

Downs and the niche party voter: the surprising role of party weight in conditioning the bases of electoral support in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Downs (1957) suggested that voters would be motivated to choose mainstream parties that were close to them in left-right terms, and researchers have assumed that the same preference for proximate parties would apply when considering issue locations. Indeed issues and left-right location have generally been seen as interchangeable theoretically, with left-right constituting a sort of “super-issue.” But recent research has proposed that specific issue preferences underlie support for so-called “niche parties,” suggesting a possible difference in motivations for niche party support and implying that issue location may not play the same role as left-right location in generating support for different types of parties. In a framework that addresses both turnout and party choice, we propose that the relative sizes of different parties govern the way voters assess other party attributes, in particular paying less attention to ideological compatibility when it comes to smaller parties. Our findings support these conjectures.

In his seminal 1957 book, Anthony Downs suggested (pp. 115-116) that voters would choose to support the party closest to them in left-right terms. For Downs, left-right was a simplifying device that removed the need for voters to take account of the stances that parties might take on specific issues. However, later scholars have tended to assume that, by maximizing proximity in left-right terms, voters would also be maximizing proximity in terms of specific issues. Indeed, some have seen the left-right spectrum as a sort of “super-issue” (Gabel and Huber 2000). But recent research has put into question whether left-right location and issue location play the same roles in voter motivations by suggesting that certain parties - “Niche parties” in contemporary parlance - get their support by stressing specific issues that are being neglected by mainstream parties (Meguid 2004; Adams et al. 2006; Hobolt and deVries 2012; Wagner 2012). If left-right proximity essentially governs support for mainstream parties as Downs supposed, this suggests that issue proximities might follow a different logic.

The idea that issue proximities might work in a different way than left-right proximities is also implied by a generally neglected suggestion made by Downs (1957:147) that voters need to anticipate the likely weights that different parties would have in the national legislature following elections to that institution, in case lack of legislative weight (which Downs saw in terms of seat shares) would render a party powerless to implement its policy promises. If generally true, this proposition would imply that smaller parties, lacking legislative weight, would never receive voter support. Downs himself, to be sure, suggested an exception to his own general rule. Voters might indeed support a party with little weight in an effort to change that situation, supporting a party in the hopes that it would gain in weight over time (Downs 1975:49). But he does not consider which parties voters might choose to support in this way or why they would choose to support those parties. This gap in Downsean theorizing is closed, we suggest, if we suppose that

voters choose some parties - mainstream parties – primarily on grounds of left-right proximity while for other parties - niche parties - issue proximity is relatively more important. In other words, we suggest that issue proximity serves a somewhat different function than ideological proximity in explaining the behavior of voters: a function whose distinctiveness becomes apparent when we distinguish between parties on grounds of their legislative weight. This perspective not only throws light on the choice between parties but also on motivations to turn out to vote.

In recent years considerable attention has been given to the possibility that voters are heterogeneous in the manner in which their support for political parties is determined, particularly in terms of educational and occupational differences that may give voters different skills and motivations for choosing between parties. With some shining exceptions, however, little attention has been given to the possibility that different motivations apply to the decisions to support different types of parties. Indeed, until recently it was not feasible to estimate well-specified models involving interactions with party characteristics since few relevant datasets included enough parties to make this viable. Using a dataset that covers 235 parties in 27 countries we propose to direct our attention onto party differences.

In the next section we develop our ideas about why party characteristics – focusing on various indicators of party weight – should be taken into explicit account in models of party support. This discussion leads into a specification of hypotheses to be evaluated in this paper. Then we introduce our modeling strategy and the data to be employed in tests of our ideas. The results of those tests are then reported, followed by robustness checks that lead to a discussion of our findings with which the paper concludes.

Theoretical expectations

The way in which contemporary scholarship approaches the study of party support goes back to

Downs (1957). Downs theorized that voters choose a party so as to maximize the benefits in terms of utility that they gain from voting for that party. Downs saw electoral utility primarily in terms of proximity between voter and party in left-right terms;¹ later research has focused more generally on policy benefits and there has been much debate about how exactly voters perceive the policy benefits promised by different parties.² Maximizing policy benefits calls for maximizing the fit between parties and voters on different criteria. In this paper we operationalize the concept of fit in terms of voter-party affinities and see policy benefits as maximized when such affinities are maximized, as will be explained below. But just as important as the policy benefits promised by each party is the power that different parties have to achieve the goals they promise (Bartels 1988). Downs (1957:147) called this the "weight" of a party and saw weight as being

¹ For Downs (1975:36-38), utility is simply a unit of account, a kind of currency, to which all sorts of benefits can be reduced for purposes of summing them or comparing them.

² Exactly how voters evaluate those promises has been a matter of controversy, and Downs' view that voters maximize utility by choosing the party closest to them in left-right terms (proximity theory) has been countered by suggestions that voters rather choose parties that take extreme positions on the same side as themselves of the left-right divide (discounting theory and directional theory) or parties with policies that are similar to their own, in proximity or directional terms (policy benefit theory), or parties seen as best able to deal with the problems they consider most pressing (issue ownership theory). For a survey see Adams, Merrill and Grofman (2005). In this paper we focus on proximity theory because this was the theory espoused by Downs, on whose work we build, and because decades of controversy have not succeeded in displacing proximity theory as the *de-facto* default approach to understanding the mainsprings of party support. But we enrich this approach by comparing left-right proximity with issue proximity.

provided by party size (the number of seats it controls in a nation's legislature). The more seats a party controls the more power it has in legislative decision-making and the more of its policy goals it is likely to be able to enact (see Tillie 1995, Merrill 1995 for supportive argumentation).

Though not noted by Downs, weight might also be provided by a variety of other characteristics including the party's age, its experience in government, and whether it is currently a member of the government. Downs did not explore the role of party weights in voter preference formation, being focused on a two-party situation in which both parties have similar weight. However, he does refer (1957:48) to the need for voters to anticipate the likely support a party will receive because voting for a party that cannot win is a "wasted vote." So it seems evident that, in multi-party situations, voters need to be aware both of their affinity with a party and of that party's weight when estimating the utility they will receive from voting for it.

This perspective also addresses incentives to go to the polls at all in order to cast a ballot. If the policy stances of mainstream parties are unattractive to certain types of individuals, such people have three options. They can support a party with unattractive policies, they can support a party that lacks legislative weight, or they can fail to vote. So it is important to understand the motivations that would lead people to vote for niche parties despite their usual lack of weight or for mainstream parties that are unattractive except in terms of legislative weight.

In our view the role of party weights in such a calculus of voting would be to condition the utility offered by voter-party affinities. This conditioning is multiplicative, since a party offers policy benefits to voters only if attractive promises are likely to be realized.³ The greater the

³ Although, as already mentioned, Downs several times points out that a voter may support a party with little weight in the hopes that this support will help the party acquire the weight that will ultimately enable it to deliver on its promises (eg. Downs 1975:49).

product of weight and affinity, the greater the utility offered by voting for that party. So in multi-party situations the conventional regression equation that determines the utility of voting for a party, by adding up the utilities each voter gets from each type of affinity felt for that party, is transformed by the inclusion of a weight term and by a term, for each measure of affinity, that is the interaction between weight and affinity, as shown in Equation 1.

$$\text{utility} = a + b_1(\text{affinity}) + b_2(\text{weight}) + b_3(\text{affinity}(\text{weight})) \quad [\text{Equation 1}]$$

This formulation allows for the possibility that some voters may choose a party that currently has no or little weight in the hopes that voting for it will increase its future weight (see footnote 3) – such behavior will be captured by b_1 in the above equation – and also the possibility that some voters may choose a party with much weight whatever the extent of its policy fit – captured by b_2 – on the basis that sure enactment even of policies not seen as particularly desirable is better than no enactments at all.⁴

Though Downs saw parties with greater weight as being more influential and thus more likely to achieve policy objectives, for him policy objectives were seen purely in left-right terms. When we widen the concept of affinity to encompass issue affinities it is not clear that both these types of affinity will benefit similarly from the influence bestowed by party weight. In particular, it is possible that, at least for some types of party, issue affinities may not play the role that left-right affinities play. In particular, as already suggested, certain (often small) parties may define themselves in terms of particular issues, becoming “niche parties” in contemporary parlance (Meguid 2004; Adams et al. 2006; Hobolt and deVries 2012). Reformulating these insights from

⁴ For some this might correspond to the notion that “there needs to be a government that can govern” (i.e. one with enough weight to be able to take decisions) – an objective that might supersede a preference for a party with greater affinity that would in practice prove ineffectual.

the perspective of voter preference formation, we get the following two hypotheses.

H1. Parties with greater legislative weight will be preferred more largely on the basis of left-right location, with less influential parties receiving support on other grounds.

H2. Parties with lesser legislative weight will be preferred more largely on the basis of issue affinities, with more influential parties receiving support on other grounds.

As suggested earlier, parties with legislative weight may receive support just because of the weight they muster. Voters who want a “government that can govern” of whatever political color may be attracted to parties with greater legislative weight irrespective of any policy affinities felt for those parties. We could see such votes as “votes for the political order.” Thus we expect larger parties to be preferred by some purely on account of their ability to conduct the business of government. But voters may not specifically focus on party size. Though not considered by Downs, voters may be attracted by a variety of attributes that will generally be concomitants of party size, especially party age and experience in office. Although, parties that are currently in government may well suffer a “cost of governing” (Downs 1957; Powell and Whitten 1993) we nevertheless also expect parties currently holding government office to be viewed as having more legislative weight. Other things being equal,

H3. Larger parties will have more weight in the minds of voters

H4. Parties with experience in government will have more weight

H5. Older (more long-established) parties will have more weight

H6. Parties currently members of a government will have more weight.

We assume in principle that these party characteristics might be attractive to voters because they give parties power to achieve their policy and other objectives. We will, however, empirically test this assumption, by comparing their moderating effects when each is used as a measure of

party weight in the evaluation of H1 and H2.

Operationalizing these expectations requires a modification to the standard approach employed in studying party support – a modification to which we now turn.

Studying party support

The standard approach to studying party support focuses on characteristics of voters. Whether we study support for a single party (as measured by some interval-level indicator of liking, support or closeness) or whether we study discrete choices using logit, probit or multinomial versions of these, the focus is almost always on what it is about people that makes them pick one party or another. Party characteristics do not customarily enter the picture because, with these approaches, each party is treated separately. Despite pleas to take account of party characteristics (Eijk and Franklin 1996; Alvarez and Nagler 1998) scholars have largely failed to do so and, even when employing methods that would permit it (such as Conditional Logit), seldom go beyond modeling proximities of voters to the issue or ideological stances of different parties.

This focus on the characteristics of voters when studying party support is somewhat curious, even paradoxical (though understandable in the light of paucity until recent times of datasets containing sufficient numbers of parties). Voters in contemporary established democracies surely do not often ask themselves “what sort of a person am I?” when considering which party to support, but rather “what sort of a party is that?” when considering whether to support it.

In this paper we argue that it is time to abandon a voter-centric focus. We do not advocate going to the other extreme, however. Party support is both about parties and about voters. It is also about the ways in which voters and parties match or fail to match: the affinity between them. Indeed, we shall be referring to three types of variables familiar from discrete choice modeling, though these different types have seldom if ever been employed as we propose. There are

individual-specific variables, things about people; there are choice-specific variables, things about parties; and there are voter-party affinities, things that draw particular types of people to particular types of parties.

Individual-specific variables are familiar to those who study voter turnout (political interest, education, and so forth) but, perhaps surprisingly, they have traditionally not been ascribed a role in party preference formation (but see Adams et al. 2012) since such variables would increase the likelihood of a vote for any party, whatever its characteristics. In this research we include no such variables.⁵ The individual-level variables of most interest when studying party support are those that draw people to particular political parties – the voter component of voter-party affinities. Variables such as left-right location have effects that are “tuned” to particular parties. If we are studying votes for a conservative party it will be people who are located towards the right of the political spectrum that will be drawn to that party whereas if we are studying votes for a socialist party it will be people who are located towards the left that will be attracted. This difference does not affect model specification so long as we study one party at a time, or employ a multinomial approach. But for the type of analysis we advocate in this paper it is necessary for such variables to be transformed into measures of affinity between voter and party: measures such as proximity to each party on a left-right or issue scale.

In contrast to the paucity of individual-specific variables, when we turn to choice-specific variables, there are, ironically, many variables with obvious relevance for a party’s attractiveness to all voters whatever their political persuasion. Charismatic leadership is a choice-specific

⁵ One such variable, political awareness, was considered for inclusion on the basis of recent findings that supporters of small parties are more likely to have high political awareness (Adams et al. 2012) but this variable did not prove significant in our model.

variable of obvious importance. Any party will benefit from a telegenic leader. A reputation for general competence is a second. A dependable source of campaign funding can be a third, at least in certain countries. And we made the point earlier in this paper that party size is another variable that will affect the fortunes of all parties whatever their character in other respects.

In order to move beyond a voter-centric approach and include in our analysis choice-specific variables and measures of voter-party affinity it is necessary to adopt a modeling strategy that encompasses all parties at once rather than focusing on one party at a time.⁶ There are common estimation models (like conditional logit) that require reshaping the data matrix so that multiple cases (one for each party) are associated with each of the individuals whose choices are under study; but when reporting the results of such analyses it is usual to make them look as much like conventional analyses as possible. So, in the presentation of findings, we often see each party occupying a separate column in a table of findings. What we seldom see are findings presented in terms of generic party choice, which would be the CL equivalent of the procedure we employ in this paper (see footnote 7).

Restructuring the data so that parties are organized as separate cases associated with each respondent (instead of as multiple variables, as is conventional) allows us to think of party preferences in general (generic party preferences), rather than focusing on preferences for specific parties.⁷ Such a step up the ladder of generality is a step we often take with variables such as

⁶ Evidently, when we focus on one party at a time, effects of party-level variables cannot be estimated since, for just one party, they have no variance.

⁷ Conditional logit makes such analyses possible, but customary uses of CL employ interactions between each input variable and indicators for each party, thus producing party-specific findings rather than findings relating to generic party support.

trade union membership or religious observance, focusing not on specific religions or unions but on membership of observance in general. Oddly, however, we seldom take such a step with party support. To address the questions of interest in this paper we do need to take that step. Indeed, we need to take that step for a second reason also: in order to be able to include in our data information regarding parties that go beyond the bounds of a single party system. With a conventional focus on individual parties the resulting organization of the data would give us missing data at the individual level for all but one country for each party. Generic party support as outcome of interest overcomes this problem but brings problems of its own, to which we now turn.

Research strategy

We have already pointed out that our focus on party-level variables threatens model estimation unless we include in our data a large number of parties. Since no one country has a large number of parties while retaining a balance between large parties and small, this also implies the need to simultaneously study a large number of countries. Studying a large number of countries is also appropriate because our claim regarding the importance of party weights is a quite general one that calls for an empirical test of maximum generality, involving as many different party systems as possible, in order to demonstrate that the importance of party weights is not something that is limited to one or a few party systems.

For these reasons, we employ data from a study of the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections (<http://www.piredeu.eu>). EP elections may not appear the most appropriate context in which to study the bases of party support in national party systems; however, EP elections are organized on a strictly national basis and are contested by national parties. So they can be seen as providing researchers with laboratory-like “windows” into national political processes (see, for example, Eijk and Franklin 1996; Brug et al. 2007). Moreover, the PIREDEU voter study (Eg-

mond et al. 2010) is a representative mass survey consisting of 27 national probability samples, each of about 1,000 respondents and containing virtually identical questions,⁸ allowing for excellent comparability across countries. To these data we merged information about party size in seats, age in years, government status, and government experience (years in office as a proportion of age) obtained from the PARLGOV data archive (Doring and Manow 2012).

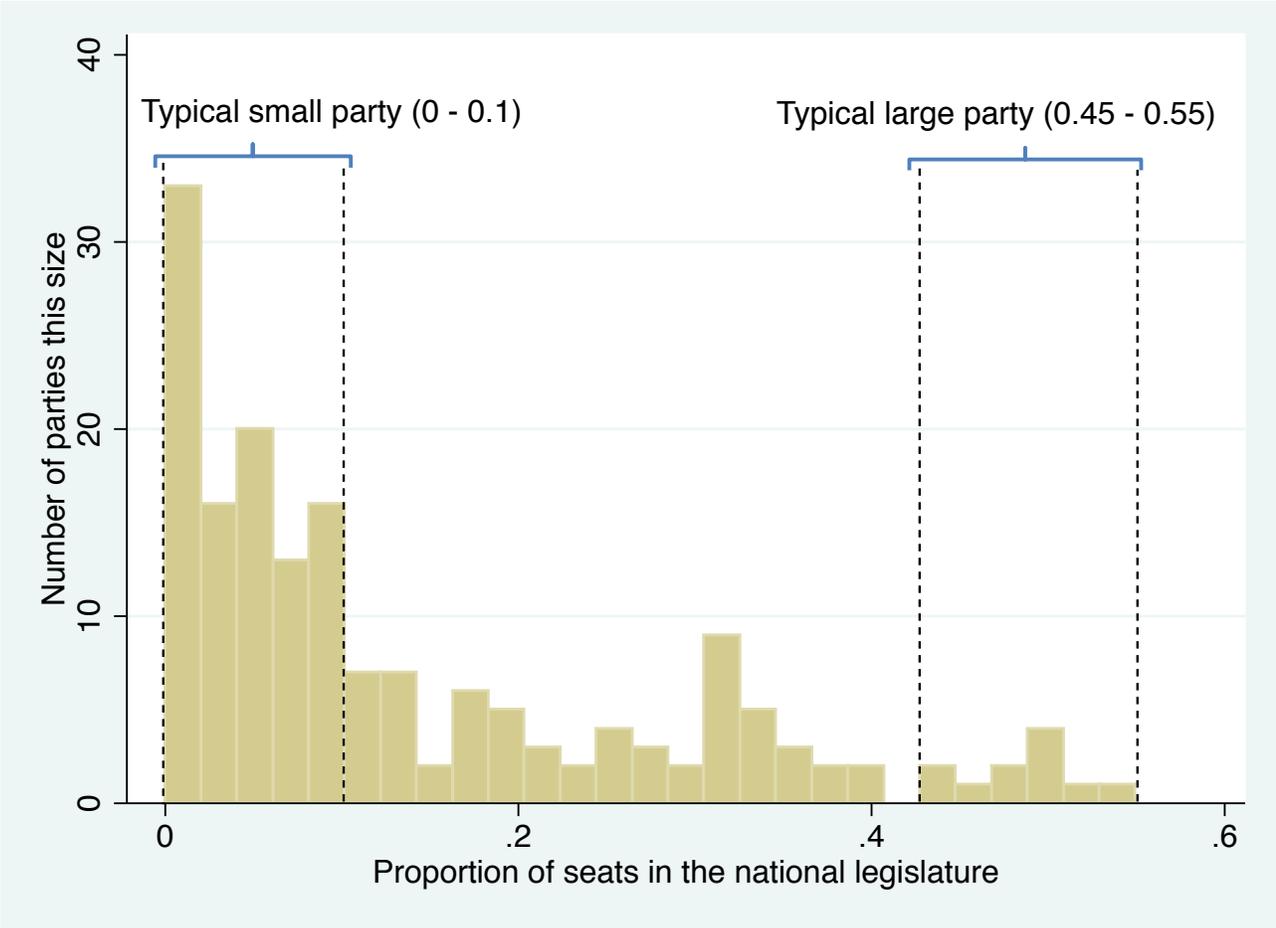


Figure 1 Distribution of parties in terms of proportion of seats in their national legislatures

In this merged dataset party size varies considerably, from parties controlling no or virtually no seats in their legislatures to a party controlling 55% of seats (see Figure 1). In what follows

⁸ Differing only in terms of inevitable variations in language and nation-specific references such as party names.

we employ a continuous measure of party size (proportion of seats controlled in the national legislature) but, in reporting our findings, we will be distinguishing particularly between smaller parties (0.00-0.10 of seats) and larger parties (0.45-0.55 of seats), as shown.

Using this dataset, we operationalize our research questions in terms of a number of models of party support, whose outcome is a measure of Propensity-to-Vote (PTV).⁹ Following a proven measurement and analysis strategy (Eijk et al. 1996, 2006; Eijk and Brug 2007, Pardos and Dinas 2010) respondents are asked to report separately for each party the likelihood that they would ever vote for that party, measured on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is labeled “would never vote for this party” and 10 is labeled “am certain to vote for this party at some time.” The dataset is then converted into a “stacked” format, by reshaping the PTVs reported for each party by each respondent into different cases of the same “generic” PTV variable, one case for each response given by each respondent (one response for each party). This reshaping changes the number of cases in each country from the number of respondents (N) to N*P responses, where P is the number of parties (Eijk et al. 2006). Of course, for this to produce meaningful results, individual-specific predictors need to be tailored to the respondent-party unit of analysis and viewed as affinities, as already explained.¹⁰

⁹ The questions were first asked in Dutch election studies in the early 1980s and have been asked in studies of elections to the European Parliament since 1989. In recent years they have found their way into increasing numbers of national election studies in addition to the Dutch ones, notably the Austrian, British, German, Irish, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese studies. Our findings using this variable are replicated in Appendix D using a discrete choice model.

¹⁰ Otherwise, all predictors (being respondent-level) would have the same values across within-respondent observations and PTV differences across multiple responses for the same respondent

In this paper our focus is on how party weight, measured in various ways, interacts with measures of respondent-party affinity regarding ideology and issues. These affinities were computed by finding the absolute distance between each party and each respondent in terms of left-right position and issue location. For left-right affinities we first averaged the positions ascribed to each party, on 0-10 left-right scales, by all respondents in answers to questions regarding each party. We then took the absolute value of the distance between those averages and each respondent's own left-right location discovered in answer to a similar question.¹¹ We did the same thing for thirteen individual issues, obtaining party locations from manifesto data where possible (see appendix G).¹² The thirteen results were summed into a single measure of

could not be modelled. Note that the questions do not focus on EP elections but on elections in general and, in practice, best indicate national party support.

¹¹ Parties were located on the basis of the average of valid answers. Since, in regard to these questions, respondents are treated as “experts” missing data only arises when the respondents concerned did not consider themselves expert enough. Missing data regarding respondents' own positions was filled in by multiple imputation, as were all other missing data, using Gary King's Amelia II to produce five separate imputations and R's MItools package to combine the estimates on the basis of Rubin's Rule.

¹² For one issue, “European integration has gone too far,” we got party locations by treating our respondents as “experts” in the same way as for left-right location. Positions of parties on this issue are not available in the manifesto data that we employ in this research, which relates to the positions party take at the times of national elections. Findings are unchanged if we use Euromanifestos to place parties on this and other issues.

total issue distance.¹³ That issue distance measure, along with left-right distance, were each of them subtracted from their maximum values to yield measures of overall proximity in issue and left-right terms that give higher values to respondents who are close to a party in left-right terms, or on issues in general.

Individual issues are “genericized” by this procedure so that our analysis can be simplified by a focus on issues in general, thus avoiding the need for multiple measures of affinity that would have called for multiple interactions with party weight – hugely restricting the number of issues we would be able to take into account. Moreover, the procedure makes substantive sense by focusing our attention on the generic concepts involved rather than on specific items contained within these concepts, which are of no interest to us in terms of our current research questions. A drawback of the issue proximity measure especially relevant for our research question is the contention made by some scholars that the coding categories in manifesto data do not adequately represent new issues (e.g. Green-Pedersen 2009). We hope to have alleviated this problem to some extent by adding a measure of support for European unification not present in the manifesto data. However, our thirteen issues certainly focus on mainstream rather than minority concerns and in any case constitute a small subset of the 90 issues coded in manifesto data. So total effects of issues will certainly be under-estimated in our findings, but there is no reason why this should alter the way in which these effects are conditioned by differences in party size.

All inputs whose values did not initially range from 0 to 1 were normalized on the basis of

¹³ It is customary to regard separate issue effects as additive (Lewis and King 1999). Sometimes issues are weighted by salience before being added, but we get the same findings when we eliminate two issues that other research has found had no weight in voter decisions (DeSio and Franklin 2012).

the minimum and maximum found empirically (interactions evidently can have smaller ranges) so that effects of all terms in the models that follow can be directly compared. Means and inter-correlations of all our measures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Values, means and intercorrelations of variables employed in this research

Level:* Variable (values)	Mean	Correlation with						
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(8)
Party level (N = 236):								
1. Party size (0-1=largest)	0.20	1.00						
2. Party age (0-1=oldest)	0.24	0.23	1.00					
3. Government party (0,1=yes)	0.30	0.22	0.04	1.00				
4. Government experience (0-1=most)	0.27	0.51	0.10	0.43	1.00			
Respondent level (N = 27,069):								
5. Political awareness (0-1=most)	0.43	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00		
Response level (N = 236,642)								
6. Issue proximity (0-1=most)	0.57	0.05	-0.02	0.03	0.07	0.01	1.00	
8. Left-right proximity (0-1=closest)	0.69	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.08	0.02	0.17	1.00
9. Propensity to support (0-10=greatest)	3.16	0.20	0.16	0.02	0.16	0.10	0.28	0.37

* Country level not shown (N = 27)

Given the construction of these measures, our research strategy was straightforward. We estimated a number of three-level random-coefficient models of propensity-to-vote for different parties (with PTV responses given by each respondent defining the lowest level of analysis, as illustrated in Figure 2).¹⁴ Our expectation is that party weight, measured in a variety of ways,

¹⁴ Responses are nested within respondents who are nested within countries. Random intercepts are specified at the country and respondent levels. For purposes of comparison, Appendix A contains models that include varying numbers of random slopes. We do not include random intercepts for a party level since these would contaminate the effects of party-level inputs; however party-level standard errors are derived from an analysis weighted to the N at the party level (see the sensitivity analysis for models that include random intercepts at the party level).

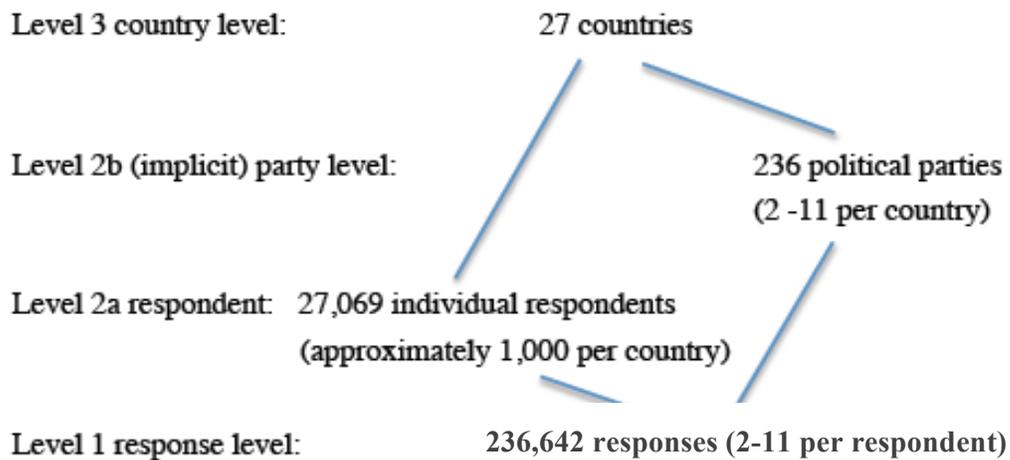


Figure 2: Cross-nested multi-level structure of the data

should prove to be an important moderator of effects on party support, perhaps largely determining the strength and even the direction of left-right and issue affinities.

Findings

We begin by investigating the relationship we expect to find on the basis of our reading of Downs (1957). If voters indeed estimate the weight that parties will have as a consequence of support from other voters then they should employ that weight as a multiplier when considering the utility they get from voting for each party. Party support should not just reflect issue and ideological affinities but the product of these affinities with the weight of each party – except to the extent that support for a party is future-oriented and motivated by hopes of helping that party move to a more favorable position in terms of weight. In this first cut we assume (as Downs did) that weight is supplied uniquely by seat shares that parties control in their national legislatures.

Table 2 shows fixed effects (and standard deviations of random intercepts) for four models. Model A shows effects of party size and left-right proximity in a traditional model of the effects of left-right proximity on party support. Left-right proximity has a powerful effect, as a reading

of Downs would lead one to expect, but party size also shows a strong effect, as expected by H3.

Table 2 Effects of party size and various affinity variables on support for European parties

	Outcome: PTV(0-10)	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
Inputs and interactions	b s.e	b s.e.	b s.e.	b s.e.	b s.e.
<i>Choice-specific effects (party-level):</i>					
Size of party (0 – 1 = 55% of seats)	2.7(0.0)**	2.6(0.0)**	0.6(0.1)**	1.2(0.2)**	
<i>Respondent-party affinities (response-level):</i>					
Left-right proximity (0-1=closest)	5.0(0.0)**	4.9(0.0)**	4.4(0.0)**	4.3(0.0)**	
Issue proximity (0-1=closest)		2.3(0.1)**		2.5(0.1)**	
Size * left-right			2.9(0.1)**	3.0(0.1)**	
Size * issues				-1.0(0.3)**	
(Intercept)	-0.8(0.1)**	-2.1(0.1)**	-0.4(0.1)	-1.8(0.1)**	
<i>Observations:</i>					
Level 1 (response)	236,642	236,642	236,642	236,642	
Level 2a (respondent)	27,069	27,069	27,069	27,069	
Level 2b (party) [†]	236	236	236	236	
Level 3 (country)	27	27	27	27	
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients:</i>					
SD of respondent intercepts	1.4(0.0)	1.4(0.0)	1.4(0.0)	1.4(0.0)	
SD of country intercepts	0.5(0.1)	0.5(0.1)	0.5(0.1)	0.5(0.1)	
<i>Variance explained (percent)</i>					
	39.7	39.9	39.9	40.2	
AIC	1188817	1187588	1187855	1186595	
BIC	1188879	1187661	1187928	1186688	

Note: Significant at *0.05, **0.001, two-tailed. † No random intercepts at the party level.(see footnote 14).

Model B adds issue affinities, as would be advocated by those who see left-right as a super-issue; and, indeed, other issues do add to the explanatory power of left-right placement, but only modestly and hardly adding to variance explained.¹⁵ These findings would suggest that Downs was right to see left-right proximity as the dominant force, but Model B does contain a hint that there

¹⁵ Variance explained in these models is the square of the correlation between party support and predicted party support, taking account of random effects that hardly change between models.

is more to the story, since the introduction of issue proximities hardly changes the effect of left-right proximities, suggesting that left-right proximity is not summarizing the effects of issues – at least not of these particular issues. Model C returns to a Downsian world that omits issue proximities, but one in which party weight modifies the effects of left-right proximity. In that model we can distinguish the effects for small parties from those of large parties, and we find that the smallest parties see an effect of left-right proximity that only 56 percent (4.4) of what large parties see ($4.4 + 2.9 = 7.3$). Model D re-introduces issue proximities and shows that when these are interacted with party weight they no longer by any means echo the effects of left-right proximity – indeed large parties see significantly less effect from issue affinities than small parties do.

These findings strongly suggests that voters in multi-party systems see the utilities they gain from large party support in multiplicative perspective, with each party's weight in the legislature conditioning the effect of perceived ideological affinity with that party. In line with H1, large parties see an effect of left-right ideological proximity that is 3 points greater on the 0-10 scale of propensity to support a party than small parties see.

By contrast, in line with H2, these same large parties see effects of issue affinities that are little more than half (1.5/2.5) what the smallest parties see. By distinguishing issue affinities from left-right affinities we find small parties being assessed in very different terms than large parties, with issues having a role to play in assessments of small parties that, while less than that of left-right proximity, is still palpable – contributing more than a third to the total influence on support for these parties. For the largest parties, by contrast, issue affinities contribute less than a sixth to total influences. In line with H3, large parties are also preferred simply because they are large, suggesting that voters care about the capacity that large parties have to govern effectively.

However, this effect is much attenuated when interactions with voter-party affinities are

included in the model. Indeed, Model C suggests that the motivation to support a party purely because of its weight is quite small and Model D makes it clear that if we are wondering why people would vote who find no large party that is close to them in left-right terms, they are more likely to be brought to the polls to support a party for which they feel an issue affinity than to vote for a party that is merely large. So the increase in choice that niche parties supply apparently provides an incentive to vote that otherwise would be lacking for certain people.

What of party age and experience, the other possible indicators of party weight? In the first three models of Table 3 (Models E-G) each in turn of party age, experience in government and current government office replace party size (as used in Model D of Table 2) as the indicator of party weight. In this table we conduct 1-tailed tests for conformity with the expectations derived from Table 2. These models (with the exception of Model G) come close to replicating the findings of Model D, though with less powerful (sometimes not significant) effects and lower variance explained. Model G differs from the other models in failing to show a positive effect of the weight*left-right interaction. Along with the smaller effect of its interaction with issues, this seems to reflect the “cost of governing” that has been found ubiquitously in other research.

These findings raise the question whether voters take account of more than one aspect of party weight when considering how much attention to pay to the attractions a party seems to offer. In practice, as we take account of more weight indicators so the conditioning effects of each individual indicator declines, and the only indicator that proved able to add significantly to the weight associated with party size was party age. Model H in Table 3 shows the conditioning effects of both size and age in a model that otherwise replicates Model D.¹⁶ As can be seen,

¹⁶ Adding government experience increases the effects of both left-right proximity and issue proximity, but not significantly, and variance explained rises by only one tenth of one percent.

Table 3 Effects of party weight and various affinity variables on party support in Europe

Outcome: PTV(0-10)	Model E	Model F	Model G	Model H
	Weight1 is party age b s.e	Weight1 is experience b s.e.	Weight1 is office-holding b s.e.	Weight1=size Weight2=age b s.e.
<i>Inputs and interactions</i>				
<i>Choice-specific effects (party-level):</i>				
Party weight 1	-0.2(0.1)	1.6(0.1)**	0.6(0.1)**	1.4(0.2)**
Party weight 2				-0.4(0.1) ⁺
<i>Respondent-party affinities (response-level):</i>				
Left-right proximity	3.9(0.0)**	4.7(0.0)**	5.2(0.0)**	3.6(0.0)**
Issue proximity	2.6(0.1)**	2.7(0.1)**	3.0(0.0)**	2.4(0.1)**
Weight1 * left-right	2.0(0.1)**	1.0(0.1)**	-0.3(0.1)	2.4(0.1)**
Weight1 * issues	0.3(0.2)	-1.1(0.2)**	-0.5(0.1)**	-1.4(0.3)**
Weight2 * left-right				1.5(0.1)**
Weight2 * issues				0.4(0.2)*
(Intercept)	-1.8(0.1)**	-2.0(0.1)**	-2.2(0.1)	-1.7(0.1)**
<i>Observations:</i>				
Level 1 (response)	236,642	236,642	236,642	236,642
Level 2a (respondent)	27.069	27.069	27.069	27.069
Level 2b (party) [†]	236	236	236	236
Level 3 (country)	27	27	27	27
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients:</i>				
SD of respondent intercepts	1.4(0.0)	1.4(0.0)	1.4(0.0)	1.4(0.0)
SD of country intercepts	0.5(0.1)	0.6(0.1)	0.5(0.1)	0.4(0.1)
<i>Variance explained (percent)</i>				
	38.7	38.5	36.9	41.1
<i>AIC</i>	1192229	1192890	118531	1183595
<i>BIC</i>	1192322	1192938	1198624	1183719

Note: Significant at *0.05, **0.001, one-tailed. † No random intercepts at the party level.(see footnote 14).
Significant at ⁺ 0.001 in a two-tailed test.

overall effects of left-right and issue proximity are greater in this model, which also explains more variance than Model D. The AIC and BIC values are lower with this model, indicating that it yields more information than Model D (or any other model in Tables 2 or 3). However, the increased effects we see are uniquely in respect of left-right proximity. Issue proximity appears to have a greater negative effect for large parties than was seen in Model D, but the difference is

only of marginal statistical significance and is entirely negated by an opposite effect, also only marginally significant, ascribed to older parties. That weights should cumulate only in conditioning left-right proximity does not contradict Downsian theorizing. The evolving effect with increasing party size of the proximities associated with specific issues was not theorized by Downs and clearly follows a different logic.

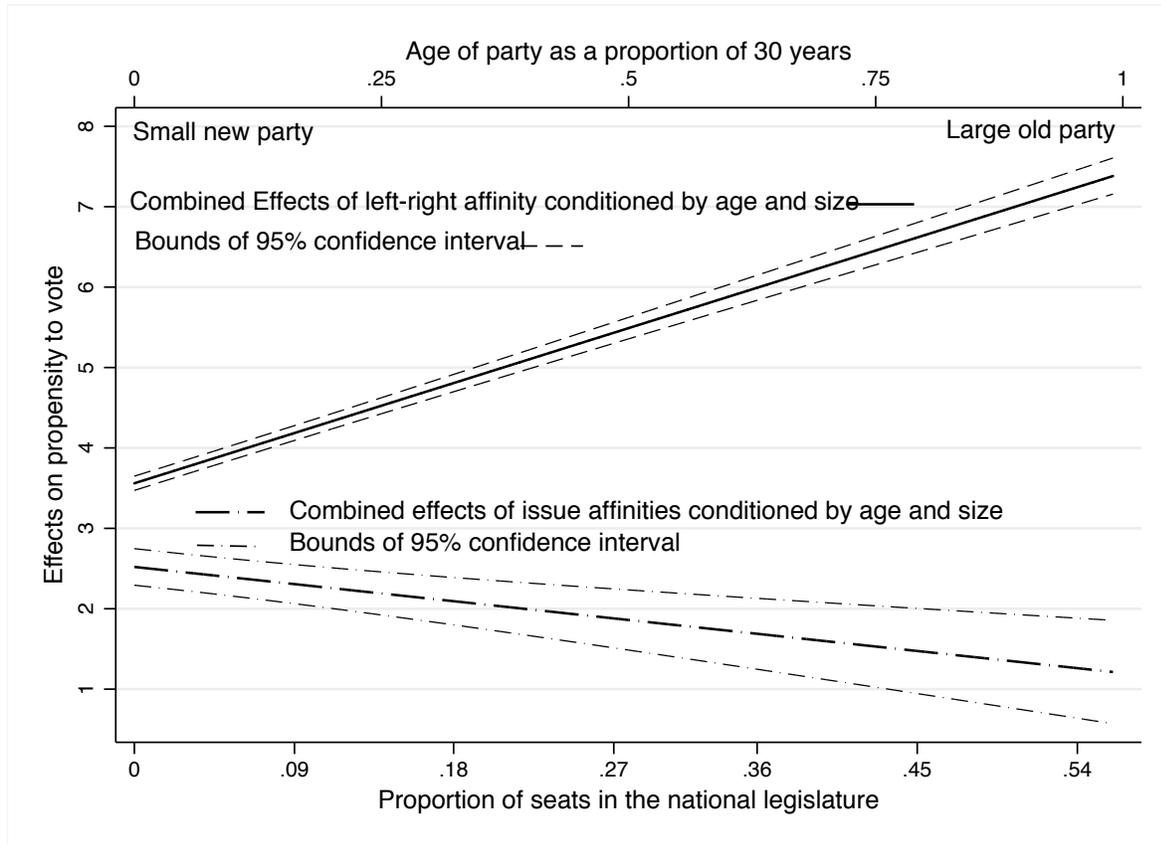


Figure 3 Effects of party size and age in conditioning slopes of voter party affinity influences

Figure 3 graphs the joint effects of left-right proximity (solid line) together with those of issue proximity (broken line), taking simultaneous account of both size and age. This could be seen as the trajectory taken by a successful new party that grows as it ages. Graphing these two developments in tandem provides a parsimonious means of viewing their joint effects. Note that this graph follows conventions recommended by Brambor, Clark and Golder (2005). So the Y-axis does not show values of the outcome variable but the magnitudes of coefficients. The graph

shows clearly that while the effect of left-right affinity increases dramatically with increasing party size and age, those of issue affinity do not. Indeed, the effects of issue affinities are at a maximum for small parties, where they almost match the effects of left-right proximity.

Nevertheless, the difference between a model that takes account of both size and age of party and one that takes account only of party size, even if statistically significant, is small. Downs was not wrong to focus on party size as his indicator of party weight. This is our substantive reason for focusing on party size as our indicator of party weight in the sensitivity analysis that follows.¹⁷ Still, one point about party age is worthy of note. When other inputs are held constant, age has a negative effect on party support – weak in Model E but moderately powerful in Model H where its effect would have been significant at the 0.001 level had we been conducting 2-tailed tests in Table 3. As a party ages it loses support unless it also grows. This finding connects well with the idea that small parties are supported partly in the hopes that they will, over time, cease to be small. If this does not happen then some supporters apparently desert the party rather than continue to lavish votes on it that increasingly appear to indeed be wasted.

Sensitivity analyses

The models presented in Tables 2 and 3 are based on pooled data collected in 27 countries. Nothing in our theorizing could give us confidence that our expectations would be found to hold true within these countries individually. For that to happen the country would need to be close to a microcosm of the pooled data, yielding coefficients with the same relative impact as in Model D for all variables. To evaluate the extent of country differences we reran Model D with random

¹⁷ Our methodological reason is to minimize the number of variables for which we need to estimate random slopes.

slopes at the country level. The model is shown in Appendix A, Model D1. The extent of variation across countries in these slopes is given by their standard deviations. If we compare these with the sizes of the corresponding fixed effects we get some idea of how much opportunity there is for each slope to have a different sign in certain countries.

The standard deviations of the random slopes for left-right and issue proximity are considerably less than their fixed effects giving us reason to suppose that the slopes will have the same signs in all countries (an expectation born out by the individual country slopes for these variables shown in Appendix B). And, even with random slopes included in the analysis, the fixed effects for these inputs remain much the same as was shown in Table 2. The standard deviations of the random slopes for party size are a different matter. If we include random slopes for party size at the country level, the fixed effects of party size decline considerably and become less than the standard deviation of the random slopes, leading us to expect significant variation in slopes across countries. Indeed, as shown in Appendix B, nine countries out of 27 show effects of party size that are not positive. Still, all other countries have effects in the expected direction of 0.7 or more. The exceptional constituent terms for party size in nine countries will of course also affect the interactions they are involved in. Still, this leaves 18 of our 27 countries conforming in general terms to the pattern found for Model D in Table 2, and graphed in Figure 3.¹⁸

We would argue that random coefficients for party size are not called for in a research design that pools countries precisely so as to obtain sufficient variation in party characteristics, but the general tenor of our findings is unchanged if we include them. Whether or not random slopes for

¹⁸ The fact that Britain (the only country in our data with a strictly majoritarian electoral system) is not included among our deviant cases suggests that the findings are not affected by whether the electoral system is proportional or majoritarian.

party size are included, inclusion of random slopes for our proximity measures make no difference to our findings (Model D1a in Appendix A). Anomalous coefficients for party size also result from including an explicit party level in the model, whether or not random slopes for party size are included at this level (models D2 and D3 in Appendix A). Again we would argue that such coefficients are not called for given our research design, but the bulk of our findings (including most importantly the effects of Downsean weights on left-right affinities) remain unaltered even with this gross change in model specification.¹⁹

The findings are also very robust to different methods of handling missing data. We tried listwise deletion, Stata's MI Impute and R's Amelia II. The different resulting datasets all produced findings that had essentially identical coefficients.

Some might wonder whether party size performs as it does because small parties tend to be extreme parties. We addressed this possible concern by adding a measure of extremism to the model and interacting it with our affinity measures, just as though it had been a measure of party weight (Appendix C). What we see is that extremity does have effects in interaction with the affinity measures, but these effects are not the same as those of party size. Adding party size and its interactions to a model already containing interactions with extremity hardly changes those interactions (the reverse is also true, as we see by comparing Model D4 in Appendix C with

¹⁹ These are cross-nested models with both parties and individuals falling between responses and countries, giving rise to possible estimation problems. Hox (2010) recommends distinguishing the two levels by including dummy variables for each of the units at the level with the most units. For us this would have required more than 27,000 dummy variables, so we used the alternative of subtracting the mean PTV for each individual from each of that individual's responses. The findings (not shown) were the same as those in Models D2 and D3 of Appendix A.

Model D in Table 2). Party weight is not serving as an indicator of party extremism, whose effects need to be assessed separately.

Finally, we address concerns that might be felt by readers who are not familiar with the use of PTVs as measures of party support. We do this in a series of discrete choice models (Appendix D) that employ party choice instead of party support as the outcome variable,²⁰ using a conditional logit model that (because conditional logit eliminates non-voters) is fleshed out by means of random effects and logit.mixed models. These latter analyses produce findings that are very similar to the equivalent PTV analysis (Model D) that was reported earlier.

Discussion

Party matters. It is important to take account of party characteristics when evaluating why some parties receive greater support than other parties do. In particular, in this paper, we demonstrated the importance of party weight in conditioning the effects of other variables. Several indicators

²⁰ We include non-voting respondents in the model by taking their highest PTV as indicating the party they would have chosen had they voted, thereby achieving comparability with the PTV analyses that are not limited to voters. This still leaves respondents coded zero if they gave no party a non-zero score on the PTV scale. Conditional logit excludes such respondents because they made no choice. This contradicts the logic of our approach that sees non-voting as a rational response to lack of attractive choice options, so we complement the CL analysis with a mixed effects logit model, and also a random effects (multi-level) analysis that yields virtually identical coefficients. The logit coefficients in Appendix E have similar magnitudes to the regression coefficients in other tables, but this is purely happenstantial. Logit coefficients have no straightforward interpretation in terms of changes in the values of outcome variables.

of party weight have quite strong effects in their own right. Moreover, the strengths and even directions of the other effects in our models are greatly affected by these party attributes. Older and larger parties get their support in markedly different ways than newer and smaller parties do. So by omitting party weight from our models of party support we not only omit important effects. We also omit major sources of heterogeneity in the manner in which parties of different weights receive their support.

The bases of support for large old parties are intimately connected with the left-right spectrum of political discourse. For these parties by far the most important source of support comes from Downsean left-right proximity. Figure 4, in contrast to Figure 3, graphs *values of* the outcome variable rather than *effects on* the outcome variable. As shown there, whereas someone as far away as possible from a small, new party in left-right terms should score that party 0 on

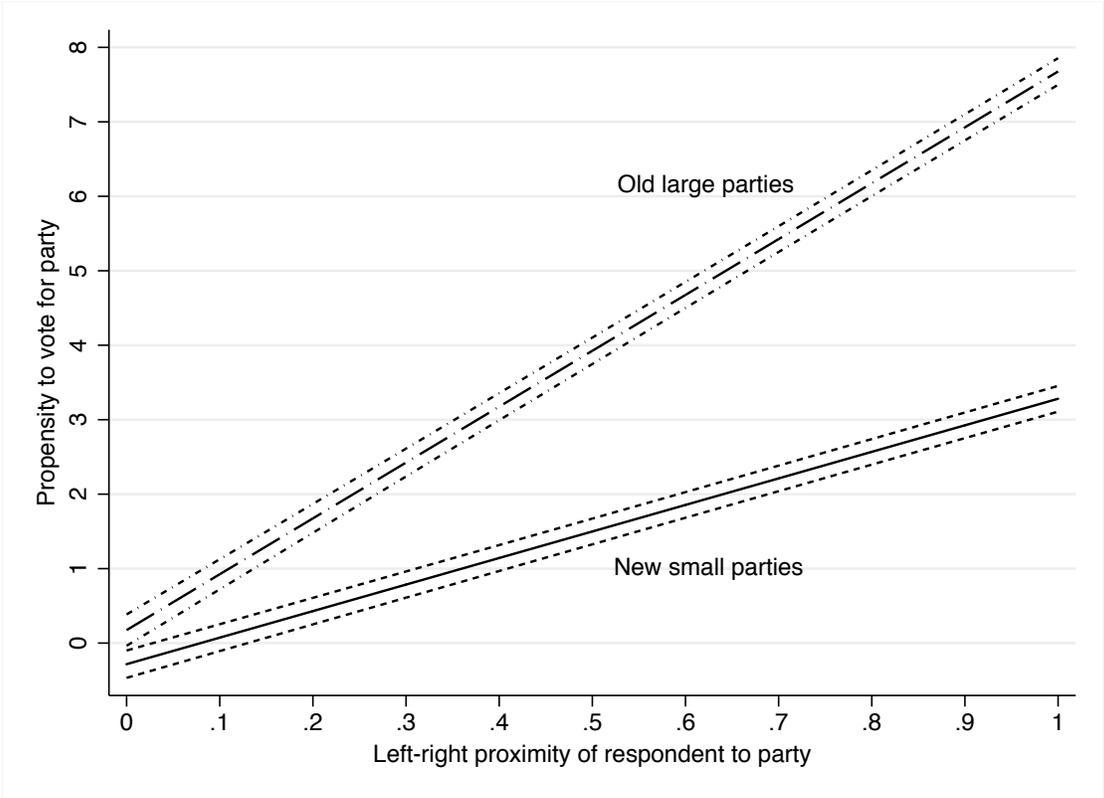


Figure 4 Effects of changing party size on vote propensity, for parties of different types (small = under 10% of seats, large = over 45%; new = under 6 years old, older = 30 years old or more). Estimates based on 1,000 simulations.

the 0-10 propensity to vote scale, for the largest old parties in our dataset, more than 30 years since their founding and controlling 45-56% of legislative seats, a respondent who is at the same point as the party in left-right terms should give that party a score of close to 8 (issue proximity being held at its mean value).²¹ For younger smaller parties, left-right proximity is still important in garnering support (the coefficient on that input variable was substantial in all our models) but, for the youngest and smallest parties, its importance is less than half what it is for the oldest and largest parties (the slope of the lower line in Figure 4 is less than half the slope of the upper line).

The surprising twist in our findings is that the importance of issue proximities does not evolve in the same way as does the importance of left-right proximity with increasing party size. It seems that issue proximities actually decline in importance with increasing party size, though some model specifications show them remaining unchanged. At all events, effects of issue affinities do not appear to be governed by party weight in the same way as is left-right affinity, so scholars who have seen left-right proximity as a “super issue” need to re-think this characterization. For small parties, issues we measure come close in importance to left-right ideology in determining party support. For large parties the issues we measure play virtually no role in comparison with the role of ideological affinity. If we had more comprehensive measures of issue affinity it seems likely that issues would out-perform ideology for small parties but not for large.

Our findings accord nicely with recent research (De Vries and Hobolt 2012) suggesting that niche parties seek support on the basis of issues that are not tied into the left-right dimension of party contestation but suggests a different interpretation for those research findings, more consistent with Downsian theorizing. In our view small parties seek support on the basis of

²¹ Simulated using Clarify functions in R (King, Imai and Lau 2011). Taking account of issue proximity adds another point to the span from minimum to maximum encompassed by the graph.

specific issues precisely because they are small. Focusing on issues provides small parties with a way to by-pass the normal penalties applying to parties without weight. But our findings suggest that such parties, if they do not grow, face a penalty of their own as some of those who had supported these parties in the hopes that they would gain legislative weight abandon them once it becomes clear that this objective is not being achieved.

Paying attention to party weight also helps us understand the dynamics of niche party support. People who feel that major parties fail to address their concerns might still vote for a major party because they think a “government that can govern” is preferable to other coalition possibilities, so that a vote for a large party is a vote for the political order. But most such people will probably fail to vote.²² A niche party that addresses concerns important to some of those who would otherwise not vote can gain support. So niche parties appear to play a role in voter turnout that should be investigated in future research. At the same time our findings give shape to a process that has often sparked scholarly perplexity: niche parties are capable of attracting support from both ends of the political spectrum. The interpretation we place on this phenomenon in the light of our findings is that parties at the extremes in left-right terms often have little legislative weight. Those who might be expected to vote for one of these parties (because of proximity in left-right terms) who instead vote for a niche party are voicing a concern associated with that niche party in preference to casting a wasted vote on proximity grounds (or failing to vote at all).

The fact that not just seat shares but also age and experience appear to operate as party weights in the minds of voters may be due to the fact that some countries do not have large par-

²² There is a correlation of 0.49 in our data between the value of the highest PTV and respondents stating that they “would vote” at a national election held “tomorrow.” So it appears that voters who give no party a high PTV score are most unlikely to vote at all.

ties (the Netherlands springs to mind in this regard) while in other countries well-established small parties can play an important role (the German FDP in the post-World War II era, for example). A better way to think about this may be to see voters as not particularly distinguishing between age and size but seeing certain parties as “players” in the game of government formation, for whom electoral support can yield policy benefits, while votes for other parties are more likely to be wasted in terms of likely policy outcomes. How a party acquires “player” status can be different for different parties, but evidently can involve all three of size, age and experience.

With these findings in mind, it is important that we end by stressing that size and its concomitants are just some of what are evidently a great many party characteristics that may need to be taken into account when evaluating the import of party heterogeneity on the mainsprings of party support. Earlier we mentioned leadership, funding and reputation for competence – characteristics that we did not consider in this research. We hope that those who study the foundations of party support in all countries will follow our lead in adopting research designs that can take account of such choice-specific aspects of voters’ party evaluations, employing the methodology exemplified in this paper, first suggested by Eijk and Franklin (1996), or other appropriate methodologies such as that recommended by Alvarez and Nagler (1998). The lesson of this paper is that, unless some such methodology is employed, considerable bias is to be expected even in effects of variables that have nothing to do with party characteristics.

As a bonus only touched on in this paper, the methods we have employed show promise of providing an integrated approach to understanding both turnout and party choice. The suggestion in our findings that niche parties play a role in voter turnout is only a taste of what we might learn about interconnections between turnout and party support by employing models that study generic party support rather than focusing on support for specific parties.

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Appendix A Random effects in the support for European parties: Model D from Table 2 with varying numbers and types of random coefficients

Outcome: PTV(0-10)	Model D1	Model D1a	Model D2	Model D3
Inputs and interactions	Coef. s.e.	Coef. s.e.	Coef. s.e.	Coef. s.e.
<i>Choice-specific (respd lvl):</i>	-1.9 (0.3) **	-1.8 (0.3) **	-1.5 (0.1) **	-1.6 (0.1) **
Party size	0.5 (0.5)	1.2 (0.2) **	-1.2 (0.2) **	-0.9 (0.2) **
<i>Affinities (response level):</i>				
Issue proximity	2.6 (0.3) **	2.5 (0.3) **	2.7 (0.1) **	2.7 (0.1) **
Left-right proximity	4.3 (0.2) **	4.4 (0.2) **	4.0 (0.0) **	4.0 (0.0) **
Size * left-right proximity	3.2 (0.1) **	3.1 (0.1) **	3.5 (0.1) **	3.5 (0.1) **
Size* issue proximity	-0.2 (0.3)	-1.3 (0.3) **	0.4 (0.3)	0.4 (0.3)
(Intercept)	-1.9 (0.3) **	-1.8 (0.3) **	-1.5 (0.1) **	-1.6 (0.1) **
<i>Observations:</i> Level 1 (response)	236,642	236,642	236,642	236,642
Level 2a (respondent)	27.069	27.069	27.069	27.069
Level 2b (party) [†]	236	236	236	236
Level 3 (country)	27	27	27	27
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients at the respondent level</i>				
Intercepts	1.4 (0.0)	1.4 (0.0)	1.4 (0.0)	1.4 (0.0)
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients at the party level</i>				
Intercepts			0.9 (0.0)	0.8 (0.0)
Slopes for party size				0.7 (0.1)
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients at the country level</i>				
Intercepts	1.4 (0.0)	1.4 (0.0)	0.4 (0.0)	0.4 (0.0)
Slopes for party size	2.3 (0.3)			
Slopes for l-r proximity	1.0 (0.1)	1.0 (0.1)		
Slopes for issue proximity	1.5 (0.2)	1.7 (0.2)		
AIC	1179233	1184020	1164647	1164566
BIC	1179420	1184165	1164750	1164690

Appendix B Slopes of random coefficients by country (from Model D1)

	Party size	Left-right proximity	Issue proximity
Austria	3.1	4.7	3.3
Belgium	-5.3	3.8	0.8
Britain	0.2	4.3	3.6
Bulgaria	-3.3	3.8	2.7
Cyprus	2.5	5.1	1
Czech Republic	0.3	3.3	2.4
Denmark	5.4	6.2	5.3
Estonia	-0.2	3.8	0.8
Finland	2	5.5	5.1
France	-0.3	5.2	2.5
Germany	1.8	4.8	5.6
Greece	-0.8	4.8	2.4
Hungary	-2.8	4.8	2.4
Ireland	-0.4	4.2	1.7
Italy	-0.1	4.5	3
Latvia	-0.8	3.2	1.1
Lithuania	0.6	3.2	0.9
Luxembourg	4.5	4.5	0.7
Malta	1.7	3.8	0.8
Netherlands	1.8	5.9	4.9
Poland	-1.1	3.1	2.5
Portugal	-1.3	5.2	4.1
Romania	0.7	2.8	2
Slovakia	2	2.9	1.7
Slovenia	1.1	4.2	3.2
Spain	1.4	3	1.7
Sweden	2.1	6	2.7
“Wrongly” signed	9	0	0

Appendix C: Extremity versus size (3-level random intercept versions of Model D, Table 2)

Outcome: PTV(0-10)	Model D3	Model D4
Inputs and interactions	Coef. s.e.	Coef. s.e.
<i>Choice-specific (respd lvl):</i>		
Party size		1.2 (0.2)**
<i>Affinities (response level):</i>		
Issue proximity	3.0(0.1)**	2.8(0.1)**
Left-right proximity	5.9(0.0)**	5.1(0.0)**
Extremism	0.2(0.1)	0.3(0.1)*
Extremism * left-right proximity	-0.8(0.1)**	-0.7(0.1)**
Extremism * issue proximity	-0.7(0.2)**	-0.8(0.2)**
Size * left-right proximity		2.7(0.1)**
Size* issue proximity		-0.9(0.3)**
(Intercept)	-2.2 (0.1)**	-2.2(0.1)**
<i>Observations:</i>		
Level 1 (resp)	236,642	236,642
Level 2a (respondent)	27.069	27.069
Level 2b (party) [†]	236	236
Level 3 (country)	27	27
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients at the respondent level</i>		
Intercepts	0.5 (0.1)	0.5 (0.1)
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients at the country level</i>		
Intercepts	1.3 (0.0)	1.3 (0.0)
AIC	1194135	1182401
BIC	1194228	1182526

Appendix D: Discrete choice (logit and conditional logit) models – versions of Model D, Table 2, with $\max(\text{PTV})=1$ as outcome

Outcome: PTV(0-10)	Clogit model (fixed effects logit)		Random effects logit model		Model C Mixed effects logit model	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
<i>Inputs and interactions</i>						
<i>Choice-specific effects (party-level):</i>						
Party size	2.0(0.2)**		1.2(0.2)**		1.2(0.2)**	
<i>Respondent-party affinities (response-level):</i>						
Left-right proximity	3.4(0.1)**		2.9(0.0)**		2.9(0.0)**	
Issue proximity	1.6(0.1)**		1.4(0.1)**		1.4(0.1)**	
Size * left-right	1.0(0.1)**		2.1(0.1)**		2.1(0.1)**	
Size * issues	-0.9(0.3)**		-0.6(0.3)*		-0.8(0.3)*	
(Intercept)			-5.2(0.1)**		-5.2(0.1)**	
<i>Observations:</i>						
Level 1 (response)	228,102		228,102		236,642	
Level 2a (respondent)	26,138		26,138		27,069	
Level 2b (party) [†]	-		-		236	
Level 3 (country)	27		27		27	
<i>Standard deviations of random coefficients:</i>						
SD of respondent intercepts					1.2(0.0)	
SD of country intercepts					0.4(0.1)	
<i>AIC</i>					191278	
<i>BIC</i>					191361	

Appendix E: Use of manifesto data to create issue affinity measures

As is well known, the long-running Party Manifesto Project takes each party manifesto and splits it into “quasi-sentences” that can be assigned to one of the ninety topic areas that the coding scheme distinguishes. Each of the sentences is then coded according to whether it is “for” or “against” the proposition that encapsulates the topic. For each topic the number of mentions are then summed, with negative mentions being subtracted and positive mentions being added yielding a score that is greater the more unbalanced the manifesto is in terms of that topic.

The European Election Study 2009 asked twelve issue questions that are represented among the ninety topics coded in the manifesto data, as follows:

Voter survey	Manifesto data
Q56. Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of <country>	080100 Multiculturalism (r)
Q57. Private enterprise is the best way to solve <country>’s economic problems	050101 Free Enterprise
Q58. Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law	090403 Homosexuals (r)
Q59. Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership	050204 Publicly-Owned Industry; 050401 Nationalization
Q60. Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion	090502 Women
Q61. Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy	050201 Controlled Economy (r); 050600 Market Regulation (r)
Q62. People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days.	080301 Law and Order
Q63. Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people	070300 Social Justice
Q64. Schools must teach children to obey authority	080200 Traditional Morality; 080301 Law and Order
Q65. EU treaty changes should be decided by referendum	020200 Democracy; 030102 Transfer of Power to the EC/EU (r)
Q66. A woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family.	080200 Traditional Morality; 090502 Women (r)
Q67. Immigration to <country> should be decreased significantly	080502 Immigration (r)

(r) = reversed, i.e. the negative side of the manifesto item is matched to the “agree” pole of the voter survey.

These measures unfortunately omit a measure of opinion regarding the environment, an important niche party issue, but do include immigration. Opinion regarding European unification

was added to the list as described below.

For each variable the manifesto score was normalized to a value that ranged from -1 to +1 and so was the position of each respondent. The proximity score for that variable was derived by taking half the absolute value of the difference between the two scores and subtracting it from 1. These measures of proximity were then summed. To this sum was added a value derived from the “European unification gone too far” question, for which we had data in the voter’s survey for both respondents and parties (as coded by respondents treated as “experts”). For each party the absolute difference between respondent position and party position was divided by 22 in order to yield a value that ranged from zero to one and this value was added to the sum of values for other issues. The total was then divided by 13 to yield a single measure of issue proximity measured on the same 0-1 scale as other input variables.