

What Policies to Emphasize? Congruence in Today's Welfare Politics

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Abstract

Post-industrialization has changed European labour markets profoundly. This has led to an increased and reconfigured support coalition for the welfare state. Thereby, the question arises as to how well parties' social policy emphases match their voters' preferences. Using original data on voters' social policy preferences - as measured through an online-survey conducted in Germany and Ireland and a new and fine-grained coding of social policy emphasis in party manifestos, this paper shows that German and Irish major parties' social policy profiles are generally congruent to their (potential) voters' preferences. Using an adapted version of the issue yield model, I show that issues with higher yields (issues that are strongly supported within the core electorate and potential new voters) are also more prominent in parties' election manifestos. Even though party electorates have changed in composition we cannot conclude that there is a substantive "mismatch" between parties and (potential) voters. Remaining incongruence can largely be explained by parties under-emphasizing social investment policies, while issues such as childcare services and tertiary education enjoy huge levels of support all over the electorate.

Introduction

The transition to knowledge societies has altered the class composition of established parties tremendously: the highly educated middle class became the core electorate of most left parties, while the working class has to a large degree shifted from left to populist radical right parties (Kriesi 1998; Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Kitschelt 1994). Hence, parties have to deal with new electorates and presumably changed preferences, including their stance on social policy. At the same time, parties on the centre-right who might have not undergone such a realignment have to deal with altered preferences of their long-standing party supporters. This is best reflected in the fact that generalized support for the welfare state is massive (e.g. Kölln and Wlezien 2016). Garritzmann *et al.* (2018) show that support for spending increases for tertiary education, childcare and active labour market policies is around 80 per cent among voters in Western Europe. Along these lines, Häusermann *et al.* (2019a) also find high support for expanding and strong opposition against retrenching social policies and, moreover, no significant differences between the preferences of the working and the middle class. As a consequence, we have witnessed an increase in issue competition in welfare state politics in the last decades (Green-Pedersen and Jensen 2019). So far, it remains unclear to what degree parties' social policy profiles align with these new demands.

While much of the literature has followed an electoral turn in studying welfare politics, the party side has received relatively little attention. How do parties react to such generalized high support for social policies? What does it imply for parties' social policy profiles? Following a responsible partisan approach (Adams 2001; Adams *et al.* 2005), we would expect parties to converge on social policy issues leading to a situation in which all parties take a pro-welfare stance. A salience approach (in contrast to the positional one) would however argue that parties on the liberal side of the economic dimension, knowing that the median voter favours social policy expansion, would rather stay silent on welfare issues. However, we know from the party competition literature that partisan strategies are best captured by combining positional and saliency considerations. In fact, for salient topics such as welfare, taking position is crucial and to some degree parties are forced to respond to the “*party-system agenda [that] emerges from the continuous political debate among political parties*” (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010: 260). Correspondingly, on the empirical side, we know that parties do speak about social policy, and we know that they do so to different

degrees. What we do not know however, is how parties address the welfare state. Which issues do they stress? Put differently, I ask: *Which social policy issues do parties emphasize and are the resulting policy profiles in line with the preferences of the electorate?*

Specifically, I analyse whether parties emphasize issues that are at the same time overly popular in their electorate, as well as among potential new voters (subsequently referred to as the potential electorate). Note that parties thereby would be able to circumvent the strategic decision whether to pursue policy- or vote-seeking (Strom 1990) since focussing on such issues is a simple way of combining the two endeavours. This idea is borrowed from the issue yield model recently developed in the party competition literature (De Sio and Weber 2014, 2015; De Sio *et al.* 2017). Within this model, focussing on issues with a high yield (so-called bridge policies) allows a party to gain new voters without jeopardizing extant votes. The issue yield model was conceptualized to describe party behaviour in a broader context. In this paper, I adopt and adapt the idea of the issue yield model and illustrate the adaptations in the field of welfare politics. Thereby, this article provides a first, rather explorative, analysis of congruence between parties and voters in social policy. Key to the adaptation of the issue yield model are two things. On the one hand it seems important that we take the recent developments on the electoral side of welfare politics seriously. There, I want to emphasize an argument recently made by Häusermann *et al.* (2019). The main message is the following: even though generalized support for the welfare state is massive, different groups of voters are in fact still distinguishable in their social policy preferences. However, these differences are rather about which kind of welfare state they want than about how big the welfare state is supposed to be. In fact, social policy preferences are composed of positions (support for a policy) and priorities (relative importance). In turn, which kind of welfare state, or more specifically, which policies parties emphasize is expected to be driven by both the positions and the priorities of a party's (potential) electorate. On the other hand, we have to think about a reconceptualization of the "potential electorate". I will argue that it is unlikely that parties adapt their positions in the direction of all voters and hence it is unlikely to observe congruence between parties and the entire electorate. It is much more reasonable to assume that certain voters are more important for certain parties than others. I suggest to use self-reported party-specific voting probabilities to identify potential voters.

Summarizing, in today's welfare politics and beyond, it seems to be a beneficial strategy to not just consider voters' support for issues, but also the importance they attribute to these issues. This unmask part of the massive generalized support and reveals crucial differences in preferences between social groups. These distinguishable preferences should ideally result in parties stressing different social policy issues. I analyse whether parties more strongly emphasize issues with a high yield, hence, issues that are overly popular among their electorate as well as among their potential electorate. In this context, we observe congruence when a high issue yield leads to stronger emphasis.

The results in this paper show that we indeed find this. By analysing the latest German and Irish party manifestos, I am able to show that overall the emphases of different social policy issues aligns with the preferences of a party's electorate. While parties and voters in Germany and Ireland are thus generally congruent, some differences between the two cases remain. The most evident one concerns the type of over- or under-emphasis that we observe. German parties' partial incongruence is due to a clear under-emphasis of social investment policies (with the exception of the liberal party), while in Ireland this can only be found for the parties of the centre whereas the left would be expected to emphasize consumption policies more strongly.

However, why should we care about voter-party congruence in the first place? From a normative point of view we would like to see voters' demands taken up by parties, or even further, to see that all voters have the same political weights (Dahl 2007). Partisan emphasis, or more specifically, their manifestos or election promises built upon these manifestos, are among the most obvious links between voters and parties. Voters choose their representatives on the basis of policy programs. Hence, for the quality of democracy it is of utmost importance that parties represent, or in more dynamic terms, respond to voters. Naturally we do not expect all parties being responsive to the entire electorate (or the median voter) but multiple parties covering a range of positions. From a party perspective, it makes sense to expect such convergence empirically. Parties make an effort to signal congruence since they are reluctant to losing voters, especially in times of decreasing bonds between voters and parties where issue voting becomes more relevant. Moreover, in light of the recent electoral turmoil and anti-elitist appeals, parties even more so are anxious to emphasize their responsiveness.

Empirically, voter-party congruence will be elaborated in three steps. First, by taking into account voters' and potential voters' positions and priorities, I show that the same issues can have very different yields for parties. Second, we will see parties' social policy issue emphases and how they vary mainly between but much less so within countries. And third, I analyse to what degree these issue emphases align with the issue yields elaborated in step one. The analysis focuses on Germany and Ireland, their major political parties' (Christian Democratic Union, Social Democratic Party, Alternative for Germany, the Greens, Free Democratic Party, the Left in Germany; Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour Party, Sinn Fein in Ireland) latest election manifestos (2017 in Germany, 2016 in Ireland) and German and Irish voters' preferences measured with an original survey in 2018. Note that I use the term *preferences* to describe the combination of a voter's position and priority regarding a policy.

The new partisan welfare politics

The literature on partisan welfare politics have changed considerably in recent years. A “new school” of partisan politics has challenged, or at least complemented, the “old school” partisan politics. The latter sees social policy output as a result from the (aggregated) preferences of a party's constituency. Left parties are considered to be the agents of the working class and therefore advocating the expansion of the welfare state (or at least the limitation of the retrenchment of the welfare state). Parties on the right on the other hand, representing their non-working class constituency, promote cutbacks to existing benefits. Häusermann *et al.* (2013) in their compelling review article of partisan welfare politics, identify three ways in which the new literature deviates from the old school approach: changing constituencies, context and competition, and the voter-party linkage. These three factors all contribute to the fact that party politics is more complex as it appears in the old literature. The argument in this paper mainly builds on the first of these factors. Regarding the constituencies, the transition to knowledge societies has altered the class composition of established parties tremendously: the highly-skilled middle class became the core electorate of left parties, while the working class has to a large degree shifted from left to populist radical right parties (Kriesi 1998; Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Kitschelt 1994). Moreover, parties' traditional constituencies may have changed their social policy preferences. This becomes

evident by looking at generalized support for the welfare state, which as a consequence of the aforementioned structural changes has increased massively. Garritzmann *et al.* (2018) show that support for spending increases for tertiary education, childcare and active labour market policies is around 80 per cent among voters in Western Europe. The implications of this are quite striking. Even the electorate of centre-right parties is highly supportive of social policy spending.

The next section describes the modification of the constituencies in more detail arguing that realignment and positive feedback have resulted in the observation that most parties' constituencies support social policy spending, but that they differ in the importance they attribute to different areas of social policy. The section thereafter deals with how these observations on the demand side match the supply side, i.e. parties' issue emphases.

The demand side: Voters' priorities

Welfare state politics in today's knowledge economies are fundamentally different from welfare state politics up until the 90s. This is best illustrated by the following observation: Generalized support for the welfare state is massive. Both social consumption as well as social investment enjoys huge levels of support (Busemeyer and Neimanns 2017; Kölln and Wlezien 2016) while cutbacks in both areas face opposition. Empirical evidence for high generalized support is numerous (e.g. Garritzmann *et al.* 2018; Häusermann *et al.* 2019a; Bremer 2018). Apparently, since generalized support is so high, differences between social classes regarding welfare preferences seem to have vanished. While we have always seen lower classes supporting the expansion of social policy, the literature has proposed several mechanisms explaining the increased support among middle classes. Among the most prominent are the theories of the new politics of the welfare state arguing that the welfare state over time forms its own support coalition through generous benefit provision (Pierson 2001). Put differently, since all citizens became stakeholders of the welfare state, support is massive and the retrenchment of benefits seems therefore highly unlikely (Brooks and Manza 2008). Along these lines, the literature on feedback argues that welfare states foster support via feedback mechanisms since policies affect politics (e.g. Pierson 1993; Svallfors 1997). Other theories are built on more specific factors such as universalism (Korpi and Palme 1998), skill specificity (Iversen and Soskice 2001), specific risks the middle class is not being spared from (Häusermann

et al. 2015; Jensen 2012; Rehm 2016), or the spread of egalitarian values among the new middle class (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Kitschelt 1994).

However, this does not mean that we have reached unanimity and that welfare politics is not politicized anymore. Because firstly, social security still ranks among the top priorities of citizens (Rovny and Polk 2019) and secondly, I argue that conflict over social policy has changed content. While most voters support an extensive welfare state, the debate is about the kind of the welfare state. One way of thinking about the *kind* of the welfare state is the social investment paradigm (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Hemerijck 2017). The logic of social investment policies differs from “old” or “passive” social policies in that they aim at “*creating, mobilizing, or preserving skills*” (Garrizmann *et al.* 2017:37) in order to support citizens’ earnings capacity. But social investment policies not only differ in their logic, but also in the way that conflict around them is structured. This becomes most obvious by looking at priorities (Häusermann *et al.* 2019b). Therefore, when studying public opinion it is reasonable to capture social policy preferences also through peoples’ *priorities* rather than only through their *positions*. Whereas differences between social groups and therefore electorates are masked by nearly a consensus on preferred welfare state size, they become more visible by looking at priorities (Häusermann *et al.* 2019a).

This change in type of conflict could be seen as a result of increased financial constraints in times of “permanent austerity” (Pierson 1998) where expansions come either at the cost of cutbacks elsewhere, higher taxes, or public debt. Hence, trade-offs have become crucial in policy-making (Stephens *et al.* 1999; ???; Bremer 2018; Busemeyer and Garrizmann 2017) and should therefore be more important in studying policy-making. This paradigm of austerity which started in the 1990s was reinforced by the Eurozone crisis culminating in 2010. As a consequence, even in European countries that were spared from undertaking massive fiscal consolidation, the context of distributive politics is constraint by budgetary limits. Welfare state politics have become a “zero-sum game” (Häusermann 2010) and voters are aware of these hard choices. The data used in this paper reveals that two-thirds of the total sample of 12’500 respondents in eight Western European countries think that social policy improvements for some group come at the expense of other groups. And at the same time, no less than 80 per cent state that the limits of taxation have been reached. Hence, while the perception of such a zero-sum scenario seems to be widespread, so far we have only very

limited knowledge of priorities, their determinants, and their implications. In this paper, the focus lies on the implications and more specifically, on the implications of priorities for partisan welfare politics¹.

Only few scholars have studied priorities in social policy so far (e.g. Bremer and Bürgisser 2018; Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017; Gallego and Marx 2017; Häusermann *et al.* 2018), even though some theories implicitly base their argumentation on the assumption of some sort of rank-ordering in voters preferences (e.g. Rueda 2005). Therefore, in this paper I use a newly collected dataset including measures of social policy positions and survey items to capture social policy priorities. This dataset was collected as part of an ongoing research project named *welfarepriorities* (Häusermann 2017) and detailed descriptions of the dataset can be found in Häusermann *et al.* (2018) and Häusermann *et al.* (2019a).

The supply side: Parties' issue emphases

The welfare state literature went through a reorientation from a focus on producer groups to the increased centrality of voters, or the voter-party link respectively (the change from old to new partisan politics as described in Häusermann *et al.* 2013). Parties and party competition have however attracted much less scholarly attention, with only a few exceptions (e.g. Abou-Chadi and Immergut 2018; Green-Pedersen and Jensen 2019). We have very limited knowledge about how parties address social policy in order to appeal to their (potential) voters.

In Downs (1957), the interaction between parties and voters was structured around policy positions and how to extent the voter base while at the same time not to jeopardize extant support. With Downs' conception of competition being challenged by the introduction of valence politics (Stokes 1963) and heresthetics (Riker 1986), the relevant question has become more about issue emphasis than issue position: which are the policies (more than which are the positions) that enable a party to extent the voter base? More recent contributions stress that the separation of position and salience is not necessarily adequate but that the two should be seen as complements (Benoit and Laver 2006; Meguid 2005). As Wagner (2012) puts it, parties should emphasize issue positions that allow

¹Note that the argument of a conflict over welfare priorities works irrespectively of whether we think that welfare politics is a zero-sum game or not. It is sufficient to the argument that voters perceive welfare politics to be highly contested and thereby have an idea about how and where they want to increase spending.

them to extend electoral support. While the position a party takes on an issue is relatively fixed since it is central to a party's identity (Spoon 2009), parties have considerable leeway in changing the importance they attribute to different issues. Therefore, the issue agenda is a strategic resource parties can manipulate (De Sio *et al.* 2018).

The question however remains, how to choose which issues to emphasize? There, the most important contribution, issue ownership (Petrocik 1996), assumes relatively stable, long-term reputations of parties' core issues². I argue that, being interested in party competition in welfare politics, this does not provide us with a useful toolkit in explaining issue selection. As Green-Pedersen and Jensen (2019) point out, it may not be so easy for parties to just talk about their pet issues. This is especially true for social policy. While clearly the left is the issue owner of social policy (Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004), the generalized high support for the expansion or the protection of benefits forces even centre-right or radical right parties to address welfare issues because *"if a party happens to ignore an issue that is salient to its voters, this can have serious electoral consequences as the voters move to a more attentive alternative"* (Green-Pedersen and Jensen 2019:4). Actually, (centre-)right parties have even overcome their opposition against expansion and now increasingly support the welfare state (Abou-Chadi and Wagner 2019).

Adapting the idea of issue yields

Recently, the issue yield model (De Sio and Weber 2014) has proposed a way to assess the ideal set of issues for a party to address. In short, parties can gain (in terms of votes) if they emphasize issues that are associated with the party and at the same time widely supported in the general electorate (De Sio *et al.* 2018). *Associated with the party* means that support for an issue is higher within the party than it is in the general electorate. If both requirements are fulfilled, meaning that an issue is overly popular within a party and strongly supported in the general electorate, this issue would be considered a bridge policy. Focussing on such bridge policies may enable a party to win new voters without risking to jeopardize the current voter base. The concept of issue yields is useful since *"political parties cannot solely rely on the mobilisation of their party preserves to*

²Although short-term changes in voters' competence perceptions do happen (see Petitpas and Sciarini 2019; Tresch and Feddersen 2018).

reach electoral majorities. Given the small size of the different classes, parties only obtain stable majorities if they succeed in creating new coalitions of voters” (Oesch and Rennwald 2018).

Issue yield, as described in the model by De Sio and Weber, is computed as an index that is based on two dimensions (partisan support and general electorate support), predicting for each issue the potential yield of addressing this issue (note that bridge policy is simply a qualitative concept that captures issues with high yields). Hence, the issue yield model assesses the *“risk-opportunity configuration offered by each issue to each party, without being limited to new issues or specific types of parties”* (De Sio *et al.* 2018: 1212). Thereby, the model picks up the well-known tension between vote- and policy seeking (Strøm 1990), or whether parties target at core or swing voters (Lindvall and Rueda 2018). Retaining the idea that parties compete by emphasizing issues, the model claims that parties focus on issues that are highly supported within their electorate (policy-seeking) and at the same time these issues should be shared by many potential voters (vote-seeking) and are thereby able to overcome this trade-off.

I argue, that the issue yield model becomes an even more useful toolkit to analyse party strategy, or as in this much less deterministic piece, voter-party congruence, if we adapt it in two ways. The first adaption concerns the calculation of voter preferences, the second one relates to the question of whose preferences parties actually (should) consider. The first one becomes evident by looking at a very recent contribution by Green-Pedersen and Jensen (2019) that studies party competition in social policy. They argue that a party’s issue emphasis is a function of the character of policy problems and the type of social risks involved (life course vs. labour market). From that follows that, for example, the traditional left should be particularly keen to cater to the working class with a focus on labour market policies. The mechanism that gets proposed is one about the different priorities of different groups of voters driving partisan emphasis. Although this implicit importance of priorities does not get tested in the paper, it shows, in line with what I outlined extensively in the chapter above, that voters’ priorities in addition to their positions could be relevant for parties’ social policy profiles. Hence, I argue that in order to be useful for analysing party competition and voter-party congruence, the issue yield model needs to incorporate priorities. It is not only voters’ issue positions but also their issue priorities that should be incorporated in the identification of bridge policies. Note that social policy as a specific policy field is a perfect illustration of why

priorities should not be neglected. As outlined in the chapter above, positional conflict on welfare issues is almost absent since an overwhelming majority of voters supports social policy expansion. We know however, that there *is* conflict that circles around the question of reform directionality (such as social investment vs. consumption). Including priorities accounts for this. However, incorporating priorities or some kind of measure of importance in the computation of yields should be beneficial for studying issue emphasis in most policy fields.

The second adaption to the issue yield model concerns the relevance of electorates to consider. For the identification of bridge policies as introduced originally, the preferences of all voters are equally important. Meaning that the model assumes all voters to be equally likely to be won over on the basis of a party's issue emphasis. However, we may not underestimate party identification and political socialisation in predicting vote choice (Adams *et al.* 2006). Put differently, it might not make sense for populist radical right parties to incorporate the preferences of the entire electorate, since some voters are extremely unlikely to vote for them anyways. Hence, both because there are more policy fields in which parties (have to) take positions (of course this argument only affects studies using the issue yield model for single policy fields) and because vote choice is not entirely driven by party positions, the relevant pool of voters differs for different parties and between different contexts. Bridge policies have the function to gain new votes without having to pay these votes by losing extent votes. But not every voter is a potential new voter and therefore not every voter's preferences should be incorporated in a party's strategy or the analysis of voter-party congruence. But whose should? The approach I take here is to use voters' self-reported probability to vote for a party. This, I believe, gives an adequate estimate of whether someone belongs to a party's potential electorate or not.

This argument could be developed even further. The literature on unequal responsiveness focussing on mass politics provides evidence that policy-makers' decisions are much more in line with the preferences of upper social strata (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005). Under such circumstances, we might ask whether we should restrict the sample of relevant voters' preferences even further. However, the issue yield model only considers voters (no abstainers) anyways, which already excludes many of the less well represented. Moreover, emphasis in party manifestos might be less vulnerable to an upper-class bias than actual decision-making since it may be considered less costly.

Summarizing, this section introduced the idea of issue yield and embedded it in the party competition literature. I tried to show that issue yield may be a useful model in assessing party strategy, or more descriptively, congruence between parties and the electorate if we (i) include priorities and (ii) reconsider the idea of the potential electorate. Taken together, this expresses in the hypothesis that issue yield (hence the degree of overlap between the preferences of a party's electorate and their potential electorate) is positively correlated with a party's issue emphasis. The next section provides a detailed description of how I consider to analyse whether parties' emphases indeed do align with voter preferences.

Data & Methods

Two types of data sources have been used in this paper. Information on voters' social policy preferences was collected using original data from an online survey conducted in the context of the ERC-project "welfarepriorities" (Häusermann 2017). The data used in this paper is (for now) restricted to the German and Irish cases. The target population was the adult population (>18 years). Furthermore, quotas on age and sex (crossed) as well as educational attainment were implemented. The sample used here counts 1344 completed interviews that were conducted between August and October 2018 in Germany and 1080 completed interviews conducted between October and December 2018 in Ireland. The sampling was based on online panels from the survey company Bilendi. Please find a more detailed description of the dataset and our efforts to ensure high-quality answers in Häusermann et al. (2019).

Germany has been included in this paper for its quite typical party system. Like in many other Western European countries, mainstream parties have to deal with a populist radical right contender and a Social Democratic party that constantly suffers from substantive electoral losses. Analysing the congruence of voters and parties in such a setting is particularly interesting, since, as I have outlined earlier, changes in parties' socio-demographic compositions leads to the observation that pro-welfare parties lose the part of the electorate that are the main recipients of such types of policies. Reform wise, Germany has gone through a period characterized by expansion rather than retrenchment. The economic boom has provided little reason to cut back and the Grand coalition offered the possibility to implement expansive measures. Ireland on the other hand is a relatively

atypical case with regards to realignment and welfare politics. Unlike most other Western European countries, Irish mainstream parties have been spared from radical right contesting parties. Moreover, alignment between voters and parties is much weaker than in many Western European countries. With regard to the welfare state, Ireland has undergone a series of retrenchments in the years after the financial crisis. Unlike Germany, voters in Ireland have experienced austerity first-hand. Therefore it is interesting to see whether this experience has had an effect on voters' distributional considerations. There are plenty of reasons why we would expect welfare politics to differ between the two cases studied here.

Measuring Social Policy Issue Emphases in Party Manifestos

Measuring issue emphasis for different social policies is theoretically straightforward but empirically difficult. The raw data is made easily accessible by the Manifesto Project (Volkens *et al.* 2018). The manifestos are split into quasi-sentences so that each of these quasi-sentences can be attributed to a policy field such as *Welfare State Expansion (per504)* or *Welfare State Limitation (per505)*. Studying issue emphasis in social policy however, I am not primarily interested in how much parties talk about the welfare state, but rather in the weights that different social policy fields receive. Hence, a more fine-grained coding of quasi sentences (thereafter called statements) is needed. More specifically, we need information on:

- Is the statement actually about **social policy**. Although some statements may fall into the Manifesto Project's welfare state categories, they do not necessarily mention or imply social policy. Moreover, for this type of analysis I was not interested in statements only addressing revenues but not expenditures (e.g. taxation). Hence, mentioning or implying social policy as well as addressing the expenditure side were the two necessary conditions for a statement to be considered in the analysis.
- which **social policy field** does the statement address? Each statement was classified into one of the following policy fields: old age pensions, unemployment benefits, social assistance, (passive) family policy, healthcare, early childhood education and care (ecec), tertiary education, education (neither ecec nor tertiary, including primary, secondary, vocational or further

education), and active labour market policies (almp). Statements not referring to one of these policy fields were coded as *other* (e.g. housing, disability). Note that one statement can speak to as many as three policy fields.

- whether the **direction** is positive (i.e. expanding, increasing, spending more), negative (i.e. retrenching, decreasing, spending less), or neither. For the following analyses, only positive statements have been considered, since in principle I am interested in expansion emphasis rather than emphasis (in order to be closer to the measure of voter preferences).

This fine-grained coding is applied on only a subset of the manifestos, namely on the parts that potentially deal with social policy. Obviously, this includes *Welfare State Expansion (per504)*, *Welfare State Limitation (per505)*, *Education Expansion (per506)*, and *Education Limitation (per507)*. Furthermore, *Equality: Positive (per 503)*, *Technology and Infrastructure (per411)* and *Labour Groups: Positive (per701)* have been included since parties frequently make social policy statements that have been coded into these categories. More specifically, most statements on active labour market policies have been coded into *Labour Groups: Positive* and would therefore have been overlooked by only including the welfare state and education categories. On average (Germany and Ireland, latest documents from the 2017 and 2016 elections), the manifestos include 2369 statements in total, of which on average 273 (11.5%) statements per party fall into the subset analysed here, with some variance between parties (4.4% for the AFD, 20.3% for Labour Party) and countries (9% in Germany, 15.8% in Ireland). The weights attached to different social policy fields are illustrated in the results section. Also note that only 0.8% of the coded statements are negative (i.e. calling for cutbacks) and 5.5% of statements are neither positive nor negative. This already points towards the fact that parties avoid to speak about retrenchment.

For the operationalization of the dependent variable, parties' social policy emphases, this new and fine-grained coding of social policy issues in party manifestos has been used. Parties use manifestos to inform voters about their positions (Eder *et al.* 2017) and media report frequently about manifestos before elections (Bischof and Senninger 2018). Furthermore, party manifestos are central for parties' communication (Harmel 2018). The fine-grained coding of manifestos as described above allows me to identify exactly how many statements a party directed to each of the social policy fields under study. These include: old age pension benefits, unemployment benefits,

early childhood education and care, tertiary education, and active labour market policies. The analyses in this paper are restricted to those five issues since information on social policy priorities of voters is not available for other issues (see next subsection).

The operationalization itself is straightforward. For every party and every policy field I divide the number of times a policy field has been mentioned divided by the number of times any of the five fields have been mentioned. This gives a measure of how a party distributes its attention within the highly contested field of social policy.

Measuring Social Policy Preferences among Voters

As shortly described above, the idea on the independent variable is to identify a yield for every party and every issue (10 parties * 5 issues = 50 yields). These yields are composed of the preferences of the party's electorate and the party's potential electorate. In order to calculate the preferences, for each issue I combine individual-level data on positions and on priorities. Priorities were measured as follows: respondents answered a so-called point distribution question, where they were asked to allocate 100 points to six different social policy fields. This is supposed to reflect the relative importance each respondent attributes to different strategies of welfare state expansion. The specific wording was the following: *“Now imagine that the government had the means to improve benefits in some social policy fields, but not in all of them. You can allocate 100 points. Give more points to those fields in which you consider benefit improvement more important, and fewer points to those areas in which you consider benefit improvement less important”*. These 100 points had to be allocated (forced choice) to the following fields: old age pensions, childcare, university education, unemployment benefits, labour market reintegration services, services for the social and labour market integration of immigrants (the last one has been dropped for the analyses since it would have complicated the recoding of party manifestos considerably). Issue specific priority is simply the points given to the respective field as a share of the sum of points given to one of the five fields included in this paper.

Further, for each of these five issues, we also assessed respondents' positions. Therefore, we used survey items that do not impose constraints on the respondents, simply asking: *“To what extent do you agree with the following policy reform proposals? The government should... (1) increase*

Table 1: Probability to vote: Means for German Party Electorates

Partisans	Potential Electorates of the					
	AFD	CDU/CSU	FDP	SPD	Greens	Left
AFD	87.2	26.1	11.4	30.6	16.4	20.3
CDU/CSU	12.8	91.7	23.4	35.8	24.7	8.0
FDP	36.9	63.4	84.4	37.4	39.9	16.1
SPD	10.6	32.2	13.5	91.0	39.3	22.1
Greens	6.8	32.1	12.2	59.0	89.6	34.0
Left	14.9	16.7	5.3	44.0	41.4	90.2

Table 2: Probability to vote: Means for Irish Party Electorates

Partisans	Potential Electorates of the			
	Fine Gael	Labour Party	Fianna Fail	Sinn Fein
Fine Gael	85.2	38.6	31.9	17.0
Labour Party	38.3	81.8	26.5	26.9
Fianna Fail	28.0	17.3	84.7	25.7
Sinn Fein	23.3	20.2	25.8	87.2

old age pension benefits, (2) increase the availability of good-quality childcare services, (3) expand access to good-quality university education for students from lower-income families, (4) increase unemployment benefits, (5) expand services that help reintegrate the long-term unemployed into the labour market". Respondents answered on a 4-point scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Hence, for each respondent and each issue we have a position (1-4 scale) and the attributed priority (0-1 scale). In order to get to a combined measure of position and priority, I use priorities as weights for the positions. Specifically, the deviation in priority from the mean priority on the same issue was multiplied with the position. This means that I upweight the position if an individual prioritizes this issue more than the average does (and vice versa). This is what I call the *preference* for an issue.

In a next step, these preferences were aggregated to the party level. Again, for each party, I am interested in the preferences of the party electorate and the party's potential electorate. For the former, the aggregation is straightforward. It is simply the mean preference of all individuals who reported to vote for the respective party in the next general election ("If there were to be a General Election next week, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?"). Unfortunately, the survey data used here does not allow me to come up with an adequate identi-

fication of a party’s *potential* electorate. Therefore, I fall back to the data of the latest European Election Study (Schmitt *et al.* 2016). The corresponding Voter Study 2014 asks respondents to indicate the likelihood of voting for a given party: “*If you think of [PARTY], what mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for this party?*” I use this information to identify potential electorates. For each party I compute the mean evaluation (likelihood of voting for party) by the electorates of the other parties (“*And if there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?*”). The results of these (weighted) means can be read from table 1 (for Germany) and table 2 (for Ireland). The rows show, for a given party’s core electorate (column 1), the mean probability of voting for any other party (as indicated by columns 2 to 7 and 2 to 5 respectively). Hence, those who reported that they would vote for the Alternative for Germany (AFD) in the next election (therefore considered as the AFD core electorate) indicated on average, that the probability to vote for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU) is 26.1 per cent (first value in the third column). I decided to set the threshold to be part of a party’s potential electorate at 20 per cent. Since the probability for the CDU/CSU by the AFD is above 20 per cent, voters of the AFD are considered to be the CDU/CSU’s potential electorate. Using this threshold, we can come up with the following compositions of the potential electorates: The potential electorate of the AFD are the voters of the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The potential electorate of the CDU/CSU are all voters except for the one’s of the Left, the potential electorate of the FDP are the voters of the CDU/CSU, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) can potentially reach all voters, the potential electorate of the Greens are all voters except for the one’s of the AFD, and the Left’s potential electorate are the parties on the Left and the AFD. For Ireland, as shown in table 2, the potential electorate of Fine Gael consists of all other voters, the Labour Party can potentially reach current voters of Fine Gael and Sinn Fein, Fianna Fail’s potential electorate is composed of the entire electorate, and the potential voters of Sinn Fein are found among Labour Party and Fianna Fail voters.

Note that all voters of a given party belong to the potential electorate of another party if the mean evaluation is above 20 per cent. Unfortunately, I cannot account for individual-level differences in vote probabilities since I get these information from the EES dataset, whereas the opinion variables that compile the independent variable are only available in the *welfarepriorities* dataset.³ Hence,

³In further iterations of this paper I will engage in predicting values for the missing probability to vote variable

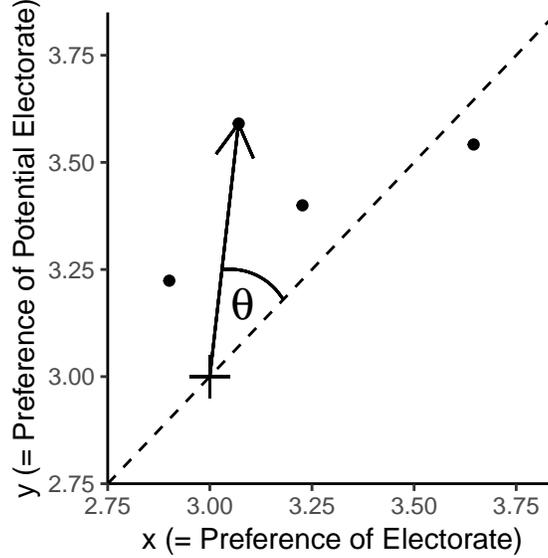


Figure 1: Measuring Issue Yield

mean preferences for potential electorates are computed in the same way as those for the core electorates: mean preference of all voters belonging to the potential electorate as identified above.

Summarizing, for all ten party electorates and their potential electorates, I have a combined measure issue position and issue priority, called issue preferences. Thereby, priorities, or more specifically, deviation from the mean in priorities have been used to weight positions. In mathematical terms:

$$pref_{pj} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_p} \frac{prio_{ij}}{prio_j} * pos_{ij}}{n_p}$$

The preference of a party electorate p on an issue j is equal to the sum of each partisan i 's deviation in priority from the mean priority for the same issue j times the individuals position, divided by the number of partisans n . The same can be computed for a party's potential electorate. In order to get to a compound measure of partisan-level preferences, I use voters' and potential voters' preferences to compute the issue yield. In line with the model as it was developed by De Sio and Weber (2014), I choose a reference point and a reference line that allow me to measure yields against. As illustrated in figure 1, the reference point is (3,3). As reported above, preferences are priority-weighted positions and these positions have been polled using a 4-point scale where 3 means "Agree". Hence, everything above 3 is a bridge policy, i.e. an issue that is supported by voters and potential voters. The reference line is chosen to be a line with intercept 0 and slope 1. This reflects using socio-structural and attitudinal items with the same wording in both datasets.

the fact that deviation towards the potential electorate has the same effect as deviation towards the core electorate. Issue yield is thus captured by a vector from the reference point to the issue and its angle to the reference line. Mathematically, issue yield is equal to $(vectorlength) * \cos(\theta)$, which, if we move the reference point to (0,0) (which we do by subtracting 3 from x and y), can be simplified by: $\sqrt{2}/2((x - 3) + (y - 3))$.

In order to test the general claim that these yields are positively correlated with emphases, I run a linear regression analysis where I regress (normalized) emphasis on (normalized) yield and include party-fixed-effects.

Results

The first step in analysing the data is to run a simple regression analysis. Table 3 shows the effect of issue yield on issue emphasis (both variables normalized) and party-fixed-effects. This effect is highly significant and relatively big in size. A maximum yield, compared to a minimal yield, comes with an increase in party emphasis of 0.52. This effect is not sensitive to using country- rather than party-fixed-effects. Hence, we can conclude that there indeed is a correlation between yield and emphasis which makes us confident to say that we observe relatively high congruence between voters and parties. However, since I have to deal with a very limited number of observations it is essential to deal with the cases more in-depth. I will start with Germany, continue with Ireland, and summarize the findings in a concluding chapter.

Germany

I will start with the demand side, hence the preferences and resulting issue yields for German parties in the field of social policy. Remember, that issue yield is composed of a party's core electorate's preferences and a party's potential electorate's preferences. Figure 2 shows exactly this. For each issue, the x-axis indicates the preferences of the core electorate, while the y-axis indicates the preferences of the potential electorate. Issues within the dyed space in the upper right are considered bridge policies, indicating that both the core and the potential electorate of the respective party strongly support this issue. This is the case for issues with at least a preference

Table 3: Effect of Issue Yield on Parties' Issue Emphases

	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	0.12 (0.09)	0.11 (0.18)
Issue Yield	0.50*** (0.13)	0.52*** (0.14)
Germany		
CDU/CSU		-0.12 (0.23)
FDP		0.20 (0.23)
SPD		-0.10 (0.23)
Greens		-0.01 (0.23)
Left		0.09 (0.23)
Ireland		
Fine Gael		0.07 (0.23)
Fianna Fail		-0.04 (0.23)
Labour Party		-0.04 (0.23)
Sinn Fein		-0.02 (0.23)
R ²	0.24	0.30
Adj. R ²	0.23	0.12
Num. obs.	50	50
RMSE	0.34	0.36

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

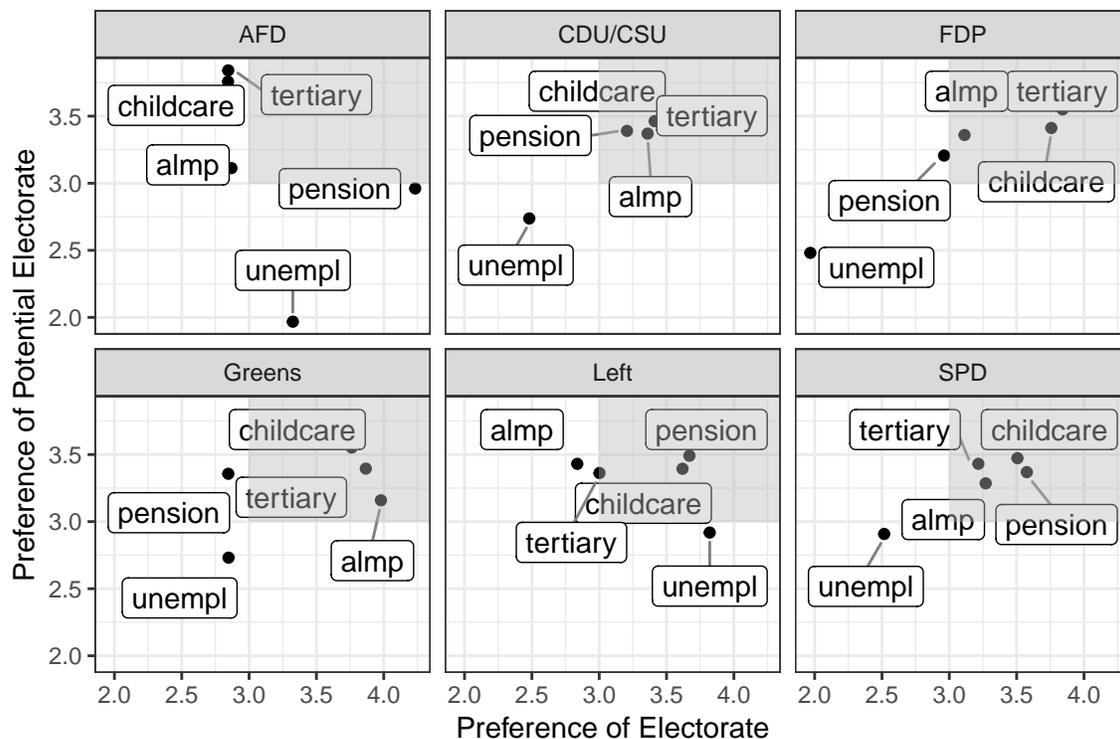


Figure 2: Issue Yields of five Social Policy Issues for the six major German Parties

of 3 on both axes. Remember that these are weighted positions, and the 3 on the positional scale was labelled “Agree” in the questionnaire.

Starting with the populist radical right party (AFD) in the upper left corner: There is no issue that might help to overcome the trade-off between new and extant voters, at least with regard to social policy. The electorate of the AFD strongly prefers consumptive issues such as old age pensions and unemployment benefits. On the contrary, their potential electorate, which are the voters of the FDP, rather prefer investment-oriented measures such as tertiary education, childcare, or even active labour market policies. Since we know that prioritizing investment-oriented social policy is strongly related to more liberal values on the socio-cultural dimension of the political space, this does not come as a surprise. We would assume that either, the high probability of FDP voters to vote for the AFD is rather affected by considerations regarding the socio-economic dimension, or by attitudes towards immigration that might not correlate that strongly with investment-consumption preferences. Hence, we would expect the manifesto of the AFD to either represent their core or their potential electorate. Both would come with the cost of either jeopardize extant or new voters.

For the CDU/CSU in the upper-middle panel, there are clearly issues with high and issues with low yields. Their core electorate has to a large degree similar preferences as their potential new voters. Since we are looking at means here, this is a fairly plausible finding. The preferences of all their potential voters (not including the Left) matches the moderate preferences of the centre-right party's electorate quite well. Investment-oriented measures and old age pensions are found to be bridge policies for them. Similar conclusions can be made by looking at the FDP in the upper-right panel. Since the FDP's potential voters are the CDU/CSU voters, we can conclude that the preferences of those two parties are largely similar. Hence, the FDP is expected to show little difficulties in attracting new voters without risking to disgruntle their current voter base. Their bridge policies are the set of social investment measures. The Greens in the bottom-left panel reveal some tensions between their core and their potential electorate. While their current voters very clearly favour the social investment policies, their potential voters (all except the AFD) also have a thing for old age pensions. However, since they all agree on especially childcare and tertiary education, it might be possible for the green party to cater to a wide electorate while keeping its modernization focus. The voters of the Left, illustrated in the bottom-middle panel, clearly prefer consumptive measures and childcare over tertiary education and active labour market polices. Their potential electorate on the other hand is relatively heterogeneous, since it includes voters from the other left parties as well as those of the AFD. This heterogeneity shows relatively well in the lacking variance on the y-axis. Nonetheless, pensions and childcare are clearly bridge policies for them. The situation of the SPD in the bottom-right panel is again relatively similar to the one of the CDU/CSU. There is quite a high degree of agreement between the voters of the SPD and all other voters (since their potential electorate includes all other voters). The mixture of high support for consumption and investment issues among the Social Democrats is no surprise either. More so than other parties, their electorate is quite heterogeneous with regards to the investment-consumption dimension, reflecting their fusion of working class and upper middle class voters.

Summarizing, different parties are potentially faced with different challenges. In other words, some parties have a relatively linear relationship between their core and their potential electorates' preferences and therefore easily identifiable bridge policies. This is true especially for the Social

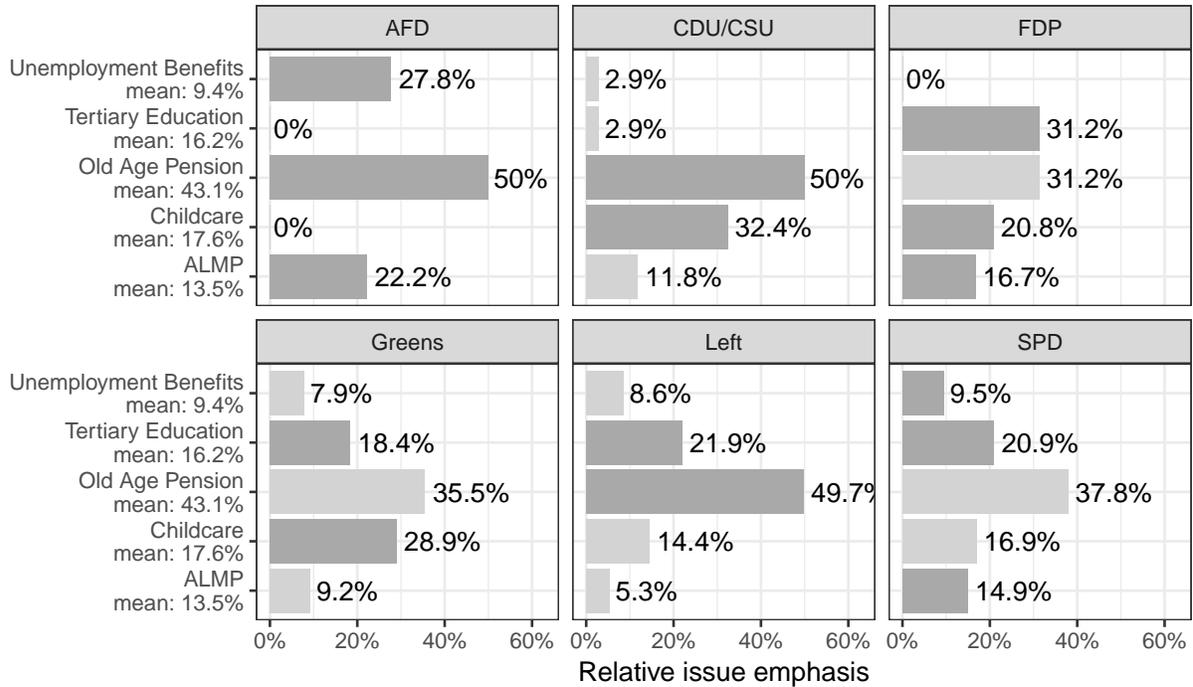


Figure 3: Differences in Issue Emphases in German Party Manifestos

Democrats, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals. Hence, representation of core voters in their cases does not necessarily come with decreased congruence between the party and its potential electorate. With regard to the different issues, it has shown that social investment, in particular tertiary education and childcare, were identified (though not exclusively) as bridge policies for almost all parties. We will see in the next steps, whether these demands are met by parties.

Having seen what voters want, we now move to the supply side. Figure 3 depicts the dependent variable, party emphasis on the five topics under study: unemployment benefits, tertiary education, old age pensions, childcare, active labour market policies. As described in the data section, emphasis here is statements addressed to the respective field as share of statements directed to one of these five fields. Overall, we notice that parties do not differ all that much. Every party puts most emphasis on the most prominent consumption issue (pension receives between 31.2% and 50% of all statements), labour market measures get least attention, although the AFD is an outlier. Note however that the number of coded statements for the AFD is quite low. Results for the AFD should thus not be overestimated. The classic social investment issues of tertiary education and childcare are for most parties somewhere in between.

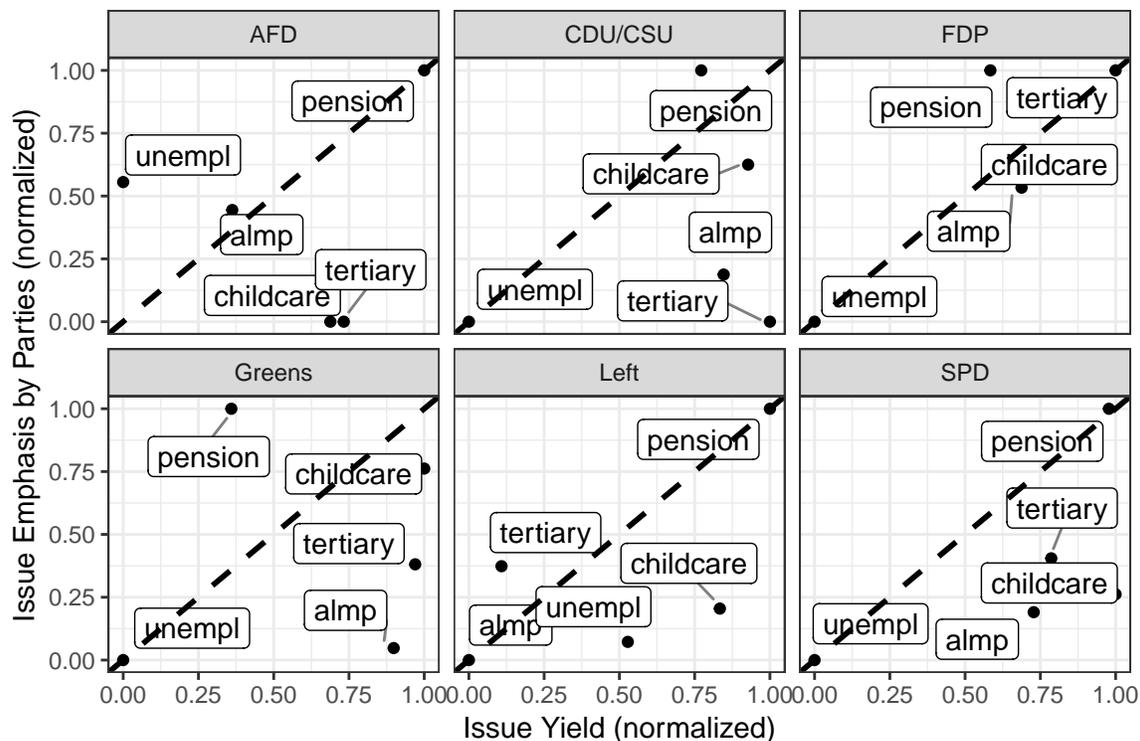


Figure 4: Voter-Party Congruence in Germany

Again starting with the AFD, we observe that their emphasis, much more so than other parties', is on consumptive and labour market measures. The CDU/CSU pays a considerable amount of their attention to childcare policies. Generally, we would not necessarily expect a conservative party such as the CDU/CSU to focus on activating family policy. However, Germany is a somewhat special case as with regards to family policy since it was mainly the CDU expanding employer-centred family policies (Fleckenstein 2011). Hence, this seems to be in line with past actions. The FDP seems to be the main advocate of expansion in tertiary education and also to some degree childcare and ALMP. Hence, from all parties, it has the clearest pro-social investment profile. The parties on the left of the centre have relatively similar profiles that are characterized by a pension focus and medium emphasis of social investment. Having in mind that the bridge policies for the Greens, the Left, and the SPD are not the same, as we have seen in figure 2, already gives us a hint that there will be some sort of incongruence for some of them.

Figure 4 brings together the relevant information from figures 2 and 3. For each issue, the x-axis shows the yield as indicated by the vector in figure 1, while the y-axis is the emphasis by parties as

plotted in figure 3. If there was perfect congruence, all issues could be found on the dashed diagonal line. Issues that are above the line are those that receive more attention than what we would expect from their yields. Issues below the line on the other hand would be expected to be emphasized more strongly. Or in less deterministic terms: deviations from the diagonal are instances of incongruence. Overall, we can see that all parties over- or under-emphasize some issues. More so, there seems to be a pattern of general under-emphasis of social investment policies. With the exception of the FDP, for all parties we find that they tend to put much less emphasis on social investment than what the preferences of their (potential) voters would suggest. On the other hand, there is a tendency to focus very much on consumption policies, as we can see from the AFD, the FDP, and the Greens. Coming back to the observation that the social policy profiles of German left parties are very similar, this figure shows that the consequences with regard to congruence are very different for the three parties. The heavy focus on pensions does not fit the Green voters' preferences, the SPD and the Greens put less emphasis on tertiary education and active labour market policies than their electorate, and they all would have been expected to talk more about childcare.

Summarizing, German voters have distinct preferences. Hence, there is still conflict in the politics of the welfare state. We do observe however, that at least on the party level there is a way to overcome this conflict. With the exception of the AFD, for all parties we find the expansion of childcare and tertiary education to be so-called bridge policies, policies that possibly build a bridge between current voters of a party and potential new voters. We find that overall these demands do align with what parties propose in their election manifestos. The very similar focus of German parties however leads to the fact that we also find incongruence for some issues and some parties. Most notably, this shows in the under-emphasis of social investment issues of first and foremost the CDU/CSU, the Greens, and the SPD, and in the persistent over-emphasis of consumptive old age pensions of the FDP and the Greens.

Ireland

The picture of voters' preferences in Ireland, as shown in figure 5, is somewhat less clear than the one for Germany. The reason for that is the not so linear relationship between core and potential voters. As we see from the upper-right panel, the voters of Fianna Fail are especially

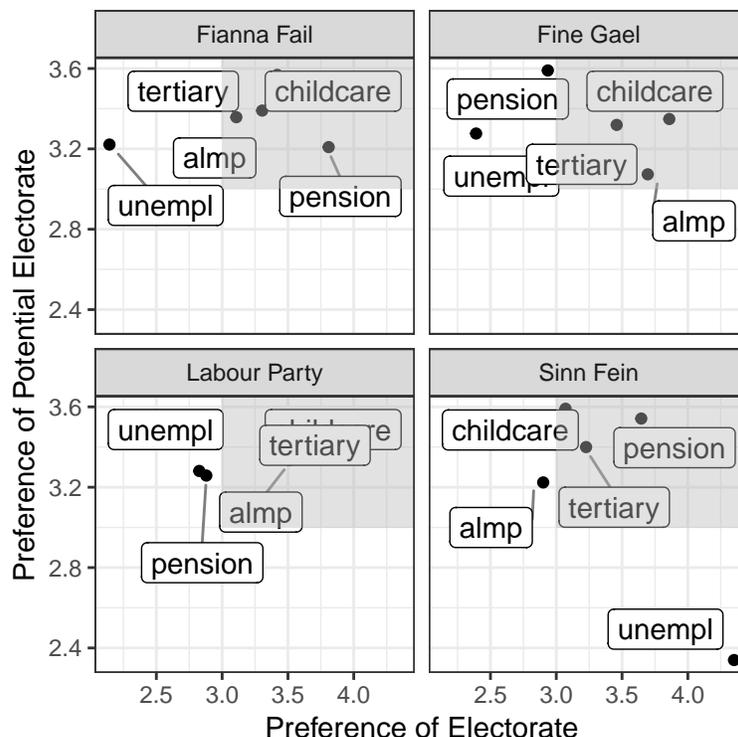


Figure 5: Issue Yields of five Social Policy Issues for the four major Irish Parties

supportive of pension expansion, and to a somewhat lower degree of the social investment issues. The preferences of their potential voters are pretty diverse, since all voters have been classified into this pool. Nonetheless, this leaves them with most issues being bridge policies, with the exception of unemployment benefits. We observe a similar pattern for Fine Gael, at least with regard to the heterogeneity of their potential electorate that favour pensions most. However, since their current voters are much more favourable towards social investment, these are the bridge policies that we identify for them. The picture is quite simple for the Labour party in the bottom-left panel. Their potential future as well as their current voters agree that they clearly prefer social investment. This makes childcare, active labour market measures and tertiary education the uncontested bridge policies. Results for the other party left of the centre, Sinn Fein, are shown in the bottom-right panel. Contrary to voters of the Labour Party, Sinn Fein partisans are clearly more pro-consumption as their preference for unemployment benefits and pension reveal. Considering the socio-demographic composition of Sinn Fein (Madden 2018), this is in line with what we would expect. However, their potential electorate in the centre parties is, in addition to pensions, also in

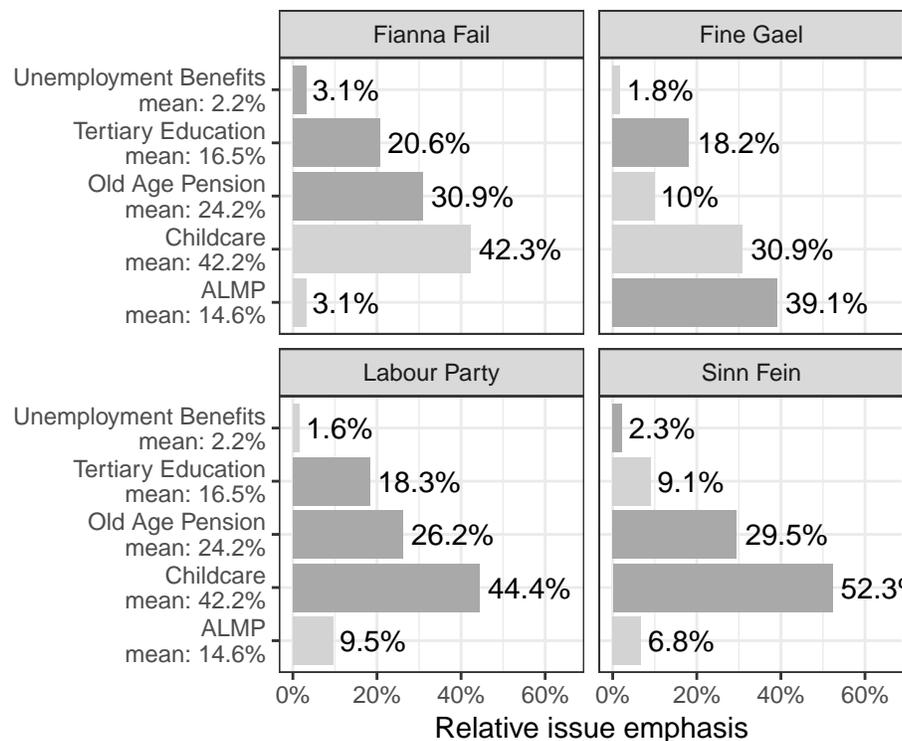


Figure 6: Differences in Issue Emphasis in Irish Party Manifestos

favour of social investment. Therefore, pensions, childcare, and tertiary education are this party's bridge policies.

Contrary to what we have found for Germany, voters' preferences in Ireland are not necessarily in line with potential voters' preferences. To some degree, this might be due to the lower number of parties and therefore the rather big pools of potential voters due to weaker levels of party identification (Marsh 2006). However, similar to what we have observed for Germany, also in Ireland social investment policies, in particular tertiary education and childcare, were identified as bridge policies. Moreover, as well as in Germany, old age pensions are a potential bridge policy for the left (Sinn Fein) and interestingly for the liberal party (Fianna Fail). The further steps will show whether these demands are more aligned to parties' supply than it is the case in Germany.

Figure 6 illustrates Irish parties' social policy profiles. At least two things are noteworthy. First, the general distribution of attention is slightly different in Ireland than what we have seen for Germany. The bulk of attention goes to childcare policies, only after it is pensions, followed by tertiary education. Similar however is the ignorance of labour market policies of most parties. This

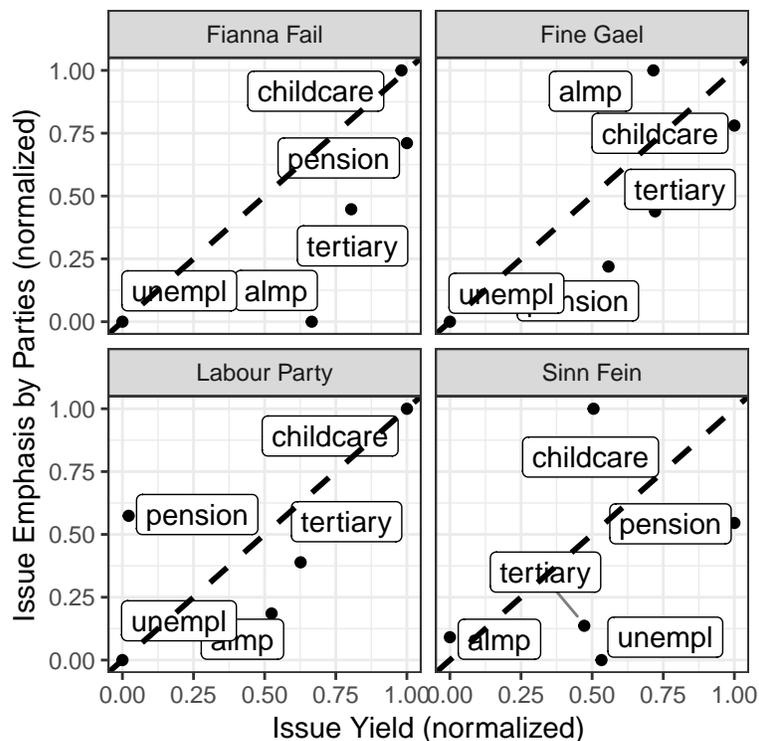


Figure 7: Voter-Party Congruence in Ireland

however is not true for Fine Gael, which brings me to the second point. It is again the parties of the centre and the left, which have very similar social policy profiles, while the party on the right deviates from this. In the Irish case this means that Fine Gael has a very strong social investment focus while Fianna Fail, the Labour Party, and Sinn Fein, exhibit the childcare, tertiary, pension profile that we know (with a different rank-ordering) from German parties.

Finally, figure 7 illustrates convergence between Irish voters and the major parties. Overall, the positive relationship between issue yield on the x-axis and issue emphasis on the y-axis that has shown to be significant in the regression analysis is visible in the party panels too. We remember that the centre and left parties have very similar emphases. This plays out very differently for the congruence with their electorate. Fianna Fail is mainly incongruent with regard to tertiary education and active labour market policies. The Labour Party's incongruence is driven by the same under-emphasis of tertiary education and active labour market policies, and at the same time an overly strong focus on pensions that is not reflected in their (potential) voters' preferences. Quite different is the picture for Sinn Fein. There the high yield of consumptive measures is not

reflected in their emphasis while childcare seems to be over-emphasized.

Summarizing, voters are quite diverse also in Ireland, putting Irish parties into a tricky situation. The resulting trade-off between catering to current voters or winning new voters can however be overcome, by largely the same policies than in Germany, namely childcare services, tertiary education, and for some (mainly left and some centre) parties also old age pensions. Overall I find that issues with higher yields are also more prominent in election manifestos. Remaining instances of incongruence are more diverse than in Germany. Very simply put, centre parties (Fianna Fail, Labour Party) under-emphasize social investment (compared to their electorate) while the left party (Sinn Fein) in contrast rather under-emphasizes consumption.

Conclusion

This paper shows that German and Irish major parties' social policy profiles are generally congruent to their (potential) voters' preferences. Using an adapted version of the issue yield model, I show that issues with higher yields (issues that are strongly supported within the core electorate and potential new voters) are also more prominent in parties' election manifestos. This is good news. Even though party electorates have changed in composition and we observe an overwhelming majority of voters being in favour of expanding the welfare state, we cannot conclude that there is a substantive "mismatch" between parties and (potential) voters.

Comparing Germany and Ireland I show that there is variation in demand within country, but not so much between country. The very opposite is true when it comes to parties' supply. There we observe some between-country variance in parties' social policy profiles, but much less within-country variance, meaning that parties are not very distinguishable. This has differing consequences for different parties depending on the preferences of their (potential) electorate. Overall, I can conclude that the instances of incongruence we find in Germany, are due to a mismatch between the very pronounced social investment preferences of voters and the somewhat weaker emphasis of parties with this regard. If we want to derive advice for German parties, the message would clearly be that they should more strongly emphasize social investment. The picture is a bit more mixed for Ireland. Even though Irish parties are very strong proponents of social investment, there remains some mismatch between manifestos and voters for the centre parties. On the left however,

voters are strongly supportive of consumption issues, a demand that is not met by the strong social investment focus that is also featured by the left party.

Moreover, and in contrast to previous literature on the partisan welfare politics, both preferences on the voter and emphasis on the party side have been measured very detailed and carefully. The inclusion of priorities for the assessment of social policy preferences pays respect to the fact that voters attach different levels of importance to various issues. Put differently, voters have an idea of not only where they want to increase benefits and services but also where such increases are deemed more important. When analysing congruence, we should consider this. Even more so if we took a more party-strategic perspective. Because parties most certainly want to build their election manifestos around issues that are perceived important. With regard to the issue yield model, I have proposed two ways of adapting it. First, the calculation of voter preferences should include some measure of importance. Second, we have to consider that not every voter is a potential voter for every party. Regardless of whether we use the model to analyse party strategy or (as here) voter-party congruence, these two points should be considered.

Finally, the question arises as to whether these results can be generalized. Subsequent versions of this paper will analyse whether the blurry differences between party families will become clearer, and whether the moderate country differences found between Germany and Ireland will transfer to other cases. The inclusion of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden will provide more insight. The fact that the differences between Germany and Ireland are only moderate, even though the situations with regard to party system and welfare politics are largely different, increases my confidence that the results will be largely similar in other settings. Moreover, there is certainly room for improvement with regard to the identification of potential electorates as I have shortly noted in the data section.

The research topic assessed here bears quite some significance. Understanding voters' policy preferences and how they impact party strategies is of utmost importance. Welfare states in the knowledge society are under pressure from many sides. Changing labour markets, globalization, public debt, the aging of the population, and the emergence of new social risks (Bonoli 2005) are intertwined and both decrease financial leeway and increase public demand for social security. Welfare state politics has become a zero-sum game (Häusermann 2010) and reforms become more complicated.

The link from public demand to partisan supply is therefore one crucial step in analysing the reform capabilities of and the coalitional dynamics in today's advanced democracies.

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