"What this Election is About…":
Issue-Emphasis Strategies in Multiparty Elections

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Our goal in this project is to integrate the spatial model of elections which analyzes how parties appeal to voters via their issue <u>positions</u>, with the study of parties' <u>issue emphases</u>, in which parties seek support by stressing the importance of alternative issue dimensions. This approach is exemplified by Riker's research on heresthetics, and also – in comparative politics – by the research of Bonnie Meguid, who has analyzed scenarios where political parties seek support by strategically manipulating the salience of different issue dimensions.

In this paper we analyze parties' issue-emphasis strategies for a scenario where their issue <u>positions</u> along different policy dimensions are fixed, but the <u>salience</u> of these dimensions is variable. Issue positions are assumed fixed in the sense that parties cannot meaningfully change their policy images in the short term. Salience is variable in the sense that the parties can expend resources to draw voters' attention to specific policy dimensions (while downplaying other dimensions), in an effort to increase the weight or salience that voters attach to these dimensions. The strategic question parties face, then, as they plot their election strategies, is not the standard spatial modeling question "What <u>policy positions</u> should we stake out in order to maximize our electoral support?", but instead: "Given our fixed policy positions (and the fixed positions of our opponents), which policy dimensions should we <u>emphasize</u> in order to maximize our electoral support?"

This write-up presents preliminary thoughts about the above question, for spatial competition in which voters evaluate 1) parties' policy positions; 2) parties' "valence" attributes such as their images for competence, integrity, and ability to govern effectively, that can influence voters' party evaluations independently of the parties' policy positons; and, 3) additional considerations that render the voters' decisions' probabilistic, from the parties' perspectives (as in standard logit and probit voting models that include a random error term). We also explore more complicated voting models that include – in addition to policy distance and valence – voter demographics (age, income, education, etc.) along with their retrospective economic evaluations and their party identifications. We ask the questions: What types of strategies involving issue emphasis should vote-seeking parties pursue?, and, does the answer to this question depend on the model of voting behavior that we investigate?

Below we present intuitive arguments, along with empirical applications to election survey data from the 2013 national election to the German Bundestag. We suggest that in multiparty elections in which parties can manipulate the <u>salience</u> of different issue dimensions, but not policy <u>positions</u> along these dimensions, parties should strategize as follows:

1) High-valence parties, i.e., those that are appealing to voters for non-policy based reasons (i.e., they have popular leaders, long-term images for competence and integrity, and/or past histories of successful governance), should simply emphasize the dimensions on which their policy positions are in line with public opinion. We label this the *<u>moderate front-runner strategy</u>*.

2) Low-valence parties, i.e., those that are less appealing to voters based on their image for competence, integrity, and the ability to govern, should emphasize dimensions on which their positions are clearly distinct from those of their valence-advantaged opponents; and in choosing which distinct position to emphasize, low-valence parties should chose positions that are not too far from the mainstream of public opinion. We label this the *<u>distinct yet reasonable underdog strategy</u>*.

We also show that – for the most part – these party decision rules work well for the alternative voting models that we investigate, i.e., models both with and without voter demographics, retrospective economic evaluations, and party identification.

We first discuss the rationale for our model of party competition over issue emphasis, with fixed party positions. We then elaborate the simple decision rules parties might use to choose their issue-emphasis strategies. Next, we apply this perspective to German parties' issue-emphasis strategies via analyses of survey data from the 2013 German Bundestag election.

Why assume parties' issue <u>positions</u> are fixed, but not the <u>salience</u> of different dimensions?

As noted above, we analyze parties' issue-emphasis strategies using the assumption that their issue <u>positions</u> are fixed. This assumption of fixed party positions is based on the following considerations:

1) There is empirical evidence that parties' perceived positions, i.e., their positions <u>as perceived by rank-and-file voters</u>, change very little over time, notably research by Russell Dalton and his co-authors (Dalton et al. 2011; Dalton and McCalister 2015). In fact Dalton makes the point that given error in measures of parties' perceived positions (i.e., survey sampling error, variation in how voters interpret questions about party positions, etc.), we cannot rule out the possibility that parties' policy images do not change at all. This seems a bit extreme, but the point is that party leaders plausibly plan their upcoming election strategy (say a year or so before the election) while assuming that their party's perceived policy positions will not change much during the run-up to the election.

2) To the extent that a focal party's policy image changes, it is unclear how much of this change is due to its own actions. For instance Adams et al. (2011) report evidence that voters do not update their perceptions of parties' Left-Right positions in response to the Left-Right tone of the party's current election manifesto, and moreover that party elites claim that they campaign based on these manifestos. This suggests that parties cannot reliably change their Left-Right policy images via the messages they broadcast to the public during national election campaigns. Moreover Adams et al. (2014, 2015) extend these findings to the European integration dimension. The authors propose various explanations for why voters may not update their perceptions of party positions in response to parties' campaign messages, including that voters may discount these messages as opportunistic pandering; that parties may "step on their message" due to campaign gaffes or other shortcomings in their communications strategies; and that the media may ignore (or distort) the party's campaign messages.

3) Tomz and Van Houweling's (n.d.) experimental research concludes that voters downgrade their assessments of a politician's valence qualities when this politician shifts policy positions, in particular that voters perceive politicians who shift their positions as less principled and competent than politicians who maintain fixed issue positions. The authors demonstrate that the magnitudes of these valence effects are such that vote-seeking politicians who espouse unpopular policy positions may be better off sticking with these positions rather than shifting to more popular positions. Thus, the "valence penalty" that such candidates will pay from shifting to more popular positions is larger than the "posi-

tional gain" these politicians achieve via their policy shifts. In addition, politicians/parties who shift their positions may be criticized for 'flip-flopping,' either by their opponents or by the media. Thus even if party leaders believe they can change their party's policy image in the run-up to the election, they may prefer 'staying put' in order to avoid depressing their valence image.

The above considerations provide a rationale to explore a model in which party elites plan their campaigns under the assumption that their party's (and rival parties') perceived policy positions will not change much between the time when campaign planning begins and Election Day, i.e., this research suggests that parties <u>cannot</u> meaningfully change their policy images in the short term, and moreover, that parties <u>should not</u> change their perceived positions (even if they could) because this depresses voters' evaluations if their valence attributes.[1]

Of course, it is also an open question whether parties can significantly manipulate the <u>salience</u> of different policy dimensions in the run-up to the election. However Hobolt and Klemmensen (2010) find that British and Danish citizens' issue priorities respond to the issues that party leaders emphasize in their speeches at their party's annual conference, and Neundorf and Adams (forthcoming) find that German political parties can cue their own supporters to prioritize different issues (although the authors do not analyze whether parties can cue the entire electorate – just their own supporters). We think that a fair summary of the research to date on this topic is that: 1) there is not much of it; 2) the little research there is does suggest that parties' can influence voters' issue priorities.[2]

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[1] The only factor we know of that substantially changes parties' policy images in the short term is national governing coalition arrangements, i.e., voters infer that parties that jointly govern in a national coalition government have similar policy positions (see Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Adams et al. forthcoming). But as the next election approaches, most parties do not realistically have the option of entering/exiting a governing coalition in an effort to shift their policy images in this way, plus the valence-related consequences of such behavior are likely negative.

[2] However there is an extensive literature on parties' "issue ownership," that analyzes how voters associate certain parties with specific issues in the sense that voters believe that a particular party is most competent to address that issue (for instance voters tend to believe that right-wing parties "own" the crime issue, that green parties "own" the environment, etc.), and which also analyzes how parties try to direct voters' attention to the issues they "own."

How parties might choose their issue-emphasis strategies: Some simple rules

Since vote-seeking parties presumably want to emphasize issue dimensions on which they are well-positioned, we begin by summarizing a couple of simple rules of thumb parties might use to evaluate whether they are correctly positioned on an issue dimension, i.e., whether their policy position approaches their vote-maximizing position on the issue. The research of Groseclose (2001) and Schofield and his co-authors (Schofield and Sened 2005; Schofield 2008) suggests the following two rules for party positioning, in elections where voters are moved by parties' policy positions and also by valence considerations (i.e., the parties' images for competence, integrity, leadership ability, and so on):

1) <u>High-valence</u> parties should locate near the center of the voter distribution, i.e., these parties should present widely popular positions. This is because for high-valence parties, such centrist positioning – relative to the voter distribution – makes them practically unbeatable since any low-valence party that mimics its high-valence competitor's position will struggle to attract any support – because if parties' positions are similar then voters must choose between them primarily based on valence considerations, a comparison the high-valence party will win. Following Groseclose (2001), we label this the *moderate front-runner* strategy.

2) <u>Low-valence</u> parties should distance their positions from those of their high-valence competitors – for the reasons outlined above – but only provided they can stake out a distinct position that is attractive to a meaningful subset of the electorate. That is, it will <u>not</u> work to announce a distinct position that is so extreme that it alienates virtually all voters. We label the low-valence party's approach the *distinct but reasonable underdog* strategy.

Turning to parties' issue-emphasis strategies, since parties should presumably emphasize the dimensions where their positions are advantageous, this suggests the following party decision rules about issue emphasis:

The moderate front-runner issue-emphasis strategy. For high-valence parties, emphasize dimensions where your positions are popular, in the sense that they are located near the mean/median voter position.[3]

The distinct but reasonable underdog emphasis strategy. For lower-valence parties, if possible emphasize dimensions where your positions are both distinct from those of your higher-valence competitors and also reasonable, i.e., not too far from the location of the mean/median voter position.

Note that this "distinct yet reasonable" underdog strategy is more complicated than the moderate front-runner strategy, since low-valence parties (i.e., underdogs) must balance two strategic imperatives. There may be no dimension on which they feature a position that is both distinct from those of their high-valence rivals and reasonable in that a substantial share of the electorate prefers the underdog party's position. This suggests the following, more nuanced, decision rule for low-valence parties: 1) Emphasize your distinct yet reasonable position(s), if you have any; 2) If you do not have any positions that are both distinct and reasonable, then if possible emphasize a dimension where your position is distinct, or one where your position is reasonable.

Can simple party decision rules cover complicated situations?

While the party decision rules outlined above appear intuitively reasonable, there are several reasons to question whether such simple party heuristics will work well in the complexity of a real-world election. First, the research of Feld, Merrill, and Grofman (2014) demonstrates that changing a focal dimension's salience toward salience of another dimension can have inconsistent effects on a focal party's support, i.e., that as the salience of a focal dimension increases a party's support can increase and then decrease repeatedly. Second, and related, the research of Dragu and Fan (2015) shows that even in multidimensional competition between two parties with equal valence, a party may at times benefit by emphasizing a dimension where its position is less popular than its opponent. Third, the research of Groseclose and Schofield, which was the

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[3] In fact things are a bit more complicated than this, in that high-valence parties should emphasize dimensions where their positions are popular relative to their opponents' positions, in particular where their positions are popular relative to the positions of other high-valence parties.

basis for our development of the moderate front-runner and distinct yet reasonable underdog rules, only accounted for valence-related factors that affected all voters' party evaluations in the same way, i.e., that cause all voters to prefer one party over another for nonpolicy-based reasons. In fact, real world voters are moved by additional considerations that can bias different voters in different directions, independently of their policy beliefs: these include voters' demographic characteristics (income, education, age, etc.), their retrospective evaluations of the national economy, and their party identification. It seems possible that when we account for these complicating factors, i.e., for voter-specific valence, then the simple party decision rules we developed will not work.

The above considerations raise the following questions that we address below:

1) In real world elections, do parties confront the "Feld-Merrill-Grofman (FMG) problem" that the electoral effect – positive or negative – of emphasizing a focal issue dimension can reverse as the salience of the dimension changes? The FMG problem will complicate party strategizing over whether to emphasize a focal issue, since while the party can project that emphasizing the issue will make the issue more salient to voters, the party cannot predict in advance exactly how salient the dimension will be on Election Day, since this depends on many factors the parties cannot know at the time they devise their issue-emphasis strategies, such as how much other parties will emphasize the issue; how much attention the media will devote to the issue; plus of course unexpected events (such as the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Madrid Train bombing, and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster) can unexpectedly raise a dimension's salience, independently of the parties' issue-emphasis strategies.

2) In real world elections, do parties confront the complicating factor that different voting models support conflicting projections about whether emphasizing an issue will increase the party's support? If so this will complicate parties' issue-emphasis strategies because they cannot be certain which voting model best approximates voters' actual decision rules. In political science this is reflected in the fact that behavioral researchers disagree about how to properly specify the voting decision. In particular, while most scholars agree that it is legitimate to include policy distance as an independent variable in empiri-

cal voting models, the inclusion of independent variables such as survey respondents' re-ported party ID and retrospective economic evaluations is controversial, because some researchers argue these variables are *endogenous*, i.e., voters' perceptions of the economy are biased by their party ID, and party ID in turn may reflect voters' policy evaluations. In Europe, furthermore, voters may equate questions about party ID as equivalent to questions about current vote intention. In addition, some scholars even question the in-clusion of voters' demographic characteristics as independent variables since traits such as income, education, etc., may be surrogates for voters' policy beliefs. Thus, if the con-sideration of different voting models (say, one that includes party ID and one that omits party ID) leads to different projections about whether a party gains from emphasizing a focal issue dimension, this complicates party strategies, since party elites may feel unsure about which voting model best represents real-world voters' decision rules.

3) A related concern is that parties not only do not know which behavioral voting model is most realistic; they also do not know how/whether their issue-emphasis strategies modify voters' decision rules. For instance, do voters have a fixed amount of policy-based atten-tion that they devote to political debates, in which case when voters weigh one policy di-mension more heavily they must weigh some other dimension(s) less heavily? In this case when a party emphasizes an issue dimension and thereby increases its salience to voters, parties should project that the electoral salience of the remaining policy dimen-sions will decline. Alternatively, perhaps the overall amount of attention that voters de-vote to parties' policy positions (versus factors such as parties' valence characteristics such as competence and integrity) may expand/contract with the degree of emphasis that political parties (and the media) devote to policy, in which case when a party emphasizes a focal issue dimension and thereby increases its salience to voters, the salience of other issue dimensions may remain unchanged. If parties project that the electoral effect of in-creasing the salience of a dimension depends on whether or not this depresses the sali-ence of the remaining policy dimensions, this will complicate their strategies.

What follows are analyses that bear on the questions:

1) In a real-world election, do our computations on parties' issue-emphasis strategies support the simple decision rules posited above, i.e., the moderate front-runner issue-emphasis strategy for high-valence parties and the distinct yet reasonable issue-emphasis strategy for low-valence parties?

2) In applications to survey data from a real world election, do our computations support <u>clear strategies</u> for parties, i.e., do our computations about whether a given party will gain/lose votes when they emphasize a given dimension change with the model of voting behavior that we estimate? That is, do our projections vary depending on whether or not we incorporate variables such as respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, party ID, and retrospective economic evaluations into our voting model? And, do our projections vary depending on whether or not we specify that voters' overall attention to issues is fixed? Moreover, do we observe instances of the "Feld-Merrill-Grofman (FMG) problem," where a party's expected vote may increase over some range of the salience of a focal policy dimension, decrease over some other range, then increase over yet another range of the salience coefficient for this issue?

3) Do our computations support predictions about party issue-emphasis strategies that are empirically supported, i.e., do the German parties in fact emphasize the dimensions that we compute will increase their vote shares, while de-emphasizing the dimensions that we project will depress their vote shares?

Below we summarize computations on survey data from the 2013 election to the German Bundestag, that suggest that the answers to all three questions are *yes*, although as we discuss below the computations do not support 100% clear strategies for parties, i.e., there are instances where the party is projected to gain votes under one voting model but lose votes under a different model. In addition, there are instances of the FMG problem, where a party's expected vote repeatedly increases and then decreases as the salience of a focal issue dimension increases. Nevertheless, these computations suggest that – for Germany in 2013, at least – our computations tell a pretty clear story, one that supports the moderate front-runner and the distinct yet reasonable underdog decision rules we have elaborated, and that is also largely consistent with the parties' actual issue-emphasis strategies.

**What issue dimensions should parties emphasize, given our simple
decision rules? Applying the model to the 2013 German Bundestag election**

There were four issue scales included in the 2013 German Election Study: A Left-Right scale; a scale pertaining to the tradeoff between raising taxes and cutting social services; a scale about the extent to which immigration should be restricted; and a scale related to the tradeoff between fighting climate change and economic growth. All four scales ran from 0 to 10. The table below presents the mean survey respondent self-placement on each scale, followed by the mean placement of each party, averaged over all respondents who provided valid party placements:

**Table 1. Survey respondents' mean self-placements and their mean
party placements, 2013 German election study**

	Left-Right	Taxes	Immigration	Environment
Voters	4.29	5.16	5.86	3.79
Die Linke	1.23	2.88	3.79	3.58
Greens	3.41	3.44	3.02	1.67
SPD	3.70	3.76	4.17	4.36
FDP	5.90	7.00	5.76	6.53
CDU	6.14	6.47	5.77	5.80

The figures at the end of this paper display the actual distributions of the survey respondents' self-placements along these four dimensions, along with the parties' mean perceived positions. These figures suggest that on all dimensions except for immigration, the distribution of the survey respondents' policy preferences was approximately single-peaked.

As we document below, the two high-valence parties in the German 2013 election were the CDU (the Christian Democrats) and the SPD (the Social Democratic Party), two large, moderate parties that represent mainstream right- and left-wing policy views, respectively. Both parties have lengthy histories in government, and one or the other has held the Chancellorship at every point since the foundation of the German Federal Republic in 1949. The other three parties – Die Linke, a sharply leftist party whose support base is in the former East Germany; the Greens, a

strongly pro-environmental party; and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), a small, pro-business party – had lower valence; in fact the analyses below suggest that the FDP had catastrophically low valence in 2013.

What do our decision rules imply about the issue dimensions that the different parties should emphasize? We might expect the two high-valence parties, the CDU and the SPD, to employ the *moderate front-runner* strategy, i.e., to emphasize the issue dimensions on which their positions approximate the mean voter position. Since the CDU's mean perceived position on immigration roughly matches the mean German survey respondent's self-placement, while the SPD's per-ceived positions on the Left-Right and environmental dimensions are similar to voters' mean self-placements on these dimensions, the moderate front-runner strategy implies the following:

Prediction 1. The CDU's expected vote (EV) increases as the immigration dimension becomes more salient.

Prediction 2. The SPD's EV increases with the salience of the L/R and environmental dimen-sions.

Things are more complicated with respect to the three lower-valence parties, for whom we out-lined a *distinct but reasonable underdog* strategy. Only one of these three parties features a clearly 'distinct but reasonable' position on any issue dimension: namely, the Greens on climate change. On this dimension the Greens' mean perceived position, 1.67, is distinct in that it is nearly two units to the left of the nearest party's perceived position (Die Linke), and the Greens' perceived position is more than two units to the left of the nearest high-valence party's perceived position (the SPD); furthermore voters' distribution on this issue is skewed to the left, and the Greens' perceived position on the environment, 1.67, is only slightly more than two units to the left of the mean survey respondent self-placement on this issue (3.79). Therefore, the Greens' position is fairly reasonable and distinct:

Prediction 3: The Greens' EV increases with the salience of the environmental dimension.

The other two low-valence parties, Die Linke and the FDP, do not have any 'distinct but reasonable' positions they can emphasize; these underdog parties have some positions that are distinct from their high-valence competitors, and other positions that are reasonable in that they are not overly distant from the mean voter position, but not both. Die Linke was perceived to have a distinct position on the far left of the Left-Right scale (1.23), but this position is rather unpopular in that the mean voter Left-Right self-placement, 4.29, more than three units to the right of Die Linke's position), while Die Linke's mean perceived position on the environment, 3.58, is near the mean respondent self-placement (3.79) but is quite similar to the high-valence SPD's perceived position (4.36). Nevertheless, the Left-Right and the environmental dimensions appear more promising for Die Linke than the other two dimensions, immigration and taxes, where Die Linke's perceived positions are not very popular (both are more than two units to the left of the mean respondent self-placement) and are not distinct from the high-valence SPD's perceived positions on these dimensions.

Prediction 4: Die Linke's EV increases with the salience of Left-Right and environmental issues.

Finally, the low-valence FDP's problem is that its perceived positions are all extremely similar to those of the high-valence CDU, which is not surprising given that 1) these parties have similar stated policy stances based on their election manifestos; 2) the FDP and CDU were in a governing coalition between 2009-2013, so that voters presumably inferred that the parties agreed on policy, independently of the parties' policy rhetoric (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). Thus the FDP had no dimensions on which its positions were distinct; however it had a popular perceived position on immigration, 5.76, which was almost perfectly in line with the mean voter position on this dimension which was 5.86.

Prediction 5: The FDP's EV increases with the salience of immigration.

Do simulations based on election survey data support our predictions about parties' issue emphases? Results for a simple voting model

The table below displays the coefficients on a simple conditional logit voting model we estimated, that includes parameters for the respondent's (linear) distance to each party on each dimension (where the party's position was defined as the mean respondent party placement), plus a party-specific intercept term designed to capture valence, i.e., voters' relative evaluations of the parties' non-policy characteristics (competence, integrity, etc.). In this model the dependent variable was the respondent's reported vote choice in the election, and the model was estimated on all respondents who reported voting for one of the five major German parties (the CDU, SPD, FDP, Greens, and Die Linke):

Table 2: Proximity and Valence Influence on Voting in Germany 2013

Left-Right	-.66
	(.03)
Taxation	-.12
	(.03)
Immigration	-.14
	(.04)
Environment	-.24
	(.01)
CDU	Baseline party
SPD	-.64
	(.07)
FDP	-2.67
	(.07)
Green	-1.05
	(.12)
Die Linke	-1.69
	(.13)
Observations	6,370
Pseudo R²	.36

Note: Conditional logit Log-Odds coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses.

To clarify, the coefficients presented above indicate that as the distance between a survey respondent's Left-Right self-placement and the mean perceived Left-Right position of a focal party

increases by one additional unit, the measured component of the voter's utility for this party decreases by 0.66; that the marginal impact of a one unit increase in the respondent's distance to the party on the tax dimension reduces the measured component of the respondent's utility for the party is -0.12, and so on. These parameter estimates show that – as expected – respondents appear to weigh their distance to the focal party on the Left-Right dimension much more heavily than they weigh distance on the three specific issue dimensions, but that voters also attach substantial weight to the environment, and some weight to taxes and immigration. Also note that the estimated valence intercepts for the SPD, the Greens, Die Linke, and the FDP are all negative relative to the CDU (the baseline category, whose valence is set to zero). These estimates thereby imply that the CDU has the highest valence, followed by the SPD – estimates that support the conventional wisdom about German politics. The FDP has the lowest estimated valence, consistent with its disastrous tenure in government between 2009-2013, when it was widely criticized for incompetence and ineffectiveness.

To evaluate the electoral effects of changing the electoral salience of different issue dimensions, we conducted simulations on the data using the following strategy. First, based on the coefficient estimates reported in the above table, we computed each survey respondent's probability of supporting each party. In turn, we used these probabilities to calculate each party's expected vote, which is simply the average of the survey respondents' probabilities of voting for the focal party, averaged over all respondents. Next, with all other parameters fixed, we varied the salience coefficient on a focal policy dimension and re-computed each survey respondent's vote probabilities, for alternative values of the salience coefficient on the focal dimension. These computations allowed us to answer questions such as "If the Left-Right policy salience parameter was decreased from -0.66 (our actual estimate) to -0.33 and everything else was held constant, how would the parties' expected vote shares change?" Below we present an initial set of computations, where we varied the salience of the Left-Right dimension while holding the salience of all other dimensions constant, i.e., in this model we assume that as voters weigh the Left-Right dimension more, they do not weigh the other issue dimensions less:

Parties' expected votes, for varying values of the Left-Right salience coefficient

	LR=-.33 (1)	LR=-.44 (2)	LR=-.55 (3)	LR=-.66 (4)	LR=-.77 (5)	LR=-.88 (6)	LR=-.99 (7)	Change in EV as the L/R salience coeff. changes from LR=-.33 to LR=-.99 (8)	FMG problem? (9)
CDU	.4460	.4388	.4313	.4241	.4173	.4113	.4060	-.0400 = -4.00%	No
SPD	.2948	.3026	.3091	.3146	.3191	.3229	.3261	+0313 = +3.13%	No
FDP	.0283	.0281	.0279	.0277	.0275	.0273	.0271	-.0012 = -0.12%	No
Die Linke	.1367	.1340	.1334	.1341	.1354	.1371	.1388	+.0021 = +0.21%	Yes
Greens	.0943	.0965	.0983	.0996	.1007	.1015	.1020	+.0077 = +0.77%	No

Note. As discussed below, we highlight the expected votes for Die Linke in yellow because these represent an "inflection point" where Die Linke's expected vote share underlines{decreases} as the value of the Left-Right distance parameter changes from -0.44 to -0.55, but then underlines{increases} as the value of this parameter changes from -0.55 to -0.66.

In case this table is not self-explanatory, the value .4460 in the upper LHS cell denotes that with the salience coefficient on Left-Right distance set to -0.33 (and the other issue salience coefficients fixed at their estimated values), the CDU's expected vote is .4460, i.e., 44.6%. And as we increase the salience of the Left-Right coefficient to -0.44, -0.55,…, -0.99, the CDU's expected vote consistently declines, to the value .4060 when Left-Right salience is set to -0.99; as presented in column 8, this represents a 4% decline in the CDU's expected vote compared to when the Left-Right salience coefficient is set to -0.33. The values reported in the remaining rows show parallel computations on the other four parties. For this exercise we chose to simulate election outcomes as the Left-Right salience parameter varied between -0.33 and -0.99, because these values bracket the actual Left-Right salience coefficient estimate of -0.66, i.e. this range covers the interval between one half of the actual salience estimate and 50% above the actual salience estimate. This struck us as a realistic range of values to investigate.

Column 8 displays the change in each party's expected vote as the magnitude of the Left-Right salience coefficient increases from -0.33 to -0.99. As discussed above, the CDU's expected vote decreases by 4% across this range. Meanwhile the SPD's expected vote increases by a little over 3%, the FDP's expected vote declines by about 0.1%, Die Linke's expected vote increases by

about 0.2%, and the Greens' expected vote increases by roughly 0.8%. These computations suggest that – to the extent that the simple voting model we have estimated captures voters' actual decision rules – the SPD, Die Linke, and the Greens increase their expected vote shares if the salience of the Left-Right dimension increases, while the CDU and the FDP would lose support.

Finally, column 9 reports whether there is a Feld-Merrill-Grofman (FMG) problem, where a party's expected vote increases over some interval of the Left-Right salience coefficient range [-0.33, -0.99] but decreases over some other interval in this range so that it must have at least two maxima overall. This occurs for Die Linke, whose expected vote declines as the salience of Left-Right distance changes from -0.33 to -0.55, but then increases as Left-Right salience changes from -0.55 to -0.99. We have highlighted the "inflection point" in the table, in yellow. Note that this effect suggests that – despite the fact that Die Linke's expected vote share is greater when the Left-Right salience coefficient is set to -0.99 than when it is set to -0.33 – Die Linke might project that the effects of increasing the salience of the Left-Right dimension are ambiguous: for low levels of Left-Right salience (i.e., in the range [-0.33, -0.55]) increasing the salience of this dimension will <u>depress</u> the party's expected vote, but for higher levels of Left-Right salience further increases in the salience coefficient will <u>enhance</u> the party's expected vote. Thus Die Linke may not have a clear strategy with respect to whether it will benefit from emphasizing Left-Right policy issues during the election campaign.

<u>Computations where we assume that the sum of voters' issue attention is fixed</u>. For the above computations we varied the value of the Left-Right policy salience coefficient with the values of the remaining policy salience coefficients fixed, i.e., we implicitly assumed that the overall degree of attention/importance that voters ascribed to policy distance could expand or contract. However as discussed above, an alternative assumption is that voters have a fixed amount of attention that they direct towards the full set of policy dimensions that are debated in the election, in which case when voters increase the importance they ascribe to one policy dimension they will decrease the importance they ascribe to one or more of the remaining policy dimensions. To explore this scenario, we next performed computations where we specified that the sum of the four policy salience coefficients (on Left-Right ideology, taxes, immigration, and environment) was constant, and that as the salience of the Left-Right dimension increased, the salience of the

remaining dimensions declined <u>proportionally to the magnitude of the coefficient estimates on these dimensions</u>. Recall that the estimated salience coefficients on these dimensions were taxes=-0.12, immigration=-0.14, environment=-0.24, and Left-Right =-.66. Thus, when we changed the value of the Left-Right parameter from -.66 to -.77, a change of -.11, we would then increase the value of the taxes parameter by .11*.12/(.12+.14+.24)]=.11*0.24=.0264, so that we would change the value of the taxes parameter from -0.12 to (-0.12+0.0264)=-0.0936. We used a parallel approach to re-calibrate the values of the immigration and environment parameters. Thus, as we varied the value of the Left-Right parameter, the values of the other parameters changed so as to maintain a constant sum for the values of the four salience parameters. This corresponds to a scenario where voters have a fixed amount of attention they can devote to the set of policies debated in the election, so that directing more attention to one policy dimension subtracts from the attention voters direct towards the remaining policy debates. The table below displays these computations:

Parties' expected votes for varying values of the L/R salience coefficient, with the salience of other dimensions varying proportionally

	LR=-.33 (1)	LR=-.44 (2)	LR=-.55 (3)	LR=-.66 (4)	LR=-.77 (5)	LR=-.88 (6)	LR=-.99 (7)	Change in EV as the L/R salience coefficient changes from -.33 to -.99 (8)	FMG problem? (9)
CSU	.4398	.4355	.4301	.4241	.4180	.4122	.4069	-3.3%	No
SPD	.2939	.3026	.3094	.3146	.3182	.3204	.3214	+2.7%	No
FDP	.0263	.0268	.0272	.0277	.0282	.0288	.0295	-0.3%	No
Die Linke	.1361	.1332	.1329	.1341	.1359	.1379	.1396	+0.4%	Yes
Greens	.1039	.1019	.1004	.0996	.0997	.1007	.1027	-0.1%	Yes

These computations, with the overall sum of the salience coefficients on spatial components fixed, support similar substantive conclusions to the earlier computations where the overall importance of policy could vary, with two interesting exceptions: 1) now both Die Linke <u>and</u> the Greens confront a "Feld-Merrill-Grofman problem," in that the electoral effect – positive or negative – of increasing the salience of the Left-Right dimension can reverse itself (the points where these reversals take place are highlighted in yellow in the table); 2) In these computations the Greens' expected vote share <u>decreases</u> very slightly (by 0.1%) as the salience of the L/R dimen-

sions changes from -.33 to -.99, whereas in the earlier simulations the Greens' expected vote <u>increased</u> by about 0.8% across this range. These computations suggest that the Greens' decision about whether to emphasize the Left-Right dimension may turn on their beliefs about which voting model – one where the sum of the policy salience coefficients is fixed, or one where it can vary – is a more realistic representation of how real world voters decide.

Next, we performed parallel computations while varying the values of the remaining three policy salience coefficients. In each case, we varied these coefficients over what seemed like a realistic range, namely, from one half the value of the actual coefficient estimate to 50% above the value of this estimate. Thus, since our coefficient estimate on taxes was -0.12, we varied the value of the tax coefficient between -0.06 and -0.18; for immigration, where our salience estimate was -0.14, we varied the salience coefficient between -0.07 and -0.21; and for the environment, where the coefficient estimate was -0.24, we varied the salience coefficient between -0.12 and -0.36. The table below summarizes these computations. In the table the notation "FMG" denotes that as we varied the values of the focal policy salience coefficient across the specified interval, the Feld-Merrill-Grofman problem manifested itself with respect to the focal party:

**Changes in parties' expected votes for varying
values of the policy salience coefficients**

	Is the sum of the issue salience coeffs. fixed?	Change in EV as the <u>L/R salience</u> coeff. changes from -.33 to -.99	Change in EV as the <u>tax salience</u> coeff. varies from -.06 to -.18	Change in EV as the <u>immigration salience</u> coeff. varies from -.07 to-.21	Change in EV as the <u>environment salience</u> coeff. varies from -.12 to -.36
FDP	No	-0.1%	0.0% FMG	+0.1%	-0.6%
	Yes	+0.3%	+0.1%	+0.3%	-0.5%
CDU	No	-4.0%	+0.7%	+2.0%	-3.4%
	Yes	-3.3%	+1.6%	+3.3%	-2.3%
SPD	No	+3.1%	-0.1%	-1.0%	+1.1%
	Yes	+2.7%	-0.7%	-1.8%	-0.1% FMG
Greens	No	+0.8%	-0.2%	-0.7%	+2.5%
	Yes	-0.1% FMG	-0.4%	-1.1%	+2.4%
Linke	No	+0.2% FMG	-0.5%	-0.5%	+0.4%
	Yes	+0.4% FMG	-0.6%	-0.6%	+0.6%

In this table, the green highlights denote issue dimensions for which we computed that the parties' expected vote shares increased across the full range of values of the policy salience coefficients that we analyzed, for both sets of assumptions we employed, i.e., for computations where we varied the value of the salience coefficient on the focal dimension <u>without</u> varying the values of the salience coefficients on the other dimensions, and also for computations where, as we varied the value of the salience coefficient on the focal policy dimension, we adjusted the values of the salience coefficients on the remaining dimensions so that the sum of these policy salience coefficients remained constant.

Four interesting points emerge from the computations summarized in the above table:

1) On every dimension except for immigration, there are instances of the "Feld-Merrill-Grofman (FMG) problem," where the electoral effect of increasing the salience of a focal policy dimension is uncertain with respect to at least one party, in the sense that as the sa-

lience of the dimension increases the party's expected vote share first declines but then increases (or vice-versa).

2) There are also several instances of the "voting model problem," where parties' projections about whether increasing the salience of a focal dimension increases their expected vote depends on whether or not the party assumes that the overall sum of the policy salience coefficients is fixed, i.e., that increasing the salience of a focal policy dimension will depress the salience of the other three policy dimensions. This occurs for the FDP and the Greens with respect to the Left-Right dimension, and for the SPD with respect to the environment.

3) Nevertheless, there are several instances – all highlighted in green – where the parties' expected vote shares increased consistently as we varied the salience of the focal policy dimension across the specified intervals, for both voting models that we analyzed, i.e., the model where the sum of the four policy salience coefficients was fixed along with the model where this sum was variable. This occurs for the FDP with respect to immigration; for the CDU with respect to immigration and taxes; for the SPD with respect to the Left-Right dimension; and for the Greens and Die Linke with respect to the environment.

4) Finally, note that the dimensions where each party is projected to gain votes by emphasizing the issue are by-and-large the dimensions identified in the earlier predictions. And, moreover, these computations match parties' actual behavior reasonably well. In particular, we compute that the Greens gain votes, on an expected value basis, as the salience of the environmental dimension increases, and the German Greens (along with green parties everywhere) do indeed emphasize the environment. Likewise, the CDU and the FDP are computed to gain expected votes as the salience of the immigration dimension increases, and these two parties do indeed emphasize immigration. The CDU is also computed to gain votes when taxes become more salient, and this party in fact emphasizes the tax issue.

Computations on more complicated voting models

Finally, we performed computations that paralleled those summarized above, for two expanded voting model specifications that included additional control variables. Specifically, we analyzed one model that incorporated – in addition to the policy distance variables and party-specific intercepts – respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, and then a second model that additionally controlled for respondents' retrospective economic evaluations and their recalled vote (the latter variable is intended as a surrogate for the effects of party ID, that is more independent from the respondent's current vote intention). As we outlined above, some scholars are dubious about including respondents' sociodemographic characteristics into vote model specifications, because they believe these characteristics may be surrogates for votes' policy beliefs (although this is a minority position in the empirical study of voting behavior). And, many scholars question the inclusion of retrospective economic evaluations and party identification variables in empirical voting specifications, because these variables may be endogenous to the respondent's current vote intention. Given scholarly disagreements over how to specify real world voters' decision rules – which reflect conflicting views about how voters actually decide – we believe it is worthwhile to check whether these alternative models change our conclusions about whether (and how much) a party benefits or is punished for emphasizing a particular policy dimension.

Two expanded voting models

A model that controls for sociodemographic variables. First, we estimated the parameters of a voting model that controlled for policy distance and valence (as in the basic model that we analyzed above) but that included the following additional respondent characteristics: political sophistication; whether the respondent resided in the former East Germany (which is important because Die Linke's core constituency resides in the east); income; and age. Sophistication and age are important because the Greens tend to attract younger, more sophisticated voters, and income is important because the CDU and the FDP tend to attract more affluent voters. We label this expanded specification the *sociodemographic model*. Rather than describe this model in detail here, we simply note that our parameter estimates on this model indeed support the expectation that younger, more sophisticated voters are biased towards the Greens, even when controlling for policy distance; that voters from the former East Germany display strong tendencies to

support Die Linke, independently of policy distance; and that higher-income voters tend to support the CDU and the FDP when controlling for policy distance.

Surprisingly, controlling for the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics has almost no effect on the estimates of the policy salience parameters. Column 1 in the table on the next page displays the policy salience parameters for the basic model introduced earlier (the one that includes only policy distance plus party-specific intercepts), while column 2 displays the estimates when sociodemographic controls are included (the sociodemographic model). The two sets of parameter estimates are virtually identical, except that the immigration parameter drops a bit with the addition of the sociodemographic controls.

A model that controls for retrospective evaluations of the economy and recalled vote. As discussed above, some behavioral researchers incorporate respondents' retrospective economic evaluations and their reported party ID into voting models, while other scholars question the inclusion of these variables on grounds of endogeneity. To evaluate whether the inclusion of these variables affected our substantive conclusions about how changing issue salience affects parties' expected vote shares, we estimated the parameters of an additional voting model that controlled for retrospective economic evaluations of the national economy, along with recalled vote (as a surrogate for party ID), and that also included the sociodemographic controls described above. We label this the *full model*.

As expected, respondents displayed strong tendencies to favor the party they reported supporting in 2009, even when controlling for policy distance and demographics, and respondents who held favorable retrospective economic evaluations tended to reward the incumbent governing parties (the CDU and FDP). As displayed in column 3 of the table below, inclusion of these variables modestly reduced the parameter estimates on policy distance:

Policy salience parameter estimates, for alternative voting models

	Basic model (policy plus Valence) (1)	Adding sociodem. characteristics (2)	Full model (includes economy and recalled vote) (3)
Left-Right distance	-.66 (.03)	-.66 (.03)	-.51 (.04)
Tax distance	-.12 (.03)	-.12 (.03)	-.10 (.04)
Immigration distance	-.14 (.04)	-.08 (.04)	-.13 (.06)
Environment distance	-.24 (.01)	-.22 (.04)	-.17 (.05)

Next, we performed computations on the two voting models we have just described that paralleled the computations on the *basic model* analyzed in the previous section. That is, for each model we computed each party's expected vote as we varied the salience of a focal policy dimension between one half the value of the actual model parameter estimate on this dimension, and 50% above the value of this estimate. And – again as described earlier – we performed these computations for two different scenarios: one where the sum of the four policy salience parameters was fixed, so that as we increased the salience of the focal dimension we proportionally reduced the saliences of the other three dimensions; and, a scenario where the sum of the four salience parameters was <u>not</u> fixed, i.e., as we varied the value of the focal salience parameter we left the values of the other salience parameters unchanged.

The table on page 24 summarizes these computations. As in the earlier table, the notation "FMG" denotes that the Feld-Merrill-Grofman problem occurred for that particular scenario, and the green highlights denote policy dimensions on which a party we projected to gain expected votes as the salience of the dimension increases, for all three voting models – the basic model, the sociodemographic model, and the full model – and regardless of whether the sum of the four policy salience coefficients was fixed or was allowed to vary. In addition, we have added red highlights to display dimensions where the focal party was projected to lose votes for every single scenario that we analyzed, i.e., these are dimensions that – according to our computations – parties should definitely avoid emphasizing.

Changes in parties' expected votes, for alternative voting models

	Is the sum of issue salience coeffs fixed?		Left-Right	Taxes	Immigration	Environ.
		Basic Model	-0.1%	0.0% FMG	+0.1%	-0.6%
	No	Sociodem	-0.1	+0.0	+0.1	-0.6
		Full Model	+0.2	+0.1	+0.1	-0.4
FDP						
		Basic Model	+0.3	+0.1	+0.3	-0.5
	Yes	Sociodem	+0.5	+0.1	+0.1	-0.6
		Full Model	+0.3	+0.1	+0.2	-0.5
		Basic Model	-4.0	+0.7	+2.0	-3.4
	No	Sociodem	-3.8	+0.8	+1.1	-3.1
		Full Model	-1.3	+0.4	+0.9	-1.4
CDU						
		Basic Model	-3.3	+1.6	+3.3	-2.3
	Yes	Sociodem	-2.3	+1.8	+1.8	-2.3
		Full Model	-1.3	+0.7	+1.5	-2.3
		Basic Model	+3.1	-0.1	-1.0	+1.1
	No	Sociodem	+2.6	-0.1	-0.6	+1.1
		Full Model	+1.3	-0.1	-0.5	+0.4
SPD						
		Basic Model	+2.7	-0.7	-1.8	-0.1 FMG
	Yes	Sociodem	+1.8	-0.7	-1.0	+0.4 FMG
		Full Model	+1.4	-0.4	-0.9	+0.1 FMG
		Basic Model	+0.8	-0.2	-0.7	+2.5
	No	Sociodem	+0.5	-0.3	-0.2	+2.3
		Full Model	+0.4	-0.2	-0.3	+1.2
Greens						
		Basic Model	-0.1 FMG	-0.4	-1.1	+2.4
	Yes	Sociodem	-1.0	-0.6	-0.4	+2.3
		Full Model	-0.1	-0.3	-0.6	+1.2
		Basic Model	+0.2 FMG	-0.5	-0.5	+0.4
	No	Sociodem	+0.8	-0.4	-0.3	+0.3
		Full Model	-0.5	-0.2	-0.3	+0.2
Linke						
		Basic Model	+0.4 FMG	-0.6	-0.6	+0.6

Yes	Sociodem	+1.0 FMG	-0.6		-0.5	+0.2
	Full Model	-0.3 FMG	+0.1		-0.2	+0.5

<u>Notes</u>. The figures in the table represent the change in the focal party's expected vote, as the magnitude of the salience coefficient on the focal policy dimension increases from 0.5 its estimated value to 1.5 times this value.

The results summarized in the table suggest that, for the most part, the analysis of different voting models – along with different assumptions about whether the overall sum of the four policy salience coefficients is fixed – supports similar substantive conclusions about whether parties will gain or lose votes, on an expected value basis, if they emphasize a given dimension. And, furthermore, these conclusions roughly accord with conventional wisdom about how the German parties actually behave. Specifically, our computations suggest that:

- The FDP should <u>emphasize immigration</u> and <u>downplay the environment</u>.
- The CDU should <u>emphasize immigration and taxes</u>, and <u>downplay both the environment and the Left-Right dimension</u>.
- The SPD should <u>emphasize the Left-Right dimension</u>, and <u>downplay both taxes and immigration</u>.
- The Greens should <u>emphasize the environment</u>, and <u>downplay taxes and immigration</u>.
- Die Linke should <u>emphasize the environment</u>, and <u>downplay immigration</u>.

With the exception of the prescription that Die Linke should emphasize the environment, the other prescriptions roughly match the German parties' actual behavior, with the arguable exception of the prescription that the CDU should downplay the Left-Right dimension.

Discussion

We end with three observations that raise questions that could be pursued in further work:

1) Analyzing a range of salience parameters for the different policy dimensions between 50% and 150% of the actual parameter estimates, as we have done here, may not be ideal. It might be worthwhile to investigate a wider range of values.

2) Our analyses do not address the issue of parties' <u>optimal</u> strategies, they simply address the question of whether there are dimensions on which parties can reliably project that an increase in salience will increase (decrease) their expected vote, regardless of the voting model. But, of course, if parties can increase their expected votes by increasing the salience of two different dimensions – which is the case for the CDU with respect to taxes and immigration – then the question of <u>how much</u> the party gains by emphasizing each dimension becomes relevant.

3) In real world politics, parties may not have a realistic option of completely ignoring a given policy dimension, even if the party projects that increasing the salience of the dimension will depress its vote share. This is because such a strategy opens the party up to the accusation that it is "avoiding the issue," which may be leveled against the party by rival parties or by the media. In this case, our computations might be used by elites to decide which issues they should emphasize as much as possible, and which issues they should downplay as much as is feasible, given the constraint that the party cannot completely ignore the issue.

Distribution of respondent self-placements (and mean party placements) across different issue dimensions