

Voter Discounting of Party Campaign Manifestos. An Analysis of Mainstream and Niche Parties in Western Europe, 1971-2011

Pablo Fernández-Vázquez*

*Postdoctoral Researcher, Carlos III - Juan March Institute (Madrid), Spain. Email: pablo.fernandez.vazquez@uc3m.es. Website: <http://pablofernandezvazquez.com>

†I would like to thank James Adams, Eric Dickson, Pat Egan, Sean Gailmard, Mik Laver, Avital Livny, John Patty, Dídac Queralt, Shawn Ramirez, Gonzalo Rivero, Keith Schnakenberg, Zeynep Somer-Topcu, Joshua Tucker, participants in seminar at Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (Vanderbilt University), and students in the 2013 EITM summer institute at Berkeley for valuable comments.

Voter Discounting of Party Campaign Manifestos. An
Analysis of Mainstream and Niche Parties in Western
Europe, 1971-2011

Abstract

Election campaigns are supposed to help voters identify what each party stands for on policy issues. Campaign promises are not binding, however, since parties may advocate some policies in the campaign and implement others once in office. Within this framework, this paper analyzes the conditions in which voters believe parties' campaign platforms. I argue that voters interpret that vote-seeking campaign platforms are less informative about the party's ideology. Focusing on Western European mainstream political parties, which have electoral incentives to appear ideologically moderate, I show that voters heavily discount centrist manifestos. With respect to niche parties, which tend to lose support if they moderate, voters discount non-centrist campaigns. These findings have implications for democratic representation, party competition and electoral volatility.

1 Introduction

Election campaigns are supposed to help citizens make informed decisions at the polls. For example, campaigns provide an opportunity for political parties to present their policy proposals. Campaign stances are not binding, however, since parties can shed their election promises once they are in office (Alesina, 1988; Banks, 1990; Callander and Wilkie, 2007; Stokes, 2001). Hence, the challenge for voters is to identify whether a party's policy rhetoric reflects its ideological views or not.

This paper argues that voters anticipate that parties are strategic in their choice of what policies to campaign on. In particular, a party may campaign on policies that deviate from its actual ideology in order to increase its electoral support. As a result, voters find platforms that can help the party electorally to be less informative about the party's ideology. Whereas such platforms may respond to short-term vote-seeking incentives, campaigning on policies that can damage the party's popularity is a strong signal of what the party stands for. Hence, voters discount electorally beneficial policy promises as less credible.

To test this implication I analyze the link between the content of campaign platforms and the perceived ideology of Western European parties. I focus the attention on mainstream political parties, which are said to face vote-seeking incentives to develop moderate ideological reputations (Ezrow, 2005, 2008; Kirchheimer, 1966). In this context, my argument predicts that voters will find campaigns advocating centrist policies less credible than those espousing more extreme policy stances. I extend the analysis to niche parties, for which my argument yields the opposite prediction: Since niche parties tend to lose votes when they moderate their policy offerings (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow, 2008), voters will be more responsive to centrist platforms. To evaluate this, I draw on public opinion data on the perceived left-right positions of Western European parties between 1971 and 2011. In order to capture the type

of policy positions that parties campaign on, I use party manifesto data ([Volkens et al., 2013](#)).

I report robust empirical evidence in support of the argument: While campaigning on left-wing or right-wing policies significantly changes opinions about a mainstream party's ideological position, running on a centrist platform has little effect on perceptions about the party's ideology. Indeed, the estimated impact of centrist manifestos on voter perceptions is not statistically distinguishable from zero. The opposite pattern emerges for niche parties: Centrist manifestos have a stronger impact than non-centrist ones. These findings therefore suggest that voters are skeptical of party rhetoric that could be electorally beneficial.

This empirical evidence contributes to our understanding of whether party campaign proposals help citizens make informed voting decisions. The implications of this paper move beyond the two main extant interpretations of the role of election platforms in party competition: the Downsian model and the cheap-talk approach. On the one hand, an unreconstructed Downsian model assuming that campaign stances are credible commitment devices cannot account for voter skepticism towards party rhetoric (e.g. [Adams et al., 2011, 2014](#)). On the other, cheap-talk approaches, by considering party statements as completely uninformative about party positions, cannot make sense of those instances in which platforms change voter perceptions (e.g. [Fernandez-Vazquez, 2014](#); [Plescia and Staniek, 2015](#)). The view that I propose is more nuanced: voters do use campaigns to draw inferences about party policy preferences, but only if party proposals are not likely to be part of an short-term electoral strategy.

Finally, by mapping conditions in which campaign platforms influence opinions about parties, this paper contributes to the debate in political science about whether election campaigns have an impact on electoral outcomes ([Hillygus and Jackman, 2003](#); [Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000](#); [Vavreck, 2009](#)). Since voter perceptions of party positions are a key

determinant of vote choices (Hinich and Munger, 1997; Jessee, 2009; Merrill and Grofman, 1999), the evidence in this paper helps identify the scenarios in which the campaign is more likely to affect a party’s electoral fortunes.

2 What we know so far

According to spatial models of elections, perceptions of where political parties stand on policy issues are a key determinant of voting choices. Indeed, there is vast empirical evidence showing that electoral outcomes depend on the relationship between voter preferences and the perceived issue position of political parties (Merrill and Grofman, 1999; Adams et al., 2005; Jessee, 2009; Lacy and Paolino, 2010). This framework is also widely used by media pundits to analyze candidates’ and parties’ electoral strategies.¹

For that reason, there is a growing scholarly interest in understanding the determinants of voter perceptions of party positions. Several papers have shown that voters use incumbent actions to make inferences about the ideological leanings of governing parties. The type of policy decisions that are implemented (Lupu, 2014), the choice of coalition partners (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013) or the type of legislation passed (Grynaviski, 2010) seem to change the ideological reputation of incumbent parties.

An alternative strategy that parties can use to signal their policy positions is to take public stances on policy issues. This is particularly important for parties in opposition since these parties cannot use policy-making to reveal their policy priorities. Political communication is in fact the object of increasing attention in political science: several text analysis

¹As an illustration, see the NYT’s recent piece on how the new British Labour leader might be too left-wing to succeed in a general election, nytimes.com/2015/09/14/world/europe/labour-partys-swerve-left-may-help-tories-in-next-british-elections.html, and the Washington Post discussing whether Republican primary candidate Ted Cruz is too conservative to win the primaries washingtonpost.com/is-ted-cruz-too-conservative-for-republican-primary-voters/.

techniques have been deployed to identify the type of topics that political parties choose to emphasize and to scale their stances on policy issues (Benoit et al., 2014; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Lucas et al., 2014; Volkens et al., 2013).

It is not obvious, however, whether a party’s policy rhetoric changes voter perceptions of what the party stands for ideologically. Indeed, several papers have suggested that voter beliefs about parties’ left-right positions do not respond to shifts in the ideological orientation of party manifestos (Adams et al., 2011, 2014). The findings of these papers suggest that, while citizen perceptions of party positions help explain voting choices, these perceptions are not shaped by the type of policy offerings that parties publicly promote (Adams, 2012).

3 Argument

In this paper, I claim that voters perceptions may fail to respond to a party’s campaign because voters do not find the policy platform credible. Policy proposals do not bind incumbents, and therefore it is possible for political parties to strategically campaign on certain policies that help them get elected and renege on their promises once they are in office (Stokes, 2001). To the extent that voters are aware of this, they may not take election platforms at face value. Specifically, when voters observe a party take an issue position, they need to interpret whether it reflects the party’s actual ideology or not.

I argue that voters anticipate that a party may have incentives to campaign on policies that increase its popularity even if such stances do not reflect the party’s ideological views (Alesina, 1988; Banks, 1990; Callander and Wilkie, 2007). As a result, voters infer that campaign stances that can help the party obtain more support are not very informative about the party’s ideology. In contrast, policy proposals that do not make the party more electorally appealing are a strong cue into what the party actually stands for. Hence, the

influence of a campaign platform on voter perceptions of the party's ideology depends on whether the platform is likely to respond to vote-seeking incentives or not.

This logic is consistent with formal models of elections that relax the assumption that campaign stances are binding. Analyzing a context in which parties have incentives to be perceived as ideologically centrist, [Banks \(1990\)](#) and [Callander and Wilkie \(2007\)](#) show that even a party that does not intend to carry out centrist policies chooses to campaign on a centrist platform. Hence, when observing a centrist stance, the voter cannot tell whether the party is actually centrist or is strategically campaigning on those policies.

I test the implications of my argument by examining the impact of campaign manifestos on the perceived left-right position of Western European parties. I focus on *mainstream* political parties, defined by [Adams et al. \(2006\)](#) as parties belonging to the social-democratic, liberal, Christian democratic or conservative party families in each country. It has long been argued that mainstream political parties have electoral incentives to develop moderate ideological reputations ([Ezrow, 2005](#); [Kirchheimer, 1966](#); [Przeworski and Sprague, 1986](#)).² For these parties, my argument predicts that voters will be more skeptical of party campaigns espousing centrist positions, because these are more likely to be driven by vote-seeking goals. I therefore test the empirical prediction that, for mainstream parties, centrist policy rhetoric generates smaller changes in voter perceptions than extreme platforms.

I complement this empirical test by analyzing responses to niche parties' campaign platforms. According to [Adams et al. \(2006\)](#), niche parties are those that belong to the green, communist or far right party families. Contrary to mainstream political parties, these parties seem to lose electoral appeal when they moderate their ideological offerings ([Adams et al., 2006](#); [Ezrow, 2008](#)). Hence, regarding niche parties the theoretical argument yields

²[Karreth et al. \(2013\)](#), however, argue that vote gains associated to ideological moderation may be short-lived.

the opposite prediction, i.e. that voters will consider centrist stances to be more credible than non-centrist ones.

4 Empirical strategy

The theoretical argument is tested using data on Western European political parties over the period 1971-2011. These political parties constitute a suitable sample to test the empirical predictions. First, there exists longitudinal data on citizen perceptions of party positions. Indeed, in several European countries since the 1970s, post-election surveys have included questionnaire items asking respondents to place parties on a left-right scale. Second, the Manifesto Project provides time-series estimates of the left-right tone of party election manifestos, a text-based proxy measure for what parties broadcast to the mass media. Such manifesto data, although non-exclusively European in scope, focuses on these countries.³

The outcome of interest is the perceived left-right position of a party after the campaign. This is captured by the average left-right placement attributed to the party in a post-election survey.⁴ The focus on the left-right dimension responds to two complementary reasons. First, the left-right axis is an ‘ideological super-issue’ that summarizes positions on several issue areas (Pierce, 1999; McDonald and Budge, 2005). As such, research has shown that the left-right dimension is useful to understand party competition in Western European democracies (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Brug et al., 2005). The second reason is more pragmatic: The left-right dimension is the issue area that is most regularly included in European national election studies. As I discuss in the concluding section, nonetheless, the theoretical argument in this paper applies to any policy issue that a party competes on.

³Only 7 of the 55 countries covered in the manifesto research project are non-European countries. See https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard_dataset/ [Last accessed December 28th 2016].

⁴The average placement is used as a summary statistic of the distribution of placements attributed to the party.

The main explanatory variable is the policy orientation of the party’s campaign, which I proxy for using the estimated left-right tone of the party’s election manifesto. These party attributes are measured around the time of elections: before the campaign in the case of manifestos and after the election for the perceived party position. Hence, the dataset includes as many data points for each party as elections have been held during the time frame of the study.⁵

The main data source for how voters perceive the left-right ideology of a political party is the European Voter Database, a collection of national election studies.⁶ I have expanded this database to include recent elections that were not part of the original data.⁷ I have also incorporated a series of Spanish election surveys between 1986 and 2008. The vast majority of these surveys use a 0 – 10 left-right scale. In the few cases where a 1 – 10 scale is used, I have rescaled the data accordingly.⁸ A table listing the countries and periods considered in the analysis is available in [table A5](#) in the [Online Appendix](#).

I employ the Manifesto Project coding of party election manifestos as an indicator of the content of parties’ campaign platforms.⁹ Election manifestos are written policy statements published by political parties in the run up to the election. Even though arguably few voters read these documents, the evidence reported in [Sommer-Topcu \(2009\)](#) and [Adams et al. \(2011\)](#) indicates that these documents inform the campaign messages that parties broadcast to the general public. Manifesto estimates rely on the division of the text into “quasi-sentences”

⁵An alternative approach to test the argument would be to rely on individual-level survey data and estimate a multi-level model. However, survey items capturing essential control variables vary widely across national election studies, and therefore it is not possible to merge these surveys into a single multi-level dataset. A second take would be to use panel surveys.

⁶For further information about this database, please refer to the following website: www.gesis.org/en/services/data-analysis/survey-data/international-election-studies/the-european-voter-project/ [last accessed December 31st 2016].

⁷These include the election studies of Sweden (2002, 2006), the Netherlands (2002, 2003, 2006 and 2010), Denmark (2001, 2005, 2007 and 2011), Great Britain (2001, 2005 and 2010), Norway (2001, 2005 and 2009) and Germany (2002, 2005 and 2009)

⁸In such cases, I have mapped the extreme values into 0 and 10, and applied the function $newscale = (oldscale - 1) \cdot \frac{10}{9}$ to the intermediate values.

⁹The data is maintained and updated by [Volkens et al. \(2013\)](#).

and their coding into mutually exclusive issue categories. Each of these categories is then classified as left-leaning, right-leaning or “neutral”. Given these issue category counts, the scaling of the manifesto left-right tone that I use is the one advanced by [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#). I do not use the one proposed by the Manifesto Project team —the *Rile* scale ([Laver and Budge, 1992](#))— because it is suspect of being biased to the center ([McDonald and Mendes, 2001](#); [Benoit and Laver, 2007](#)).¹⁰ [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#) scale avoids this problem because it does not take into consideration “neutral” quasi-sentences. Instead, it computes the log of the ratio of right and left mentions. I have rescaled the logit estimates of manifesto left-right positions so that they also take values on the 0-10 interval.¹¹ As a robustness check, the [Online Appendix](#) presents a replication of the empirical analyses using [Kim and Fording \(1998\)](#) scaling of manifesto data, which also addresses the problem of centrist bias in *Rile* estimates. The substantial conclusion of my paper is not affected by the use of this alternative scale. The [Online Appendix](#) also presents estimates addressing measurement error in left-right manifesto estimates. Following [Benoit et al. \(2009\)](#), I re-estimate the empirical models using a simulation-extrapolation approach and show that, once we take measurement error into account, the empirical results offer even stronger support for the theoretical argument.

Data on whether a political party is niche or mainstream also comes from the Manifesto Project, which includes information on party family affiliations. Lastly, the indicator of whether a political party is in government or in opposition draws on information on the partisan composition of cabinets, obtained from the *Parliamentary Democracy Data Archive*

¹⁰*Rile* captures the difference in the number of right and left mentions over the total number of sentences and therefore an increase in neutral text units pushes *Rile* towards zero, thereby suggesting a shift in party position towards the center even though the number of mentions to left and right issues has remained constant ([McDonald and Mendes, 2001](#); [Benoit and Laver, 2007](#)). This potential centrist bias would be particularly worrisome for my analyses because it would overestimate the number of centrist manifestos

¹¹Given that the logit estimates of manifesto positions do not have fixed endpoints ([Lowe et al., 2011](#)), I have based the rescaling on the *empirical* distribution of logit estimates (including for this purpose niche parties). Leaving aside a clear outlier —the Swedish left party in 1991—, the logit left-right estimates range from -3.09 to 2.71 . Accordingly, I have assumed that the logit values -3.5 and 3 map onto 0 and 10 in the survey scale. Hence, the original logit values have been transformed by applying the following rescaling function: $\text{transformed_logit} = (\text{original_logit} + 3.5) * 10/6.5$

(Müller et al., 2012) and the *Parties, Governments, and Legislatures* dataset (Cusack et al., 2007). Table A7 in the [Online Appendix](#) provides summary statistics of the data.

4.1 Empirical model

I model a party’s perceived left-right position after the election as a combination of two factors: the position stated in the election platform and its perceived position *before* the campaign. The baseline model that I estimate is the following:

$$\text{Voter Perceptions}_t = \alpha \text{Platform}_t + (1 - \alpha) \text{Voter Perceptions}_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t \quad (1)$$

A party’s perceived position after an election campaign (*Voter Perceptions_t*) is thus defined as a weighted average of the party image before the campaign (*Voter Perceptions_{t-1}*) and the position stated in the campaign manifesto (*Platform_t*), where the relative weight of each factor is determined by the α parameter. The model assumes that α is bounded between 0 and 1 and that the sum of the two coefficients equals 1. The coefficients for *Platform_t* and *Voter Perceptions_{t-1}* will be estimated without imposing any constraint, which makes it possible to test whether the modeling assumption holds.

Substantively, this model implies that, after the campaign, the party is perceived to be somewhere between the initial party image and the campaign stance. The higher the value of α , the closer the post-election party image to the position stated in the campaign. In other words, the party image shifts as a result of the election manifesto in a proportion α of the distance between the initial policy image and the campaign platform.

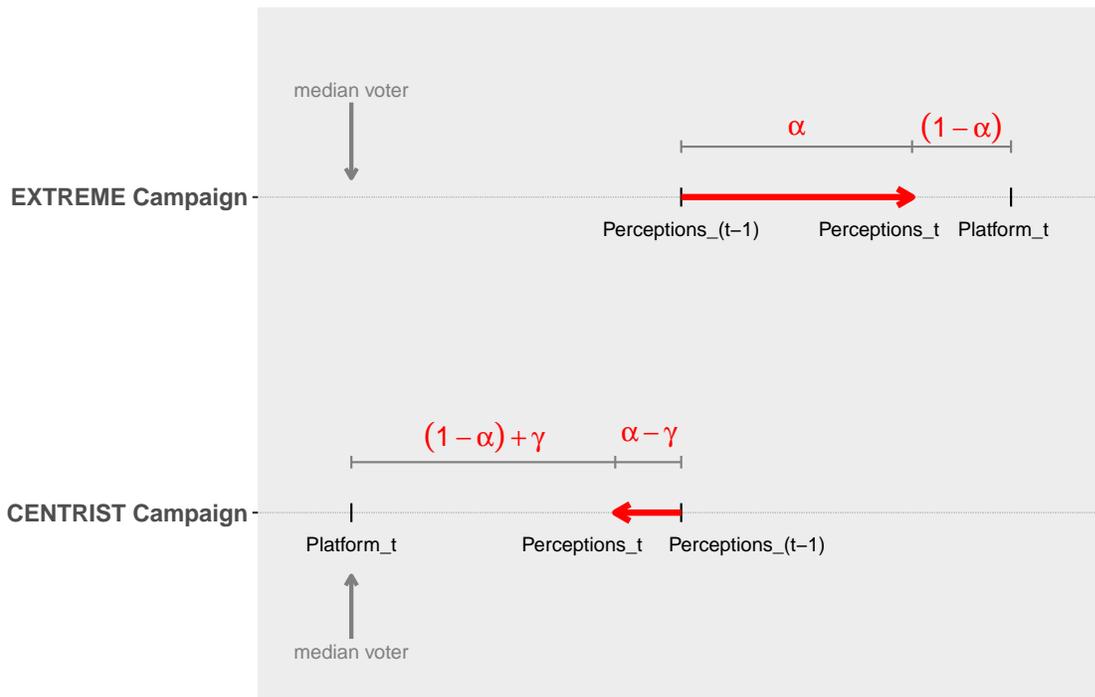
In order to test whether centrist manifestos are more heavily discounted than extreme platforms, I interact both the party’s perceived position before the campaign and the plat-

form with an indicator that the manifesto is centrist (*Centrist*):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Voter Perceptions}_t &= \alpha \text{Platform}_t + (1 - \alpha) \text{Voter Perceptions}_{t-1} \\ &- \gamma (\text{Platform}_t * \text{Centrist}_t) + \gamma (\text{Voter Perceptions}_{t-1} * \text{Centrist}_t) + \varepsilon_t \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Centrist takes the value of 1 if the manifesto is more centrist than the party's pre-campaign image. The parameter γ captures how the effect of campaigns on voter perceptions changes depending on whether the party runs a centrist campaign or not. Namely, the effect of the platform equals α if it is extreme, and $\alpha - \gamma$ if it is centrist. The weight of the initially perceived position, in turn, amounts $1 - \alpha$ and $(1 - \alpha) + \gamma$ for centrist and non-centrist manifestos, respectively. The theoretical argument predicts that, when mainstream parties adopt centrist platforms, the effect of the campaign is *smaller* and the degree of persistence in voter perceptions is *larger*. Therefore, it implies that $\gamma > 0$. The graph in [figure 1](#) illustrates this empirical prediction. As above, no constraint will be imposed in the estimation of these coefficients, which makes it possible to test whether parties' perceived position after the election are indeed a weighted average of campaign messages and initial party image.

Figure 1: Hypothesized relationship between the type of platform and its influence on a mainstream party’s perceived left-right position. In this example, the party is initially placed to the right of the center (median voter). Two scenarios: a centrist and an extreme campaign manifesto. Both platforms are equally distanced from the initial party image. α and $(1 - \alpha)$ reflect the impact of campaigns and initial perceptions when the party adopts an extreme platform. If the party chooses a centrist platform, the marginal effects are $\alpha - \gamma$ and $(1 - \alpha) + \gamma$. Therefore, the hypothesis implies that $\gamma > 0$.



In sum, I estimate a standard updating model in which current perceptions are defined as a weighted average of new and past information. This is a common approach in political science. It is present in studies that use Bayesian updating to model the dynamics of political attitudes, such as party identification (Achen, 2002), perceptions of incumbent performance (Bartels, 2002) or candidate evaluations (Bartels, 1993). At the aggregate level, public opinion trends have also been approached as a process that combines memory and current events (Erikson et al., 2002).¹² Within the field of electoral competition, Enelow and Munger (1993) propose a formal model of elections in which voter policy expectations from each

¹²As Erikson et al. (1998, p. 910) put it: “macropartisanship incorporates not only the political and economic news of the present but also the accumulation of news from the past.”

candidate are a weighted average of the previous and the current policy stance. Lastly, this approach has also been adopted in a previous study of the effect of campaigns on voter perceptions (Fernandez-Vazquez, 2014).

5 Results

This section presents the empirical test of the theoretical argument. Table I reports the main results for mainstream political parties. The first column presents the estimates of the baseline model —equation 1—. These results uphold the modeling assumption that a party’s perceived position after the election is a weighted average of the pre-campaign perception and the position advocated in the manifesto. The Platform and Voter Perceptions_{*t*-1} coefficients capture α and $(1 - \alpha)$, respectively, which implies that both parameters should equal 1. In fact, the sum of both estimated coefficients is very close to one —1.01— and an F test cannot reject the null that they equal one.¹³ Substantively, the results of the baseline model suggest that campaigns have a small overall impact on voter perceptions —the coefficient for Platform is positive and statistically significant—. The fact that the coefficient for Voter Perceptions_{*t*-1} is 0.9 and that of Platform is 0.11 implies that, on average, the magnitude of the shift in the party’s perceived ideology is about 10% of the distance between the initial perception and the campaign platform. To give an example, a party’s average perceived left-right placement will move from 6 to 6.1 if the party runs a campaign on policies considered as a 7 on the scale.

¹³The F statistic with is 0.38 and the p-value 0.55.

Table I: The impact of campaign platforms as a function of whether the platform is centrist or not. Lowe et al. (2011) logit scale. **Mainstream political parties.**

	Baseline	Interaction
Voter Perceptions _{t-1}	0.90*** (0.02)	0.54** (0.21)
Voter Perceptions _{t-1} X Centrist		0.37* (0.21)
Platform	0.11*** (0.03)	0.35** (0.14)
Platform X Centrist		-0.29** (0.14)
Centrist		-0.28 (0.50)
Intercept	-0.03 (0.10)	0.47 (0.48)
R^2	0.94	0.94
RMSE	0.4	0.4
N	185	185

Significance levels: *: 10% **: 5% ***: 1%. In parentheses, clustered standard errors at the party level. 28 clusters in the first model, 27 in the second.

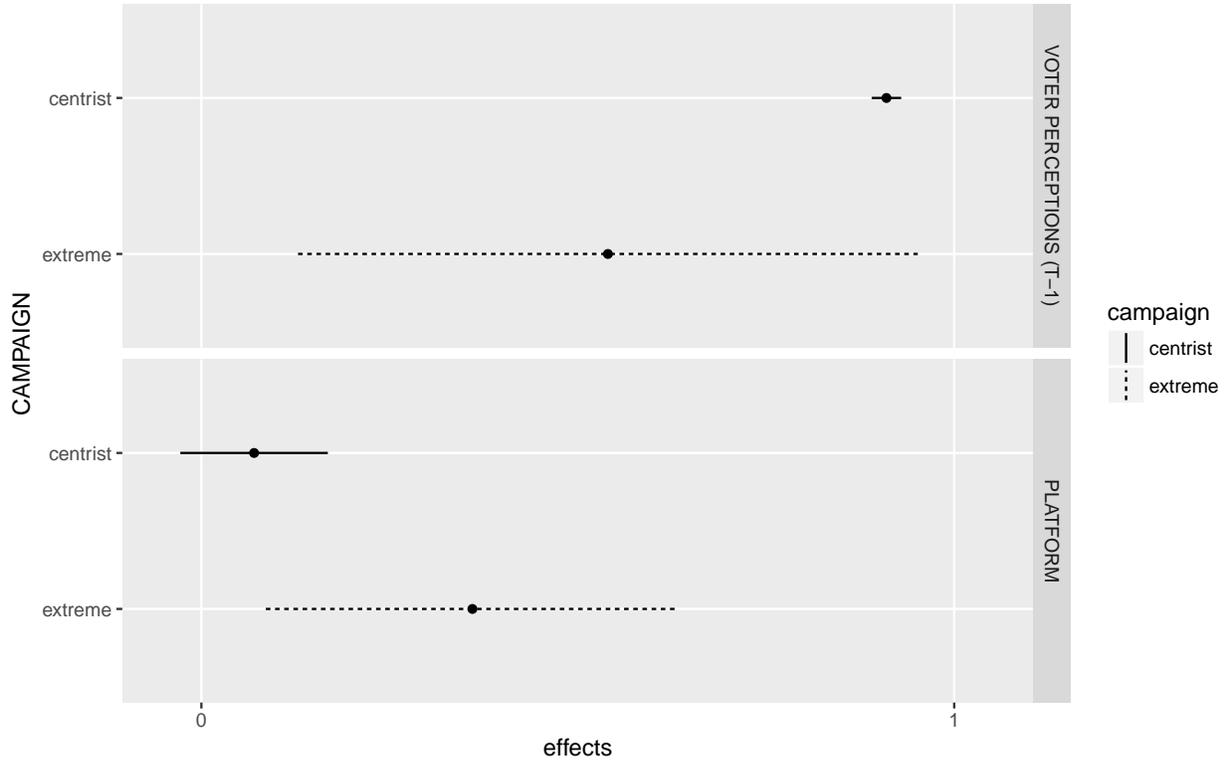
Column 2 provides the results of estimating the interaction model for mainstream political parties. It shows that the effect estimated in the baseline model disguises a fundamental heterogeneity. Whereas non-centrist manifestos substantially change perceptions of the party’s ideology, centrist campaigns are rather inconsequential for the party’s perceived position. With an ideologically centrist campaign, the marginal effect of platforms is very small, 0.06, —the *sum* of the coefficients Platform and Platform X Centrist— and this effect is not statistically distinguishable from zero.¹⁴ Post-election party placements are thus almost fully

¹⁴The standard error of this marginal effect is 0.05.

driven by the pre-campaign party image. Indeed, the marginal effect of the initial party image is 0.91 —the sum of $\text{Voter Perceptions}_{t-1}$ and $\text{Voter Perceptions}_{t-1} \times \text{Centrist}$ —.

In contrast, running a non-centrist manifesto has a relevant effect on the party’s perceived ideological position. The influence of the campaign is substantial, 0.35, and statistically different from zero. In addition, the degree of persistence in party placements is significantly lower when the party runs an non-centrist manifesto: the Voter Perceptions coefficient is now 0.54. As the interaction coefficients show, these differences between centrist and extreme platforms are statistically significant. Figure 2 plots the estimated marginal effects and their 95% confidence intervals. The results of the interactive model can be summarized in the following example: Take a mainstream party perceived to be located at position 6 on a 0–10 left-right scale. If the party runs on a campaign platform located at 5, its policy image barely changes: voters locate it at 5.94 after the election. Instead, if the party espouses right-wing policies located at 7, the manifesto significantly shapes voter perceptions: the party’s perceived position becomes 6.40.

Figure 2: The marginal effect of campaign platforms on party policy images. [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#) logit scale of manifesto left-right positions. Centrist and extreme manifestos. Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals. Party level cluster-robust std. errors. **Mainstream political parties.**



Note: The top pane reflects the estimated marginal effects for Voter Perceptions (t-1), i.e. the average left-right placement attributed to the party before the campaign. The bottom pane reflects the marginal effect for Platform, i.e. the left-right tone of the party's election manifesto.

5.1 Robustness Checks

I replicate the empirical models restricting the sample to parties in opposition. The reason is that incumbents' actions in office could confound the relationship between platforms and voter perceptions. Hence, by narrowing the focus to parties that are out of office, I reduce the risk of endogeneity bias. I define opposition parties as those that have not participated in

any cabinet during the period between the previous and the current election.¹⁵ This ensures that the parties included in the analyses have not been responsible for government decision-making. Table II reports these results and figure 3 provides a graphical representation.

Table II: The impact of campaign platforms as a function of the direction of the policy movement. Lowe et al. (2011) logit scale. **Mainstream political parties in opposition.**

	Baseline	Interaction
Voter Perceptions _{t-1}	0.90*** (0.04)	0.36 (0.28)
Voter Perceptions _{t-1} X Centrist		0.57 ** (0.27)
Platform	0.15*** (0.05)	0.54*** (0.17)
Platform X Centrist		-0.49 ** (0.18)
Centrist		-0.30 (0.64)
Intercept	-0.31 (0.18)	0.41 (0.67)
R^2	0.94	0.95
RMSE	0.4	0.4
N	101	101

Significance levels: *: 10% **: 5% ***: 1%
clustered standard errors at the party level

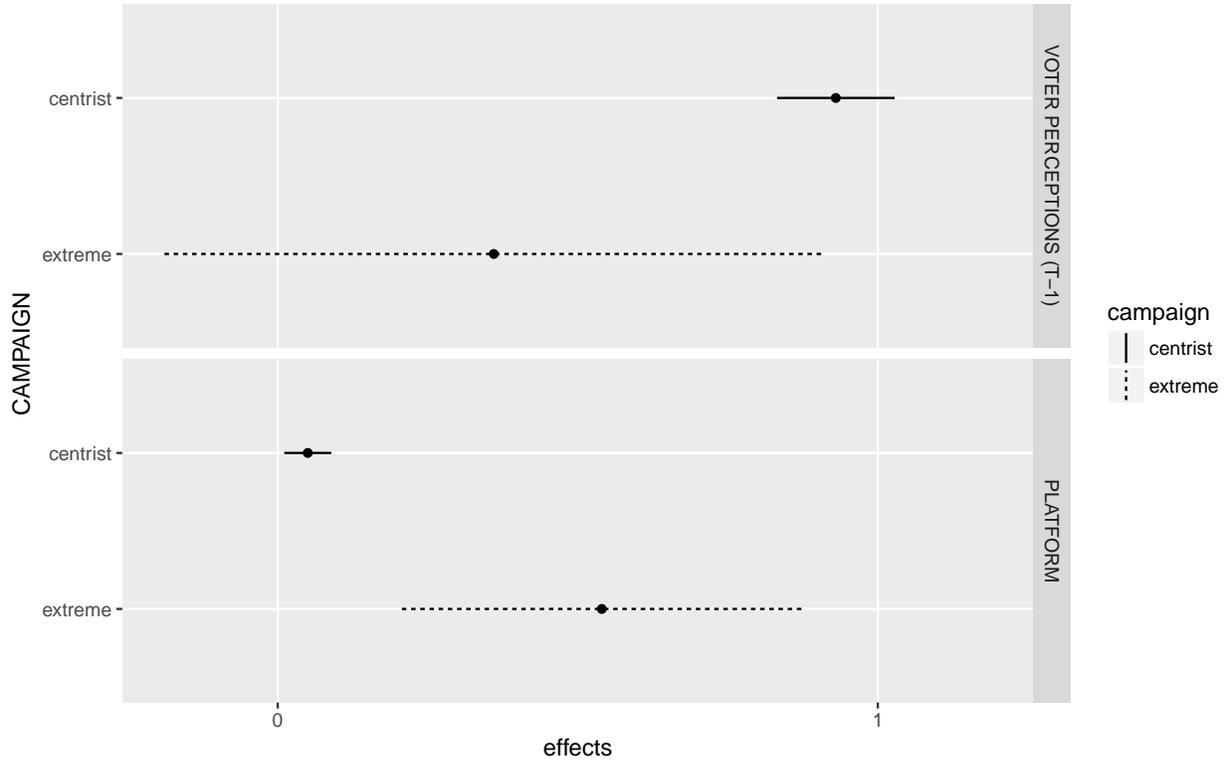
The estimates for the baseline model are substantially identical to the results for the full sample of mainstream parties. Campaign platforms have a statistically significant effect on post-election party images, but this overall effect is small relative to the magnitude of inertia

¹⁵ To give an example, the Swedish Conservative party (*Moderaterna*) is not considered to be in opposition in the 1982 election, even though at that precise time it did not form part of the government. The reason is that it had participated in the cabinet for some time after the previous election, concretely between 1979 and 1981.

in voter perceptions. Regarding the interaction model, results for opposition parties offer a sharper pattern of results. Non-centrist campaign platforms have a considerable effect. In fact, the weight of the campaign on a party's perceived position is larger than that of the initial party image, 0.54 vs. 0.36, and the latter estimate is not statistically significant. When parties propose centrist policies, however, campaigns have a minimal impact—the estimated effect is 0.05—and therefore party images after the election are almost fully explained by the pre-campaigned placement.¹⁶ Again, these differences between centrist and extreme platforms are statistically distinguishable from zero. These estimates and their confidence intervals are plotted in [figure 3](#).

¹⁶The marginal effect of the initial image is 0.93.

Figure 3: The marginal effect of campaign platforms on party policy images. [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#) logit scale of manifesto left-right positions. Centrist and extreme campaigns. Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals. Party level cluster-robust std. errors. **Mainstream Parties in opposition.**



Note: The top pane reflects the estimated marginal effects for Voter Perceptions (t-1), i.e. the average left-right placement attributed to the party before the campaign. The bottom pane reflects the marginal effect for Platform, i.e. the left-right tone of the party’s election manifesto.

The [Online Appendix](#) presents several additional robustness checks. It displays the results of estimating the empirical models using an alternative scaling method for manifestos’ left-right positions ([Kim and Fording, 1998](#)). With a simulation-extrapolation procedure, I also address the presence of measurement error in manifesto data ([Benoit et al., 2009](#)). In addition, the interaction model is estimated including party and country fixed effects. In all cases, the same empirical pattern emerges: Centrist platforms bear less influence on the perceived ideological position of mainstream political parties than non-centrist ones.

5.2 Ruling Out an Alternative Explanation

In this section I address the possibility that the empirical pattern described above is the result of an alternative causal mechanism. It could be argued that the reason why centrist platforms are less consequential is not because they are less credible, but because they tend to be more ambiguous than non-centrist manifestos. In order to rule out this alternative explanation, I make use of data presented by [Benoit et al. \(2009\)](#) and [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#), who gauge the reliability associated to estimates of manifesto left-right positions. If the meaning of centrist platforms is indeed more ambiguous, we should observe that uncertainty is higher for estimates of ideologically moderate manifestos.

Table III compares the standard error in estimates of manifesto positions for both centrist and extreme platforms. This difference in means test shows that the level of uncertainty associated to centrist manifestos is not higher than that of non-centrist ones. The difference between average standard errors is very small and it is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Hence, this analysis suggests that the lower impact of centrist platforms on voter perceptions of mainstream parties is not due to systematic differences in the ambiguity of party manifestos.

Table III: Comparing the uncertainty of centrist and extreme manifestos. Difference in means test. Mainstream political parties. Standard errors in parentheses.

	Average Uncertainty	Difference
Centrist = 1	0.23 (0.01)	0.01 (0.03)
Centrist = 0	0.22 (0.02)	

Significance levels: *: 10% **: 5% ***: 1%.

Uncertainty is measured as the standard error in estimates of manifesto left-right positions ([Benoit et al., 2009](#); [Lowe et al., 2011](#)).

5.3 Extension: Niche Parties

I extend the analysis to evaluate the impact of campaign platforms for niche parties. According to Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow (2008), these parties lose electoral support when they adopt centrist left-right positions. Hence, in contrast with mainstream parties, niche do not face vote-seeking incentives to adopt moderate policy stances. The theoretical argument thus predicts that, regarding niche parties, voters will find campaigns espousing centrist policies *more* credible than extreme ones. To test this empirical prediction, I have estimated the baseline and interaction models for niche parties. Table IV presents the regression results.

Table IV: The impact of campaigns for niche parties. Lowe et al. (2011) logit scale.

	Baseline	Interaction
voter perceptions (t-1)	0.92*** (0.03)	0.93*** (0.04)
voter perceptions (t-1) X centrist		-0.05 (0.05)
platform	0.09 * (0.05)	-0.00 (0.03)
platform X centrist		0.18*** (0.06)
centrist		-0.38 * (0.19)
intercept	-0.02 (0.10)	0.13 ** (0.05)
R^2	0.97	0.97
RMSE	0.5	0.5
N	66	66

Significance levels: * : 10% ** : 5% *** : 1%

clustered standard errors at the party level

Results in the baseline model are almost identical as those for mainstream parties: Platforms have a small average effect on the perceived left-right placement of the party after the campaign —the marginal effect is 0.09—. However, a key difference appears between mainstream and niche parties when comparing the effect of centrist and extreme platforms. In line with the theoretical argument, for niche parties centrist campaigns have a *higher* impact on voter perceptions than non-centrist platforms: while extreme manifestos seem to have no effect on the party’s perceived position —the marginal effect is -0.00 —, centrist campaigns have a non-negligible influence —the marginal effect is 0.18—. Such difference is statistically significant.¹⁷

Taken together, the empirical evidence for both mainstream and niche parties is in line with the argument that voters are more skeptical of platforms that are likely to be driven by vote-seeking pressures. For mainstream parties, who tend to have electoral incentives to appear ideologically moderate, voters are more responsive to non-centrist campaign proposals. With niche parties, in contrast, centrist campaigns have a deeper influence on voter placements of party positions.

6 Discussion

This paper has explored the conditions in which a party’s campaign platform influences voters’ perceptions of what the party stands for ideologically. The approach taken highlights the fact that election promises are not binding and therefore voters may not find party platforms credible. Specifically, the theoretical argument predicts that voters will discount platforms that are likely to respond to vote-seeking incentives.

¹⁷In terms of the interaction between the prior perceived position (voter perceptions t-1) and the indicator of a centrist platform (centrist), the estimated coefficient has the expected sign — -0.05 —, but it is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

I have reported robust empirical evidence in support of this prediction. Regarding mainstream political parties in Western Europe, which have electoral incentives to develop moderate ideological reputations (Ezrow, 2005, 2008; Kirchheimer, 1966), centrist manifestos do not affect the party’s perceived left-right position. The opposite pattern is observed for niche parties, which tend to lose votes when they move to the center (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow, 2008). Hence, for niche parties centrist platforms are more credible and have a strong impact on the party’s image.

This paper thus helps illuminate why voter opinions about a party may not respond to what the party campaigns on (Adams et al., 2011, 2014). It suggests that the disconnect between party manifestos and voter perceptions is not necessarily the result of voters “not listening” (Adams et al., 2011). Voters may still be listening, but they do not update their perceptions because they do not find the party’s platform credible. The fact that some platforms have a stronger impact on the party image than others is consistent with this interpretation.

The empirical evidence also makes a contribution to the debate in political science about the influence of campaigns on election outcomes (Hillygus and Jackman, 2003; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Vavreck, 2009). Indeed, perceptions of where parties stand on issues affect voting decisions (Hinich and Munger, 1997; Jesse, 2009; Merrill and Grofman, 1999). Hence, by identifying when platforms have a stronger effect on perceptions, this paper helps map scenarios in which campaigns are likely to impact election returns. Specifically, it suggests that, for a mainstream party, running a centrist campaign has a smaller impact on the election outcome than a left-wing or right-wing platform. For niche parties, in contrast, shifting the platform to the center is more consequential than shifting away from it.

The implications of the paper generalize beyond the left-right policy dimension. The logic of the argument applies to any issue that a party may campaign on: For each possible policy

dimension, it predicts that voters will discount the platforms that are most likely to be part of an electioneering strategy. Take the hypothetical example of a party that has incentives to develop an anti European Union reputation in order to increase its voter support. In that case, a pro-EU platform cannot respond to vote-seeking pressures and therefore it provides a more credible signal of what the party stands for than adopting a Euro-skeptic campaign. Future work will be able to test the argument advanced in this paper on policy issues beyond the left-right dimension.

An additional extension could be to analyze the impact of campaigns for political parties outside of Western Europe. For instance, [Ezrow et al. \(2014\)](#) report results from postcommunist countries in Eastern Europe suggesting that parties with extreme policy reputations perform better in elections. For these parties, therefore, the argument predicts that voters will be more skeptical of left-wing and right-wing manifestos than of moderate ones.

This paper also opens the way for further research that explores individual-level differences in the discounting of party platforms. Indeed, the contribution of this paper has been to uncover general patterns in the link between campaign platforms and perceptions of partisan ideologies. What remains to be analyzed is whether the impact of a campaign platform diverges across individuals as a function of their education, their level of political sophistication, or their party identification. A survey-experiment approach, for instance, could address these follow-up questions in future research.

If the electoral incentives that Western European parties face were to change, further research should also re-examine the pattern of voter discounting. Indeed, the predictions of the argument about mainstream and niche parties are specific to the time period analyzed in the paper. If the electoral environment changes, then the predictions of the theoretical argument change as well. For instance, if it became electorally profitable for mainstream parties to adopt extreme left-right positions in order to address the threat of more radical

parties, the argument implies that left-wing and right-wing platforms would become less credible than centrist ones.

Lastly, the empirical evidence raises the following question: if voters discount vote-seeking campaigns, how can parties reshape their ideological reputation in order to improve their electoral performance? The extant research helps provide an answer. It suggests that incumbent parties can credibly signal their policy preferences through their actions in office (Lupu, 2014), their choice of coalition partners (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013), or the type of legislation passed (Grynaviski, 2010). The task seems more difficult for parties in opposition, since they are more reliant on policy rhetoric to communicate changes in ideological views. Recent research, however, suggests that electing a new party leader makes voters more receptive to the party's campaign platform (Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu, Forthcoming).

References

- ACHEN, C. H. (2002): “Parental Socialization and Rational Party Identification,” *Political Behavior*, 24, 151–170.
- ADAMS, J. (2012): “Causes and Electoral Consequences of Party Policy Shifts in Multi-party Elections: Theoretical Results and Empirical Evidence,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15, 401–419.
- ADAMS, J., M. CLARK, L. EZROW, AND G. GLASGOW (2006): “Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties’ Policy Shifts, 1976-1998,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 513–29.
- ADAMS, J., L. EZROW, AND Z. SOMER-TOPCU (2011): “Is Anybody Listening? Evidence that Voters do not Respond to European Parties’ Policy Programmes,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 55, 370–382.
- (2014): “Do Voters Respond to Party Manifestos or to a Wider Information Environment? An Analysis of Mass-Elite Linkages on European Integration,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 58, 967–978.
- ADAMS, J., S. MERRILL, AND B. GROFMAN (2005): *A Unified Theory of Party Competition. A Cross-National Analysis Integrating Spatial and Behavioral Factors*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- ALESINA, A. (1988): “Credibility and Policy Convergence in a Two-Party System with Rational Voters,” *American Economic Review*, 78, 796–806.

- BANKS, J. (1990): "A Model of Electoral Competition with Incomplete Information," *Journal of Economic Theory*, 50, 309–25.
- BARTELS, L. M. (1993): "Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure," *American Political Science Review*, 267–285.
- (2002): "Beyond the "Running Tally": Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions," *Political Behavior*, 24, 117–150.
- BENOIT, K., D. CONWAY, B. E. LAUDERDALE, M. LAVER, AND S. MIKHAYLOV (2014): "Crowd-Sourced Text Analysis: Reproducible and Agile Production of Political Data," London School of Economics.
- BENOIT, K. AND M. LAVER (2007): "Estimating party policy positions: Comparing expert surveys and hand-coded content analysis," *Electoral Studies*, 26, 90–107.
- BENOIT, K., M. LAVER, AND S. MIKHAYLOV (2009): "Treating Words as Data with Error: Uncertainty in Text Statements of Policy Positions," *American Journal of Political Science*, 53, 495–513.
- BRUG, W., M. FENNEMA, J. TILLIE, ET AL. (2005): "Why Some Anti-Immigrant Parties Fail and Others Succeed: A Two-Step Model of Aggregate Electoral Support." *Comparative Political Studies*, 38, 537–573.
- BUDGE, I., H.-D. KLINGEMANN, A. VOLKENS, J. BARA, AND E. TANENBAUM (2001): *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors and Governments 1945-1998*, Oxford University Press.
- CALLANDER, S. AND S. WILKIE (2007): "Lies, Damned Lies, and Political Campaigns," *Games and Economic Behavior*, 60, 262–286.

- CUSACK, T. R., S. FUCHS, AND K. MÜLLER (2007): “Parties, Governments and Legislatures Data,” WZB, Berlin.
- ENELOW, J. AND M. C. MUNGER (1993): “The Elements of Candidate Reputation: The Effect of Record and Credibility on Optimal Spatial Location,” *Public Choice*, 77, 757–72.
- ERIKSON, R. S., M. B. MACKUEN, AND J. A. STIMSON (1998): “What Moves Macropartisanship? A Response to Green, Palmquist, and Schickler,” *The American Political Science Review*, 92, 901–912.
- (2002): *The Macro Polity*, Cambridge University Press.
- EZROW, L. (2005): “Are Moderate Parties Rewarded in Multiparty Systems? A Pooled Analysis of Western European Elections, 1984–1998,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 44, 881–898.
- (2008): “Research Note: On the Inverse Relationship between Votes and Proximity for Niche Parties,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 47, 206–220.
- EZROW, L., J. HOMOLA, AND M. TAVITS (2014): “When extremism pays: Policy positions, voter certainty, and party support in postcommunist Europe,” *The Journal of Politics*, 76, 535–547.
- FERNANDEZ-VAZQUEZ, P. (2014): “And Yet It Moves The Effect of Election Platforms on Party Policy Images,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 47, 1919–1944.
- FERNANDEZ-VAZQUEZ, P. AND Z. SOMER-TOPCU (Forthcoming): “The Informational Role of Party Leader Changes on Voter Perceptions of Party Positions,” *British Journal of Political Science*.
- FORTUNATO, D. AND R. T. STEVENSON (2013): “Perceptions of Partisan Ideologies: The Effect of Coalition Participation,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 57, 459–477.

- GRIMMER, J. AND B. M. STEWART (2013): “Text as data: The promise and pitfalls of automatic content analysis methods for political texts,” *Political Analysis*, 21, 267–297.
- GRYNAVISKI, J. (2010): *Partisan Bonds: Political Reputations and Legislative Accountability*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions, Cambridge University Press.
- HILLYGUS, D. S. AND S. JACKMAN (2003): “Voter decision making in election 2000: Campaign effects, partisan activation, and the Clinton legacy,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 47, 583–596.
- HINICH, M. J. AND M. C. MUNGER (1997): *Analytical Politics*, Cambridge University Press.
- JESSEE, S. A. (2009): “Spatial voting in the 2004 presidential election,” *American Political Science Review*, 103, 59–81.
- KARRETH, J., J. T. POLK, AND C. S. ALLEN (2013): “Catchall or Catch and Release? The Electoral Consequences of Social Democratic Parties’ March to the Middle in Western Europe,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 46, 791–822.
- KIM, H. AND R. C. FORDING (1998): “Voter Ideology in Western Democracies, 1946-1989,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 33, 73–97.
- KIRCHHEIMER, O. (1966): “The Transformation of the Western European Party System,” in *Political Parties and Political Development*, Princeton University Press.
- KLINGEMANN, H.-D., A. VOLKENS, J. BARA, AND I. BUDGE (2006): *Mapping Policy Preferences II: Estimates of Parties, Votes and Governments in Central and Eastern Europe, European Union and OECD 1990-2003*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

- LACY, D. AND P. PAOLINO (2010): “Testing Proximity versus Directional Voting Using Experiments,” *Electoral Studies*, 29, 460–471.
- LAVER, M. AND I. BUDGE (1992): *Party Policy and Government Coalitions*, St. Martin’s Press.
- LEDERER, W. AND H. KÜCHENHOFF (2006): “A Short Introduction to the SIMEX and MCSIMEX,” *The Newsletter of the R Project*, 6, 26.
- LEWIS-BECK, M. S. AND M. STEGMAIER (2000): “Economic determinants of electoral outcomes,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 183–219.
- LOWE, W., K. BENOIT, S. MIKHAYLOV, AND M. LAVER (2011): “Scaling Policy Preferences from Coded Political Texts,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 36, 123–155.
- LUCAS, C., R. NIELSEN, M. E. ROBERTS, B. M. STEWART, A. STORER, AND D. TINGLEY (2014): “Computer Assisted Text Analysis for Comparative Politics,” *scholar.harvard.edu*, 1–43.
- LUPU, N. (2014): “Brand Dilution and the Breakdown of Political Parties in Latin America,” *World Politics*, 66, 561–602.
- MCDONALD, M. D. AND I. BUDGE (2005): *Elections, Parties, Democracy: Conferring the Median Mandate*, Oxford University Press.
- MCDONALD, M. D. AND S. M. MENDES (2001): “The Policy Space of Party Manifestos,” in *Estimating the Policy Position of Political Actors*, ed. by M. Laver, Routledge.
- MERRILL, S. AND B. GROFMAN (1999): *A Unified Theory of Voting. Directional and Proximity Spatial Models*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- MÜLLER, W. C., K. STROM, AND T. BERGMAN (2012): “Comparative Parliamentary Democracy Data Archive,” .
- PIERCE, R. (1999): “Mass-Elite Issue Linkages and the Responsible Party Model of Representation,” in *Policy Representation in Western Democracies*, ed. by W. E. Miller, R. Pierce, J. Thomassen, R. Herrera, S. Holmberg, P. Esaisson, and B. Webels, Oxford University Press.
- PLESCIA, C. AND M. STANIEK (2015): “In the eye of the beholder. Voter perceptions of party policy shifts: the case of Germany,” Paper presented at the PSAI Annual Conference.
- PRZEWORSKI, A. AND J. SPRAGUE (1986): *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism*, University of Chicago Press.
- SOMER-TOPCU, Z. (2009): *Responsible agents: Public opinion, uncertainty and party policy change in established democracies*, University of California, Davis.
- STOKES, S. C. (2001): *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VAVRECK, L. (2009): *The message matters: The economy and presidential campaigns*, Princeton University Press.
- VOLKENS, A., O. LACEWELL, P. LEHMANN, S. REGEL, H. SCHULTZE, AND A. WERNER (2013): “The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR).” Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).

A Online Appendix

A.1 Empirical analyses using Kim and Fording (1998) scales

The main empirical analyses have been replicated using an alternative scaling of manifesto positions proposed by [Kim and Fording \(1998\)](#). Like the logit scales ([Lowe et al., 2011](#)), [Kim and Fording](#)’s index addresses the centrist bias allegedly present in the original Manifesto Project’s *Rile* scale. The “fix” that Kim and Fording introduce is straightforward: As with *Rile*, the estimate of a manifesto position is the difference in the proportion of right and left-leaning text units, but they compute these proportions over the total number of positional sentences, discarding those that are neutral or uncoded.¹⁸

The empirical results obtained with these alternative manifesto data largely reproduce the ones using the logit scale. The conclusion that emerges is the same: election platforms are not an effective tool to signal a moderation in a party’s policy preferences. In contrast, voters are more willing to revise their evaluation of a party’s position when the party campaigns on ideologically extreme platforms. In this case, the effect of these campaigns on party reputations is substantively relevant.

Table [A1](#) reports the results of estimating the baseline and interaction models with mainstream parties —[equation 1](#) and [equation 2](#)—. In the baseline model, I estimate a statistically significant but small average effect of platform announcements: 0.07 compared to 0.9 for the prior policy image. This would suggest that, on average, platforms have a limited effect on the perceived ideology of a political party. As seen in the main results section, however, this

¹⁸[Kim and Fording \(1998\)](#)’s alternative left-right estimate is computed as:

$$\text{Kim_index} = \frac{r - l}{r + l} \cdot 100$$

where r and l denote the number of right and left-leaning sentences, respectively.

general picture is an artifact of conflating centrist and non-centrist campaigns in the same analysis. The evidence produced by the interactive models shows that extreme platforms have a noticeable effect on party policy reputations —the marginal effect is 0.21—, whereas that of moderate campaigns is negligible —only 0.05—.

Table A1: The impact of campaign platforms as a function of whether the party runs a centrist campaign or not. [Kim and Fording \(1998\)](#) scale. Mainstream parties.

	Baseline	Interaction
Voter Perceptions _{t-1}	0.90*** (0.02)	0.64*** (0.13)
Voter Perceptions _{t-1} X Centrist		0.28 ** (0.13)
Platform	0.07*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.07)
Platform X Centrist		-0.16 ** (0.07)
Centrist		-0.53 (0.38)
Intercept	0.18 ** (0.07)	0.78 ** (0.35)
R^2	0.94	0.94
RMSE	0.4	0.4
N	185	185

Significance levels: *: 10% **: 5% ***: 1%
clustered standard errors at the party level

Table [A2](#) reports the evidence produced with the subsample of mainstream parties in opposition. The estimated marginal effect of non-centrist campaigns is 0.27 and that of centrist platforms is only 0.03, and in this case it is not statistically different from zero. We can thus conclude that, while announcing extreme policies clearly changes voter perceptions, centrist stances are heavily discounted by voters, leaving party images substantially unchanged.

Table A2: The impact of campaign platforms as a function of whether the party runs a centrist campaign or not. Kim and Fording (1998) scale. Mainstream parties in opposition.

	Baseline	Interaction
Voter Perceptions _{t-1}	0.91*** (0.04)	0.59*** (0.20)
Voter Perceptions _{t-1} X Centrist		0.33 * (0.19)
Platform	0.10*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.09)
Platform X Centrist		-0.24 ** (0.09)
Centrist		-0.31 (0.62)
Intercept	-0.03 (0.16)	0.61 (0.60)
R^2	0.94	0.95
RMSE	0.4	0.4
N	101	101

Significance levels: * : 10% ** : 5% *** : 1%
clustered standard errors at the party level

A.2 Dealing with measurement error: Simulation-Extrapolation estimates

In this section I report the results of replicating the interaction model using a simulation-extrapolation procedure (simex) in order to address measurement error in manifesto data. For that purpose, I follow [Benoit et al. \(2009\)](#), who suggest using simex to estimate models using text-based data as a predictor. The rationale is that the process of producing a text is inherently random, and therefore any text-based estimates will be affected by measurement error. The simex estimation technique creates several simulated dataset with increasing

levels of measurement error. The empirical model is estimated in each of these simulated datasets. The final estimates are extrapolated from the results obtained in these simulated datasets to a hypothetical setting with no measurement error.¹⁹ In order to use simulation-extrapolation, estimates of the measurement error in the covariates are needed. These have been made available by [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#). These authors estimate the uncertainty in the point estimates of manifesto positions by bootstrapping the coded text-units.

I have re-estimated the empirical models taking into account the manifesto-specific uncertainty in [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#) logit scales. The results, reported in [table A3](#), offer clear support for the hypothesis that voters discount centrist platforms more heavily than non-centrist ones. Looking at the results for the whole sample, we see that, when a party campaigns on extreme policies, the platform has a substantial impact (0.67) while the degree of persistence in party brands is minimal (0.11) and not statistically different from zero. In contrast, with an ideologically moderate campaign, there is a high level of inertia in voter perceptions, 0.92, and the influence of the platform is very small: 0.03. Indeed, we cannot rule out statistically that this effect is actually zero. These differences in the impact of campaigns are statistically significant. This pattern of results is even stronger in the subsample of parties in opposition. While the estimated effect of a campaign promising non-centrist policies is 0.95, that of a moderate one is almost non-existent (0.01). Conversely, with extreme platforms there seems to be *no* inertia in voter perceptions—the coefficient for $\text{Voter Perceptions}_{t-1}$ is not statistically significant, while it is very substantial for centrist campaigns: 0.95—. In sum, once we take measurement error into account, the difference in the effectiveness of centrist and extreme election stances appears even starker.

¹⁹For further information about this estimation procedure, please see [Lederer and Küchenhoff \(2006\)](#).

Table A3: The impact of campaign platforms as a function of whether the party runs a centrist campaign or not. [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#) scale. **Simulation-Extrapolation (SIMEX) estimates.** Mainstream parties.

	All parties	Parties in opposition
Voter Perceptions _{t-1}	0.11 (0.22)	-0.21 (0.27)
Voter Perceptions _{t-1} X Centrist	0.81*** (0.22)	1.16*** (0.27)
Platform	0.67*** (0.15)	0.95*** (0.19)
Platform X Centrist	-0.62*** (0.16)	-0.94** (0.20)
Centrist	-0.81* (0.46)	-1.03* (0.59)
Intercept	1.08** (0.44)	1.26** (0.54)
RMSE	0.4	0.4
N	185	101

Significance levels: *: 10% **: 5% ***: 1%

Jackknife standard errors in parentheses.

A.3 Models with Fixed Effects

Table [A4](#) presents the result of testing the hypothesis both in a model with country fixed effects (column 1) and in another model with party fixed effects (column 2). As can be seen, the empirical pattern presented in the results section is robust to including either type of fixed effects. Both with country and with party fixed effects we see that centrist platforms have a minimal impact on perceptions of where the party stands ideologically. The marginal effects are 0.07 and 0.02, respectively, and in neither case the impact is statistically distinguishable from zero. In contrast, non-centrist manifestos do significantly alter the party's perceived

ideology: the marginal effects are 0.36 and 0.28. In sum, this robustness check confirms the findings reported in the main text.

Table A4: The impact of campaigns on voter perceptions as a function of whether the platform is centrist or not. Lowe et al. (2011) logit scale. Mainstream parties.

	Country FE	Party FE
voter perceptions (t-1)	0.52*** (0.15)	0.28 * (0.15)
centrist	-0.33 (0.43)	0.11 (0.43)
voter perceptions (t-1) X centrist	0.38 ** (0.16)	0.28 * (0.15)
platform	0.36*** (0.10)	0.28*** (0.11)
platform X centrist	-0.29 ** (0.11)	-0.26 ** (0.11)
intercept	0.48 (0.41)	2.27*** (0.46)
R^2	0.95	0.41
RMSE	0.4	0.4
N	185	185

Significance levels: *: 10% **: 5% ***: 1%

Note: The equation with party fixed effects is commonly known simply as a “fixed effects” model or within estimator.

A.4 Additional descriptive statistics

Table A5 summarizes the countries and time periods that these election studies cover.

Table A5: Countries and time periods included in the empirical analyses.

Country	Time period	Number of elections	Number of parties
Sweden	(1979-2006)	9	7
Netherlands	(1971-2010)	13	8
Norway	(1977-2009)	9	7
Germany	(1976-2009)	10	5
Great Britain	(1983-2010)	7	3
Denmark	(1994-2011)	6	10
Spain	(1986-2008)	7	3

Table A6: List of parties and elections included in the dataset. In **bold**: years in which the party is in opposition.

Party name	Elections
<i>Great Britain</i>	
Conservative Party	1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010
Labour Party	1983, 1987, 1992, 1997 , 2001, 2005, 2010
Liberal Democrats	1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010
<i>Denmark</i>	
Center Party	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Christian Democrats	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Conservative Party	1994, 1998, 2001 , 2005, 2007, 2011
Liberal Party	1994, 1998, 2001 , 2005, 2007, 2011
People's Party	1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Progress Party	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007
Radical Liberal Party	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Red Green Coalition	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Social Democratic Party	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Socialist Party	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
<i>Germany</i>	
Christian Democrats	1976, 1983 , 1987, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2005 , 2005, 2009
Green Party	1983, 1987, 1990, 1998 , 2002, 2005, 2009
Left Party	1990, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2009
Liberal Party	1976, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2009
Social Democrats	1976, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1998 , 2002, 2005, 2009
<i>Netherlands</i>	
Christian Democrats	1981, 1982, 1986, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2002 , 2003, 2006, 2010
Democrats 66	1971, 1972, 1981 , 1982, 1986, 1989, 1994 , 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010
Green Left	2002, 2003, 2006, 2010
Pim Fortuyn League	2002, 2003, 2006
Labor Party	1971, 1972, 1981 , 1982, 1986, 1989 , 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006 , 2010
Party for Freedom	2006, 2010
Socialist Party	2002, 2003, 2006, 2010
Liberal Party	1971, 1972, 1981, 1982 , 1986, 1989, 1994 , 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010

Continued from previous page

Party name	Elections
<i>Norway</i>	
Christian Democratic Party	1977, 1981 , 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997 , 2001, 2005, 2009
Conservative Party	1977, 1981 , 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001 , 2005, 2009
Labor Party	1977, 1981, 1985 , 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005 , 2009
Liberal Party	1977, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997 , 2001, 2005, 2009
Progress Party	1977, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009
Socialist Party	1977, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001 , 2005, 2009
<i>Sweden</i>	
Center Party	1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1998, 2002, 2006
Christian Democrats	1982, 1985 , 1988, 1991 , 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
Green Party	1988, 1991, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
Moderate Party	1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991 , 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
Social Democrats	1979, 1982 , 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994 , 1998, 2002, 2006
Left Party	1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
Liberal Party	1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991 , 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
<i>Spain</i>	
Conservative Party	1986, 1989, 1993, 1996 , 2000, 2004, 2008
Left Party	1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Socialist Party	1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2004 , 2008

Table A7: Summary statistics of the variables in the models.

Name	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	N
<i>Voter Perceptions</i>	5	2.2	0.7	9	310
<i>Platform (logit scale)</i>	4.9	1.6	0	9.6	317
<i>Std error in Platform (logit scale)</i>	0.3	0.2	0.1	1.1	317
<i>Platform (Kim et al. scale)</i>	4.3	2.1	0	10	317
<i>Centrist (logit scale criterion)</i>	0.7	0.5	0	1	293
<i>Centrist (Kim et al. criterion)</i>	0.6	0.5	0	1	293
<i>In Government</i>	0.3	0.5	0	1	342