi’s electoral appeal (Barisone 2014) have found that political (dis)interest has had a role in his success along with traditional sociological controls of gender, labor market participation\(^{47}\), age, and education. Each of these variables has been recoded for consistency between survey years.

4.6 Findings

4.6.1 Coalition and Party Choice

The sequential logit\(^ {48} \) models are presented in Table 4.2. The first column in each election year indicates the variables that affected coalition choice. In all three elections, a more conservative ideology and a belief in the right coalition economic issues ownership led voters to select the Berlusconi-led coalition. Immigration ownership only had an independent effect on coalition choice in the 2001 election. Sociological variables have no statistical impact on this choice, with the exception of women not engaged with the labor market tending towards the Berlusconi coalition in 2006 and the politically

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\(^{47}\) Housewives, as suggested by Barisone (2014), are a crucial component to the Berlusconi coalition, and thus an interaction between gender and labor market participation is used to capture this effect.

\(^{48}\) Errors were clustered on the constituency level to account for heterogeneity introduced in the various regions, including electoral coalitions in regional elections and some constituencies having a greater likelihood of a local candidate gaining representation versus a vote only applying to the national percentage.
disinterested tending towards the center-left in 2008.

The opinion of party leaders had minimal impact on the coalition choice except in 2001, where those with a more favorable opinion of Berlusconi were more likely to vote for his coalition. This is in sharp contrast to the party favorability scales. In 2001 and 2008, those with greater favorability of any of the parties of the right coalition led voters to tend towards selecting that coalition. The 2006 election only saw this positive effect for Forza Italia, Berlusconi’s party.

The rest of the columns in each election display coefficients of a variable’s effect on a voter making a choice other than Berlusconi’s party: Forza Italia in 2001 and 2006, PdL in 2008. Positive coefficients in the far right column in 2001 and 2006, for example, indicate variables for which a voter is more likely to vote for the Centrist Christian Democrats than Forza Italia. In 2001, a distaste for Berlusconi, his Forza Italia party and the Lega Nord, and rating the UDC party highly leads one to support UDC over Forza Italia. In 2006, a similar pattern of personal distaste for Berlusconi and his Forza Italia party and a liking of UDC and its leader, Casini, leads voters to select this party.

The second column from the right in the 2001 and 2006 elections display the coefficients that voters use to distinguish the post-neofascist Allenza Natioanle from Forza Italia. In line with UDC voters, Allenza voters have a lower opinion of Berlusconi and his party and a greater favorability of their own party and Gianfranco Fini, their party leader, than FI voters. Unlike the UDC, however, the coefficient for ideology is statistically significant in both 2001 and 2006. Thus, more conservative voters, holding party and leader favorability constant, tended to vote for this extreme party over the mainstream FI.
The remaining column displays coefficients comparing Lega Voters to FI/PdL voters. Only in 2001 are these voters statistically more conservative than Forza Italia voters. What uniquely distinguishes these voters, however, holding constant ideology, is that those who believe that the Berlusconi coalition is best able to deal with the issue of immigration are more likely to select the Lega in 2006 and 2008. In no other election, and for no other party, is an ownership variable a statistically significant predictor. Similar to its coalition partners, Lega voters approve of their party and are displeased with others, although, unlike other coalition partners, those more adversarial towards Berlusconi are no more likely to vote for the Lega than FI. The sociological controls confirm the finding of Barisone (2014) in that women not engaged with the labor market tend towards Berlusconi’s party.

4.6.2 Total Effects

The regression coefficients demonstrate how through three elections, first ideological and then issue-based variables uniquely distinguish the niche Lega Nord voter from mainstream Forza Italia voters. As opposed to just distinguishing between parties, the predicted effect that each variable has on the ultimate choice was post-estimated for each voter. In this manner, the total effect of each variable, as opposed to inter-coalition and intra-coalition decomposition, are able to be explored.
Table 4.2 – Sequential Logistic Regression of Vote Choice in Italian Elections
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<th>2001</th>
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<td>Un v. FI</td>
<td>AN v. FI</td>
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<td>1.44***</td>
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<td>(0.19)</td>
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<td>(0.76)</td>
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Note: Clustered Errors by Region Shown in Parenthesis
p < 0.05; *p < 0.1; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001
Source: IT-FMGES
Figure 4.3 plots the ideological position, van der Brug's (2004) most important determinant of voting behavior, against how much each variable affects the probability of voting for a party allowing for a quadratic fit. This probability is taken over both choice sets, as opposed to the choice between parties elucidated by the regression coefficients themselves. In this manner, the y-value is the overall change in probability for selecting one of these parties.

There are three major things to note regarding the total effect of these key variables. Variables that fall below 0 have a negative impact on a voter choosing that party. We see this most pointedly in how extremely ideologically conservative voters are less likely to vote for Forza Italia in 2001 and 2006 and the Lega Nord in 2008. The concave down fit suggests that as voters become increasingly conservative or extremely leftist, they tend to not vote for either the Lega or Forza Italia. The vertex of the ideological vote also conforms with the regression coefficients; in 2001 and 2006, FI voters were more liberal than other members of their coalition, while in 2008 the vertex shifted rightward, as more conservative voters selected Berlusconi’s PdL.

In examining the relative effects of the variables, the second pattern emerges. Voters believing that the right coalition has mainstream economic issue ownership leads voters to select the mainstream party member when compared to niche immigration issue ownership. The opposite pattern is observed for Lega voters; that is, the effect of immigration ownership almost always leads to a greater probability of choosing the Lega Nord than the effect of economic ownership.

A third pattern involves the incorporation of the ideology variable into this
relative analysis. For Forza Italia, with the exception of the most conservative voters in 2001 and 2006, in comparing a voter with all else equivalent attributes, being more conservative ideologically has a greater effect on the probability of selecting Forza Italia than any issue variable.

These findings are in stark contrast to the overall effects of the variables on the probability of selecting a Lega voter. With the exception of 2001, believing the center-right coalition can better deal with the immigration issue produces a greater probability of voting for the Lega Nord than does a voter possessing a more conservative ideology. In fact, the effects of ideology and economic ownership are statistically negligible in these later elections.
Figure 4.3 - Predicted Total Effects of Issue Ownership Variables
4.7. Discussion

This analysis has focused on determinants of voting for the center-right bloc in Italy through the first decade of the 2000s, specifically interested in ideological versus character valence versus issue-based explanations. Cross-national findings have found that Italians often have the greatest amount of proximity, or sincere, voting (Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Hobolt and Karp 2010) whereby voters select the party they evaluate most positively. This finding, however, appears to be driven by party favorability measures, as opposed to ideological proximity. In each election, those who found a party more favorable were indeed more likely to select that party. With the exception of 2001, controlling for party favorability produced insignificant findings for the effect of ideology. This supports Adams et al.’s (2005) notion that parties promote policies tailored to their supporters, which mediates the effects of sheer ideological position. It can also be noted that parties with voters ideologically indistinct from Forza Italia are those with the greatest party favorability coefficients. Thus, while systems with greater ideological dispersion produce a greater reliability on character-based voting (Clark and Leiter 2014), within systems this data supports the contrary in that voters do in fact use party valence to distinguish parties when ideology fails to do so, extending Green’s (2007) findings in Britain to this multiparty proportional system.

Another contribution beyond previous studies is the effect of disfavorability. Holding constant one’s favorability for the party a voter ultimately selected, as a voter held a less favorable view of Berlusconi’s party, so too was she more inclined to select any alternative party. A similar effect can be found in the favorability of party leaders. The measurement of these variables did not preclude a respondent to score all parties
high or low on this measure; that is, scoring one’s party higher does not automatically reduce the score of other parties or leaders. Thus, the effects presented are not artifacts of measurement strategies. In this manner, the original methodology of this research design demonstrates that while the “hard test” suggestion of favorability of one’s own party does have an impact on vote choice, so too is vote choice a function of the favorability of other parties in the system. Voters sorting within coalitions, face similar character valence “cross-pressures” (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008) independent from ideology as those deciding between coalitions.

Relating back to ideology, which encompasses political beliefs beyond the primary issues salient in the election, Italian voters seem to primarily sort between, not within, coalitions using the heuristic. Thus, after including issue-based, party-based, and leader-based factors in an analysis, van der Brug’s (2004) conclusion that ideological proximity is the most important determinant for voting behavior in multiparty systems may better apply to coalitions (Duch, et al. 2010) than to specific parties.

With the exception of Lega Nord supporters, Italian voters did not attribute issue ownership in statistically different ways. In order to gain electorally from the issue-ownership perspective, parties differentiate themselves on the issues they emphasize and voters subsequently sort (Petrocik 1996) with niche parties specifically needing to differentiate themselves from other mainstream competitors on key issue dimensions (Meguid 2005; Schofield and Sened 2005; Spoon 2007). In the Italian case, voters for various parties of the right coalition did not vary in their ascription of their coalition’s economic issue ownership in any systematic ways. While on the surface this seems reasonable, it does slightly challenge the notion of a niche-mainstream distinction. It has
been argued that niche parties are less concerned with economic issues (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Meyer and Miller 2013; Bischof forthcoming); however, on the level of their voters, this appears to not be the case. While theory suggests that extremist niche voters should downplay economic concerns and focus on the non-economic issues put forth by their parties, Italians and their parties appear to ascribe a “collective responsibility” (Adams, et al. 2013) for the economy to coalitions at large.

4.7.1 Changing Coalition Rules, Changing Coalition Roles

Turning to a temporal assessment of the results, it appears that voters altered the weight of variables in their vote choice as the electoral rules and party issue agendas shifted. Recall in 2001, Italy used a mixed-member majoritarian system with 75% of seats allotted in single-member districts and the remaining 25% of seats proportionally. After 2005, Italy had a proportional system (Taylor, et al. 2014) that granted the largest coalition an automatic governing majority in the chamber. This change in procedure had impacts that the methods employed by this paper can clearly discern.

The change in electoral system resulted in voters transitioning from coalition-as-party voting behaviors to those more conducive to viewing a party-within-coalition. In 2001, voters selected a coalition based on ideological and directional issue-based based voting. This is the only election year and only choice set in which all three of the main variables of interest are statistically significant, a point that should not be taken lightly. This means that holding constant all other variables, voters found a variety of reasons to support this multifaceted coalition: ideological, economic-issue consideration, immigration-issue consideration, party favorability, and personal favorability. Within the
coalition, voters with more extreme ideological and less extreme personal and partisan attachments to Forza Italia sorted to other parties, although not away from the coalition itself.

This viewpoint reflects the electoral rules well. Only 25% of seats were determined by the proportional vote that would be split among the six coalitions passing the threshold. While only three coalitions passed the 4% threshold of representation, the other three received greater than 2% of the vote, which reinforces the notion that this coalition choice is analogous to a party vote in a multiparty election. Thus, Italy in 2001 looks similar to findings of other nations whereby ideology is the strongest predictor of vote choice (van der Brug 2004) both between parties and overall, with the total effects of ideology greater than coalition ownership predictors in 2001 as seen in Figure 4.3.

After the electoral system change, the winning coalition was guaranteed a majority of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In this manner, an Italian vote became directly tied to a vote for a government. It appears that in 2006 and 2008, voters followed suit and acted as if they were voting a party-within-coalition. Ideology and economic stewardship still mattered for the coalition vote, but party leader effects and party favorability, with exception to the coalition leader, no longer played into the coalitional vote choice. In looking at the total effects graphs, the impact of ideology is greatly reduced in relation to the effects of coalition issue ownership on vote choice, as made evident by the strength of effects in Figure 4.3.

With changing issue profiles of the parties, a niche-mainstream sorting becomes more apparent. Referring back to Figure 4.2, in 2001, the Allenza Nationale least addressed niche issues. Voters were seemingly attuned to this and it attracted a more
extreme ideologically conservative vote. After 2006, the Lega Nord distinguished itself from coalition partners in how uniquely it addressed niche issues, and those who believed the right was more capable of dealing with immigration were driven to the Lega Nord. The magnitude of this sorting is made evident both by the coefficients on these variables in Table 2 and the total effects in Figure 3, whereby it is clear that immigration ownership drives the vote of the Lega Nord after 2006.

In toto, when there is no incentive to differentiate between parties within a coalitional system and the parties follow suit in their issue agendas, voters view these parties as being interchangeable (Adams, et al. 2013) and utilize non-ideological factors to differentiate alternatives. When coalitions become affiliated with governance and party issues considerations converge, voters follow suit and do not ascribe different levels of economic competence on members; instead, differentiation is in policy space (Adams 1999), as demonstrated throughout the analyses presented. First, the greater conservative values of the Allenza and the Lega’s niche immigration focus appear as statistically significant regression coefficients in comparing these voters to FI/PdL in Table 4.2. Second, the total marginal effect of immigration ownership is uniquely strong in a voter for the Lega in 2006 and 2008, as presented in Figure 4.3. Third, extreme conservatism leads to a negative impact on the choice to select the mainstream FI/PdL in 2006 in favor of other more extreme coalition members, i.e. the Allenza. On the whole, it appears the assertion that ideology is the most important predictor of party choice in proportional systems (van der Brug 2004) should be slightly revised in the context of coalitions.

Contributing to previous research (Blais, et al. 2006; Gschwend 2007; Hobolt and Karp 2010) on similar topics, the findings presented above suggest that in proportional
systems, ideology is the most important predictor of coalition choice, while party choice can be more accurately predicted by including issue concerns into analysis. Thus, the greater party-voter linkage as suggested by Adams, et al. (2006) and Ezrow, et al. (2011) has foundations beyond those of ideological extremity as previously hypothesized and also include issue-based components, whereby voters for niche parties are more attentive towards the issue agendas that parties present.

Chapter 4 utilizes data provided by ITANES, the Italian National Election Study. I am grateful to Gianluca Passarrelli for our early conversations about the Lega as well as providing access to the data. I also wanted to think Debra Leiter and the entire panel on models of voting behavior at the Midwest Political Science Association, where this paper received earlier feedback. I also wanted to express my gratitude for the generous funding for my research as provided by the Italian Club of San Diego. The social and political findings of this chapter speak strongly to the intent of the fellowship.
Chapter 5

It's the Economy, Suomi: An Issue-Based Analysis of the 2011 Finnish Parliamentary Election

The purpose of this chapter is to test the issue salience portion of the dissertation argument. A case is examined whereby voters are presented with a wide variety of parties that each have a historical issue profile, some mainstream and some niche. Traditional theory would expect that voters finding economic issues salient would vote for mainstream parties and those finding niche issues of greater import would select one of the niche parties. The Finnish case is presented so as to limit concerns of directional ideological voting and issue ownership. With a history of oversized coalitions, coalition-directed voting is limited and a sincere vote can be captured. The effects of issue ownership suggested in previous chapters depend on voters realizing that niche parties can find mainstream issues salient. Voters who find the economy salient should consider niche parties that address economic issues no differently than other mainstream parties. The relevant literature will be reviewed, followed by a description of the electoral and party system. Empirical results show that, while indeed traditionally niche voters are still motivated by niche issues they find salient, they also are no less motivated by economic concerns than voters for mainstream competitors.

5.1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, nationalist parties have achieved unexpected levels of electoral success in virtually every European country. Finland seemed immune to the
appeals such parties (Kestilä 2006). While the supply and demand conditions seemed to be present, not until 2011 do we observe a significant parliamentary presence for a nationalist movement in Finland. Various explanations for such a breakthrough have been posited, including intra-party competition, political scandals, and the Eurozone economic crisis (Arter 2011, 2013; Westinen 2014).

While not ignoring these explanations, this chapter argues for a slightly different interpretation. Instead of taking the high-salience corruption and Euro issues at face value, the salient issues in the eyes of voters will be explored. The electoral success of niche parties has often been the result of accentuating their extreme positions on the left-right dimension and thereby claiming issue ownership over non-economic dimensions (Meguid 2008). In other words, niche parties uniquely do not benefit from being close to the median voter (Ezrow 2008).

This chapter argues the electoral success of the True Finns in the 2011 Finland parliamentary elections is precisely because they were perceived as competent on the mainstream economic dimension of competition. First, literature relating issue salience to vote choice is reviewed. Thereafter, post-election surveys are utilized to demonstrate the concerns of the of the Finnish electorate in 2011 and how the issues a voter finds salient relates to vote choice and support for government participation. A discussion of the True Finns capitalization of nationalistic and economic issues concludes.

5.2 Personal Issue Salience and Electoral Representation

While mainstream parties – christian democratic, liberal, conservative, and social democratic/socialist – succeed by responding to mean voter positions on the primary left-
right dimension, niche parties – ecologist, nationalist, ethno-regional – with their narrower agendas, lose electoral support when they deviate away from the extreme positions of their core partisans (Adams, et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008). Mudde (1999) and Meguid (2005, 2008) argue that niche parties do not present cogent platforms on other dimension beyond their single issue, and are thus unable to credibly compete on the economic dimension. These reasons provide the foundation for why mainstream parties are found to be more “congruent” ideologically with the general electorate while niche parties represent their partisans' ideological and salient issue considerations (Ezrow, et al. 2011) and salient issue considerations (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014).

Yet, given the multidimensionality of policy space in most European nations, parties that are extreme on one dimension may be quite centrist on others. In this manner, should voter evaluations of existing mainstream parties and/or their issue saliencies change, “niche” parties may actually compete for votes with non-proximal parties. Conversely, a mainstream party could become associated with niche issues given consistent campaign effort, such as the Swiss People's Party transforming itself from an agrarian party to one associated with immigration issues (Varone, et al. 2014).

If a party, be it niche or mainstream, can attain an association with an issue, that provides a level of credence in its ability to implement favorable policies (Petrocik, et al. 2003). Parties that attain issue ownership of an issue salient to the voter have a much higher probably of receiving that vote (de Vries 2007; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008; Arndt 2014). A salience-based vote is particularly high for left-authoritarians, who make up around a fifth of the European electorate and are found to base their vote on economic over socio-cultural considerations (Lefkofridi, et al. 2014).
Kestilä (2006) has found such voters present in the Finnish electorate. A party, especially a niche nationalist one, that can achieve greater issue salience-based congruence with this electorate would thus likely be expected to increase its vote share among voters who feel that their personal issue saliences are better represented (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014). The rest of this chapter tests to see if indeed votes for the nationalist True Finns were driven by salience considerations.

5.3 Finland and the 2011 Parliamentary Election

The 2011 True Finns electoral breakthrough serves as a crucial case within the niche party literature. Finland is noted for its multidimensional political space – perhaps even the greatest in Europe, as in empirical studies of dimensionality, Finland exhibits the greatest gain in explanatory power by expanding the issue space from two to three dimensions (Bakker, et al. 2012). Due to the only recent nature of the True Finns's success, Finland is rarely a case of study for those investigating the success of nationalist parties (Arter 2010). A brief overview of the party system aids in grounding the findings presented later. The eight parties represented in the Eduskunta, the Finnish Parliament, are presented below in Table 5.1, along with their historical interests, recent historical electoral outcomes, and most recent change in vote share between the 2007 and 2011 elections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Party Abbrev</th>
<th>Interests Served</th>
<th>Founded</th>
<th>2003 vote share (%)</th>
<th>2007 vote share (%)</th>
<th>2011 vote share (%)</th>
<th>% swing ('07-'11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Coalition</td>
<td>KOK</td>
<td>Rightist socioeconomic values</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Leftest socioeconomic values</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Party</td>
<td>KESK</td>
<td>Rural Interests</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Finns</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Nationalist and Populist Interests</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>+15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Alliance</td>
<td>VAS</td>
<td>Leftist socioeconomic Values</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green League</td>
<td>VIHR</td>
<td>Environmental Protection</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
<td>KD</td>
<td>Traditional Moral Values</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish People's Party</td>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>Swedish-speaking people</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, it should be noted that these underlying issue dimensions fit relatively well to the “frozen” cleavages that Lipset and Rokkan (1967) hypothesize are the foundations.

Sources: (Grönlund and Westinen 2011; Suomen Virallinen Tilasto (SVT) 2011)
of modern political competition, especially with the empirical and theoretical congruence of historical ethnic and more recent post-material conflicts pitting universalism against traditional communal values (Bornschier 2010; Stoll 2010). The Finnish case takes dimensionality to the extreme with a variety of parties representing non-mainstream issues. Not only are numerous alternative dimensions such as linguistic and urban-rural prevalent in Finland, but the more common economic, social, and European dimensions are empirically found to be most distinctive and least correlated among Western European nations (Bakker, et al. 2012).

Second, Finnish voters are quite used to a multiplicity of partisan choices in elections. Again, as compared to other Western European nations, Finland persistently has had a high effective number of parties, higher ideological fragmentation, and lower aggregate electoral volatility than other advanced industrial states (Gallagher, et al. 2011). The same eight parties have contested each election for at least the past twenty years, making the Finnish case crucial for understanding changes to a stable system and the role of issue dimensions in this political shake up.

The oldest parties – Centre Party {KESK}, Social Democratic Party {SDP}, Swedish People's Party {SFP}, and National Coalition {KOK} – have had historical strongholds that have persisted since the beginning of the twentieth century (Paloheimo and Sundberg 2005; Westinen 2014). The emergence of the True Finns {PS} did not disrupt these traditional patterns, as electoral support was quite evenly geographically spread (Westinen 2014). As reproduced from the NSD50, European Election Database, in

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50 "(Some of) the data applied in the analysis in this publication are based on material from the "European Election Database". The data are collected from original sources, prepared and made available by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). NSD are not responsible for the analyses/interpretation of the data presented here".
Figure 5.1, three of these traditional parties – KESK, KOK, and SDP - have vied quite evenly for the position of largest party since the 1980s.

Spatially, the tripolar Finnish system is represented in Figure 5.2, with a pattern that conforms well to the historical popularity of the three largest parties (Karvonen and Paloheimo 2005, 294–296). These surround the center of the political space. For the other parties to survive politically, it could be well reasoned that they are appealing to a stable, smaller unique niche electorate.

The Rural Party, due to issues beyond the scope of the dissertation, lost its electoral following and the True Finns took their place as a successor party (Arter 2012) receiving early support from the defunct party over two decades ago. Now, however, its credentials as a nationalist populist radical right party have been established with their “ethno-pluralist” discourse (Bornschier 2010), ethno-nationalism, anti-elitism (Mudde 2007), anti-immigrant (Arter 2010) and anti- EU positions (Ennser 2012), and
claims of representing the populist-right (Paloheimo 2012) and populist radical right classifications based on analyses of voters and party-level data (Arter 2010; Kestilä 2006). Classifying the True Finns as a member of the “radical right party family” is also reinforced by country and cross-national experts who compile and utilize the Chapel Hill Expert Survey dataset (Bakker, et al. 2012) in the study of comparative policy positions of parties across Europe.

With this foundation, more specific hypotheses to this case can be clarified. A null hypothesis would posit that voters of mainstream parties find the economic dimension salient and ascribe ownership of this dimension to mainstream parties. Niche party voters – with stronger positional linkages (Ezrow, et al. 2011; Adams, et al. 2012) and issue congruence (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014) – should find alternative dimensions (Green, Ethno-Cultural, Nationalist) more salient and ascribe issue ownership to their chosen party.

Should traditional explanations of True Finns success be valid, one can then expect that True Finns supporters are motivated by issues on the nationalist dimension including the aforementioned ethno-cultural issues and the core issue of the populist radical right - immigration (Ivarsflaten 2008; Bale, et al. 2010). As such, True Finns voters should be disproportionately concerned with non-economic issues and less concerned about mainstream economic issues than mainstream party voters.
The alternative hypothesis argued by this dissertation runs counter to this. Instead of limiting its appeal to its unique electorate, the True Finns were able to gain the votes in 2011 from voters ascribing to it issue ownership of the mainstream economic dimension in the same manner that mainstream voters ascribe it to their chosen parties.

5.4 Data and Methods

To test the issue-based hypothesis, a voter's assessment of the importance of various issues is needed. The “Follow-up on Finnish Parliamentary Elections 2011” provides just this type of information. Using GallupChannel Data Collection System, the study focuses on voting behavior, political party and candidate choice, and what kind of influence the media, information sources, election campaigns and advertising have had on people’s voting decisions. Various other questions were included to probe respondent's ideology, reasons for voting, opinions on potential election outcomes, and acceptable

51 Source: (Bakker, et al. 2012)
measures for sustaining the political economy. A total of 1253 respondents from a multistage stratified sample that is representative of the target population - people aged 18-70 living in Finland, excluding the Åland Islands - was collected using the computerized GallupChannel data collection system, which involves installing Internet terminals or Gallup Internet browsers in the homes of the respondents (Moring 2012).

Besides providing a respondent's vote choice, this survey asks “If voted, how important were the following issues when making your voting decision in the parliamentary elections?” It then goes on to list 23 different potential issues including Finnish EU policy, crime prevention, unemployment, regional disparities, government debt and poverty. Respondents had one of five potential choices: 1 - Very important, 2 – Moderately important, 3 – Slightly important, 4 – Not at all important, and 5 – Can't say. This type of question is ideal for determining issue priorities of voters and nearly identical to that used to examine party-voter linkages and issue salience congruence in Germany (Neundorf and Adams forthcoming).

5.5 Issue Saliences – Descriptive Statistics

This section will explore the issues sets in three groups of four characteristic issues displayed on Table 5.2. The first set is clearly identifiable with niche dimensions. The second set involves issues most identified with the nationalist niche subset and international/cultural issues often cited as leading to nationalist victories. The third set of issues will be those associated with the economic dimension. For these examinations, the null hypothesis would be for niche party voters to find the niche issues of greater importance than mainstream parties and for niche party voters to find their specific niche
issues of greater importance. The alternative hypothesis is that the True Finns broke away from the other niche parties by gaining ownership of economic dimensions and thus attracting voters who find the economy to be salient (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). The percentage of voters for that particular party who found the issues to be “very important” to their voting decision is presented. To make it clear how to interpret Table 5.2:

\[ H_0: \text{Niche voters find niche issues more important while mainstream voters find mainstream economic issues more important.} \]

\[ H_1: \text{Same as above with the exception of the True Finns voters who will also find mainstream economic issues as salient as mainstream voters.} \]

Should \( H_1 \) be found to be validated by the data, this would establish that True Finns voters are indistinguishable on mainstream dimensions from mainstream voters – the first step in establishing if these voters have been captured by the True Finns.

The first group of issues presented in Table 5.2 are four non-economic, non-nationalistic potential niche parties issues. Niche voters clearly prioritize some issues over others. Green voters, for example, are more than five times more likely as mainstream, large party voters to find the environment to be a very important and are twice as likely to deem energy/nuclear policy a very important issue than any other party. Similarly, gender equality weighs heavier on the minds of voters of the far-left - with 10% more of VAS voters finding that issue of greater importance than any other party - and those voters often characterized with high post-material values - the Green League. While the True Finns have historical roots in the Rural party, contemporary voters who
are heavily concerned with regional disparities are more likely to support the Centre Party than the True Finns. This finding leads some support to the hypotheses that the True Finns electoral base has indeed become more mainstream. Overall though, the multi-dimensional Finnish system, hitherto established via expert and party data, can be confirmed at the voter level as well.

While on general niche issues, True Finns supporters appear mainstream, on populist/nationalistic issues, they are distinct – holding a greater salience on EU issues, crime prevention, and immigration than any other party. On the immigration issue, they are most distinct, which is in line with most populist radical right parties (Ivarsflaten 2008). Over 50% of True Finns supporters deem this issue very important. The numbers are similar for EU policy, which also falls in line with recent positions taken by populist radical right parties (Ennser 2012). Likewise, law and order issues are usually high on the agenda of this type of party, and again we find True Finns voters to find these issues of greater concern than other parties. In previous campaigns, the True Finns have made appeals regarding the strengthening of the army, but noting here, in this election, True Finns voters are no more likely than mainstream voters to find this issue of import.

On the whole, it should be noted that while popular explanations for the true True Finns success is often attributed to the high salience of the European Debt Crisis in the 2011 election - this position is not held by a plurality Finnish voters. On the whole, less than 20% found EU policy to be of great salience. From the above tables, it appears that even Energy Policy was deemed of greater import to Finnish voters than the EU issue.
Table 5.2 – % of Party Supporters Finding an Issue “Very Important” to Vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Niche Issue</th>
<th>KOK</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>KESK</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>VAS</th>
<th>VIHR</th>
<th>SFP</th>
<th>KD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment &amp; Climate Change</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Nuclear Power</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Disparity</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security and Defense Policy</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Policy</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Prevention</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Issue</td>
<td>KOK</td>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>KESK</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>VAS</td>
<td>VIHR</td>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>KD</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security &amp; Healthcare</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>32.5</td>
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<td>Pensions</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income Disparity</td>
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<td>48.2</td>
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<td>35.6</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
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<td>Business Subsidies</td>
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<td>Elder Care</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>40.3</td>
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<td>42.1</td>
<td>21.3</td>
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<td>31.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Security</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party), PS (True Finns), VAS (Left Alliance), VIHR (Green League), SFP (Swedish People’s Party), KD (Christian Democrats)
It has hitherto been claimed that True Finns voters appear to hold both niche-level saliences of nationalist/populist issues and non-niche level of salience on issues unaffiliated with that dimension. Turning towards an examination of mainstream issues, if the True Finns had a niche electorate, we would find that their voters are less concerned with the economy than mainstream voters.

The finding on economic issues runs counter to this. The multi-dimensional nature of Finnish politics is again confirmed with these economic issues. On the whole, niche voters are less concerned with issues falling on this dimension. Mainstream party voters consistently find mainstream issues of greater import than Green voters. True Finns voters, however, are consistently found to be just as concerned with economic issues as mainstream parties. With the exception of VAS voters, for which the economic dimension serves as niche given its extremity (Adams, et al. 2006), True Finns voters hold economic issues of high salience second only to the Social Democrats. Notice too, that the overall levels of “very important” issue salience are much greater for the economic issues than the other issues examined. This conforms well with the expectations that the True Finns have captured the Finnish left-authoritarians.

To confirm that this is not just a case of extremes, the supplemental appendix\(^\text{52}\) includes the full distribution along with a normal curve overlay to visually aid in comparisons for some of the issues examined: unemployment, immigration, EU policy, environment, and regional disparity. Voters of all parties find unemployment to be a major issue that was on their minds during the elections. Left Alliance voters followed by Social Democratic and True Finns voters stick out as holding unemployment to be of the

\(^{52}\) Diagrams A1-A5 can be found in Bergman_fullmodels.pdf
greatest concern, with a peak of unemployment salience noticeably higher than the rest of the parties.

The True Finns as a nationalist party is again clear on issues most closely associated with this type of party. True Finns voters uniquely feel motivated by immigration issues; while all other parties have a modal interest of “slightly”, True Finns voters clearly hold immigration to be “very important”. A similar pattern is found with EU policy concerns, whereas other voters feel this issue to be primarily “slightly” or “moderately” important, these highly concerned voters dominates the True Finns.

The final two issues are those most commonly associated with niche parties. The environment as an important issue stands out most prominently with the Green League, with little interest by the largest four parties. Only Left Alliance voters find these issues pressing on their minds. Likewise, issues of regional disparity hold no great weight with any group besides a skew towards importance for the Centre Party.

Overall, it appears that economic issues dominate the minds of mainstream voters, and niche issues dominate the mind of niche voters. Against conventional wisdom of the 2011 election, highlighting the salience of the EU and immigration, it would appear that the economy stood out in the minds of Finnish voters. Given that context, we should be even more surprised of a niche party victory in light of the various theories that would predict mainstream parties to benefit from a focus on mainstream issues (Ezrow 2008; Meguid 2008).

5.6 Multivariate Analysis

While the previous section made clear that True Finns voters appear to be both
mainstream and niche on their issue saliences, this section makes a stronger claim that the True Finns did well electorally because voters viewed them as equally competent on mainstream economic dimensions. This requires one to be able to make a statement “holding constant one's nationalist sentiments, a voter is more likely, or no less unlikely, to vote for the True Finns based off mainstream economic concerns”. Multivariate choice models accomplish this task well. To be explicit about the hypothesis to be tested through use of a vote-choice model follows:

H₀: Holding constant other issue saliences, a niche party voter is indifferent parties based on economic issue salience.

H₁: Holding constant other issue saliences, a True Finns voter chooses such an option due to economic concerns in line with mainstream parties.

A multinomial probit model fits this task well for at least three reasons in particular. First and foremost, it allows for the control of various saliences, thereby allowing for a focus on the economic dimension and for interpretations “holding constant other issue concerns...”. Secondly, the use of multinomial probit allows for sociological controls. Much of the previous research on the populist radical right has found sociological foundations for these parties' appeal. Including these variables in a model along with issue saliences serves as a robustness check that it is the issue salience, and not socioeconomic position, that is driving the vote choice. Finally, a multinomial model, as opposed to a binary response model, better approximates the decision of voters. As opposed to studies that employ a binary yes/no vote for the populist radical right, this
study seeks to explore what issues differentiate all parties – mainstream and niche - from one another. In other words, a multinomial probit is employed to analyze to what extent voters are using mainstream and niche issues in their choice between multiple potential outcomes.

As evident from the descriptive issue salience tables above, the voters of a party are likely to hold similar issues of equal import. As such, including multiple issue saliences that fall on the same dimension would lead to issues of multicollinearity. As such, representative issues of the main dimensions of Finnish politics are chosen. The same questions are presented earlier, recoding finding the issue “very important” as 4, “moderately important” as 3, “slightly important” as 2, and “not at all important” as 1. The representative issues chosen are employment for the mainstream economic dimension, immigration for the cultural dimension, environment for the environment dimension, and regional disparity for the urban-rural divide. These form the primary variables of interest. For robustness, given the traditional explanation of EU policy being directly related to True Finns electoral success, the models are rerun using EU policy salience in replacement of immigration.

Unfortunately, there are not enough degrees of freedom for the model to include all sociological controls for the smaller parties. As such, a strictly issue-based model with all eight represented parties as vote choices is presented first. Multinomial probit calculate likelihoods as compared to a base category, with coefficients indicating either a positive or negative effect of that variable of selecting one choice over another. Here the base category is selected to be the Centre party – the largest party represented in parliament before the election. Additionally, since the True Finns are the party of interest,
comparing them to the party for which many argue having a similar rural base allows for
the isolation of issue salience effect over sociocultural identifiers. Finally, as depicted
earlier, in order for the True Finns to gain access to mainstream voters, they would have
to be deemed more credible on mainstream dimensions then the Centre party. As such
being able to directly compare the Centre party to their mainstream competitors and the
True Finns on specific issues is a relevant comparison.

Table 5.3 – Multinomial Probit of Vote Choice (Issue Salience Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variables</th>
<th>KESK v.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KOK</td>
<td>0.222*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>0.657***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5.95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>0.279*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.36)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAS</td>
<td>0.719***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5.40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIHR</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>0.162</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1.02)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>0.382*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2.38)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemploy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrants</td>
<td>0.164</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1.90)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(-0.81)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.812***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(8.58)</td>
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<td>-0.188</td>
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<td>0.086</td>
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<td>(0.65)</td>
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<tr>
<td>environ</td>
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<td>-0.208*</td>
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<td>1.308***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(10.15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.361**</td>
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<td>0.065</td>
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<td>(0.45)</td>
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<td>regional</td>
<td>-0.913***</td>
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<td>(-8.95)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.754***</td>
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<td>(-7.47)</td>
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<td>-0.705***</td>
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<td>-0.882***</td>
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<td>0.438</td>
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<td>(-1.32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-1.246**</td>
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<td>(-2.77)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-1.140*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(-2.45)</td>
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<td>0.207</td>
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<td>(0.42)</td>
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N: 931
log-likelihood: -1471.133
chi2: 396
AIC: 3012.265
BIC: 3181.534

t statistics in parentheses
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001
Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party),
PS (True Finns), VAS (Left Alliance), VIHR (Green League), SFP (Swedish People's
Party), KD (Christian Democrats).
Table 5.3 demonstrates the results of the 8-party multinomial probit. Niche party competition on their own dimensions appears to be verified. Holding constant one's economic, environmental, and immigration concerns, an individual who places greater import on regional disparity is less likely to vote for any other party besides the Centre Party. This result is quite telling in that it demonstrates in this most recent election, not only have the True Finns expanded geographically into areas once dominated by other parties, they, too, have shed their ideological image as the successor to the Rural Party, and represent interests beyond those of less densely populated areas.

What is also quite powerful are the coefficients related to two other niche parties in the Finnish system. By far, the Green League is attracting voters, who holding other issue saliences constant, are driven by their concern for environmental issues. No other issue statistically distinguishes them from the hitherto largest party in Finland. In using other parties as the base of comparison, Green party voters are more likely than all other parties to select that party if they have higher salience of the environment. Similarly, the coefficient for the Left Alliance on the economic dimension is much greater than the others. In line with Adams et al (2006), it would appear as if communists do have a “niche” position on the economic dimension based, from these findings, not on their extreme L-R position, but on the salience of the economic dimension among its electorate. However, these results also seem to support Meguid (2008) in her contention that communists should not be considered niche parties. While she argues that their primary concerns are, in fact, economic, here it appears they should not be considered niche because their voters have statistically piqued salient issues in multiple dimensions.

Figure 5.3 plots the coefficients related to the two remaining dimensions. True
Finns voters do indeed stand out as those most concerned with immigration, as their vote-choice appears to be independent of their beliefs on other dimensions. What breaks with previous research, however, is that the True Finns are statistically indistinguishable from the mainstream parties on individuals concern for employment issues. The True Finns, while definitively nationalistic, seem to be quite as dubiously niche as the communists.

**Figure 5.3 – Issue Salience and Vote Choice**

Given the other variables in the model, the conclusion that one can reach is that holding constant one's views on immigration, an individual that places greater import on unemployment is more likely to vote for the True Finns than the Centre Party. Shifting the base category to one of the other mainstream parties, results in statistically insignificant results. Thus, the alternative hypothesis presented here, and counter to
existing understandings of niche party voters, is supported – holding constant an individual's issue salience on other dimensions, a voter is no less likely to vote for the True Finns than the other mainstream parties.

Table 5.4 – Multinomial Probit of Vote Choice (Issue Salience Model: EUpolicy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variables</th>
<th>KOK</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>VAS</th>
<th>VIHR</th>
<th>SFP</th>
<th>KD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unemploy</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.646***</td>
<td>0.351***</td>
<td>0.732***</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.403*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.20)</td>
<td>(5.79)</td>
<td>(3.05)</td>
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<td>(-0.09)</td>
<td>(0.61)</td>
<td>(2.48)</td>
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<td>EUpolicy</td>
<td>0.517***</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.692***</td>
<td>-0.157</td>
<td>-0.157</td>
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<td>(4.79)</td>
<td>(-0.25)</td>
<td>(6.11)</td>
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<td>(-1.14)</td>
<td>(2.18)</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
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<td>environ</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>-0.245*</td>
<td>0.484***</td>
<td>1.294***</td>
<td>0.342*</td>
<td>0.067</td>
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<td>(1.25)</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
<td>(-2.46)</td>
<td>(4.57)</td>
<td>(10.13)</td>
<td>(2.55)</td>
<td>(0.47)</td>
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<td>regional</td>
<td>-1.039***</td>
<td>-0.765***</td>
<td>-0.860***</td>
<td>-0.701***</td>
<td>-0.866***</td>
<td>-1.074***</td>
<td>-0.919***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(-9.58)</td>
<td>(-7.14)</td>
<td>(-7.63)</td>
<td>(-5.62)</td>
<td>(-6.27)</td>
<td>(-6.83)</td>
<td>(-5.76)</td>
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<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>1.038***</td>
<td>0.387</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>-1.329***</td>
<td>-1.048*</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>0.112</td>
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<td>(2.98)</td>
<td>(1.11)</td>
<td>(-0.11)</td>
<td>(-2.99)</td>
<td>(-2.25)</td>
<td>(-0.17)</td>
<td>(-0.22)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

| N         | 934 |
| log-
likelihood | -1499.432 |
| chi2      | 361 |
| AIC       | 3068.863 |
| BIC       | 3238.25 |

* t statistics in parentheses
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.01

Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party), PS (True Finns), VAS (Left Alliance), VIHR (Green League), SFP (Swedish People's Party), KD (Christian Democrats).

The results are reproduced for robustness using EUPolicy as the proxy for the nationalist cultural dimension in Table 5.4. Statistical results from the previous analysis remain quite similar. The Centre Party definitely dominates the regional dimension and Green League voters are highly motivated by the environment with Left Alliance voters...
also likely to be motivated by environmental concerns. One notable change on non-economic issues is that the Swedish-People's Party now becomes significant on this issue, which falls in line with that party's focus on deeper EU integration, and thus stronger ties to Sweden, an issue they hold with greater importance than on immigration specifically.

The novel hypotheses presented above, that niche parties are able, in the eyes of voters, to be statistically indistinguishable from mainstream parties on economic issues holding constant the niche dimension salience is again confirmed. Substituting in EU-policy for immigration results in a loss of significance for the National Coalition on the unemployment issue. Thus, holding constant a voter's salience of EU-policy, the environment, and regional disparity, if a voter were to have a greater concern for the unemployment, they would be no more likely to vote for the National Coalition than the Centre Party, but indeed more likely to vote for the True Finns. Of large parties with culturally conservative credentials, then, the True Finns appear to have become statistically dominant for those placing high salience on the economic dimension, as proxied by concern about unemployment\textsuperscript{53}.

The power of the issue-based results can best be confirmed by assessing them in light of previous findings on populist nationalist parties. To do this, sociological controls are introduced to ascertain the robustness of these findings. Various questions from the survey conform well to this previous literature on radical right populists and are included below.

\textsuperscript{53} Switching the base to the National Coalition Party, one still finds a positive coefficient on unemployment for the True Finns, Social Democratic Party, and Left Alliance
Class/Occupational Category/Education: The sociological explanations for the rise of nationalist parties are numerous, but many relate to a grievance hypothesis by the “losers of modernity” thesis (Betz 1994). Modernization and globalization bring with them economic changes to the advanced industrial societies. Blue-collar workers with low education feel the brunt of these changes, being the most economically at risk from international competition (Kitschelt and McGann 1997; Kriesi, et al. 2006). Messages of exclusion and authoritarianism resonate well with groups antagonistic towards cosmopolitan universalism (Mudde 2007). Similarly, immigrant groups ethnically threaten certain individuals competing for scarce low wage resources such as jobs and houses (Lubbers 2001). Thus, modernization’s losers seek to undo social change that resulted in increased individual autonomy and functional differentiation of society and revert to an earlier homogenized past (Minkenberg 2001).

Using categorical social class, occupation, and education as measures of an individual's potential to classify a modern societal winner or loser is commonplace. Just as the old middle class – small shop owners and self-employed craftsmen – supported the inter-war fascist parties for threats of displacement by centralized, large-scale industry and the growing power of organized labor (Lipset 1981), empirical research has noted that industrial workers and the old middle classes and the unemployed are over-represented in radical right voters (Lubbers, et al. 2002; Ivarsflaten 2005; Norris 2005). By contrast, those who are in classes even below these, who never stood a chance at international competition in terms of education and social class do not vote at all (Bornschier and Kriesi 2012). Given these findings on nationalist voters and the traditional parties class and occupation based electorates, categorical, as opposed to
ordinal, measures of class, occupation, and education are employed as controls.

*Gender:* Traditional appeals of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism may seem unappealing to women - nativist appeals of ethnic competition for housing, labor, and marriage; authoritarian focus on strictness of law and individuality as opposed to collective problem solving; and populists calls for a return of power to the “losers of modernization” from those supporting elite post-material values of equality - all can be viewed as antithetical towards female interests (Immerzeel, et al. 2013). Including gender as a control thus can isolate the issue-based dimensional explanation from these more ideological ones.

*Region:* Local levels of unemployment, immigration, or an interactive effect of the two have been found to predict success of nationalist parties. Additionally, in a recent analysis of the success of the True Finns, Arter (2013) extends the argument laid out by Bergman et al. (2013) that in open-list proportional representation systems longer lists are a rational party strategy in that each additional candidate can attract a marginal voter. Arter notes that in the Finnish case, not all parties run the same number of candidates in each district, and longer True Finns lists could explain an increase in the amount of votes received by this party. Adding in a regional control takes care of both the sociotropic economic and demographic situation as well as this electoral system variable.

A full model is thus run with sociological controls using respondents who voted for the four largest parties in Table 5.5. Given the gap between large and small parties – the smallest “large party” received over double the votes of the largest “small party” – focusing on these four is not unreasonable, conclusions from these controlled models

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54 Controls omitted here for space. Full models are available in the supplemental appendix Bergman_fullmodels.pdf as Model 5.A1 and 5.A2
simply should be understood with the condition of “as compared to voters of other large parties.”

Table 5.5 - MNP of Large Party Vote Choice (with sociological controls)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>KESK v.</th>
<th>KOK</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>KOK</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>PS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>unemployment</td>
<td>0.325*</td>
<td>0.791***</td>
<td>0.328*</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>0.771***</td>
<td>0.418***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.32)</td>
<td>(5.45)</td>
<td>(2.17)</td>
<td>(1.93)</td>
<td>(5.32)</td>
<td>(2.84)</td>
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<tr>
<td>immigration</td>
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<td>0.816***</td>
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<td>(-1.92)</td>
<td>(6.80)</td>
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<td>0.499***</td>
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<td>-0.726***</td>
<td>-0.725***</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-0.891***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>-666.091</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1775.944</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

t statistics in parentheses
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001  
Controls not shown for Gender, Class, Education, Occupational Group, and Region  
Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party), PS (True Finns)

The results presented earlier, on the whole, withstand the introduction of these controls as introduced in Table 5.5. Among the largest four parties, holding constant their saliences on other dimensions are more likely to vote for the Centre Party should they have a greater salience of regional issues. None of the largest four parties has partisans
that are statistically more concerned about the environment than others. Focusing on immigration/EU policy, we again find that holding constant one's opinion on other dimensions, should a voter find these issues to be of greater import, they would be more likely to support the True Finns, and given the controls, this result is independent of employment situation. Finally, the main hypothesis presented above is still supported. Even with sociological controls, True Finns supporters are statistically indistinguishable from other large mainstream voters given an individual's propensity of having a high salience for unemployment concerns, with the exception of being more likely to select the True Finns than the outgoing largest Centre Party – a finding that is robust to a voter's potential to be, or already have been, in the case of the unemployed, affected by international economic pressures.

5.7 Issue Ownership

Thus far, these results seem to support the belief that the True Finns are indeed competitive on economic issues. This finding in itself challenges our understandings of nationalist parties and niche party-voter linkages. However, this section takes the next step and attributes this to the electoral success of the 2011 election. Thus far, results have demonstrated that nationalist voters likely have higher issue saliences than other parties in the system. This question could also lend itself well to an issue ownership type of question – can True Finns issue ownership of the economic dimension be cited as a contribution to its electoral success, which leads to the more notable question of whether a niche party could “own” an economic dimension.
$H_0$: Mainstream parties “own” economic dimensions and niche parties “own” non-economic dimensions

$H_1$: The True Finns, even as a populist nationalist party, “owned” the mainstream economic dimensions and thus was able to breakthrough from a small niche party to a large one, with mainstream characteristics of owning economic dimensions.

To analyze individual perceptions of party issue ownership, another data source must be utilized. The Follow-Up Survey utilized above does not specifically attribute a party to owning a particular issue, only who a voter with high salience of an issue selected in the election. The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems cross-national dataset (“CSES Module 3 Full Release [dataset]” 2013) asks a uniform set of post-election questions across a set of 50 nations. Data is released in modules approximately every three years. The third module included elections between 2006 and 2011. This timeframe allows for an analysis of the election case at hand – Finland 2011 – as well as the election just prior – Finland 2007. In this manner, the dynamics of issue ownership transfer can be analyzed.

The dataset asks two questions that when paired, produce the concept of issue ownership. The first asks, “What do you think is the most important political issue facing Finland today?” while the next question ask respondents, “Thinking of the most important political problem facing Finland today, which party do you think is best in dealing with it?” Paired in such a manner, as opposed to the previous survey questions that focused on salience, we have a direct measure of which political party individuals
think are most competent to tackle a specific issue. For the Finnish case, respondents offered 53 different responses. For ease of interpretation, these were narrowed down to thirteen categories primarily following the descriptions of issue categories utilized by (Kriesi, et al. 2006): Welfare, Budget, General Economy, Cultural Liberalism, Europe, Culture, Immigration, Assimilation, International Issues, Law and Order, Environment, Institutional reform/Rural Issues, and Governability.

In 2011, only four categories received more than 30 of that year's over 900 valid responses: Welfare, General Economy, Europe, and Immigration. Focusing on the distribution of these would thus best enable an understanding of the ownership of issues that voters found particularly salient, and how the party's attribution of such ownership changed between the elections.

Taking percents by party produces a measure of which issues, partisans most strongly feel a specific party is best able to tackle. These percentages are reproduced below in Table 5.6 {were all issues represented, columns would add to 100%}. Analyzing in such a manner does not require proportional partisan samplings in each election, which did not occur, as what is being calculated is an intra-party diagnostic of issue ownership. Assuming that those who feel the chosen most important issue party was their vote choice, a way to interpret these results would be along the lines of “____% of _____ party supporters feel their party is best able to handle _____ issue”.

---

55 Specifics of coding can be found in Bergman_fullmodels.pdf; complete tabulation of results appears in this chapter's appendix. It is interesting to note that the overall levels of concern with economic issues increased in the 2011 election, when conventional wisdom pointed at this election being less about the economic and more about European/cultural issues and thus the rise of the True Finns.
Table 5.6 – Party Supporter's Most Important Political Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Important Political Issue</th>
<th>KOK (Nat. Coalition)</th>
<th>SDP (Social Dem.)</th>
<th>KESK (Centre Party)</th>
<th>PS (True Finns)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Economy</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at general trends, overall partisans felt that their chosen party was best able to handle the general economy than in the prior 2007 election. It should again be noted that with this survey, too, voters found the economy to be a more important issues than in years prior, when conventional wisdom cites Europe, scandal, and protest as newly dominant issues on the agenda to explain True Finns success.

The main finding of this ownership portion of this analysis is that while in 2007, True Finns supporters would be among the least likely to call their party one that owns the economic dimension of politics, by 2011 they were just as, if not more, likely to call their party one that is best able to handle the economy. Quite surprisingly, True Finns supporters in 2011 were more likely to call the economy the most important issue, significantly moreso than immigration and Europe, for which they are most typically associated. It would thus appear that the True Finns were, in fact, able to transform themselves from a nationalist party to one that is indeed more mainstream, whereby voters trusted the party with economic, non-niche issues.

While those who support the True Finns find them to have a level of economic issue ownership, a more convincing case would be if the overall electorate, so too, found the True Finns to have competence in economic arenas. Questions asking all voters about...
all parties are not too common, and when asked, usually ask respondents to place parties on a Left-Right continuum. This form of question cannot get at specific issue ownership. The Finnish Gallup follow-up survey, however, does have another question that can aid in this form of investigation (Moring 2012). Respondents are asked “The new Government will have to make difficult decisions over the next four years. In the light of the election results, which parties should be in the Government...” As opposed to being forced to choose one answer, respondents were allowed to answer as many parties as they want. Thus, using a logistic regression model, one can determine which issues an individual believes that a party is more or less competent in regardless of overall vote-choice.

Separate models are run for each party using the same variables as the issue salience models and the results are combined in Table 5.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>KESK</th>
<th>KOK</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>VAS</th>
<th>VIHR</th>
<th>SFP</th>
<th>KD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>unempl</td>
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<td>1.001</td>
<td>1.702***</td>
<td>1.328***</td>
<td>1.705***</td>
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<td>(5.84)</td>
<td>(1.76)</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</table>

Odds-ratios presented; t statistics in parentheses
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.01

Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party), PS (True Finns), VAS (Left Alliance), VIHR (Green League), SFP (Swedish People's Party), KD (Christian Democrats)
While in the multinomial models the coefficients expressed a difference between parties, these coefficients simply express one's propensity to support a party in government based upon their issue saliences and are more easily convertible into probabilities, as will be addressed later. Table 5.7 presents the results as odds-ratios by exponentiating the logit coefficients for ease of comparative interpretation. The change in a voter's odds of supporting a party's government participation based on their issue priorities can thus be more easily visualized across and within models, with greater odds of support being greater than 1, and a decreased likelihood of support with odds of less than 1. The standard log-odds for the economic and immigration dimensions are displayed in Figure 5.4, with coefficients greater than 0 representing an increased probability and those less than 0 representing a decreased probability of supporting a party's government inclusion.

Two non-economic dimensions stand out. Those who believe the environment to be of greater importance are significantly more likely to prefer the Green League participate in government and those who believe immigration to be of greater importance are significantly more likely to support government participation of the True Finns. The median voter in the dataset holds unemployment to be of moderate importance and immigration, the environment, and regional disparity to be slightly important. A voter holding median views with the exception of holding the environment to be of moderate importance is 5% more likely for her to support the Green League's participation in government. With the exception of the environment, no other issue, even if moving from minimal to maximum value, alters a hypothetical voter's support for Green League participation by more than 2%, whereas moving from minimal to maximal environmental
salience increases support by 17%. The Green League, can thus be thought of as the “owner” of the environmental dimension.

![Figure 5.4 – Support for Government Coalition Membership in Finland 2011](image)

Turning now to the True Finns, increasing the salience of immigration of the median voter to of moderate importance, increases the propensity to approve of governmental participation by 2.7%. Increasing the median voter's immigration salience to very important only increases support of the True Finns a further 2.4%. Contrast these two increases in immigration salience to a single increase of a median voter's unemployment salience one step to very important resulting in a 4% increase in support for the True Finns governmental participation. Holding all other saliences at their medians, a shift from holding unemployment not at all important to very important results
in a 14% greater propensity to support a True Finns participation. This, too, is quite comparable to a the 12% greater propensity to support a Left Alliance participation. It would thus appear that the True Finns, even as the sole immigration owner, are thought of owning economic issues in line with those of the mainstream center-left and communist parties.

Chapter 5 utilizes data provided by the Finnish Social Science Archive housed at the University of Tampere. Were it not for Katri Seiberg and the two funded trips to the University of Tampere via the “Institutions in Context” summer school, I would have never been exposed to the Finnish electorate and the breakthrough electoral success of the True Finns. I also would like to thank Seth Jolly for his comments on an early version of this chapter. He pushed forward my thinking on what it means for an issue to be salient. The comments I received at the Midwest Political Science Association Conference, as well as from meeting with those in charge of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey have had larger impacts on my theory development than any sort of reading from a distance could have produced.
## 5.A Appendix

### Table 5.A.1 - Most Important Political Issue (2007) by Party Best Able to Deal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>KESK</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>KOK</th>
<th>VAS</th>
<th>VIHR</th>
<th>SFP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party), PS (True Finns), VAS (Left Alliance), VIHR (Green League), SFP (Swedish People's Party), KD (Christian Democrats)
Percentages taken by column/party

### Table 5.A.2 - Most Important Political Issue (2011) by Party Best Able to Deal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>SDP</th>
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<th>KOK</th>
<th>VAS</th>
<th>VIHR</th>
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<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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Note: KESK (Center Party), KOK (National Coalition), SDP (Social Democratic Party), PS (True Finns), VAS (Left Alliance), VIHR (Green League), SFP (Swedish People's Party), KD (Christian Democrats)
Percentages taken by column/party
Chapter 6

Conclusion: The “Normal” Niche Party

This dissertation began with the objective to push forward understandings of political competition in the context of proportional representation. Assumptions regarding niche parties and their issue agendas were challenged by empirical realities at the level of individual voters and aggregate electoral performance. In contrast to literature that assumes niche ownership of non-economic issues, and their fates dependent upon mainstream party engagement with those issues, this dissertation explored niche engagement with issues considered to be mainstream. Empirical findings suggest, that voters do indeed reward niche parties when they broaden their agenda. Additionally, voters recognize niche parties as having ownership potential over mainstream economic issues. This challenges a variety of understandings inherent in the literature and offers many questions for future research. This conclusion chapter explores these in turn, first through a discussion of the findings of the empirical chapters, followed by a broader discussion of their implications, and a promising field for future research.

6.1 Economic Issue Salience: Finland

Chapter 5 examined the Finnish election of 2011. Finland has a long history of parties with loyal voters that chose their party based upon the types of issues their selected party focuses upon. Low electoral volatility has characterized a party system with an entrenched center-left, center, and center-right party. The election of 2011 disrupted this longstanding pattern. The nationalist party – the True Finns – gained votes
to the expense of all other parties in the system. Common explanations have supposed that the electorate became much more concerned with immigration, protest, and Europe. Counter to traditional claims that economic issue salience weakens nationalist parties (Ivarsflaten 2005; Meguid 2008), this chapter demonstrated that it was the electorate's concern with the economy that led to the electoral success of this once-fringe party. Post-election survey data was utilized in to assess these claims.

While a portion of the electorate still found nationalist issues highly salient and supported the True Finns, overall, the party's support became more associated with mainstream voters. Evidence was introduced that demonstrated that True Finns voters believed economic issues to be just as important as the conservative mainstream parties. While other niche party voters retain their focus on particular issues, the True Finns found issues beyond traditionally nationalist issues to be salient. In fact, True Finn voters found economic issues to be salient more than any other conservative party, second only to the niche communist Left Alliance and the Finnish Social Democratic Party.

Beyond just finding economic issues salient, a multivariate analysis was then utilized to control for the effect of nationalist saliences. It was found that True Finns voters selected their party due to the salience of economic issues, independent of their concerns regarding nationalist issues of immigration or the European Union. This finding did not hold true for other niche parties in the Finnish system and withstood the introduction of sociological explanations.

Finally, the question of niche issue ownership was addressed. Again, against conventional wisdom of the overall importance of the European bailouts and immigration in the 2011 election, survey data finds that in the eyes of the voters, the economy was
even more important in 2011 than 2007. Against this backdrop, True Finns supporters were likely to believe their party could best deal with economy at levels more associated with mainstream parties. Furthermore, in analyzing the entirety of the Finnish electorate, while not denying the relationship between greater immigration salience and True Finns support, it was found that holding a greater salience of economic issues resulted in an even greater propensity to support True Finn government participation. Thus, it can be concluded that in the 2011 election, the True Finns virtually quadrupled their electoral support not because of a change in the electorate towards nationalist issues, but a change in the perceptions of the electorate that the True Finns were a non-niche party able to competently manage economic issues.

Finding that a niche party can compete with mainstream parties for mainstream voters has great implications for the study of comparative electoral politics. First, these findings should not be assumed to be unique to the Finnish case. Other nationalist parties, the National Front in France and the Danish People's Party, for example, might also be transitioning to an electoral base with greater mainstream concerns. Second, even when other issues dominate media or campaigns, voters might still be deciding their vote based on traditional economic issues. While it has been noted, that nationalist parties have been able to capture some historical constituencies of mainstream parties, the findings here imply that nationalist parties are now capturing the issues of mainstream parties. Finally, these findings suggest mainstream parties must alter their strategies not only to seek to maintain their vote-base, but their issue base as well.

What is left unanswered is how the True Finns were able to capture these new issues. While indeed, they devoted more of their manifesto to economic issues and
governability, so too did other Finnish parties including the Centre Party. What made the claims of the True Finns more credible than that of other parties in the eyes of the electorate and what role, if any, did their niche background have in this regard? How did voters overlook their seemingly permanent opposition status and make sincere votes on economic grounds, believing a party likely not to be in government as best able to address issues?

The totality of dimensions on which niche parties compete was not specifically focused upon in this dissertation. While the True Finns appeared able to compete on their nationalist and mainstream dimension, in doing so, they appeared to lose rural competitiveness. Additionally, the Green League appeared to be able to compete only on the environmental dimension, while the communist Left Alliance appeared to capture both economic and environmental dimensions, although to a lesser extent than the Greens. The Swedish People's Party and and Christian Democrats, not the focus of this study, also appeared able to have appeal beyond historical issues. Larger patterns of niche competition beyond their primary dimension are left open for research based off these findings.

6.2 Niche Ownership of Economic Issues: Italy

Chapter 4 set out to explore niche voters in the context of coalition voting in multiparty systems testing the effects of party issue agendas in light of the coalition voting. Voters ascribed economic issue ownership to the coalition as a whole moreso than the specific parties within the coalition. When voters are unable to distinguish between

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56 Budge, et al. 2001
parties or reward or punish individual coalition members, they ascribe collective accountability for competence on specific issues, be they mainstream or niche. The mainstream-led coalition serves to provide the economic position with certainty (Snyder and Ting 2002), taking this off the table as a criteria intra-coalition sorting. Only when parties distinguished themselves on the focus of nationalist issues did voters sort between them using this issue. When the governance incentive is present, voters ascribe economic competence to the coalition at large and then sort within it. Ideological sorting plays only a minor role as compared to party preference, suggesting that voters do use partisan, as opposed to ideological, heuristics when voting for parties when their elites have signaled that they have done the same by converging in issue space via electoral cooperation (Green 2007; Adams, et al. 2014).

Previous analyses of the study of vote choice could be enhanced by the usage of methods that better approximate the choices of votes. The conditional logit “work horse” (Alvarez and Nagler 1998b; Adams, et al. 2005; Mauerer, et al. 2015) does not provide for the explicit distinction of favorability of one party or leader and disfavorability of others. The inclusion of ratings for multiple parties and leaders produced results that indicate voters to be both motivated by the “hard test” variables of party and leader favorability as well as party and leader displeasure. Additionally, studies of niche party voting often use a dichotomous coding for the party of interest, and thus the findings are compared to the mean voter. Using a categorical choice model, however, allowed for a more relevant question to be asked of what distinguishes niche conservative voters from mainstream conservative voters. Similar to the Finnish case analyzing vote for the True Finns, while indeed ascribing greater ownership to immigration, Lega Nord voters are no
more ideologically conservative nor do they ascribe economic stewardship to their chosen party less than mainstream conservative voters. The usage of simple logistic models would be unable to discern such variables’ effects on an inter-coalition versus intra-coalition vote; thus, extreme ideologies are often ascribed to niche voters (Passarelli 2013), when in fact this ideology belongs to conservative parties at large.

There are numerous places for further study at the intersection of issue and coalition voting. This study utilized the stability of the Italian party space in the 2000s to conduct an analysis that limited alternative explanations associated with party system supply changes. One could also expect differences in national voting patterns among cases where coalitions are unknown in advance, as in the Finnish case, those with a history of specific coalitions like the German case, and nations utilizing stronger official pre-electoral coalitions, such as Italy and Sweden.

While research has concluded much about niche parties, voters, and their linkages, what this study opens the door for is more work on mainstream-niche cooperation and differentiation. Numerous countries regularly have green or radical right parties explicitly or tacitly support governments with legislative confidence, yet how voters make sense of this has not been explicitly modeled. The evidence of intra-coalition sorting presented here, though limited, should not be overlooked. The cooperation dynamics between niche and mainstream parties is still not fully understood.

Likewise, research on voters of niche parties often examines niche voters in a vacuum. While studies at the party level take into account mainstream competitors (Meguid 2005, 2008; Spoon, et al. 2014; van de Wardt 2014; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016), the inclusion of mainstream competitors at the level of voters remain scarce.
Relatedly, when research does discuss alterations of party strategy, the dependent variable of interest is often ideological position (see Adams 2012 for a review). The Italian case demonstrates the impact of other strategies: issue focus and coalition membership. While institutional conditions that increase the likelihood of pre-electoral coalitions (Ferrara and Herron 2005; Golder 2005) and voter preferences for such coalitions (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008; Falcó-Gimeno 2012; Debus and Müller 2013), this chapter explored how voters differentiate between pre-electoral coalition members.

While not a focus of study, party mergers and coalition formation could also be elucidated through studies of issue focus. After converging in issue considerations in 2006, the conservative coalition junior members each pursued a separate path. The UDC and FI exhibited no statistically significant differences between their voters besides party and leader evaluations. In 2008 these parties parted ways, and the UDC then became the only party to immediately suffer electoral losses. In 2006, only ideology distinguished voters between Forza Italia and Allenza Nationale. These two parties subsequently merged. The Lega Nord, even though having voters that were least dissuaded by Forza Italia disfavor, pursued a subsequent independent issue strategy and remained a distinct party, yet still an ally of Berlusconi. The impact of distinct niche issue segments held by the Lega Nord and UDC could provide an incentive for these parties choosing to remain independent and rely on post-election bargaining for policy influence.

Finally, this case contributed to the larger project's goal of identifying the consequences of niche parties locating themselves in non-extreme positions. The Lega Nord had a more extreme party to its right ideologically in the Allenza Nationale until 2006, and did not radicalize thereafter to fill the void left by the merger of conservative
parties in 2008 as per Table 4.1. While niche parties and partisans are often touted for
their extremity, unique issue concerns, and stronger party-voter linkages, should they
appear in moderate positions with similar issue considerations as they did in Italy, they
appear to be in no league of their own.

6.3 Electorally Successful Mainstream Nationalist Parties: Cross-National Analysis

This chapter sought to measure the electoral effects of altering an issue profile.
Focusing on niche issue specialization and uniqueness a series of hypotheses were tested
on election and manifesto salience data from a set of 23 parliamentary democracies from
1970-2013. The main finding is that as nationalist parties broadened their issue agenda
from extreme positions or in systems with a high number of parties they were able to
increase their vote-share.

The approach differs from similar studies in five important ways. First and
foremost, the operationalization of the niche concept is continuous. As opposed to a party
either dichotomously niche or mainstream, a continuous measure quantifies how specific
a party's non-economic issue focus is. This continuous measure allows for the second
distinction - modeling the dynamic electoral results of altering an issue profile. As
opposed to just descriptively analyzing the levels of non-economic issue focus associated
with greater electoral results (Spoon, et al. 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016; Han forthcoming),
this chapter explored the change in vote share that a party narrowing or broadening its
issue foci have on subsequent electoral results.

Third, this chapter tests macro-level and aggregate electoral effect, and cannot in
itself identify which issues voters are paying attention to as parties alter their stances. A
broadening literature seeks to address this (Spoon and Klüver 2015; Klüver and Spoon forthcoming), and can further advance in light of the findings presented here. What this literature does not yet address, but what could be fruitful research is what causes voters to take heed of the non-niche, that is the mainstream economic issues, that niche parties are addressing.

Fourth, the dataset extended time and country coverage beyond Continental European Union nations with the inclusion of Norway, Iceland, Israel, Canada, Cyprus, and the antipodes. This presents us with a greater variation in the size of party systems that led to the conditional findings based off the effective number of parties. Indeed, while traditional explanations for nationalist success hold in systems in which a variety of case studies have suggested a narrow focus as the best electoral strategy in nations such as UK and France, the effects of focusing on niche issues has the opposite effect in multiparty systems. In systems that supply a variety of parties to represent conservative interests, nationalist parties can indeed perform better by broadening their issue profile.

Finally, electoral competition on the left differs in statistically meaningful ways from competition on the right. While the mainstream left and ecological parties have reached a form of issue equilibrium, there remains a competitive issue market on the right side of the ideological spectrum. Additionally, successful issue strategies used by ecological parties differ from those that could prove successful for nationalist parties, thus contributing to recent findings that differentiate between types of niche parties for more specific analysis.

What is not entirely clear from the operationalizations used are which specific issues benefit the mainstream right or nationalists as they alter their agenda. Nationalist
parties addressing issues associated with the right, e.g. welfare state contraction, or left, e.g. welfare state expansion, both would be operationalized the same way by the quantification to produce the results we found. Perhaps other parts of the electoral context not identified here could determine which, if either, strategy is more beneficial than the other. Further research as to how traditionally niche parties broaden their issue profiles could resolve this uncertainty.

6.4 Implications for Related Literature

The implications of the research presented in this dissertation could impact a variety of literature not specifically addressed in the analyses. This dissertation examined the electoral effects of parties altering their issue distinctiveness on their own success. What drives parties to alter their platforms has become a field of fruitful research, suggesting effects derived from voters, governing status, and other parties (Adams, et al. 2006; Adams and Ezrow 2009; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Somer-Topcu 2009 Ezrow, et al. 2011; Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012; Adams, et al. 2013; Somer-Topcu and Williams 2014; Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016). With a continuous measure of how unique and specialized a party's agenda is, future research could examine what drives parties to alter their nicheness as well as how other parties respond.

This dissertation focused primarily on one type of niche party – nationalists. The findings suggest that these parties can successfully engage with economic issues. Yet the literature on niche parties also suggest that ethno-regional, green, religious, and agrarian parties also display similar features that would classify them as niche, extolling narrow non-economic issue agendas (Meguid 2005; Adams, et al. 2006; Bélanger and Meguid
Future research could determine if and when these types of parties could successfully engage with a broadened agenda.

Previous case studies that addressed niche issue engagement focused on electoral systems with single-member districts (Meguid 2008; Spoon 2011). The cross-national and single-country case studies of this dissertation found that in systems with proportional representation and multi-member districts that niche parties could successfully gain issue ownership of economic issues. This suggests opportunity structures present in these larger party systems unavailable to parties with norms of two-party dominance. Future research could examine what these specific mechanism are. It was suggested that the coalition-directed vote and a more permissive translation of votes into marginal seats altered voter utility functions. This could be directly tested with models of individual voting behavior utilizing electoral system predictor variables including, for example, party list features, district magnitude, and the presence of an upper-tier.

6.5 A New Field of Research: Multidimensional Issue Competition

Ultimately, this dissertation suggests shifting the focus of political competition from ideology-based to issue-based. Ideology, especially with the inclusion of multiple dimensions, might be difficult for voters to precisely identify for either themselves or political parties (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). The issues that voters find salient (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014) and those that parties address might be more easily identifiable due to public and media discourse (Walgrave and De Swert 2007; Walgrave, et al. 2009). Ideological placement of political actors might even be a result of latent salient issues
(van der Brug 2004). As such, the ability to measure issue attention directly could lead to a better understanding of political behavior. Voters appear to be non-responsive to the shifting ideologies of political parties (Adams, et al. 2011, 2014), yet the findings here suggest that voters are responsive when political parties alter the issues they present to voters. The causes and consequences of issue variation within countries in sub-national constituencies, between countries by party, and across countries over time could better help develop a more comprehensive theory of multidimensional issue competition. This dissertation embraced the beginnings of such an undertaking by demonstrating that such a paradigm shift is essential to understanding the electoral success of niche parties and the motivations of their voters.
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