

Intra-party heterogeneity in policy preferences and its effect on issue salience: Developing and applying a measure based on elite survey data

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Abstract

Quantitative research on party politics often has to assume that parties are unitary actors with homogeneous policy preferences simply because intra-party heterogeneity is difficult to measure. This article proposes a measure of preference heterogeneity based on surveys of party elites. We draw on Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) data from 28 elections in 21 developed democracies to quantify intra-party heterogeneity and validate this measure. The usefulness of the measure is demonstrated by studying the effects of intra-party heterogeneity on issue salience. We find support for the hypothesis that heterogeneity regarding a policy issue tends to be negatively associated with the emphasis a party places on that issue by regressing measures of issue salience from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey and the Manifesto Project on our CCS measure of heterogeneity. Problems of elite surveys notwithstanding, drawing on this data source seems a promising way to overcome the unitary party assumption.

Keywords

elite surveys, ideology, intra-party heterogeneity, issue attention, party positions

Introduction

Quantitative research on party politics often assumes that parties are unitary actors. While it may be unproblematic to use this assumption in some circumstances, it limits our understanding in others. It implies, for example, that parties occupy precisely defined positions in the policy space, when in reality they are unlikely to be completely united in their preferences. If we conceptualize parties as organizations that consist of multiple actors, we can think of policy “positions” as distributions that might vary between parties, within parties between issues, and across time. The extent of this intra-party preference heterogeneity is likely to influence phenomena such as party strategy and competition, coalition building, and voting behavior.

It is difficult to study intra-party preference heterogeneity empirically because valid cross-national data on this phenomenon are difficult to come by (Saalfeld and Strøm, 2014: 392). In this contribution, we argue that party elite surveys can be used to measure intra-party preference

heterogeneity. Such data are readily available in the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS), a cross-national research endeavor which consists of numerous post-election polls of candidates to national legislatures (CCS, 2016). As of now, the CCS has collected data about candidates’ attitudes toward policy issues from 28 parliamentary elections in 21 developed democracies. This candidate survey data represents direct and easy-to-use information about intra-party preference heterogeneity and might be of great value for party politics research.

We demonstrate this value by studying the link between intra-party preference heterogeneity and issue salience.

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Research on party competition (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996) has pointed out that parties emphasize different policy issues. For a number of reasons parties might place more emphasis on issues which their elites have homogeneous preferences about: It seems rational given electoral incentives, and party leaders might find it easier to agree on a collective party position if they, as individuals, have similar policy preferences. Against this background, a number of empirical studies have explored the effect of intra-party dissent regarding European integration on the salience of European integration (e.g. De Vries and Van de Wardt, 2011; Spoon, 2012; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). But preference heterogeneity and dissent are not the same. We therefore use our survey-based measure of preference heterogeneity to reinvestigate the link between intra-party politics and issue salience and to extend this line of research to other issue areas. The results suggest that parties tend to place less emphasis on policy issues over which their candidates hold heterogeneous preferences. This finding is substantially important in itself. It also demonstrates that a survey-based measure of intra-party preference heterogeneity is useful in relaxing the unitary actor assumption, as it allows studying the implications of intra-party preference heterogeneity for party behavior with quantitative data.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the next section, we describe our concept of intra-party preference heterogeneity. The third section discusses different approaches to its measurement. In the fourth section, we derive the hypothesis about the effect of intra-party preference heterogeneity on issue salience. Given the novelty of our approach to measuring intra-party heterogeneity, the fifth section describes in detail how the CCS data can be used to derive this measure and discusses its validity. The sixth section is concerned with testing the hypothesis on the heterogeneity-salience link. After discussing the measurement of salience, control variables, and methods, we present the results. A final section points to implications, discusses the problems of elite survey data, and proposes avenues for future research on intra-party preference heterogeneity.

Conceptualizing intra-party heterogeneity

We understand intra-party preference heterogeneity as the degree to which party elites hold different policy preferences. This has been labeled (absence of) programmatic cohesion in previous studies, that is, the “general agreement within a party organization on specific issue positions” (Kitschelt and Smyth, 2002: 1229). Intra-party preference heterogeneity is *not* behavioral unity—“the observable degree to which members of a group act in unison” (Sieberer, 2006: 151). Furthermore, preference heterogeneity is neither party discipline, which refers to elites following decisions by the party’s top leaders for fear

of sanctions, nor party loyalty, which refers to elites abiding by the previously internalized norm that parties should display unity in public. Preference heterogeneity and both these phenomena may influence behavioral unity, but they are conceptually distinct (e.g. Andeweg and Thomassen, 2010). Two aspects of our definition merit further discussion, namely the specification of whom we consider elites and how we conceptualize policy preferences.

Following Norris (1995: 28), we understand party leaders as “members of the government and shadow cabinet, legislators, candidates for elected office, convention delegates and members of the national executive committee.” Party leaders (or, synonymously, party elites) constitute the top level of a three-tier party hierarchy of leaders, subleaders, and non-leaders.¹ If the goal is to study the impact of intra-party heterogeneity on intra-party politics and party–voter relationships, we need to focus on that subset of party members which matters for intra-party politics and is visible to the public. Party leaders, as defined above, precisely meet these criteria. Extending the circle by including subleaders would include actors without public visibility and influence on intra-party politics at the national level. Contracting the circle by focusing only on a few top leaders would exclude party actors who fit the two criteria of public visibility and intra-party influence.

In the empirical section below, we focus on candidates in elections to the national legislature. Candidates constitute the core of the group of party leaders, because they satisfy the two criteria. First, they play an important role in shaping their party’s public image and electoral success (Kriesi, 2012; MacAllister, 2007). They are usually highly visible actors in election campaigns (in their respective constituency) and thus give specific faces to their respective party. Second, looking at decision-making within the party, candidates shape their party’s electoral platform (Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012). Note that studying candidates empirically converges with studying party officials: Many candidates of national elections also play important roles within their party. They hold party functions and have informal influence due to their role as candidates.

The second aspect of the definition of intra-party heterogeneity which merits discussion is what we mean by policy preferences. At the analytical level, we can distinguish between value orientations (Kluckhohn, 1951) or *outcome preferences* (Ganghof, 2003: 10), which refer to preferred states of the world, and preferences regarding the *policy means* that are necessary to achieve these ends. While value orientations are by definition general in that they transcend situations, policy means can differ in their level of abstraction. At the most concrete level, party elites might disagree over *specific output proposals* (such as a specific legislative proposal). At a more general level, party elites might disagree ideologically over general *policy principles* in an issue area.

Given this analytical distinction between preference types, we can ask whether the level of intra-party heterogeneity varies between them. Furthermore, we can ask whether the effects of intra-party heterogeneity vary depending on the preference type. We suspect that intra-party heterogeneity regarding policy principles will nourish disagreement over specific policy outputs and have larger effects on party politics than the latter. Heterogeneity in value orientations probably exerts even more fundamental effects on (intra-)party behavior. This article will not pursue these differentiations, however, because only disagreement at the level of policy principles can be measured with the cross-national survey data at our disposal.

Quantitative approaches to intra-party preference heterogeneity

Intra-party heterogeneity has been studied from different perspectives. It has proven difficult, however, to construct measures that allow us to compare the extent of intra-party preference heterogeneity between parties cross-nationally and over time. While qualitative research has shown for individual cases that parties consist of different (groups of) actors with divergent policy preferences (e.g. Daalder, 1983; Eldersveld, 1964), this methodological approach finds its limits when the goal is to detect general patterns across many cases—for that, we need to construct quantitative measures of intra-party heterogeneity. We can identify at least three approaches to satisfy this need: (1) interpreting party actors' behavior as expressions of (heterogeneity in) preferences, (2) expert assessments of preference heterogeneity, and (3) surveying party elites about their preferences. Of these, only the last represents a direct and explicit measurement of intra-party preference heterogeneity.

Using the first approach, several scholars have analyzed how united parties are in their voting behavior in legislatures (e.g. Sieberer, 2006; Stecker, 2013). But voting unity is not intra-party preference homogeneity. Scholars of legislative politics consider preference heterogeneity to be one of several factors influencing the voting unity of members of parliament (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2010: 658). Thus, in order to study the relative influence of these factors empirically, we need a measure of preference heterogeneity which is distinct from these factors as well as from behavioral unity.

Similarly, another strand of research looks at intra-party heterogeneity by quantitatively analyzing political text, such as speeches in parliament or at party congresses, that intra-party actors produce (e.g. Bernauer and Bräuninger, 2009; Ceron, 2016; Greene and Haber, 2016). However, just like MP voting, these texts are no direct measure of preferences. Their creation and publication are influenced by these preferences as well as other features, such as tactical considerations and pressures by the leadership (see,

e.g. Greene and O'Brien, 2016). Furthermore, as of now, text analysis has not produced cross-nationally comparable data on intra-party heterogeneity at a larger scale.

The second approach to tap intra-party preference heterogeneity is to draw on expert judgments. In theory, experts could be asked to assess the distribution of preferences within a party. A limiting factor of such a measure is that the experts can only assess elite preferences based on the information available to them. Their answers are therefore influenced by issue salience and biased toward the preferences of prominent party leaders. In practice, no such expert ratings of preference heterogeneity exist. The closest approximation can be found in the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (CHES), which include an item asking about the "internal dissent or conflict in a party on European integration" (e.g. Bakker et al., 2015). These expert ratings have allowed scholars to study the implications of intra-party dissent on European integration, for example, how it affects the salience of this issue (De Vries and Van de Wardt, 2011; Spoon, 2012; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Van der Wardt et al., 2014). But dissent and conflict are not the same as preference heterogeneity. Differences in opinion will not always result in open conflict. Rather, open conflict (which can be observed by experts) is probably a consequence of preference heterogeneity, issue salience, and the unwillingness to compromise. Vice versa, the absence of open conflict is not a valid indicator of preference homogeneity because this absence may be the result of party discipline or party loyalty.

The third approach is to use surveys of party elites, which allow the direct measurement of the distribution of preferences within parties (Bailer, 2014). It is easy to construct measures of intra-party preference heterogeneity from these individual-level data. If the same issue batteries are employed repeatedly and cross-nationally, it is possible to compare heterogeneity across space and time. Crucially, the strength of a survey-based measure of heterogeneity is that it is not confounded by other phenomena researchers might be interested in, such as party unity, discipline, and loyalty.²

So far, only a handful of studies have used survey-based measures of intra-party preference heterogeneity. Bailer (2009) assesses the impact of the European Union (EU)'s 2004 Eastern enlargement on the ideological heterogeneity of parliamentary groups in the European Parliament using representatives' self-identified position on the left-right scale. Andeweg and Thomassen (2010) describe patterns of intra-party heterogeneity on a range of different issue items using surveys of members of the Dutch Lower House. Kitschelt and colleagues draw on party elite survey data to measure the cohesiveness of parties in Eastern Europe (Kitschelt and Smith, 2002) and Latin America (Kitschelt et al., 2010). They aim to find out whether party systems are programmatically structured in the sense that parties "compete on the basis of clearly articulated issue-based

programs” (Kitschelt and Smyth, 2002: 1228). These studies demonstrate the value of party elite survey data. We build on this work by using candidate survey data to measure intra-party preference heterogeneity and go beyond our predecessors in two ways: First, we depart from the mainly descriptive approach of these previous studies by studying the implications of preference heterogeneity for party competition. Second, in order to do so, our empirical analysis combines a disaggregated (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2010) and cross-national (Kitschelt and Smyth, 2002; Kitschelt et al., 2010) perspective: We measure preference heterogeneity at the level of party–issue combinations with data that allow for cross-national comparison.

Intra-party heterogeneity and issue salience

One area where preference heterogeneity likely matters is issue emphasis by political parties. Theories of party competition such as the saliency theory (Budge and Farlie, 1983) or the related concept of issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996) highlight that parties emphasize different policy issues. As discussed above, a number of studies have investigated the effect of intra-party dissent on issue salience with regard to European integration (e.g. De Vries and Van de Wardt, 2011; Spoon, 2012; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). By applying our measure of preference heterogeneity to similarly study the effect of intra-party politics on issue salience, we aim to demonstrate the usefulness of our measure with regard to a question of ongoing interest to scholars of party politics. We expect parties to emphasize policy issues on which their leaders agree.³ Two arguments support this expectation.

First, party elites have a common electoral incentive to emphasize internally uncontroversial issues if they believe that voters reward parties that appear united and punish parties that appear divided (Greene and Haber, 2015). To prevent punishment, the candidates of a party may downplay issues they disagree on. This argument, which centers on rational vote-seeking, is emphasized by research on the dissent–salience link with regard to European integration (De Vries and Van de Wardt, 2011: 177). In addition to risking electoral defeat, emphasis of internally controversial issues jeopardizes a party’s very survival if it leads to mass resignations or party splits. Against this backdrop, intra-party cohesion appears desirable and it becomes an “internal-rational strategy” (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004: 169) to downplay issues on which preference heterogeneity is high.

Second, if party leaders have heterogeneous policy preferences and stick to them out of conviction, the salience of issues in a given party is not only a matter of what might be in the common interest of the party; it is also a result of negotiation and compromise among party leaders. From this perspective, we suspect that party elites may find it

easier to agree on common positions and policy proposals if they hold the same positions on an issue in the first place. As a direct consequence, they are likely to say more about these policy issues in public party statements (oral as well as written). In contrast, party elites might find less common ground on issue areas characterized by high internal disagreement. What makes the agenda is what party leaders are willing to agree on, given their policy preferences. Both mechanisms lead to the same expectation: The more consensual a policy issue is among party elites, the more it is stressed by the party in its public statements, including its manifesto. Or, equivalently: *The higher the intra-party preference heterogeneity on an issue, the lower its salience.*

There is, however, a counterargument which can be derived from the processes recently described by Greene (2016): Party elites might use public statements and manifestos to negotiate and codify the details of internal compromise. The need for such compromises is likely higher when there is disagreement on policy principles in an issue area. As a result, intra-party heterogeneity could affect the salience of an issue positively, not negatively. Here, we follow the prior literature on EU issue salience (e.g. De Vries and Van de Wardt, 2011; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004) in hypothesizing that, on balance, intra-party preference heterogeneity affects the salience of an issue negatively.

We also follow this prior literature on EU issue salience in assuming a causal arrow that runs from heterogeneity to salience. There might be an endogeneity problem, however, since candidates could have homogeneous preferences on an issue because it is constitutive for the party and thus chronically salient. Parties typically emerge from societal conflict over a specific policy issue. Examples are the Social Democratic parties, which emerged from conflict about the “social question,” and the Green parties, which were founded to make environment protection a political priority. These parties are likely to attract and select politicians who have the same position on the constitutive issue—but who do not necessarily have the same preferences concerning other issues. Furthermore, elite preference heterogeneity and issue salience at the party level may have a common cause. Top leaders of the party may strategically decide which issues to emphasize in the upcoming electoral campaign and then whip candidates into following this party line. We implement a robustness check in the empirical analysis to mitigate these endogeneity concerns. But since we cannot completely control for them, these alternatives should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

A measure of intra-party heterogeneity in candidates’ issue positions

We use the CCS (2016) to measure intra-party heterogeneity. The CCS is an international collaboration that

integrates post-election polls of candidates for national legislatures. The surveys draw on a common core questionnaire and thus allow for international comparison. Module 1 of the CCS was carried out in 36 elections between 2005 and 2013. A second module runs from 2013 to 2018. The current version of the data set (version 3.1; April 2016) includes data for 31 national legislative elections in 23 developed democracies. While the main interest of the CCS lies in electoral campaigning (Zittel, 2015), the core questionnaire also includes questions about policy issues. Since not all questions of the core questionnaire were included in all surveys, the number of available cases (elections and countries) in which preference heterogeneity can be measured varies somewhat between policy issues. Moreover, three elections have to be dropped entirely because issue position data were almost completely missing in these cases. This leaves us with data for 28 elections from 21 countries.⁴

The individual candidate surveys differ somewhat in the definition of the sampling universe, the sampling procedures, the modes of data collection, and the response rates. While most surveys contacted all running candidates, a few were limited to specific types of candidates or parties. In the latter case, inclusion rules differed—for example, in some instances only successful candidates were contacted, in others only candidates of the two largest parties. The overwhelming majority of surveys used self-completion mail-back questionnaires. The mean response rate in the surveys for which this information is available is 38.2%, with a maximum of 66.7% (Iceland 2009) and a minimum of 16.2% (Czech Republic 2006).

The CCS includes a battery which asks for candidates' agreement with a number of statements that concern general views on controversial policy issues. The included items allow us to study preference heterogeneity with regard to policy principles on two overarching conflict dimensions that are widely believed to structure political conflict in established democracies and on two specific additional issues areas that are not (unequivocally) aligned with these two traditional dimensions. As for the general conflict dimensions, we distinguish the well-known economic and a sociocultural line of conflict that contrasts libertarian and authoritarian positions (e.g. Kitschelt, 1994). We constructed additive indexes using items which map to only one of the two dimensions, respectively (see Table 1A in the Online Appendix for question wording and response categories of all items used). Positions on the economic dimension are measured by statements on whether government should provide social security, redistribute wealth and income, and intervene in the economy. The sociocultural dimension aggregates views on whether immigrants should "adjust to the customs of the country," on "stiffer sentences" for criminal offenders, on the use of torture to prevent terrorism, on same sex marriages, and abortion. As for the specific issues, we focus on European

integration and environmental protection. These two issues are integral components of neither the traditional economic nor the sociocultural dimension, and party elites can probably influence the salience of these "non-traditional" issues quite easily. Preferences about European integration are measured with an additive index of three single items (concerning assessments of EU membership, the preferred level of European unification, and satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU). A single item on whether "stronger measures should be taken to protect the environment" captures preferences about environmental protection. The three additive indexes were rescaled to range from zero to one.⁵

Given these measures of preferences on policy principles, it is straightforward to operationalize intra-party heterogeneity. For the three quasi-metric indices, this is as simple as calculating the standard deviations of candidate positions within parties. For the single item on protection of the environment, we followed van der Eijk's (2001) proposal on how to calculate heterogeneity in responses given on an ordered-categorical scale.⁶ We calculated a party heterogeneity score only if at least ten of its candidates reported a preference on a given policy issue—the measures would likely be unreliable if calculated on the basis of fewer candidates. We standardized all our heterogeneity measures to range from zero to one.

Having described the construction of the measures, we turn to descriptive findings. To illustrate, Figure 1 shows the distribution of candidates' issue positions in the two-dimensional policy space for four elections. In addition to the position of single candidates, the figure shows the mean issue positions of parties as crosses. The stroke length of a cross represents the standard deviation of the respective candidates' preferences. For example, the top left panel shows the German Bundestag election of 2009: The Greens (colored green if you read this online) are more homogeneous on the sociocultural dimension than on the economic dimension; the reverse holds for Left Party candidates (colored purple). This is the pattern of intra-party heterogeneity experts of German politics would expect. More generally, Figure 1 offers four insights: The (mean) party positions seem valid, we observe a high amount of intra-party heterogeneity, candidates of different parties often have overlapping positions, and the patterns of heterogeneity across dimensions and parties appear valid.⁷ In the Online Appendix (Table 1D), we list the data on heterogeneity and party positions for all the issue dimensions. These data show a high face validity for the other policy issues as well. To give just one example, preference heterogeneity on European integration in the United Kingdom (in 2010) is lowest in the British National Party (0.00) and in UKIP (0.06), while positions vary widely among candidates of the Conservative Party (0.70).

We would like to go beyond eyeballing the data and systematically validate the measures of intra-party

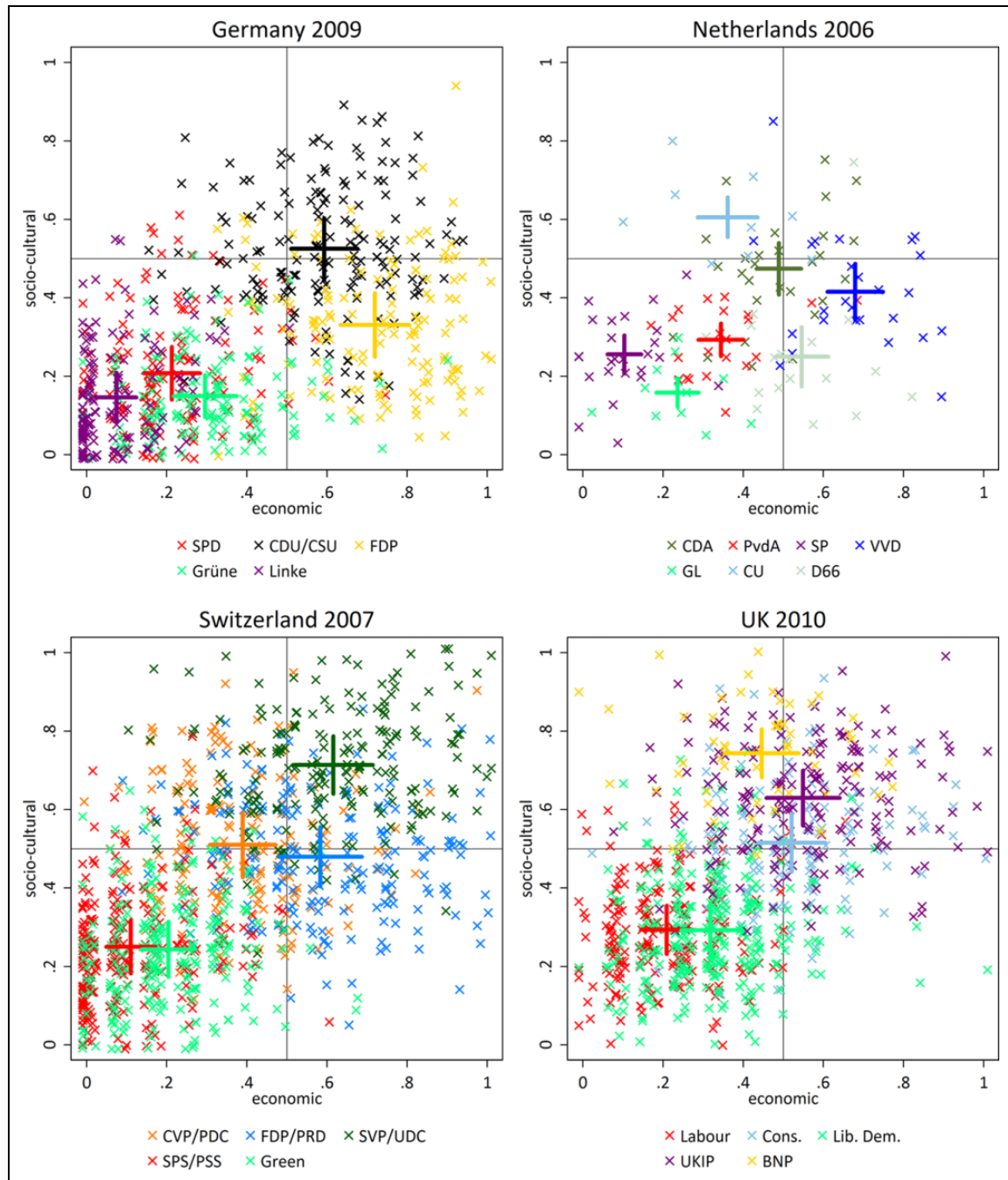


Figure 1. Candidate positions in a two-dimensional policy space. *Note:* Data from the CCS; x signs indicate the positions of individual candidates (jitter added to prevent overlaying); the crosses indicate the mean positions for all candidates of a specific party with the stroke length being set to the standard deviation of the positions of the respective parties' candidates on the relevant dimension. Smaller parties and independent candidates are excluded. CCS: Comparative Candidates Survey.

heterogeneity by comparing them with existing alternatives. Such a test of convergent validity is difficult, however, because there are no alternatives available which could claim (higher) validity. We therefore decided to validate the heterogeneity estimates by comparing CCS estimates of mean party positions with the analogous CHES estimates. The latter are widely used in comparative

research and considered to be valid. High correlations between the CCS and CHES position measures may be interpreted as evidence that our CCS measure of the underlying preference heterogeneity is valid as well. To compute these correlations, we merged the party mean positions derived from the CCS with the CHES 2010 data (Bakker et al., 2015).⁸ As Table 1 shows, the association between

Table 1. Mean positions of party candidates from CCS versus party positions from CHES 2010.

CHES 2010 mean expert assessments	Correlation with corresponding mean party position from the CCS
<i>Economic dimension</i> : position of the party in terms of its ideological stance on economic issues (0–10)	0.86*** (n = 132)
<i>Sociocultural issues</i> : position of the party in terms of its ideological stance on democratic freedoms and rights (GALTAN) (0–10)	0.85*** (n = 127)
<i>European integration</i> : overall orientation of the party leadership toward European integration (0–7)	0.88*** (n = 105)
<i>Environment</i> : position toward the environment (0–10)	0.78*** (n = 144)

Note: Only parties included for which at least 10 valid observations on candidate positions on the dimension/issue in question are available. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

the survey-based measures and their counterparts from the CHES data is strong.

We further checked the validity by comparing our estimates of intra-party heterogeneity on European integration with experts' perceptions of party dissent on European integration as measured by the CHES 2010. We obtain a weak positive correlation of 0.27, which is in line with our argument that preference heterogeneity and conflict are related but not the same. Moreover, the data support our reasoning that experts tend to observe conflict when intra-party heterogeneity on European integration is high and party elites are not able to keep the salience of the issue low. We describe this interaction between preference heterogeneity and salience in more detail in the Online Appendix (see section 6).

The association of intra-party heterogeneity and issue salience

To relate our measures of intra-party heterogeneity to issue salience, we need data on the issue importance for the parties in our sample. We draw on two available alternatives: the Manifesto Project data (Volkens et al., 2016) and the CHES 2010 (Bakker et al., 2015). The former gives us a manifesto-based estimate of issue salience—"the main information" coded in the manifesto data is "the relative emphasis parties give to the different messages they wish to transmit to electors" (Klingemann et al., 2006: 116, emphasis in the original). The CHES data contain experts' assessments of the salience various policy issues have in the party's public appearance. The theoretical arguments discussed above imply negative effects of heterogeneity on

both measures of salience. By employing both, we are able to consider how robust our findings are.

We matched our four intra-party heterogeneity measures to the Manifesto salience data by computing the fraction of statements on a particular issue dimension in a given manifesto. We follow Tavits and Potter (2015: 749) in operationalizing the salience of the economic and sociocultural dimensions by recording the total sum of all Manifesto categories which relate to each dimension. Analogous measures were computed for European integration and environmental protection.⁹ As for the CHES, there are items which ask directly for the experts' rating of the salience of European integration and environmental protection. Since experts were not asked to rate the salience of the economic and sociocultural conflict dimensions as such, we averaged the salience ratings of individual issues which constitute the respective dimension (see Table 1E in the Online Appendix for detailed information). All salience measures were standardized to range from zero to one.

We first looked at bivariate scatterplots and correlations of intra-party heterogeneity and issue salience across the four issue dimensions (Figure 2). In line with our expectation, we found a negative correlation in all cases. With the exception of the sociocultural dimension in case of the CHES 2010 salience measure, the coefficients are statistically significant and meaningful in size.¹⁰ Thus, overall the results support our expectation that intra-party preference heterogeneity has a negative effect on both salience dimensions.

In a second step, we tested if the same findings emerge from multivariate regression analyses. The effect of intra-party preference heterogeneity on issue salience can best be identified with a model that uses only the variation in issue salience between parties within elections. Note that salience might vary for several party-external reasons. For example, external events can increase the public salience of a specific policy issue and pressure all parties to respond. Moreover, it might be generally difficult for parties to avoid some (e.g. economic) issues entirely. Our argument implies that the remaining variation in salience we observe across parties once we account for these party-external drivers of salience should be related to intra-party preference heterogeneity. We thus estimate separate models for each issue and include fixed effects (FE) at the election level. Since FE models use only within election variance, they control for all confounders at the election level. This leaves us with potential confounders that are specific to parties (or party-issue combinations). One such potential confounder is the extremity of the party position on the issue in question. Parties with an extreme issue position attach more salience to it, and the candidates of these parties are more likely to hold homogeneous positions on it (De Vries and Van de Wardt, 2011: 176; Wagner, 2012). This is partly due to a methodological problem: Candidates from a party which is located close to one of the end points

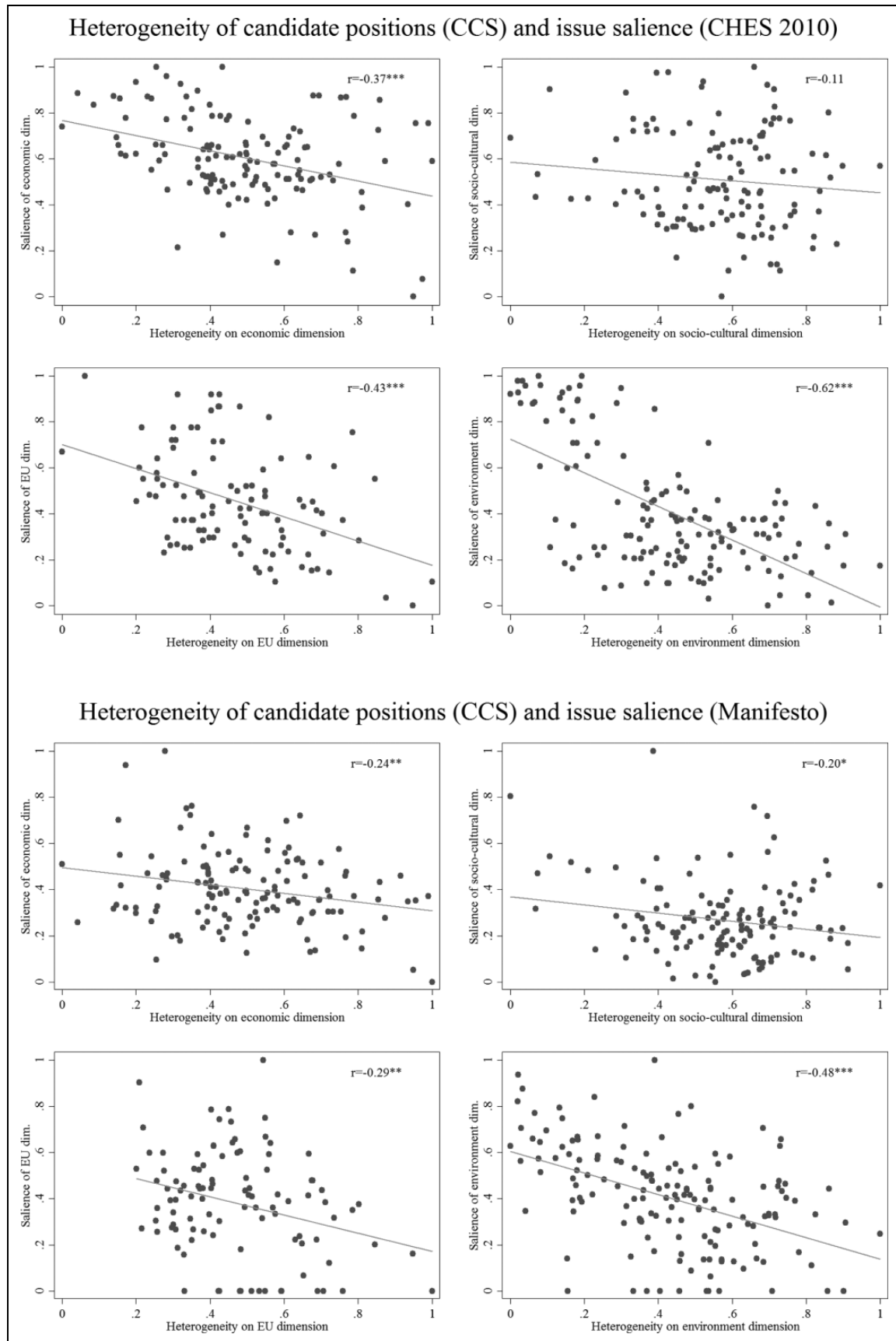


Figure 2. Heterogeneity of candidate positions and issue salience. *Note:* Only parties included for which at least 10 valid observations on candidate positions on the dimension/issue in question are available. Linear regression line added. Pearson correlation with significance level ($^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$) added.

effect on issue salience, they also confirm that the socio-cultural dimension deviates from this pattern. This could be due to the amalgam character of the dimension, which summarizes a number of related but distinct policy issues. Associations at the item level might have cancelled each other out at the aggregate level if the heterogeneity and/or salience of the sociocultural issues vary independently from each other. To explore this possibility, we disaggregated the sociocultural dimension into its five item components. Employing van der Eijk's measure, we computed disagreement on (1) the cultural assimilation of immigrants, (2) stiffer criminal sentences, (3) torture of prisoners, (4) same sex marriages, and (5) abortion. Corresponding salience measures, measured with the Manifesto data and the CHES 2010, were then regressed on these heterogeneity measures (see Tables 1N and 1O in the Online Appendix for details). We obtained a strong negative correlation between intra-party heterogeneity and salience for multiculturalism and criminal sentences. As expected, parties that are united in their stances toward these issues devote more attention to them.

For the other three issues, however, we found the reversed pattern: Heterogeneity in preferences about torture and the two lifestyle issues is associated with an *increased* salience of these issues. This surprising finding might reflect methodological problems: The mean party positions on these items are strongly skewed toward the libertarian position, with median values of 1.9 (torture), 2.1 (same-sex marriage), and 1.7 (abortion) on scales from 1 to 5. As a result, we tend to observe high levels of disagreement only for parties that are, on average, authoritarian and conservative. This might affect our result in that some of these parties also attach high salience to issues of law and order and social lifestyle.¹⁴ An alternative substantive explanation of these results may lie with the mechanisms described by Greene (2016), as discussed above—party elites' might use public statements and manifestos to negotiate and codify the details of internal compromise with regard to these issues. Specifically, party elites might want to find an internal compromise if they expect to be forced to take a position in the future. We suspect that parties cannot ignore the conflict over social liberties but enjoy more leeway with regard to newer issues such as European integration, protection of the environment, or migration (Meguid, 2008). This might explain why we observe a consistently negative association between heterogeneity and salience for these latter issues but a positive association for (some) social liberty issues. We have to leave it for future research to explore whether the association between heterogeneity and salience is indeed reversed for some policy issues along these lines or whether these divergent findings for the socio-cultural dimension are an artifact of biased measures of heterogeneity for these issues.

Conclusion and implications

Quantitative research on party politics regularly invokes the assumption that parties are unitary actors with homogeneous policy preferences. Although it has been criticized as unrealistic and therefore potentially problematic in a range of important research questions in the field of party politics (e.g. Daalder, 1983: 21), data availability has hindered researchers to relax this assumption in their empirical analyses. In turn, it remains unclear how heterogeneous the policy preferences of party elites actually are and whether an explicit inclusion of preference heterogeneity would lead to different conclusions about party politics. In this article, we have made an attempt to address this research gap. The publicly available data of the CCS were used to look at the preference heterogeneity of party elites. Relying on data from 28 national elections in 21 developed countries, we showed that candidates often hold quite heterogeneous issue positions and that the extent of this heterogeneity varies significantly across parties as well as within parties across different issue dimensions.

Party elite surveys contain direct and easy-to-process information about intra-party *preference* heterogeneity—an important phenomenon in party politics, which is extremely difficult to measure with other data sources. Measures based on voting behavior, political texts, and expert surveys are confounded with phenomena such as party discipline, loyalty, and unity, which are themselves important factors in intra-party politics. In order to study their nature and inter-relationship, we need distinct measures of each of these phenomena. Furthermore, given appropriate items, elite survey data have the potential to measure preference heterogeneity of different kinds at different places and points in time.

This article also looked at one implication of intra-party preference heterogeneity for party strategy and competition to illustrate the usefulness of the survey-based measure. It was argued that preference heterogeneity and issue salience go together because parties will emphasize policy issues that leaders agree on. To test this argument empirically, we related measures of candidate heterogeneity based on CSS data to issue salience measures from the CHES and the Manifesto Project. Across different issue dimensions and the two salience measures, we found that parties tend to attach lower salience to issues over which they are internally divided. Importantly, having employed a measure of intra-party heterogeneity which does not run the risk of confounding heterogeneity and salience, these findings speak more directly to the issue of intra-party preference heterogeneity than previous studies. At the same time, our analysis goes beyond previous research (on European integration) because it includes a range of policy issues. The divergent results on the law and order and lifestyle issues show, however, that the negative association between intra-party heterogeneity and

salience may not be universal but issue dependent—a possibility future research must address.

Despite the general value of party elite survey data, there are limitations to consider (also see Bailer, 2014; Laver, 2014: 213–214). One problem is low and possibly biased response rates. Valid, comparable measures of preference heterogeneity presuppose that the response distribution of the sample reflects the actual differences between party elites. This may not be the case. For example, if candidates who dissent with the official party line are less likely to participate, party heterogeneity will be underestimated because party hacks then dominate the sample. The rather low percentages of successful candidates in the CCS (Zittel, 2015: 290) may be interpreted as evidence for this very situation. A second concern is that we do not know who actually answers the questionnaires. Is it the party leader or her staff? Assuming that staff will be more careful to toe the party line, staff responses deflate our measures of party heterogeneity. Third, even if the questionnaire is filled in by the target person, the responses might not reflect sincere preferences. Respondents may trod the party line when answering these surveys. Although this argument is generally valid, we believe it to be a minor one, because the costs of revealing true preference (and the utility of giving strategic answers) in an anonymous academic survey seem negligible. In fact, respondents might reap expressive utility from reporting deviating opinions which they would not report in public.

Since we shared some of these concerns, we turned to the candidate survey data with a healthy dose of skepticism and were careful to check the validity of the measures. The fact that the CCS measures of intra-party preference heterogeneity exhibit predictable and robust effects on different measures of salience increases our confidence in this approach to studying the nature, causes, and consequences of intra-party heterogeneity.

The quantitative study of intra-party preference heterogeneity is still in its infancy, and it is necessary to explore the nature of this heterogeneity further. A promising path for future research is to examine its antecedents: How does it vary between parties from different party families? Does heterogeneity differ between established and newcomer parties, between government and opposition? Is heterogeneity affected by organizational structures, with more hierarchical parties being more homogenous? What is the role of institutional characteristics of the party system—is there more heterogeneity in two-party systems than in multi-party systems? There are also many other exciting questions on consequences of intra-party heterogeneity: How does it affect coalition negotiations, for example? This study suggests that party elite survey data might be one tool in the kit of researchers interested in answering these questions.

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Notes

1. Subleaders are defined as “regional and local party officeholders, other constituency activists, passive grassroots members and voting supporters” and non-leaders as “occasional and lukewarm party supporters” (Norris, 1995: 28).
2. One of the anonymous reviewers pointed out that elites might tread the party line even when answering survey questions. The more this is so, the less appealing the survey-based measure becomes. We come back to this concern in the conclusion.
3. Since we relax the unitary party assumption, we do not think of a party’s issue salience as monolithic. In our understanding, a party’s issue emphasis reflects a weighted average of the attention various intra-party actors devote to an issue in their public statements (which can be observed by, e.g. respondents of an expert survey). Issue emphasis in collective decisions by the party (e.g. what to write into manifestos) should be seen as the result of intra-party decision-making.
4. These are Australia (2007, 2010), Austria (2008), Belgium (2007, 2010), Czech Republic (2006), Denmark (2011), Estonia (2011), Finland (2011), Germany (2005, 2009), Greece (2007, 2009, June 2012), Hungary (2010), Iceland (2009), Ireland (2007), Italy (2013), the Netherlands (2006), Norway (2009), Malta (2013), Portugal (2009, 2011), Romania (2012), Sweden (2010), Switzerland (2007, 2011), and United Kingdom (2013). Elections in Canada (2008), Finland (2007), and New Zealand (2011) were dropped from the data set.
5. The items used to measure a given dimension correlate positively with one another, and these correlations are mostly larger than those with items of the other two different dimensions. A factor analysis also supports the assumption that these items measure overarching economic, sociocultural, and European integration preferences (see Table 1B and section 3 in the Online Appendix).
6. We reversed von der Eijk’s agreement index to produce a measure of *disagreement*. This measure of disagreement and the standard deviation of positions on environmental protection are closely related (Pearson’s $r = 0.87$).

7. Figure 1A in the Online Appendix shows the scatterplots of all remaining CCS elections, which reveal the same insights as the four cases presented here.
8. In the Online Appendix (see section 4), we describe in detail how we merged the CSS data with the CHES 2010 and the Manifesto Project data (Volkens et al., 2016). For the validation of the positional data, we focus on the CHES 2010 data because it includes ready-to-use measures that match our four issue dimensions well.
9. In these cases, we took the natural logarithm of the sum (i.e. of the percentage of all statements in a manifesto devoted to the respective issue dimension) because otherwise the distribution would be strongly right-skewed.
10. The plotted observations do not exhibit an inverted U-shaped pattern, which was hypothesized with regard to intra-party dissent on European integration and the salience of European integration (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004).
11. Note that this is a thorny issue indeed: From an intra-party heterogeneity point of view, an extreme party position can also be considered a *consequence* of its elites having uniformly the same extreme positions on an issue dimension. Moderate collective positions could result from heterogeneous positions of party elites.
12. This analysis is not a perfect research design either, because intra-party heterogeneity as measured after the previous election is only a proxy for the relevant heterogeneity at the time the new manifesto is agreed upon. This proxy contains measurement error when there are candidate replacements between elections or when party elites change their preference over time. This measurement error does not necessarily bias our estimates toward finding an effect, however, but introduces an attenuation bias.
13. We assume that candidates who see no chance of success are less influential than candidates who believe in standing a chance. The perceived chance of success is the best available proxy for a candidate's influence, based on the criteria of validity and data coverage in the CCS.
14. One example is the Danish People's Party which strongly disagrees on the torture item (0.88) and attaches high salience to law and order versus civil liberties according to both the Manifesto (0.82) and CHES data (0.83).

Supplemental material

The online appendices are available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/1354068817715553>.

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