

Selective Responsiveness?

Party policy change in nine Western European democracies

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Abstract:

The goal of this project is to figure out whether political parties selectively change their policy positions in response to shifts in the policy preferences of specific groups of voters, and who these voters are. I identify primary party goals as survival and success. I argue then that political parties should be responsive to their own supporter preferences in order to survive, and to their neighboring rival party supporter preferences to increase their vote share for success. Using the Comparative Manifesto Project and Eurobarometer data I show that political parties respond to the current changes in the left-right position of their own supporters and to the lagged changes of the neighboring rival party preferences by shifting their electoral manifesto left-right positions in the same direction as these groups of voters have changed. These results have important implications to understand party behavior in Western Europe, for representation, and for the spatial modeling literature.

Introduction:

The theory of representative democracy claims that political parties should respond to public opinion. Politicians' and parties' livelihood depends on their response to public preferences. Whether they are ultimately office- or policy-seekers, their vote shares are critical to achieve their objectives. Thus, the parties should care about and respond to voter preferences. The question of whether they do respond has attracted extensive scholarly interest. Scholars have examined how governments and elective representatives respond to public preferences by adjusting their policy responses (Ellis et al 2006; Golder and Stramski, 2007; McDonald and Budge, 2005, Stimson et al. 1995; Wlezien 2005, 2006), how parties represent median voter preferences (Adams et al. 2004, 2006, 2009), and how representatives and political parties selectively respond to more affluent groups or to the preferences of opinion leaders (Bartels, 2005, Gilens, 2005, Adams and Ezrow, 2009).

This research examines selective responsiveness of political parties to party supporters in nine Western European democracies. I argue that the two most essential goals of all parties are to survive and to succeed. They need to survive through the upcoming election with their supporters, and they want to increase their influence in politics by winning yet more votes. These different goals affect parties' responsiveness to public opinion. The goal of survival requires political parties to satisfy their existing voters. They have to win at least as many votes as they did in the previous election. This means that political parties have to understand and respond to the preferences of their own voters. The first hypothesis of this research examines this selective responsiveness to party supporters.

As political parties guarantee survival and seek more power through yet more votes, however, they court the support of additional voters. They seek new voters to join the party's

ranks by addressing the preferences of voters beyond their own supporters. There are limits, however, for the extent of this responsiveness. Party organizations are conservative organizations, willing to take only minimal risk in a highly uncertain environment. They need to have some assurance that their policy changes will not endanger their existing voter base, and will guarantee some additional voters. In this situation, the group of new voters that the party will target reduces to only those voters who are at the immediate vicinity of the party ideologically. This research, therefore, examines parties' selective response to the supporters of their neighboring rival party.

Using the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data for the changes in party policy positions and the Eurobarometer survey data for the shifts in the preferences of the party's own supporters and of the neighboring rival party supporters, I examine how parties selectively respond to these groups of voters. The analyses, which include nine Western European countries between 1980-1998, support the hypotheses. The parties respond to their own voters' current and neighboring rival party supporters' lagged left-right positions by changing their own positions in the same direction as these groups of voters have changed.

These results have important implications for understanding party behavior, for the quality of democratic representation, and for the spatial modeling literature. First, by laying out the main goals of parties, the expected behavior according to these goals, and their effort to adjust their election manifestos selectively in response to specific groups of voters this research provides a better understanding of party behavior and ideological change in Western European democracies.

Second, the results suggest that to talk about representation is not necessarily talking about the responsiveness to aggregate preferences. When the unit of analysis is political parties,

one should acknowledge the conservative characteristics of party organization with their goals of survival and success. In order to evaluate the quality of democratic representation via political parties we have to shift our attention from aggregate opinion to party supporter preferences in the light of the goals of survival and success.

Finally, this paper and its results provide evidence for the two central expectations of the spatial modeling literature: political parties respond to public opinion and to rival parties. These results also move this literature forward by combining these two essential expectations under one theory. It is important to develop models that combine these two theories, and these results show us empirically that parties behave in accordance with the expectations developed in the spatial modeling literature.

Theory

Political parties are the primary representative link between citizens and the state. Understanding the linkage between political parties and citizens is important for comprehending how modern representative democracy works. This requires understanding the behavior of political parties in response to changes in public opinion. The goal of this project is to figure out whether political parties selectively change their policy positions in their election manifesto in response to shifts in the policy preferences of specific groups of voters, and who these voters are.

This research argues that political parties compete in free and fair elections first to survive through the next electoral period with their existing voters (core constituency), and also to succeed by gaining as many votes as they could (Mair et al., 2004). Both these goals require political parties to be responsive to changing public opinion. Party elites need to inform themselves about the demands and preferences of their existing supporters along with potential

new recruits, package themselves accordingly, and eventually justify their policy positions to the voters (Poguntke, 2002).

Downs (1957), in his seminal work, assumes that political parties are purely vote maximizers, and therefore allowed to make huge changes in their ideological position to win the elections. Parties, however, are not as free as Downs posits in his work. The goal of survival restricts political parties in their policy change, and forces them to keep their positions as intact as possible to satisfy their core constituency. Political parties should maintain stable ideologies unless their own supporters demand change.

Any response to additional groups of voters beyond the party's current supporters would be risky and increases electoral uncertainty. Political parties cannot accurately estimate whether policy change in response to a broad spectrum of voters would increase their vote shares, and more importantly, how their behavior would be perceived by the critical constituencies of party activists, donors, and supporters in their own party. As Kollman et al. (1998, 141) state, "in contrast to standard spatial models, parties in the real world may not act 'as if' they are fully informed and capable of selecting an optimal platform." Political parties have limited information about voter preferences, ideological position that they want to stick with as much as possible, reputational concerns that make them reluctant to shift their policies, and party organization with established norms and codes of behavior (Kollman et al., 1998).

Party elites become concerned about endangering essential associations with particular issues if they change their positions beyond what their own supporters demand. They do not want to negatively influence their reputation in the eyes of their core party supporters. As noted by Janda et al. (1995, 174) political parties are conservative and risk-averse organizations because parties become identified with issue positions, depend on the support of certain social

groups, and are built on delicate power bases. Thus, we can argue that uncertainty and risks associated with policy change would increase apprehension toward ideological change within party organization unless it is demanded by the party supporters themselves. Wilson (1994) also acknowledges these limitations on party behavior in his work. He writes:

“To shift the party's appeal to a different clientele means risking the loss of voters the party already has in order to gain new voters from different socioeconomic categories. Even if the new groups of voters are large or growing in importance, party leaders hesitate to risk losing traditional voters by too-blatant appeals to the new target groups” (Wilson, 1994, 271)

Survival is not the only goal of political parties, however. If political parties were only concerned about their existing vote shares and current supporters, how could the parties increase their votes? Unless they accidentally also respond to other groups of voters while shifting their positions in response to their own supporters, they would merely be able to preserve their existing vote share. In reality, every political party is also interested in increasing its vote share.

In order to increase their vote shares, political parties should add additional voters into their ranks. This is possible if parties respond to the preferences of voters other than their own supporters. However, given the risks and concerns associated with any change, the party leadership should convince the party organization that addressing the preferences of these additional voters will positively affect the vote shares of the party in the upcoming elections.

I argue that peripheral rival party supporters are the most likely target for the party in their search for more votes. The dilemma between keeping the ideological position as stable as possible for the core constituency versus gaining additional votes motivates political parties to

focus their attention on the groups of voters that they can more easily recruit to their own party. The political parties literature to date has focused on the responsiveness to and representation of the aggregate preferences reflected by the mean/median voter position (see, e.g., Adams et al 2004, 2006, Erikson et al. 2001, Huber and Powell, 1994; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Powell, 2000; Stimson et al. 1995; Wlezien 2005, 2006). There is uncertainty, however, on the degree of support mustered from the whole voting population. Uncertainty forces parties to regard some voters as more important than others (Downs, 1957). As Huntington (1950) states in his analysis of congressional representatives:

“(...) Instead of appealing to all groups the parties will limit their appeal to certain specific groups. They will attempt to win elections by mobilizing a high degree of support from a small number of interests rather than by mustering a relatively low degree of support from a large number of interests.” (Huntington, 1950, 675).

To sum up, we expect to see party policy responsiveness both to the party's own supporters as a result of the survival goal, and to the neighboring rival party supporters as the party seeks additional votes.¹ These hypotheses are also supported by the political party elites that I interviewed during the summer of 2008 in Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria. One of the questions I asked to these elites (party leaders, members of the parliament, campaign directors, directors of the party think-tanks) was about their selective responsiveness. In this

¹ Several scholars in the literature have examined the responsiveness of political parties to their own supporters (see, e.g., Dalton, 1985; Ezrow et al., 2007; Wessels, 1999; Weissberg, 1978), and the effects of rival parties on focal party policy changes (Adams and Somer-Topcu, *forthcoming*; Baker and Scheiner, 2004; Budge, 1994; Downs, 1957; Meguid, 2005; Snyder and Ting, 2002; Somer-Topcu, *unpublished manuscript*). These latter studies have examined how new entries to the party systems, niche parties, parties on the left and right of the focal party, and parties in the same party family affect party policy change. There has been no research to my knowledge, however, that examines these two questions simultaneously.

question I differentiated the party's current supporters, additional voters the parties could attract, and the general public as the three main groups of voters in a political system. I then asked which group is more salient for party policy positions in their own party.

First, all of these party elites responded that their core supporters constitute the most important group of voters. And, all of them also agree that responding to the general preferences of the entire electorate is too risky. A party elite from the liberal party in Germany (FDP) answered the question as follows:

“We have had this discussion before, and I think that in the end you lose (if you target the general population) because your strong supporters (...) won't accept that you are soft on that (particular issue) position and they will cut their support. But you won't gain in the general public as well because they won't believe you that you really do it by heart” (FDP party elite, July, 2008).

Many of these elites also indicated the importance of other potential voters beyond their core electorate. A party elite from the Christian Democratic Union party in Germany answers the question as follows:

“On the one hand we have to keep the traditional voters attached to the party, we have to deliver to them. On the other hand, we have to be attractive for many additional people in this country. (...) If you look at our new, basic program (...) you will see that there are certain issues that are really important to our traditional voters. With other issues we have tried to open up to new voters, talk or reach to new groups of voters. So, it is a job of ensuring permanent balance; and it is very difficult” (CDU party elite, July, 2008).

I have argued so far that political parties should respond to their own supporter preferences and the positions of the neighboring rival party supporters while writing their election manifesto. But can they do this simultaneously? Do they have enough information and strong supportive organization at the time of writing their election manifesto to adjust themselves in favor of the rival party supporter preferences? As the CDU party elite states above, it is a difficult job to ensure a permanent balance.

I argue that uncertainty associated with the party's core supporters, along with rival parties' supporters affect the timing of responsiveness.² First, political parties are not isolated institutions. They make efforts to reach their own supporters. They listen to their complaints, read their letters, follow their reactions to their policies, speeches, and meetings. They make every attempt to reduce their uncertainty about their own voters, whom they depend on for their survival. As a result, they register short-term changes in the preferences of their own supporters almost immediately. Moreover, the party organization, which is conservative and risk-averse as depicted above, should be willing to respond quickly to the supporter preferences as the election approaches. Therefore, I argue that political parties respond to their own supporters immediately.

Political parties need more time to respond to their rival party supporters' preferences, however. First, political parties know relatively less about the rival party supporters' policy positions. They need both to identify the rival party supporters and to figure out their left-right ideological positions. This would take time. The information about the rival party supporters and their positions comes more readily from the previous elections. Based on the profile of the rival party voters and with the help of the extensive surveys at the time of the previous election the

² The effects of elapsed time have been the focus in many recent studies to explain party behavior. In one strand of this literature scholars have examined the lagged effects on party behavior (see, e.g., Adams and Ezrow, 2009; Kollman et al. 1992; Laver, 2005). Adams and Ezrow (2009), for instance, argue that, in addition to responding to voters' current policy shifts, parties will also respond to public opinion shifts from earlier time periods.

focal party can acquire the necessary information to respond to these supporters in their next election manifesto. Second, even if they had enough information about rival party supporters at the time of writing their manifesto, it would take time for the focal party to respond. The focal party organization would be less willing to respond to the preferences of voters who they do not depend for survival, and about whom they have imperfect information. As a result, we may see a weaker response to the short-term changes in the rival party supporters' policy preferences at time t , while parties are expected to respond more to rival party supporters' previous policy shifts (between time $t-2$ and $t-1$) while formulating their manifestos.

The hypotheses of this research, therefore, are:

H1: Political parties respond to their own party supporters by shifting their positions at time t in the same direction as the supporters have shifted their positions at time t .

H2: Political parties respond to their neighboring rival party supporters by shifting their position at time t in the same direction as the neighboring rival party supporters have shifted their positions at time $t-1$.³

Research Design:

To test the hypotheses it is necessary to develop measures of party policy change (the dependent variable) and the changes in the policy preferences of the party's own supporters along with those of the rival party's supporters (the independent variables). The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and the Eurobarometer data provide the necessary variables to test the

³ Note that even though these hypotheses are formulated to test the effects of current shifts in the supporter positions and of lagged shifts in the rival party supporter preferences, I do not exclude the possible effects of lagged supporter preference and current rival party supporter position shifts on party policy change at time t . I only expect stronger effects for the hypothesized shifts. Below, I use all current and lagged shifts to estimate the models.

hypotheses. In this research, I rely on the left-right policy position of parties as derived from the CMP data, and on the survey based left-right locations of voters using the Eurobarometer data.

The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data have been the medium of research over the last decade to study strategic party positioning. These data provide cross-national time-series measurements of party policy based on the published party manifestos (see Budge et al, 2001 for more details on the project). Using the content of the party election manifestos, scholars in this project have coded the proportion of each election manifesto dedicated to fifty-six different issues. They have then constructed the left-right political scale using twenty-three of these issues. This left-right scale ranges from -100 to +100 with positive and higher numbers representing a more right-wing emphasis. This ideological index has been employed by scholars to examine changes in party policy positions and the reasons behind these changes (e.g. Adams et al. 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu, *forthcoming*; Budge, 1994; Ezrow, 2005, 2007; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Pennings, 1998, Somer-Topcu, 2009). While focusing on one dimension (left-right) may sacrifice a better understanding of the politics in some countries, the left-right scale provides the summary view of politics in most advanced industrial democracies (see, e.g. Carkoglu, 1995).

While the CMP data provide the party policy change dependent variable, the Eurobarometer data have the necessary information to code the supporter left-right positions. In these series of surveys, approximately 2,000 respondents are asked twice a year to locate themselves on the 1-10 left-right ideological scale (where the higher numbers represent a more rightwing position), and to indicate their vote intentions, among many other questions. I first aggregated the two surveys that were administered before the upcoming election. Using these

aggregated surveys and the specific questions on the 10-point left-right scale self-placement and vote intention I have generated the supporter policy positions and shifts in these positions.⁴

The analyses for this paper encompass the party systems of nine Western European countries for which the Eurobarometer data on respondents' Left-Right self-placements is available: Denmark, France, Britain, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.⁵ The time period extends from 1980 to 1998. In total, the analyses include thirty-two parties in twenty-two elections.

The first hypothesis argues that political parties should change their policy promises in their election manifestos in the same direction as their supporters' policy positions have shifted at time t . The crucial independent variable for the first hypothesis is the change in the party supporters' left-right location between $t-1$ and t ($\Delta_{own_supporter_position_t}$), i.e. the party supporters' left-right positional change between the surveys before the election at time $t-1$ and current surveys at time t .⁶

According to the second hypothesis, we also expect political parties to respond to the shifts in the preferences of their closest rival party supporters at time $t-1$. To generate this variable I first employed the CMP data to code the closest neighboring rival party using parties' left-right positions at time $t-1$.⁷ Next, I coded the shifts in the left-right positions of these

⁴ There is an extant literature on the problems of survey measurements. Despite the flaws, however, surveys provide quality information to political leaders. For a nice summary of advantages of and problems with surveys see Geer and Goorha (2003).

⁵ Even though the Eurobarometer data also include Belgium, Ireland, and Germany for the whole time period under analysis here, Huber (1989) reports empirical analyses suggesting that Eurobarometer respondents' left-right self-placements are not meaningfully related to their preferences along specific dimensions of policy controversy in these three countries. Therefore, I have run the models reported in this research using only the nine countries listed above.

⁶ I use the Eurobarometer data to calculate the changes of supporter position on the 10-point left-right scale to generate this variable. The supporters are defined as those survey respondents who indicated that they would vote for a particular party if the elections were held today.

⁷ I coded the closest party as the party that had the closest CMP left-right position at time $t-1$. I did not code the closest party at time t because at the time of writing the new election manifesto for the election at

neighboring rival party supporters between the surveys at time t-2 and t-1

($\Delta rival_supporter_position_{t-1}$).⁸ In addition to the current shifts of own and lagged shifts of rival party supporter left-right positions, I also include the lagged shifts in the left-right policy positions of the supporters and the current shifts in the position of rival party supporters into the model to control for these shifts and check their effect on party policy change ($\Delta rival_supporter_position_t$ and $\Delta own_supporter_position_{t-1}$).⁹

The dependent variable is the party policy change between elections t-1 and t, based on the CMP codings of parties' election manifestos ($\Delta party_policy_t$).¹⁰ I also include the lagged dependent variable ($\Delta party_policy_{t-1}$) into the right-hand side of the equation to address the serial correlation problem (Beck and Katz, 1995). Moreover, previous work by Budge (1994) and by Adams (2001) argues that party elites have electoral incentives to shift their party's policies in the opposite direction from their shifts in previous election, which would imply a negative relationship between the previous and current policy changes.¹¹

The model to test the hypotheses is as follows:

$$\Delta party_policy_t = b_1 + b_2 [\Delta party_policy_{t-1}] + b_3 [\Delta own_supporter_position_t] + b_4 [\Delta own_supporter_position_{t-1}] + b_5 [\Delta rival_supporter_position_t] + b_6 [\Delta rival_supporter_position_{t-1}]$$

time t most parties would not see the manifestos of other parties. Therefore, I assume that political parties only have information about the manifesto positions of the parties from the previous election (at time t-1). I argue that parties use this information to identify their closest neighboring party and their supporters' left-right policy preferences.

⁸ I note that these closest rival parties do not necessarily belong to the same ideological bloc with the focal party, i.e. to party groups of left, center, right, or others (special interest parties). However, for the sixty-three percent of all cases the closest party was in the same party family bloc.

⁹ Appendix I presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent and main independent variables.

¹⁰ While the scale is a 200-point scale in the CMP data, I rescaled the variable to a 10-point scale in order to have a more meaningful comparison with the voter preference change variables.

¹¹ I also ran the model excluding the lagged dependent variable. The results, which are available upon request, were robust.

To examine the hypotheses, I run OLS regression clustered by country election. Clustering controls for possible correlations between parties within a specific inter-election period in a specific country (Williams, 2000).¹²

Results:

One question that may arise before the test of the hypotheses is whether the positions of party own supporters and neighboring rival party supporters differ. If they do not differ significantly then a response by a party to its own supporters can be perceived as a response to rival party supporters' position. Moreover, if these preferences are similar, political parties might not be able to differentiate the positions of these different groups. Figure 1 shows the average absolute difference between the party own supporter left-right positions and neighboring rival party supporter left-right preferences at time t . According to the figure, the average absolute distance between the own and rival party supporters is the lowest in Denmark (0.855 out of maximum possible ten point difference), and the highest in Greece (3.439). As this figure shows, the party own supporters and rival party supporters are located in considerably different positions on the 10-point left-right ideological spectrum.

The first column on Table 1 presents the results for the model described above. If parties change their policy positions at time t in the same direction as their own voters or the rival party supporters shift their positions at time t , then the estimated coefficients for the variables $\Delta_{own_supporter_position_t}$ and $\Delta_{rival_supporter_position_t}$ should be positive and statistically significant. These results would indicate that if the party's own supporters or rival party

¹² I also ran the panel corrected standard errors and fixed effects methods for the same specification, and explored whether different clusters (by country or party) generate any different results. The results were robust.

supporters moved to the left (right), than the party also moves to the left (right) in its election manifesto. The coefficients for the variables $\Delta_{own_supporter_position_{t-1}}$ and $\Delta_{rival_supporter_position_{t-1}}$ show whether the supporter shifts have any lagged effects on the party manifesto position. If these coefficients are positive and statistically significant, they would indicate that there are time lags before parties respond to the supporter shifts. The hypotheses imply that we should see positive and statistically significant coefficients for the current shifts of the supporter positions ($\Delta_{own_supporter_position_t}$) and for the lagged shifts of rival party supporter preferences ($\Delta_{rival_supporter_position_{t-1}}$).

The results in the first column show that political parties respond to their own supporters' current policy shifts by shifting their manifesto positions in the same direction, supporting the first hypothesis. Substantively, the coefficient for the $\Delta_{own_supporter_position_t}$ suggests that if the parties shift their position by one-unit to the right (left) on the 10-point left-right scale, the political parties change their positions by 0.4 points in the same direction.

The coefficient for the $\Delta_{rival_supporter_position_{t-1}}$ is also statistically significant, supporting the second hypothesis that parties respond to shifts in the neighboring rival party supporter preferences but only in a lagged manner. Substantively, the coefficient for the variable $\Delta_{rival_supporter_position_{t-1}}$ indicates that for every unit shift towards the right (left) by the neighboring rival party supporter position at time t-1, the focal party changes its manifesto position by 0.47 units in the same direction.

[Table 1 about here]

Sensitivity Analyses:

I estimated several alternative models in order to test the sensitivity of the results. First, I included the mean voter left-right positional change (at time t and t-1) into the main model. The

literature, as I indicated above, has focused on how governments and parties respond to shifting aggregate preferences, which are best represented by the mean voter position (see, e.g., Adams et al., 2004, 2006; Erikson et al., 2001; McDonald and Budge, 2005). While I argue that political parties would face internal opposition to changing their positions in response to the mean voter position (given the risks and uncertainty associated with such a general policy change), as also noted by Huntington (1950), we would have stronger implications if we control for the mean voter left-right changes and still find robust results.

The second column in Table 1 shows the results for the model including the variables for the mean voter left-right policy change at time t and $t-1$ ($\Delta mean_voter_position_t$ and $\Delta mean_voter_position_{t-1}$). The coefficients for the mean voter current and lagged shifts are negative and not statistically significant. More importantly, the results for the shifts in the own and rival party supporter left-right positions are robust when we control for the mean voter positional changes.¹³

In the third column of Table 1, I included three additional control variables into the main model, which are emphasized in the political parties literature: the mainstream party status dummy, and two dummy variables for the right-wing and center (liberal) parties. Niche parties are defined as the communist, ultra-nationalist, and green parties which offer either an extreme ideology (in the case of ultra-nationalist and communist parties) or a noncentrist niche ideology (in the case of green parties). Adams et al. (2006) examine how niche parties respond to changing aggregate public opinion differently compared to the mainstream parties. They argue

¹³ One might suspect that there are highly correlations between own and rival party supporters preference shifts, and the changes in the mean voter positions. The pairwise correlations show that none of the correlations are high, and the highest correlation is between the current and lagged mean voter change ($r=-0.43$). Nevertheless, in addition to the main model reported in the first column I also ran the model using only the variables of interest ($\Delta own_supporter_position_t$ and $\Delta rival_supporter_position_{t-1}$). The results, which are available upon request, were robust.

that niche party elites may emphasize *long-run* support while mainstream party elites maximize support in the short term, and therefore resist responsiveness. Niche parties may also seek ideological stability as an optimal strategy to satisfy their activists, who are strongly policy oriented and are therefore highly resistant to change. In a more recent study, Ezrow et al. (2007) argue that niche parties are more responsive to their own supporters. To the extent that these studies are correct, we may expect niche parties to behave differently from the mainstream parties toward their own and neighboring party supporter preferences.

In addition to the mainstream versus niche party difference, the scholars in the political parties literature have also examined how different party families behave. Przeworski and Sprague (1986), Kitschelt (1994), and Adams et al. (2009) find that parties of the center and right adjust their ideologies in response to public opinion shifts while left parties do not. They argue that the organizational structures of the leftwing parties restrict their ideological flexibility. The right and center dummy variables for the analysis in the fifth column are measured based on the party family. Conservative, Christian democratic and ultra-nationalist parties are coded as belonging to the right, and liberal parties are coded as belonging to the center.¹⁴

The results in this column show that neither of the dummy variables included into the model are statistically significant. The coefficients for the main independent variables are similar to the original model in the first column. The effect of the current change in the supporter preferences weakens to some extent but these additional variables overall do not affect the relationship.

¹⁴ The CMP data provide the necessary information for the party families. They code each party as belonging to a party family (greens, communists, social democrats, liberals, conservatives, Christian democrats, ultra-nationalists, agrarian or special interest group parties).

Reverse Causality?

I have shown that political parties are responsive to public preferences. But how much are these preferences shaped by the parties? Is it the parties who respond to the supporter preferences, or is it the supporters who adjust their preferences based on what parties advocate? If supporters change their preferences based on what parties say in their election manifesto, the endogeneity problem becomes a concern for this research.

Both cue-giving and cue-taking directions have their supporters. Several scholars have examined the interrelationship between supporters and policies (see, e.g., Erikson et al 2001; Wlezien 1995, 1996). Several recent studies have shown, however, that the effects of citizen preferences on political party policies is solid (Carruba, 2001; Ezrow et al., 2007; Steenbergen et al. 2007). As Page and Shapiro (1983) conclude, “the process of opinion affecting policy is the more prevalent one” (188).

The formulation of the variables in this research overcomes this problem of reverse causality to a certain extent. As I mentioned in the research design section, I aggregated the two Eurobarometer surveys that were administered before each election in order to estimate the supporter preferences. However, I did not include the most recent survey if it was conducted within two months of the upcoming election. Given that most of the parties in Western Europe publish their election manifestos within two months of the elections,¹⁵ this aggregation method should overcome the endogeneity problem, if there is any, to some extent.

On the other hand, this research design does not eliminate all the endogeneity concerns. Political parties do not stay silent until they publish their manifesto, neither do the media or other parties. In this interactive environment voters gather information about party policies, and can

¹⁵ This information is provided by the party elites whom I interviewed about their party election manifestos, among many other topics, during my trip to the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria in the summer of 2008.

adjust their preferences accordingly. To explore this possible endogeneity problem I estimated a model where the dependent variable is the change in the party supporter preferences, and the main independent variable is the party policy change.

Table 2 presents the result for the analysis of this model. In this analysis I used both the current party manifesto left-right change and the lagged change as the independent variables. None of them had any significant effect on the change of party supporter preferences. While these results indicate that the directionality is from the voters to parties, this is just a preliminary analysis of the reverse relationship. This important question requires more thorough analysis in the near future.

[Table 2 about here]

Moderating factors:

I have argued in this research that political parties are torn between survival and success. They try to satisfy their supporters for survival, and seek more votes by responding to the rival party supporters. The results have supported my arguments: political parties care about their supporter preferences, and they also respond to the shifts of rival party supporters. The effect of the party's own supporter preferences is no surprise. Parties must be responsive to their own voters. However, given that rival party supporters are not critical for party survival as much as their own supporters, can we find out specific factors that mediate party responsiveness to rival party supporters? When and under which conditions do political parties respond to neighboring rival party supporters?

Two such factors that come to mind are the ideological distance and vote share difference between the focal party and its neighboring rival. We may expect the focal party to be more responsive to the rival party if they are ideologically close to each other on the left-right scale. If

the parties have similar ideological outlooks, the party organization may be more in favor of responding to the closest rival party supporter position. The difference of the vote shares may also affect party response. If the competition is fierce, and both of the parties have similar vote shares, the focal party would be more willing to steal the vote shares of its neighboring rival. Thus we may see more response to the preferences of these rival party supporters, which are the close competitors of the focal party vote share.

These two possibilities are tested in Table 3. In the first column I included the absolute ideological distance variable, which codes the absolute left-right distance between the focal and the neighboring rival party using their CMP scores at time t-1. To see the moderating affect of this distance, I also generated the interaction variable between the change in the rival party supporter preferences (t-1) and this absolute ideological distance variable.¹⁶ The results show that neither the interaction variable nor the ideological distance variable has any statistically significant effects on party policy change. The effect of rival party supporter preferences does not depend on the ideological distance between the focal and neighboring rival party.

The second column tests the moderating effect of the absolute vote share difference between the focal and neighboring rival party. I generated the absolute difference between the vote shares using the CMP reported vote shares of the parties, and interacted this variable with the lagged rival party supporter preference change. The results are similar to the results in the first column. Neither the absolute vote share difference nor the interaction variable is statistically significant.

¹⁶ In these models I generated the interaction variables using only the rival party supporter changes at time t-1, and also included the current supporter position change variable. These are the main variables of interest and the only statistically significant variables from the original model. I also note, however, that if I included the other variables from the original model ($\Delta_{down_supporter_position_{t-1}}$ and $\Delta_{rival_supporter_position_t}$) they are still weak and not statistically significant, and do not substantively affect the results presented here.

To sum up, there is no evidence that parties disproportionately respond to the rival party supporter preferences if they are ideologically similar or have competitive vote shares. These results do not indicate that there are no other factors that can possibly moderate the relationship between rival party supporters and party policy change. However, unearthing these factors, if there are any, requires further attention.

[Table 3 about here]

Conclusion

Political parties respond both to the changes in their own supporters' preferences (between time $t-1$ and t), and to the changes in their neighboring rival party supporters' left-right positions (between time $t-2$ and $t-1$) when they adjust their left-right ideological positions in their election manifesto. This relationship between the supporter preferences and party policy change is robust for many additional specifications.

In the near future, several additional questions regarding party responsiveness to public opinion demand closer attention. First, can there be other factors beyond the difference in vote shares and ideological proximity that could explain and influence party responsiveness to the rival party supporters? Are there any rival parties that the parties are more responsive? One can argue that coalitionary considerations may cause parties to selectively respond to other rival parties than their neighboring rival. If the parties have a pre-coalitionary agreement with the neighboring rival party they would rather steal votes from other parties around them to increase the chances for their coalition arrangement.

In addition, are there specific groups of voters rather than party supporters and aggregate public opinion, to which the parties are more responsive, e.g. affluent, highly educated, religious,

female, or young voters? The only comparative empirical research by Adams and Ezrow (2009) on this question shows that political parties are more responsive to opinion leaders. The preliminary analyses using the dataset of the current paper suggest that no other specific sub-constituency group has any likelihood to influence party position-taking. This issue requires more attention in the near future.

Appendix: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	St Dev	Min	Max
Δ party policy _t (Dependent var)	-0.042	0.658	-2.095	1.544
Δ own_supporter_position (t)	-0.108	0.263	-0.685	1.005
Δ own_supporter_position (t-1)	-0.035	0.255	-0.771	0.567
Δ rival_supporter_position (t)	-0.137	0.259	-0.666	1.005
Δ rival_supporter_position (t-1)	-0.026	0.289	-0.661	0.751

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Tables and Figures:

Table 1: The analyses of the hypotheses and the sensitivity analyses

	Main Model	The mean voter position	Additional Variables
Δ own_supporter_position _t	0.401* (0.196)	0.425** (0.201)	0.310 [§] (0.220)
Δ own_supporter_position _{t-1}	-0.161 (0.263)	-0.153 (0.275)	-0.179 (0.273)
Δ rival_supporter_position _t	0.182 (0.182)	0.206 (0.181)	0.183 (0.192)
Δ rival_supporter_position _{t-1}	0.465** (0.199)	0.498** (0.203)	0.495** (0.216)
Δ mean_voter_position _t		-0.173 (0.407)	
Δ mean_voter_position _{t-1}		-0.106 (0.357)	
Δ party_position _{t-1} (LDV)	-0.492*** (0.144)	-0.492*** (0.148)	-0.497*** (0.158)
Mainstream party			-0.113 (0.163)
Rightwing Party			-0.090 (0.196)
Center/ Liberal Party			-0.044 (0.172)
Constant	0.073 (0.081)	0.068 (0.086)	0.183 [§] (0.132)
N	71	71	71
Adjusted R ²	0.32	0.33	0.33

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. The dependent variable in these analyses is the CMP party policy positional change at time t (10-point scale). I used OLS regression clustered by country election.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; § $p < .10$ one-tailed.

Table 2: Reverse causality

	Reverse Causality
Δ party_position _t	0.056 (0.065)
Δ party_position _{t-1}	0.008 (0.053)
Δ down_supporter_position _{t-1} (LDV)	-0.202 (0.120)
Constant	-0.091** (0.033)
N	93
Adjusted R ²	0.06

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. The dependent variable in these analyses is the change in the preferences of party supporters at time t (10-point scale). I used OLS regression clustered by country election. * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

Table 3: Additional factors to explain response to rival party supporters

	Ideological distance	Vote share difference
Δ own_supporter_position _t	0.434* (0.236)	0.453* (0.218)
Δ rival_supporter_position _{t-1}	0.125 (0.283)	0.409* (0.199)
ideological distance	-0.032 (0.237)	
Δ rival_supp _{t-1} * ideol dist	0.591 (0.570)	
vote share difference		-0.001 (0.001)
Δ rival_supp _{t-1} * vote diff		-0.0002 (0.006)
Δ party_position _{t-1} (LDV)	-0.480*** (0.143)	
Constant	0.060 (0.129)	0.059 (0.074)
N	71	71
Adjusted R ²	0.33	0.32

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. The dependent variable in these analyses is the CMP party policy positional change at time t (10-point scale). I used OLS regression clustered by country election.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; § $p < .10$ one-tailed.

Figure 1: The average absolute difference by country between the parties own supporter positions and the neighboring rival party supporter left-right positions:

