

# Party Competition in Western Europe

## Roundtable Session on Parties

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## Event announcement

Today, there's the third session of our speaker series on  
*Understanding Democracies: Challenges and Solutions.*

- **Nathalie Giger** who has worked on the effects of political inequalities and issues relating to party competition will be our guest
- Presentation on “The Impact of a High Information Environment on the Congruence of Vote Choice. Evidence From Two Field Experiments”
- again, you are all invited to join us directly after our seminar today, 12-13 in Room SCH 100.3

## What we did last week...

- introduced how new parties emerge and by which criteria we can define them
- learned about different waves of challenger parties
- discussed how challenger parties innovate the party system agenda by their anti-establishment rhetoric and issue entrepreneurship

## Plan for today

- In the first part of the session, we do another roundtable session in which we'll discuss your essays on political parties.
- In the second part, we will discuss two different perspective on the issue, as outlined by Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) and Hjorth and Larsen (2022)

## Task

*In recent years, there has been a steady decline in the vote share of mainstream parties. At the same time, the far-right has gained increasingly at the ballot box. How should mainstream parties react? Should they accommodate the far-right by absorbing their political demands and/or cooperating with them? Or should they distance themselves from the far-right? What do you think? Which advantages and disadvantages do you see with both strategies?*

## Procedure

Same procedure as last time: We split the class into two groups.

1. In each group, one person briefly summarizes their essay.
2. Then, the commentators jump in: do they agree with the argumentation? If yes, explain why it makes intuitive sense to you. If not, please explain why you share a different opinion.
3. Brief open discussion.
4. After each of the authors have presented and received comments, open discussions: is there still anything missing?

# Radical Right's Success and Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions

Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) provide an empirical test of Vries and Hobolt (2020) argument. What do they do?

# Radical Right's Success and Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions



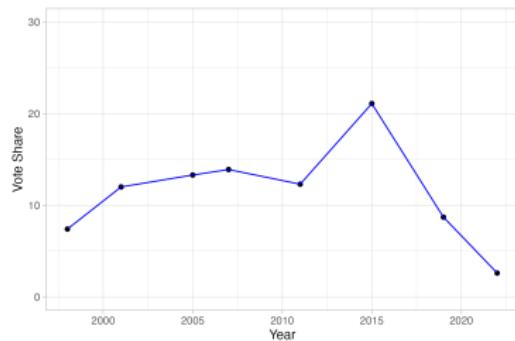
Figure: A change in rhetoric by the German SPD

## Argument

As we discussed before, there are structural transformations on the demand side, having implications for party competition:

- anti-immigrant sentiments become more vocal
- mainstream parties could directly target the new challenger and try to 'steal' their votes
- if that works out, dominance is restored

# Argument



(a) Danish People's Party Vote Share

Denmark's centre-left set to win election with anti-immigration shift

Social Democrats expected to return to power this week after backing once far-right policies



The Social Democrat leader, Mette Frederiksen, has defended her party's more hardline stance. Photograph: Henning Bagger/AFP/Getty Images

(b) *Guardian Coverage* on the Danish Elections 2019

Figure: Side-by-side comparison of DPP vote share and *Guardian* coverage

# Argument

Is the strategy of the Danish Social Democrats a response to the electoral success of the Danish People's Party?

## Data and Methods

Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) argue: we cannot know whether policy shifts are *caused* or just *correlated* with the emergence of the far-right.

- focus on parliamentary representation of the far-right
- use of data by Manifesto Project on parties' policy shifts on multiculturalism
- regression-discontinuity design (RDD) with the electoral threshold as a natural cut-off point

What's the underlying logic behind the RDD?

## Data and Methods

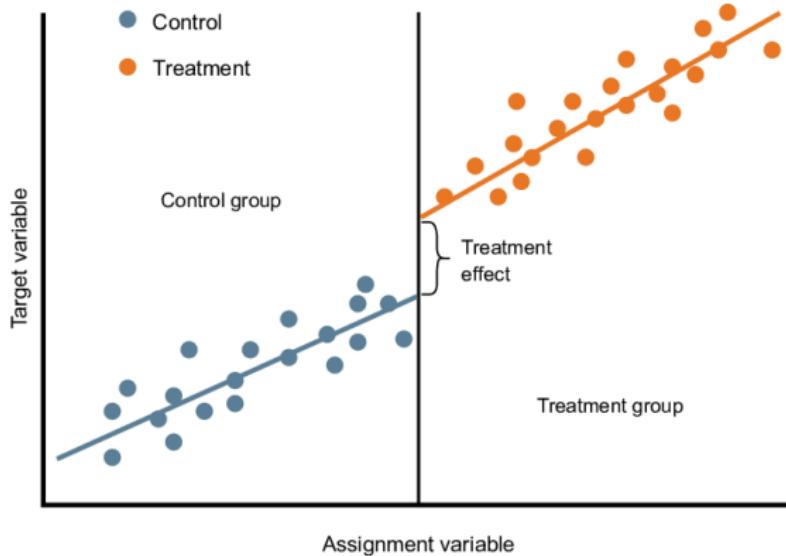
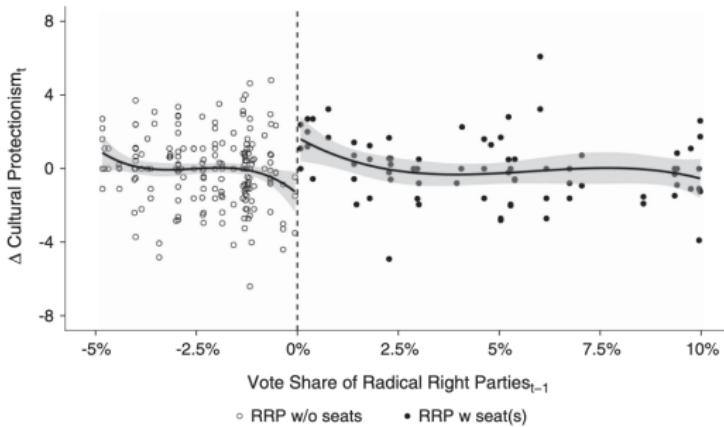


Figure: The idea of regression-discontinuity designs ([source](#))

## Data and Methods



@Max: what seems to happen just below the threshold?

# Findings

TABLE 2 *Mainstream Party Position Change on Cultural Protectionism*

LATE	St. Err.	Bandwidth	Polynomial	Approach	$N < c$	$N \geq c$
3.072***	0.643	3.315	1	Non-Parametric	214	32
4.388***	1.184	3.315	2	Non-Parametric	214	32
3.777***	0.820	global	3	Parametric	272	119
4.853***	1.003	global	4	Parametric	272	119

*Note:* Country-fixed effects and two-way clustered standard errors used. Bandwidth estimation according to Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2009). \* $p < .1$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

What do the different cells tell us? What's the bottom line of Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) analysis?

## Follow-up research

Question by **Tanguy** and **Max**: Does the article distinguish between the impact of a first parliamentary success ("breakthrough") and the impact of an established parliamentary presence, and what avenues might be considered for future historical research in light of their findings?

## Follow-up research

Question by **Christian**: Does a party's tougher manifesto stance on cultural issues merely serve an electoral or does it translate into concrete and lasting policy change?

## Follow-up research

Question by **Christian**: Does a party's tougher manifesto stance on cultural issues merely serve an electoral purpose, or does it translate into concrete and lasting policy change?

- Lutz (2019) and Römer, Leonce, and Zobel (2023): no effect of electoral success, but government participation of RRP plays a role for restrictive migration policies
- but might be too early to call Römer, Leonce, and Zobel (2023)

## Follow-up research

- if mainstream parties respond, are they successful? (essay task)
- we talked about social identity appeals last week, should we also expect mainstream parties to align with challengers on their group appeals?
- what happens if mainstream parties lose dominance? are there any transitions from mainstream parties back to challengers?
- is this a story about the far-right? or does it travel to left-libertarian parties, too?

## To conclude...

- **Research Question:** Do mainstream parties adopt the positions of far-right parties once they become successful?
- **Main Argument:** Two sided coin: mainstream parties adjust, but this may be due to a general change in public opinion on immigration
- **Data and Method:** Cross-sectional study with a RDD: threshold as cut-off point
- **Results:** Success of far-right causes right-wing shift on migration of both mainstream left and right
- **Implications:** Parties are responsive to challenger parties and try to absorb their issues

## Arguments for accommodation

Based on your essays, what are potential arguments why accommodation may work?

## Arguments for accommodation

- following the dominance mechanism Vries and Hobolt (2020) argue that dominant parties have a competency advantage → new parties lack that competency; dominant parties, particularly those in government, could copy their demands to solve grievances right away
- parties should aggregate societal interests; that implies a certain degree of *responsiveness* to citizens' demands; dismissing these demands may conflict with normative ideas relating to democratic legitimacy

## Arguments for accommodation

- in prior sessions, we discussed the idea by Mair (2013) that dominant parties increasingly converge on political issues, leading to frustration and de-politicization of the society; responding to new demands could make them more distinctive again

## Evidence for the electoral success of accommodation

In her seminal work on niche parties, Meguid (2005) investigates how accommodation works building on the example of the Front National.

**TABLE 4. Predicted versus Observed Effects of Strategies on Niche Party Vote:  
Assessing the Standard Spatial Model's Predictions**

Predicted Effects on Vote According to Std. Spatial Model	Strategies		Observed Effects on Vote (Coefficients from Table 3)	90% Confidence Intervals
Decrease	Dismissive	{ DIDI	-1.37	-2.57 to -0.17
		{ ACAC	-1.52	-3.05 to 0.00
	Accommodative	{ DIAC ACAD AC> ACAD AD>	-0.92 -1.12 +1.12	-2.15 to 0.31 -2.09 to -0.15 0.15 to 2.09
Increase	Adversarial	{ DIAD	+3.72	0.70 to 6.75
		{ ADAD	+6.54	3.97 to 9.11

*Note:* In the second column, the mainstream party strategic combinations are grouped by the tactic of the party proximal to the niche party on its new issue dimension.

## Evidence for the electoral success of accommodation

According to Meguid (2005, p. 349), “[b]y challenging the exclusivity of the niche party’s policy stance, the accommodative mainstream party is trying to undermine the new party’s issue ownership and become the rightful owner of that issue. The mainstream party is aided in this process by its greater legislative experience and governmental effectiveness.”

# Evidence for the electoral success of accommodation

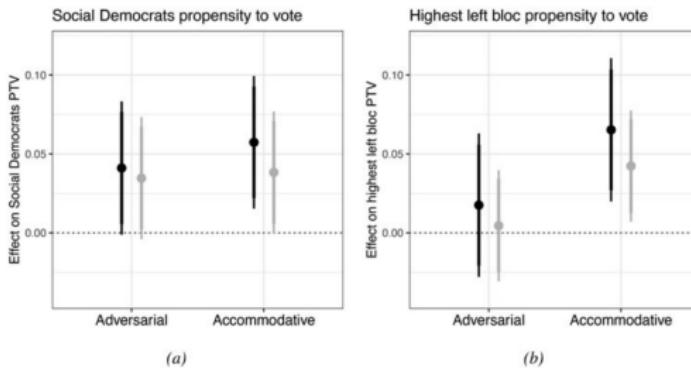
Spoon and Klüver (2020) come to more nuanced (and perhaps surprising) conclusions:

**Table 1.** Results from logistic regression with clustered robust standard errors.

DV: Vote switching	Model 1 All parties	Model 2 Right parties	Model 3 Left parties
<i>Explanatory Variable</i>			
Party position change (anti-immigration)	-1.273 (1.141)	-0.494 (1.763)	-2.344** (0.946)

# Evidence for the electoral success of accommodation

...and finally, Hjorth and Larsen (2022) find that adversarial strategies and accommodation may benefit the Social Democrats, but the left-wing bloc benefits the most from accommodation



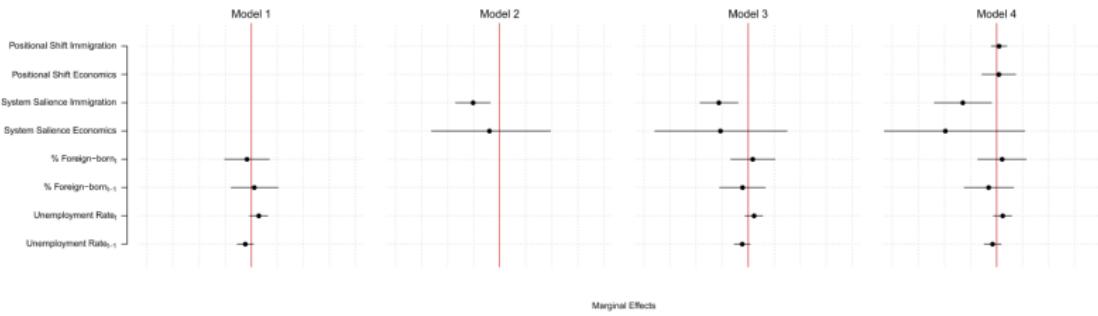
# Evidence against the electoral success of accommodation

Based on your essays, what are potential arguments why accommodation may not work?

## Evidence against the electoral success of accommodation

- challenger parties are first-movers: once they credibly claim political space, reclaiming it may not work
- often new issues are wedge issues: if mainstream parties accommodate challenger parties' ideas, they may lose part of their electorate
- politics is characterized by limited attention spans: engaging with a new issue may distract from parties' core agenda

# Evidence against the electoral success of accommodation



Migration salience and positional shifts against migration cannot win voters for centre-right parties (Abou-Chadi, Cohen, and Wagner 2021)

# Evidence against the electoral success of accommodation

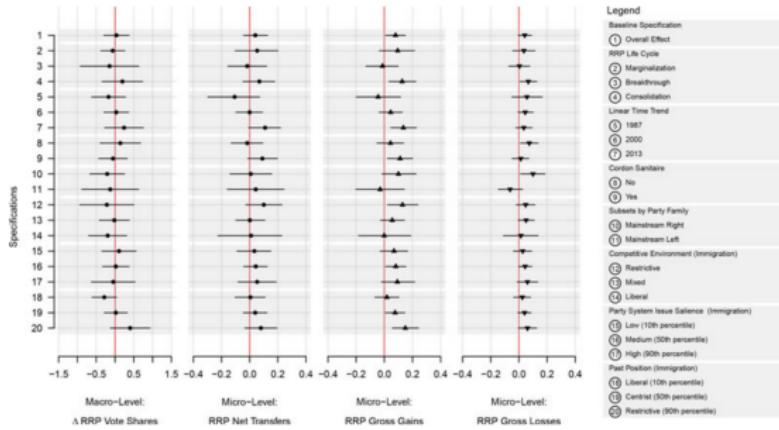
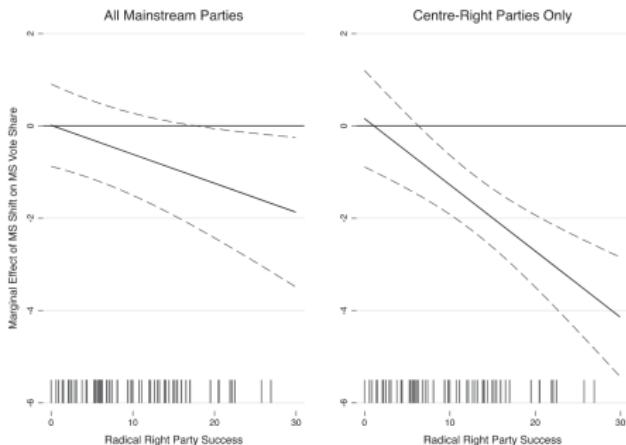


Fig. 2. Alternative specifications—marginal effects with 95 percent confidence intervals.

...and, in fact, accommodation either has no effect or a positive effect on far-right gains (Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi 2023)

# Evidence against the electoral success of accommodation



**Figure 1.** Effect of Mainstream Party Shifts on Vote Share as Radical Right Party Electoral Strength Varies.

The negative effect seems to extend to other issues, such as Euroscepticism (Meijers and Williams 2020)

## What might have been overlooked

- existing studies often zoom in on the electoral consequences of accommodation for mainstream parties but there might be other reasons why accommodation may not be the right choice
  - ideological coherence: parties' values might simply not align with positions of challengers
  - legitimization of ideas harmful to (liberal) democracy
- while Meguid (2005) stresses the role of timing, many studies only focus on short-term effects
- what happens if parties that accommodate the challenger cannot deliver on their promises?

## To prepare for the week after next one...

- Next week, there's again no session (EPSA)
- In two weeks, we meet for our final block on party competition, where we talk about institutions
- **Mandatory reading**
  1. **Fiva JH and Hix S (2021)** Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination. *British Journal of Political Science* 51 (4), 1782–1791. ISSN: 0007-1234, 1469-2112. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123419000747](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000747)
- **Complementary reading**
  1. **Ellenbroek V (2024)** The Effect of More Choice on Voter Turnout Causal Evidence from Germany. *German Politics* 33 (4), 713–739. ISSN: 0964-4008. DOI: [10.1080/09644008.2024.2326457](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2024.2326457)

## To prepare for the week after next one...

- Data snack on institutions, most likely using data by Emanuele and Marino (2024)

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?

## Literature

-  **Abou-Chadi T, Cohen D, and Wagner M (2021)** The Centre-Right versus the Radical Right: The Role of Migration Issues and Economic Grievances. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–19.
-  **Abou-Chadi T and Krause W (2020)** The Causal Effect of Radical Right Success on Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions: A Regression Discontinuity Approach. *British Journal of Political Science* 50 (3), 829–847.
-  **Ellenbroek V (2024)** The Effect of More Choice on Voter Turnout Causal Evidence from Germany. *German Politics* 33 (4), 713–739.
-  **Emanuele V and Marino B (2024)** *Dataset of Electoral Volatility in the European Parliament Elections since 1979 (2024 Update)*. 2024.

## Literature

-  **Fiva JH and Hix S (2021)** Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination. *British Journal of Political Science* 51 (4), 1782–1791.
-  **Hjorth F and Larsen MV (2022)** When Does Accommodation Work? Electoral Effects of Mainstream Left Position Taking on Immigration. *British Journal of Political Science* 52 (2), 949–957.
-  **Krause W, Cohen D, and Abou-Chadi T (2023)** Does Accommodation Work? Mainstream Party Strategies and the Success of Radical Right Parties. *Political Science Research and Methods* 11 (1), 172–179.

## Literature

-  **Lutz P** (2019) Variation in Policy Success: Radical Right Populism and Migration Policy. *West European Politics* 42 (3), 517–544.
-  **Mair P** (2013) *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*. London: Verso, 2013.
-  **Meguid BM** (2005) Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success. *American Political Science Review* 99 (03), 347–359.
-  **Meijers MJ and Williams CJ** (2020) When Shifting Backfires: The Electoral Consequences of Responding to Niche Party EU Positions. *Journal of European Public Policy* 27 (10), 1506–1525.

## Literature



**Römer F, Leonce Röth, and and Zobel M (2023)**

Policymaking on Immigrant Welfare Rights: The Populist and the Mainstream Right. *Journal of European Public Policy* 30 (8), 1537–1564.



**Spoon JJ and Klüver H (2020)** Responding to Far Right Challengers: Does Accommodation Pay Off? *Journal of European Public Policy* 27 (2), 273–291.



**Vries CE and Hobolt SB (2020)** *Political Entrepreneurs: The Rise of Challenger Parties in Europe*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020.