The role of distinctiveness in party survival and support

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Abstract

Political parties are essential to the functioning of democratic systems, and the role of their policy positions in electoral success has been widely studied. This thesis builds on this literature to explore the impact of party distinctiveness -- the degree to which a political party's ideological position is distinguished from that of its rivals. The thesis chapters investigate the role of party distinctiveness in three areas of party politics: party electoral performance, party survival, and voter support. Using cross-national data from Europe, the first paper draws on cross-sectional data from Europe, examines party survival and finds that parties with low distinctiveness are less likely to survive long-term. The second paper examines the electoral performance of parties and demonstrates that distinctiveness plays a significant role in a party's electoral success. A third paper uses individual-level survey data from the UK to investigate whether voters reward perceived party distinctiveness, finding that voters indicate stronger support for parties they perceive to be more distinctive. The thesis concludes by discussing the contributions and limitations of the research, as well as potential directions for further research.

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Chapter 1: Distinctiveness and its Influence on Survival , Performance, and Voters

Political parties and elections are central pillars of democratic governance. Parties organize politics by aggregating interests, formulating policy platforms, and contesting elections (Aldrich 1995). The dynamics of interparty competition shape the alternatives available to voters, accountability of leaders, and responsiveness of the political system (Schumpeter 1942). By articulating distinctive positions across major policy dimensions, parties provide citizens with clear choices during elections (Downs 1957). Individual citizens must evaluate party platforms and leaders in order to cast meaningful votes consistent with their interests and values (Campbell et al. 1960). The ability of citizens to perceive and comprehend differences between parties is thus essential for electoral accountability (Popkin 1991). When parties adopt very similar positions, it becomes difficult for even sophisticated voters to distinguish between options (Tomz and Van Houweling 2008).

This thesis investigates the concept of party distinctiveness and its effects on party and voter behaviour. Party distinctiveness refers to the degree to which a party's policy positions are differentiated from those of its competitors. The central argument is that greater distinctiveness provides benefits to political parties in terms of their survival prospects, electoral performance, and public support. The thesis further proposes that distinctiveness serves as an informational shortcut for voters when evaluating parties, requiring less detailed political knowledge than assessing absolute party positions.[1]

The thesis builds upon existing literature on party competition and voter behaviour. Seminal research established the predominant framework of spatial theory for analysing party positioning (Downs 1957). Proximity models argue voters choose the party closest to them ideologically (Adams et al. 2005; Ezrow et al. 2011). This literature often overlooks the

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[1] Absolute party positions are the positions a party is perceived as operating in. This is different to absolute distinctiveness or absolute proximity, which are all transformed into a positive number to remove directionality (left and libertarian being negative and right and authoritarian being positive).

separate role played by differentiation between parties, except where specifically focused on niche parties (Meguid 2005; Meyer and Wagner 2013).

Some work has begun to address this gap by incorporating measures of relative party locations and distances (Bolleyer 2013; Nagel and Wlezien 2010; Carter and Patty 2018).2 But the concept of party distinctiveness and its electoral effects remains underexplored. This thesis builds on scholars like Bolleyer (2013) and Nagel and Wlezien (2010) who have begun incorporating relative positional differences into models of party fortunes. It provides a theoretical framework for why distinctiveness shapes party and voter behaviour beyond current scholarship focused narrowly on niche parties.

The chapters seek to explore the role of party distinctiveness – the extent to which a political party is differentiated from its competitors – in three key areas of party politics: party survival, party performance, and voter perceptions and support. Each of these variables is explored in detail in the three core chapters of this thesis, which argue that party distinctiveness is a key factor in determining these aspects of party politics: a party's ability to gain and maintain public support, whether parties remain viable in the face of competition from other parties, and individual voter's willingness to support a particular party.

The party-level analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that distinctiveness, all else equal, boosts party performance and survival for both niche and mainstream parties across the political spectrum. The individual-level data in Chapter 4 also provides direct evidence that voters factor in distinctiveness, not just proximity, when evaluating parties. This supports the claim that distinctiveness serves as an informational shortcut for voters with limited political knowledge (Popkin, 2020), an important contribution to the heuristics literature. Chapter 4 allows the thesis to unpack micro-level mechanisms behind macro-level outcomes. The

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2 Relative party locations and distances are the measured locations or distances on the relevant spectrum between two or more parties.

findings reinforce those of Chapters 2 and 3 to present evidence that distinctiveness fundamentally shapes political behaviour and outcomes.

In synthesizing these findings, the thesis provides a broad test of the independent effects of distinctiveness in party systems. This differentiates it from prior works focused narrowly on niche parties (Meguid, 2005) or single countries (Nagel and Wlezien, 2010). The cross-national data documents generalizable patterns while the UK case delves into individual-level dynamics. By developing distinctiveness as a concept, measuring it in comparative context, and demonstrating its impacts on both parties and voters, this thesis advances scholarship on party competition and representation. It emphasises the importance of considering distinctiveness as a part of spatial theory moving forward.

Overall, the thesis makes several important contributions. It develops the underexplored concept of party distinctiveness within the spatial theory tradition and provides novel evidence for distinctiveness as a determinant of party and voter behaviour. This adds to proximity models that do not account for differentiation between parties. The thesis also documents the heterogeneity in which dimensions offer the greatest distinctiveness returns for certain types of parties. Additionally, it elucidates the mechanism of distinctiveness offering a cognitive shortcut for voters with limited political information. The cross-national party data documents generalizable patterns, while the individual-level survey analysis delves into micro-level processes. This approach differentiates the thesis from existing works focused more narrowly on single countries or party types. Through these theoretical and empirical innovations, the thesis advances scholarship on party competition, voter decision-making, and democratic representation.

<u>Defining Distinctiveness</u>

This thesis focuses on the concept of party distinctiveness: the degree to which a party's

policy positions are differentiated from its competitors. Distinctiveness refers to how different political parties position themselves in terms of policy preferences and ideological stances. Each political party develops a set of policy positions and proposals across key issue areas. This policy platform allows voters to understand what each party stands for, typically understood on a political spectrum, as from left to right. Distinctiveness captures the relative locations of parties in ideological space rather than their absolute positions (Nagel and Wlezien, 2010).

This diverges from traditional proximity models of spatial theory that emphasize how close parties are to voters or the median voter in policy space (Downs, 1957). While absolute proximity is undoubtedly important, distinctiveness offers additional explanatory power by measuring intraparty distances on economic and social dimensions (Carter and Patty, 2018).

Distinctiveness is both something signalled by parties and objective and subjectively perceived by voters (Merrill and Grofman 1999). Although parties engage in efforts to make themselves distinct, subjective voter perceptions of party distinctiveness ultimately shape vote choice and electoral outcomes. Citizens compare parties and form judgments about their relative differentiation (Campbell et al. 1960). A voter may see a party as undifferentiated from competitors. It is these subjective perceptions of distinctiveness that matter electorally.

Greater distinctiveness clarifies electoral choices by enabling easier distinctions between party platforms. This benefits parties seeking to avoid overlapping indistinguishably with rivals. Distinctiveness also aids voters by providing a cognitive shortcut, requiring less detailed political knowledge than assessing specific party positions (Popkin, 2020). By developing distinctiveness as a concept and demonstrating its multifaceted impacts, this thesis contributes to spatial theory and research on party competition. It argues that incorporating distinctiveness enhances our understanding of party strategies and voter decision-making.

The chapters of the thesis argue distinctiveness provides benefits in three key areas:

party survival, party performance, and voter support. These three areas represent critical consequences for assessing the value of distinctiveness in shaping partisan competition. Party survival speaks to maintaining relevance and viability over multiple election cycles. Party performance relates to electoral and legislative success, which determines access to power and policymaking influence. Voter support connects to parties' abilities to improve their standing in the perceptions of voters. Together these factors capture how distinctiveness allows parties to thrive electorally, endure politically, and resonate with supporters. By evaluating distinctiveness through these three prisms, this thesis will demonstrate the benefits greater differentiation provides to parties seeking durable competitive advantage.

The empirical analysis draws on diverse data spanning 33 democracies over several decades. Chapter 2 demonstrates parties lacking distinctiveness face greater risk of decline over time, while Chapter 3 shows distinctiveness boosts vote share. Effects vary based on economic versus social policy dimensions and party family type. Chapter 4 reveals voters reward perceived distinctiveness, especially those less attentive to politics for whom it offers an informational shortcut. Together, these findings challenge proximity models overlooking differentiation. They establish distinctiveness as a critical determinant of party competition and voter decision-making. Incorporating distinctiveness into spatial theory can significantly advance scholarship on party strategies and electoral behaviour.

Spatial theory and Distinctiveness

Because distinctiveness is inherently about the relative positions of parties along policy dimensions, it is conceptualised and measured based on the spatial theory of elections. Spatial theory, originating in Downs' (1957) seminal work, argues that party competition and voter choice occur along spatial policy dimensions and that voters then choose the party closest to them in this policy space. Distinctiveness, meanwhile, refers to how unique a party's policy

platform is compared to its rivals. The relative spatial locations of parties is precisely what defines how distinctive or distinct they are from one another.

While the concept of party distinctiveness has been underexplored, some recent work has begun incorporating measures of relative party locations and distances, in particular that of Bolleyer (2013) and Nagel and Wlezien (2010). Bolleyer (2013) found that new parties with more distinct profiles compared to established parties were more likely to succeed electorally. Nagel and Wlezien (2010) modelled the vote share for the Liberal Democrats in Britain based on their ideological distance from Labour and Conservatives. They found that the party benefited from being located between the two major parties.

Other scholars have examined distinctiveness mainly in the context of niche parties. Meguid (2005) showed niche parties that emphasize novel non-economic issues at odds with mainstream parties gain electoral success. However, this frames distinctiveness as a characteristic specific to niche parties, rather than a broader spatial strategy. Carter and Patty (2018) incorporated measures of major party divergence in their models of US elections but did not focus extensively on distinctiveness concepts.

Overall, while components like niche appeals or intraparty distances have been sporadically studied, there has yet to be an overarching framework integrating distinctiveness into spatial theory and empirically demonstrating its multifaceted impacts. By developing distinctiveness as a distinct concept and explicating its effects on both parties and voters, this thesis aims to fill that gap and establish distinctiveness as a critical determinant of party competition and electoral outcomes.

First, it addresses a gap in spatial theory regarding the role of intraparty positional differences, rather than solely proximity to voters or the median (Downs, 1957). Second, the cross-national measurement and analysis of distinctiveness on economic and social dimensions advances the study of party competition. Third, the individual-level survey analysis reveals

micro foundations underlying the observable effects of distinctiveness. This elucidates the mechanism of distinctiveness offering a cognitive shortcut for voters lacking political information (Popkin, 2020). Fourth, the comprehensive empirical approach documents the generalizable importance of distinctiveness while also delving into individual-level dynamics. This differentiates the thesis from existing works focused narrowly on single countries or party types (Meguid, 2005). Finally, the robust evidence for distinctiveness influencing both party and voter behaviour challenges proximity models that overlook differentiation. Incorporating distinctiveness into spatial theory can significantly advance models of party strategy and voter decision-making.

Positions are of course not the only basis upon which parties can distinguish themselves. For example, it is also possible to be 'distinctive' on non-policy factors like party competence (Green and Jennings, 2017) and issue salience (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). It can also distinguish itself by emphasizing different priority issues or demonstrating greater governing competence. These ideas relate to a different concept, which is the relative advantage in some area. Here we are concerned with party distinctiveness separate from any advantage in terms of policy position, but the direct result of how differentiated a party's ideological positions are. That is, distinctiveness provides clarity of choice per se, an advantage where voters overwhelmed by a crowded field of proximate parties.

As the thesis uses distinctiveness in spatial position as its framework, it is worth considering how spatial theory and salience theory differ. Saliency theory contends parties are selectively emphasizing or deemphasizing certain issues to their strategic advantage (Robertson. 1976; Budge and Farlie 1983). In principle, a party benefiting from salience due to issue ownership and from policy position are separate concepts (Basu, 2020), and distinctiveness as defined here draws upon the latter. Two parties could both highly emphasize the same issue, making that issue salient but not contributing to either party's distinctiveness

on ideology. Alternatively, parties could benefit from the salience of different issues, but still not necessarily occupy distinctive positions on those issues. However, it is also the case that distinctiveness in position could reinforce salience. Thus, the two ideas are compatible, and both could contribute to a given party's performance. A party's ability to capitalise on salience may be an independent factor, or it may be that a specific issue advantage is endogenous to distinctiveness on an overall ideological dimension.

The arguments in this thesis about distinctiveness diverges from salience theory by considering not just which issues parties prioritize but how differentiated they are in their overall profile. That is, a distinctive policy platform differs from emphasizing certain issues more than other parties. Policy platforms lay out positions across issue areas to present a coherent agenda, while an issue emphasis is narrower concept. Distinctive platforms differentiate parties through stances across issues – an overarching party ideology – in platforms that define party identity and set voter expectations for future policy commitments.

In addition to the broad spatial theory literature, the concept of party distinctiveness relates to scholarly work on niche parties. Niche parties distinguish themselves by focusing on a limited set of non-economic issues neglected by mainstream parties, such as the environment, immigration, or decentralization (Meguid, 2005). They strategically articulate stances on niche issues to differentiate themselves from mainstream competitors. However, niche parties have typically been studied in terms of their issue focus, rather than directly analysing their spatial distinctiveness. This thesis aims to build on this work by directly quantifying the multidimensional distinctiveness of niche and mainstream parties alike and relating distinctiveness to party success. While niche parties provide prototypical examples of harnessing distinctiveness, spatial differentiation emerges as a strategy with broader applicability to any party. The analysis provides a comprehensive framework for comparing the distinctiveness and success of diverse parties based on their spatial profiles.

Most fundamentally, distinctiveness enables parties to differentiate their platforms and avoid overlapping indistinguishably with rivals in the policy space. This clarifies electoral choices for voters, who can more easily understand the differences between parties when they stake out distinct positions. Empirically, the chapter demonstrates distinctiveness provides a significant electoral advantage, boosting a party's vote share all else equal. This effect is robust across diverse party types and mainstream ideologies.

Parties can leverage distinctiveness strategically by targeting the policy dimension that offers the greatest electoral returns depending on their circumstances. The data shows mainstream parties gain the most from distinguishing themselves on bread-and-butter economic issues, where they can highlight left-right differences. Meanwhile, niche parties benefit more from differentiation on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, allowing them to carve out unique profiles on signature social/cultural issues. Distinctiveness also aids new and emerging parties in gaining recognition and visibility in a crowded electoral marketplace. Of course, adopting positions too extreme and distant from any concentration of voters could be detrimental. In addition, multiple parties all chase distinction on the same dimension, it can ironically lead to crowding together and reduced differentiation and parties are also constrained where certain policy domains are already saturated with competitors. Additionally, mainstream parties with established brands risk diluting their reputation if they fluctuate positions excessively in pursuit of distinctiveness.

Measuring distinctiveness

As conceptualized in this thesis, distinctiveness refers to the degree of policy differentiation between a party and its competitors. A key methodological challenge in the thesis is developing a valid and reliable empirical measure of party distinctiveness. To quantify this within the following chapters, distinctiveness is measured as the distance between a party's

position and that of its nearest rival on each policy dimension. This distance between parties reveals the degree of policy differentiation in their platforms.

The choice to calculate distinctiveness relative only to each party's ideologically closest competitor merits discussion. Parties could perceive different competitors as their rivals. Smaller niche parties may orient themselves against larger mainstream parties. Meanwhile, major parties focus attacks on their primary ideological counterpart. There is potential for mismatch if the empirically nearest rival differs from a party's perceived key opponent. While it is possible to measure a party's distance from any rival or multiple rivals, proximity to the nearest rival is most relevant to the theory in this paper. The closest rival party provides the best baseline for measuring relative policy distinctiveness because it has the smallest ideological distance from a given party. This minimal differentiation signifies the lower bound of that party's distinctiveness. The closest competitor also tends to be the other party it is directly competing with for votes and poses the greatest threat of crowding out votes and constraining room for differentiation (Bolleyer, 2013). Focusing on this key rival thus captures the pressure for distinctiveness in a way that can be applied consistently to all parties and this approach is used for the empirical purposes of the thesis.

A second measurement issue is determining the policy scales used to calculate distances. An extensive body of literature has examined how parties position themselves along policy dimensions and how the political space is structured multidimensionally. Seminal work established the dominant left-right economic dimension, with parties differentiated based on their stances on redistribution, regulation, and role of government (Downs, 1957; Hinich and Munger 1994). Later scholarship demonstrated the emergence of a second major dimension of competition involving social and cultural values, spanning libertarian-authoritarian divides related to issues of personal morality and cultural openness (Kitschelt, 1994; Marks et al, 2006). While the left-right and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions are most salient, research also

reveals other potential issue dimensions like foreign policy as well as differences between old and new politics issue alignments (Franklin, 2010). Overall, mapping the political space involves identifying the number and nature of cross-cutting cleavages along which parties articulate and voters align.

Economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions are selected based on theoretical prominence. However, other potential issue dimensions exist, like foreign policy. Incorporating additional axes could reveal variation in distinctiveness incentives. This thesis develops a parsimonious model focusing on major policy dimensions, economic and libertarian-authoritarian, given their primacy in the literature. and nearest rival distance. While exploring dynamism in relevant reference parties and expanding to specific issue areas could enrich distinctiveness measurement, the aim here is to establish the concept of distinctiveness for the most general cases.

In Chapter 2 on party survival, distinctiveness is operationalized and modelled separately for the economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions, showing that both have independent effects. The results reveal heterogeneity - certain parties gain the most survival advantage from economic distinctiveness, while others uniquely benefit from differentiation on the libertarian-authoritarian axis. Chapter 3 on party performance also measures distinctiveness independently for both dimensions. The results show that economic distinctiveness provides the greatest returns for most mainstream parties, while libertarian-authoritarian differentiation is especially relevant to parties associated with niche or minor status. In Chapter 4's individual-level analysis, the analysis is based only on the general left-right economic dimension due to limitations of the survey data. In the specific UK case, a single dimensional overarching interpretation has been most widely accepted and by the focus on the major parties in the two-party system. Thus, this can be seen as a zooming in on the economic dimensional findings on Chapter 3.

Overall, incorporating multiple dimensions consistently proves important for fully capturing distinctiveness and its effects. The thesis demonstrates that both economic and social/cultural value cleavages shape party competition and voter behaviour. Parties can differentiate across multiple spectra, not just a single left-right dimension. This multifaceted spatial approach allows assessing the contingent value of distinctiveness for diverse parties on different axes. The multidimensional perspective ultimately enhances the conceptualization, measurement, and explanatory power of the distinctiveness concept.

Distinctiveness and Survival: Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, this study examines the role of distinctiveness in determining the survival of political parties. Previous literature on party survival has largely explored internal factors such as instability and uncertainty. This paper, however, investigates the impact of external factors on survival. Positioning is a key element of the literature surrounding party performance, while distinctiveness has not been discussed in the same manner. This paper seeks to use the flexibility of distinctiveness to assess its impact on party survival.

To assess the impact of distinctiveness, this chapter uses the measure of survival as a dichotomous state of being alive or dead. This measure is frequent enough to limit right censoring and allows for comparison between elections. In this paper, distinctiveness is defined as the difference between a party and its nearest rival, while party positioning is defined as the location on the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrums. Furthermore, divisions between each region are made to enable comparison.

Survival is an important area of politics to investigate to understand a party's life cycle. Every party comes into existence and every party may eventually die out. Which parties die out at which points is an interesting and important area of research, as it could differ from time period to time period. Distinctiveness helps explain the entry zones of new political parties as

well as the restrictions and overcrowding that could plague older parties and thus harm their chances of survival.

Chapter 2 investigates the impact of distinctiveness on a party's survival, which could include the impact of distinctiveness on the survival of newer parties and older parties. The regional differences between East and Western Europe are potentially important since the former has fewer years experienced in terms of democracy compared to the western and more advanced democracies. *I argue that distinctiveness will improve a party's chances of surviving from election to election. Furthermore, I argue that distinctiveness will have a different effect on survival from region to region.*

This chapter investigates the impact of distinctiveness using an election 'check-in' for whether the party has survived to be a viable party and participate in the next election as a survival measurement. The findings from the analysis suggest that low distinctiveness is detrimental to long- term political party survival, while high distinctiveness on both the libertarian-authoritarian and economic spectrum leads to a considerable drop in survival in both groups. Libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness is essential to stabilising survival early on in Eastern European democracies, while advanced democracies benefit more from state-market distinctiveness.

The results confirm distinctiveness significantly decreases risks of party failure, though effects vary based on dimension and context. Economic distinctiveness matters most in established Western democracies, while newer post-communist systems depend more on differentiation along the social dimension. Highly distinctive parties also decline over time. The chapter elucidates the dynamics of party positioning and changing positions that shape distinctiveness. It argues differentiation enables parties to attract voters while avoiding indistinguishable crowding, establishing distinctiveness as a critical determinant of party survival, highlighting the need to balance voter proximity with maintaining a distinct profile.

<u>Distinctiveness and Performance: Chapter 3</u>

Chapter 3 investigates how party distinctiveness affects electoral performance, operationalized as vote share. It develops a quantitative measure of distinctiveness calculated as the ideological distance between a party and its nearest competitor. Using party manifesto data across democracies, distinctiveness is quantified on both economic and social policy dimensions. The empirical analysis employs regression modelling to test if greater distinctiveness improves performance.

The results demonstrate distinctiveness significantly increases vote share for diverse parties, with economic differentiation providing the greatest returns for mainstream parties while social differentiation aids niche parties. The chapter argues distinctiveness offers an electoral advantage by clarifying choices and attracting voters. However, becoming overly extreme risks alienating supporters, requiring balance between differentiation and median voter proximity.

In the literature pertaining to party performance, much of the focus is placed on the economic spectrum as well as the economic policies which influence a party's position. There has been a considerable evolution of the economic spectrum rooted in class, as described in Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage theory, which is influenced by several factors relating to the role of government in the economy. A distinct spectrum can be identified relating to the ideology driving preferences on libertarian and authoritarian policies. While the economic spectrum consists of economic policies such as welfare, the libertarian and authoritarian spectrum consists of policies surrounding social and cultural issues, which are often captured in topics such as immigration attitudes and nationalism. It is possible to capture the positions of mainstream and niche parties based on these dimensions, and their distinctiveness with regard to each. This chapter looks at the effect of both economic and ideological distinctiveness

in the performance of parties in an electoral context and the relative importance of these two types of distinctiveness.

Empirically, Chapter 3 focuses on the implications of distinctiveness for the performance of a political party, which is determined by the vote share they receive and the change in vote share. Using a measure of party positions on the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrums, distinctiveness is measured as the absolute distance between a party and another party or voter. This measure of how distinct parties are from one another is considered throughout the paper.

This chapter aims to contribute to the literature by introducing distinctiveness as a measure of party performance. An advantage to the measure of distinctiveness used in this chapter is that it is a flexible relative measure and can be used to compare different states between parties, such as the nearest rival or most distant party, in contrast to party positions themselves which are based on absolute interpretations of points in policy space. The flexibility of distinctiveness as a measure also allows for it to be extended to a comparison of individual policies in future research or extended to directional applications.

With this in consideration, Chapter 3 focuses on party distinctiveness and the electoral performance of political parties. This chapter investigates distinctiveness as a variable which improves a party's performance and expands upon the positioning measure in this way. This chapter will also pave the way for Chapter 2's investigation into the survival of political parties, both new and old. Therefore, Chapter 3 aims to prove that *Distinctiveness is beneficial for the performance of political parties.*

The vote share obtained by a party is used as the measure to record a party's performance, while distinctiveness is measured by comparing the party in question and its nearest rival. The key findings of this chapter are that distinctiveness is an important factor for a party to succeed, and that economic distinctiveness has a greater impact than libertarian-

authoritarian distinctiveness. Additionally, the importance of distinctiveness is consistent across different party types.

Distinctiveness and the Voter's Perceptions: Chapter 4

Though voters are critical players in democracies and voters' preferences ultimately determine if a party will be able to obtain office, the perception of voters is not yet explicitly addressed by the preceding chapters. Chapter 4 provides individual-level evidence to complement the party-level findings in earlier chapters, investigating how party distinctiveness shapes voter decision-making and willingness to support their preferred party. Using survey data from the UK, it analyses how voters respond to party distinctiveness when evaluating their political choices.

The literature on the willingness of voters to cast their ballots for a particular political party has largely focused on the role of spatial proximity, as well as the influence of heuristics. However, it has not addressed the potential of voters to use distinctiveness itself as a heuristic in influencing party choice. This chapter seeks to explore this gap in the literature by defining distinctiveness as the distance between a party's perceived position, as determined by placement by participants of the British Electoral Study, and the perceived position of its nearest rival. This chapter investigates the impact of distinctiveness on voting intention.

Chapter 4 conducts an empirical investigation of the impact of distinctiveness on the electorate's voting intent. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to observe the perceptions of the voter regarding how much attention an individual believes they pay to a political party and politics. *I argue that perceived distinctiveness has a positive impact on the voter's willingness to vote for a party. Further, because distinctiveness serves as a heuristic, I argue that the more attention an individual pays to politics, the less influence distinctiveness will have on their voting.*

To test this these hypotheses, the chapter uses the voter's preferred voting choice and how much the intent to vote for the party is for the voter. Using survey data from the British Election Study, it measures distinctiveness based on respondents' perceived policy differences between their most preferred party and its nearest competitor. This chapter makes use of distinctiveness based on the perceived position of the preferred party by the voter and the perceived position of their party's nearest rival. The voter's position and their preferred party's distinctiveness from them themselves is also considered to account for the direct effect of perceived party position. The analysis finds that voters do indeed indicate greater support for parties that are more distinctive. This effect is much stronger for those with less attention to politics, suggesting that distinctiveness is serving as a heuristic for voters with less overall political information.

Overall, Chapter 4 provides micro-level evidence that distinctiveness boosts voters' willingness to vote for a party by clarifying choices. It elucidates individual-level mechanisms connecting differentiation and voting behaviour. The findings underscore the importance of distinctiveness in shaping voter evaluations and party competition. Incorporating distinctiveness into models of electoral behaviour can enrich understanding of policy positioning effects.

Concluding Notes

Through its empirical chapters, this thesis undertakes an investigation of the role of distinctiveness in various facets of party politics. Chapter 2 demonstrates that distinctiveness also enables party survival over time, reducing risks of decline and failure. The performance of political parties in elections is examined in Chapter 3, finding that greater distinctiveness on both economic and social issue dimensions provides an electoral advantage. At the voter level, Chapter 4 shows that distinctiveness serves as an informational shortcut, increasing citizens'

willingness to support their preferred party. Together, these three avenues of inquiry provide evidence that distinctiveness influences shapes party and voter behaviour. Despite some limitations in data availability and model specifications, the consistency of findings points to the overarching importance of differentiation as a determinant of party system dynamics.

As elaborated in the concluding Chapter 5, the thesis makes several notable contributions to the literature. First, it addresses a gap in proximity models of spatial theory, which focus heavily on the distance between voters and party positions, by elucidating the separate role played by differentiation between the parties themselves (Downs, 1957). While absolute proximity is important, intraparty distances provide additional explanatory power regarding party fortunes and voter decision-making (Carter and Patty, 2018). The conceptualization and measurement of distinctiveness across multiple policy dimensions will enhance analyses of party strategies under spatial theory.

Second, the individual-level analysis in Chapter 4 reveals the micro foundations underlying the observable macro-level impacts of differentiation documented in the party-level data. Understanding voters' perceptual response to distinctiveness is key to a comprehensive account of how policy positioning shapes elections. The survey findings also elucidate the mechanism of distinctiveness offering an informational shortcut for voters lacking detailed political knowledge, connecting to the heuristics literature.

Third, the empirical approach combining aggregate cross-national data and individual-level insights differentiates this thesis from existing works. The party-level findings establish generalizable patterns regarding differentiation, while the survey analysis delves into context-specific dynamics. Together, these components validate distinctiveness as a fundamental driver of party and voter behaviour.

Chapter 5 discusses opportunities that remain for further research. Investigating distinctiveness in additional country cases and institutional contexts could corroborate the

external validity of these conclusions. More fine-grained analysis of specific policy domains may offer additional insights. Dynamic models could better capture how distinctiveness evolves over multiple elections. The antecedents of distinctiveness also warrant examination: when and why do some parties pursue differentiation while others converge? Additionally, exploring multiplicative effects between distinctiveness and other party strategies could find more complex synergies. In summary, by developing the distinctiveness concept and demonstrating its multifaceted impacts, this thesis aims to set the stage for extended scholarship on the drivers and implications of party positional differences.

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Chapter 2: Party Distinctiveness and the Survival of Political Parties.

Introduction

When political parties are unable to secure the necessary votes to maintain their support, they face the prospect of declining or dying out. When an established party becomes ineffective at winning and ceases to be competitive, it can profoundly affect the political system, leading to volatility in party representation and fragmentation (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2013; Tavits, 2006). Meanwhile, some small parties may emerge and grow into larger ones and remain fixtures in the party system through a process of accumulation of advantages over time (Bartolini and Mair, 2007). The more electoral support a party receives, the more supporters it should accumulate over successive elections, and the more likely it is to stay relevant in the political system over an extended period of time (Pedersen, 1982; Rose and Mackie, 1988). Well-established parties develop party loyalty and have an advantage at mobilizing resources to maintain electoral viability (Converse, 1969). But declining established parties that fail to adapt open space for new challengers to gain a foothold and grow (Bolleyer, 2013).

Political parties are sensitive to evolving voter priorities and structures of competition, undergoing constant adaptation (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Wolinetz, 2006). The introduction and success of new parties over time illustrates this dynamism. During the Cold War, communist and extreme left parties emerged across many countries in response to ideological shifts (Ishiyama, 1995; Waller, 1981). With communism's collapse, ex-Soviet states saw an efflorescence of diverse new parties spanning the ideological spectrum as part of their democratic transitions (Lewis, 2000; Tavits, 2005). Even in established party systems, novel parties like the Greens and right-wing populists have arisen in response to changing values and grievances (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Mudde, 2007). While some initially promising parties fade in relevance, the most prescient become entrenched players reshaping the political

landscape through a process of accumulation of advantages over time (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). This cycle of flux and realignment allows party systems to fill ideological and interest gaps generated by social change (Enyedi, 2005; Schlesinger, 1991). The sensitivity of parties to adapting and representing popular voices, both existing and emerging, is thus integral to democratic representation (Daalder, 2002; Lawson, 1980). While destabilizing in excess, party evolution enables democracies to refresh and reinvent themselves rather than ossify.

In recent decades, the political landscape of Europe has undergone significant change marked by the rise of niche parties focused on specific issues or ideologies. These niche parties, including radical right, radical left, Green, ethno-regionalist, and populist parties, have disrupted established patterns of political competition and reshaped party systems across the continent (Abou-Chadi, 2016). A substantial body of literature has emerged examining the electoral fortunes of radical right populist parties campaigning on anti-immigration, nationalist ideologies (Golder, 2016; Mudde, 2016). Their success has been linked to economic insecurity, cultural backlash against immigration and European integration, and political dissatisfaction with mainstream parties (Greven, 2016). These and other niche parties differ based on the distinct issues and bases of support they mobilize (Wagner, 2012). Meanwhile research on post-communist Central and Eastern Europe shows the volatility and the durability challenge confronting new parties in these transitioning party systems (Kostelecky, 2002).

Throughout the period this thesis focuses on, parties underwent many changes in positioning, as well as in the structure of competition between them. This chapter aims to investigate why some parties survive beyond their initial elections and others ultimately fail. A key factor for survival, I argue, is the ability of a party to distinguish itself from other parties in terms of ideological positioning, which leads to a long-term competitive advantage in attracting voters. Political parties must consider how their policies and platforms will give them a long-term competitive advantage in attracting voters. Political parties must consider how their

policies and platforms will ensure their survival in the long-term. This includes how their platforms will differentiate them from other parties. This chapter explores how party distinctiveness affects the overall survival of a political party.

This chapter develops the concept of ideological and policy distinctiveness in multiparty competition and argues it is a critical factor influencing party survival prospects. Distinctiveness is conceptualized as the multidimensional distance between a party and its nearest rival across both economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions. The chapter first elucidates how greater distinctiveness allows parties to carve out distinctive brands amid crowding and reduces proximity-based voting against them. To test the hypothesis that greater ideological and policy distinctiveness boosts party survival chances, the analysis constructs a novel multidimensional measure of distinctiveness at the party-level using cross-national expert survey data. This cross-national approach evaluates the relationships in diverse institutional environments. Regression and hazard models are then used to estimate the effects of distinctiveness on party vote share and survival over multiple elections. The results provide robust evidence that higher levels of perceived distinctiveness strengthen parties' electoral performance and durability across contexts. By developing and validating a conceptualization and measurement strategy for multidimensional distinctiveness, this chapter strengthens scholarly understanding of its critical role in shaping multiparty competition.

Understanding a Party's Survival.

For parties struggling to win consistent vote shares, survival may be uncertain. This section reviews the literature on party survival, exploring the various factors that can influence a party's ability to survive. Additionally, this section will discuss the implications of the present study for the existing literature on party survival, highlighting the novel insights that can be gained from this research.

The Concept of Party Survival

Scholars have proposed various explanations for why some parties thrive electorally while others decline, and the conceptualization of party survival itself is contested. Parties seek to endure and avoid vote loss, reduced viability, and organizational atrophy (Yanai, 1999). Bolleyer (2013), Cyr (2016), Rose and Mackie (2014), Yanai (1999), and Zur (2019) have each examined determinants of party success versus failure. However, definitions of survival vary. Yanai (1999) and Cyr (2016) use absolute definitions based on organizational continuity. In contrast, Zur (2019) proposes a minimal threshold of parliamentary representation to qualify as surviving. While low, this captures parties' key function - winning seats. A party unable to gain legislative representation arguably lacks political relevance, despite persisting organizationally. Like Yanai (1999), Zur (2019) also investigates ramifications of splits and mergers for party system change. Clearly delineating the conceptualization of survival is crucial for coherently analysing causes. This chapter aims to clarify the concept while testing distinctiveness as a driver of party electoral success.

In this chapter, I aim to discuss a party's survival and focus on survival in terms of a party's ability to participate in elections or be significant enough to obtain seats. If a party is unable to win any seats or participate in subsequent elections, the party is classified as having failed to survive in this chapter. This builds upon Bolleyer's investigation on the survival of new parties (2013) by expanding the focus to all parties, not just emerging ones. Furthermore, this chapter aims to build on the party survival literature (Cyr, 2016; Rose and Mackie, 2014; Schoonmaker, 2014; Yanai, 1999) more broadly.[3] To judge how long a party has survived for the party's age at the time of the party election year has been used. While this measurement in itself has a level of censoring in it, because of the time frame creating a grey area between

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[3] Cyr (2016), Rose and Mackie (2014), Yanai (1999), and Zur (2019) use slightly different definitions of survival.

elections, this paper treats it as a viable measurement because it creates a time cushion for parties to decide whether they have folded, or whether they are fragmenting with a key point in their life cycles – an election.

Defining Distinctiveness

The key explanatory factor I explore in this study is party distinctiveness. This chapter defines party distinctiveness as the difference between a given party and its nearest rival in terms of ideological competition space. Several articles in the literature surrounding political party policy and positioning suggest that as larger parties grow and gain more votes, they consume smaller and newer parties, encroaching on the latter's space on the libertarian-authoritarian or economic spectrum (Budge, 1994; Herzog, 1987; Tudor and Ziegfeld, 2019).

This idea of parties facing the threat of being consumed by others is central to the concept of party survival. As a result of a merger in which the minor party dies off in favour of a larger one, a party is either consumed or no longer exists on its own merits—for example, the Social Democrats in the United Kingdom merge with the Liberals into the Liberal Democrats (Denver and Bochel, 1994). To increase its chances of survival, a party would have to be distinct enough not to occupy a space controlled by a larger party. In addition, a party must be able to internally operate without internal strife (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis, 2013, p. 466). In cases where internal divisions remain, splits could create a new party caused by the distinctiveness between itself and its old faction.

Second, and similarly, political parties require some element of distinctiveness to attract voters. To benefit from its distinctiveness, a party needs to be distinct on either the economic or libertarian-authoritarian spectrum, not necessarily both. The economic spectrum – defined on attitudes toward the welfare state and government intervention in the economy – and the libertarian-authoritarian spectrum — defined through policies which relate to social and

cultural — each can be important for distinguishing between parties and allowing voters to make informed decisions. One dimension may still predominate for explaining a party's survival due to the salience for the party. Economics, as the most basic understanding of issues surrounding inequalities and state support, is often thought to be the most critical dimension. Brady (1978) implied this to some extent when discussing voting behaviour and intentions in agricultural and urban areas of the United States, and Boix (1997) found economics to be an important factor that can determine how a government acts. However, party positions must be distinct enough to distinguish them from other smaller, medium-sized, or even larger parties. This allows the electorate to determine the party's main goals and effectively observe their objectives and policies in a comparative manner, rather than as if they were in the shadow of the larger party. The electorate must tell the difference between two parties (Peterson, 2015, p. 47; Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 64)—particularly for smaller, lesser-known parties—for the party to benefit at all.

Lastly, regarding distinctiveness, Bolleyer (2013, p. 78–99) discussed the role of programmatic distinctiveness on newer parties. When considering these newer parties, Bolleyer made it clear to separate single-issue parties and other parties. This consideration allows the more volatile parties to be viewed differently while focusing on the more commonplace party family types. Although being incredibly distinct may benefit a party in the short term, being extreme on one spectrum or another may not yield long- term success.

Finally, building upon Bolleyer's (2013) findings, it is essential to consider that new and old parties may have different levels of distinctiveness. Bolleyer (2013) found that certain family groups are prone to clustering. However, Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis (2013) noted that parties can shift their positions from election to election. Therefore, the family groups of the party may move in tandem with its members. To further explore this, it is useful to compare the median distinctiveness within each party family group and the median within each country.

The Dynamics of Party Distinctiveness

Positioning on the ideological spectrum is essential to a political party's success (Downs, 1957; Merrill and Grofman, 1999). Political parties typically construct their policies around two primary dimensions: the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrums (Albright, 2010). Parties consider that the electorate and interest groups are more likely to be attracted to parties that place themselves in popular policy areas (Baron, 1994, p.35).

A lack of potential voters in a certain ideological space makes it difficult for a political party to successfully position itself there, as a lack of supporters is one of the main reasons a party may not survive the next election. According to Bartolini (2002, p. 90), there are several conditions that must be met for a political party to succeed: the ability to contest a position, the availability of voters for the party, the willingness of the party to compete, and the vulnerability of the party to losing power in the future. The distinctiveness of a party may suggest that this positioning would be advantageous; however, it is equally important to consider that to win votes, the party must be positioned with sufficient potential supporters (Budge, 1994; McKelvey and Ordeshook, 1986).[4]

The effects of changing positions as a political party must always be taken into account, as this can have an impact on the distinctiveness of each party in comparison to its closest rival. Over time, such changes can bring a number of advantages, such as entering into areas with new voters, adapting to the demands of policy, and increasing the degree of differentiation (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis, 2013, pp. 464–465). However, this can also come with certain costs, such as the loss of identity, alienation of voters, and the inability to counter the actions of other parties (Adams, 2001, p. 123). Thus, it is important for a political

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[4] This opens up the question of whether being especially distinct improves survival rates but not necessarily the success of a party in a given election, which is explored in Chapter 1. In each country, there is a different median party ideological positioning, which will affect the limit of overly distinct parties.

party to seek a balance between maintaining its distinctiveness and appealing to its voters.

To survive and succeed, parties must move into space where they can obtain voters by altering positions (Adams, 2001, p. 123; Lachat, 2015, p. 5). Moving away from these areas can lead a party to die off due to a lack of support (Adams, 2001, p. 123; Van Es and Koenig, 1976, p. 18). However, without a distinct position from other parties vying for these voters, parties would not be able to convince voters to support them over competitors. Parties must base these decisions on imperfect information about voter locations from previous elections and move accordingly (Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer, 2020)[5.] Many parties will fail to obtain the optimal degree of distinctiveness to win available votes, and thus fade in competitiveness.

Distinctiveness is also part of the appeal of "single issue" parties, which can effectively function like a narrow focus within one ideological dimension. Issue-centric parties are naturally sensitive to their positioning through policies: '... policy-motivated parties are likely to be better informed than individual voters about the possible consequences of alternative policies' (Martinell, 2001, p. 147). However, other parties may replicate the party's moves to obtain votes by narrowing down these popular policies. Therefore, it is essential that a party can move to a more distinct area on a secondary spectrum to differentiate itself from the other parties to survive. Thus, single-issue parties need distinctiveness on at least one dimension to differentiate themselves and survive, not just issue emphasis, and this requires translating salience into unique positional brands.

Even though moving positions has many advantages (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis, 2013), there are also costs involved (Meguid, 2022). Martinell (2001) argued that a party would pursue its policies regardless of voters, but I contend repositioning calculations may supersede rigid policy goals if survival is threatened. Shifting positions risks eroding distinct brands cultivated over decades, as loyalists may feel betrayed by pivots (Meguid, 2022). While

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[5] Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer investigated whether a party should move towards a party to whom they have lost votes.

adaptability can aid vote share (Schumacher et al., 2013), it can also alienate stalwarts by eliminating differentiation advantages (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2010). Thus, even single-issue parties must balance flexibility with maintaining clear profiles. Losing differentiation through realignment endangers issue parties reliant on niche positioning, despite policy motivations. Overall, the risks of diminished distinctiveness underscore its importance, even for policy-driven parties.

Lastly, although the party may adjust its positioning, the other parties will not be static. They will also be evolving and adapting. The distinctiveness a party has from its nearest rival is in flux. A party may move into an area the other parties have decided to move to (Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer, 2020)[6]. Thus, they lose their distinctiveness, identity, and popular policy in the more crowded area of the spectrum.

Party Types

Although distinct positioning itself is crucial, survival may differ among parties and among party family groups. As mentioned above, each country has a differing perspective on the parties' average party position and policy. A policy considered necessary in one country may be less popular in another—a good example of this is the difference in preferred leave policies in Austria, Sweden Switzerland, and the United States (Valarino, Duvander, Haas, and Neyer, 2018). The electorate is not only reactive to national events but also active; they force parties to rethink approaches to obtain votes. Political parties often are associated with other parties of similar demeanour, policy, and positioning as an alternative to the simple economic dimension (Castle and Mair, 1984). These party families tend to have a similar objective or goal, which dictates their general disposition to specific policies.

Party families, including transnational federations, provide ideological frameworks

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[6] Multiple parties may move to the same location to react to losing votes to the same party.

shaping positioning (Mair and Muddle, 1998). Global events may bolster or diminish family fortunes - far right and Eurosceptic parties have recently gained appeal (Evans and Mellon, 2019). Struggling families face electoral penalties, threatening member survival. While shared lineages create vulnerabilities, impacts vary. Narrowly focused groups like single-issue, religious, extreme leftist or alt-right parties are more exposed, as their brands hinge on specific stances (Meguid, 2022). Abandoning niche positions risks reputational damage. Thus, confined ideologies intrinsically limit adaptability, unlike broad centrist families. Consequently, niche party survival is more perilous. Family heritage shapes positioning options, but vulnerability differs. Even within genealogies, crafting distinct brands through flexibility aids survival.

Pre- and Post-Cold War

Due to changes across time in party system contexts, it is helpful to assess the impact of time periods on these families. One of the most notable events distinguishing periods in the sample is the end of the Cold War, the fall of communism, and the emergence of new democracies (Kramer, 1999), which can differ from established Western democracies (Ishiyama and Shafqat, 2000). Parties emerging out of communist systems in Eastern Europe countries such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Hungary rapidly changed as their roots fell into disrepair (Tavits, 2008; Moraski and Loewenberg, 1999). This left many of these parties vulnerable to falling apart through either internal implosion, a general lack of support amongst the electorate, or potential bans. This also led to a dramatic shift in libertarian positioning and distinctiveness within parties, as the authoritarian parties were less appealing, forcing the distinctiveness to decrease a little, creating a new zone in which distinct parties benefited, provided they were on the correct side of the spectrum. It is also important to note that a wider variety of parties appeared in the post-Cold War period due to the emergence of new democracies (Tavits, 2008). Therefore, in the first few years of these democracies' existence,

survival rates parties were incredibly volatile. New democracies often lack the immediate functioning stability that older democracies have. Although new parties may be freer to emerge and move into a distinctive space, the instability of the democracy and the uncertainty of the electoral system leave them vulnerable to collapse, lack of support, or internal splits.

Impact of the Electoral System

The type of electoral system influences parties' chances of survival, as it is harder to gain seats and recognition in majoritarian systems compared to proportional systems (Indridason, 2011; Karp and Banducci, 2008). In majoritarian systems like first-past-the-post, the threshold to win a seat is higher, so parties may struggle to gain public support if voters think the party has no chance of winning a seat - people won't vote for a party they believe can't gain seats, as that would be a wasted vote (Grofman and Lijphart. 1986, Budge, 1994). Also, without representatives, parties lose visibility and recognition. Even one seat gives a party some recognition, as their representative can advance policies linked to the party (Karp et al., 2008). Thus, in majoritarian systems, once a party secures a seat, it becomes more competitive and less likely to disappear.

In contrast, proportional systems make it easier for parties to win votes and seats, as all parties have more equal chances of crossing the threshold and gaining recognition (Karp and Banducci, 2008). However, highly proportional systems allow many niche parties to gain seats and recognition, diffusing attention and support for existing parties (Palfrey, 1984). A party could effectively disappear in a crowded field and become prone to dying out. Overall, though, majoritarian systems likely pose greater survival challenges for parties compared to proportional systems.

The Age and Stability of Democracy

The age and stability of democracies shape party survival chances. Nascent democracies exhibit greater volatility and churn compared to established systems (Yanai, 1999). Parties fluctuate across contexts, with new parties emerging in new regimes often disintegrating rapidly amid instability. Electoral systems that limit the effective number of parties may advantage existing major players over new entrants (Laakso 1979). Consequently, the survival prospects for new parties are dimmer in younger democracies still solidifying their institutions and competitive dynamics. In contrast, mature democracies with predictable electoral environments and patterns foster conditions more conducive for newer parties to gain footholds.

The Framework

Several datasets have been combined in order to create the larger and broader dataset used in this chapter. To make this chapter as comprehensive as possible, we have used the ParlGov dataset (Döring and Manow, 2019), the Manifesto Project dataset (Krause et al. 2018), as well as the Matt Golder dataset (Bormann and Golder 2005; Bormann and Golder 2005 2013). This chapter's most fundamental data is the ParlGov dataset (Döring and Manow, 2019), which acts as the base set with which other data sources were combined. It is important to determine which states can be classified as democracies, within which party competition is comparable. To this end, this chapter refers to the Polity IV dataset. Any country with a Polity count of 6 or higher is considered a democracy, while those with a lower count are considered undemocratic and are excluded from consideration. Consequently, this chapter focuses solely on democracies.

This chapter focuses on the following countries from 1960 to 2010: Australia, Austria, Belgium[7], Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia Finland, France,

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[7] Due to the nature of Belgium being a heavily divided country, it has been divided up in the data into Wallonia Belgium and Flemish Belgium.

Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom[8]. The United States despite being a democracy, is not included in the data because of its presidential and two-party system nature.

However, due to its reputation as a borderline democracy, Turkey was removed from the data set. A borderline democracy is a country which would pass the polity test; however, the country has had a considerable amount of human rights concerns and violations over the years. Thus, this could be considered a democracy in all but name. In order to represent the survival of political parties in a reasonable and comprehensive manner it is important the countries included in the data set are democracies. Autocracies tend to limit the parties which are active within a country, if parties exist at all.

Another restriction to the data is in regard the United Kingdom and other cases where a majoritarian system is in use. Due to the U.K. having a consistent majoritarian system they have been removed from the data set in this chapter. Majoritarian systems behave differently to that of proportional systems, and therefore it would potentially create an error term, or a level of unpredictability in an otherwise proportional representation system set. In majoritarian systems it is much more difficult for a party to obtain seats, and representation compared to that of a proportional system. Furthermore, the majoritarian cases were not included in the regression as there are two fewer cases. However, in a test where they were included the results were very similar. Despite this, the results included in this chapter are the proportional system cases because it creates a more accurate comparison across the countries in question.

The time frame itself, 1960-2010, provides a window into the survival of a wide range of parties over a particularly turbulent period of time in the political landscape. Many countries

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[8] Due to the nation of the UK, Parties which operate in Scottland, Northern Ireland and Wales exclusively have been removed from the data set. This is done to avoid situations in which a party such as the SNP would be unable to compare itself to the distinctiveness of the DUP.

had been affected by war, and afterwards had been limited by the iron curtain. Therefore, the reintroduction of countries to democracy in the time frame allows a comparison to be done between parties which have emerged from the iron curtain and those which exist during the cold war. The data is constructed from party election years. For each election there is a single observation from each political party that is in that election.[9] This provides a snapshot of where a party is and how they performed and their stance. Furthermore, the cut off at 2010 provides the solution to a potential censoring issue which is prevalent in survival analysis. While it does not solve the issue in its entirety it reduces the limitations of the data.

What Constitutes Survival?

At its core, one of the fundamental objectives of a political party is to represent and influence the overall direction in which a country is heading politically. Whereas the issue of incumbency has been discussed by many scholars, this chapter focuses on the opposite aspect of a political party, the decline. There are many reasons why a party may begin to decline in popularity. However, the final destination for many of these parties is their destruction, disbandment, or shrinkage to the point of being so irrelevant that they cannot obtain enough votes to continue appearing in elections.

Survival in this chapter is defined as the ability of a political party to remain registered and receive enough votes to secure a seat in the next election. It is important to note that the frequency of elections may vary across countries. A party's survival is determined by whether or not it is included in the subsequent election data. If a party fails to meet this criterion, it is considered to have failed to secure its existence at the last known election point. By measuring survival in this way, it is possible to assess the party's performance at the given election and gain insight into when a party may be in decline.

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[9] There is a special situation in which Wallonia and Flemish Belgium, in which certain parties are active in two areas. Therefore, that party exists in versions of the country.

Within the election data, managing the issues of left and right censoring is of particular importance. Left censoring occurs when the given first point of data is not the true first point of data, but merely the first recorded point. This chapter addresses this problem by measuring results before the measured data; for example, data since 1945 are included. To build in a post-war buffer and counter the left censoring caused by the war and the new democracy post-war elections, the data are measured from 1960. Dealing with right censoring (the future) is more complex. This is because the data are more restrictive, and electoral acts do not coincide across all countries included in the data. Therefore, this chapter has created a two to three election period buffer to counter right-censoring, resulting in data measured up to 2010. This does not include the most recent election data, but it allows for a deeper understanding of the survival of the parties, as the current data would be incomplete due to the requirement of a minimum of one election period.

Measuring Distinctiveness

In this chapter, I argue that the distinctiveness of a political party is essential to its continued existence. Distinctiveness is formed from the libertarian-authoritarian and economic position of the party during the election and is thus a crucial component of the positioning debate. To measure the distinctiveness of a party, its position is compared to that of its competitors. This provides a measurement of the differences between political parties without examining specific policies. To determine the distinctiveness of a party, its position is taken and compared to those of rival parties.

The calculations below use the state-market measurement in the dataset to capture economic position, rather than the direct left-right measurement, as the latter is cross-contaminated with the libertarian-authoritarian measure, potentially influencing the distinctiveness measure, and making it difficult to differentiate between the two variables. The

state-market variable provides a more accurate representation of the party's economic stance.
This method is similar to Bolleyer's (2013) methods on new parties.

$$State\ Market\ Distinctiveness$$

$$State\ Market\ Position - State\ Market\ Position\ of\ the\ Party\ to\ the\ Left$$
$$= Left\ Distinctiveness$$

$$State\ Market\ Position - State\ Market\ Position\ of\ the\ Party\ to\ the\ Right$$
$$= Right\ Distinctivness$$

$$Iff\ Left\ Distinctiveness \le Right\ Distinctiveness,$$
$$State\ Market\ Distinctiveness = Left\ Distinctiveness$$
$$Iff\ Left\ Distinctiveness > Right\ Distinctiveness,$$

$$State\ Market\ Distinctiveness = Right\ Distinctiveness\ Liberty\ Authority$$
$$Distinctiveness$$

$$Liberty\ Authority\ Position - Liberty\ Authority\ Position\ of\ the\ Party\ to\ the\ Left$$
$$= Libertarian\ Distinctiveness$$

$$Liberty\ Authority\ Position - Liberty\ Authority\ Position\ of\ the\ Party\ to\ the\ Right$$
$$= Authoriarian\ Distinctivness$$

$$Iff\ Libertarian\ Distinctiveness \le Authoriarian\ Distinctiveness,$$
$$Liberty\ Authority\ Distinctiveness = Libertarian\ Distinctiveness$$
$$Iff\ Libertarian\ Distinctiveness > Authoriarian\ Distinctiveness,$$

$$Liberty\ Authority\ Distinctiveness = Authoritarian\ Distinctiveness$$

In these two measures, taking the lower distinctiveness value is important due to the nearest rival's ability to occupy and consume votes from the electorate in the most competitive area between the two parties. Both measures are forced to favour one side of the distinctiveness over the other in the rare case there is a tied distinctiveness.

Although distinctiveness is valuable, parties would also benefit from being in the range of where other parties are competing such that it does not isolate itself from the electorate. This extremism would be become a hinderance. To account for this, a measure of extremism is calculated annually for each country.

<u>Measuring Positioning</u>

As part of the construction of the distinctiveness variable, it is important to consider its base elements, namely a political party's core positioning. There is the possibility of including the policy positions and comparing the parties more fundamentally by using the Manifesto Data (Manifesto Corpus, et al., 2018) and ParlGov Data (Döring and Manow, 2019) collections.

In addition, positioning is an important variable because it can moderate common policy types within a country given its spectrum of views. For example, a party that may seem extremely left-wing by the standards of one country may be considered the central party in another. It is possible to avoid this by controlling for position. Furthermore, it is possible to view the distribution of parties over a period of time in a given state. Thus, it is possible to determine whether there is a general shift in policy direction over time or whether distinctiveness has increased or decreased.

Throughout this chapter, two measures that are relevant to the economic spectrum have been considered to capture similar variation: the left-right measure and the state-market measure. The general left-right measure is less useful for this chapter due to it combining social

and economic policies, which can lead to collinearity issues between the libertarian-authoritarian measures and make it difficult to disentangle. At the same time, the state-market measure also has its limitations, as it is available for somewhat fewer political parties. Nevertheless, given its clearer focus on economic issues and distinctness from libertarian-authoritarian, compared to the left-right variable, the state-market measure is considered optimal for the usage in this context.

This chapter uses the Libertarian-Authoritarian Variable generated in the ParlGov dataset as the second spectrum (Döring and Manow, 2019). Although the manifesto dataset produces several policy position variables, many of them cross further into the combination between the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrum. This chapter focuses on the pre-produced libertarian-authoritarian variable to avoid errors created by cross-spectrum data.

Determining Party Family Type

In the political arena, parties are often classified according to party family (Mair and Muddle 1998), which relates to their stances on various issues and other general features that might influence their baseline survival (Bolleyer 2013). Certain party families may do well in some countries, and not so well in others. A clear example of this would be the concept of a religious party – such as Christian Democrats. A religious country this set of parties may do much better than in a non-religious country. Furthermore, specific family groupings may have historical impact in certain democracies, such as those which existed behind the iron curtain. A location in which communist parties (coded as Extreme Left) would have a potential impact even in the post-communist era. Therefore, utilizing the concept of party family is useful for grouping parties together and controlling for these group effects in the analysis.

Party family type could be considered an alternative measure to positioning, as positioning is the location of the party's policy and party family is the pre-established grouping

that is to some extent reflecting policy (Mair and Muddle 1998). However, this chapter treats positioning and family type as separate variables, as both have their merits in controlling for party activity. For example, party families can be used to estimate how in character a party behaves regarding their policy by comparing them and the other parties within their family bracket (Janda 1980). This can be especially useful in cases where parties behave in ways that are not consistent with their expected behaviour for a particular family type. This paper uses the party family type defined by the core data sets which this paper is built on, primarily the ParlGov data set (Döring and Manow, 2019). ParlGov defines Party Family by using their state-market position, and their cultural position. These parties were then assigned one of 9 different groups – Extreme Left, Green, Social Democrat, Liberal, Agricultural, Christian Democrat, Conservative, The Right or Other.

The observations classified as Other mostly consist of one-seat parties, or independents who have stood for election. As these individuals do not represent a party and may rely on personality rather than policy and positioning or cause abnormal results in the paper these cases have been removed. While this is a potential detriment to understanding the distinctiveness between an individual and a party, these individuals do not all have a united stance or party family, and therefore grouping them together would create a conflict within the party family groupings, and thus make the variable less useful as a control.

Furthermore, it is necessary to control for both party family group and positioning because the variables are, while similar, different. One of the most considerable differences between these variables is positioning is based on economic and libertarian-authoritarian positioning while party family is constructed from a more cultural standing (Janda 1980). Therefore, while it is incredibly probable a party may exist within the confines of its other family members' positioning, it is not guaranteed.

Measuring the Age of Democracy

The age of a democracy has a significant effect on the stability of the party system and the ability of new parties to form. As democracies age, established parties become more entrenched, leaving fewer opportunities for new parties to gain votes, or create a risk for them to be absorbed into larger parties (Tavits 2006). Additionally, older democracies tend to have more experienced electorates and more established electoral systems, making it less likely for parties to collapse due to inexperience or for reversion to authoritarian systems through elections (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). On the other hand, newer democracies are more likely to have an outburst of parties when they first turn democratic because of the new ability to form a party, which was likely restricted before (Tavits 2005). These newer parties would be far more fragile and more likely to evolve or merge in order to operate within the newfound system. This therefore needs to be controlled for in a simple but standard manner.

Polity is used as the base measure for democracies, and therefore this paper uses it. The Polity IV dataset itself consisted of a measure which required converting into a scale from 0 to 10. This became the democratic scale. Countries above or equal to 6 were considered democratic, and those below were considered undemocratic (Marshall et al. 2014). With this dichotomy it was possible to covert this into age of democracy by investigating the state of democracy prior to 1946, which was the beginning of the distinctiveness data set. The Polity data extended further back which allowed a yearly counter to be created and count each year a country remained democratic. While it is plausible some countries could be considered democratic before the Polity measurement began documenting, those forms of democracy would be further from what is considered democracy in the present. Therefore, this measure of democratic status and age is viable.

Countries that were occupied during the Second World War have their age of democracy reset to 0 in the dataset, allowing for the impact of change to be more accurately

measured and preventing semi-democratic or undemocratic countries from skewing the data (Yanai 1999). Furthermore, countries which have dipped below the polity line were investigated whether to reset their democratic age to 0 until they re-emerged as a democracy. Semi-democratic or undemocratic countries may impact what parties are allowed to operate throughout the political playing field. They can be responsible for the prevention of participation, or disbandment of specific parties, which do not adhere to the ruler's ideology or outright banning of all parties.[10]

Defining Regional Split

A potential additional factor related to democracy's age is measuring the East-West regional split (Wheatley and Mendez, 2019). This chapter considers controlling for region due to the Cold War's impact (Lewis, 2001). The division may account for some party family differences (Evans and Whitefield, 1993). The communist legacy and nationalist tensions have led to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension's heightened salience in post-communist countries (Jenne and Mudde, 2012). Political dynamics often involve questions of the legacy of authoritarianism (Roberts, 2009) and liberal agenda (Stanley, 2001), as well as ethnic nationalist tensions (Bustikova, 2014). In this context, the dimension became intertwined with nationalist ideologies and the communist collectivist legacy, contributing to the dimension's importance among political actors. The rise of nationalist and conservative movements in these countries has been highly focused on cultural issues related to identity and sovereignty (Barša et al., 2021; Brils et al., 2020).

Thus, we expect that countries who were part of the Eastern Bloc will be more heavily influenced by the libertarian-authoritarian aspects of party competition. In the below, region is

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[10] One year in which France dipped below, however, it appeared an unusual dip and was considered a potential error, or inconsistent with common knowledge about the country's democratic status, and was thus set as democratic.

separated into three groups.: Region 1 – Western Advanced Democracies, Region 2 – Eastern European Democracies (post-communist countries, with the exception of Germany), and Region 3 – Non-European Advanced Democracies.[11]

Effective Number of Political Parties

The impact of the electoral system on party survival is partly determined by the classification of the party system in the data. However, this classification fails to account for the level of competition within each system and each country. The number of parties vying for seats and vote share varies across countries and over time. To address this, the concept of the effective number of political parties is introduced, which captures the overall competition that parties may encounter (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Unlike distinctiveness, which focuses on individual parties and their similarity, the effective number of political parties takes into consideration all parties in the system. It considers that as the number of parties increases, there is a greater likelihood of vote share being divided among them, which needs to be accounted for. Therefore, an additional measure is required to mitigate the influence of overcrowded electoral systems. In recent years, several countries have witnessed a rise in the entry of political parties into their systems. This phenomenon was observed in the ParlGov data set before the merging process.

In summary, the effective number of political parties offers a weighted measure of party fragmentation, accounting for the competitiveness of the system by considering the presence of multiple parties and the spread of vote share among them.

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[11] Advanced Democracies consisted of: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.
Eastern Democracies consist of: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

Electoral System Type

It is important to further consider the electoral system's impact on a political party's survival. Proportional systems have a much larger opening for new parties to gain votes, as seats are more accessible for the smaller parties. However, it is also possible that parties that can earn a single seat in a Majoritarian system are more likely to survive overall. Therefore, this chapter uses the Matt Golder (Bormann and Golder 2005; Bormann and Golder 2013) measurement of legislative type to control for this distortion. Matt Golder defined the systems in three different ways: Majoritarian, Mixed, and Proportional. These are the umbrella categories for the wider range of electoral systems out there. Using the umbrella categories was deemed more useful, as the broad scope and focus on the systems are the same, and the focus of the investigation is on survival and distinctiveness rather than distinctiveness within electoral system type. Therefore, controlling for each umbrella group would provide insight while maintaining the overall focus on survival and distinctiveness.

Table 1 – Systems included (Observations in each category)[12]

	Majoritarian	Proportional	Mixed	Total
Total	669	2,970	520	4,159

Results

To assess whether a party's distinctiveness has an impact on whether it is likely to exist in the next election, the Cox model is used. The model takes into account the various variables that affect the survival of a political party over time. It is important to note that the Cox model is a hazard model such that positive coefficients indicate an increased probability of the party's death after the election. The results of this table can be interpreted as follows: a party's position on the State Market spectrum ($b = -0.0662$) has no significant effect on the hazard rate.

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[12] Source: Author's calculations based on data from Bormann and Golder (2013). Democratic electoral systems around the world, 1946–2011, Years: 1960–2016

Unlike the libertarian-authoritarian spectrum （b ＝ 0.126）.

Unsurprisingly, the age of democracy is statistically significant (b = -0.0228***), confirming its importance. Focusing on the distinctiveness variables in the Cox model, both types of distinctiveness are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. The more distinctive a political party is, the lower its hazard rate.

Table 2 – Determinants of Party Survival – the initial regression[13]

VARIABLES	(All) Hazard Rate
Liberal-Authoritarian Distinctiveness	-0.913***
	(0.185)
State-Market Distinctiveness	-0.626***
	(0.165)
Liberal-Authoritarian Position	0.126**
	(0.0636)
State-Market Position	-0.0662
	(0.0668)
Party Family: Greens	0.0785
	(0.461)
Party Family: Social Democrats	-0.154
	(0.281)
Party Family: Liberals	0.327
	(0.421)
Party Family Agricultural (Centre):	-0.453
	(0.491)
Party Family: Christian Democrat	-0.372
	(0.492)
Party Family: Conservative	-0.157
	(0.485)
Party Family: The Right	0.436
	(0.500)
Age of Democracy	-0.0228***
	(0.00357)
Effective Number of Political Parties	0.00996
	(0.0493)
Observations	1,919

[13] Standard errors in parentheses *** p <0.01, ** p <0.05, * p <0.1
Source(s): Author's calculations based on data from Döring and Manow, 2019, Parliament and Government Dataset (ParlGov 2018 Release, Elections Tab and Parties Tab); Manifesto Corpus; Krause, et al., 2018: Manifesto Corpus. (Version: 2018-2); Bormann and Golder (2013). Democratic electoral systems around the world, 1946 – 2011; Systemic Peace Organisation; Marshall, et al., 2018, Polity IV Project, Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2017; Years: 1960-2016.

Table 2 shows the model in the sample of all parties. Suppose a political party is more distinct—the chance of survival increases. It is important to consider the dimensions in which the distinctiveness occurs.

The post-Cold War countries exhibit a significantly higher number of new political parties than those in Western democracies.[14] These newer democracies are also considered to be relatively new. It can be seen in Table 3.1 and 3.2 that Western democracies have the highest party share, followed by non-Eastern countries.

Furthermore, using Table 3.1 and 3.2, the data are split further into high and low levels of distinctiveness. Two measures are used to calculate this: the mean distinctiveness and the median distinctiveness. In this chapter, the can median is used instead of the mean.

Table 3.1 - Distinctiveness Split of Advanced Democracies (Observations)[15]

Advanced Democracies	Low Libertarian - Authoritarian (Dist)	High Libertarian - Authoritarian (Dist)	Total
Low State-Market (Dist)	323	276	599
High State-Market (Dist)	284	347	631
Total	607	623	1,230

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[14] During the investigation, a comparison was drawn between newer and older parties at a dividing line of 16 years. While slightly impractical, it gave an initial understanding of the appearance of parties.

[15] Source(s): Author's calculations based on data from Döring and Manow, 2019, Parliament and Government Dataset (ParlGov 2018 Release, Elections Tab and Parties Tab); Manifesto Corpus; Krause, et al., 2018: Manifesto Corpus. (Version: 2018-2); Bormann and Golder (2013). Democratic electoral systems around the world, 1946 – 2011; Systemic Peace Organisation; Marshall, et al., 2018, Polity IV Project, Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2017; Years: 1960-2016.

Table 3.2 – Distinctiveness Split of Eastern Bloc Democracies (Observations)[16]

Eastern Bloc Democracies	Low Libertarian - Authoritarian (Dist)	High Libertarian - Authoritarian (Dist)	Total
Low State-Market (Dist)	121	62	193
High State-Market (Dist)	73	110	236
Total	194	172	366

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 display the distribution of political parties by distinctiveness levels within their respective groups. For the sake of simplicity, advanced democracies are a combination of Western democracies and Oceanic-Asian democracies. The country's median of each electoral distinctiveness is taken by the year to control for global movements in distinctiveness and distinctiveness created as a result of national events. Low distinctiveness describes parties whose distinctiveness is less than that of the relevant median, with high distinctiveness parties having a higher distinctiveness than the relative median.

Interestingly, when Tables 3.1 and 3.2 are converted to percentages, the distribution across the categories is approximately the same between both regions. Low state market distinctiveness is 54% and 52%, respectively. High state market distinctiveness is 46% and 48%. Low libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness is 54% and 62%, and high libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness is 46% and 38%. This indicates that the distribution of distinctiveness types is similar (but not exact) between the regions. This might suggest that the survival rates of parties throughout both areas would be very similar, but this is not the case.

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[16] Source(s): Author's calculations based on data from Döring and Manow, 2019, Parliament and Government Dataset (ParlGov 2018 Release, Elections Tab and Parties Tab); Manifesto Corpus; Krause, et al., 2018: Manifesto Corpus. (Version: 2018-2); Bormann and Golder (2013). Democratic electoral systems around the world, 1946 – 2011; Systemic Peace Organisation; Marshall, et al., 2018, Polity IV Project, Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2017; Years: 1960-2016.

Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the survival of political parties across non-majoritarian systems. Figure 1 reflects advanced democracies, and Figure 2 Eastern Bloc states. The data suggest that low distinctiveness is detrimental to long-term political party survival. This pattern is evident in both samples, with the low-distinctiveness group being starkly separated in the Western European cases. Consequently, they have a lower chance of appearing and surviving until the next election. Interestingly, in the Eastern European countries, low distinctiveness is initially beneficial, though this appears to be only for the period of one election (1 to 4 years).

Moreover, parties with high distinctiveness on both spectrums experience a considerable drop in survival in both groups. This could be due to the parties having moved too far away from where the voters are situated, or as a result of a merger or split. Although these graphs and data have been used to minimise right censoring, these parties may still be affected by right censoring to some extent.

It is important to note that in both examples, the survival of a party needs to maintain some level of distinctiveness on one or both dimensions for most of the majority of a party's lifespan. However, in the Eastern European democracies, the distinctiveness of libertarian-authoritarian is essential to stabilising survival early on, compared to that of those in Figure 1. Advanced democracies benefit more from state-market distinctiveness. It appears that a point is reached within the Eastern European democracies when it is necessary for parties to emphasise state-market distinctiveness.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 – Survival Rates by Distinctiveness Type[17]
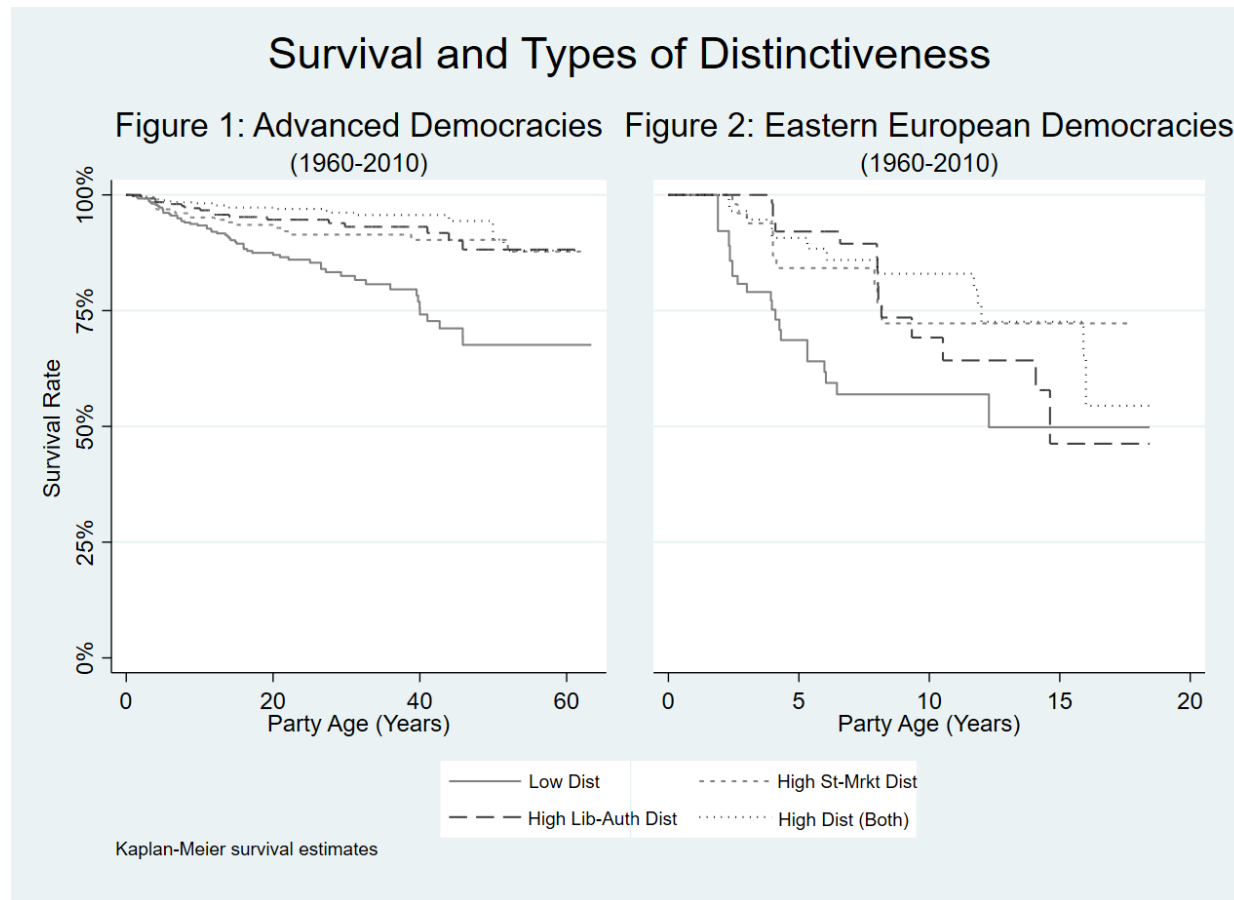
Survival and Types of Distinctiveness

Investigating the impact of region, it is relevant to include it in the model compared to the base model. Although an external factor could be impacting survival in the former Eastern bloc, there was evidence of a level of influence concerning the type of distinctiveness being used, despite the similar distribution.

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Table 4 – Factors on Political Party Survival (Included)[18]

VARIABLES	(All) Hazard Rate
Libertarian-Authoritarian Distinctiveness	-0.870***
	(0.188)
State-Market Distinctiveness	-0.871***
	(0.187)
Liberal-Authoritarian Position	0.0526
	(0.0628)
State-Market Position	0.0182
	(0.0622)
Party Family: Greens	-0.00791***
	(0.00295)
Party Family: Social Democrats	-0.272
	(0.503)
Party Family: Liberals	-0.566**
	(0.280)
Party Family Agricultural (Centre):	-0.0617
	(0.409)
Party Family: Christian Democrat	-0.851*
	(0.493)
Party Family: Conservative	-0.637
	(0.482)
Party Family: The Right	-0.631
	(0.460)
Age of Democracy	-0.0245
	(0.486)
Region: Eastern Europe	2.068***
	(0.216)
Region: Other Adv. Democracies	0.357
	(0.246)
Effective Number of Political Parties	0.0339
	(0.0499)
Observations	1,747

[18] Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4 presents the final regression used to demonstrate the effects of the factors on a political party's survival. The importance of both types of distinctiveness being statistically significant, and having strong negative coefficients Libertarian-Authoritarian distinctiveness being b = - 0.870 and State-Market distinctiveness being b = - 0.871 respectively, is evident. The more distinctive a party is in either direction, the less likely it is to fail. The large negative coefficients for both state-market and liberal-authoritarian distinctiveness leads to the conclusion that the more distinct a party is the better their chance of survival. As for control variables, established families like the Greens (b = - 0.00791), Christian Democrats (b = - 0.851), and Liberals (b = - 0.566) exhibit higher survival rates, and Eastern Europe is associated with lower survival chances overall (b = 2.068). Other controls like party positioning, age of democracy, and effective number of parties are not significant.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the limits of a political party, investigating the risk a party faces and delving into the survival and difficulties a party may face from election to election. It has further examined the impact of distinctiveness in positioning and policy making, observing it at a party-to-party level. The primary goal of this chapter has been to understand the death of a political party among its surrounding rivals, parties which may be of a similar family type or policy alignments to its own. Different definitions of survival have been discussed, each with their own drawbacks. These include varying election times, which may be difficult to counter due to different democratic rules and functions. The role of the position of a party on the survival rate has also been examined, with some parties behaving oddly compared to others. This has been explained by the literature, which has demonstrated that distinctiveness is a much more important and significant way to track how a party would

survive.

This chapter has posed the overarching question of whether each type of distinctiveness would improve the survival of a party. I find that each type does play a significant role in the survival of a political party. The analysis has revealed that high distinctiveness on both spectrums leads to a decrease in survival for both groups. However, low distinctiveness is damaging to long-term political party survival. It has been shown that libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness is necessary for maintaining survival in Eastern European democracies, while state-market distinctiveness is more beneficial for advanced democracies. It is important to note that although there is a point on the Eastern European democracies graph at which being distinct is not helpful for a party, such points are very time limited. This has had an impact on party ideologies, which in turn may have affected the role distinctiveness plays.

This chapter has also considered is the type of system being used by the country. For the sake of this model, the majoritarian party system was removed. Although they produced the same result, it affected the model. As these systems are rare, and proportional systems outweigh the other types of system, it is simple to control for the system.

The role of splits and mergers in party survival is also worthy of further investigation in this context. Although this chapter did not delve excessively into splits and mergers, their effects on survival are complex and relevant. Ibenskas (2020) has recently studied the impact of splits and mergers on a party's ability to gain support, but not their survival. Similarly, Cyr (2016) noted that, while parties may perform equally poorly in national elections, their ability to exercise influence in other spheres of activity can vary dramatically (p. 216). Park (2010) has also explored the effects of splits and mergers on political parties in South Korea. To what extent does this sphere of influence lead to the consumption of the smaller parties? Does a party's ability to pull away from another part of itself due to being more distinct increase both new splits' chance of survival?

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This leaves open the question of why, given the importance of distinctiveness to survival in the Eastern European democracies, the distribution types of distinctiveness have formed as indicated. An answer to this could be that post-communist party systems in Eastern Europe are still relatively young, having only emerged and evolved following the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lewis, 2000; Spirova, 2007). Compared to the more established party systems in Western Europe, the nascent party systems in the East may not have fully stabilized along clear programmatic or ideological lines during the time of this sample. This development and maturation of the party system could contribute to the observed patterns of party distinctiveness in Eastern Europe (Tavits, 2005). However, there may be other, more complex reasons, which warrant further investigation.

This further leads to another area of research—pressure groups. Do pressure groups have the capacity to determine the level of survival of a political party? Political parties and pressure groups have various connection points to the electorate, such as ethics, religion, and economic direction (Bornfriend, 1969). In conjunction with distinctiveness, this more expanded process of survival could address what leads up to a party becoming more distinct. Future research may be able to develop the role of distinctiveness in creating splits, mergers, and survival.

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Chapter 3: Party Distinctiveness and the Survival of Political Parties.

Appendix

Table A1 – Systems included (Observations in each category by country)[19]

Country	Total	Country	Total
Australia	144	**Japan**	155
Austria	84	**Latvia**	78
Belgium	199	**Lithuania**	99
Bulgaria	75	**Luxembourg**	75
Canada	105	**Netherlands**	187
Croatia	88	**New Zealand**	109
Czech Republic	55	**Norway**	113
Denmark	264	**Poland**	99
Estonia	62	**Portugal**	115
Finland	160	**Romania**	95
France	144	**Slovakia**	78
Germany	98	**Slovenia**	89
Greece	77	**Spain**	165
Hungary	66	**Sweden**	125
Ireland	123	**Switzerland**	196
Israel	220	**Turkey**[20]	69
Italy	196	**United Kingdom**	152
Total		4,159	

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[19] Source: Author's calculations based on data from Bormann and Golder (2013). Democratic electoral systems around the world, 1946–2011, Years: 1960–2016)

[20] (Turkey and the United Kingdom are removed from the data set for the model) Table 1a represents the observations in each category by country. This table is the expanded version of Table 1 in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3: Party Distinctiveness and the Electoral Performance of Political Parties

Introduction

Despite stability in most party systems, success fluctuates for both new and old parties (Ishiyama, 2001; Tavits, 2008). There is potential for the decline of traditional parties, such as conservatism, liberalism, and social democracy, in light of the apparent shift in voter preferences towards post-material concerns and the emergence of populism (Algan, Guriev, Papaionnou, and Passari, 2017). The rise of populist and extremist parties has also brought renewed attention to party popularity fluctuations and the stability of party systems in the West, issues of change electoral performance have been thrown into the spotlight (Algan, Guriev, Papaionnou, and Passari, 2017; Becker, 2010; Ishiyama, 2001; Piro, 2014).

This chapter examines the question of party performance, with a focus on the role of distinctiveness in party policy positions compared to rival parties. I argue that maintaining distinctiveness is critical to gaining and preventing the loss of votes. This chapter measures distinctiveness by analysing the *separation* between parties regarding their economic (state-market) policy positions and libertarian-authoritarian[21] dimensions based on pre-election manifestos. This chapter explores how party ideological distinctiveness affects the performance of a political party through an analysis of electoral data from thirty-three Western, predominantly European, democratic countries. I argue that all other things being equal, greater distinctiveness will increase a party's performance.

Using the Manifesto Project (Manifesto Corpus, 2018) and ParlGov datasets (Döring and Manow, 2019), I compute a distinctiveness measure that allows comparisons between parties on economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions. The measure is used to calculate

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[21] The concept of social issues is explored by Inglehart (1981). Inglehart discusses the immediate reactions and shifting priorities of voters to match their needs and desires. Furthermore, another dataset that deals with social and cultural measurements is Chapel Hill (Bakker, et al., 1999-2019) through their Galtan measurement (position of the party in terms of their views on social and cultural values).

the relative and absolute distinctiveness of the economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions, as well as the combination of these two dimensions.

I find that distinctiveness on both dimensions affects party success, with each effect similar in size in a pooled regression. I then examine this with a panel approach, accounting for party-level effects, and find that the economic dimension is most influential. In a further analysis, I separate these effects by party family and find that the importance of each dimension varies. Social Democratic, Agricultural (central), and Christian Democratic parties benefit from economic distinctiveness only. Green and Conservative parties benefit from liberal-authoritarian distinctiveness. Meanwhile, extreme left and extreme right parties each benefit from both dimensions, with libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness of greater magnitude for the former and economic distinctiveness of greater importance for the latter. I suggest that this is due to the need to stand out from other parties that may share similar policy stances. These effects remain largely consistent in models with party's fixed effects.

I conclude with a discussion of the importance of these findings in light of the rise of populist parties and others stressing post-material dimensions. The decline of traditional parties and the rise of new parties illustrates the potential importance of party distinctiveness in the party system changes shaping global politics.

Examining the role of Distinctiveness and Positioning on Performance

While the effects of distinctiveness in the performance of political parties have not been thoroughly investigated in the literature on party competition, a number of factors have been examined in order to ascertain the success of political parties, particularly in terms of their policy positioning. Though also emphasising the importance of party locations on libertarian-authoritarian and economic dimensions, these can be distinguished from distinctiveness, as are other related literatures, such as those on niche parties, issue parties, and emerging parties.

Chapter 2: Party Distinctiveness and the Electoral Performance of Political Parties

Party Positioning

A wide range of factors shape political parties' electoral fortunes. Positioning plays a crucial role in determining success (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Dawson and Robinson, 1963; Downs, 1957; Hellström and Nilsson, 2010; Van der Brug et al., 2000). Competition, at least in in European and advanced democracies, typically is said to operate on two dimensions (Albright, 2010). First is the economic spectrum concerning redistribution, regulation, and government's role (Downs, 1957; Hinich and Munger, 1994). Second is the libertarian-authoritarian spectrum spanning cultural and moral issues (Kitschelt, 1994; Marks et al., 2006). Some prior studies solely utilized the uni-dimensional left-right economic scale in analyzing competition and voting, conflating the second dimension. For instance, Van der Brug (1999) examined left-right positioning alone. Likewise, Van der Brug, Van der Ejik, and Franklin (2007) demonstrated limitations of the single left-right dimension.

Overall, examining both axes provides greater insight into how differentiation across ideological and policy divides shapes parties' fortunes. This multidimensional approach better captures the nuances of modern partisan competition. However, other scholarship has highlighted the importance of the libertarian-authoritarian dimension for understanding party competition, distinct from just left-right economics. For instance, Abou-Chadi (2014), Arzheimer and Carter (2006), and Müeller-Rommel (1998) all incorporated the libertarian-authoritarian dimension separately in their studies of parties. While the left-right scale is most associated with economic issues, the term "right-wing" can also encompass populist, anti-immigration, and authoritarian cultural stances (Van der Brug 1999). In sum, analysing both the economic and cultural dimensions allows more nuanced examination of how parties craft differentiated brands. The libertarian-authoritarian axis captures meaningful divides beyond just economics. Multidimensional positioning provides greater flexibility for differentiation as the policy space grows more crowded. This study's conceptualization and measurement of

distinctiveness across domains aids in fully understanding modern party competition.

Niche parties are also said to differentiate themselves by emphasizing novel non-economic issues outside the mainstream left-right debate (Meguid 2005). These niche parties, including Greens, radical right populists, and regionalists, have often prospered by staking out distinctive positions on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension (Adams et al. 2006; Evans and Mellon 2019). For instance, the success of Green parties has been linked to their ability to serve as a protest vote against the establishment by adopting a unique stance on environmental issues (Mueller-Rommel 1998). Similarly, radical right parties have crafted distinctive appeals based on nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments (Arzheimer and Carter 2006). While niche parties provide salient examples, this thesis argues that differentiation as a strategy has broader applicability for mainstream parties as well. By developing distinctive brands across economic and social policy dimensions, parties of all types can clarify their platforms for voters.

Given that differentiation can occur on both the economic and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions, this thesis analyses the two scales separately when measuring party distinctiveness. Keeping the dimensions distinct allows for examining the multifaceted nature of policy positioning and distinctiveness.

Economic and libertarian-authoritarian Dimensions of Distinctiveness

A party's positioning on the libertarian-authoritarian and economic dimensions directly impacts its distinctiveness relative to competitors. The economic dimension stems from Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) concept of class-based economic cleavages, with different classes holding divergent policy interests (Henjak, 2010). Parties must differentiate economically as class structures continuously evolve (Brooks and Manza, 1997; Ford and Jennings, 2020; Johnson, 1977; Kreisi, 1998; Lipset and Clark, 1991; Weakliem, 1993). Specifically, labor's decline and the growing middle class shifted many working-class parties toward the center (Johnson, 1977;

Kitschelt, 1994). As citizens increasingly prioritize economics (Johnson, 1977) and vote based on factors like inflation (Powell and Witten, 1993), leftist parties in some countries became more pro-market, reducing distinctiveness from the right (Snegovaya, 2021). Without economic differentiation, parties struggle to attract support.

Additionally, some scholars associate authoritarianism with right-wing positions (Aron, 1966). Declining class differences between skilled and unskilled workers likely contributed to the rise of centrist and right parties (Aron, 1966; Johnson 1977). Furthermore, class-party linkages have weakened (Evans and Tilley, 2011). While one might assume economic hardship only affects voter preferences on the economic dimension. However, such tumult can also increase support for extreme populist stances on the libertarian-authoritarian axis (de Bromhead et al., 2012). Thus, a party could adopt centrist economic positions while differentiating itself on the cultural dimension through libertarian-authoritarian policies related to issues like immigration. Even amid economic upheaval, the second dimension provides options to craft distinct brands. Flexibility across axes enables parties to downplay economics while emphasizing libertarian-authoritarian divides. Multidimensionality facilitates differentiation even when traditional cleavages fade.

Single-issue parties often differentiate by emphasizing a signature policy dimension. For instance, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) cultivated anti-EU stances within the libertarian-authoritarian spectrum, forging distinctiveness on that axis (Evans and Mellon, 2019). Similarly, France's National Front carved out a niche with nationalist immigration policies, distinguishing itself on libertarian-authoritarian divides (Schain, 1987). Though such niche parties' future success is uncertain, signature issues can benefit newer, smaller players through differentiation and visibility (Converse, 1964; Highton and Kam, 2011). The National Front's anti-immigration positioning provides a distinct brand, even without immediate electoral gains. Niche issue appeals represent one path to distinction.

Niche issue appeals represent one path to distinction. This thesis examines how positioning across economic and social dimensions shapes parties' fortunes. Issue emphasis is partly captured within these two dimensions, and partly a separate factor outside the dimensions. Note that salience and distinctiveness often align, as niche parties elevate novel issues on which they adopt outlier stances. UKIP fused salience and distinction through its anti-EU platform (Evans and Mellon, 2019). But salience alone does not guarantee differentiation. This thesis focuses specifically on policy distinctiveness rather than issue salience. In summary, niche issues can facilitate distinctiveness, but parties must translate salience into positional differentiation to benefit from distinctiveness as defined here. In summary, niche issues can facilitate distinctiveness, but parties must translate salience into positional differentiation.

Emerging Parties

When new parties emerge, especially during founding elections in new democracies, they face challenges in distinguishing themselves amid crowded competition while avoiding appearing too extreme (Daalder 2002). Gaining visibility and mainstream credibility requires balancing distinctiveness and moderation (Adams et al. 2006). This dilemma is critical for newer parties seeking to enter party systems and gain votes. As this chapter examines, developing an optimally distinctive yet viable spatial profile is key to electoral performance. Newer parties must craft platforms distinct enough to stand out, resonate with underrepresented voter interests, and avoid being absorbed by proximate rivals, yet moderate enough to attract a sustainable base (Bolleyer 2013). This thesis argues appropriate multidimensional differentiation enables diverse parties, both new and established, to clarify their brands and attract support. The analysis provides an overarching framework for assessing how distinctiveness impacts performance across contexts. For emerging parties navigating crowded

electoral markets, carving out a recognizable niche is an essential yet delicate task with significant implications for their electoral fortunes.

When new parties emerge amid crowded electoral competition, they face challenges distinguishing themselves in ways that resonate with voters while avoiding appearing too extreme (Daalder 2002). Certain party families may carry stigmas that new entrants must overcome through crafting an appealing brand (Rahn 1993). Differentiation enables entering parties to escape pre-assigned stereotypes and carve out a unique space (Bolleyer 2013). As this thesis examines, developing an optimally distinctive yet viable spatial profile is key to new party performance. Appropriate multidimensional positioning clarifies choices for voters seeking alternatives while demonstrating mainstream acceptability. The analysis assesses how differentiation impacts diverse parties' abilities to attract support and make inroads in established party systems. For new parties, balancing distinctiveness and mainstream credibility is essential to electoral fortunes.

When entering party systems, newer parties face tradeoffs in how distinctly they position themselves. Adopting extreme outlier stances risks alienating voters and lacking mainstream appeal (Budge 1994). However, converged centrist positions may result in indistinguishability and absorption by proximate rivals (Tavits 2008). New parties must balance differentiation to attract interest with moderation to avoid appearing non-viable. Some strategic distinctiveness can clarify choices for voters dissatisfied with existing options. But excessive extremity can repel potential supporters. As this thesis examines, optimizing distinctiveness is essential yet delicate for new parties seeking to enter party systems while avoiding marginalization. The analysis assesses how multidimensional differentiation impacts diverse parties' abilities to cultivate competitive brands and carve out positions that can succeed in the party system.

Data and Measures

This chapter seeks to evaluate the performance of a political party by examining primarily the distinctiveness of the party and voter's location. It is also important to take into account other variables. These variables include the age of the party, the age of democracy, change in inflation, and change in GDP.

This chapter, as in Chapter 3, focuses on the time-period 1960 to 2010. Furthermore, it focuses on the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium[22], Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom initially.

Turkey was originally in the data set, however, due to its nature as a borderline democracy it was removed from the data set. Unlike Chapter 2, the United Kingdom is included in this chapter, however, due to the United Kingdom consisting of different countries and specific parties such as the DUP and SNP operating in very localised areas rather than across the whole of the U.K these parties have been removed from the data set's analysis. This was done to prevent scenarios in which these parties could potentially be actively nearest rivals to one another.

The data for this paper is constructed from a single observation per party per election year. Therefore, creating a snapshot of how the party performed at the given election, and their positioning accordingly.

Performance of Political Parties

Regarding the electoral performance of political parties, several measures are possible,

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[22] Similarly to Chapter 2, Belgium has been divided into Flemish Belgium and Wallonia Belgium

including local and national election results, European election results, change in vote share, and change in seat share. Three forms of electoral data can be used to gauge a party's performance: European, local, and national general elections. This chapter focuses on national elections. While European electoral data can be valuable and usable in showing shifts in political party's support, these are treated as an arena for second-order voting, making them more difficult to interpret as performance. Local elections, although it can be a potential indicator for upcoming electoral fortunes, also do not present a meaningful power change within a country since the locality does not extend nationally or change the governing power (Curtis and Payne, 1991). Therefore, it is beneficial to focus on national general elections when assessing a political party's performance for the purposes of this chapter.

Once the data have been organized, the change in vote share must be calculated to assess the performance of the political party. Although the change in seat share reflects more of the consequences of success, it has a significant limitation for comparability. The electoral system in use directly affects the allocation of seats. Despite a vast number of the countries in the dataset being proportionally based systems, some are majoritarian. Therefore, a party with a vast number of votes may have no seats and be considered a failure when, in fact, it was more successful in the second election than in the first. The calculation of the change in vote share is performed using the following formula.

$$\Delta\, Vote\ Share = Vote\ Share\ at\ t - Vote\ Share\ at\ (t-1)$$

Measuring Party Distinctiveness

To measure party distinctiveness, this chapter proposes an approach focused on its position. This chapter will measure distinctiveness by directly calculating the positioning of a political party. By converting the measurement to a numerical estimate of distinctiveness, the accuracy of the difference between the parties (derived from the manifestos) should be evident.

The calculation of distinctiveness is based on information from the Manifesto Project (Manifesto Corpus, 2018) and ParlGov data (Döring and Manow, 2019). To separately account for the multiple dimensions discussed above, the distinctiveness measure will be calculated on each of the two different scales: the economic-political scale, which evaluates the positioning of the party on an economic policy scale, and the libertarian-authoritarian scale, which assesses the libertarian-authoritarian positioning of the party. The economic-political scale is available from the ParlGov dataset (Döring and Manow, 2019) and can be measured by either the pre-calculated state-market variable or the recalculated left-right variable, although the former is a more direct measure since left-right can incorporate elements of multiple dimensions of policy. To account for any potential calculation discrepancies between the two, both will be considered in this chapter.

It is then necessary to compute the absolute difference between the political parties by utilizing these pre-calculated values. For this calculation, only the two closest rivalling parties on each axis of the spectrum are used because the distinction between a party and its more distant rivals is not as relevant to its overall distinctiveness as the nearest rival's position is likely to be the main reason for lacking distinctiveness and the alternative voters would primarily consider, before more distant rivals.

Figure 1 – Party Placement in the United Kingdom 2010
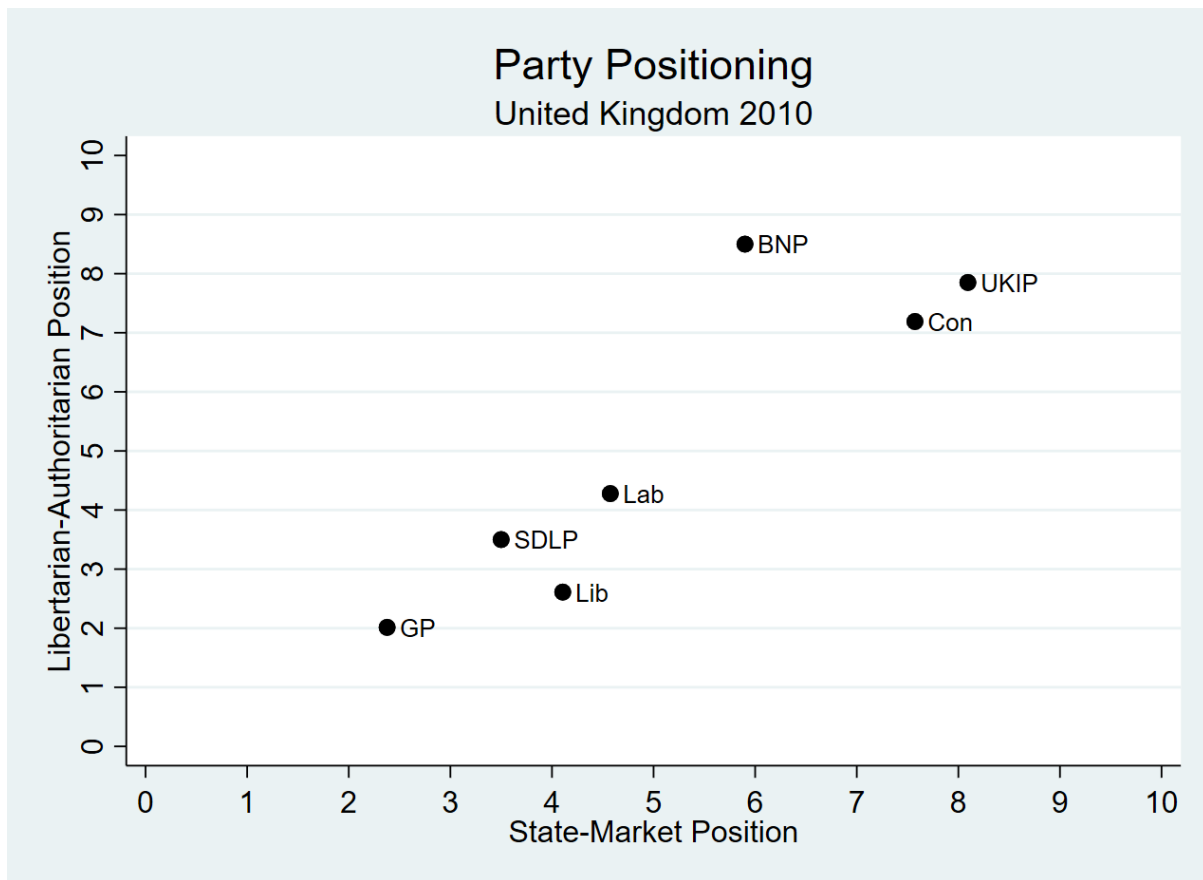
Thus, to determine the distinctiveness of each party, it is essential to ascertain the difference between each party and its closest competitor. Here, the focus will be on the economic dimension, using only integers. Bolleyer (2013) provides a basic integer example for the economic dimension, which can be used to begin the calculation.

$$Distance.Left = (Object\ Party - Left.Rival)$$

$$Distance.Right = (Object\ Party - Right.Rival)$$

$$If\ Distance.Left > Distance.Right\ use\ Distance.Right$$

$$If\ Distance.Right > Distance.Left\ use\ Distance.Left$$

Table 1 – Positioning and Distinctiveness in the United Kingdom[24]

Party name	State-market position	Libertarian-authoritarian	State-market distinctiveness	Libertarian - authoritarian distinctiveness
BNP	5.90	8.50	1.33	0.65
CON	7.57	7.19	0.521	0.66
GP	2.38	2.01	0.98	0.60
LAB	4.57	4.28	0.468	0.78
LIB	4.11	2.61	0.468	0.60
SDLP	3.50	3.50	0.61	0.78
UKIP	8.09	7.85	0.521	0.65

Using the above method, the libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness can be calculated, also similar to Bolleyer's (2013) methods:

$$Distance.Auth = (Object\ Party - Auth.Rival)$$

$$Distance.Lib = (Object\ Party - Lib.Rival)$$
$$If\ Distance.Auth > Distance.Lib\ use\ Distance.Lib$$

$$If\ Distance.Lib > Distance.Auth\ use\ Distance.Auth$$

However, as depicted in Figure 1 and Table 1, not all parties have two nearest rivals, due to extreme positioning. For instance, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is shown to be on the extreme right in Figure 1, thus only having one nearest rival, the Conservative Party. Therefore, the value of the nearest rival is instead used.

Furthermore, this paper acknowledges that there are some cases in which parties will

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[24] Source(s): Döring and Manow, 2019, Parliament and Government Dataset (ParlGov 2018 Release, Elections Tab, Parties Tab); Manifesto Corpus, 2018: Manifesto Corpus. (Version: 2018-2); Years: 1960-2016.

never come into contact with one another in the United Kingdom Example. The example above is a generic explanation of how the distinctiveness functions. For the case of the U.K and Belgium, additional measures have been taken during the regression process to ensure that these cases are managed.

Figure 2– Party Positions and Distinctiveness by Family Group 1960-2016 [25]
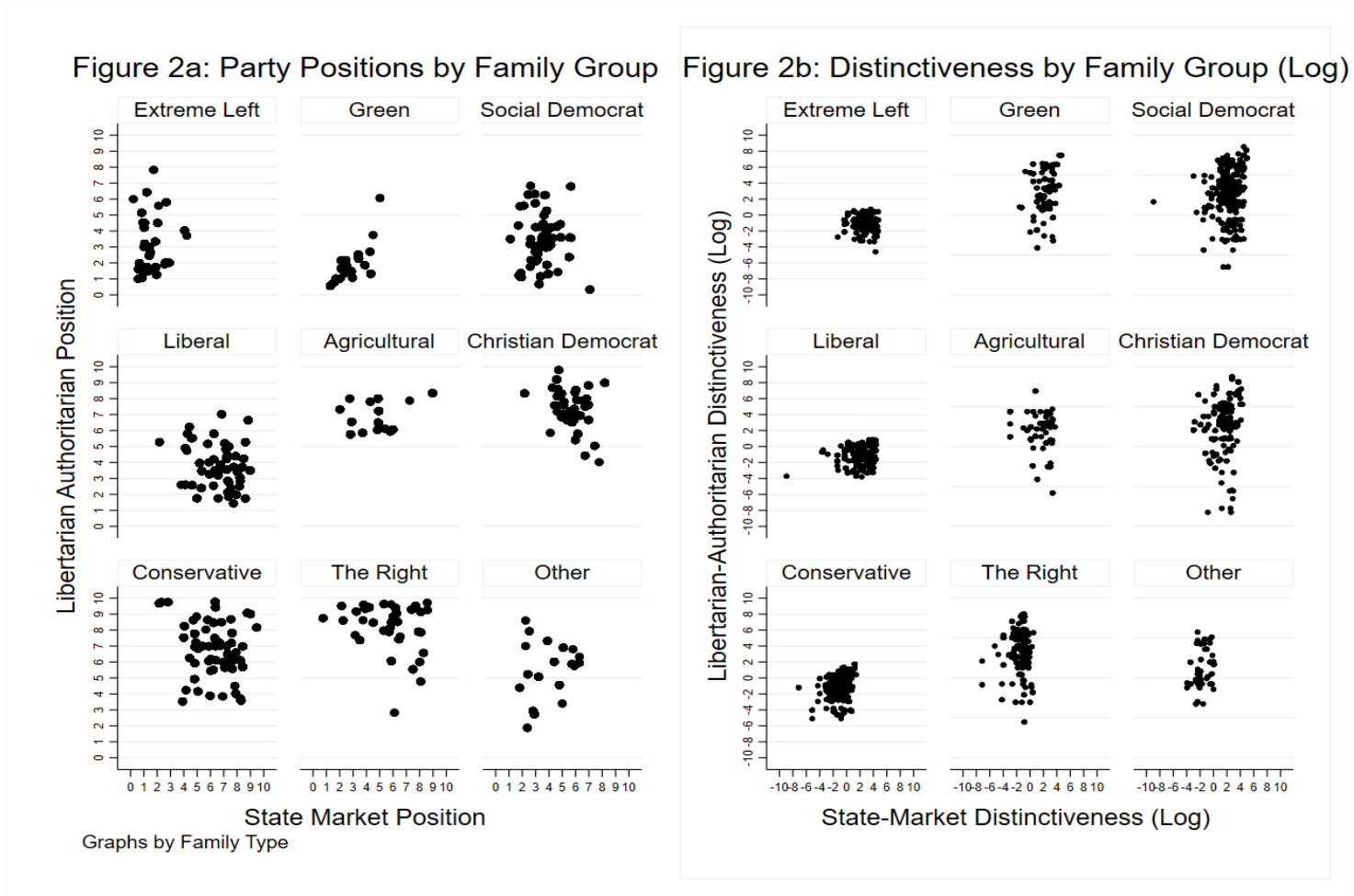
Figure 2a: Party Positions by Family Group

Figure 2b: Distinctiveness by Family Group (Log)

First, it is useful to describe distribution of types of political parties in the dataset. Figure 2a displays the overall comparison of these parties' positioning by family and Figure 2b their distinctiveness values, providing a visual representation of the differences in the positioning of various political parties across the four periods -- which vary considerably each party family -- and the associated range of distinctiveness values.

Control variables

In order to investigate the influence of distinctiveness on a political party's performance, it is essential to take into account additional factors that may also have an effect on the party's performance, such as the age of the democracy, the age of the party, and economic conditions.

Age of Democracy

The age of democracy is included as a control variable to take into account any tendencies in baseline performance that could be caused by the contexts of new democracies. New democracies can lead to a skewed dataset due to the inexperience of their voters and the distinctiveness of their political parties. First, voters may not have less stable preferences or less knowledge about the parties as programmatic actors (Tavits 2005). Second, given that democracies are still developing, it is likely that only parties will be less established and institutionalised (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). This could mean that the ideological location and distinctiveness of the parties could differ in effect, potentially being less important. To account for this, the age of democracy for each state is taken into consideration using the Polity IV score.

A country's polity score was created by the Systemic Peace Organisation and converted into a scale of 1-10. The countries with a polity of 6 of more are considered democratic, and countries with 5 or less are considered undemocratic. While Turkey does score a borderline polity score, it is considered for all intents and purposes by this paper as undemocratic and is

removed from the data set. On the other hand, there is an instance in which France is considered borderline undemocratic, however, due to the history and polity score either side of this result, France is considered democratic by this paper.

The second stage of constructing age of democracy is done via the year counter initiated by the Polity Data set. The Polity Data set records the year in which polity is measured. Therefore, from this the

Age of Party

It is also important to consider the age of a political party when assessing its performance. This enables accounting for the potential volatility in performance associated with all newer parties. This can also occur due to factors such as the re-identification of a party resulting from a party split resulting in a change of party label (Ibenskas and Sikk 2016). It is essential to note that the formation of a new party due to a split may be accompanied by a lack of electoral experience and, thus, a decrease in performance. This can be accounted for using the electoral system variable (Golder 2003). The age of a political party is measured in years determined by two variables: the registered election in the ParlGov dataset (Döring, Manow, 2019) and the last known election in the Manifesto project dataset (Manifesto Corpus, 2018). In order to calculate the age of the political party, the following steps occur:

Age of Party = Last known Election Year – First Known Election Year

This measure accounts for the electoral age of a party rather than the physical age of a party. By using electoral age rather than formation age it allows for parties to be confirmed as being a functional party rather than a dysfunctional one. A party that is unable to compete in an election will have no performance to measure, as it was unable to participate in the election. This does create a small amount of uncertainty between elections, as countries have a varying election rate, however, as seeking office is the main goal of political parties in general, using

elections as the main checkpoint for measuring age is effective. Furthermore, as the data consists of party election years the points in the data set are simply elections. Therefore, the only points of uncertainty in party age exist prior to the first registered election.

Change in Inflation Rate

To account for rapid shifts in economic conditions that could impact all parties' electoral fortunes, I also control for changes in inflation. Inflation and its effects on living standards are salient issues for voters, as rising prices directly affect their wellbeing (Lewis-Beck 1988). Inflation relates to the economic policy dimension central to political competition. Periods of high inflation can prompt anti-incumbent protest voting against established parties, as voters seek options promising radical solutions to deteriorating economic conditions. Therefore, inflation changes constitute an important macroeconomic factor that may advantage fringe parties with system-critical appeals during hard times. Controlling for inflation helps to isolates the impacts of distinctiveness from the broader context.

Calculating the change in inflation is straightforward. Information supplied by the World Bank allows the data for inflation and enables the usage of the inflation percentage. Once obtained, it is a simple calculation to obtain the change in inflation:

$$\Delta\ Inflation\ (\%) = (t)Inflation(\%) - (t-1)Inflation(\%)$$

Using the rate of inflation at the time of the election would give a general overview of the economic state of the country. However, this paper uses the change in inflation because the change in inflation between elections is more important than the inflation rate. It gives a level of comparison to that of the previous election. To some extent this acts as an economic measurement of the impact of outside economic affairs be it positive or negative[26], as well as

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[26] This paper takes the direction of inflation (positive or negative) into consideration.

the economic impact of the party in government at the time of the election.[27]

Change GDP per Capita as a Percentage

I also control for changes in GDP per capita to account for shifting national economic conditions that may affect party fortunes. GDP per capita data can be obtained from the World Bank. Changes in GDP per capita indicate a country's macroeconomic health, which can shape voter demands (Duch and Stevenson 2008). Periods of declining GDP growth often advantage left-wing parties promising more social welfare spending, as voters experience economic pain (Nadeau et al. 2017). Therefore, a new right-wing party may underperform in a left-leaning economic context of weak growth, even if differentiated from rivals. Controlling for GDP changes isolates the impacts of party positioning from broader economic effects driving voter behaviour. Macroeconomic fluctuations constitute important omitted variables that could obscure the true effects of strategic differentiation.[28] To calculate the change in GDP per Capita, the following steps are followed:

$$\Delta \text{ GDP per Capita} = ((t)\text{GDP per Capita} - (t\text{-}1)\text{GDP per Capita})*100$$

Similarly, to Inflation, using the change variable compared to the value itself is preferred because the change in GDP per Capita between elections offers a level of comparison in which a positive or a negative can be taken into consideration. Economic status and stability may have an impact on how mainstream parties perform compared to less mainstream parties. Understanding whether this is a decrease or increase compared to the previous election is therefore a useful control rather than the given GDP per Capita.

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[27] This paper does not use inflation rate to distinguish between the two.

[28] However, this chapter aims to use the growth in GDP per capita instead of direct change.

Direct Role of the Electoral System

One of the most important control variables for investigating party electoral performance is the electoral system, as it has the capacity to significantly affect the volatility of political parties. Majoritarian systems tend to disadvantage smaller parties that are unable to concentrate their resources, while favouring larger parties. Electoral systems with a lower boundary cap on parties joining the system also have a role in determining vote share, as they necessitate a minimum vote share of a certain percentage or more. Thus, the electoral system must be taken into account. Nevertheless, in proportional systems, parties that are not particularly distinct can still gain votes. Consequently, this article draws on the data provided by Golder (2013) to account for the electoral system within a state:[29]

$$Majoritarian = 1$$

$$Proportional = 2$$

$$Mixed = 3$$

The data provided by the Golder data set originally consisted of the umbrella classifications and the sub-set of classifications for electoral systems. Chapter 3 uses the umbrella classifications for electoral systems instead of the sub-set classifications. This was done firstly, because the generic functions of each umbrella group of systems is primarily similar and secondly, controlling for the umbrella groups rather than the intricate sub-groups allows, compared to narrowing on sub-sets of electoral systems. As most electoral systems contain core similarities to one another within their assigned grouping, it can also be assumed that the further sub-sectioning of the electoral systems will have a limited impact on distinctiveness.

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[29] Majoritarian, Proportional and Mixed systems are all defined by the Golder (2013) dataset, and therefore do not have a sublayer of system types. Mixed systems have elements of proportional and majoritarian systems.

The Results – Does Distinctiveness Affect Performance?

To evaluate the effects of distinctiveness on performance, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions are used with several variations. In columns 1 and 2, the calculation for the state-market is used to represent the economic variables rather than the left-right calculation. The regression produces a result of statistical significance concerning economic distinctiveness and libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness.

Table 2 - Regression Results: Effect of Distinctiveness on Vote Share[30]

VARIABLES	(Cluster Errors Party ID) Vote Share	(Random Effects Year) Vote Share	(Random Effects Year) Vote Share
Economic Distinctiveness (State-Market)	3.240***	3.403***	
	(0.950)	(0.347)	
Libertarian-Authoritarian Distinctiveness (Libertarian - Authoritarian)	2.691***	2.939***	3.234***
	(0.768)	(0.318)	(0.320)
Economic Positioning (State-Market)	0.883***	0.888***	
	(0.230)	(0.103)	
Libertarian-Authoritarian Positioning (Libertarian - Authoritarian)	-0.286	-0.274***	-0.510***
	(0.235)	(0.0951)	(0.125)
Age of Democracy (Years)	-0.0524***	-0.0462***	-0.0410***
	(0.0137)	(0.00598)	(0.00605)
Age of Party (Years)	0.227***	0.222***	0.230***
	(0.0281)	(0.0116)	(0.0118)
Electoral System 2. Proportional	-3.738*		
	(2.014)		
Electoral System 3. Mixed	-1.762		
	(2.245)		
Deflation	-0.00321	-0.0108	-0.00450
	(0.0355)	(0.0268)	(0.0272)
Inflation (Consumer Prices)	0.0110	0.0159	0.0115
	(0.0297)	(0.0216)	(0.0219)
GDP Growth	0.298***	0.296***	0.269***
	(0.0906)	(0.0692)	(0.0695)
	(Cluster Errors Party	(Random Effects	(Random Effects

VARIABLES	ID)	Year)	Year)
	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share
Legislative Type		-1.067***	-1.460***
		(0.392)	(0.396)
Left-Right Distinctiveness			2.806***
			(0.334)
Left-Right Placement			0.723***
			(0.122)
Constant	5.602**	4.270***	6.490***
	(2.335)	(1.086)	(1.075)
Observations	3,266	3,266	3,274
R-squared	0.222		
Number of year		56	56

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Table 2 presents the results of two random effects regression models and one model with standard errors clustered by party. The cluster model incorporates parties as the cluster variable in order to account for repeated observations of the same parties over time. This analysis reveals that when clustering by party, both economic and libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness have positive and statistically significant coefficients. These results indicate that greater levels of distinctiveness on either dimension are associated with higher vote share for parties. Furthermore, the economic left-right positioning of parties also demonstrates a positive and significant relationship with vote share, suggesting that more right-wing economic positioning predicts improved performance. Among the control variables, the age of democracy and party age have opposing effects - older democracies are associated with lower vote share, while greater party age predicts higher vote share. This divergence aligns with expectations, as nascent party systems in newer democracies tend to experience greater volatility and challenges to party survival compared to more established democracies. In contrast, older parties have accrued greater experience and overcome initial organizational hurdles. Additionally, higher GDP growth and proportional electoral systems are both associated with increased vote share. In summary, this analysis highlights multidimensional distinctiveness and right-wing economic positioning as advantageous for vote share, while accounting for relevant institutional factors and party characteristics.

Columns 2 and 3 in Table 2 present random effects models with similar specifications, the only difference being the measure of distinctiveness used. Column 2 incorporates economic distinctiveness, while column 3 uses libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness. The positive and statistically significant coefficients on both distinctiveness variables indicate they have a positive relationship with vote share. However, the larger coefficient for economic distinctiveness suggests it may have a greater impact than libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness. The positioning variables are also significant, with more right-wing and liberal

ideological positions associated with higher vote share. Overall, these models demonstrate that greater distinctiveness on either the economic or libertarian-authoritarian dimension is linked to improved party performance. However, the models do not account for the upper limit on vote share within party systems. As total vote share across all parties in an election sum to 100%, there are constraints on how much vote share a given party can feasibly obtain.[31]

Furthermore, to illustrate the value of using two different potential measures of the economic spectrum, the correlation of the two is presented.

Table 3.1 – Comparing Left-Right Positioning and State-Market Positioning[32]

	Left-Right	State-Market
Left-Right	1.0000	
State-Market	0.83	1.0000

Table 3.2 – Comparing Left-Right Distinctiveness and State-Market Distinctiveness[33]

	Left-right-distinctiveness	State-market-distinctiveness
Left-right-distinctiveness	1.0000	
State-market-distinctiveness	0.57	1.0000

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 display the measurement's interconnectivity but also illustrate their imperfect compatibility. They, indeed, differ as measurements, both in change and static formats. With this under consideration, a further requirement is, therefore, to observe the introduction of a fixed- and random-effects model on these parties.

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[31] A logged regression was done at the basic level for this investigation. There was no statistical significance, however, that could be due to the structure of the model.

[32] Source: Author's calculations based on data from Döring and Manow, 2019; Parliament and Government Dataset (ParlGov 2018 Release, Elections Tab, Parties Tab); Years: 1960-2016.

[33] Source: Author's calculations based on data from Döring and Manow, 2019; Parliament and Government Dataset (ParlGov 2018 Release, Elections Tab, Parties Tab); Years: 1960-2016.

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Table 4 - Comparison of Random Effects (Grouped by ID)[34]

VARIABLES	(All Parties) Vote Share	(Extreme Left) Vote Share	(Green) Vote Share	(Social Democrat) Vote Share	(Liberal) Vote Share	(Agricultural) Vote Share	(Christian Democrat) Vote Share	(Conservative) Vote Share	(The Right)[35] Vote Share	(Other) Vote Share
Economic Distinctiveness (State Market)	1.492***	0.995***	0.170	1.599***	0.559	5.516**	3.257**	0.758	1.495	0.461
	(0.251)	(0.329)	(0.794)	(0.500)	(0.787)	(2.350)	(1.376)	(0.719)	(0.967)	(0.290)
Libertarian-Authoritarian Distinctiveness (Lib-Auth)	0.809***	0.880	1.427***	1.394**	-0.459	2.428	-0.254	1.796***	0.418	-0.0187
	(0.226)	(0.691)	(0.440)	(0.562)	(0.699)	(1.642)	(0.494)	(0.609)	(0.440)	(0.337)
Age of Democracy (Years)	-0.0542***	-0.0260*	0.00232	-0.133***	-0.0376	0.0164	-0.0705**	-0.0591**	-0.0269***	0.00276
	(0.00924)	(0.0145)	(0.0179)	(0.0321)	(0.0232)	(0.0769)	(0.0304)	(0.0269)	(0.00905)	(0.00871)
Party Age (Years)	0.0383***	0.00349	0.0968***	0.0317	0.0519*	0.0880	-0.0175	0.0469	0.109***	0.0201
	(0.0118)	(0.0191)	(0.0226)	(0.0366)	(0.0291)	(0.0940)	(0.0360)	(0.0336)	(0.0207)	(0.0130)
Electoral System (Proportional)	-3.344***	0.422	-0.0132	-5.249***	-2.987	7.391	6.968**	-6.639***	0.900	0.375
	(0.730)	(1.174)	(1.302)	(1.879)	(2.602)	(6.908)	(3.203)	(1.684)	(1.257)	(1.219)

[34] Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
[35] The far-right party family is called the Right within the datasets used here.

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VARIABLES	(All Parties) Vote Share	(Extreme Left) Vote Share	(Green) Vote Share	(Social Democrat) Vote Share	(Liberal) Vote Share	(Agricultural) Vote Share	(Christian Democrat) Vote Share	(Conservative) Vote Share	(The Right) Vote Share	(Other) Vote Share
Electoral System (Mixed)	-3.473***	0.549	-0.475	-6.121***	-4.217	7.838	2.935	-1.150	0.118	0.439
	(0.712)	(1.182)	(1.491)	(1.671)	(2.773)	(7.642)	(3.228)	(1.491)	(1.476)	(1.298)
Libertarian-Authoritarian (Position)	-0.227	-0.0292	-0.0563	-0.307	1.819**	0.245	-2.185*	-1.089	-0.968***	0.208
	(0.150)	(0.462)	(1.170)	(0.918)	(0.718)	(1.322)	(1.216)	(0.771)	(0.340)	(0.189)
Economic (Position)	0.828***	1.317	-0.502	1.022	0.0716	0.907	2.729**	0.921	0.473*	-0.119
	(0.168)	(0.854)	(1.385)	(1.318)	(0.692)	(1.149)	(1.383)	(0.784)	(0.264)	(0.213)
Inflation GDP (Deflation)	-0.0220	0.0137	0.0436	0.00853	-0.0143	-0.00875	-0.117	-0.0845**	-0.00237	0.0224
	(0.0156)	(0.0251)	(0.119)	(0.0409)	(0.0344)	(0.111)	(0.0986)	(0.0370)	(0.0395)	(0.0543)
Inflation GDP (Consumer Prices)	0.0232*	-0.0139	-0.0549	-0.00856	0.00783	-0.00299	0.152**	0.0963***	-0.00485	-0.0333
	(0.0128)	(0.0209)	(0.114)	(0.0322)	(0.0272)	(0.0795)	(0.0736)	(0.0313)	(0.0381)	(0.0505)
GDP (Growth)	0.114***	-0.0138	-0.0565	0.111	0.279***	0.0277	0.220**	0.145	-0.0731	0.0361
	(0.0367)	(0.0606)	(0.0726)	(0.0969)	(0.0894)	(0.200)	(0.104)	(0.105)	(0.0915)	(0.0330)

VARIABLES	(All Parties) Vote Share	(Extreme Left) Vote Share	(Green) Vote Share	(Social Democrat) Vote Share	(Liberal) Vote Share	(Agricultural) Vote Share	(Christian Democrat) Vote Share	(Conservative) Vote Share	(The Right)[36] Vote Share	(Other) Vote Share
Constant	8.834***	2.252	3.832	18.19***	3.969	-9.744	5.919	18.01**	9.357**	
	(1.185)	(2.325)	(3.401)	(6.950)	(5.926)	(13.72)	(13.57)	(8.085)	(4.014)	
Observations	3,266	439	224	620	528	112	351	606	307	79
Number of Party IDs	714	93	46	112	132	22	68	137	87	17

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[36] The far-right party family is called the Right within the datasets used here.

Table 5 - Comparison of Fixed Effects (Grouped by ID)[37]

VARIABLES	(All Parties)	(Extreme Left)	(Green)	(Social Democrat)	(Liberal)	(Agricultural)	(Christian Democrat)	(Conservative)	(The Far Right)[38]	(Other)
	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share	Vote Share
Economic Distinctiveness (State Market)	1.006***	0.963***	0.469	0.836*	-0.661	8.612***	3.857***	0.248	1.123	0.504
	(0.257)	(0.350)	(0.938)	(0.470)	(0.872)	(2.940)	(1.433)	(0.736)	(1.420)	(0.304)
Libertarian-Authoritarian Distinctiveness (Lib-Auth)	0.295	0.267	1.601***	0.671	-1.093	1.346	-0.761	1.080*	0.504	-0.0304
	(0.233)	(0.784)	(0.472)	(0.527)	(0.744)	(1.687)	(0.486)	(0.640)	(0.542)	(0.352)
Age of Democracy (Years)	-0.0615**	0.102**	-0.667	-0.391***	0.280**	5.457	-0.0621	-0.166**	0.175	-0.000621
	(0.0312)	(0.0405)	(0.717)	(0.0941)	(0.123)	(4.150)	(0.0884)	(0.0708)	(0.202)	(0.0108)
Party Age (Years)	0.00862	-0.134***	0.768	0.220**	-0.288**	-5.400	-0.0584	0.111	-0.0747	0.0291*
	(0.0313)	(0.0412)	(0.718)	(0.0938)	(0.124)	(4.147)	(0.0897)	(0.0713)	(0.197)	(0.0157)
Electoral System (Proportional)	-2.613**	0.467	-1.960	-4.378**	2.763		7.791	-4.395*	0.492	
	(1.028)	(1.754)	(1.822)	(2.228)	(2.549)		(5.259)	(2.413)	(4.042)	

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[37] Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
[38] The far-right party family is simply called the Right within the datasets used here

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VARIABLES	(All Parties) Vote Share	(Extreme Left) Vote Share	(Green) Vote Share	(Social Democrat) Vote Share	(Liberal) Vote Share	(Agricultural) Vote Share	(Christian Democrat) Vote Share	(Conservative) Vote Share	(The Far Right) Vote Share	(Other) Vote Share
Electoral System (Mixed)	-3.741***	0.519	-1.380	-6.073***			1.884	-1.639	-0.137	-0.171
	(0.836)	(1.411)	(1.836)	(1.721)			(4.596)	(1.625)	(4.384)	(0.435)
Inflation GDP (Deflation)	-0.0344**	0.00774	0.0693	-0.0116	-0.0286	0.0712	-0.114	-0.0857**	-0.269**	0.0409
	(0.0166)	(0.0264)	(0.126)	(0.0389)	(0.0424)	(0.350)	(0.0978)	(0.0373)	(0.121)	(0.0571)
Inflation GDP (Consumer Prices)	0.0354**	-0.00711	-0.0761	0.00776	0.0184	-0.0632	0.150**	0.0972***	0.272**	-0.0422
	(0.0138)	(0.0221)	(0.130)	(0.0312)	(0.0341)	(0.230)	(0.0726)	(0.0315)	(0.123)	(0.0536)
GDP (Growth)	0.0812**	-0.0414	-0.0284	0.0868	0.250***	-0.0570	0.192*	0.121	0.0322	0.0369
	(0.0370)	(0.0627)	(0.0777)	(0.0907)	(0.0935)	(0.220)	(0.101)	(0.108)	(0.111)	(0.0340)
Constant	15.88***	2.356	39.26	36.36***	0.570	-107.5	9.446*	22.94***	-3.025	0.593*
	(1.267)	(1.862)	(38.02)	(3.029)	(4.086)	(86.16)	(5.503)	(2.850)	(8.071)	(0.313)
Observations										
R-Squared	3,266	439	224	620	528	112	351	606	307	79
Number of Party IDs	0.055	0.068	0.304	0.230	0.049	0.128	0.248	0.113	0.085	0.219
	714	93	46	112	132	22	68	137	87	17

In contrast to Table 5, Table 4 displays a random effects model on static data. The vast increase in the statistical significance and its coefficient for libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness is most apparent between these two models ([All Parties] b = 0.809***; b = 0.295). Table 5 accounts for random effects with the Party ID and the Country. Adding random effects to account for the party-level effects is important due to the unmeasured factors affecting all observations from a party in the overall sample. For all samples, country must be considered a potential random effect due to country-level factors.[39] What is observed in Table 5 under Random Effects is that economic distinctiveness ([All Parties] b = 1.006***) is statistically significant in obtaining vote share. The more distinctive a party is, the better its vote share. Surprisingly, libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness ([All Parties] b = 0.809***) has a relatively minor coefficient compared to economic distinctiveness and appears relevant for specific party groupings. What is apparent from this particular model is that the coefficient produced through the economic distinctiveness is consistently the largest, therefore further illustrating the power of the economic spectrum. Furthermore, in cases in which the economic distinctiveness is not statistically significant, libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness provides a large coefficient, presenting a potential shift in the power of the variable by the party family.

Comparing the static distinctiveness results across different party types presents an interesting picture. The economic distinctiveness of the Green, Liberal, Conservative, and populist Right parties' economic distinctiveness is not statistically significant. For Green and populist right, this likely results from lower salience to the economic dimension compared to libertarian-authoritarian. The unexpected result here may be that the Conservative parties, as they are often associated with right wing economic policy, but there as these make up approximately 20% of the observations, the variety within this group may explain this.

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[39] See Appendix for the case of Høyre. Høyre appeared to be an outlier within its group in the overall positioning of parties; however, closer inspection shows it to be close to the mean positioning within its own country

However, distinctiveness does matter for the Green, Conservative, and Communist parties concerning their libertarian-authoritarian stance. For Green parties, this is expected as they are parties centred around environmental and post-material issues and thus associated with the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. The lack of relationship among 'Other' parties, which includes one-seat candidates and disparate types of regionalist parties, is consistent with expectations of the large variety in this group.[40]

To probe the functional form of the distinctiveness-survival relationship, I also examined models with a quadratic term for distinctiveness to assess whether the effects of differentiation diminish or reverse at higher levels due to potential voter penalties for extremism. However, the results showed no evidence of diminishing returns by this type of measure. The quadratic distinctiveness terms were non-significant across models, indicating that the association between differentiation and reduced failure risk persists across the distribution rather than diminishing at higher levels of distinctiveness. Greater distinctiveness appears to linearly improves survival chances within the range of the data. This may mean that parties appear able to exploit distinctiveness to enhance longevity even at ideological extremes, but it is important to note that this measure does not definitely rule out limits to distinctiveness.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the importance of distinctiveness for a given party for it to succeed. Throughout the different models tested, it becomes apparent that certain types of parties are more than others. The directional value of this distinctiveness also depends on the kind of party. Despite the potential differences between different party types and the effect of distinctiveness, there is a consistent statistical significance of distinctiveness, with a relatively large coefficient. However, the economic distinctiveness produces a far greater coefficient than

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[40] Removing the 114 one-seat, no- affiliation, and no-seat observations from the dataset did not produce any notable changes in the results for the group of uncategorised parties

the libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness when indeed significant. This is likely due to economic policy's much stronger historical standing. Only in recent years have singular issues, such as the environment and nationalism, become important battlegrounds. Although it could be argued that nationalism has existed for a long time, it appears to have been somewhat suppressed as a battleground issue until the recent years, which included economic crisis in the European Union, the period leading to Brexit, and general growth in populism.

However, these effects are notably more pronounced when there is no limit to the amount of gains are that are available, simply: if there are infinite votes to gain. A party may decide to move into this space to improve their performance if they can secure additional votes by occupying a distinctive space. Nevertheless, since the electorate is a finite resource for the parties, it is essential to acknowledge the limitation imposed upon them. Parties may be unable to move into a more distinctive space because of the finite electorate.

Furthermore, it is useful to consider that there may be a lag effect present between the performance and distinctiveness of the parties. This study does not explore this directly, but it is not implausible that a change made in one election to the positioning, policy, or distinctiveness of a party may delay in reaching and effectively communicating with the electorate sufficiently to see a change in performance. Moreover, this lag may even be different by country and party. The ability to measure the strength of such communication could potentially prove vital to understanding the implications of rapid policy change, for example, the shift in the Labour Party (United Kingdom) from centre left to left, compared to a slower evolutionary change that exists in some parties, such as the evolution of many Green parties to include multiple policies.

Although the data presented in this chapter provided evidence to support the theory that distinctiveness impacts performance, certain limitations should be noted, such as not denoting whether a party bypassed any effective voting percentage thresholds present in countries such

as Germany. Furthermore, due to data constraints, this study mainly focused on European countries and did not include the United States or countries in South America or Asia, which are worthy of investigation as well. However, the European sample does present some comparability in terms of multi-party parliamentary democracies. A case like the United States is important, but its electoral system would necessitate adaptations when discussing the effects of distinctiveness due to its rigid two-party system.

This chapter has raised a number of questions for future research regarding the potential consequences of a party moving into a less distinct area to compete with other parties, which absorb more of the votes to some extent. These questions include: is it better to stay within a niche area and be guaranteed a consistent portion of votes or go to more crowded areas to gamble for victory? At what point does this gamble start to fail? How do new parties balance moving into the most crowded place and making themselves distinct enough to eventually obtain enough votes to challenge the older parties? Finally, what is the role of the leader in the policy and placement of parties, and does it matter? By addressing these questions in future research, it would be possible to assess the impact of distinctiveness even more comprehensively on electoral success.

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Appendix

The Cases of the Canada's CPC and Norway's Høyre

In regard to the mapping process, two parties stand out in regard to positioning, that is, the CPC and Høyre. These also provide useful case studies for distinctiveness measure. What is striking about both parties is their self-consideration as conservative parties and their classification within the dataset of them being conservative parties. Why is it then that these parties are both considered to be almost extreme or outliers within their party family's classification?

The first of these two parties, the CPC is based in Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada. Naturally, due to its name, it is worth considering it is a conservative party. However, although according to the positioning chart, it embodies a significant positioning on the economic scale, what is more noticeable is its position on the libertarian-authoritarian axis. A potential reason for its rather unusual position and sudden existence on the positioning is the circumstances for the party's birth. The party is the result of a merger between two other parties, the Canadian Alliance, and the Progressive Conservative parties. Therefore, a compromise would have to be considered for the merger to remain and consolidate. As a consequence, it is possible that both parties would have to be lenient with one another in regard to what they considered an acceptable standard position within which the party operates. However, from the data, it appears that the RPC was more influential. Another potential reason behind the Conservative Party of Canada being so uniquely placed is the Quebec situation. The divisive behaviour exhibited within Canada over the state and future of Quebec has often been apparent, and therefore each party has to make a clear statement on where they position themselves. The CPC makes itself and its stances on clear (Conservative Party of Canada, 2020).

By contrast, Høyre has a name that translates to the Right, and proclaims itself to be in the conservative branch of politics. Although this party seems to acknowledge many economic

policies associated with that of conservative parties, their stance is very open, stating on their party website that they believe in maximum freedoms for the individual, who mostly lurks among the Liberal parties (Høyre Party, [No Date]). Upon further examination, it is very clear that Høyre is not as abnormal as it first appears. Figure 3 illustrates the positioning of Høyre in comparison to the other parties in Norway.

Figure 3 visually makes it apparent that Høyre is in one of the most central positions within Norway for Libertarian-Authoritarian ideals. Furthermore, the calculations revealed that the mean Libertarian-Authoritarian position in Norway was approximately 4.223, with a standard deviation of 2.4, which, compared to Høyre's 3.548, illustrates its normalcy.

Figure 3 – Party Positioning in Norway[41]
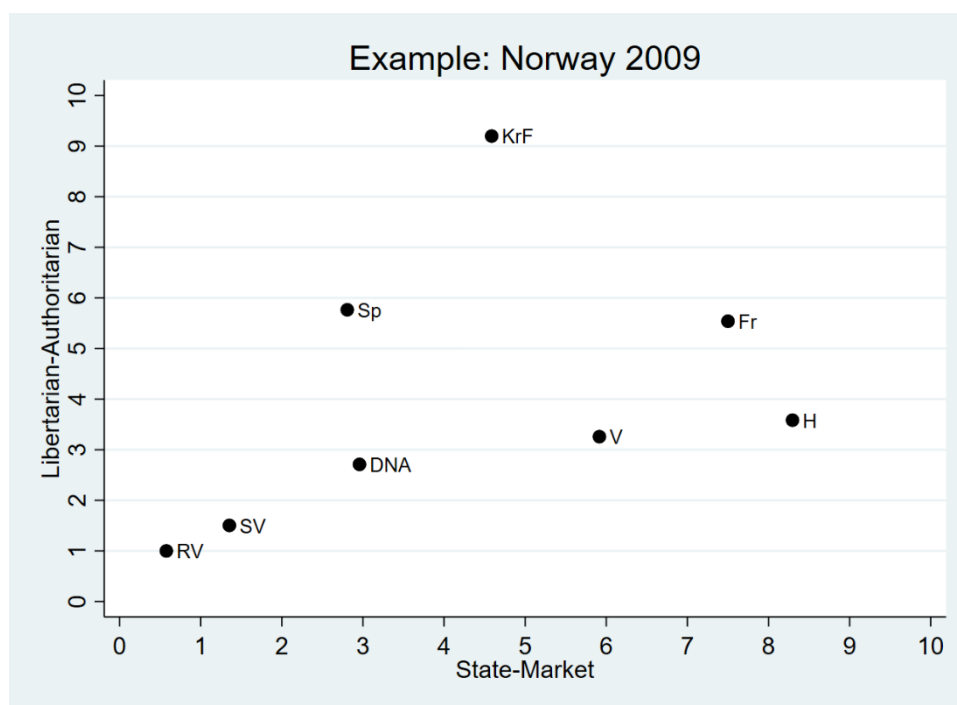
Chapter 4: Party Policy Distinctiveness and the Electorate's Individual Voting Intent

Introduction

Observers may contend that there is minimal variation in democratic political systems, however, politics is constantly evolving (Budge, 2019). In the last decade, Europe has experienced political upheaval as traditional ruling parties have been defeated in elections (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). This upheaval has also led to the emergence of new political parties and pressure groups. As an example, the United Kingdom has seen the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Brexit Party, which have both prospered and then dissipated. This paper will analyse party competition in the UK, which is the process by which parties differentiate themselves from their competitors to gain votes.

Political parties have a variety of policies and characteristics that can either attract or repel voters (Stokes, 1963; Webb and Bale, 2021). To remain competitive, parties must assess their attributes, such as policies, competency, and image, in comparison to those of their opponents. Certain policies and directions are more significant to a party than others, especially for smaller or "niche" parties (Wagner, 2012). For example, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) was founded on the then-radical proposition that the UK should leave the European Union (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). To remain in the electoral system and in the minds of voters, parties must receive media attention, maintain internal unity, and garner votes.[42]

In this paper, I investigate voters' response to party ideological distinctiveness, specifically how their preference to vote for parties is shaped by the perception that parties are offering distinct policy alternatives. These preferences do not always translate into behaviour

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[42] Parties may make themselves distinctive in order to appeal to the more radical positions of their party members who are aware driven by negative attitudes towards other parties. Conservative party members, for example, often demand that the party puts "clear blue water" between the party and its competitors.

or behavioural intentions. If a preferred party has little chance of either winning a seat or forming the government, voters may choose to vote for another party. Strategic or tactical voting means that preferences do not always determine voting behaviour (Downs, 1957). Nevertheless, preferences are a good indicator of an individual's voting intentions. This paper investigates the role of party policy distinctiveness on the intentions of an individual voter. Distinctiveness is measured by the absolute difference between the voter's preferred party and that party's nearest rival. It is also necessary to consider the position of the party and the voter and the distance between a voter and their preferred party. A party's policy distinctiveness is a heuristic that can be derived from party position.

There is extensive literature available about the role of cleavages—such as classes, positions (e.g., left-right) and party labels (e.g., Social Democrat, and Conservative)—and how they the change in them can be used to explain the voter's willingness to vote for specific parties (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Webb and Bale, 2021). Whereas these mostly focus on more direct issues, this paper will examine the impact of distinctiveness on the reactions of the voters on political parties, arguing that this is a form of heuristic (Popkin, 2020). Voters respond to parties representing their position (Downs, 1957, Adams and Merrill, 2009), but also appear strong and united (Ceron and Volpi 2022). Compared to reacting to each party's absolute position, enduring distinctiveness reduces the amount of information voters need to make their choices.[43] As a heuristic, distinctiveness enables voters to reduce the amount of information that needs to be acquired and processed.

I argue that perceived distinctiveness increases a voter's willingness to vote for a party, holding constant position, because of its benefits for clarifying voting choices by serving a heuristic.[44] Parties monitor their competitors and react to one another to counteract their stances

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[43] Downs (1957) distinguished between reliability staying in the same position and responsibility (not abandoning previously held positions).

[44] I argue is an effective way of learning about a party. Furthermore, it can be used at a party level or at a voter level

or move to where the party which benefited most last election positioned itself (Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer, 2020; Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). Distinctiveness is, in this chapter, operationalised at the micro level. It is used to investigate the impact of perceived positioning on political parties by calculating perceived distinctiveness.

The paper uses the data provided by the British Election Study (BES) to construct the variables and focuses on the years 2014-2017. This is a period where party alignments were affected by the Brexit Referendum, a period with useful variance in party differentiation and party alignments.

The results show that distinctiveness helps parties obtain the degree of support they do. While controlling for party positioning and the voter's positioning, this chapter finds that perceived distinctiveness increases a voter's reported willingness to vote for their preferred party. This effect is strongest for voters that are lacking with lower attention to politics, a finding I attribute to the greater importance of the heuristic function of distinctiveness for such voters. Greater party attachment limits the effect of distinctiveness, suggesting these voters are less sensitive to this information. Although the findings are limited to the UK, 2014-2017, this paper provides clues about further areas for investigation for similarly designed studies in different countries.

Literature Review and Theory

Competition between political parties is one of the most important aspects of all democracies (Downs, 1957). Competition in the political marketplace is expected to ensure that the voter preferences are decisive, much as consumers respond to the economic marketplace (Smith, 1776). There are three assumptions about what drives party behaviour: vote-seeking, office seeking, and policy-seeking (Strøm, 1990). This paper primarily focuses on vote-seeking and office-seeking by political parties. An essential element of this is policy

positioning vis-à-vis voters and each other in order to align with potential voters. However, beyond merely aligning with voter preferences, parties can benefit from adopting a distinctive position that differentiates them from their rivals. Certainly, parties that adopt a distinct and unique place may not grow. Fringe parties are consistently distinct but may emphasise issues lacking interest among the electorate and would be unlikely to succeed until such issues became more important and the electorate would respond to a party's lack of compromise on its clear stance (Meguid, 2022; Usherwood, 2008). However, other things being equal, being distinctive should be generally beneficial because it enables the voters to have a clearer understanding of that party's positions. The appeal of clarity prevents parties from overlapping and enables them to break free of another party's 'shadow.' Overlapping party positions can harm both parties and voters (Darmofal, 2009) because being in the same space can make it harder to differentiate between the parties or candidates and therefore voters may struggle to cast their vote.

Importance of Heuristics

Several authors recognise that different voters may use different heuristics to manage the information (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). This could be by forming an attachment to a party, or the complicated nature of a party's positioning. Party positioning contains a lot of information about a party but requires an in-depth understanding of the party's policies to process. The relevant heuristics will vary by the voter's needs (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). Policy distinctiveness should be easier to perceive than policy positions as it is a direct way for a member of the electorate to compare parties. It should be particularly influential for unsophisticated voters who know little about politics, have poorly structured opinions, have weak predispositions, or find it hard to relate those predispositions to policy choices (Luskin, 1987; 1990; Zallerm, 1992) . Policy positions are among the most important measures used to understand the differences between political parties and why voters are attracted to them. Parties strategically choose a set of policy positions that influence where it places itself and

where voters perceive that placement (Lupu, 2015). One of the most common measures used is the party's position (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Benoit and Laver, 2006) and sometimes in multidimensional space, both economic and libertarian-authoritarian policies are used. These measures focus on the party's position based on their absolute locations in policy space. Curini (2015), for example, discussed how parties move towards voters to reduce the spatial distance to attract them. By contrast, distinctiveness considers the difference between the parties and their rivals[45].

Political Sophistication, Positioning, and Distinctiveness

Positioning is an effective way of taking a party at its given value, as it is based on policy and policies shape a party's position. Although policy positioning may appear to be a basic concept for members of the electorate to understand, most literature suggests this is not the case. Positioning is a complex phenomenon because it assigns a value to each party with little to compare it to. Policies can be difficult for members of the electorate to understand, particularly for those who lack interest and understanding of politics (Dancey and Sheagley, 2013; Ashworth, Bueno de Mesquita, and Friedenberg, 2018; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960, Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Lupia, 1994). Position considerations help the politically sophisticated more than the less sophisticated because it gives the voter a more direct understanding of what a party stands for rather than the difference between two parties. Distinctiveness benefits voters seeking a basic heuristic for vote choice rather than complete information on party positions. Lupia pointed out that "voters may choose to employ information shortcuts" (Lupia, 1994, p. 63) instead of holding detailed information on party positions. For some voters, the ability to tell the difference between parties is as or more important than where a party stands.

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[45] Nagel and Wlezien (2010) developed a model of Liberal Democrat vote in Great Britain using party distinctiveness to test both 'vacated centre' and 'occupied centre' theories that explain the growth in support for that party. The key independent variables are the distance between the Conservative and Liberal Democrats and the distance between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

There is considerable debate about whether political sophistication affects the electorate's voting decisions (Bartle, 2005; Dancey and Sheagley, 2013), in part due to voter knowledge. Distinctiveness is based on positioning and also requires some understanding to compare a party accurately to another. Nevertheless, as it is only a relative measure, it requires less information and less effort to obtain than information on party positioning. Voting based on policies and party position requires greater knowledge of the overall ideological competition space. By contrast, distinctiveness is more likely to influence voters with less sophisticated knowledge of absolute party positioning. More understanding of distinctiveness improves the voter's ability to interpret which party is less distinctive to their own position, similar to spatial distance, and which parties can be more easily identified. This means that, on average, voters will reward more distinctive parties. It also means that attention impacts how probable an individual is to vote, and vote for a party, "Much of what citizens are expected to do requires an understanding of the rules" (Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 64). The more sophisticated—that is, the more knowledgeable and the more structured their opinions—the easier it is for them to determine the difference between parties. I expect that the effect of distinctiveness on voter support for a chosen party will be greater for voters who are less attentive to politics.

Attachment to Parties

Partisan attachment is itself considered a type of heuristic by some scholars (Downs, 1957; Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Rahn, 1993; Popkin, 2020). The more strongly attached a voter may feel towards a party, the less likely they are to vote for a different party (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002). Reported party attachment is a highly reliable predictor of voting in elections (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002). Although distinctiveness can be perceived by a voter who is strongly attached to a party, we would expect it to have much less effect. In some cases, attachments may be so strong that distinctiveness has no effect. A highly attached

voter may be unwilling to change the party they want to vote for. This is illustrated through Peterson, Skov, Serritlew, and Ramsøy's (2013) investigation of attachment. Following a party and maintaining the same positions as them requires effort, particularly in the case of a popular party with certain expectations and a large number of voters loyal to their stance (Peterson, Skov, Serritlew, and Ramsøy, 2013). A voter can adopt the same position on an issue as the party to which they are attached. As a result, their perception of other parties may matter less because the voter has exerted considerable effort to match their opinion to that of their chosen party (Peterson, 2015). In short, the more attached a member of the electorate is to a party, the less perceived distinctiveness will matter to them.

Although distinctiveness is likely to influence voting behaviour, a voter's attachment to a party will impact how likely they are to vote for that or a different party. Leeper and Slothuus (2014) believed that parties influence public opinion. This influences voters' willingness to associate themselves with a political party and their own opinions. As voters associate themselves with a party, they become more likely to vote for them, all else equal. The power of a person's association and attachment to a party impacts the party position they perceive and how close they see the party to themselves (Greene, 1999). As a result, there is less influence from heuristics based on distinctiveness.

Consequently, the voter's greater attachment to a party can reduce the willingness to compare parties based on their relative positions. As attachment increases, the distinctiveness effect on the support for a different party, in particular their nearest rival, will therefore decrease. I expect that the effect of distinctiveness on voter support for a chosen party will be greater for voters who are less attached to a political party.

Research Design and Methodology

This paper investigates whether support for a party is affected by the distinctiveness of

a party in comparison to its nearest rival. It focuses on the economic dimension rather than any potential libertarian-authoritarian dimension.[46] This chapter measures support for a party as the probability that respondent will vote for their most preferred party. Distinctiveness is measured by the respondent's reported perceptions of party positions. This allows distinctiveness to be assessed in a different way to chapters 2 and 3. The identification of the main rival to the most preferred party is important. So is the self-placement of the individual.

Other variables are divided into general or standard controls and more other controls. The general or standard controls include year, the party itself, the electorate member's poverty risk and their unemployment risk, whereas the more direct control variables include the strength of the identification to a political party as well as their personal attention to politics. It is important to remember these are relative and subjective measures.

This paper investigates the UK from 2014 to 2017. By examining individual voters' perceptions and decision calculus, it gives a more micro-level understanding of the mechanisms connecting distinctiveness to vote choice, which complements the macro-level relationships.

Dependent Variable: Probability of Voting for the Most Appealing Party

There are several variables available in the BES that are relevant to party support. The first is based on responses to a self-identification of the individual with that political party or so-called 'party identification' (Campbell et al., 1960; Butler and Stokes, 1974).[47] The second is based on current voting intention, as in the regular tracking question used by commercial pollsters. [48] The third—and the one that this paper depends on—is based on how likely

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[46] This is partly because the economic dimension has a particularly strong impact on vote decisions in Britain and partly because the content of the economic dimension is relatively stable over time. The libertarian-authoritarian dimension has less impact on votes and the content of that dimension is more disputed and apparently unstable over time.

[47] The question reads, "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Nationalist, or what?"

[48] This question reads, "If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?"

participants were to vote for a party on a scale between 0 and 10.[49]

Self-identification varies in intensity. Some people feel very strongly 'Conservative' or 'Labour'. whereas others feel 'not very strongly' 'Conservative or Labour'. The stronger the identity, the more likely they are to vote and vote for their party when they turn out. Nevertheless, party identification is not the ideal measurement for this paper. Long-term self-identification is not the same as current voting intentions (Butler and Stokes, 1974). Identifiers may defect from their party because of short-term forces, including policy preferences, evaluations of conditions, perceptions of leaders, and strategic considerations.

The 0-10 likelihood to vote measure was chosen as the key dependent variable due to its advantages over party identification and current voting intention. While party identification captures enduring partisan loyalty, it can overlook short-term shifts caused by policies, issues, leaders, or strategy. Current voting intention is more sensitive to proximate electoral forces yet fluctuates with events. The likelihood measure balances continuity and flexibility, remaining sufficiently stable between surveys for aggregation while reflecting electoral swings. Its continuous 0-10 scale allows gradation in support, leveraging more information than blunt binary measures. The probability wording mitigates social desirability bias compared to definitive voting intention queries. Moreover, previous research has validated likelihood as a robust predictor of turnout and vote choice, without the drawbacks of the alternatives. In summary, the 0-10 likelihood variable strikes a productive middle ground between partisan identity and shifting intentions, providing analytical purchase on differentiation's effects on current party support.

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[49] The original question from BES: "How likely is it that you would ever vote for each of the following parties?"

Table 1 Party Identification[50]

Party Identification	Frequency
Conservatives	83,282
Labour	86,802
Liberal Democrats	20,747
United Kingdom Independence Party	20,056
Green Party	9,448
None	54,380
Total	274,715

Vote intention has its limitations. An individual may be most likely to intend to vote for the Labour party on the balance but if this probability is less than 50% (as is possible in a multi-party context), they may change their intention or not vote at all. The probability of vote is the most appropriate of the three measures (Clarke et al., 2004). Like party identification the probability of vote varies in strength. This variation means that it contains more information makes it a more accurate indicator. The probability of vote is derived by taking the probability of each participant throughout the waves they participated in and for each one, comparing the probabilities of them voting for each of the main parties. Parties that do not compete in English elections, such as the Scottish Independence party, and Plaid Cymru, are excluded. This is due to them being very localised within the election to their corresponding locations, and thus could present a restricting or less focused observation on the Rival's distinctiveness (Table 3 shows the distance to the nearest rival).

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[50] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Study, Internet Panel Waves 2-12, (2014–2017) Wave 5 is excluded

Table 2 - Probability of Voting for the Participant's Most Preferred Party, 2014-2017.[51]

Vote Intent	Con	Lab	Lib Democrat	UKIP	Green Party	Multiple	None	Total
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,871	4,871
1	36	84	43	106	124	346	0	739
2	81	104	61	108	189	365	0	968
3	114	260	91	159	254	455	0	1,333
4	178	369	139	230	324	686	0	1,926
5	778	1,163	416	704	746	4,611	0	8,418
6	1,419	1,754	779	992	1,030	2,877	0	8,851
7	4,140	1,759	1,553	2,000	1,696	5,040	0	18,188
8	7,458	5,794	2,314	3,043	2,181	4,933	0	25,723
9	6,560	4,902	1,930	2,850	1,911	2,255	0	20,408
10	10,732	26,155	4,331	12,144	4,629	9,792	0	87,773
Total	51,496	44,404	11,657	22,336	13,084	31,350	4,871	179,198

Table 2 displays the voting intent of the participants in the BES. This table presents responses to the question regarding how willing a participant may be inclined to vote for a specific party, which were then converted to reflect their highest voting intent (thus, which party the participant is most likely to vote for, and at what intent level). The table shows that the Labour party and the Conservative party have the strongest voting intent in comparison to

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[51] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Panel Study Wave 2 (2014) to Wave 12 (2017) – Wave 5 has been excluded

the much smaller parties. However, there are several cases in which the smaller parties, such as the liberal democrats have a stronger voting intent than that of the larger parties at the upper end of the scale. Nevertheless, the overall understanding of the data is the larger parties have a stronger voting intent than that of the smaller parties.

Table 2 introduces an issue that must be addressed in this chapter. The most important of these issues is how to manage individuals who do not associate themselves with a party or an intention to vote for a party. According to Table 2, there are 4,871 of such cases. Although this may seem small, (approximately 3% of the data), it further raises the question surrounding those who are unable to choose between two parties—the participants who are included in the multiple categories. When combined, these categories consist of approximately 20% of the data.

To use this measurement, all the probabilities of the parties that the participant assigned a probability of voting for were compared. The highest probability was taken as an indicator of their first preference. In cases with multiple parties tied for highest probability, the instances were dropped from the analyses.[52]

The dropping of these cases does create a potential risk of bias. However, rather than creating bias, this chapter aims to focus on those individuals who are not considered to be potential swing voters, or uncertain voters as these could limit the data. These omitted cases could be re-included using randomisation between the two parties or using the original voting intention, given the voting intention matched one of the tied probabilities. Although this limits the sample, it does not limit the data as much as using the original voting intention.

Calculating the Rival's Policy Distinctiveness

The policy distinctiveness of the rival party is the key independent variable. This is

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[52] Instances of multiple preferred parties could be investigated in a separate study.

calculated in a series of steps. First, the identity of the rival is established. Second, the perceived position of the rival is subtracted from that of the party that the respondent is most likely to vote for, building upon Bolleyer's (2013) work on distinctiveness while accepting the limitations of the dataset. Calculating the distinctiveness between each party on the economic scale:

$$Perceived\ Distinctiveness\ =\ Conservative\ Party\ Score - Labour\ Party\ Score$$

$$Absolute\ Perceived\ Distinctiveness = |Perceived\ Distinctiveness|$$

The absolute value is used because of the potential misplacements. The misplacement may be caused by the participant switching the left and right direction on the economic scale. This seems an unlikely problem. However, when assessing the data itself, the issue does come up a significant number of times. These observations are unreliable and are omitted.

From this standard calculation of distinctiveness, the list of distinctiveness for each party is considered, and using the party which matches the independent variable, it is possible to select the nearest rival. The nearest rival is the party with the lowest distinctiveness to that of the preferred party. This absolute value is the key independent variable.

Table 3 displays the nearest rival's distinctiveness, given the party which the individual is most likely to vote for based on probability. Table 3 therefore, is a visual aid and indicates that a lot of participants are unable to differentiate between parties. Table 3 aligns with Table 2 which displays approximately 31,000 observations as having multiple parties which the individual would be most likely to vote for, as they assign an equal voting probability to multiple parties.

Table 3 - Party Distinctiveness, 2014 to 2017[53]

Distance to Nearest Rival	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	UKIP	Green Party	Total
0	**11,495**	12,605	3,207	7,530	3,852	28,689
1	**11,892**	10,831	3,289	4,212	2,808	33,032
2	**11,860**	6,597	2,049	3,119	1,959	25,584
3	**4,183**	3,183	696	1,409	1,111	10,582
4	**1,679**	1,512	147	575	609	4,522
5	**1,373**	1,417	103	479	362	3,734
6	**367**	369	2	136	160	1,034
7	**211**	214	1	94	70	590
8	**131**	148	2	57	33	371
9	**59**	60	2	22	8	151
10	**266**	295	8	90	23	682
Total	**43,516**	37,231	9,506	17,723	10,995	118,971

Attention to Politics

A factor that should be accounted for in this chapter is how much attention a participant pays to politics. This is important to distinctiveness, as the ability for a voter to make an informed decision about a party comes down to their knowledge and their awareness of a party and its policies.

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[53] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Panel Study Wave 2 (2014) to Wave 12 (2017) Excluding Wave 5, due to missing data

The investigation of scholars (Prato and Wolton, 2016) into the importance of voters and their attention and interest revealed the importance of "Goldilocks voters"[54] (Prato and Wolten, 2016, pp. 726-727). Following on from the concept provided by Prato and Wolten (2016), if distinctiveness may act as a heuristic for voters. Therefore, attention to politics will affect how distinctiveness would be useful as a heuristic in influencing the intensity of support given to a party.

On the other hand, the more attention to politics a vote pays in general may influence the political participation of an individual. Verba and Sidney, et al (1997) investigated the differences between men and women in politics. As a part of that study it was discovered that men are more attentive in general regarding political activity, and as a result were able to be more successful politically. This implies that the more attention to politics these voters were willing to pay, the more knowledgeable about politics they became, and thus were more successful. Therefore, the more attention a voter pays to politics the more informed a voter may become (Prato and Wolten, 2016; Verba, Sidney, et al., 1997). Those who pay less attention to politics are more likely to need and benefit from a heuristic to cast their vote.

Attention to politics was rated by the participants on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest attention, and 1 being the lowest and should be considered as a continuous variable. The distribution is shown in Figure 3 (Appendix). Using their self-perception produces an interesting scenario. Some participants may inflate their attention to politics, and others may deflate it. However, Verba and Sidney, et al, (1997) discovered there was little difference in voting participation between men and women. This in turn leads to the assumption that most participants would state they paid some attention to politics. With this in consideration, it can be assumed those participants who ranked themselves much higher on the scale were actively involved in politics. Therefore, self-perception in regard to attention to politics functions

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[54] Policy is at its best when voters care somewhat about politics but not overly.

alongside their self-perceived positioning.

<u>Perceived Proximity between Voter and Preferred Party</u>

An important control variable in the analysis is the perceived ideological proximity between respondents and their preferred party. This captures the degree of proximity and alignment voters feel with their most favoured option (Merrill and Grofman 1999). Greater perceived proximity is expected to increase party support due to enhanced congruence (Adams et al. 2005). Moreover, accounting for perceived proximity is needed to help isolate the effects of distinctiveness, capturing the variance due to ideological alignment driving enthusiasm for the party. Although subjective, respondents' perceived proximity to parties captures a key variable that should be accounted for.

$$Distance = Position\ of\ party\ most\ likely\ to\ be\ voted\ for - Participant's\ Position$$
$$Absolute\ Distance = |Distance|$$

It is important to use the absolute value to counteract any misplacements via misunderstanding of positioning, and to account for different parties positionings. Furthermore, there are cases in which the participant chose to answer, "Don't Know". For a participant who is unaware of their own positioning, it becomes impossible for them to be measured.[55]

Because of this variable's close relationship to the calculation of distinctiveness below we also examine a model to show the effects of distinctiveness without its inclusion.

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[55] In these cases, these participants are removed from the data. However, it may be possible to use these participants in a different study.

Strength of Party Identification

A control variable to account for is strength of party identification with their preferred party.[56] Strength of identification is linked to the individual and the party they associate themselves with. As a result, the participant may be more likely to vote for the party they have a strong identity to rather than one they do not.

Strength of party identification is rated from 1 to 3[57]. The truncated nature of this variable means that the variable categorical. It is scored with 1 being the highest and 3 being the lowest. This variable is similar to the British spatial model used by Katz (1979) and somewhat similar to the model initially used by Weisburg (1980), however, the model this paper uses extends to other political parties. Katz's 1979 model (pp. 149) was created at a time where parties such as UKIP and the Green party did not exist yet or were too young to potentially make an impact.

This paper is presented with a variety of answers in which participants may have answered "Don't Know". It is important to remove or null any variable considered as a response of "Don't Know", because a group of participants being unable to place themselves on the scale creates the potential for this group to be a mixture of identity strengths which could directionally pull against one another.

In addition, the truncated measure makes problematic to assume that every unit shift on this variable represents the same magnitude of movement on the assumed latent variable. A full and complete measurement for strength of party identification is complex, because an individual may be loyal or have attachments to multiple parties at a single point in time and may classify themselves as having no political identification as a result (Weisberg, 1980). However, the small scale does allow for a greater understanding of the perceived attachments to parties to be seen, rather than distributed in a more sporadic manner.[58] To make this variable easier to understand in this chapter, the

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[56] The question reads, "Would you call yourself very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong $party?"

[57] Those who selected "Don't Know" as an option were omitted, as this chapter has a focus on partisans.

[58] One of the issues with a 3-point scale is there is a tendency towards the middle option as seen in Figure 4.

scores were reordered; so, 1 is the lowest and 3 is the highest.

Control Variables

In addition to the above variables, I control for the years in which the survey takes place, poverty and unemployment risk, and the party itself. One of the most important variables controlled for in this chapter is the proximity effect. This will be used to compare the proximity effect and distinctiveness when both are present in the model, and when it is omitted.

Political Context

The British Election Study Panel Survey (BEPS) data spans a politically turbulent period from 2014 to 2017 encompassing two general elections and the pivotal Brexit referendum. This shifting context could substantially impact voter attitudes and party positioning. Thus, it is critical to control for potential contextual effects when analysing the pooled BEPS data across multiple waves.

The year 2014 provides a baseline pre-referendum period before Brexit dominated politics. In 2015, the general election saw David Cameron's Conservatives win a majority after polls suggested a hung parliament was likely (Cowley and Kavanagh 2016). This result would influence the political landscape for years. The 2016 wave occurred amid the Brexit referendum campaign that culminated in the historic vote for the UK to leave the EU, which empowered Eurosceptic forces and raised the salience of issues surrounding the campaign (Clarke et al. 2017). In addition, the Brexit referendum completed UKIP's primary goal, undermining its main purpose (Leigh 2017). Its future positioning became uncertain after achieving its signature mission. Finally, the 2017 snap election called by Theresa May saw Conservatives lose their majority, forcing reliance on the DUP. Wider political instability also likely impacted parties' strategic positioning and voter calculations (Mellon et al. 2018). The wave dummies in

statistical models account for these changes and aim to mitigate bias and enhance internal validity in a time of great change.

Table 4 - Sample Size by Wave[59]

Year	Frequency
2014	53,608
2015	87,939
2016	118,050
2017	62,227
Total	321,824

The Importance of the Party

In the analysis, it is important to control for the party they ultimately chose in addition to distinctiveness, attention to politics, and strength of party identification. In the analysis, it is vital to control for the party itself even though distinctiveness, attention to politics, and strength of party identification are the key independent variables. This accounts for the baseline average support amongst each party's voters. It taps into habitual factors that generate persistent loyalty to a party over time, regardless of ideological positioning, which may vary by party of choice (Denver et al., 2012, McAllister et al 1991).

This variable assesses which party the participant has selected to be their most likely choice and is categorically used to control for party isolates the specific effects of distinctiveness by adjusting for variance in this stable component of support. This prevents long-term loyalties of each party's supporters from confounding the distinctiveness effects. In

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[59] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Study, Internet Panel Waves 2-12, (2014-2017) Wave 5 is excluded

essence, controlling for party holds constant the typical level of support for that party to precisely estimate how distinctiveness shifts voting intentions on top of that baseline.

Poverty Risk and Unemployment Risk

The penultimate control variable is the self-perceived risk of poverty. Controlling for perceived poverty risk is important because economic vulnerability can influence both voter turnout and party choice (Burden and Wichowsky, 2014; Rosenstone, 1982). Voters who feel financially insecure may be more receptive to parties promising economic stability and social welfare policies (Jesuit et al., 2009; Wright, 2012). This relates to the economic grievance thesis - if voters feel their preferred party understands their economic struggles, they may have greater satisfaction and commitment to that party (Arndt, 2013).

Similarly, controlling for perceived unemployment risk helps account for how economic precariousness can shape political behaviour and attitudes. Together with poverty risk, this provides a robust control for individuals' economic circumstances, which may influence their willingness and ability to participate politically, as well as the appeal of certain parties over others (Margalit, 2019). Those facing higher economic risks may gravitate towards parties viewed as better addressing their economic interests and policy priorities.

The data has the self-perceived risk of unemployment and poverty risk listed as five ordinal categories: very unlikely, fairly unlikely, neither likely or unlikely, fairly likely, and very likely.

Results

Table 5 — Impact of Distinctiveness on Voter's intentions[60]

VARIABLES	(1) No Proximity Highest Voted Party (Probability)	(2) Standard Highest Voted Party (Probability)	(3) Interactions Highest Voted Party (Probability)
Nearest Rival's Distance	0.0760***	0.0521***	0.118***
	(0.0126)	(0.00326)	(0.0143)
Attention to Politics	0.0636***	0.0645***	0.0796***
	(0.00411)	(0.00369)	(0.00511)
Nearest Rival's Distance #Attention to Politics	-0.00315**		-0.00795***
	(0.00152)		(0.00169)
ID Strength: Fairly Strong	0.915***	0.869***	0.865***
	(0.0196)	(0.0162)	(0.0233)
ID Strength: Very Strong	1.498***	1.379***	1.430***
	(0.0209)	(0.0177)	(0.0247)
ID Strength Fairly Strong X Nearest Rival's Distance	0.915***		0.00145
	(0.0196)		(0.0106)
ID Strength Very Strong X Rival's Distance	1.498***		-0.0287***
	(0.0209)		(0.0108)
Participants' Proximity to HVP		-0.0682***	-0.0702***
		(0.00436)	(0.00438)
Party Chosen (HVP) = 2, Labour	-0.246***	-0.217***	-0.217***
	(0.0133)	(0.0139)	(0.0139)
Party Chosen (HVP) = 3, Liberal Democrat	-0.466***	-0.469***	-0.465***
	(0.0221)	(0.0228)	(0.0227)
Party Chosen (HVP) = 4, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	-0.159***	-0.145***	-0.138***
	(0.0171)	(0.0184)	(0.0184)
Party Chosen (HVP) = 5, Green Party	-0.541***	-0.490***	-0.482***
	(0.0265)	(0.0271)	(0.0271)

[60] Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p <0.01, ** p <0.05, * p <0.1

Chapter 4: Party Distinctiveness and the Electoral Performance of Political Parties

VARIABLES	(1) No Proximity	(2) Standard	(3) Interactions
	Highest Voted Party (Probability)	Highest Voted Party (Probability)	Highest Voted Party (Probability)
Poverty Risk	-0.0276***	-0.0298***	-0.0294***
	(0.00476)	(0.00506)	(0.00506)
Unemployment Risk	-0.0307***	-0.0271***	-0.0267***
	(0.00485)	(0.00510)	(0.00509)
year = 2015	0.448***	0.431***	0.430***
	(0.0132)	(0.0138)	(0.0138)
year = 2016	0.331***	0.314***	0.312***
	(0.0135)	(0.0141)	(0.0141)
year = 2017	0.501***	0.493***	0.491***
	(0.0148)	(0.0155)	(0.0155)
Constant	7.699***	7.805***	7.682***
	(0.0367)	(0.0360)	(0.0456)
Observations	87,177	74,018	74,018
R-squared	0.208	0.210	0.210

Table 5 displays the results from an OLS regression in which the dependent variable is the probability of voting for the most preferred party. Model 1 contains all control variables except for the proximity variable. This was done to test whether or not proximity had an effect on the statistical significance of distinctiveness. Model 2 is the standard model and contains all of the control variables but does not use the interaction terms and lastly Model 3 contains the interaction terms.

Model 2 assesses the impact of the absolute distinctiveness between the preferred party and their nearest placed rival is statistically significant and correctly signed (b = 0.0521). The more distinctive a party is from its nearest rival the greater the preference (score on the dependent variable) other things being equal. Furthermore, Attention to politics is statistically significant (b = 0.0645), therefore the more perceived attention to politics a participant pays, the

more likely they are to vote for the party they prefer. Similarly, the more a participant identifies with their preferred party, Fairly Strongly Identify (b = 0.869) and Very Strongly Identify (b = 1.379) respectively, the more likely they are to vote for them. In regard to proximity, the further the participant is from their preferred party, the less likely they are to vote for them (b = -0.0682). A more surprising result was the Poverty and Unemployment Risk, in which the more at risk of either Poverty (b = - 0.0298) or Unemployment (b = - 0.0271) a participant was, the less likely they were to vote for the party they preferred. Lastly, in regard to the year of participation, the year itself has a positive impact on the likelihood the participants would vote for their preferred party. The first hypothesis is confirmed. If two parties share the same space, the voter's attention would be more divided between the two parties.

Figure 1 Marginal effects of distinctiveness by attention to politics[61]
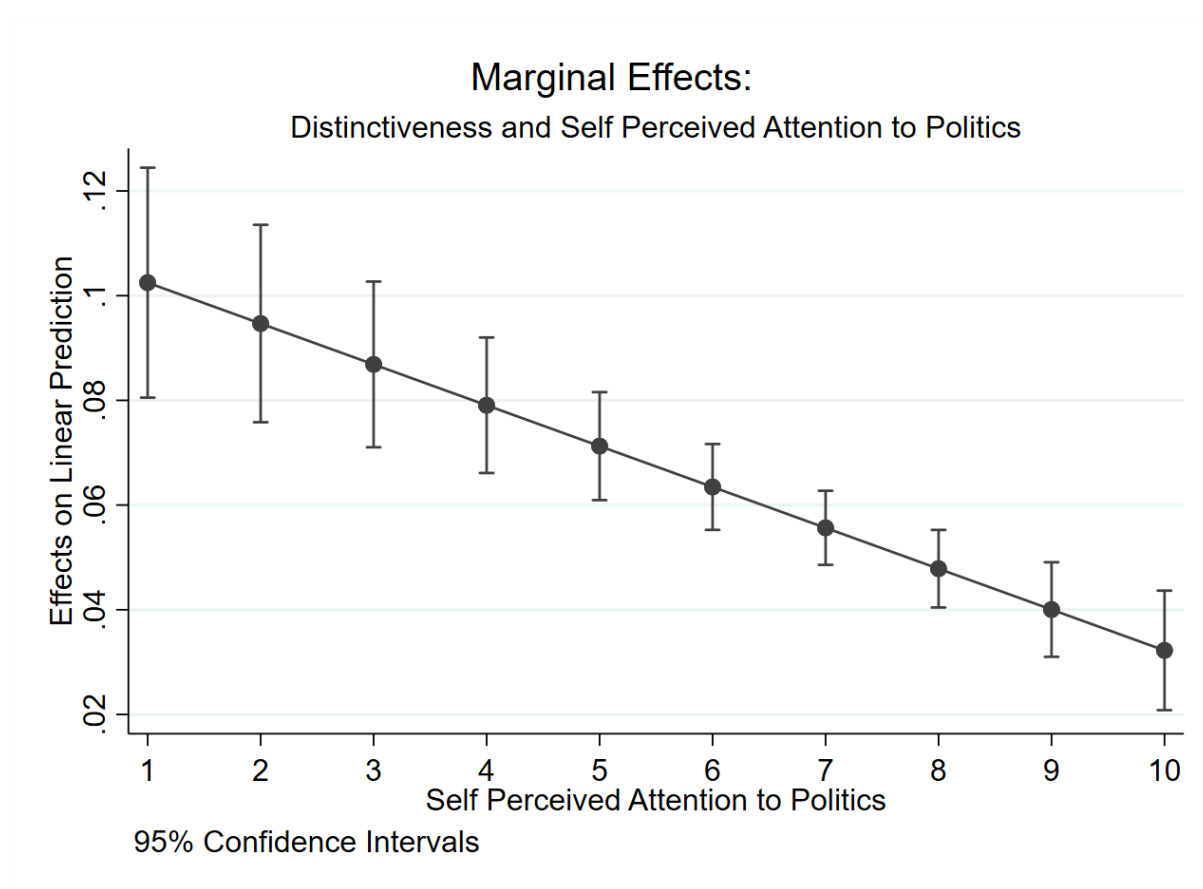
The second hypothesis is that the effect of distinctiveness is stronger among those who pay the least attention to and are least engaged with politics. This is assessed by including an interaction term between distinctiveness and the participant's attention to politics (Friedrich, 1982; Jaccard and Turrisi, 2004).

The results displayed under Model 3 reveals that as the attention to politics increases, distinctiveness has less effect (b = -0.00795). The interaction is statistically significant, and the effect is displayed in Figure 1. Distinctiveness matters more for those who pay least attention to politics—a finding that seems plausible given the theoretical discussion laid out above.

The third hypothesis is that distinctiveness interacts with the strength of party identification. Figure 2 displays the marginal effects for distinctiveness across the range of

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[61] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Study, Internet Panel Waves 2-12, (2014-2017)

strength of party identification. Considering the interaction between party identification and the rival's distinctiveness, the negative statistically significant coefficient for the interaction term for the strongest ID ("Very Strong") indicates that at least those that identify very strongly with a party exhibit less effect of distinctiveness on their support for the party (b = -0.0287), as we would expect from the arguments presented here. This is consistent with the possibility that party identification restricts the effects of distinctiveness, with the loyalty and attachment of strong identifiers overriding the heuristic effects.

The proximity of a voter to a party does influence their likelihood of voting for that party. However, this paper argues that perceived distinctiveness has an effect above and beyond proximity. This stems from distinctiveness's heuristic value. Both perceived distinctiveness and proximity are constructed from perceptions of party positioning. Yet cases may arise where a voter is much closer to one party on one side of their position but farther from the other party on the opposite side. This paper contends the voter would still be more inclined toward the more distinctive party, despite not being the closest.

While this chapter is only able to show the results from the economic spectrum, it is possible if not likely that the libertarian-authoritarian spectrum does present a viable distinctiveness trait, which may be greater than that of the economic spectrum. While this is hypothetical due to data limitations, it is very plausible that a voter may be persuaded by the distinctiveness on the other spectrum, despite the proximity of the party being closer to them on the first spectrum. A relevant example of this is the United Kingdom Independence Party. This party shares a close proximity to that of the conservative party itself on the economic spectrum, however, it has a level of distinctiveness on the liberal-authoritarian spectrum. This could explain why members of the conservative party have voted for UKIP.

The consideration of the proximity effect is controlled for in the voter level analysis, with a variable of the perceived voter's position and the perceived HVP's position. This does

produce a negative statistically significant result, although it is very slight. This result concludes that there is a perceived proximity effect occurring. The closer you are to the party the more likely you are to vote for them. It is difficult to separate the distinctiveness effect from the relative proximity effect. Specifically, when controlling for distance to the nearest party, the distinctiveness term may simply be capturing proximity to the next nearest option rather than a party's substantive uniqueness. The positive distinctiveness effect could therefore reflect lack of proximate alternatives rather than voters valuing distinctiveness per se. While the critique raises a valid concern about potentially confounding distinctiveness and proximity effects, the current approach in the thesis can still provide meaningful evidence regarding voter preferences for party distinctiveness. The inclusion of the nearest party distance control accounts for the proximity of the closest option, but the effect of distinctiveness is also present when this not controlled for. In either case, the distinctiveness term remains positive and significant, suggesting voters do prefer parties that offer a more novel, distinctive platform, over and above proximity. The thesis acknowledges the limitations in fully disentangling the mechanisms, but argues the model provides initial evidence of a distinctiveness preference, controlling for proximity.

Figure 2 Marginal effects of distinctiveness by strength of party identification[62]
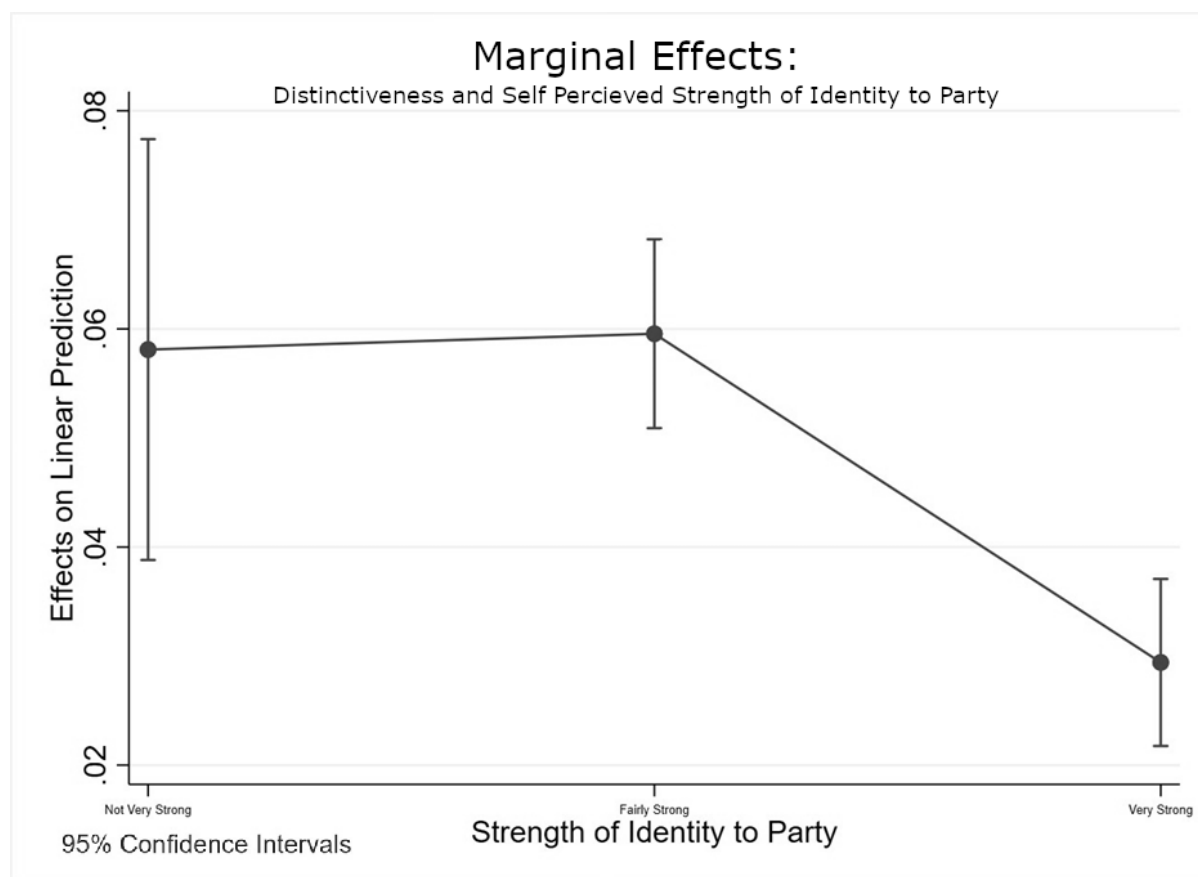
Turning to the results for the remaining variables in Table 1, the effect of distance from the preferred party is statistically significant and negative in both models 1 and 2. As expected, the greater the distance between the respondent and the party, the less likely they are to vote for them. Models 2 and 3 also contain controls for party preference as it may influence their intent.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the significance and importance of distinctiveness for the choices of voters for political parties at a micro level. In this paper, we analyse the perceptions of individual voters as well as the degree to which they support certain political parties. My

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[62] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Study, Internet Panel Waves 2-12, (2014-2017) As per the other tables and figures, wave 5 is excluded

objective was to determine whether or not individual voters would be more supportive of the party that they associate with if the party were more distinctive. I also explored whether, as expected by the theory of distinctiveness serving as a heuristic, the effect of distinctiveness on voter support for a voter's preferred party would be greater for those voters who pay less attention to politics. Further, I aimed to prove to the reader that it is advantageous for political parties to distinguish themselves from their closest opponents. Finally, I sought to demonstrate that voters who do not belong to any political party are more likely to support the party of their choice if distinctiveness is considered.

Political parties operate within the democratic space and produce policies that are represented in elections by their positions on a policy spectrum. It is the left-right spectrum that is the most commonly discussed characteristic of party competition, which is the clearest spatial framework for voters to understand. However, positioning presents a complex set of information to voters as well. However, distinctiveness, the relative position of parties to rivals, can be more easily identified and serve as a heuristic for voting choices based on the perceived positions of political party placements. Distinctiveness is an important in understanding voters' attitudes toward their political choices.

Although there were certain restrictions due to the lack of information in the dataset from the British Election Study, the study used a substantial sample to assess the attitudes and political leanings of participants in the study between 2014 and 2017. The study was carried out in multiple waves and studies throughout that period, with 321,824 British participants able to participate in the study. These data were also limited to measuring positions and distinctiveness on a general left-right spectrum; however, this research design enabled analysis of voter perceptions of distinctiveness within a case study of the bipolar party system of the UK.

From the investigations I undertook in this paper, I discovered that the more distinctive

a party is from its nearest rival, the stronger the voting intent for the electorate member's preferred voting choice for the next election. In addition to the effect of the nearest rival on distinctiveness, the more attention a voter attributes to politics, the weaker the effect of distinctiveness on increasing support for the voter's preferred party. Furthermore, the strength of an individual's loyalty to their political party reduces the effect of distinctiveness on reported probability of voting for the preferred party.

This paper uncovered the effect of distinctiveness on a micro level which raises the question of whether this effect will be replicated in other countries. I believe the results in the United Kingdom will likely be present in many other countries in the European Union, despite that it has a majoritarian system rather than a proportional system. In fact, it is likely that the other countries and their larger, more expansive multiparty systems would possibly be even more sensitive at the micro level to the impact of distinctiveness on voting intent. However, this is an area which is open to future research.

A further area of research that could be investigated based on the findings of this study is the impact of attention to politics on distinctiveness. For example, in this paper, we discovered that attention of politics does reduce the effect of distinctiveness. However, deeper level of attention needs to be uncovered, such as what constitutes attention to politics rather than self-perception. For example, what effect does the media have on the perception of distinctiveness? The findings of this study open up this discussion.

Another area for future investigation would be the point where diminishing returns becomes significant for distinctiveness, and whether or not the proximity effect then becomes more preferable for the voter in order for them to make a decision. Furthermore, the distinctiveness effect may be far more valuable to specific voters who are highly motivated on a specific policy issue. Another potential area for future investigation is tied to the attention a voter pays to politics. In cases there it would be worth a future investigation as to whether or

not the proximity a voter has to a party is more useful for them to make a voting decision rather than distinctiveness, as distinctiveness is better for voters who have less political knowledge.

The effect of distinctiveness on voters who have 'tied' preferences in regard to voting intent can also be investigated in future studies, which were not considered in this study. A large number of these individuals comprise the data in this paper, and potential approaches to studying the influence of distinctiveness on multiple preferences need to be considered.

As noted, a potential criticism of the distinctiveness effect found in this chapter's model is the potential conflation with a relative proximity effect. Specifically, controlling for distance to the nearest party makes the distinctiveness term partly capture distance to the next nearest option, and thereby reflect lack of alternatives. This critique raises a fair concern about confounding the distinctiveness and proximity mechanisms in the model specification. However, the distinctiveness term remains positive and significant in models where proximity is controlled for as well as when it is not, and we would not necessarily expect this pattern from the relative distance to the nearest rival's party. While not definitive, these results can be interpreted as consistent with distinctiveness shaping party support among voters, complementary to proximity, as a first step in quantifying distinctiveness effects and advancing this theory. However, a cautious interpretation of the current findings as suggestive rather than conclusive regarding distinctiveness is appropriate. Further empirical testing is needed to fully disentangle distinctiveness from proximity effects, but the model meaningfully pushes forward theoretical understanding of how voters respond to party uniqueness. Future work should further strengthen identification of the distinctiveness mechanism.

Another limitation of the current analysis is the reliance solely on the left-right economic dimension to operationalize party positioning and distinctiveness. As discussed in previous chapters, the libertarian-authoritarian dimension also significantly structures competition in many party systems. The inability to account for potential distinctiveness on this second

dimension omits part of what makes parties unique for voters. For example, a party could be economically right-wing but distinctively libertarian compared to its nearest rivals. The model would underestimate this party's distinctiveness. Similarly, voters may weigh distinctiveness on the libertarian-authoritarian axis more heavily in their decision calculus. For example, it is plausible that a voter may be persuaded by the distinctiveness on the other spectrum, despite the proximity of the party being closer to them on the first spectrum. A relevant example may be the United Kingdom Independence Party, which shared a close proximity to that of the Conservative party on the economic spectrum but had a level of distinctiveness on the liberal-authoritarian spectrum that could win support from voters who were otherwise aligned with the Conservative party.

The left-right focus thus provides only a partial picture of the distinctiveness mechanism. To fully capture substantive uniqueness, future iterations should incorporate multi-dimensional measures of distinctiveness encompassing both the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrums. This will allow more robust assessment of how voters respond to the diverse ways parties differentiate their brands. The current left-right operationalization represents a preliminary approach that can be built upon with further dimensionality.

Ultimately, this paper aimed shows the potential importance of the concept of distinctiveness as a fundamental and understandable heuristic that voters can use to comprehend the political landscape where political parties operate. According to these findings, distinctiveness is an important factor in determining what inspires voters to vote for a particular party and the intensity of that support. From this, distinctiveness may explain a variety of voting actions in a variety of other settings, such as party positions in local elections, referendums, and perhaps even international stances. This research has demonstrated the importance of distinctiveness for voters and political parties and opened up new avenues for further exploration.

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Appendix
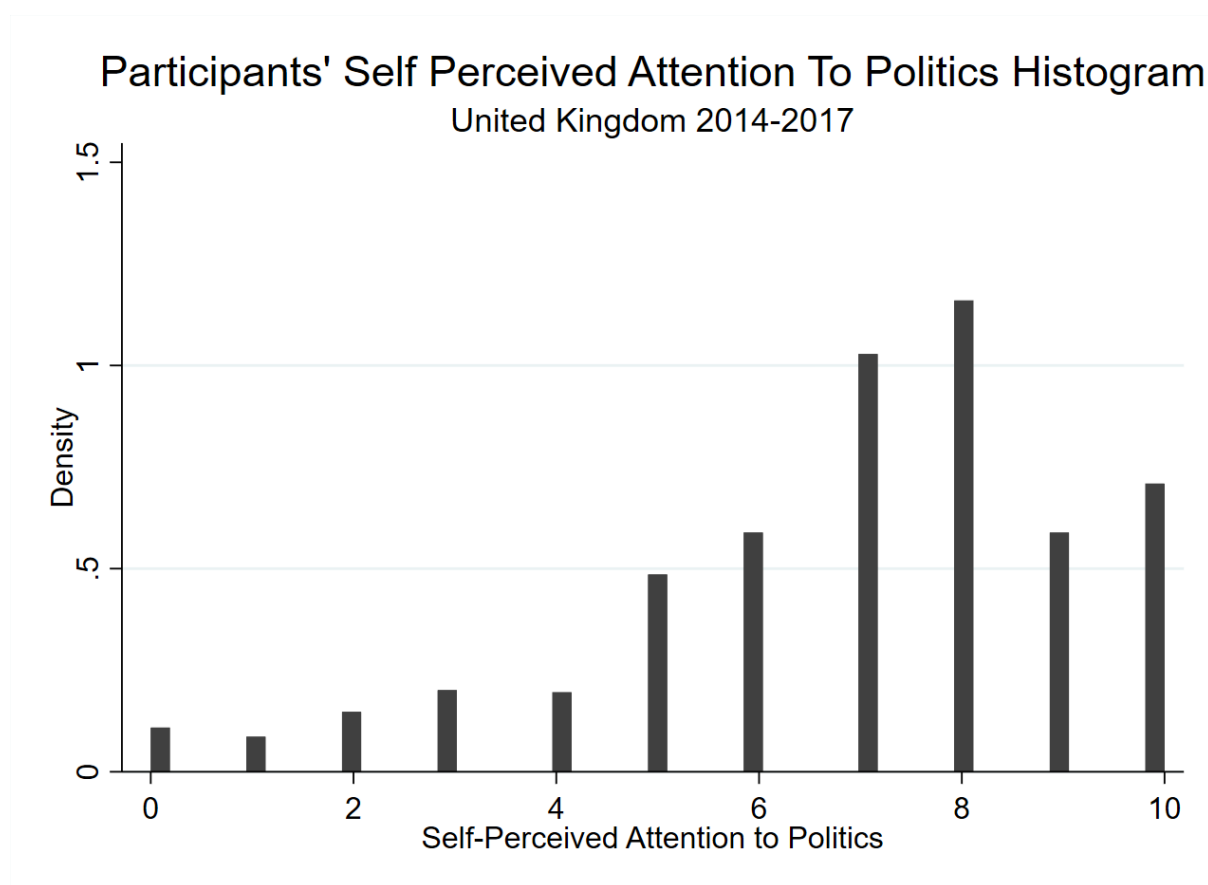
Figure 3 – Self Perceived Attention to Politics[63]

Figure 3 displays the placement each participant believes their attention to politics to be. The highest concentration of participants is around 8.[64] This self-placement could illustrate a level of bias of the participant. It is important to keep this in consideration when attempting to understand why voters may act how they do.

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[63] Source: Author's calculations based on data from British Election Study, Internet Panel Waves 2–12, (2014–2017), excluding Wave 5.

[64] 0 is considered to be the lowest score and 10 is considered to be the highest score, or most attentive.

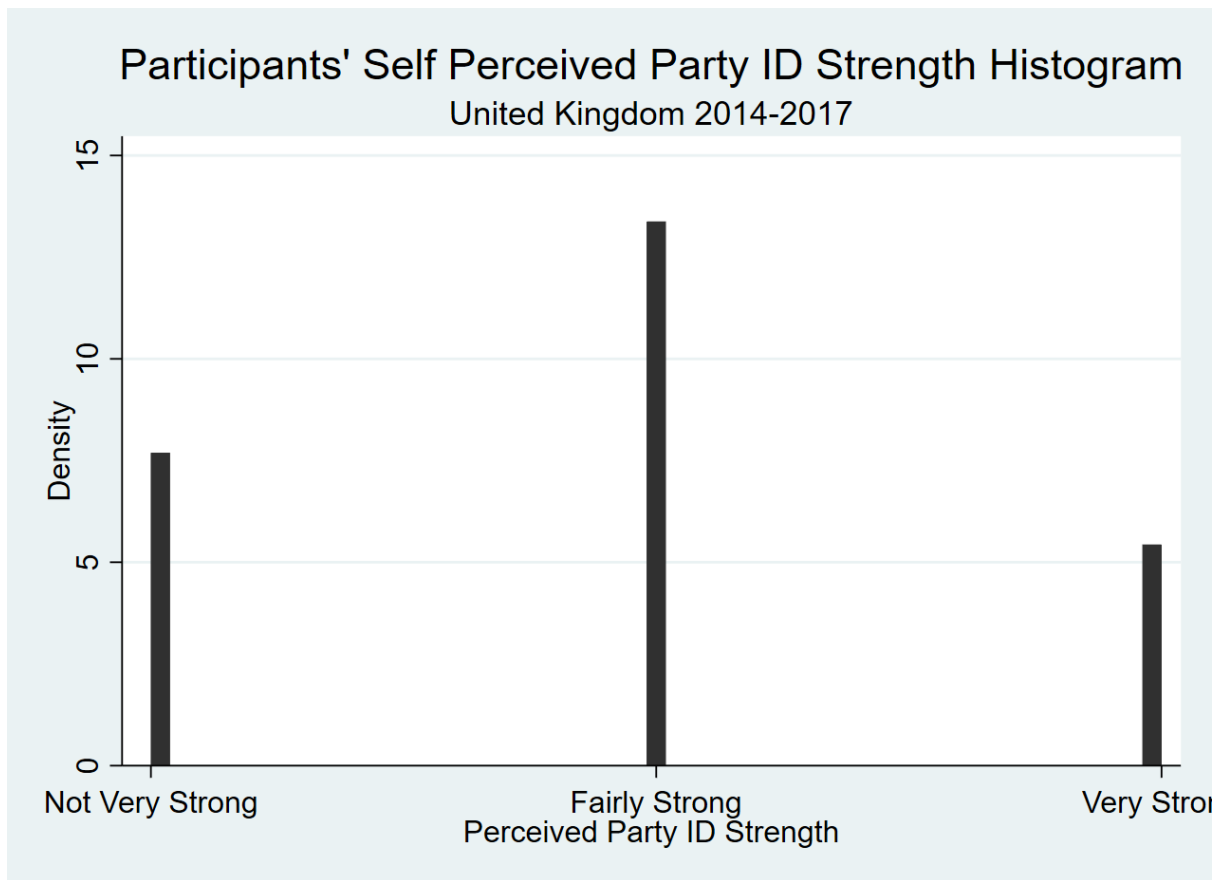**Figure 4 – Self Perceived Strength of Party Identification**

Figure 4 displays the density of the participants who attached themselves to a party. There is a gathering of data in the centre of the figure. This is potentially due to only three options being available to choose between.

<u>Chapter 5: Conclusions – The Impact of Distinctiveness in Elections</u>

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the effect of distinctiveness on both the performance and survival of political parties and on the choices of individual voters. Distinctiveness refers to how policies are mapped in a manner that can be perceived by the electorate, experts, and other parties. What makes one party different from another and why does it matter for party politics? While the literature on party positioning has tended to assume a level of understanding of the basic spatial model, the requirement of voters to know party positions is not fully necessary for distinctiveness to influence electoral politics—only the ability to identify and distinguish a party from immediate rivals. This is, in part, why distinctiveness is conceptually important in understanding party performance and voter behaviour.

Using cross-national empirical data and survey data from the UK, this thesis establishes the importance of distinctiveness for the success of political parties and the perception of voters. The data in Chapter 3 provide an answer to the impact of distinctiveness on the performance of the parties. Using cross-national party-level data, distinctiveness is shown to be beneficial for the performance of a political party on both the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrum; however, the effects of distinctiveness vary by the party's family type. Certain family types are more affected by economic distinctiveness from rival parties, whereas others are more sensitive to distinctiveness in their libertarian-authoritarian positions. In some cases, distinctiveness was relevant only on one spectrum.

The chapter also shows that a party's absolute position on policies on the economic and libertarian-authoritarian spectrums are key determinants of a party's distinctiveness but also directly impact its ability to move into a more distinctive space. Similarly, the party's family affects how distinctiveness matters, as certain issues and families may be able to command specific policies and thus create a distinctive position on the economic, or, more commonly,

libertarian-authoritarian spectrum. Lastly, the chapter shows that the electoral system matters to performance since proportionality affects the ease of becoming a viable competitor and obtaining seats in elections.

Chapter 2 then presents the use of cross-national empirical data to investigate a party's life cycle more broadly—that is, its survival. Whereas Chapter 3 establishes that parties can often benefit from a more distinctive position in any election, Chapter 2 examines whether parties that enter a political system are better able to remain viable when they hold distinctive profiles in the policy space within which parties compete in the political system. The survival analysis in the chapter reveals that being distinctive does improve a party's chance of survival from election to election. Distinctiveness's effect on a party's survival is positive, with parties lacking distinctiveness facing consistently greater odds of disappearance from electoral competitiveness.

In addition, the empirical data indicate a difference between newer Eastern European democracies and the more advanced democracies in the West. Regional distinction is shown to be important to the functioning of distinctiveness. As a result of the overall context in Eastern European democracies that have more recently reintroduced democracy, there is, of course, a much greater risk of parties failing to survive elections than in advanced democracies with more established party systems. Therefore, the analysis examines these regions separately and finds noteworthy differences in the effects of distinctiveness across them. In advanced Western democracies, state-market distinctiveness is more important to a party's survival in the early years than in Eastern European democracies, where libertarian-authoritarian distinctiveness is more important. Thus, although a lack of distinctiveness is shown to threaten party survival in

both regions, the Eastern European represents a different overall context within which distinctiveness has functioned compared to Western democracies.

The chapter also demonstrates that being highly distinctive on both spectrums, although initially helpful to parties compared to having no distinctiveness, can be harmful to a party as time passes, whereas each form of distinctiveness reverses in importance with the age of the party. Overall, the important conclusion of this chapter is that, regardless of region, being distinctive on either spectrum decreases the hazard rate a party faces compared to parties lacking distinctiveness from their rivals.

Furthermore, Chapter 2 demonstrates that the type of political party family is a relevant factor in survival. Party family is likely connected to region due to the influence of the communist era on ideology in post-communist contexts. These ideological differences across regions and countries could easily extend to party family types. Consequently, this chapter examines the effects of party family type on survival. This chapter uncovers that certain family types are more likely to survive than others, as parties within the same family type may be bound together – hindering their ability to be distinct and their chances of surviving. This crowding and potential position binding can be seen in Figure 3 of Chapter 3.

In the last paper, Chapter 4, the empirical data provide individual-level panel data from a single case—the United Kingdom—to illustrate the voter's perspective on the concept of distinctiveness. Here, we find that the perceived distinctiveness of parties improves the probability with which they support their preferred party, indicating that their confidence in their voting decisions is enhanced by this party being more distinctive than its nearest rival. In investigating the importance of distinctiveness at the voter level, it was important to account for baseline loyalties to the party. The results show that, since attachment to a party directly increases the willingness to vote for that party, it reduces the effect of the distinctiveness

compared to less attached voters. Voters who are exceptionally loyal to their parties would be less persuaded by distinctiveness from potential rival parties.

Chapter 4 also focuses on the matter of attention to politics to investigate the mechanism behind the effect of distinctiveness, which, according to the thesis, serves as a heuristic for voters to identify their preferred party. The results show that the less attention a participant paid to politics, the more distinctiveness matters for their voting preference. Meanwhile, those who are highly attentive are less influenced by this mechanism.

Contributions and Limitations

Overall, this thesis advanced the conceptualization and application of party distinctiveness, but fully elucidating its complexities demands ongoing methodological innovation and pluralistic analytic strategies. By mining diverse data and outcomes, scholars can progressively refine distinctiveness measures while also illuminating blind spots that quantitative methods alone cannot discern. The empirical results here, while meaningful, represent initial forays into a broader field requiring creative, interdisciplinary exploration.

Several methodological and data challenges are worth noting. Some analytic outcomes initially lacked transparent explanations, but deeper engagement with the literature illuminated productive paths forward. Operationalizing distinctiveness, in particular, demands further refinement to address limitations like its absolute rather than directional conception. While an absolute measure afforded interpretive clarity here, future work should explore directional dynamics, where positive and negative differentiation countervail.

The multidimensional approach—leveraging both economic and social policy spectrums—conferred advantages over single-axis reliance. It enabled flexible, nuanced analyses of how distinctiveness affects parties across ideological domains. However, each dependent variable captured only partial effects due to distinctiveness's multifaceted impacts.

Chapter 5: Conclusions – The Impact of Distinctiveness in Elections

Looking at both dimensions demonstrated that the effects of differentiation depend on ideological domains. For example, liberal-authoritarian distinctiveness proved more pivotal for party survival in Eastern Europe, whereas state-market differentiation held greater importance in Western Europe. Moreover, the two-dimensional approach revealed heterogeneity in distinctiveness advantages across party families. Positioning strategies that leverage differentiation must consider issue contexts and brand histories.

Chapter 2 extends this to the concept of survival. Investigating a party's survival chances using a hazard model allowed for an understanding of a party at the end of its life cycle, and whether or not distinctiveness is a factor. The hazard models in this chapter added insight into the divisions between each type of distinctiveness, as well as a comparison between Western and Eastern European democracies. This measure also presented limitations due to the left and right censoring involved with survival data. Left censoring arose from limited antecedent observations - an artifact of staggered founding dates. To mitigate its effects, analysis was restricted to the postwar period. Right censoring results from unfinished stories - parties surviving beyond the dataset's end. A censor date before the final election managed this issue.

The party success analysis in Chapter 3 makes several valuable contributions to the literature. First, it represents one of the first investigations into the effects of ideological distinctiveness on aggregate party performance using data across multiple countries. The findings demonstrate distinctiveness provides explanatory power over and above proximity in predicting success. Second, the disaggregated models by party family reveal heterogeneity in effects. However, limitations persist. The cross-sectional models cannot account for shifting alignments and volatility over time that may alter parties' relative positioning and distinctiveness. While the party success analysis provides initial evidence on distinctiveness effects, dynamic models and multi-method approaches could enrich understanding of how differentiation shapes parties'

electoral fortunes. The chapter lays groundwork for further scholarship to refine insights into this relationship.

Chapter 4 highlights a key advantage of distinctiveness—its relativity makes it accessible for voters lacking detailed political knowledge. Many voters find it difficult to interpret abstract ideological concepts like left, right, libertarian or authoritarian in absolute terms. But distinctiveness simply conveys difference—an inherently comparative cue. This reduces misinterpretations plaguing judgments of parties' isolated positions. As a relative measure, distinctiveness only requires grasping parties' policy contrasts, not locating their stances on an absolute scale. Voters need merely process inter-party divergence, not complex systemic contexts. Distinctiveness thus offers a cognitively "cheap" decisional shortcut, sacrificing nuance for parsimony. Whether this informational efficiency outweighs oversimplification remains an open question. But evidence suggests citizens effectively leverage distinctiveness when making choices despite limited expertise. Its essential relativity likely explains this user-friendly quality for many voters—a feature less critical for experts already fluent in partisan landscapes. By incorporating citizens' real-world heuristics, distinctiveness is an accessible too for decision making really used by voters.

These insights also contribute to the heuristics literature, as the relative measure of distinctiveness offers an explanation for party success that may be less informationally demanding than positioning. This is important as a contribution because distinctiveness can be used with less understanding of a specific party. A voter can more easily distinguish between two or more parties than place each individually. In future work, this concept could also be used on a policy-by-policy basis, such as pro- or anti-EU policies.

Overall, each chapter revealed key insights regarding the importance of distinctiveness. Evidence for the importance of distinctiveness is shown not only useful at the party level, but also at the voter level. Therefore, this paper has provided insight into distinctiveness as a

measure that captures an important heuristic for voters, one that influences the fortunes and, therefore, the strategy of political parties. Chapter 3 expanded upon the importance of distinctiveness as an additional explanation of why parties obtain votes and win elections as an alternative to direct positions. It also allowed for other questions regarding reactive policy movements and distinctiveness.

In terms of broader implications, the findings suggest dilemmas for parties believing their current positions are strategically optimal in terms of positioning yet lacking distinctiveness from rivals. Such parties face the question as to whether to risk change. Altering platforms can increase differentiation but may enables rivals to capitalise in terms of position. Intraparty heterogeneity further complicates the ability of parties to shifts, as factions may resist deviating from established brands. Furthermore, realignment may empower competitors now occupying a lonely distinctive flank. Differentiation by one party perversely makes others more unique. These complex dynamics reveal individual party decisions balancing continuity and change cascade through systems, collectively shaping distinctiveness. Parties convinced existing positions remain viable must determine whether standing out outweighs benefits of convergence.

Another complexity of the findings is that voters reward differentiation but also convergence. This paradox creates incentives undifferentiated systems to cater to voters, despite voters' apparent desire for distinct options. Resolving this dilemma requires addressing complex roots of voter behaviour promoting convergence in the aggregate, despite seeking differentiation to clarify choices.

The research also prompts questions surrounding what features of party systems might bolster differentiation. By encouraging differentiation, systems may better represent evolving interests and reengage disaffected citizens. A question for future research is if greater distinctiveness would also lead to perceived efficacy, trust, and participation by clarifying

choices. However, impacts likely depend on specific configurations of parties and the demand side of policy dimensions. Further research should investigate contextual conditions under which distinctiveness enhances system responsiveness and democratic vitality.

Overall, maintaining differentiation poses complex challenges and trade-offs for parties navigating competitive imperatives. But the research underscores distinctiveness's importance amid changing cleavages. By continually reinventing vibrant brands rooted in evolving social divides, parties and systems can enhance representation, accountability, and democratic legitimacy.

Directions for Future Research

This thesis reveals several fruitful avenues for further research to build on the findings regarding ideological distinctiveness.

At the party level, future work could examine distinctiveness on specific policy dimensions rather than broad economic and social spectra. Does differentiation on particular issues like immigration, healthcare, or the environment confer advantages? Studies could also investigate if niche parties especially benefit from distinctive positioning within their party family, occupying a unique sub-niche.

The regional variation in distinctiveness effects on party survival merits deeper investigation to unravel contextual specifics. What policies drive the economic versus liberal-authoritarian dimensions' impacts in Western versus post-communist Europe? Are newly salient issues like globalism reshaping differentiation? Comparing party age via first election rather than founding would provide another angle.

Voter-level analyses represent a major potential area of expansion of this topic, exploring survey data. How does distinctiveness shape non-aligned citizens' willingness to identify with a party? What role does it play in growing party membership and activating

supporters? Perceived distinctiveness may diverge between party and leader – how do such gaps influence voters? Panel data tracking individuals over time could also assess ideological differentiation's impacts on political identities in formation.

In summary, distinctiveness' effects manifest across multiple levels but our understanding remains incomplete. By diving into specific policies, contextual nuances, temporal dynamics, and individual heterogeneity, scholars can advance this research agenda. Combining quantitative positioning measures with qualitative case knowledge and micro-level data will provide new insights into how differentiation influences modern party competition.