Mainstream or niche?

Vote-seeking incentives and the programmatic strategies of political parties

Thomas M. Meyer, University of Vienna

Markus Wagner, University of Vienna

In these supplemental materials, we provide further information on the measurement of niche and mainstream party strategies, robustness checks using a continuous measure of niche strategies, and the assignment of CMP categories to issue areas.

Measuring niche and mainstream party salience profiles

In assessing whether a party's program qualifies as 'niche' in a particular election, we follow the approach set out by Wagner (2011a). Instead of relying on mere coding based on party families, the measure is based on actual issue salience relative to other parties in a given system at the same point in time. The approach has been shown to provide valid estimates of niche and mainstream salience profiles. Here, we summarize the main steps of this approach.

1) Data source: We use the CMP dataset to measure issue salience. This reflects the CMP approach well, since it codes the proportion of (quasi-)sentences within a party election program that address each of the categories in its coding scheme.

2) Issue areas: We aggregate the 56 categories used by the CMP into nine broader issue areas following the approach of Bäck et al. (2011; see below: *The assignment of CMP issue categories into aggregate issue areas*). One issue area is economic, the others are non-economic.

3) <u>Mean party system salience</u>: For each of these nine issue areas, we calculate the
(weighted) mean salience of all parties excluding the respective party of interest. The
formula for this is:

$$\mu_j = \sum_{p=1;p \neq j}^{k}(v_p \times s_p),$$

where μ_j is the weighted mean salience of an issue area for party j in a party system, v_{pj} is
the vote share of the party divided by the total vote share (excluding party j), s_p the
proportion of the manifesto devotes to that issue area and k is the total number of parties.
Note that (1) v_{pj} sums to 1 in every case and (2) this is calculated for all parties other than
the party of interest itself.

4) <u>Condition 1 - High emphasis on one or more non-economic issues compared to</u>
<u>competitors</u>: A party is coded as emphasizing an issue more than its competitors if its
salience is at least one weighted standard deviation above the mean party system salience.
The formula for this is:

$$s_j \geq \mu_j + \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{p=1;p \neq j}^{k}[v_{pj} \times (s_p - \mu_j)^2]}{1 - \sum_{p=1;p \neq j}^{k}(v_{pj})^2}},$$

where s_j is the proportion of the manifesto a party devotes to an issue area and μ_j, v_{pj} *and*
s_p are defined as above. Vote shares are provided in the CMP dataset.

5) <u>Condition 2 – High general party emphasis on an issue area</u>: A party is coded as generally
emphasizing or addressing an issue area if it devotes at least 10 per cent of its manifesto
to that topic. The formula for this is:

$$s_j \geq 0.1,$$

where s_j is defined as above.

6) <u>Condition 3 - Low emphasis on economic policy compared to competitors</u>: A party is
coded as de-emphasizing economic issues compared to its competitors if its salience is at

least one weighted standard deviation below the mean party system salience. The formula for this is:

$$s_j \geq \mu_j - \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{p=1;p\neq j}^{k}[v_{pj} \times (s_p - \mu_j)^2]}{1 - \sum_{p=1;p\neq j}^{k}(v_{pj})^2}},$$

where s_j, μ_j, v_{pj} and s_p are defined as above.

Overall assessment: If one or more criteria are not met, a party is coded as having a mainstream salience profile.

A continuous measure for niche party status

In the paper, we draw on Wagner's (2011a) dichotomous measurement approach to distinguish niche and mainstream parties. Conceptualizing the niche-mainstream divide in a dichotomous way is consistent with the existing literature on niche parties. It also allows us to understand changes using a transition model. Such a model enables us to distinguish clearly between the reasons for switching from niche-to-mainstream and from mainstream-to-niche strategies. Indeed, one of our most important findings in the paper is that vote-seeking incentives *can* explain niche-to-mainstream transitions but *cannot* account for mainstream-to-niche transitions. Apart from that, the dichotomous measure simplifies the analysis by allowing us to focus on the most significant changes in party issue emphasis. Nevertheless, we provide an additional robustness check of our results using a continuous measure for niche party status.

It is possible to derive a continuous measure for the 'degree' of a party's niche party strategy from the measurement approach suggested by Wagner (2011a). Wagner classifies a party as a niche party if (1) it emphasizes one or more (sufficiently salient) issue dimension(s) by at least one weighted standard deviation above the mean party system salience and (2) it de-

emphasizes economic issues compared to its competitors by at least one weighted standard deviation below the average party in the system.

The cut-points based on standard deviations were chosen because they arguably capture the difference between typical emphasis on topics and unusually high or low emphasis. However, it is also possible to derive a continuous measure from the manifesto-extracted salience information. We present the measure and the results of analysis using it to check the robustness of our main results.

Specifically, we build a continuous measure from conditions (1) and (2). For each policy dimension k, let

$$rel\_s_{kj} = \frac{(s_{jk} - \mu_{jk})}{\sigma_{jk}}$$

denote the relative issue salience rel_s_{jk} of party j on issue k where s_{jk} denotes party j's issue emphasis on issue k, μ_{jk} denotes the (weighted) mean issue emphasis of the remaining parties (excluding party j) and σ_{jk} stands for the weighted standard deviation (again, excluding party j). Let $k=1$ indicate economic policies. For all non-economic issues,

$$max_{k;k \neq 1}(rel\_s_{jk})$$

is an indicator for a party's degree of pursuing an exclusively niche strategy. For the economic dimension, the reverse is true. Treating the economic dimension as the main dimension of electoral competition, a party tends to the niche pole if it deemphasizes economic policies. Therefore,

$$y_j = max_{k;k \neq 1}(rel\_s_{jk}) - rel\_s_{j1}$$

can be taken as an indicator for a party's degree of pursuing an exclusively niche strategy.

Modeling transitions using a continuous measure

With a continuous dependent variable, we can no longer make use of transition models. This is unfortunate as we know from these models that the direction of change (niche-to-mainstream, mainstream-to-niche) makes a difference to the effect of our key variables of interest. We choose to model the new, continuous dependent variable by estimating the effect of the independent variables (e.g. vote change) conditional on a party's strategy chosen at time t-1. For example, Hypothesis 1 states that *vote losses in the previous election increase the likelihood of transitions between niche and mainstream profiles at the next election, while vote gains increase the likelihood of stability between elections.* Vote gains should therefore increase the probability that a party pursues a niche strategy at time t *if* it had a niche profile at time t-1. However, if a party followed the mainstream strategy, vote gains should have a negative effect.

We test Hypothesis 1 (*General electoral change*) using a linear regression model:

$$y_{jt} = b_1 \cdot vote\ change_{t-1} + b_2 \cdot y_{j,t-1} + b_3 \cdot vote\ change_{t-1} \cdot y_{j,t-1} + controls$$

The value of b_1 will indicate the effect of vote changes for parties that were relatively mainstream at *t-1* (and thus have a $y_{j,t-1}$ value that equals 0). We expect this coefficient to be negative: the more successful a party is (i.e. *vote change* increases), the less likely it will be to increase its nicheness (y_{jt}). The interaction term then allows the effect of *vote change* to depend on the nicheness of the party at *t-1*. As nicheness at *t-1* increases, we expect vote change to have a more positive effect, so parties pursuing a niche strategy will continue or strengthen this strategy if they are successful. This means that b_3 should be positive. We can test Hypotheses 2 to 4 by adding the necessary additional interaction terms to the above model.

The control variables included in all models are identical to the ones we include in the models in the paper: the policy profile at time t-2 ($y_{j,t-2}$), party size and decade dummies. As in the transition model presented in the paper, we account for country-level heterogeneity using standard errors clustered by country.

We present the results of our robustness checks graphically. The exact results of the various regression models are presented in Table 1 of this document. To be able to compare our results here with those presented in the paper, we present effects for parties that pursue niche strategies at t-1. Therefore, we set the lagged value to a relatively high value (mean + 1 standard deviation). The graphs show whether parties react to the electoral defeat by switching to a more mainstream-like policy profile. Similar to the results presented in the paper, we present the effect of a vote loss of approximately 4 per cent compared to vote stability. Figure 1 shows the results using the continuous measure.

Figure 1: Effect of electoral defeat for niche parties switching to a mainstream profile
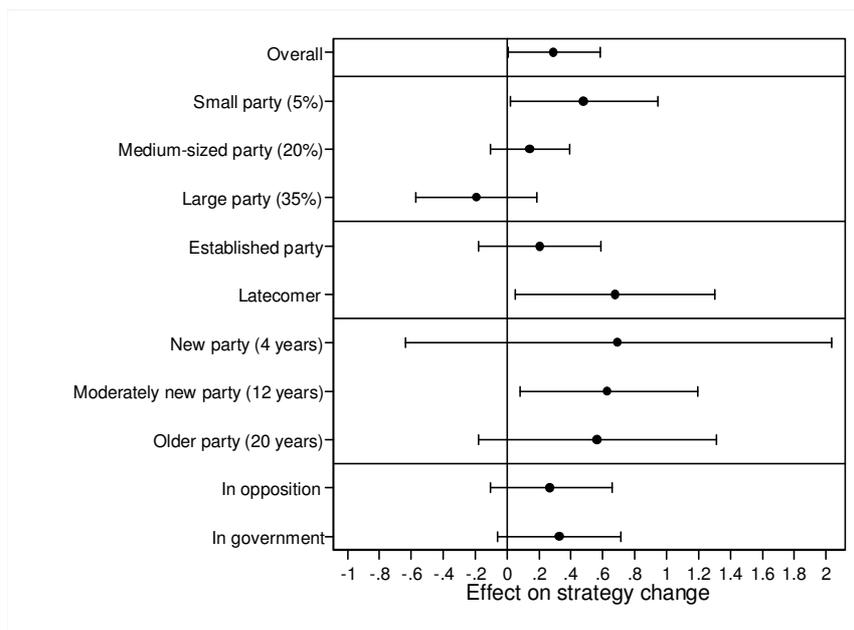
Notes: Bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Effect of electoral defeat based on a vote loss of approximately 4 per cent compared to vote stability. Detailed results of the models are in the Appendix.

The results are largely robust to both measurement approaches: Electoral defeat makes niche parties to shift towards a mainstream strategy (H1). Moreover, smaller parties are more

likely to switch strategies as reaction to an electoral defeat than larger ones (H2). We also find in both panels that latecomers are more likely to react to changes in electoral fortunes than established parties (H3a). In addition, increasing party age reduces the likelihood to follow vote-seeking incentives, although the pattern is weaker when using the continuous measure (H3b).

The *Government constraint hypothesis* (H4) is not robust to our alternative measurement approach. Using a continuous measure, we no longer find that government parties are constrained when switching from a niche to a mainstream profile. Therefore, in the paper itself we are cautious when interpreting our empirical results for the *Government constraint hypothesis*.

Table 1: Estimates of OLS regressions of a party's niche profile at time *t*

	Model 1 General electoral change	Model 2 Party size constraint	Model 3a Party entry constraint	Model 3b Party age constraint	Model 4 Government participation constraint
Vote change (t-2 → t-1)	-0.046**	-0.129*	-0.025+	-0.220*	-0.069*
	(0.016)	(0.053)	(0.014)	(0.100)	(0.031)
Niche party (t-1)	0.238**	0.264**	0.230**	0.303*	0.232**
	(0.049)	(0.057)	(0.055)	(0.135)	(0.050)
Party size (t-1)	-0.040**	-0.036**	-0.038**	-0.103	-0.039**
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.061)	(0.008)
Vote change (t-2 → t-1) · Niche party (t-1)	0.021*	0.048**	0.013	0.071	0.024+
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.009)	(0.044)	(0.012)
Vote change · Party size		0.004*			
		(0.002)			
Party size · Niche party (t-1)		-0.003			
		(0.002)			
Vote change · Party size · Niche party (t-1)		-0.002*			
		(0.001)			
Latecomer			0.247		
			(0.498)		
Vote change · Latecomer			-0.211**		
			(0.052)		
Latecomer · Niche party (t-1)			0.009		
			(0.094)		
Vote change · Latecomer · Niche party (t-1)			0.058*		
			(0.021)		
Party age				0.009	
				(0.021)	
Vote change · Party age				0.000	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
				(0.005)	
Party age · Niche party (t-1)				-0.009	
				(0.007)	
Vote change · Party age · Niche party (t-1)				-0.000	
				(0.003)	
In government (t-1)					-0.167
					(0.220)
Vote change · In government					0.047
					(0.042)
In government · Niche party (t-1)					0.028
					(0.090)
Vote change · In government · Niche party (t-1)					-0.006
					(0.016)
Niche party (t-2)	0.143**	0.140*	0.141*	0.109	0.142*
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.125)	(0.052)
1950s	0.074	0.114	0.133	NA	0.086
	(0.339)	(0.351)	(0.292)		(0.345)
1960s	-0.085	-0.056	-0.020	-0.865	-0.072
	(0.271)	(0.272)	(0.224)	(1.141)	(0.276)
1970s	0.030	0.047	0.061	-0.849	0.042
	(0.312)	(0.312)	(0.293)	(1.287)	(0.311)
1980s	reference	reference	reference	reference	reference
1990s	-0.281	-0.264	-0.312	-0.607	-0.264
	(0.354)	(0.355)	(0.373)	(1.241)	(0.350)
2000s	-0.328	-0.286	-0.353	-0.444	-0.311
	(0.349)	(0.348)	(0.369)	(1.202)	(0.345)
Intercept	2.154**	2.101**	2.072**	3.262	2.189**
	(0.592)	(0.598)	(0.451)	(2.200)	(0.626)
Log likelihood	-3892.2	-3889.5	-3888.1	-929.2	-3891.3
Observations	1528	1528	1528	299	1528

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The assignment of CMP issue categories into aggregate issue areas

Bäck et al. (2011) originally distinguish 13 dimensions. Since we merge the economy, industry, health, finance and labor dimensions into one overall economy dimension, we are left with nine issue areas, each of which is designed to represent a typical area of responsibility of a government ministry. CMP issue categories are assigned to these nine areas as follows:

Economy	401 (Free Enterprise: Positive), 402 (Incentives: Positive), 403 (Market Regulation: Positive), 404 (Economic Planning: Positive) 405 (Corporatism), 406 (Protectionism: Positive), 407 (Protectionism: Negative), 408 (Economic Goals), 409 (Keynesian Demand Management: Positive), 410 (Productivity), 412 (Controlled Economy: Positive), 413 (Nationalisation: Positive), 414 (Economic Orthodoxy), 415 (Marxist Analysis: Positive), 504 (Welfare State Expansion), 505 (Welfare State Limitation), 701 (Labour Groups: Positive), 702 (Labour Groups: Negative), 706 (Non-economic demographic groups)
Foreign policy	101 (Foreign Special Relationship: Positive), 102 (Foreign Special Relationship: Negative), 103 (Anti-Imperialism: Positive), 106 (Peace: Positive), 107 (Internationalism: Positive), 108 (European Integration: Positive), 109 (Internationalism: Negative), 110 (European Integration: Negative)
Defense	104 (Military: Positive), 105 (Military: Negative)
Interior	201 (Freedom and Human Rights: Positive), 202 (Democracy: Positive), 203 (Constitutionalism: Positive), 204 (Constitutionalism: Negative), 301 (Decentralisation: Positive), 302 (Centralisation: Positive), 303 (Governmental and Administrative Efficiency), 304 (Political Corruption), 605 (Law and Order: Positive), 607 (Multiculturalism: Positive), 608 (Multiculturalism: Negative)
Justice	201 (Freedom and Human Rights: Positive), 202 (Democracy: Positive), 203 (Constitutionalism: Positive), 204 (Constitutionalism: Negative), 303 (Governmental and Administrative Efficiency), 304 (Political Corruption),

605 (Law and Order: Positive)

Education	506 (Education Expansion: Positive), 507 (Education Expansion: Negative)
Agriculture	703 (Farmers: Positive)
Environment	416 (Anti-Growth Economy: Positive), 501 (Environmental Protection: Positive)
Social Affairs	503 (Social Justice: Positive), 603 (Traditional Morality: Positive), 604 (Traditional Morality: Negative), 606 (Social Harmony) ,705 (Underprivileged Minorities: Positive), 706 (Non-economic Demographic Groups: Positive)