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

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Abstract

Recent findings from the welfare state and public opinion literature have shown that support for social policy is massive. Over the last decades we have witnessed a growing support coalition and an increase in conflict over the specific design of the welfare state. In this context of high but specific support for social policy, parties engage in issue competition. Thereby, the question arises as to how well parties' social policy issue emphases match voters' preferences and more specifically; which voters' preferences do they match? I argue that parties emphasize issues with high yields and thus issues that enjoy high support both among party supporters as well as among the general electorate. Using original data on voters' social policy preferences - as measured through an online-survey conducted in six West European countries and a new and fine-grained coding of social policy emphasis in party manifestos - this paper shows that issues with high yields are more prominent in parties' election manifestos. Hence, while we do observe congruence between parties and their supporters, issue emphases are "corrected" towards issues that are at the top of both the partisans' and the general electorates' priority list. Moreover, I find that this does not hold for all party families alike: While mainstream parties incorporate the preferences of the party supporters and the general electorate, radical right parties primarily respond to partisans, and radical left parties neglect their core voters and respond to the general electorate.

Introduction

While the electoral side of welfare politics has increasingly received attention in the recent past, its consequences for political parties have been less often in the focus of scholars (see however Green-Pedersen and Jensen 2019; Abou-Chadi and Wagner 2019; and Abou-Chadi and Immergut 2019). This is puzzling since the crucial transformations revealed by the literature on the electoral side bear important consequences for political parties. These transformations in demand can be illustrated with two observations. First, general support for the welfare state has become massive. Recently, Garritzmann *et al.* (2018) have shown that support for increases in government spending for tertiary education, childcare, and active labour market policies is around 80 per cent among voters in Western Europe (also see Busemeyer *et al.* 2017). Similarly, for traditional social policies such as old age pension benefits, Häusermann *et al.* (2019b) find that support for further expansion is equally high, both among working- and middle/upper-classes. Moreover, opposition towards retrenchment is even more explicit. Support for other social policy fields such as for example healthcare (Kölln and Wlezien 2016) is equally high. Second, while most voters do support an extensive welfare state, the debate is about how to recalibrate the welfare state (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Bürgisser and Bremer 2017; Busemeyer *et al.* 2018). Hence, we observe disagreement over the type of welfare state citizens favour. Put differently, voters attribute differing levels of importance to specific issues (Häusermann *et al.* 2019c). Hence, while there is a high level of positional coherence, conflict is about which specific issues should be prioritized.

Taking this altered demand-side structure as given, in this paper *I ask whether parties' social policy profiles are (still) congruent with the preferences of voters.* As outlined, these preferences consist of both positions and priorities. Hence, in order to be congruent, parties are expected to reflect not only voters' positions (whether they are in favour or against a given policy) but also their priorities (how much weight they attribute to their position), which I subsume in the term *preferences.* Building on that, we may ask *with whose preferences parties are congruent* and *how this depends on party family.* Research on policy responsiveness generally distinguishes between responsiveness to the general electorate (Downs 1957; Stimson *et al.* 1995) or responsiveness to party supporters (Egan 2013; Kastellec *et al.* 2015; Wright 1989). While both certainly matter to some degree, I propose to adapt the idea of issue yield (De Sio and Weber 2014, 2019) to studying

congruence. Thereby, I argue that parties focus on issues with high yields. In short, parties can gain (in terms of votes) if they emphasize issues that are overly popular among partisan voters and at the same time widely supported among potential new voters (De Sio *et al.* 2018). If both requirements are fulfilled, such an issue would be considered a bridge policy. Focussing on bridge policies may enable a party to win new voters without risking jeopardizing the current voter base. Note that this implies that congruence between parties and their core voters may diminish since the preferences of the partisan and the general electorate may differ. Hence, I would expect that, while parties to some degree are congruent to the preferences of their current electorate and to the voters they (additionally) cater to, that issue yield is the better predictor of issue emphasis than either the preferences of the general electorate or the partisan voters.

Moreover, taking up the arguments by the party responsiveness literature on effect heterogeneity, we might expect this emphasis on issues with high yields to be restricted to mainstream parties. It has been shown that radical parties (sometimes labelled "niche parties") rather adjust their positions in accordance to their core electorate and are less prone to incorporate (shifts of) positions of the general electorate (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow *et al.* 2011; Schumacher *et al.* 2013). Adapting this into the model of issue emphasis should thus result in high congruence between radical parties' emphases and their voters' preferences but reduced predictive power of issue yield. Summarizing, I expect that parties' social policy profiles respond to both the partisan and the general electorate, which is best reflected in a measure of issue yield. Hence, issue yield is expected to predict issue emphasis of parties. Additionally, this is assumed to hold only for mainstream parties. Radical parties such as the radical left and the radical right are expected to primarily respond to their core electorate.

I test these expectations using quantitative data based on election manifestos and original individual-level survey data from six West European countries, namely Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK, Sweden, and Italy. To measure my dependent variable (issue emphasis), I draw on new coding of the latest (national) election manifestos (see Enggist and Pinggera 2019 for a more detailed description of the coding procedure). I use individual-level data to measure the preferences of parties' core electorates, the general electorate, as well as the resulting issue yields (Häusermann *et al.* 2019a). The results generally confirm my expectations, indicating that parties' social policy

issue emphases map respective issue yields. Indeed, parties do more strongly emphasize issues that are overly supported among party supporters *and* the general electorate. As with regards to the distinction between mainstream and radical parties, results are also in line with the expectations as far as the reduced predictive power of issue yield is concerned. However, I find some surprising heterogeneity within radical parties. While radical right parties do not correct their issue emphasis towards the general electorates' preferences, radical left parties do the exact opposite and seem to rarely incorporate their current voters' preferences. Hence, while mainstream parties incorporate both their partisans' as well as the general electorates' preferences in their election manifestos, radical parties focus either on their party supporters (radical right) or on the general electorate (radical left).

This paper adapts and applies the issue yield model to the area of welfare politics and highlights the limits of the concept with regard to radical parties. Thereby, it makes at least two relevant contributions. First, it offers a comprehensive attempt in analysing partisan social policy issue emphasis. Enabled by the fine-grained new coding of election manifestos, I am able to study parties' social policy profile beyond simple pro-/contra-welfare stances. The results show that the profiles of parties, even for specific issues within the broader topic of social policy, are in line with voters' preferences. The more issue-specific conflict on the demand side thus translates to the supply side, meaning that parties offer distinct social policy profiles. The fact that all parties in their manifestos primarily locate themselves on the pro-welfare state side does therefore not mean that "parties are the same". Second, the paper incorporates social policy priorities, both among voters as well as parties. While voter priorities are receiving increased levels of attention and priorities of parties have been studied for a longer period now, what has been missing is an attempt of combining the two and being able to compare priorities on the basis of an identical set of issues.

Changed Electoral Landscape

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 *et al.* 2017; Kölln and Wlezien 2016) while cutbacks in both

areas face opposition. Empirical evidence for high generalized support is numerous (Bremer 2018; Garritzmann *et al.* 2018; Häusermann *et al.* 2019b, 2019c). One could think that, since generalized support is so high, differences between social classes regarding welfare preferences have vanished. While we have always seen lower classes supporting the expansion of social policy, the literature has empirically shown and explained 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 1998, 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 (positive) feedback argues that welfare states foster build their own support coalitions since ever more voters become beneficiaries themselves (Pierson 1993; Svallfors 1997; see Busemeyer *et al.* 2019 for an excellent overview). 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 in preferences and that welfare politics is not politicized anymore, as recent studies have shown. Firstly, social security still ranks among the top priorities of citizens (Rovny and Polk 2019; Traber *et al.* 2018) and secondly, conflict over social policy has changed content. While most voters support an extensive welfare state, the debate is about how to recalibrate the welfare state (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Bürgisser and Bremer 2017; Busemeyer *et al.* 2018). This recalibration has been captured by different terms such as "social investment" (Hemerijck 2013, 2017; Morel *et al.* 2012) or "new social risks" (Bonoli 2005). Along these lines, (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018) show that support coalitions for social investment policies differ from support coalitions for traditional consumption-oriented social policies. Related to that, Häusermann *et al.* (2019b) provide evidence that working and middle/upper class voters, even though highly supportive of social spending, differ in how much they prioritize some over other types of policies. The same holds for party electorates (Häusermann *et al.* 2019c). Hence, there is ample evidence that conflict centres around the importance that different actors attribute to

different types of policies. 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 importance or priorities.

Implications for Parties

The implications of both increased demand and altered conflict structures for political parties have received little attention. Obviously, traditional positioning of parties, meaning that left parties advocate a big welfare state while right parties do the opposite, seems inadequate since general support is so massive. Taking anti-welfare stances, even for parties on the right, seems electorally harmful (Brooks and Manza 2008). This is not to say that parties do not differ in their stances on the size of the welfare state, but they do so less evidently. While indeed we do observe that clearly identifiable negative statements towards the welfare state are as good as absent in parties' election manifestos, parties still do differ in how and how much they talk about social policy. Hence, while we may conclude that parties have somewhat limited leeway in terms of position, this is certainly less true when it comes to salience or emphasis. First, parties can alter the weight they attach to social policy issues in their manifestos. Left parties considerably more often address the welfare state, while right parties may rather avoid speaking too much about it (Enggist and Pinggera 2019; Green-Pedersen and Jensen 2019). However, the "party-system agenda [that] emerges from the continuous political debate among political parties" (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010: 260) does not allow parties to stay completely silent on a salient topic such as the welfare state (Green-Pedersen 2019). Thus, secondly, parties use the available leeway to address specific welfare issues. Put differently, parties engage in issue competition (Green-Pedersen 2019) and thus differ in their social policy issue emphasis. This difference is expected to reflect differences in voter preferences as outlined above. The question remains as to which voters drive party emphasis.

The "new partisanship" literature argues that the structural changes of post-industrial societies are key to study party behaviour (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Häusermann *et al.* 2013): in short, electoral compositions have changed considerably due to the decline of the working class and the emergence of second dimension issues. These changes have a crucial impact on party politics because even within a parties' electorate, preferences may differ. Noteworthy, this

is equally true for welfare politics, since it is exactly the new conflict over priorities introduced above, that cuts across parties' electorates. Positively speaking, these new conflict structures thus allow for new kinds of welfare coalitions (Häusermann 2010), in negative terms this means that parties face electoral trade-offs that before they did not (Oesch and Rennwald 2018).

Hence, more broadly speaking, parties face the challenge to cater to their core supporters and potential new voters, with the difficulty that preferences may not perfectly match between the two. Along these lines, Abou-Chadi and Immergut (2019) argue that electoral competition is decisive in whether parties follow their vote- or policy seeking incentives. Under high competition, parties are expected to follow a vote seeking strategy and thus reach out to potential new voters. When competition is low however, parties do well enough by sticking to their core electorate and pursuing a strategy of vote seeking. Note that parties' emphases closely follow the structure of the conflict, meaning that for example left parties are either expected to opt for an investment strategy (high competition) or a consumption strategy (low competition). In the light of increased issue voting however, it is questionable whether parties indeed focus on such policy bundles or whether they "cherry-pick" issues more loosely. Contrary, Green-Pedersen and Jensen (2019) apply such an issue-specific approach. Loosely speaking, parties are free to combine different issues, may they be of an investing kind or consumptive, because it is rather the character of policy problems and the type of social risk involved that drives partisan emphasis. They argue that these risks and problems vary over different issues and do not neatly align with the structure of conflict identified by Abou-Chadi and Immergut. However, whether parties are expected to emphasize an issue or not is dependent on their electorates' preferences, which do not get measured in the article but are assumed to be known. Keeping in mind that conflict over priorities greatly differs from conflict (and thus attitudes) over positions, resulting expectations may be misleading. Let me underline this with the following example: In Green-Pedersen and Jensen's article, left parties are expected to emphasize labour market policies more than other parties, because this is how they cater to the working class. However, this implies that working class voters prioritize labour market policies, and that working-class voters' attitudes are decisive in traditional left parties' issue emphasis. Both might be questioned. Hence, I argue that we need a model that incorporates voter preferences in the prediction of parties' issue emphases.

Let me note here, that I look at issue emphasis rather than issue position. As shortly outlined above, party positions, much like voter positions, do not greatly vary. At least this holds for party position as presented in election manifestos. Parties from all party families are very reluctant to speak about social policy cutbacks. In my understanding, this is a consequence of general agreement on a large welfare state on the side of the voters. Hence, we may almost speak of social policy expansion as a valence issue (Stokes 1963). Competition, then, could be understood more as a struggle over credibility (very recent studies have combined competition in terms of positioning on conflictive issues and credibility-claiming over uncontested issues; D'Alimonte *et al.* 2019: @de_sio_issue_2019). The consequence of this insight would be that we needed a measure of (perceived) problem-solving credibility. Let me mention three arguments why I think I do not need such a measure. First, as argued above, while voter positions on expansion are very similar, their priorities for certain social policy issues vary. Hence, it is misleading to think of welfare politics in general as a valence topic. This is reflected by parties paying more attention to certain topics than others. Put differently, we are still in an area of conflict rather than general agreement as soon as we take a more careful look at preferences (also see Van der Brug 2017 who argues that valence issues are actually positional issues as soon as the debate is more specific about means rather than broadly about goals). Second, if one is not willing to give up the idea of welfare politics as a valence issue, I would argue that parties' emphases of different kinds of policies can be interpreted as an attempt to signal credibility in reforming the welfare state in the right direction (by the right means). Third, a recent paper shows that the struggle over issue ownership (which can be understood as a stickier concept of problem-solving credibility) comes down to spatial proximity, and hence positioning (Seeberg 2019). To sum it up, the struggle over social policy is reflected in parties emphasising different types of social policy issues, namely those that are more strongly preferred by the respective electorate.

Issue Yield in the Context of Welfare Politics

Recently, outside of the literature on welfare politics, De Sio and Weber (2014, 2019) have proposes a model that does incorporate voter preferences in the prediction of parties' issue emphases. The "issue yield model" 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 yield is useful since "political parties cannot solely rely on the mobilisation of their party preserves to reach electoral majorities. Given the small size of the different electoral preserves, parties only obtain stable majorities if they succeed in creating new coalitions of voters" (Oesch and Rennwald 2018: 801). 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 above-mentioned 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 popular among the general electorate (vote-seeking) thereby enabling parties to overcome this trade-off. Similarly, while research on policy responsiveness usually distinguishes between responsiveness to the general electorate (Downs 1957; Stimson *et al.* 1995) and responsiveness to party supporters (Egan 2013; Kastellec *et al.* 2015; Wright 1989), the issue yield model synergizes the two approaches. This results in the following hypothesis *H1: Issue yield predicts issue emphasis of parties.* Consequently, parties are expected to be congruent with both the general electorate and their current voters. Therefore, combining the two factors in the concept of issue yield is a better predictor of emphasis than either of the factors on their own.

Further, adapting the issue yield model to welfare politics requires a modification concerning priorities. I have argued before that conflict over the welfare state has changed, in particularly due to decreased conflict over positions and increased conflict over priorities. Hence, since voter preferences are expected to predict parties' issue emphases, we have to make sure to measure preferences adequately. In the issue yield model as presented originally, yield is computed from percentages of support for a given issue (and party size). Support is measured as what I here call position, namely whether a given voter agrees or disagrees with the expansion of a given issue.

Given the much more prevalent conflict over priorities, these should be included in a measure of yield for social policy issues. Note that it is not per se a new idea that priorities matter for emphasis. Also Green-Pedersen and Jensen (2019) use the term "priority" in voter preferences in order to determine whether a party emphasizes an issue more strongly than another party. However, so far voter priorities have not empirically been included in party studies since respective data has been scarce. Hence, as I will outline in greater detail in the data and methods section, measures of voters' priorities are used to weight their positions on an issue. Note that this also refers to the ongoing discussion whether competition over positional and valence issues can be meaningfully combined in a single model (D'Alimonte *et al.* 2019). If we include the straightforward and intuitive assumption that voters still vary in the importance they attribute to different valence issues and we include such a measure of importance in the identification of preferences, we circumvent the problem of unanimity. This point is both theoretical and empirical, however rather limited to applications of the issue yield model in policy areas that are characterized by general positional agreement (such as this paper on social policy or for example environmental politics).

The Limits of Issue Yield

A logical next step in the analysis of issue yield and its effects on issue emphasis is to look into effect heterogeneity. Above, I have claimed that the issue yield model synergizes what Ezrow *et al.* (2011) call the "general electorate model" and the "partisan constituency model". As indicated by their label, the former assumes that parties respond to the general electorate (Downs 1957; Stimson *et al.* 1995), while the latter argues that they rather respond to party supporters (Egan 2013; Kastellec *et al.* 2015; Wright 1989). Research on party responsiveness has shown that the general electorate model is more adequate to describe mainstream party behaviour, whereas the strategy of radical parties (sometimes labelled "niche parties") rather follows the partisan constituency model and is less prone to incorporate (shifts of) positions of the general electorate (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow *et al.* 2011; Schumacher *et al.* 2013). Different mechanisms explaining the choice of strategy have been proposed. Adams *et al.* (2006) argue that niche parties are simply more policy-seeking and therefore less prone to react to the electorate in general. Bischof and Wagner (2017) add that parties that focus on neglected issues (which they argue is conceptually very close to the idea of niche parties) are also less likely to follow shifts of the general electorate. Further, there is some

evidence that party organization affects the relative importance of the preferences of the general electorate (Schumacher *et al.* 2013). Moreover, Klüver and Spoon (2016) find that radical parties are more responsive towards their party supporters in "own" issue areas.

Summarizing, it seems highly likely that there are limits to the issue yield model. Namely, I expect that it is foremost mainstream parties' issue emphasis that is in line with corresponding yields. For radical parties however, I expect that it are the preferences of their partisan voters that drive emphasis. In terms of congruence this means that radical parties are expected to show higher congruence to their electorate than mainstream parties (since they are supposed to be more policy-seeking). This is summarized in hypothesis *H2: For radical parties, it is the preferences of their party supporters rather than issue yield that predicts issue emphasis.* Note that I will stick to the term "radical parties" rather than "niche parties" in order to circumvent conceptual unclarity (Bischof 2017)[1].

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 *et al.* 2019a). The data used in this paper is limited to the cases of Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK, Sweden, and Italy. 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 7603 completed interviews that were conducted between August and December 2018. 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.* (2019b). For the independent variable, I rely on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens *et al.* 2018)[2].

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[1]While green parties typically are considered niche parties, my concept of radical parties certainly does not include them. However, I did not find evidence for differences between green and mainstream parties in my analysis.

[2]I considered the latest national election manifestos: Germany 2017, the Netherlands 2017, Ireland 2016, the UK 2017, Sweden 2018, Italy 2018.

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. Party 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 of the following kind:

- 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 and sufficient 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. re-trenching, 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). But anyhow, the number of negative statements, as noted above, is neglectable.

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, the manifestos include 1540 statements in total, of which on average 163 (10.6%) statements per party fall into the subset analysed here, with some variance between parties (from 4% for the Dutch PVV to 26% for the Swedish Venstre) and countries (from 9% in the Netherlands to 19% 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.

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 policy fields (also called issues here) 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 these five issues since information on social policy preferences of voters is not available for other issues (see next subsection).

The operationalization itself is straightforward. For every party and every issue I divide the number of times an issue has been mentioned divided by the number of times any of the five issues 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 (32 parties ∗ 5 issues = 160 yields). These yields are composed of the preferences of the party's electorate and the general 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 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*
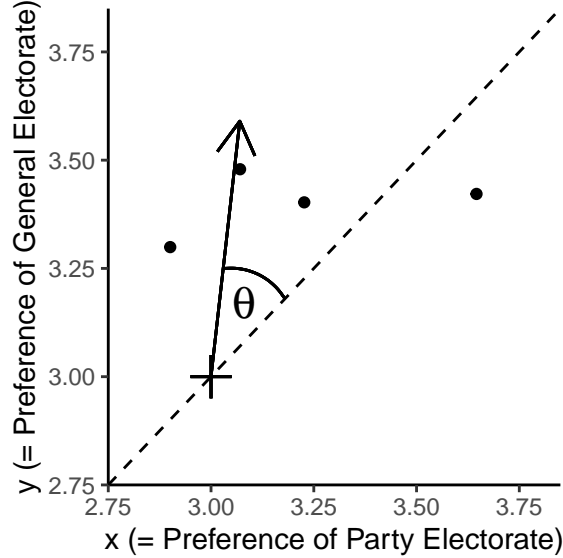
Figure 1: Measuring Issue Yield

for an issue.

In a next step, these preferences were aggregated to the party level. Again, I am interested in the preferences of each party's electorate and the general electorate in a country. 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?")* and the mean preference of all voters for each country. 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 the general electorate. In order to get to a compound measure of partisan-level preferences, I use the preferences of party supporters and the general electorate 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

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by partisans and the general electorate. The reference line is chosen to be a line with intercept 0 and slope 1. This reflects the fact that deviation towards the general 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: $\sqrt{2}/2((x-3) + (y-3))$.

For hypothesis 2 on effect heterogeneity between mainstream and radical parties I use the following classification:

- Radical Right: Alternative for Germany (GER), Party of Freedom (NL), League (ITA), Brothers of Italy (ITA), Sweden Democrats (SWE)
- Radical Left: The Left (GER), Socialist Party (NL), We Ourselves/Sinn Fein (IRE), Left Party/Venstre (SWE).

For the time of interest there are no relevant radical parties in the UK, no radical right party in Ireland, and no radical left party Italy.

Concerning the method, I run linear regression analyses where I regress (normalized) emphasis on (normalized) yield and include country-fixed-effects. In addition, I control for party size (small parties are expected to be slightly more reluctant to neglect their supporter's preferences, De Sio and Weber (2014)), the total number of statements on social policy issues since the fewer statements the more emphasis is sensitive to change, and whether a party is in government or in opposition.

Results

The first part of this section is descriptive, in order to get a sense of the data and the operationalization used. Figure 2, for the exemplary case of Germany, shows for each party the preferences of the partisan voters (x-axis) and the preferences of the general electorate (y-axis) for the five issues under study. The dyed space on the top right of each panel highlights the bridge policy area. Issues placed within this space are both strongly supported by the party and the general electorate. As outlined in detail above, this is what merges in the measure of issue yield. The take away from this figure is that some parties face a quite distinct set of voters to appeal to, but even for these parties
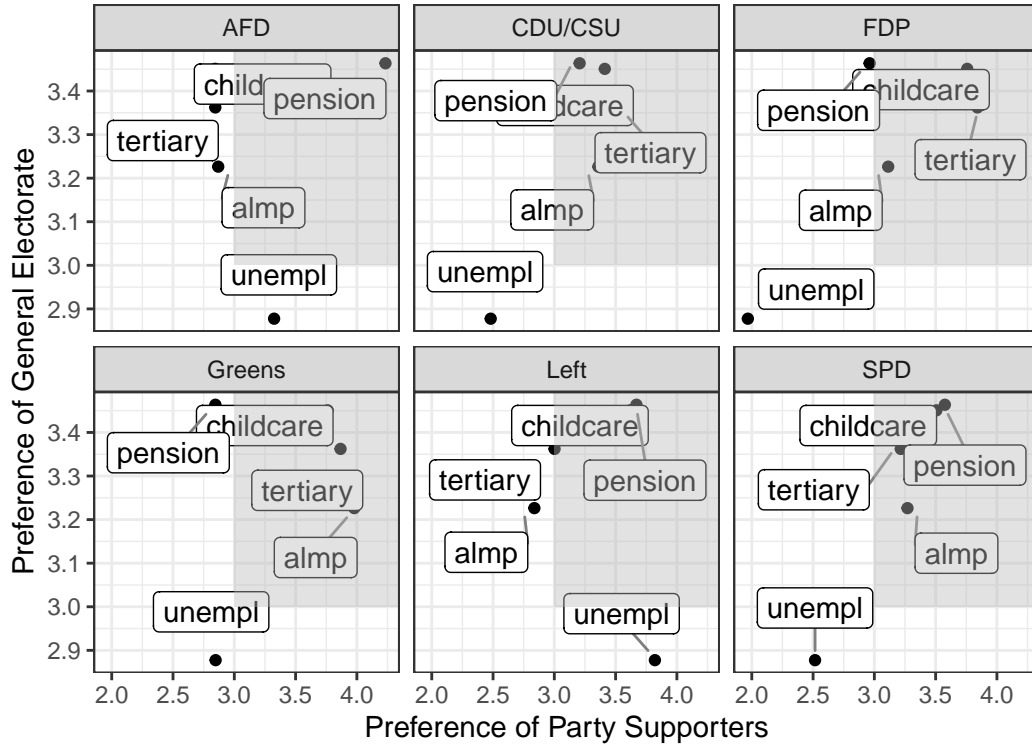
Figure 2: Preferences of Party Supporters and the General Electorate by Party (Germany)

there is a certain set of issues that they can emphasize without jeopardizing either current or new voters. The exception is the radical right AFD, who apparently cannot easily overcome the trade-off between catering to current and new voters. We will come back to this further below. Also note, that the idea of voters still having distinct preferences is nicely illustrated by the figure.

Figure 3 shows the dependent variable, namely issue emphasis of parties in their election manifestos, again for the case of Germany. Even though there is a general trend among German parties towards emphasizing pensions, we do observe that parties still offer different issue combinations. The following analysis will show whether these emphases are indeed driven by the yields identified on the demand side.

Table 1 shows the results for the first hypothesis, which expects that issue yield predicts issue emphasis. Model 1 is a simple model regressing emphasis on yield that confirms the positive relationship between the two variables. Note that the variables included are normalized. Hence, if an issue moves from being the least attractive to emphasize (yield=0) to being the most attractive to emphasize (yield=1), relative party emphasis increases by 39 per cent. I interpret this as a
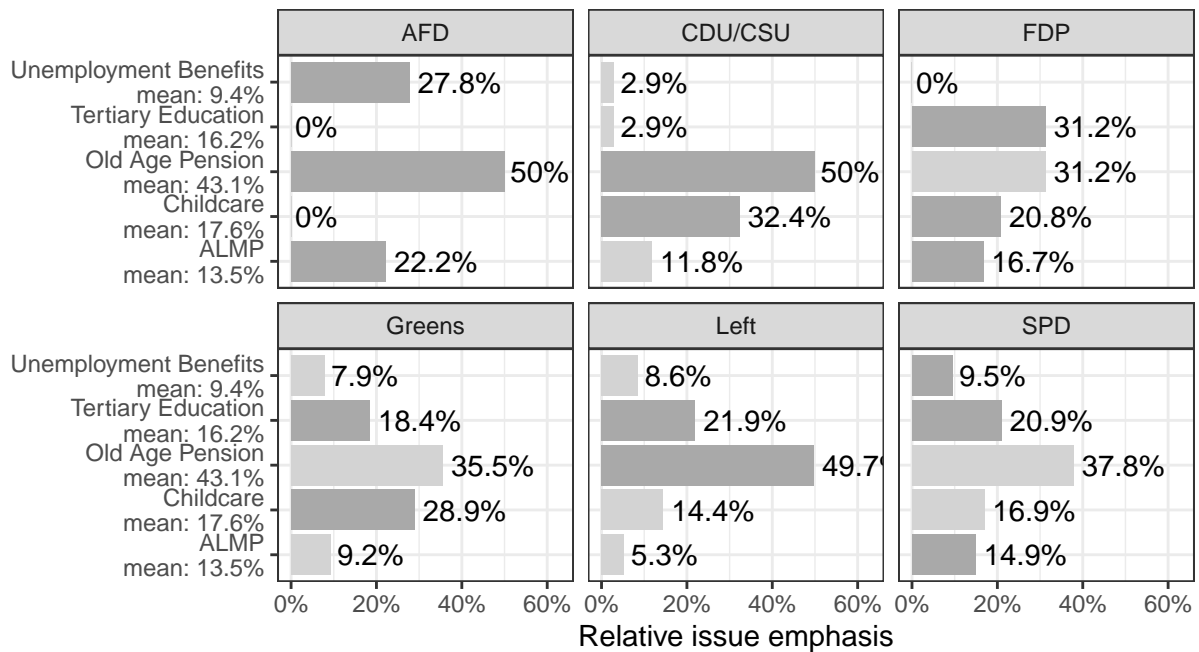
Figure 3: Issue Emphases of Parties (Germany)

Table 1: Effect of Voters' Preferences on Parties' Issue Emphases

	Issue Emphasis				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Issue Yield	0.399***			0.668***	
	(0.077)			(0.229)	
General Electorate		0.387***			0.283***
		(0.080)			(0.089)
Party Supporter			0.342***	−0.284	0.212**
			(0.078)	(0.228)	(0.086)
(Intercept)	0.186	0.139	0.249	0.168	0.115
	(0.176)	(0.181)	(0.178)	(0.176)	(0.178)
Observations	160	160	160	160	160
R^2	0.163	0.147	0.124	0.172	0.180
Adjusted R^2	0.113	0.095	0.072	0.116	0.125

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

All models include country-fixed-effects.

substantial effect confirming the first hypothesis. Models 2 to 5 provide further evidence. Model 2 regresses emphasis on the preferences of the general electorate, revealing an effect that is equally strong as the effect of yield. Parties are thus to some degree congruent to the preferences of the general electorate. Further, model 3 tests the effect of the preferences of the partisan voters, which is slightly less strong but nonetheless provides evidence for some degree of congruence between parties and their current voters. Models 4 and 5 look into the composition of the effects. The effect of yield increases with the inclusion of the partisan voters' preferences (model 4), since these are part of the issue yield index in the first place. However, the effect of the general electorate is mediated by the partisan voters (model 5). Therefore, I conclude that parties respond to both partisan voters and the general electorate, an observation that is in line with the idea of issue yield. The goodness-of-fit-measures at the bottom of the table reveal that model 5 which includes the preferences of the general and the partisan electorate separately slightly outperforms model 1 which includes issue yield only. Hence, statistically, issue yield does not result in better predictions of emphasis than voter preferences separately but it offers a conceptual framework to understand party issue emphasis. The control variables (not shown in table) are close to zero and insignificant. The results are robust to leaving out the control variables.

Table 2 presents the models analysing effect heterogeneity of issue yield. According to hypothesis 2 we would expect that issue yield may not be an adequate predictor of emphasis by radical parties. Thus, in model 1 we include an interaction between issue yield and a dummy variable for radical parties. The regression coefficient however is not significant. Figure 4 graphically depicts the interaction. Even though it is not significant, the direction of the effect is in line with the expectations. The strong positive effect of issue yield on issue emphasis is considerably weakened for radical parties. The next step is to look at the mechanism that we expect to drive the deceased predictive power of issue yield, namely whether radical parties rather respond to their party supporters and do not incorporate the preferences of the general electorate. For reasons that will become evident in the following models and graphs, the analysis looks at radical right and radical left parties separately. Models 2 and 3 in table 2 examine radical right parties. Model 2 shows that there is no significant interaction effect between radical right parties and the preferences of the party supporters. Model 3 however reveals a negative interaction effect between radical right parties and the preferences of the

Table 2: Effect of Voters' Preferences on Parties' Issue Emphases: Radical vs. Mainstream Parties

	Issue Emphasis				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Issue Yield	0.465*** (0.092)				
Radical (vs. Mainstream)	0.079 (0.117)				
Partisan Electorate		0.331*** (0.087)		0.395*** (0.083)	
General Electorate			0.457*** (0.086)		0.394*** (0.086)
Radical Right		−0.046 (0.134)	0.252 (0.168)		
Radical Left				0.170 (0.144)	−0.008 (0.180)
Issue Yield*Radical	−0.227 (0.170)				
Partisan Electorate*Radical Right		0.059 (0.211)			
General Electorate*Radical Right			−0.439** (0.210)		
Partisan Electorate*Radical Left				−0.436* (0.236)	
General Electorate*Radical Left					−0.053 (0.239)
(Intercept)	0.137 (0.187)	0.269 (0.191)	0.121 (0.189)	0.206 (0.179)	0.131 (0.183)
Observations	160	160	160	160	160
R^2	0.175	0.125	0.172	0.145	0.148
Adjusted R^2	0.114	0.060	0.111	0.081	0.085

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
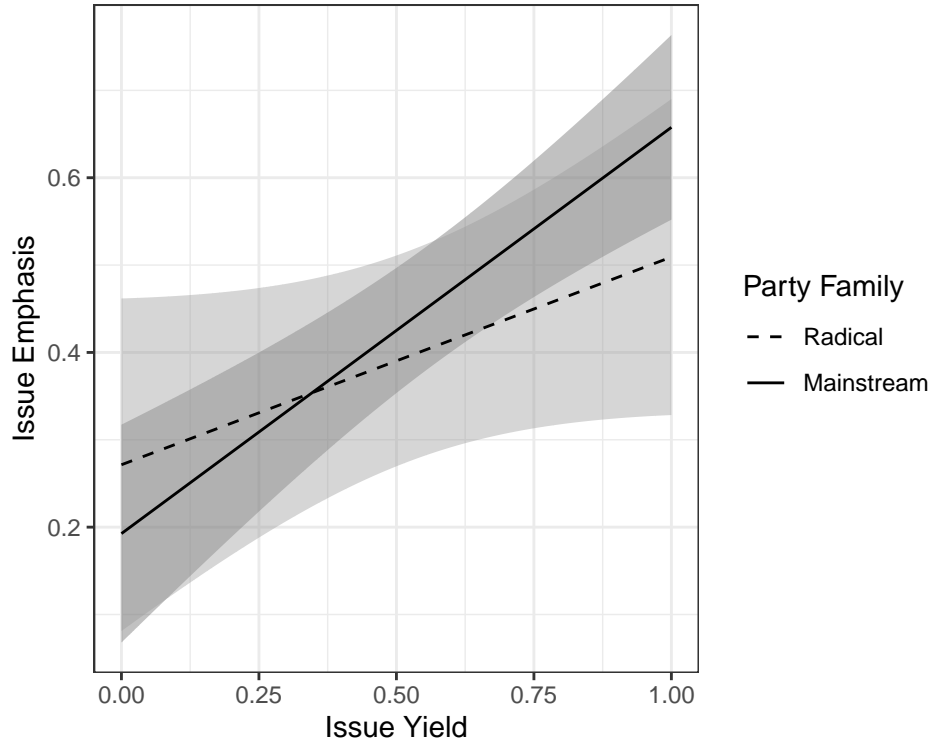All models include country-fixed-effects.

Figure 4: Effect of Issue Yield on Issue Emphasis of Radical and Mainstream Parties

general electorate. Figure 5 illustrates these findings in a more accessible manner. The left panel shows the effect of the preferences of party supporters on issue emphasis for radical right parties (dashed line) compared to all other parties (solid line). As in model 2 of table 2 above, there is no significant interaction effect, meaning that radical right parties are not more strongly driven by their partisan voters than other parties. That is somewhat surprising and not entirely in line with the hypothesis. The right panel of figure 5 shows the same comparison, but for the effect of the preferences of the general electorate rather than those of the party supporters, based on model 3. Cleary, the preferences of the general electorate are not mirrored in radical right parties' issue emphases. Hence, radical right parties do not correct their emphases towards the general electorate, which however does not result in increased congruence to partisan voters.

Models 4 and 5 examine the same for radical left parties. While in model 4 we find a negative interaction effect with party supporters (only on the 10-percent level though), the coefficient for the interaction with the general electorate in model 5 is insignificant. Again, figure 6 illustrates these findings. As the left panel shows, radical right parties' issue emphases are not correlated
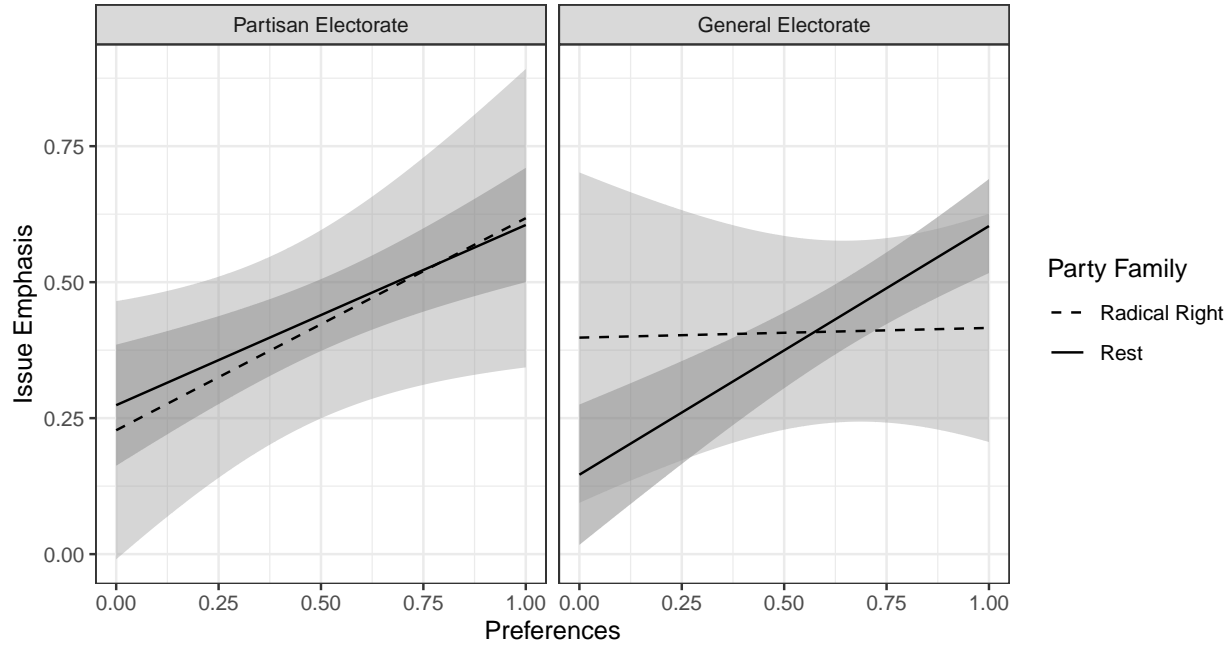
Figure 5: Effect of Preferences of Partisan and General Electorate on Issue Emphasis of Radical Right

with the preferences of radical left voters. As the right panel makes clear, the positive effect of the preferences of the general electorate holds for radical left parties as well. Overall, these results are even more surprising than those for the radical right. In congruence terms, there seems to be no congruence whatsoever between radical left parties and their supporters. The control variables (not shown in table) are close to zero and insignificant. The results are robust to leaving out the control variables.

Hence, the hypothesis that claimed that it was the preferences of the party supporters rather than the combined measure of issue yield that predicts party issue emphasis, cannot be confirmed without specification. There is evidence, even though not statistically significant, that issue yield predicts radical parties' issue emphasis less well than it does mainstream parties' issue emphasis. However, I do not find that this reduced effect is due to increased congruence with party supporters on the side of radical parties. Even though radical right parties do not correct their issue emphasis towards the preferences of the general electorate, this does not result in increased congruence with partisan voters. For radical left parties I find the exact opposite. They are congruent to the general electorate to the same degree as mainstream parties are, but their own supporters' preferences are not reflected
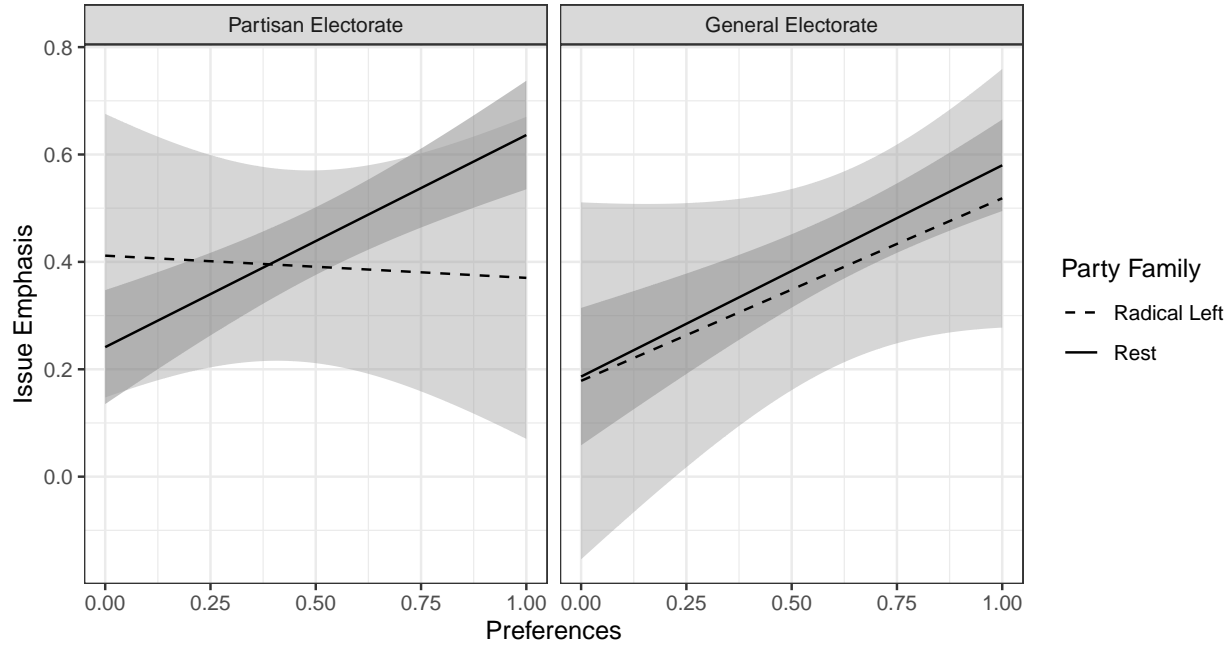
Figure 6: Effect of Preferences of Partisan and General Electorate on Issue Emphasis of Radical Left

in their issue emphasis. Summarizing, the issue yield model is a useful tool for the analysis of issue emphasis and resulting congruence also for welfare politics, but only for mainstream parties.

The results generate at least two questions: Why does issue yield not predict radical parties' emphases? And how can we explain the differences between the radical right and the radical left? Starting with the first question, the literature on party responsiveness has suggested that radical parties are policy seeking and therefore rather interested in being congruent with their party supporters. However, as outlined in length above, this is not exactly what we find. The fact that both parties on the radical left and right respond either to their partisans or the general electorate without this getting translated into increased congruence with the respective group is puzzling. This suggest that there are other factors driving issue emphasis which in this model appears as some sort of "randomness". Moreover, one might expect that issue yield is not a good predictor of emphasis by radical parties because radical parties have to deal with quite some gap between the preferences of their voters and the general electorate while mainstream parties are faced with a constituency that is closer to the general electorate. Figure 7 therefore plots aggregated (simple mean) preferences of party voters (x-axis) and preferences of the general electorate (y-axis) for different party families. For the Conservatives (r=0.63), the Liberals (r=0.53), and the Social Democrats (r=0.56), there
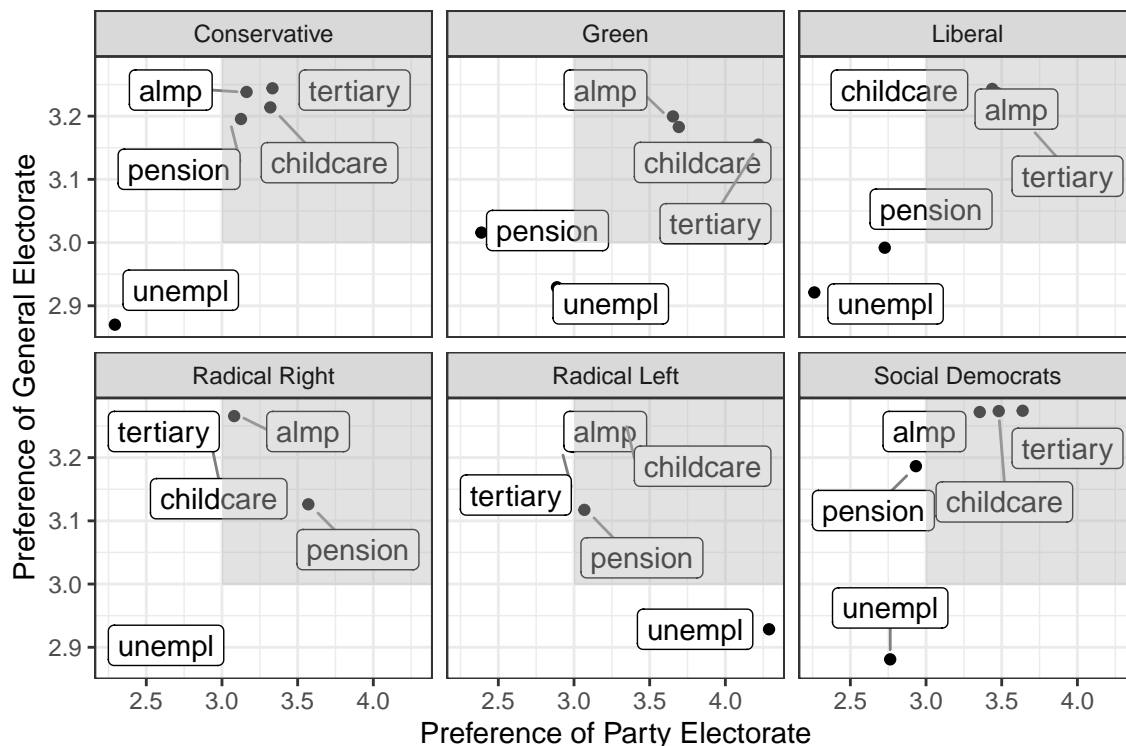
Figure 7: Preferences of Current and Potential New Voters by Party Family

seems to be a positive relationship between the preferences and a quite strong correlation between the preferences of their electorate and the general electorate (note that the correlations are based on the individual parties). This means, that for these mainstream parties, the issues with high yields are actually the issues preferred most by partisans and the general electorate. In contrast, this is not the case for the radical left (0.31). This supports the claim that for mainstream partiesthere is no trade-off between being congruent with the own voters and being congrent with the general electorate. However, both the picture of the Greens (r=0.45) and the radical right (0.57) do not fit this explanation. While for the radical left indeed focussing on issues with high yields comes with partial neglect of either their partisans or the general electorates' top issues, this is not the case for radical right parties. Hence, there are trade-offs to overcome for mainstream parties too and the issue yield considerations help them to overcome these trade-offs.

But how to explain differences between radical party families? Reviewing the literature on niche party responsiveness suggested that the type of issue may influences how strongly radical parties follow their supporters. If the issue is more important for a party, the position of the supporters

gains in importance for party strategy. This is the exact opposite of what I find. It is the radical right rather than the radical left, who I expect to care more about social policy, that are more responsive towards their supporters. While the results for the radical right are still mostly in line with the literature and certainly do not contradict existing findings, I do not have an explanation for the surprising issue emphasis of the radical left. An ad-hoc explanation would suggest that radical left parties rather target at their new electorate among new middle class voters which have similar preferences as the general electorate and thereby neglect the preferences of their extant working class voters, who for example rather prefer labour market measures such as unemployment benefits (as is apparent from figure 7). Or that on the one hand radical left parties may follow an inclusive strategy of social policy making that takes more than just their partisans into account while on the other hand radical right parties take stances closer aligned to their partisans because they want to signal that they make politics for "their people". For them, the topic of social policy is simply not that important for attracting additional votes. Contrary, for the (radical) left, social policy is one of the issues where their profile is distinctly different from other parties. Hence, this is where they potentially win over new votes and their slight move towards the median voter might be understood as an attempt to reinforce their issue ownership status (Seeberg 2019).

Conclusion

This paper adapts and applies the issue yield model to the area of welfare politics and highlights the limits of the concept with regard to radical parties. More specifically, I asked whether the social policy profiles of parties are congruent with the preferences of voters, and with which voters? Put differently, do parties emphasize issues that are preferred by their supporters or by the general electorate? Applying the issue yield model (De Sio and Weber 2014) to welfare politics, I have argued that parties emphasize issues that are both popular among partisans as well as among the general electorate, thereby overcoming the trade-off between winning over new voters and satisfying extant voters. Hence, parties are expected to be congruent to their voters only to some degree since they will "correct" their emphasis towards issues also prominent among the general electorate. The results confirmed these expectations. Indeed, issues with higher yields are more strongly emphasized in parties' election manifestos. Moreover, I asked whether all parties are expected to focus on high-yield issues. Based on findings on party responsiveness I hypothesized that radical

parties rather emphasize issues that are popular among their partisans and that thus issue yield has a decreased predictive power for them. Results are more mixed in this regard. Radical right parties indeed do not consider the preferences of the general electorate in their issue emphasis but rather focus on party supporters. However, they are not more congruent with their supporters than mainstream parties are. Contrary, radical left parties' issue emphasis seems unrelated to their supporters' preferences but driven by the preferences of the general electorate.

While these results (with the exclusion of the radical left) are generally in line with existing literature, there are very recent studies that at first sight may seem contradicting. Barberá *et al.* (2019) find that US legislators (and therefore mainstream parties) are more likely to be in line with their supporters rather than the general electorate. Moreover, Ibenskas and Polk (2019) find social democratic parties, on issues of importance to them, respond to the party constituency and less so to the broader public. Hence, the take-away of these studies is that also mainstream parties respond to party supporters. Regardless of whether these studies look at the US or analyse shifts and thus responsiveness rather than congruence, the findings are compatible with those in this paper. Even though I find that mainstream parties emphasize issues popular among partisans and the general electorate, this seems to have only minor consequences for congruence with party supporters, which remains quite high.

The findings have several implications. First of all, even though both demand for social policy as well as the electoral landscape have changed considerably, parties are very much in line with their voters. With the notable exception of radical left parties, even fine-grained and specific social policy preferences among voters are taken up by parties and find their way into election manifestos. To what extent these claims actually make their way into legislation should be subject to future studies. Second, results show that even the radical right emphasizes the issues important to its voters. Even though we know that demand for social policy among voters of the radical right may vary to quite some degree (Ivarsflaten 2005; Oesch and Rennwald 2018), at least there seems to be a general agreement on what issues are most pressing (also see Enggist and Pinggera 2019) and this agreement is mirrored in radical right parties emphasis. Third, the mismatch between the radical left and its supporters is astonishing but might be interpreted as an attempt to attract new voters with their pet issue. Fourth, it will be interesting to see whether the findings in regard to the

viability of the issue yield model for radical parties translates into other policy areas.

This paper also comes with limitations. Firstly, the results are based on a relatively small number of issues and parties. I would however argue that those five issues are a relatively adequate selection to identify conflict and congruence in social policy. The low number of parties is in so far a problem in that it produces results that are just or just not significant even though the coefficients are often times relatively large in size. Moreover, the coefficients are somewhat unstable and sensitive to changes to the model with regard to leaving out parties or countries. Secondly, I cannot make any causal claims since for most parties manifestos have been published before measurement of public opinion. Hence, we must assume a certain degree of stability in preferences.

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