## A Online Appendix

### A.1 Empirical analyses using Kim and Fording (1998) scales

The main empirical analyses have been replicated using an alternative scaling of manifesto positions proposed by Kim and Fording (1998). Like the logit scales (Lowe et al., 2011), Kim and Fording’s, index addresses the centrist bias allegedly present in the original Manifesto Project’s *Rile* scale. The “fix” that Kim and Fording introduce is straightforward: As with Rile, the estimate of a manifesto position is the difference in the proportion of right and left-leaning text units, but they compute these proportions over the total number of positional sentences, discarding those that are neutral or uncoded.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The empirical results obtained with these alternative manifesto data lead to the same conclusions as the ones using the logit scale. Table A1 reports the results of estimating the baseline model. It presents estimates for the full sample of mainstream parties and separately for governing and opposition parties. For the full sample we observe that manifestos have an impact on voter perceptions although this impact is of moderate magnitude, in line with Fernandez-Vazquez (2014). In addition, the content of platforms is not relevant for the image of governing parties, as described in the main text. Reassuringly, the campaign platforms of opposition parties can have an impact on voter perceptions. In sum, baseline results are qualitatively the same irrespective of whether we use Lowe et al. (2011)’s logit scales or Kim and Fording (1998)’s.

**Table A1**: Baseline Models. Mainstream parties. The impact of campaigns on voter perceptions as a function of whether the platform is centrist or not. **Kim and Fording (1998) scale**.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All parties | Governing | Opposition |
| voter perceptions (t-1) | 0.90 | 0.89 | 0.91 |
|  | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.04) |
| platform | 0.07 | 0.05 | 0.10 |
|  | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.03) |
| intercept | 0.18 | 0.41 | -0.03 |
|  | (0.07) | (0.13) | (0.16) |
|  | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.94 |
| RMSE | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| N | 185 | 84 | 101 |
| Significance levels:  : 10%  : 5%  : 1%  clustered standard errors at the party level | | | |

Table A2 test the argument in the paper for mainstream parties. It compares the impact of platforms that involve a centrist shift with those that signal a centrifugal movement. Results for governing parties confirm that platforms are not consequential for these parties: No matter whether the manifesto signals a centrist shift or not, its effect on the party’s perceived position is small — if there is a centrist shift,  otherwise— and neither of these effects is statistically distinguishable from zero. When looking at the subsample of parties in opposition, the evidence supports the argument in the paper: When a mainstream party adopts a more centrist manifesto, voters discount it as less credible than when the party endorses a more extreme one. The effect of the platform is only  in the first case while it rises to  in the second. These results confirm that the evidence presented in the main text is *not* an artifact of using Lowe et al. (2011)’s approach to scale manifesto positions.

**Table A2:** Interaction Models. Mainstream parties. The impact of campaigns on voter perceptions as a function of whether the platform is centrist or not. **Kim and Fording (1998) scale**.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All parties | Governing | Opposition |
| voter perceptions (t-1) | 0.64 | 0.81 | 0.59 |
|  | (0.13) | (0.11) | (0.20) |
| voter perceptions (t-1) \* centrist shift | 0.28 | 0.09 | 0.33 |
|  | (0.13) | (0.12) | (0.19) |
| platform | 0.21 | 0.08 | 0.27 |
|  | (0.07) | (0.05) | (0.09) |
| platform \* centrist shift | -0.16 | -0.01 | -0.24 |
|  | (0.07) | (0.08) | (0.09) |
| centrist shift | -0.53 | -0.50 | -0.31 |
|  | (0.38) | (0.46) | (0.62) |
| intercept | 0.78 | 0.69 | 0.61 |
|  | (0.35) | (0.38) | (0.60) |
|  | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.95 |
| RMSE | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| N | 185 | 84 | 101 |
| Significance levels:  : 10%  : 5%  : 1%  clustered standard errors at the party level | | | |

### A.2 Dealing with measurement error: Simulation-Extrapolation estimates

In this section I report the results of replicating the interaction model using a simulation-extrapolation procedure (simex) in order to address measurement error in manifesto data. For that purpose, I follow Benoit et al. (2009), who suggest using simex to estimate models using text-based data as a predictor. The rationale is that the process of producing a text is inherently random, and therefore any text-based estimates will be affected by measurement error. The simex estimation technique creates several simulated datasets with increasing levels of measurement error. The empirical model is estimated in each of these simulated datasets. The final estimates are extrapolated from the results obtained in these simulated datasets to a hypothetical setting with no measurement error.[[2]](#footnote-2) In order to use simulation-extrapolation, estimates of the measurement error in the covariates are needed. These have been made available by Lowe et al. (2011). These authors estimate the uncertainty in the point estimates of manifesto positions by bootstrapping the coded text-units.

I have re-estimated the empirical models with mainstream parties but taking into account the manifesto-specific uncertainty in Lowe et al. (2011) logit scales. The results, reported in table A3, yield the same conclusion as those presented in the main text. For governing parties, campaign platforms are not relevant, irrespective of whether they adopt centrist or non-centrist positions. This is both in line with results presented in the main text and with previous research (Bawn and Somer-Topcu, 2012; Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu, 2017). There is empirical support for the argument both when looking at the subsample of opposition parties. Whether the manifesto endorses centrist or extreme policies makes a very large difference. With a platform signaling a centrist shift, the effect of the Platform is  and that of Voter Perceptions (t-1) is . Hence the manifesto has a negligible impact and the post-election perceived position is largely explained by the pre-election one.

With a non-centrist platform, in contrast, the relative weight of the manifesto and the initial perceived position is reversed. The coefficient for Voter Perceptions (t-1) is statistically undistinguishable from zero () and that of Platform is very high (). Hence, these estimates suggest that, if the platform is not centrist, it substantially reshapes the party’s perceived position. In sum, the simulation-extrapolation approach indicates that, once we take measurement error into account, the difference for opposition parties in the effectiveness of centrist and extreme manifestos appears even starker.

**Table A3:** The impact of campaign platforms as a function of whether the party runs a centrist campaign or not. Lowe et al. (2011) scale. **Simulation-Extrapolation (SIMEX) estimates**. **Mainstream** parties.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All parties | Governing | Opposition |
| voter perceptions (t-1) | 0.20 | 0.73 | -0.09 |
|  | (0.20) | (0.33) | (0.26) |
| voter perceptions (t-1) \* centrist shift | 0.70 | 0.15 | 1.02 |
|  | (0.20) | (0.33) | (0.26) |
| platform | 0.60 | 0.10 | 0.86 |
|  | (0.14) | (0.22) | (0.18) |
| platform \* centrist shift | -0.54 | -0.01 | -0.82 |
|  | (0.15) | (0.23) | (0.18) |
| centrist shift | -0.73 | -0.54 | -0.97 |
|  | (0.47) | (0.75) | (0.59) |
| intercept | 0.93 | 0.77 | 1.09 |
|  | (0.43) | (0.70) | (0.53) |
| RMSE | 0.42 | 0.4 | 0.41 |
| N | 185 | 84 | 101 |
| Significance levels:  : 10%  : 5%  : 1%  Jackknife standard errors in parentheses. | | | |

### A.3 Models with Fixed Effects

This section presents further tests of the argument as it applies to mainstream parties. First, I check whether the empirical results are robust to specifying country fixed effects. Next, I confirm that empirical results are not affected qualitatively if party fixed effects are included in the regression equation. Table A4 presents regression estimates for the models with country fixed effects. The evidence is largely in line with the estimates presented in the main text (table II). First, for governing parties the type of platform —centrist or non-centrist— does not seem to matter for its impact: Interaction coefficients for Platform and for Voter Perceptions are not statistically distinguishable from zero. For opposition parties, who rely on campaign communication to signal changes in their policy position, the nature of the manifesto is very consequential, however: While a platform indicating a centrist shift has a negligible effect of  and we cannot reject the null hypothesis of zero effect, if the manifesto signals a centrifugal shift the mainstream’s party image changes substantially. The effect in this case is . The difference in the effect of centrist and non-centrist manifestos also emerges in how similar the post-election perception is to the pre-election one. With a centrist platform, the marginal effect of Voter Perceptions is , i.e. the party’s post-election image is largely accounted for by the pre-election one. With a non-centrist platform, in contrast, the effect is much smaller , which suggests that there is much less stability in voter perceptions about the party.

**Table A4:** The impact of campaigns on voter perceptions as a function of whether the platform is centrist or not. Lowe et al. (2011) logit scale. Country Fixed Effects. **Mainstream parties**.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All parties | Governing | Opposition |
| voter perceptions (t-1) | 0.52 | 0.79 | 0.35 |
|  | (0.15) | (0.25) | (0.20) |
| voter perceptions (t-1) \* centrist shift | 0.38 | 0.08 | 0.58 |
|  | (0.16) | (0.25) | (0.20) |
| platform | 0.36 | 0.11 | 0.52 |
|  | (0.10) | (0.16) | (0.14) |
| platform \* centrist shift | -0.29 | 0.06 | -0.50 |
|  | (0.11) | (0.17) | (0.15) |
| centrist shift | -0.33 | -0.47 | -0.33 |
|  | (0.43) | (0.72) | (0.54) |
| intercept | 0.48 | 0.04 | 0.77 |
|  | (0.41) | (0.71) | (0.50) |
| Country FE | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 |
|  | 0.95 | 0.95 | 0.96 |
| RMSE | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| N | 185 | 84 | 101 |
| Significance levels:  : 10%  : 5%  : 1% | | | |

Table A5 presents the estimates of models with party fixed effects. These models reproduce the findings reported in the main text. First, platforms do not seem to matter for the perceived position of governing parties. Whether the manifesto is centrist or not, the estimated effect is small in magnitude ( in the first case,  in the second) and in neither case can we reject the null hypothesis of no effects. Results for the full sample and for the subsample of opposition parties offer support for the argument: Adopting a centrist platform has a small —— and statistically insignificant effect on the party’s perceived position. If the manifesto is non-centrist, on the other hand, the estimated effect is substantial in magnitude . In toto, we can conclude that models with country or fixed effects *also* support the argument advanced in the paper.

**Table A5:** The impact of campaigns on voter perceptions as a function of whether the platform is centrist or not. **Mainstream parties**. **Party Fixed Effects**.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All parties | Governing | Opposition |
| voter perceptions (t-1) | 0.28 | 0.72 | 0.06 |
|  | (0.15) | (0.24) | (0.22) |
| voter perceptions (t-1) \* centrist shift | 0.28 | -0.31 | 0.50 |
|  | (0.15) | (0.25) | (0.21) |
| platform | 0.28 | -0.08 | 0.47 |
|  | (0.11) | (0.16) | (0.15) |
| platform \* centrist shift | -0.26 | 0.15 | -0.38 |
|  | (0.11) | (0.18) | (0.16) |
| centrist shift | 0.11 | 1.08 | -0.52 |
|  | (0.43) | (0.76) | (0.60) |
| intercept | 2.27 | 1.90 | 2.53 |
|  | (0.46) | (0.84) | (0.67) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Party FE | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 |
|  | 0.41 | 0.33 | 0.42 |
| RMSE | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| N | 185 | 84 | 101 |
| Significance levels:  : 10%  : 5%  : 1% | | | |

### A.4 The Long-Term Effect of Campaign Platforms

To illustrate the difference in the effect of centrist and non-centrist platforms on parties’ perceived positions, this section presents several plots with the predicted outcome depending on the type of platform that the party campaigns on. Given that the empirical models are dynamic —they include a lagged dependent variable— I follow the strategy proposed by Williams and Whitten (2012) and report the predicted perceived party position over the long-term.

I present four plots, two for mainstream parties and two for niche ones. In each plot the initial perceived position is the same and what varies is the position advocated in the manifesto —as scaled by Lowe et al. (2011)—. Predictions are generated up to four election periods *after* the new platform is adopted. These prediction plots report evidence in support of the argument in the paper.

The first plot, figure A1, presents the predicted evolution of a mainstream party’s image that is initially placed at position  on the left-right scale. The blue line defines the evolution of the party’s perceived position if it proposes a more centrist manifesto located at position . The red line, in contrast, reflects the prediction when the party proposes a more extreme manifesto (located at 2). Both predictions include their corresponding confidence intervals. As a benchmark, the black line plots the predicted pattern if the manifesto endorses the same position where the party is initially placed, i.e.  on the left-right scale. As can be seen, while proposing a more centrist manifesto barely moves the party’s perceived position in that direction, proposing a more centrist one significantly shifts the party’s image in the expected direction. This is consistent with argument in the paper.

**Figure A1**: Predicted evolution left-right image. Mainstream Party. **Initial perceived position: 3**

Figure A2 also refers to a mainstream party but changing its initial perceived position. Namely, a political party is initially perceived (on average) at position  on a 0-10 left-right scale. The red line and its confidence interval indicate the predicted perception of the party if it chooses a more extreme manifesto at position . The blue line and its confidence interval report the predicted evolution of the party’s image if it adopts a more centrist manifesto at position . The benchmark of comparison is the black line, i.e. the expected perception if the party campaigns on a manifesto that mimics the initial party reputation (position 7). While the prediction with the more centrist manifesto is practically undistinguishable from the benchmark, the predicted image with a more extreme manifesto shifts significantly in that direction. This long-term prediction thus provides further evidence that campaigning on more extreme positions has a stronger effect on mainstream parties’ images than campaign on centrist ones.

**Figure A2:** Predicted evolution left-right image. Mainstream Party. **Initial perceived position: 7**

Figure A3 turns the attention to niche parties. It presents the predicted values of the dependent variable for a niche party that is initially perceived at position . The red line and its confidence interval reflect the expected evolution of a party that runs the campaign on a more extreme platform (at ). The blue line corresponds to the prediction when the party decides to move closer to the center with a manifesto at . The benchmark is again defined by the black line that reflects the predicted pattern if the party stays put by endorsing the position  in its manifesto. In line with the argument in the paper, for niche parties the effectiveness of centrist vs extreme platforms is reversed. While a extreme platform is barely distinguishable from the benchmark, adopting a more centrist platform tends to move the party closer to the center. This effect is particularly apparent when comparing the evolution between the centrist platform and the benchmark. Note, however, that the difference in the expected outcome between a centrist and an extreme platform is only statistically significant after two election periods.

**Figure A3:** Predicted evolution left-right image. Niche Party. **Initial perceived position: 3**

Lastly, figure A4 plots the predicted values for a niche party that is initially perceived to be at position  on a 0-10 left-right scale. The red line refers to the scenario where the party adopts a more extreme manifesto at . The blue line, as before, corresponds to the scenario where the party presents a more centrist platform (at ). The black line corresponds to the benchmark of comparison, in which the party campaigns on the same position where it is initially perceived. The evidence in this figure suggests that adopting a more extreme platform does not help the party to be perceived as more extreme. Indeed the perceived position shifts in the opposite direction. Consistent with the argument, a centrist platform is more effective: Relative to the benchmark, adopting a centrist manifesto helps the party be perceived as closer to the center. Note how, as in the previous example, the difference in the impact of centrist and extreme manifestos is *not* statistically obvious in the short-term. The difference only becomes statistically significant after three election periods. This is largely due to the high uncertainty around the predicted impact of extreme manifestos.

**Figure A4**: Predicted evolution left-right image. Niche Party. **Initial perceived position: 7**

### A.5 Additional descriptive statistics

Table A6 summarizes the countries and time periods that these election studies cover.

**Table A6:** Countries and time periods included in the empirical analyses.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Time period** | **Number of elections** | **Number of parties** |
| Sweden | (1979-2006) | 9 | 7 |
| Netherlands | (1971-2010) | 13 | 8 |
| Norway | (1977-2009) | 9 | 7 |
| Germany | (1976-2009) | 10 | 5 |
| Great Britain | (1983-2010) | 7 | 3 |
| Denmark | (1994-2011) | 6 | 10 |
| Spain | (1986-2008) | 7 | 3 |

**Table A7:** List of parties and elections included in the dataset. In **bold**: years in which the party is in opposition.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Party name** | **Elections** |
| *Great Britain* |  |
| Conservative Party | 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, **2001**, **2005**, **2010** |
| Labour Party | **1983**, **1987**, **1992**, **1997**, 2001, 2005, 2010 |
| Liberal Democrats | **1983**, **1987**, **1992**, **1997**, **2001**, **2005**, **2010** |
| *Denmark* |  |
| Center Party | 1994, 1998, **2001**, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| Christian Democrats | 1994, **1998**, **2001**, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| Conservative Party | 1994, **1998**, **2001**, 2005, 2007, **2011** |
| Liberal Party | 1994, **1998**, **2001**, 2005, 2007, **2011** |
| People’s Party | **1998**, **2001**, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| Progress Party | **1994**, **1998**, **2001**, **2005**, **2007** |
| Radical Liberal Party | 1994, 1998, 2001, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| Red Green Coalition | **1994**, **1998**, **2001**, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| Social Democratic Party | 1994, 1998, 2001, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| Socialist Party | **1994**, **1998**, **2001**, **2005**, **2007**, **2011** |
| *Germany* |  |
| Christian Democrats | **1976**, **1983**, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1998, **2002**, **2005**, 2005, 2009 |
| Green Party | **1983**, **1987**, **1990**, **1998**, 2002, 2005, **2009** |
| Left Party | **1990**, **1998**, **2002**, **2005**, **2009** |
| Liberal Party | 1976, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1998, **2002**, **2005**, **2009** |
| Social Democrats | 1976, 1983, **1987**, **1990**, **1998**, 2002, 2005, 2009 |
| *Netherlands* |  |
| Christian Democrats | 1981, 1982, 1986, 1989, 1994, **1998**, **2002**, 2003, 2006, 2010 |
| Democrats 66 | **1971**, **1972**, **1981**, 1982, **1986**, **1989**, **1994**, 1998, 2002, **2003**, 2006, **2010** |
| Green Left | **2002**, **2003**, **2006**, **2010** |
| Pim Fortuyn League | **2002**, 2003, **2006** |
| Labor Party | **1971**, **1972**, **1981**, 1982, **1986**, **1989**, 1994, 1998, 2002, **2003**, **2006**, 2010 |
| Party for Freedom | **2006**, **2010** |
| Socialist Party | **2002**, **2003**, **2006**, **2010** |
| Liberal Party | 1971, 1972, 1981, **1982**, 1986, 1989, **1994**, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, **2010** |
| *Norway* |  |
| Christian Democratic Party | **1977**, **1981**, 1985, 1989, 1993, **1997**, 2001, 2005, **2009** |
| Conservative Party | **1977**, **1981**, 1985, 1989, 1993, **1997**, **2001**, 2005, **2009** |
| Labor Party | 1977, 1981, **1985**, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001, **2005**, 2009 |
| Liberal Party | **1977**, **1981**, **1985**, **1989**, **1993**, **1997**, 2001, **2005**, **2009** |
| Progress Party | **1977**, **1981**, **1985**, **1989**, **1993**, **1997**, **2001**, **2005**, **2009** |
| Socialist Party | **1977**, **1981**, **1985**, **1989**, **1993**, **1997**, **2001**, 2005, 2009 |
| *Sweden* |  |
| Center Party | 1979, 1982, **1985**, **1988**, **1991**, **1998**, **2002**, **2006** |
| Christian Democrats | 1982, **1985**, 1988, **1991**, 1994, **1998**, **2002**, **2006** |
| Green Party | **1988**, **1991**, **1994**, **1998**, **2002**, **2006** |
| Moderate Party | 1979, 1982, **1985**, **1988**, **1991**, 1994, **1998**, **2002**, **2006** |
| Social Democrats | **1979**, **1982**, 1985, 1988, 1991, **1994**, 1998, 2002, 2006 |
| Left Party | **1979**, **1982**, **1985**, **1988**, **1991**, **1994**, **1998**, **2002**, **2006** |
| Liberal Party | 1979, 1982, **1985**, **1988**, **1991**, 1994, **1998**, **2002**, **2006** |
| *Spain* |  |
| Conservative Party | **1986**, **1989**, **1993**, **1996**, 2000, 2004, **2008** |
| Left Party | **1986**, **1989**, **1993**, **1996**, **2000**, **2004**, **2008** |
| Socialist Party | 1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, **2000**, **2004**, 2008 |

**Table A8:** Summary statistics of the variables in the models.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max | N |
| *Voter Perceptions* | 5 | 2.2 | 0.7 | 9 | 310 |
| *Platform (logit scale)* | 4.9 | 1.6 | 0 | 9.6 | 317 |
| *Std error in Platform (logit scale)* | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 1.1 | 317 |
| *Platform (Kim et al. scale)* | 4.3 | 2.1 | 0 | 10 | 317 |
| *Centrist (logit scale criterion)* | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 | 293 |
| *Centrist (Kim et al. criterion)* | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 | 293 |
| *In Government* | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 | 342 |

To confirm that there is common support for interaction terms, the following figure plots the distribution of the variable Platform both when Centrist Shift  and also when Centrist Shift .

**Figure A5:** Distribution of campaign platform positions (Platform) as a function of the moderating variable Centrist Shift

The following figure provides descriptive information on the difference between platform positions —Platform— and the party’s previous left-right image —Voter Perceptions (t-1)—. This gives a sense of the magnitude of the policy movements that political parties attempt to signal with their campaign manifestos.

**Figure A6:** Distribution of difference between platform positions —Platform— and the party’s previous left-right image —Voter Perceptions (t-1)—

1. Kim and Fording (1998)’s alternative left-right estimate is computed as:   
      
    where  and  denote the number of right and left-leaning sentences, respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For further information about this estimation procedure, please see Lederer and Küchenhoff (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)