The Vital Centre, the Middle of Nowhere, or Something In-Between:

A Study of Political Centrism in Western Democracies

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics at the University of Oxford.

21 May 2021

Contents

List of Figures v
List of Tables vi
Acknowledgements vii
Abstract ix

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
The Importance of Understanding the Centre 3
The Gap in the Literature 7
Theoretical Contribution 10
Scope 14
Data 15
Overview of Empirical Chapters 19
Conclusion 21

Chapter 2: Theory 22
Defining Centrist Parties 22
The Centrist Image 22
Ideological Centrism 28
Middle Centrism 41
Stylistic Centrism 46
Centrism and Populism 50
Parties: Conclusions 52
Defining Centrist Voters 53
The Ideological Voter 54
Intentionality 55
Partisanship 58
Political Interest 64
Moderation 68
Symbolic Centrism 73
Voters: Conclusions 75
Conclusion 76

Chapter 3: Descriptive Typology 77
Analysis of Centrist Parties 79
Ideologically Centrist Parties 84
Moderate Centrist Parties 90
Mainstream Economic Centrist Parties 92
Niche Economic Centrist Parties 93
Syncretic Centrist Parties 95
Middle Centrist Parties 97
Stylistic Centrist Parties 109
Parties: Conclusions 115
Analysis of Centrist Voters 116

Categorisation 126
Genuine Moderates 127
Genuine Syncretics 128
Default Moderates 128
Default Syncretics 129
Empirical Categorisation 129
Voters: Conclusions 132
Conclusion 133

Chapter 4: Centrist Parties, "Centrist Ideology," and European Integration 134
Centrist Ideology and European Integration 135
What, if Anything, is "Centrist Ideology?" 135
Centrist Ideology and Issues 138
Hypotheses 148
Moderation on the Economic Dimension 148
Syncretic Liberalism 156
Centrism and Governing 169
European Integration as a Single Issue 176
Centrist Parties and the Electorate 180
Data and Methods 185
Dependent Variable 188
Independent Variables 190
Controlling for Variation Within Countries 198
Model 199
Results 200
Findings 205
Conclusions 217

Chapter 5: Centrism as an Expression of Symbolic Values 219
Symbolic and Operational Ideology 220
Hypotheses 224
Compromise 224
Pro-Elite Sentiment 227
Flexibility in Thinking 230
Attachment to the Status Quo 233
Symbolic Values and Types of Centrists 235
Data and Methods 236
Dependent Variable 237
Independent Variables 240
Classical Predictors 248
Controls 251
Models and Results 252
Findings 262
Centrist Types 269
Conclusions 272

Chapter 6: Can Centrist Parties Rely on Centrist Voters? **275**
The Empty Centre 275
Hypothesis 281
Data and Methods 286
Dependent Variable 297
Independent Variables 302
Controls 303
Centrifugal, Centripetal, and "Backwards" Party Systems 304
Model, Results, and Findings 308
Conclusions 319

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Discussion **321**
Theoretical Contribution 321
Centrist Parties, "Centrist Ideology," and European Integration 323
Findings 323
Connection to Theory and Motivations 325
Implications 326
Limitations and Future Research Agenda 328
Centrism as an Expression of Symbolic Values 330
Findings 330
Connection to Theory and Motivations 332
Implications 333
Limitations and Future Research Agenda 335
Can Centrist Parties Rely on Centrist Voters? 336
Findings 336
Connection to Theory and Motivations 337
Implications 338
Limitations and Future Research Agenda 339
Political Philosophy and Social Science 342

Works Cited **347**

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Ideological Distribution of European Voters 4
Figure 2.1: Three Types of Centrist Parties 27
Figure 2.2: Typology of Ideologically Centrist Parties 40
Figure 2.3: Illustration of Middle Centrist Parties 44
Figure 3.1: Ideological Distribution of European Parties 83
Figure 3.2: Ideologically Centrist Parties in Context of all Centrist Parties 87
Figure 3.3: Types of Centrist Parties by Location on Ideological Dimensions 88
Figure 3.4: Illustration of Prototypical Moderate Party 91
Figure 3.5: Illustration of Prototypical Mainstream Economic Centrist Party 93
Figure 3.6: Illustration of Prototypical Niche Economic Centrist Party 94
Figure 3.7: Illustration of Prototypical Syncretic Centrist Party 96
Figure 3.8: Ideological Topography of Austrian Party System, 2014 101
Figure 3.9: Ideological Topography of British Party System, 2014 102
Figure 3.10: Ideological Topography of Greek Party System, 1999 104
Figure 3.11: Ideological Topography of Dutch Party System, 2014 106
Figure 3.12: Ideological Topography of Irish Party System, 2010 108
Figure 3.13: Ideological Distribution of European Voters 120
Figure 3.14: Percentage of Respondents with No Party Identification by Ideology 122
Figure 3.15: Operational Definitions for High and Low Intentionality 124
Figure 3.16: Policy Positions of Voters by Ideology 125
Figure 3.17: Typology of Centrist Voters (Theoretical) 127
Figure 3.18: Typology of Centrist Voters (Empirical) 130
Figure 4.1: Parties by Overall Ideology and Positions on Issues 141
Figure 4.2: Issue Positions of Parties by Ideology 143
Figure 4.3: Parties by Overall Ideology and Syncretic Score 162
Figure 4.4: Parties by Syncretic Score and Positions on Immigration/Single Market 168
Figure 4.5: EU Position by Respondent Ideology 182
Figure 4.6: Centrist Respondents and Centrist Party Voters on Issues 183
Figure 4.7: Do Centrist Parties Represent Their Voters? 184
Figure 4.8: Marginal Effect of Economic Moderation on European Integration 206
Figure 4.9: Marginal Effect of Syncretic Liberalism on European Integration 209
Figure 4.10: Marginal Effect of Governing Metrics on European Integration 212
Figure 4.11: Marginal Effect of Single-Issue Score on European Integration 215
Figure 5.1: Predicted Probability of Centrist ID by Non-Ideological Values 257
Figure 5.2: Effects of Non-Ideological Values on Probability of Ideological ID 261
Figure 6.1: Hypothetical Centrifugal Party System 306
Figure 6.2: Hypothetical Centripetal Party System 307
Figure 6.3: Marginal Effect of Relative Proximity by Ideology (2009/overall) 311
Figure 6.4: Marginal Effect of Relative Proximity by Ideology (2014/overall) 312
Figure 6.5: Marginal Effect of Relative Proximity by Ideology (2009/implied) 316
Figure 6.6: Marginal Effect of Relative Proximity by Ideology (2014/implied) 317

List of Tables

Table 4.1: Components of MARPOR Economic Ideology Scale 192
Table 4.2: Components of MARPOR Sociocultural Ideology Scale 194
Table 4.3: Effect of Party Characteristics on European Integration (CHES) 200
Table 4.4: Effect of Party Characteristics on European Integration (GPS) 202
Table 4.5: Effect of Party Characteristics on European Integration (MARPOR) 204
Table 5.1: Factor Loadings for Pro-Elite Sentiment Variable 243
Table 5.2: Factor Loadings for Flexibility in Thinking Variable 246
Table 5.3: Correlation Matrix of Non-Ideological Values 253
Table 5.4: Effect of Non-Ideological Values on Centrist Identification (OLS) 255
Table 5.5: Effect of Non-Ideological Values on Centrist ID (Multinomial/Left) 259
Table 5.6: Effect of Non-Ideological Values on Centrist ID (Multinomial/Right) 260
Table 5.7: Effect of Centrist Predictors on Non-Ideological Values 270
Table 6.1: Comparison of American Data Sources and European Data Sources 293
Table 6.2: Components of MARPOR Economic Ideology Scale 297
Table 6.3: Major Pole Parties by Country 299
Table 6.4: Effect of Relative Proximity and Ideology on Vote Choice (2009/overall) 309
Table 6.5: Effect of Relative Proximity and Ideology on Vote Choice (2014/overall) 310
Table 6.6: Effect of Relative Proximity and Ideology on Vote Choice (2009/implied) 314
Table 6.7: Effect of Relative Proximity and Ideology on Vote Choice (2014/implied) 315

Acknowledgements

I was not expecting advice when I knocked at the door of Dan Levy's office at the Harvard Kennedy School in the summer of 2016, much less advice that I would think about almost every week throughout my time as a doctoral student. I had merely stopped by for a quick hello and catch-up. But Dan, my former econometrics professor and one of the greatest pure teachers I have ever known, made sure to give his counsel when he heard the news that I'd be coming to Oxford to start my doctorate that autumn.

"You'll never ask yourself the question 'can I do this?' You have the talent and the drive. But when it's wintertime, and the sun sets early, and you're sitting by the library window watching the world go dark, the question you'll ask yourself will be 'am I meant to do this?' And that's much harder. My advice on your PhD: don't get it right – get it written."

I am a deeply spiritual person, and while not a fatalist, I cannot count the number of times I've asked myself – or anyone who would listen – if I was meant to do this. It is an incredibly difficult, often lonely, almost comically frustrating job. There were many moments I wondered whether this was the best way to use my time and gifts in the one life I've been given. And yet, I find myself at the end of the journey. Was I meant to do it? Perhaps not. But I've done it anyway, and I am extremely proud that it's now a part of my story.

I'd flatter myself to think that it's because of my talent and determination alone. I'd flatter myself to think that it's even *mostly* because of my talent and determination. I'm here because a great many people have stood behind me, walked with me, or led me forward. And while I cannot thank them all by name in this space, I aim to show them personally how grateful I am.

That starts with my family – my impossibly loving and supportive parents, my brother and new sister, my cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, those with us still, and those we miss for now. (Maddie and Catie deserve their own separate thanks for their distraction.) Burke writes about the ties between generations – that our lives are the product of those who came before us and we are similarly obliged to those who come after us – and that was an idea that I never needed to read in order to know in my heart.

Of course, since no one in my family is exactly qualified to direct high level scholarly research, I must next thank the three people who essentially "raised" me as a researcher, with an accompanying long and frustrating adolescence. I am indebted to Professors Jane Green, Sergi Pardos-Prado, and David Rueda, who handed me off like the baton of a relay race. I am, shall we say, somewhat unlikely to win the Skytte Prize someday, but somehow shepherding me to the end of this process should count among their great professional accomplishments all the same. I am similarly grateful for the contributions of other academics who encouraged me and helped me along: Ali Cirone, Toni Rodon, Roi Zur, and others who gave so freely of themselves.

That being said, much like an iceberg, one's supervisors only hear a small portion of questions relating to the thesis; it is one's peers and colleagues who are largely on the receiving end. Feel no sympathy for them, since they're all much more gifted and accomplished researchers than I am: Catarina, Ilona, Maya, Rebecca, Yuan, Tanushree, Zack, Jacob, and everyone else in our cohort – needless to say, they've kept this thesis from being a bit too journalistic.

And speaking of gifted and accomplished thinkers – they may not have been in my department, but they were kind enough to spiritually include me in theirs. Jamie, Vafa, Claire, Helen, and Ji (some of the coolest kids I know); I have been amazed by their talent and heartened by their friendship.

Like many who come to Oxford, the college system was a mystery to me when I was first admitted. But I very quickly grew to love New College and think of it as both a physical and intellectual home. It was very hard living and writing this past year without having the garden to walk in or the Hall to dine in; I'll always have better memories of serving as MCR President and behind the bar than I will of writing my thesis. I'm so thankful to everyone who makes New College special: all my beloved flatmates and neighbours from four years in the Weston Houses, my friends from the MCR (and JCR and SCR), and the professional community who supports us – faculty and academic staff, but also the cooks, scouts, porters, servers, and back-office staff I got to know by name.

Sadly (for them), not all of my friends in Oxford are members of New College, but their friendship is no less important to me. And indeed – not all my friends in Europe reside in Oxford, but I've often relied upon them as though they lived next door. In their own ways, they've kept me from being too insular and too focused on the minutiae of work when living abroad is one of life's great adventures and not to be wasted.

Given that this is the final thing I'll ever write in the course of my formal education, I would especially like to thank all the teachers throughout my life who have shaped me as a person and a thinker, particularly Tom Patterson, Elaine Kamarck, and Matt Baum, without whom I'd never have completed this journey; but also David Gerber, Gregg Johnson, Jim Holmes, and the legions of schoolteachers in Lackawanna and Buffalo who inspired and pushed me, without whom I'd have never even started this journey.

Finally, I want to thank all the friends and acquaintances who've added colour to the past five years. I could write another thesis on all the little interactions that I've found myself missing most during what has been the most unusual and one of the most difficult years of my life. I cannot wait to kiss them and shake their hands and tell them that I've missed them, appreciate them, and couldn't have done this without them.

The proximate beginning of the journey to this day came about a year before that chat with Dan Levy, over a tall glass of *Apfelwein* in scenic Alt-Sachsenhausen. Lauren and Roman were kind enough to invite me to their wedding, and so I went and got the first-ever stamp in my passport, with no idea that that one adventure would eventually lead here.

That moment is emblematic of my entire life. What I've accomplished has all been because of the encouragement from those who love me – to live fully, maximise my gifts, and expand the scope of my world. I could never say enough about how much I love and appreciate them in return, but I hope that dedicating this project to them will be a start.

Abstract

The nature of the centre is one of the most significant concepts in the study of comparative politics, due to its place at the fulcrum of the ideological spectrum. However, scholarly interest in the subject has not matched its importance, with a relative paucity of research leaving the idea of the centre often poorly defined, imprecise, and theoretically muddled.

The main contribution of this thesis lies in its response to this confusion. It advances a novel typology to streamline and clarify disparate conceptions of political centrism. It proposes a new theoretical framework of centrist parties and centrist voters, and contextually grounds it within the wider literature on ideology and its effects.

Guided by this typology and utilising several large-sample studies of ideology (expert surveys and manifesto content analysis for parties, and mass public opinion surveys for voters), the three empirical chapters explore several questions related to two fundamental themes – how centrist political actors differ from their counterparts on the left and right, and how centrist political actors differ among themselves.

Specifically, among other things, this thesis finds that subtle variations in centrist ideology can account for parties' enthusiasm for European integration. It finds that many centrist voters are neither particularly moderate in their views nor are they as compromising and ideologically flexible as they are often presupposed. And it finds that the relationship between the intensity and extremity of preferences bears on electoral behaviour, as centrists are shown to be less sensitive to ideology than other voters when casting their ballots.

This research demonstrates the importance of a more nuanced and comprehensive conception of the centre, and the crucial implications it has for the wide range of subjects in the social sciences relating to political ideology, including party competition, voter behaviour, political psychology, and democratic theory.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It would certainly be an exaggeration to say that "practically speaking, the history of the West, and everything we need to know about it, begins with the French Revolution," as a well-educated but intellectually blinkered schoolgirl claims in Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914*. That being said, there is more than a grain of truth in the statement when it comes to the study of political ideology in the West.

In the early summer of 1789, a revolutionary new body – *l'Assemblée nationale* – met spontaneously at the tennis court at the Palace of Versailles for the first time. Formed as the result of an oath taken there by commoners who had been excluded from power in the *États généraux* by the nobles and clergymen who dominated that convention, the *Communes* were quickly joined by those latter groups when it became clear that the social and economic system underpinning the Kingdom of France was in danger of breaking down altogether. One of the most pressing issues facing the new body was the amount of power the king should wield in government – in particular, his absolute right to veto legislation approved by the Assembly. As debate progressed, those that supported the king's entitlement to the veto – mostly the aristocracy, the landed gentry, and the Church – sat together in the chamber to the right of the speaker and advocated for a position that embraced tradition, hierarchy, continuity, and conservation of the established order; their opponents – mostly the *Communes* – gathered on the speaker's left and argued in favour of a more radical, countercultural, progressive, and liberal idea (Hunt, 1984; Gauchet, 1996).

The seating arrangement did not last long – the king quickly proceeded to surround Versailles with his soldiers, the Bastille was stormed in mid-July, and the *Ancien Régime* collapsed within days, kicking off the Revolution in earnest. However, the conception of politics as formed by the duality of a radical left and conservative right became ingrained in

European thought, and as the franchise expanded and mass democracy spread over the succeeding decades, the twin ideals grew to represent the fundamental choices present in politics, largely assuming their present meanings by the early 20th century.[1] Today, left and right are undeniably fundamental concepts in Western politics, and arguably the basis of any discussion of political ideology in democratic society or elsewhere (Bobbio, 1996).

However, as is self-evident, the diversity of political viewpoints is simply too great to be reduced to a duopoly of two alternatives. The left-right political continuum, the most prominent construction for the description and communication of political thought, is more than just its endpoints. Left and right are not a dichotomy like black and white, two mutually exclusive categories that encompass all possible political positions, but more akin to the termini of a rainbow, between which spans an entire spectrum of values and beliefs. And while most points within that range can be described in relation to the endpoints – mostly left or closer to the right – one and only one cannot.

The political centre is both left and right; as well as neither. It is a confluence of the two; and it is a distinct, third state, entirely set apart. It serves as the expression of a set of values; but it is also a declaration of neutrality, disclaiming any opinion at all. Depending on the perspective, it is therefore reliant upon the way left and right are characterised; or it transcends the construction entirely.

The only sure thing that can be said about the centre is that it remains a puzzle, open to many interpretations but subject to none. While left, right, and all the many other ideologies of the Western body politic are constantly evolving, they are heavily researched and never fail

[1] In today's democratic West, the ideas of left and right have come to be attached to competing expressions of economic ideology, specifically relating to the state's intervention in the market. However, since this was not always the primary axis of political competition (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967 – see next chapter), left and right do not necessarily always refer to economic ideas when encountered in either historical or social science literature.

to draw the attention of scholars. By contrast, the centre is generally either forgotten or dismissed through simple assumptions. This thesis is a reaction to this tendency, and it tries to answer a small fraction of the riddles posed by the theoretical and empirical concept of the centre.

What exactly does it mean to say that a party, politician, person, or policy lies in the centre? What is the nature of this ideology? Is it an ideology at all? And how does it manifest in our democratic life, among both parties and voters? These are not idle questions, asked purely for the sake of intellectual exercise.

The Importance of Understanding the Centre

The political centre is a highly relevant subject, both in practical politics, and in scholarly literature. The former becomes obvious upon engagement with almost any news or public affairs content. The conception of parties, politicians, policies, rhetoric, and ideas as "centrist," "extreme," or some other adjective grounded in the construct of a political continuum with a middle and endpoints is ubiquitous.[2] This fascination is certainly justified, since scholarly research validates the centre's prominence, even when its focus is elsewhere.

Centrist parties and elites are key actors in elections and governments across Europe. According to scholarly expert surveys, parties with centrist programmes lead governments in France and Italy, participate in the governments of many other countries, and have a key role in the leadership of the European Parliament (Bakker et al., 2020; Norris, 2020). The centre's importance is even more apparent when the electorate is considered. Figure 1.1 displays the self-identified ideological distribution of European voters on the overall left-right scale,

[2] As an example, in the past year, there have been more than 400 mentions of political centrism in the *Financial Times*, the English-language house organ of the European political and business elite.

according to the European Election Study's 2019 Voter Survey, a scholarly public opinion database (Schmitt et al., 2020).[3]

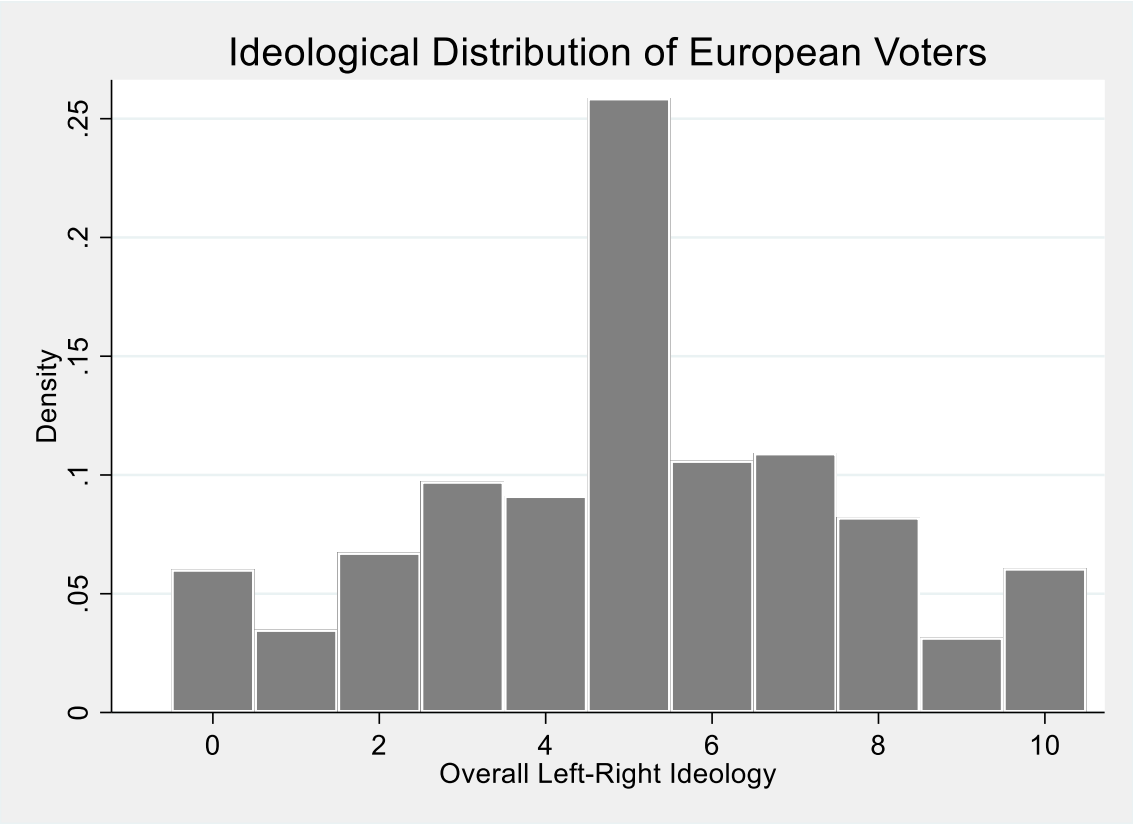

Figure 1.1: The distribution of voters in the EES sample by overall left-right orientation. N = 22,826

A large plurality of the citizens of European Union member states identifies as centrists by this common method of evaluating ideology. Although not shown here, this holds true on the national level as well, meaning pluralities of respondents in every Western European country identify as centrists – indeed, in some countries, the centre category claims more

[3] A full discussion of this data – and all data used in this thesis – is found later in this chapter and in successive chapters. The survey question used here reads: "In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right.' What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on an 11-point scale. On this scale, where 0 means 'left' and 10 means 'right,' which number best describes your position?"

adherents than the *total* number of respondents identifying to either the left or right of centre. Furthermore, the electoral centre has grown over the last 50 years, as evidence shows that the European voter distribution tightened over the second half of the 20th century (Knutsen, 1998).

Beyond the significance of centrist actors in politics, the *idea* of the centre has proven to be a highly valuable theoretical construct in any scholarly work touching on political ideology. In the most prominent example, Downs' (1957) seminal work on the median voter theorem is entirely underpinned by the assumed preferences and behaviour of a median voter, someone who resides at or near the centre ground of a specific policy issue. The intellectual progeny of this research, the spatial model of voting, operates under a similar set of assumptions concerning the decision rules of voters, and holds that the party that is most proximate to the largest share of voters on the ideological landscape stands to capture the most votes at elections (e.g. Enelow & Hinich, 1984; Schofield, 2008). Therefore, most spatial models predict that parties go where the voters are and converge towards the centre of the ideological spectrum. Directional models of voting are often even more dependent upon understanding the nature of the centre, since such models generally make wildly different predictions about the behaviour of voters even slightly to the left and right of the centre position, while centrists themselves are thought to be simply neutral between competing alternatives (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Platt, Poole, & Rosenthal, 1992). Scholarly work on coalition formation is reliant upon common assumptions of actors' positions and movements within an ideological space (e.g. Baron, 1991; Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999); so too is the field of legislative studies (e.g. Poole & Rosenthal, 1985; Segal, Cameron, & Cover, 1992; McCarty & Poole, 1995). The study of political psychology is all but unthinkable without the use of abstract constructs like the political spectrum to tether researchers and subjects to the

highly complex ideas that comprise modern democratic life – the same is unquestionably true for political philosophy.

While not truly endless, the number of fields and subfields within the social sciences that depend upon the conception of political ideology as a topographical space – from a spectrum to a plane to constructs in three or more dimensions – is too numerous to list here. And therefore, virtually every single one of them is dependent upon some interpretation of the "centre" as inherent to those conceptions. Why? Because geometrically, every common conception of political ideology as a "space" – a physical dimension or dimensions within which things may exist, move, and interact – requires, by definition, both a bounded edge and a centre, making a firm definition and understanding of the latter all but essential to the discipline.

And yet, despite the "centrality" of the concept to major puzzles of political science, the centre has not been a particularly popular topic in scholarly literature, what Daalder (1984) called a "curious anomaly." He went on:

> "Writings about European party systems abound with references to the Left. They also give considerable attention to a less easily defined Right. Yet, there is practically no systematic treatment of the center or of center parties. Admittedly, the term *center* is widely, if loosely, used in both journalistic comment and in academic descriptions of the functioning of party systems in individual countries. Nevertheless, European party systems are rarely viewed from a center perspective. On the contrary, the idea of a center tends to find little favor with scholars" (p. 92).

While the state of scholarly literature on the centre is less desolate today than Daalder (1984) described decades ago, the situation has only marginally improved – there is still far less research on the centre than warranted by virtue of its import, and the centre and centrists can often seem forgotten in scholarly literature (Rodon, 2015; Fowler et al., 2021).

The Gap in the Literature

A simple example taken from a common scholarly tool serves as a powerful example of the gap in our understanding of this crucial political concept. One of the most widely used data sets in the comparative study of political party positions is the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), a long-running survey of experts on European parties (Bakker et al., 2015; 2020). The CHES rates parties on an 11-point scale representing the overall left-right political continuum, with 0 representing the furthest point left, 10 representing the furthest point right, and 5 representing the political centre.[4] On the 2017 version of the survey, three Western European parties were clustered within the narrow band between 4.9 and 5.2, the closest to the midpoint out of hundreds of parties throughout the continent. The three parties were: the Netherlands' Christian Union, a very small party whose policies are explicitly grounded in a conservative Protestant interpretation of the Bible; Greece's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (commonly known as PASOK), a social democratic catch-all party that was once the dominant force on its country's centre-left; and Italy's Five Star Movement, an avowedly anti-establishment and pro-direct democracy movement founded by a comedian and nurtured on the internet, with difficult-to-classify positions on common public issues and controversies. Aside from a nominally overall centrist ideological image – at least according to the experts surveyed by the CHES – it is difficult to imagine what these parties have in common. What then, does it mean to say that they are all "centrist?" If they are, then we require a dramatically more nuanced definition of the term, and if they are not, then the word has simply become a dumping ground for political subjects that do not fit neatly into the present paradigm.

[4] Again, a full discussion of data and methods will follow in the succeeding chapters. In this introduction, the CHES is cited merely for illustrative purposes.

For all the CHES' popularity, it is but one example of this phenomenon. But it is certainly not alone. A survey of significant scholarly literature on ideology, with thousands of citations in total, reveals a great many alternative descriptions of and definitions for the political centre. If perhaps the most famous statement on the subject is to be believed, the centre does not even deserve a definition:

> "This is equivalent to saying that the centre does not exist in politics: there may well be a Centre party but there is no centre tendency, no centre doctrine. The term 'centre' is applied to the geometrical spot at which the moderates of opposed tendencies meet: moderates of the Right and moderates of the Left. Every Centre is divided against itself and remains separated into two halves, Left-Centre and Right-Centre. For the Centre is nothing more than the artificial grouping of the right wing of the Left and the left wing of the Right. The fate of the Centre is to be torn asunder, buffeted and annihilated: torn asunder when one of its halves votes Right and the other Left, buffeted when it votes as a group first Right then Left, annihilated when it abstains from voting. The dream of the Centre is to achieve a synthesis of contradictory aspirations; but synthesis is a power only of the mind. Action involves choice and politics involves action" (Duverger, 1954, p. 215).

Certainly, not every scholar agrees. But scholars that dispute Duverger's (1954) claim do not necessarily agree with each other. Keman (1994) writes: "We start from the assumption that party-life in the centre-space of a political system has distinctive features. Centre parties must therefore be conceptualised and analysed as phenomena *sui generis* and do not belong to either the left-wing or the right-wing of a party system" (p. 124), but Evans & Tonge (2003) respond that "…the centre may be a hybrid, rather than a discrete position" (p. 43). Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge (1994) were similarly dismissive: "Left parties take leftist stands. Right parties take rightist stands. And center parties wander about in the middle" (p.254).

In his enormously influential work on the so-called "Third Way," Giddens (2000) took exception with the latter idea:

> "These findings stand behind the concern of third way politics with the political centre. To those who believe that all political problems divide into left and right, the centre is uninteresting – it is the neutral ground between clearly defined positions on either side. A politics that appeals to the centre is bound to be a politics of compromise. When third way politicians talk of moving to the centre, or of 'the new middle', those on the more traditional left respond with some derision. In particular, they ridicule the suggestion that there can be a 'radical centre' or an 'active middle'" (p. 43).

The activists "on the more traditional left" that Giddens' invoked are by no means the only critics of his conception of a "radical centre," with some scholars questioning the entire premise of a commonly-understood, objective, left-right ideological construction itself: "Parties cannot move to and occupy the political centre in the same way that people can move to and occupy the centre of a room. The centre is not simply *there*" (Hindmoor, 2007, p. 7).

All of the previous statements deal with centrist parties or centrist ideology, but the intellectual battles concerning the nature of centrist voters are no less pitched. For Tomz & Van Houweling (2008), centrists "make relatively sophisticated judgements that help align policy with their preferences" (p. 305), thus fulfilling an important role in representative democracy. But to others, identifying with the centre is simply a voter's refuge from a question she does not know the answer to: "placing oneself at the neutral position between left and right can be a concealed form of non-response; a very disproportionate share of those who place themselves at the exact centre have little interest in politics" (Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976, p. 247). This is a rather kind characterisation compared to that colourfully made by Deutsch, Lindon, & Weill (1966), who likened France's centrist voters to *le marais* – in English,

"the swamp" – a group of "floating and non-opinionated" citizens, incapable of serving as the "pragmatic and realistic" rock of a functioning democracy (p. 10).

While there is no unanimous scholarly agreement on virtually any subject in the social sciences, these passages are not merely examples of narrow disputes, but evidence that a group of experts are talking past each other, describing fundamentally different conceptions of the same basic idea. It is difficult, if not impossible, to advance the scholarly exploration of the centre without first addressing the tussle over the definition – and indeed even the existence – of the concept itself.

Theoretical Contribution

As a response to the definitional confusion and theoretical muddle over this pivotal concept, this thesis proposes a theoretical framework to streamline and clarify the multiple, important, and often competing definitions of the political centre, among both parties and voters. By gathering all the various aspects of centrism under one umbrella for the first time, this framework creates a coherent space for intelligible debate and mutual understanding about what the centre means in its various conceptions. And beyond that, it allows for the empirical exploration of the two themes that flow throughout the thesis – how centrist political actors differ from their counterparts on the left and right, and how centrist political actors differ among themselves.

Since ideology is manifested differently by different classes of political actors, the theory makes a distinction between the centrism of elites and parties on the one hand, and the centrism of voters on the other. Through separate analysis of what the centre means to both groups individually, it becomes possible to analyse the ways that their centrist identity – and ideology in general – mediates the fundamental relationship between them.

The framework for centrist parties, centrist elites, and abstract conceptions of political centrism begins with a top layer, separating first-order varieties of centrism into three theoretically distinct but often empirically overlapping types. These types are not mutually exclusive – a party can exemplify two or even all three types simultaneously. Rather, the typology is setting out different theoretical domains by which the descriptor "centrist" can apply – correctly – in different ways to different parties. Consider the case of other adjectives with multiple meanings. For example, a *green* building could be either emerald in colour or energy efficient – it can even be both simultaneously. But even though the object belongs to both categories, the categories themselves clearly exist in different conceptual domains. *Centrist* is very similar as an adjective, in that even if is used in political terms, it can still have three distinct meanings.

In the framework presented in Chapter 2, those meanings are the three types of party-level centrism: *ideological*, *middle*, and *stylistic*.

Ideologically centrist parties are the most familiar type; they are the parties that have an ideological and policy programme broadly aligned with the centre position on the West's common political continuum. An ideologically centrist party in Germany has an ideological and programmatic outlook much like a centrist party in Portugal, and the two are therefore comparable under one conception of centrism.

Middle centrist parties are the most directly obvious type; they are the parties that exist in the middle of their specific party system, between the major poles of electoral competition. Regardless of their ideology or policies, these parties are centrist because they occupy the central space in their competitive ecosystem, and therefore share commonalities with other such parties on that basis.

Stylistic centrist parties are parties that have made a strategic or cultural choice to emphasise their commitment to some defined set of centrist values, no matter their actual ideological position or place in the party system. Again, even though their specific contexts may be different, parties that rhetorically attempt to claim the mantle of the centre demonstrate a common set of behaviours, which demarcates them from other parties.

Since the party-level empirical work in this thesis concerns mostly ideologically centrist parties, there is a further classification system for them. Just as there are different types of centrist parties overall, there are also different types of ideologically centrist parties, which arrive at their ideologically centrist image through different means. Some – moderate centrist parties – are generally moderate in their positions, mostly inhabiting the space between the left and right on all issues. Some – mainstream and niche economic centrist parties – emphasise their moderate position on the economic ideological dimension but are not moderate in other matters. And some – syncretic centrist parties – combine "opposing" non-moderate positions with the result that they appear to be centrist overall. These differences highlight the dangers of casual use of the label "centrist" to describe parties and elites with substantially different conceptions of that ideology.

The imprecise nature of that overarching descriptive label is similarly inadequate when applied to voters. Classical models of individual ideological identification, like that formulated by Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) treat ideology largely as a function of partisanship and values. However, modern empirical reality shows that political centrists are both far more likely to eschew political party attachment than non-centrists; and that their "values," such as their views on political issues, are not consistently moderate (Schmitt et al., 2020). Additionally, since centrism in the electorate has indeed been tied to a lack of political interest – and therefore, sophistication – by a number of studies (e.g. Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976;

Knutsen, 1998; Iversen & Soskice, 2015) this classical model breaks down at the centre of the spectrum. In short, much like parties, the theoretical explanations for why someone identifies as a centrist are manifold, meaning that many groups of self-identified centrists have little in common with each other politically, unlike those on the extremes. Therefore, a new way to categorise and differentiate centrists is needed, both from those on the right and left, as well as from each other.

This thesis therefore proposes an update of that classical model for application to centrists. It argues that two variables structure the centrist population – *intentionality* and *moderation*. Intentionality is a successor idea to partisanship for a de-aligned population in an increasingly de-aligned Western world. Together, political interest and partisanship combine to form this new metric that stands for the centrist's capacity and willingness to appreciate their political identification, separating genuine centrists from default centrists. And moderation is the successor idea to values, in that it separates centrists who hold the moderate views we would expect from them from those who seem to hold syncretic views on issues alongside their overall centrist orientation. Finally, the framework acknowledges the conceptual difference between symbolic and operational ideology as a plausible explanation for the variation in values among centrist voters.

This theoretical argument is not offered in a vacuum, as a musing on differences that have no material bearing on empirical reality. Instead, the framework is a way to classify and identify differences that should indeed create different expectations about different groups, that upon initial inspection, all happen to share the same "ideology." The empirical chapters of this thesis are devoted to analysing those differences and illustrating the imperative of a deeper, more nuanced understanding of what it means for parties and voters to be in the centre of our politics.

Scope

The scope of this thesis is the economically advanced Western European nations in the 21st century, due both to interest in settled democracies, and in a desire to maximise the internal validity of the analysis. The first qualifier – economically advanced – is important because the balance of research on the subject has shown an inextricable link between the development of an advanced industrial (and now post-industrial) economy and the development of functioning democratic institutions and participatory mass electorates (e.g. Rueschemeyer, Huber, & Stephens, 1992; Burkhart & Lewis-Beck, 1994). The second qualifier – Western – is necessary because the post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe have displayed significant and persistent differences from Western European nations in the fields of political economy, the development and stability of party systems, and – perhaps most crucially for a study like this one – partisan ideology and the meaning of the left-right political spectrum (Mair, 1997; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Vachudova, 2005; Tavits & Letki, 2009). These differences make the post-communist nations inappropriate for many of the comparisons made in this thesis.

Therefore, the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe are eliminated from analysis here: former SSRs (including EU member states Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania); Soviet satellite states (including EU member states Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia); and former Yugoslav states (including EU member states Croatia and Slovenia). Additionally, an "advanced economy" is defined as one that meets that standard in all three major development indices – those measured by the World Bank, IMF, and OECD – a threshold that also eliminates two EU member states that are not former communist nations (Cyprus and Malta).

Altogether, this leaves a core group of eighteen nations as the scope of the thesis, although at times the availability of certain data will require further refinement of an analysis. Those nations are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

14 of the 18 are members of the European Union, with four exceptions: the UK, which left the EU in early 2020; as well as Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland, which have never been members. However, all four countries have extensive relations with the EU. Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland are all members of the European Free Trade Association and participate in the Schengen Area (Liechtenstein also qualifies, but micro-states tend to be excluded from most data sources). Iceland and Norway are also members of the European Economic Area, formally including them in the European Single Market; Switzerland is not, but through a series of domestic laws and bilateral treaties with the EU, it is functionally a participant as well. As for the UK, it was a member of the EU for the entire period under study, and during much of the period that this thesis was written, it was "enjoying" a temporary extension of its membership in the European Single Market and European Customs Union as part of its transition arrangement with Brussels. It was therefore appropriate to include these four countries in the study, as they satisfy the other criteria of being liberal democracies with advanced economies.

Data

The comparative nature of this research necessitated the use of large, quantitative data sets that provided sample sizes robust enough for the statistical analysis of models with many

variables. This thesis therefore makes use of four comparative data sets, three for European political parties, and one for European voters.

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES),[5] an expert survey of European party positions, has been conducted approximately every five years since 1999. Recently, it has been timed to roughly coincide with the quinquennial elections to the European Parliament. The CHES has taken measurements on well more than 300 parties during that time, with the oldest and largest parties receiving as many as six evaluations over the years. The most recent iteration, in 2019, surveyed 421 experts' opinions of 277 parties across the continent. While the CHES does specialise in questions pertaining to specific policies of the EU, it has also featured dozens of variables on party positions on ideological dimensions, specific policy issues, and issue salience. While parties from most of the countries in Western Europe have been studied since the survey's inception, some hailing from countries outside the EU (Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, and Switzerland) have only been included more recently. Altogether, the CHES is the longest-running, most comprehensive expert survey of political party positions of its kind, and because it provides data comporting well with the purview of this thesis, it is utilised repeatedly throughout Chapters 3, 4, and 6.

The Global Party Survey (GPS),[6] is a recent expert survey of party positions with a worldwide scope. At this writing, it has been conducted once, in 2019. While the GPS' design was developed in concert with many of the team behind the CHES, it aims to fill a slightly different research need in its purview and emphasis. Unsurprising given its name, the GPS is a truly global catalogue of political parties, as it surveyed 1,861 experts on their views of 1,043

[5] Bakker, R., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., Polk, J., Rovny, J., Steenbergen, M., & Vachudova, M. A. (2020). *1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File.* v1.2. www.chesdata.eu

[6] Norris, P. (2020). *The Global Party Survey, 2019*. v1.0. www.globalpartysurvey.org

parties from 163 countries around the world. Since it is less focused on European parties than other prominent expert surveys, it features no questions specifically on European policy issues, but a number of items that measure populist rhetoric and tendencies. It is an excellent complement to other expert surveys and its data is analysed in Chapter 4.

Throughout its history, different generations of the team behind the Manifesto Project Database (MARPOR),[7] have been known by different names, including the Manifesto Research Group and Comparative Manifesto Project, but the current version of the data set – MARPOR 2020b – is functionally the same as all its forebears in that it measures party positions over time based on an objective content analysis method. Unlike expert surveys, which aggregate the subjective opinions of scholars, journalists, and other authorities, MARPOR measurements are taken directly from the words of the parties themselves, offering a different perspective from the previous two data sources. Theoretically grounded in the concept of direct correlation between the salience a party places on an issue in its published programme and its position on that issue, MARPOR data is essentially a count of sentence fragments that are coded as positive or negative mentions of specific issues and policies. Although this means that MARPOR data on party positioning can extend to any country and any time where parties published electoral manifestos, in practise this thesis only makes use of MARPOR data from 1999 on in order to match with the other data sources, as it does in Chapters 4 and 6.

The European Election Studies' Voter Study (EES)[8] is a long-running survey of voters in EU member states, first conducted in 1979 and every five years thereafter, in the wake of

[7] Volkens, A., Burst, T., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., Weßels, B., & Zehnter, L. (2020). *The Manifesto Data Collection, Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR).* v2020b. https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu

[8] Schmitt, H., Hobolt, S. B., van der Brug, W., & Popa, S. A. (2020). *European Parliament Election Study 2019, Voter Study*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7581 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.13473.

the elections to the European Parliament. This makes it an invaluable tool for studying the comparative behaviour of European voters. The EES presented an ideal option for this thesis for several reasons. First, its large sample size – generally 1,000 respondents in each of the now-27 member states participating in the European Parliament elections – allows for rich comparisons across national boundaries. Second, the political focus and stability of its questionnaire captures data on respondents' vote choices, political media consumption, ideological identification, views on specific policy issues, most important public concerns, and more. And finally, its timing and structure makes it the ideal voter-centric companion to the CHES, as it is used in Chapters 3 and 6.

This thesis also makes use of one data source that is not international in nature, but whose remarkable depth compensates for its relatively narrow focus. The 2014-2023 British Election Study Internet Panel (BES)[9] is the most recent output of the British Election Study, a research project measuring political public opinion in the UK for more than 50 years. The survey is remarkable in its size, depth, and consistency – the current panel study includes approximately 30,000 respondents in each wave, with overall impressive retention rates, permitting research into changes in attitudes over time. The questionnaire for the BES is larger and substantially more wide-ranging than that for the EES, making this data of particular interest for its measurement of social attitudes and values somewhat adjacent to politics. BES data is prominently analysed in Chapter 5.

Where each data set is used, particularly in the empirical chapters, a full discussion of the features, strengths, and weaknesses of both the data set's general type and the specific data set in question are provided.

[9] Fieldhouse, E., Green, J., Evans, G., Mellon, J., Prosser, C., De Geus, R., Bailey, J., Schmitt, H., & Van der Eijk, C. (2020). *British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1-20*. https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-objects/panel-study-data

Overview of Empirical Chapters

Chapter 4 begins the empirical chapters with an examination of the diversity among ideologically centrist parties, a task accomplished by diving deeper into an issue that, on the surface, seems to unite them. The chapter begins by illustrating a well-established fact – the tendency of centrist parties to support European integration and its associated institutions. It then establishes why this truism is so puzzling – because the structure of political conflict over European integration is qualitatively different from that of virtually every other policy issue, with the effect of placing normally moderate centrist parties at an ideological extreme. A number of party characteristics particular to centrist parties are advanced as hypothetical explanations for this phenomenon. Two of the proposed links between centrist parties and European integration are ideological – economic moderation on the one hand and syncretic liberalism on the other. And two are strategic or cultural – centrist parties' experience and acculturation to government, and their emphasis and unity on the European issue above all others. These hypotheses are then tested using three of the above data sources that specialise in measuring the comparative programmatic differences between parties – the CHES, the GPS, and MARPOR. Some clear results indicate that there are multiple reasons for centrist parties' enthusiasm for European integration, and that ideological centrism itself is far too simplistic an explanation.

Chapter 5 continues with a variation on the main theme of exploring beneath the surface of the descriptor "centrist" – but among voters. The chapter opens with a discussion about an alternative to classical models of political ideology – the distinction between a person's operational ideology, defined by their views on issues of public importance; and their symbolic ideology, or their overarching identity defined as a function of closely-held abstract values. This overview is then used to frame one of the ground-breaking findings in political

psychology, and one of the most under-studied in comparative voter behaviour – the inverse relationship between the intensity and extremity of one's preferences. The chapter then proceeds to investigate several abstract, generally non-ideological values that, within the context of the intensity-extremity relationship, ought to have particular association with political centrism: the premium placed on compromise; deference to elites with expertise and strong opinions; intellectual flexibility and open-minded thinking; and an inertial preference for the *status quo* over radical alternatives. The prevalence of these values among the electorate is then explored through use of the BES' expansive questionnaire, and a number of counterintuitive conclusions are reached about how ideology relates to abstract values and how that might inform our expectations of voter behaviour.

This then hands the baton to Chapter 6, which endeavours to answer just the kind of question raised by the previous chapter: can the intensity-extremity relationship potentially help to explain one of the most fundamental paradoxes in political science – the "empty centre" phenomenon? First, the chapter establishes the puzzle, and surveys recent research on the importance of valence issues to contextualise the classic enigma that is the generally poor electoral performance of centrist parties despite the massive advantage that the spatial model of voting predicts for them. Then, continuing the exploration of the link between intensity and extremity of preferences, the argument is made that one possible reason for the empty centre is the relatively low value of a party's centrist ideology to centrist voters. Building upon previous research by Adams et al. (2017), the chapter goes on to present a case for extending those authors' research method to a new and different setting – the 2009 and 2014 elections to the European Parliament – and a model to evaluate voters' sensitivity to differential ideology is constructed. Finally, three data sets – the EES, the CHES, and MARPOR – are combined in order to build an ideological topography of the elections and the model is tested, with

positive results indicating that the intensity-extremity relationship is indeed politically relevant and may explain centrist voters' relative lack of enthusiasm for ideologically similar parties.

Conclusion

The final chapter of the thesis lays out some of the limitations and implications of this research. It presents the discussion by reviewing what has been learned, what it might mean, and what more can be done to advance this work, with the end goal of both stating the main findings of the thesis and proving the need for further research on the subject.

Like the black hole at the nucleus of our galaxy, the political centre is an enigma around which much else of consequence revolves. By shedding some much-needed light on this mysterious, but vitally important concept, this thesis offers a contribution to our greater understanding of ideology and the enormous role it plays in our politics.

Chapter 2: Theory

What does it mean to be centrist? As Chapter 1 showed with a simple sweep of the existing literature, this label – "centrist" – is a slippery and inadequate term that scholars and practitioners use to describe a wide range of political phenomena. Clearly, a more nuanced and empirically valid understanding of centrism than those that currently exist is needed.

This chapter will provide that novel conception of centrism, grounded in the existing theoretical literature. It is divided into two sections: the first outlining a theoretical typology of centrist parties, the second setting forth a theoretical typology of centrist voters. The rest of this thesis will flow from these theoretical expectations and will empirically show the value of this new way to think about this important political concept.

Defining Centrist Parties

The first section begins with a discussion of the core issue of perceptions and defines the *centrist image*. It then moves to proposing three types of centrist parties, or three frames through which to view a party's centrist image – the *ideological*, the *middle*, and the *stylistic*. Finally, there is a discussion of populism as it relates to centrism, and how the literature on populism reflects on the current subject.

The Centrist Image

The literature on party positioning is suffused with the issue of perceptions. Much of the descriptive, seemingly objective language that scholars, voters, politicians, and the media use to describe political actors and positions is actually subjective, driven by perceptions, and underpinned by internal definitions of abstract political concepts (like "left," "right," "liberal,"

or "green") that are not necessarily universally shared. This means that research on such abstract political concepts must always be conducted in the knowledge that what is actually being studied is the subject's *image* of those concepts.

For the purposes of studying political parties then, the subject of this section is less centrist parties themselves than it is the *centrist image* of those parties. And as shown above, there is wide divergence in views on how a party's centrist image is acquired, what that image means, and how that image informs perceptions about the party's values and behaviour.

The divergence in the perceptions of the centre is not merely a narrow, technical disagreement over how to classify centrist parties; it is indicative of a more fundamental disagreement over the very nature of political centrism. For example, Duverger, for whom "the centre does not exist," (1954, p. 215) and Giddens, who wrote of a "radical centre" or an "active middle" (2000, p. 43) are not merely in conflict with their definitions, disagreeing over technical points separating one idea from a similar but distinct alternative. Rather, they appear to be writing past each other, with irreconcilable conceptions of what they are describing. While much of Giddens' public fame comes from his idea that the centre is a unique, radical solution for the failings of the conventional left and right, Duverger's conception of the political spectrum denies such an option's very existence; for him, the centre is nothing more than the confluence of the only possible political choices. These are not normal academic quibbles over esoteric minutiae; these prominent scholars have fundamentally incompatible views of the centrist image. As Hazan (1997) states: "Party systems scholars have a tendency to attach the centre label all too quickly and superficially, and have thereby emptied it of any apparent meaning" (p. 21).

Without a shared, common understanding of the centrist image and the centrist concept itself, any simple description of parties that relies on the term "centrist" alone is

necessarily incomplete. A view of the centrist image that relies entirely on the context of a party's position within its national party system cannot be cleanly reconciled with one that relies entirely on a cross-national evaluation of ideology; each will lead to a different categorisation and a different set of conclusions. The example from Chapter 1 of this thesis cited three parties with an overall centrist rating that have vastly different political objectives – the Netherlands' Christian Union, Greece's PASOK, and Italy's Five Star Movement. Relying on these parties' overall ideological rating as an indication of the policies they would pursue in government would be foolhardy; an expectation that would not be the same for the three parties on the farthest right or the farthest left of the spectrum, whatever countries they hailed from. However, the discrepancy between meanings of the label "centrist" goes beyond divergence in policy and ideological values. For another example, Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Netherlands' Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) are superficially similar parties, with very similar ideological ratings, and many analogous policies, histories, constituencies, and so on. However, the former party is a major pole of its party system, the main representative of the German right wing, whereas the latter acts as a centrist party in the Dutch party system, swinging between coalitions with social democratic parties on the left and liberal parties on the right, parties that rarely govern together without the CDA's participation. Two parties with virtually identical ideological ratings, neither of them ideologically centrist, but with very different roles in their national party systems – one centrist, and one not. Taken together, these examples show that centrist parties cannot be categorised in mutually exclusive groups based on one underlying set of criteria. Instead, they can only be categorised depending on the lens used to view their centrist image.

These examples succinctly demonstrate the core theoretical puzzle that this thesis is devoted to: the fact that the centre – a crucial political idea – is fuzzily defined and thus poorly

understood. And in short, this thesis' theoretical answer is that the reason for this is that "centre" does not refer to one concept at all but is, in fact, *one word used to define three distinct, but related concepts*. Analogous to a rather more famous trinity, each of the three conceptual understandings of the centre is *distinct*, in that they are whole, complete ideas that do not rely on each other for justification; but *related*, in that each has a differing, but equal claim to define the same core idea – political centrism.

These three conceptual understandings can be thought of in various ways. They are three manifestations of one idea; three lenses or frames through which to view the centrist image of parties; three types relying on three different definitional criteria. But in combination, these types help to unify the various definitions of the centrist image used throughout the existing literature and place them within a common framework that can be used as the basis of analysis. Without this common framework, Duverger (1954) and Giddens (2000) are nominally writing about the same phenomenon while giving competing definitions; with it, they are actually describing different ideas under the same theoretical umbrella. This theoretical proposal thus permits meaningful comparisons between various centrist images and the implications those images have on party behaviour.

The three types proposed here – *ideological*, *middle*, and *stylistic* – are essentially different facets of a party's centrist image, and the parties that qualify as centrist within each have a distinct claim to that label. The *ideological* type is viewed through a frame that considers centrism as a function of a party's positions on ideological dimensions – centrist parties hold positions broadly consistent with experts' cross-national definition of "centrist" policies. The *middle* type is viewed through a frame that considers centrism as a function of the topography of a party system – centrist parties are those in the middle of their party system, relative to the other parties in the same spatial framework. And the *stylistic type* is viewed through a frame that

considers centrism as a function of a party's chosen brand – centrist parties are those that actively try to inhabit a constructed centrist position.

As mentioned above, the three types are *distinct* from each other, offering three different ways of conceiving of the political centre ground, and thus three different justifications to apply a centrist image to a party. This means that the criteria used to classify each type are only useful within the confines of the assumptions underlying each type, and therefore the categories created are not mutually exclusive, even as some parties overlap. For example, a party could have a centrist image because of its ideology and spatial location within its party system, but also have a non-centrist image because of its rhetoric and non-centrist claims. Indeed, a party may fit any of the permutations offered by the Venn diagram in Figure 2.1 and be plausibly labelled as centrist, even though it may have a non-centrist image when categorised by another type.

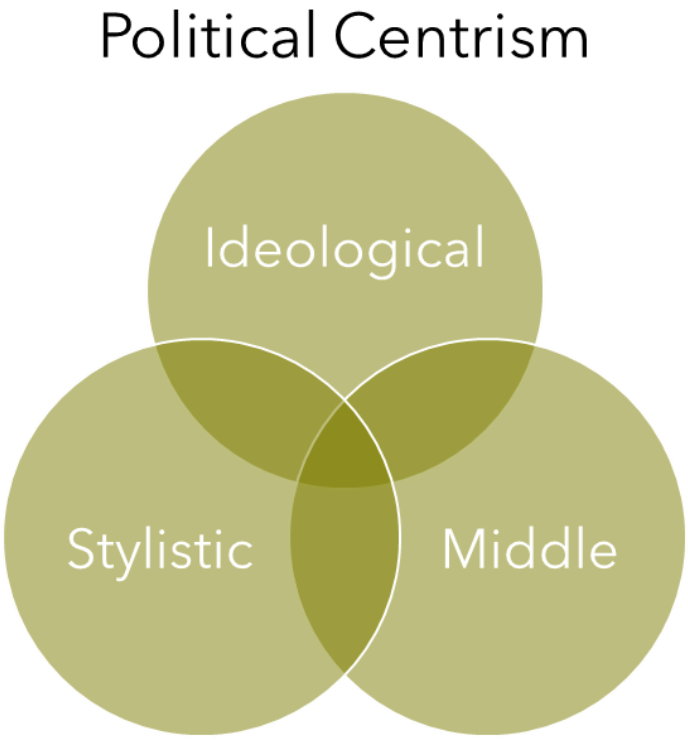

Figure 2.1: The three types of centrist parties. The types are distinct and self-contained, but a party can be more than one type and thus derive their centrist image from multiple sources.

And yet, the three types are also *related*, in that they are each an attempt to define the same core idea – political centrism – in different terms: the centrism of ideological space, the centrism of a party system, the centrism of operational style.

In other words, a party cannot be considered centrist without a centrist image conferred by one of these three mechanisms; such a qualification is *necessary* to be a centrist party. And although there are three distinct ways to acquire a party's centrist image – and many centrist parties derive their centrist image from all three – fulfilling any one is all that is needed to describe a party as centrist; each type is *sufficient* to bestow the label. This point underlines the necessity of this thesis and its theoretical contribution – the adjective "centrist" simply does not provide enough detail on its own to convey an understanding about a party's position,

views, or methods, but must relate to its subject through one of the three ways listed in Figure 2.1.

This conceptual umbrella provides the theoretical framework necessary to collect and unify the conflicting and competing definitions of party centrism found in the literature. With that foundation, it finally becomes possible to distinguish among the various parties that have a centrist image – parties that are widely described with the very same word, even as they differ dramatically in their views and behaviours.

This chapter now turns to providing a theoretical justification, explanation, and examples for each of the three types, while the subsequent chapter provides empirical validation and more in-depth description of these concepts.

Ideological Centrism

Ideologically centrist parties are those that derive their centrist image from their positions on ideological dimensions, or more fully, their position in the multidimensional ideological space. This type of party is thus defined independently from the relational context of its national party system and is marked by its adherence to a set of ideological positions that are considered "centrist" in a cross-national context. Identification of this type is only possible due to scholars' work in evaluating the comparative ideology of political parties, and in establishing baselines used to classify a party's ideological characteristics and family affiliation.

A classic scholarly definition of political ideology comes from Sargent's (1969) foundational text on the subject:

> "[Ideology is] a value or belief system that is accepted as fact or truth by some group. It is composed of sets of attitudes towards the various institutions and processes of society. It provides the believer with a picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and in so doing, it organizes the

> tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable" (p. 2).

Budge (1994) contributes his own definition of ideology as providing politicians with a "broad conceptual map of politics into which political events, current problems, electors' preferences and other parties' policies can be fitted" (p. 446).

In other words, party ideologies are a heuristic, adopted by elites to reduce the impossibly large, complex, and unknowable real world into a coherent, human-scale worldview.[10] This heuristic can be applied to all manner of political situations, and – along with other inputs – results in positions and programmes that benefit the groups and interests organised on some side of a public controversy, or what Lipset and Rokkan (1967) called "social cleavages."

There is an ongoing scholarly debate about the extent to which ideology influences party positions, strategies, and voters' perceptions. In some conceptions, ideology functions as a bridge between a party's uncertainty about voters' preferences or intentions and its views on specific policy issues by providing a valuable input for policy outcomes. In others, ideology functions as the walls; the philosophical constraint that tends to keep a party from adopting any position on any issue for strategic or tactical reasons (e.g. Budge, 1994; Adams et al., 2004; Budge, 2006; Budge, Ezrow, & McDonald, 2010).

Regardless of the outcome of this debate, ideology is certainly a defining characteristic for political parties and an important mark of differentiation among parties for both elites and the public. It is equally clear from the scholarly literature concerning centrist parties that a party's centrist image is often (if not most often) derived from its association with a specifically

[10] Rather the opposite of the fabled map of the empire in Jorge Luis Borges' 1946 short story "On Exactitude in Science."

"centrist" ideological profile (e.g. Daalder, 1984; Keman, 1994; Hazan, 1997). Therefore, any comprehensive study of centrist parties must analyse the subject in ideological terms.

But of course, as shown in the example posed in Chapter 1, the label "ideologically centrist" is less meaningful than it may initially appear. When two parties can share the description of "ideologically centrist," but have dramatically distinct political philosophies and policy preferences, what value does the overall label provide? If a group characterisation can be so broadly construed as to encompass such wildly divergent members, why delineate the group at all? While ideology is obviously superficially important in defining the terms of centrism, a more focused and meaningful definition is dependent upon a deeper examination of the concept of party ideology.

Conceptualising ideologically centrist parties is dependent upon the conception of ideological space. Characterising parties as centrist – or, for that matter, "extreme," "social democratic," "green," or any other label based on ideology – requires a common understanding of political space, or the range of possible issues and positions on those issues that parties are judged on. This logic is the fundamental underpinning of the concept of party families (Von Beyme, 1985). Indeed, "policy and ideology" is one of the four core characteristics that scholars use to categorise parties into party families, the others being origins and sociology, transnational links, and party name (Mair & Mudde, 1998). While there has indeed been research indicating an increasing homogeneity within, rather than among party families – a process termed the "Europeanisation" of party systems (Camia & Caramani, 2012) – there is a longstanding concession that there is significant diversity within families (Von Beyme, 1985; Hloušek & Kopeček, 2010). Such wide variance is particularly evident among liberal parties, which make up a notable share of the parties often considered centrist (Smith, 1988; Marks & Wilson, 2000). One of the most widely used categorisations of party families,

from Hix & Lord (1997), classifies centre parties along with agrarian parties; the latest version of the CHES, which uses this classification, places only three parties in all of Europe into this family. It is clear that the concept of centrism transcends common family categorisation, even though it is obviously linked to ideological positioning.

If a party's centrist image is based on its location in the centre of an ideological "space," the shape, boundaries, and contours of that space are crucial components of that image. Scholars' conception of political space is thus vitally important to any identification of ideologically centrist parties. This demands a reckoning with the concept of ideological dimensionality, and there are two key features of this conception that require particular examination.

First, there is a primary dimension to modern democratic political space in most countries, generally known as the left-right economic dimension. While there are clearly many more political issues contested in politics and parliaments, scholars have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of the left-right economic dimension, both to the ideological perception of voters, and to the structure of partisan competition (e.g. Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990; Klingemann, Hofferbert, & Budge, 1994; Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Hix, 1999; Mair, 2007; Costello, Thomassen, & Rosema, 2012). The dominance of the left-right dimension in European political competition is the subject of one of the most famous works in the social sciences – Lipset & Rokkan's (1967) exposition on the ties between social cleavages and party systems. In their view, cultural divides over geography, family, and religion were responsible for the variety of political systems in pre-industrial Europe. But with the advent of the industrial economy, new cleavages formed based on the contest between labour and capital. These new cleavages quickly grafted onto the old, creating the familiar left-worker-secular, right-owner-clerical class-based political system. With the dramatic expansion of the franchise

and the creation of mass political parties in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these cleavages became "frozen" in place, becoming the foundation of the politics that defined modern Europe, as well as many of its erstwhile colonial possessions (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). This mechanism is largely accepted as the reason for the primacy of the left-right dimension in most European countries, although the end result of the mechanism need not be a party system defined by economic issues – Ireland is a classic example of a country whose party system "froze" on non-economic historical and social cleavages (Carty, 1981). However, left-right economic issues do still structure the politics of most European countries, allowing for the cross-national comparison of parties and party systems on those grounds.

Given that primacy, it is likely that a main driver of the policy centrist image would be a centrist position on the left-right economic dimension, meaning that a party that was centrist on that dimension but extreme on another may plausibly be considered centrist, while a party that was extreme on the left-right economic dimension but moderate on another might not.

Second, there are multiple ideological dimensions, and a party's position on those multiple dimensions is meaningful to perceptions of its overall ideological orientation. There is significant empirical evidence to suggest this is the case, even as studies demonstrating the importance of multiple ideological dimensions differ on both the primacy of the left-right economic dimension, as well as the definition, constitution, and importance of another dimension or dimensions (e.g. Allardt, 1968; Inglehart, 1977; Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Kriesi et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2008; Stoll, 2010). Several studies have largely agreed on the existence and salience of a second dimension, although there is no precise agreement on its name. This "postmaterial," "social," "cultural," "new politics," or "GAL-TAN" dimension is structured by voters' views on the state's place in regulating sociocultural life.[11] It has been

[11] This thesis will henceforth use the term "sociocultural dimension."

proposed that this dimension captures party attitudes towards a range of discrete policy controversies, such as same-sex marriage, multiculturalism, nationalism, and the role of religion in public life (Kitschelt, 1994; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Flanagan & Lee, 2003; Bornschier, 2010). There is also evidence of the increasing importance of the sociocultural dimension in European party competition, with parties increasingly trying to distinguish themselves on this score (e.g. Kitschelt, 2004).

Despite its inarguably increasing relevance in European politics, the proliferation of names for this non-economic dimension underscores the uncertainty about its constituent elements and its independence from the economic left-right spectrum it is ostensibly distinct from (Rovny & Polk, 2019). This means that despite the large quantity and high quality of research into the subject, there is some flexibility on how many political dimensions there are or what issues they comprise. For Kitschelt (1994; expanded upon by De Lange, 2007), the "authoritarian-libertarian" dimension is a function of: attitudes towards the inclusivity or exclusivity of culture and citizenship; the comparative values of individual autonomy and social norms; and the degree to which individuals participate in the political process. Others have conceived "second" dimensions as including environmental issues, as the GAL-TAN dimension does (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002), while other studies indicate that the environment and green politics have been assimilated into the economic dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006). Similar questions surround the controversial question of immigration policy. While some scholars (e.g. Kitschelt, 1994) see attitudes towards immigration as a reflection of society's views on cultural and national universalism or particularism, others have shown that the performance of anti-immigration parties are best explained with a model of one-dimensional party competition (Van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2005). Even scholars who agree on the existence and evolution of the second dimension over time may not agree on

either the foundations or the adaptations of that dimension. Rovny & Polk (2019) posit that the second dimension was built on the clash of values between clerical traditionalists and secular reformers; and that although modern European politics is largely secular, religion still conditions the relationship between the economic and sociocultural dimensions, with historically Catholic countries having less distinct dimensions than historically Protestant countries. On the other hand, Kriesi et al. (2006) propose that the religious-secular origins of the second dimension have all but given way to a "globalisation" cleavage that divides the mobile, educated, cosmopolitan "winners" of globalisation from the parochial, rooted, alienated "left behind" on the basis of their attitudes towards trade liberalisation, immigration, and supranational integration (chiefly, but not exclusively referring to the European Union).

This last issue, while highly politically salient in recent years, possibly due to a number of shock events – the Greek debt crisis; waves of migration/asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa; uncertainty surrounding the future of the common currency; Brexit and its fallout – has defied easy categorisation as part of any defined political dimension. Some scholars have argued that support for or opposition to further European integration correlates well with empirical observations of the sociocultural dimension among parties and voters (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson, 2002; Gabel & Hix, 2002). Others have asserted that the EU issue has largely been subsumed into a left-right unidimensional continuum (Marks & Steenbergen, 2004), has become increasingly disentangled from left-right ideology over time (Hellström, 2008), or even that party positions on the EU have nothing at all to do with the left-right spectrum in many countries (Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2007), leading to speculation that the EU issue may be best characterised as its own political dimension altogether (Proksch & Lo, 2012). These and other disagreements over dimensionality prompted something of a warning shot from Benoit & Laver (2012), cautioning researchers to reflect on the various

methodological and epistemological issues that complicate attempts to discern ideological dimensions and potentially impact findings through a sort of observer effect.

This thesis does not attempt to settle these debates over political dimensionality. But it is true that the existence of multiple dimensions is what motivates the need for a further layer to the categorisation of ideologically centrist parties. If parties' ideology could be evaluated on only one dimension, then rating and evaluating ideological centrism would be self-evident, and there would be no purely ideological distinctions among centrist parties.[12] However, if parties are evaluated on multiple ideological dimensions, this creates a substantially more complex political space, and potentially, more avenues for the creation of a party's centrist image.

Beyond position, there is one further factor in evaluating a party's ideological type: salience. Party politics is about more than determining a party's stance on an issue – it is also about determining which issues are most important. No party has infinite time or resources, and the voters that parties look to attract certainly have limits on their attention and capacity to consider political issues. Therefore, party politics is not merely a contest of ideas concerning specific issues; it is also a contest over which specific issues are to be contested in the first place, or what Rovny and Edwards have described as a "struggle over dimensionality" (Rovny & Edwards, 2012, p. 56). The issues that parties emphasise in their appeals – the salience these issues have to the party's identity and programmes – are thus an important component in the definition and categorisation of parties.

The salience of various public issues and controversies is not assigned at random; they are at least partly determined by party strategies that affect the course of issue development

[12] Such a one-dimensional conception of political space would seem to be responsible for Duverger's definition of the centre.

and evolution. Such decisions are not necessarily merely tactical and time-limited – indeed, they can elevate unknown or previously settled political issues and dramatically alter the electoral trajectory of a whole country, as the Republican Party's 1960s embrace of white racial grievance demonstrates (Carmines & Stimson, 1986; 1989). For example, one such strategy is to focus on issues that the party has "ownership" of in the public's mind (Petrocik, 1996); another is to focus on issues made salient by forces exogenous to party competition, or "riding the wave" (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994). Naturally, given finite time, resources, and public attention, the choice of which issues to emphasise is also a choice of which issues to deemphasise, and intentional ambiguity or obfuscation is also a well-studied party strategy, particularly in the United States (e.g. Shepsle, 1972; Bartels, 1986). However, there is a developing literature on the value of such strategies in a multiparty context, which dovetails with the present discussion of political multidimensionality (e.g. Bräuninger & Giger 2016; De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). There is evidence that ambiguous positions, or "blurring," of an entire political dimension can be used to great electoral advantage by parties that wish to mobilise voters on the other – a strategy used most effectively by radical right and other niche parties (Rovny, 2012; Rovny & Polk, 2020). That being said, strategic ambiguity is not strictly the province of the extremes. There is evidence that mainstream parties actually benefit from vague appeals used to seek broad support from many subgroups in the electorate; such ambiguity has the effect of making the party seem ideologically closer to voters across the political spectrum (Somer-Topcu, 2015).

In this literature, this question of dimensional salience is commonly used to differentiate "mainstream" parties from "niche" parties – a delineation that is both distinct from and related to the present discussion about centrist parties. Mainstream parties tend to rate more centrist in their overall orientation. They also tend to focus on issues related to the

left-right economic dimension. This focus also comports with another common, if not universal, feature of mainstream parties – their age. In keeping with Lipset & Rokkan's "freezing hypothesis" (1967) outlined above, older parties are more likely to mobilise voters on older social cleavages (most prominently the industrial class-based cleavage) than newer ones. In contrast, niche parties tend to be more extreme in their positions, and also tend to emphasise issues unrelated to the left-right economic dimension in order to differentiate their brand and avoid competition on those issues with a large number of established mainstream parties (Meguid, 2005; Adams et al., 2006; Meguid, 2008; De Vries & Hobolt, 2012).[13] Although most definitions of niche parties demand an ideologically extreme position overall (Wagner, 2012), there are indeed centrist parties that pair a low salience, centrist position on the left-right economic dimension with a highly salient, extreme position on the sociocultural dimension, very much emulating the description of a niche party. This is consistent with evidence showing that extreme positions are generally associated with high-salience strategies, at least among niche parties and "issue entrepreneurs" (Rovny, 2012; Hobolt & De Vries, 2015; De Vries & Hobolt, 2020).

Thus, when categorising centrist parties, while the salience a party places on an ideological dimension cannot trump its position – an extreme position is an extreme position and likewise for a centrist position – it does condition that position. Two parties may well have identical centrist positions on the economic dimension and matching identical non-centrist positions on the sociocultural dimension; but if one party places great emphasis on its centrist

[13] "Mainstream" and "niche" need not be a blunt dichotomy; Meyer & Miller (2015) prefer to characterise the concept of "nicheness" as a continuum, meaning a party can be "more niche" or "less niche" as a more accurate descriptor of a party's nature. Their minimal definition of "niche" generally comports with the rest of the literature on the subject.

economic position and tones down or blurs its non-centrist sociocultural position while the other party does the inverse, those parties will have markedly different profiles.

Within the bounds of political space as just described, there are several conceivable ways a party could be perceived as centrist in ideological terms; two types and four distinct sub-types of ideological profile a party could have and be considered ideologically centrist. Just as it is important to delineate ideologically centrist parties from middle and stylistically centrist parties due to their differences in quality and behaviour, even if they are all called "centrist," so too it is important to categorise different types and sub-types of ideologically centrist parties that share a similar overall centrist profile but have very different underlying dimensional positions and different emphases on those positions.

Intuitively, there are a number of reasons why a party could enjoy an ideologically centrist image in the view of experts (or anyone else). A party could have generally centrist views across the board, or in other words, be consistently centrist over many policy issues. Alternatively, a party could have an ideologically centrist image because it takes a centrist position on one policy or dimension and emphasises that position, even if it is otherwise non-centrist. A party could also maintain an ideologically centrist image on balance, marrying extreme positions in a way that appears centrist overall. Unquestionably, although these different kinds of parties might share a similar superficial ideological rating and a centrist image, the mechanisms by which they do so vary significantly, and must be explored in order to have a more complete understanding of centrist parties.

Consider again the duelling conceptions of ideological centrism that Duverger (1954) and Giddens (2000) described above: the former sees the centre as a confluence or overlap between an established left and right; the latter views it as a "third way," integrating parts of left and right into a novel, independent position that implicitly rejects the idea of a set political

spectrum at all. The prolific Italian political philosopher Norberto Bobbio (1996) refers to these different concepts as the *mediated* centre and the *transcended* centre. The mediated centre is "included," in that it accepts the duality of left and right and provides an alternative to them in the form of compromise between them. In this way, it is "both left and right." On the other hand, the transcended centre is "inclusive," in that it goes "beyond two opposites, incorporating them in a higher synthesis, and therefore cancelling them out." It rejects the idea of left and right as two mutually exclusive poles, as "in theory, it claims not to be a compromise between two extremes, but to supersede them both," or "neither left nor right." In his words, the mediated centre is "essentially practical politics without a doctrine," while the transcended centre is "essentially a doctrine in search of a practical politics, and as soon as this is achieved, it reveals itself as centrist" (pp. 7-8).

The following typology of ideologically centrist parties adapts these two concepts and develops them further using empirical observation. Parties of the mediating centre are defined by their moderation – they derive their centrist image from a balance or accommodation between left and right. Parties of the transcending centre are centrist, but not moderate – they derive their centrist image from a fusion of immoderate left positions and immoderate right positions.

Finally, the four sub-types of centrist parties are the result of empirical differences among the parties that embody these two concepts. Three of these sub-types reflect Bobbio's (1996) mediated centre. *Moderate centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is defined by their consistent moderation on both ideological dimensions. *Mainstream economic centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is defined by their moderate, high-salience position on the dominant left-right economic dimension. *Niche economic centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is defined by their moderate, low-salience position on the dominant left-right economic

dimension. And finally, *syncretic centrist parties* are those reflected in Bobbio's (1996) transcended centre, parties whose centrist image is not defined by a moderate position on the dominant left-right economic dimension, but by immoderate positions on both dimensions that yield an overall centrist orientation on balance. Figure 2.2 illustrates this relationship.

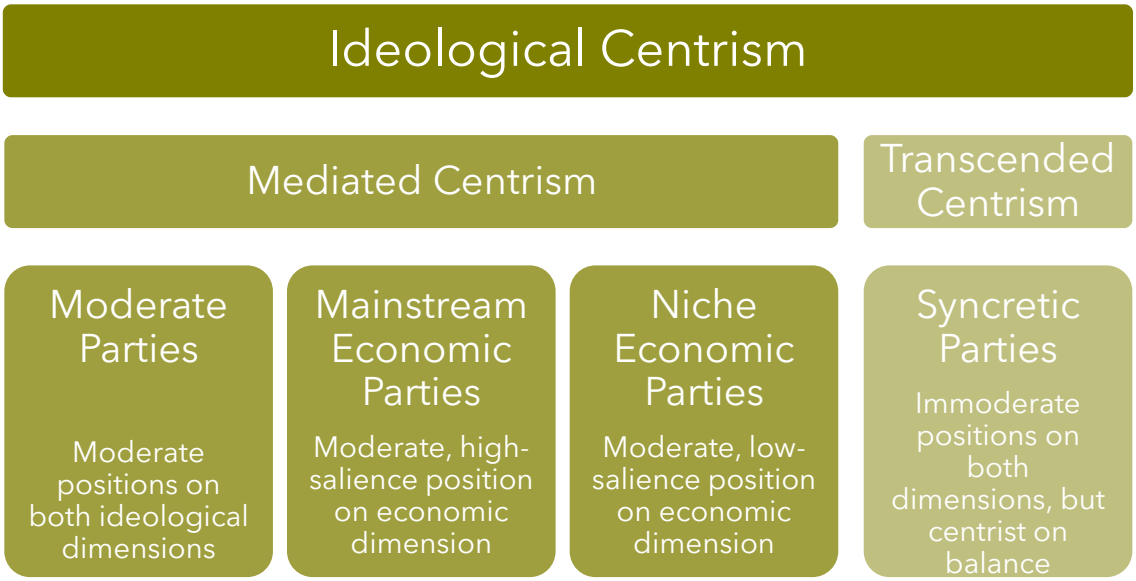

Figure 2.2: A typology of ideologically centrist parties. The second level of the diagram shows the conceptual definition of centrism reflected in the sub-types of centrist parties found on the third level.

As will be illustrated in the next chapter, there are clear and compelling differences between these four sub-types that have not been elucidated previously.

In conclusion, what unites all ideologically centrist parties is a centrist image derived from their ideological leanings and positions on public issues and controversies. Since comparative ideological ratings are cross-national, ideologically centrist parties share their centrist image across borders, as a sort of universal programmatic identity; a feature that is not

present in the other types of centrist parties. In the following chapter, this theory will be applied to empirical reality, and a typology of ideological centrist parties will be developed in full.

Middle Centrism

Middle centrist parties are parties that derive their centrist image not from any cross-national comparison of positions, but from their location at or near the middle of their native party system, regardless of (or in addition to) their other characteristics.

The middle of a party system can be defined in at least a few ways. The first is to consider the median party in a party system the middle of the system; a second is to consider the party with the median legislator in the parliament as that middle. Both definitions present problems. The former definition, if agnostic to party size, treats all parties as ideologically relevant without regard to electoral strength, and by including parties with little or no constituency or importance in the party system, it potentially distorts the range and size of the system's middle. Even if party size is considered by weighting the parties by their share of votes, the former definition does not take into account the fact that a national party system may not have an even distribution of parties across the ideological spectrum and may show a decided left or right tilt. The archetypal case may be the Italian party system of the post-war period, where a large Communist party shifted the entire system leftward. The latter definition is similarly problematic, as it is vulnerable to considerable variation through electoral systems and electoral outcomes. If a party earns a majority of the seats in parliament, then that party, by definition, holds the median legislator. Consider the case of the UK's Conservative Party, which has often held the median legislator in the House of Commons by virtue of holding a majority of the seats; they are certainly not a middle party in any meaningful conception of that term (Hazan, 1997).

Instead, consider a definition of the political middle offered by Collier & Collier (1991) in their book on Latin American political development, as a "middle position between fundamental political alternatives" (p. 781). This definition was later developed and expanded upon by Scully (1992), who posited the centre as "a political space created by the appearance of fundamental political alternatives [rather than] as a geometric point between two extremes" (p. 181).

In his book on centrist parties, Hazan (1997) pushes the concept further, defining the middle as "the area between the opposing alternatives of the major cleavage in the politics of a particular country" (p. 24). Hazan called these alternatives the "major poles of electoral competition" (p. 24) in that they tended to be the two largest parties (or party alliances) in a system, representing the organising and leading parties of governments. In most European countries, the major pole parties are easy to spot as the major catch-all parties that have traded the leadership of governments – the CDU and Social Democratic Party in Germany; the People's Party and Spanish Socialist Workers' Party in Spain; Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil in Ireland.

Therefore, a party is a middle centrist party if it lies in the space between those major pole parties, regardless of its cross-national ideological stance. This is because a middle centrist party is determined by its relation to the fundamental alternatives in its country, which may be significantly shifted left or right. It also means that the major pole parties cannot serve as middle centrist parties, regardless of their own cross-national ideological evaluation (Lim, 2009). To continue with the example, although Germany's CDU is occasionally rated as an ideologically centrist party by scholars, it is also a major pole of its party system, and thus cannot be a middle centrist party.

The context of the national party system is integral to the classification of a middle centrist party; without it, a middle centrist party could not be identified as such. This means that middle centrist parties are highly relativistic, dependent upon the particular qualities of their party system, as well as their electoral competitors. Importantly, this only requires that middle centrist parties share a similar national context, but not necessarily an overall ideological orientation. This caused Hazan to consider the concept of middle centrist parties as "ideologically blind" (1997, p. 25), citing Sartori's (1976) famous words on the political centre:

> "What matters is neither the name nor the doctrine (whatever a center doctrine might be) but the position… since a center is relative to its left and right wings, it will follow in the long run the general trend of the polity. If history goes to the left, the center can only remain in a central position if it also moves left (and vice versa if history goes to the right)… [and therefore] the center will move if the balance between its left and right should shift" (pp. 157, 164-165).

Indeed, middle centrist parties can have dramatically different ideological leanings, and perhaps even relatively extreme views. Figure 2.3 shows an example of how this is possible. In both examples, the black dots represent the major pole parties, while the gold dots represent middle centrist parties, using this definition. These designations hold between the examples, even though the examples display very different party systems.

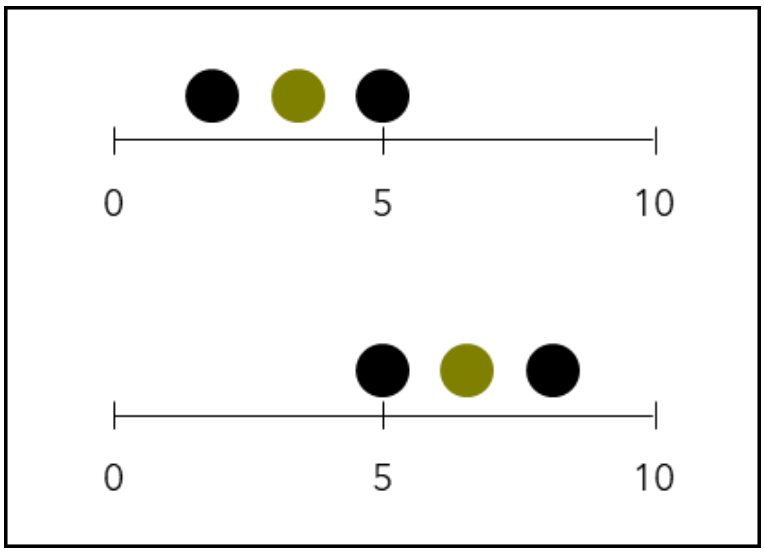

Figure 2.3: A notional example of two simple party systems. The system on top is left-shifted, while the system on the bottom is right-shifted. The gold parties are both middle centrist parties, despite neither being ideologically centrist parties (nor are they ideologically similar). In the top system, the right-most party would rate as an ideologically centrist party, but not as a middle centrist party; the same is true for the left-most party in the bottom system.

Since the presence of a middle space is dependent upon the specifics of a national party system, there are two considerations about that system that must be addressed. First, a middle centrist party can only exist in a multiparty system. A two-party system obviously has two poles, and it may well have a large middle space, but it self-evidently lacks another party that could fill that space, as a party cannot be both a middle centrist party and a major pole party simultaneously. The nations empirically studied in this thesis are all multiparty democracies in Europe, and thus all fulfil this main condition.[14]

[14] While no two-party systems are fully examined in this thesis, a theoretical exception to this criterion can be conceived, allowing for a middle centrist party in a two-party system. One of the implications of Duverger's Law is that majoritarian electoral systems tend to produce two-party party systems; but those parties may be less internally ideologically coherent than parties in proportional systems, and thus essentially function as alliances of factions. These alliances can be formal, as in Australia, where the Labor Party comprises legally recognised factions, and the Liberal-National Coalition consists of a longstanding partnership of two independent parties; or informal, as in the United States, where both main parties exist as loose collections of smaller interests. For example, in the second half of the 20th century, the Republican Party was largely a tenuous alliance of economic libertarians, Christian social conservatives, and *realpolitik* internationalists. In a structure like this, factions within each main party could plausibly come to represent the major poles of electoral competition, thereby opening up space for a middle centrist faction.

Somewhat related to the number of parties is the electoral system, as there is no reason that a middle centrist party could not exist in a majoritarian, plurality, proportional, or mixed electoral system. There is, of course, some evidence that a country's electoral system has an impact on the number of effective parties in the party system, with majoritarian systems generally producing two-party systems and proportional systems generally producing multiparty systems – the relationship known as Duverger's Law (Duverger, 1954; Riker, 1982; Cox, 1994) – but it is the effective number of parties, rather than the electoral system that sets the proximate conditions for the existence of a middle centrist party or parties. For example, even though it employs a first-past-the-post electoral regime, the United Kingdom's multiparty party system is fully capable of supporting a middle centrist party – and indeed, it does.

The behaviour and motivations of the middle centrist party are also distinct from its ideologically centrist counterparts (although a middle party may also be an ideologically centrist party). Since a middle centrist party is, by definition, not a major pole of electoral competition in its party system, its only route to government power is to form a coalition with nearby parties. Hazan (1997) describes a middle party as a "viable coalition partner for either pole," and one that shows "a reluctance to enter into a coalition with extremist parties, and the fear of a grand coalition between right and left" (p. 25). Keman (1994) refers to specific middle centrist parties as "pivot parties" if they combine their central position with "electoral-cum-legislative" dominance, thereby exercising greater governing power than their size would ordinarily indicate. However, few middle centrist parties meet this threshold for dominance without altering the basic behavioural pattern proposed by Hazan (1997), demonstrating that it is the intention to act as a floating coalition partner that defines middle centrist parties, rather than their success in doing so. Indeed, the rationality of this approach has been endorsed by scholars of the game theory of coalition formation (Peleg, 1981; Van Deemen, 1991).

In conclusion, middle centrist parties are united by their position in the middle space of their party system, between the fundamental governing alternatives in their national context. While they do not necessarily hold the same style or programmatic identity, their shared centrist image is due to their shared relative position within each party system. The next chapter will detail how the middle area of a party system can be defined empirically; how to identify the major poles of electoral competition and thus, the middle centrist parties; and how actual party systems vary from country to country and era to era in producing and sustaining middle centrist parties.

Stylistic Centrism

Stylistically centrist parties are those that derive their centrist image from their self-designed appearance as a centrist party. These parties look to "construct" and inhabit a centrist political space through their words, methods, and overall tenor. At times in this chapter, the centrist image has been described as a "brand" in the mind of elites and voters; nowhere is that description more accurate than here, since stylistically centrist parties are those which earn their centrist image through an intentional choice of packaging.

It is well-established that voters often rely upon heuristics in lieu of comprehensive political information when making political choices (Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1993). One of the most important and most studied heuristic shortcuts is the party label, which uses a very short, simple message to communicate complex information about a party's positions, reputation, history, and more (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960; Aldrich, 1995; Snyder & Ting, 2002).

The first and foremost piece of identifying information that a party communicates to the outside is its name – and the importance of the "feeling/tone" of a political party's name

has been apparent for decades (Hartmann, 1936). Party names and labels have proven valuable as scholarly indications of ideology and party family (Thomas, 1975); as cues to voters about a party's spatial position (Van Elk, Van Schie, & Bekkering, 2010); and as representative of a party's history and values (Coakley, 1980). Approximately a third of European parties have re-labelled themselves since 1945, and core reasons for doing so include change in a party's intended brand identity and the shock caused by a terrible electoral performance (Kim & Solt, 2017).

Consider two examples of this phenomenon, one to emphasise through addition, one to deemphasise through subtraction. In an attempt to showcase its opposition to the governing Liberals' plan for Irish Home Rule and appeal to disaffected unionist Liberals, the UK's Conservative Party officially changed its name to the "Conservative and Unionist Party" in 1909, well before the formal merger of the Conservatives with the Liberal Unionists that followed in 1912 (Gamble, 2016).[15] And in 2019, the European Parliament group Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe renamed itself "Renew Europe," a name specifically chosen in order to excise the word "liberal," whose connotations posed a domestic political problem for one of the group's newest and most prominent members, Emmanuel Macron's The Republic Forward![16] Both are clear examples of a party altering its label to change the public's assumptions about its positions and priorities (Janda et al., 1995).

[15] Although the name change was in response to Irish nationalism, it has been deployed for similar purposes in the case of Scotland. It was not until 2016 that Conservative leaders registered their party's full "Conservative and Unionist" with the Scottish Election Commission, entitling them to use that name on ballot papers in Scotland. While subtle, this was portrayed as an obvious attempt to capitalise on anti-nationalist sentiment after the failure of the independence referendum two years prior. See: Devlin, K. & Gardham, M. (2016, 4 March). Tories apply to become "Conservative and Unionist Party" across Britain. *The Herald*. https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14320263.tories-apply-to-become-conservative-and-unionist-party-across-britain/

[16] De la Baume, M. (2019, 12 June). Macron-liberal alliance to be named Renew Europe. *Politico*. https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-liberal-alliance-to-be-named-renew-europe/

Such branding considerations certainly apply to the political centre, and Hazan (1997) made explicit mention of what he called "centre label" parties – a distinct group of parties that were not necessarily either ideologically centrist or in the relative middle of their party system. And as mentioned previously, party name is one of the four main characteristics used as the basis of categorising a party family (Mair & Mudde, 1998).

Party rhetoric and publications serve many of the same purposes as the party name, in that they are deliberately chosen to communicate information about the party and its aims. Certainly, there is substantive research about rhetoric and publications in the field of party competition and comparative politics. For example, content analysis of party manifestos forms the backbone of one of the most widely used methods to evaluate party positioning on issues (e.g. Budge, 2001; Klemmensen, Hobolt, & Hansen, 2007; Volkens et al., 2013). Discourse analysis has also been used to study political rhetoric's link to traits other than spatial party positioning – for example, populism (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016), use of valence appeals in campaigning (Kosmidis et al., 2019), and the reliance upon fear as a political tool (De Castella, McGarty, & Musgrove, 2009).

There is another tradition in studies of political rhetoric, one that seeks to explain how rhetoric shapes or "constructs" the political perceptions of voters, and through those voters, political reality (Potter, 1996). Political analyses in the constructivist tradition have focused on the way that parties and politicians use their rhetoric to frame and spin issues and events in a way that suits their political goals. Scholars have shown the adaptability of this approach, in applying it to diverse topics such as labour strife (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996), climate change (Hartmann, 2010), and the development of political institutions like the American presidency (Tulis, 1987).

In his book *New Labour at the Centre*, Hindmoor (2004) proposes that the political centre is more than a descriptive term for a collection of policy positions – it is a constructed political space, created through strategic choice and designed actions. Hindmoor suggests that a party cannot "move to the centre" through policy change in the same way that a person can move into the centre of a room, since political space is a metaphorical, rather than tangible thing. Indeed, in this constructivist conception of political space, a party's policy and ideological views are irrelevant since policies or positions "are not inherently left-wing or right-wing" (p. 38). What matters is the belief of the electorate that a party inhabits the political centre, and thus a party must actively construct the metaphorical centre position through its intentional use of four tools: rhetoric, innovation, framing, and leadership.

These four tools are distinct, and yet they overlap and reinforce each other. Rhetoric – political arguments made both directly to the electorate and filtered through various media channels – binds the other tools together, in that each tool is accompanied by attempts to convince the electorate that the party's views and actions are consistent with the broad political centre of its society. Innovation is a response to Downs' (1957) view of spatial political combat, where there are only a finite set of policy options for voters and parties to choose, neatly arrayed along a universally understood continuum with defined endpoints. An innovation in policy outside of those bounds could thus help a party break entrenched perceptions and permit it to form new ones in the minds of voters. Framing is the tool concerned with the context of a policy or political argument. Changing the frame of a debate can allow for a shift in voters' opinions, even with no change in the policy or argument. Finally, a stylistically centrist party will select and empower leadership that personifies its society's view of the centre – as mainstream, familiar, and "normal." While these tools do not have any intrinsic relationship to centrism – they can be used to construct political space of any kind in a

constructivist's view – they are an important part of any theory concerning the nature of political space and are of obvious value in explaining the political centre.

A similar, though slightly different argument comes via the example of New Labour's counterpart on the other side of the Atlantic. Velasco's (2010) *Centrist Rhetoric* is an in-depth study of Bill Clinton's communication policy as the dominant American political figure of the 1990s. However, in Velasco's telling, the centre is not merely a metaphor for occupying a place of compromise, it is a symbol of a politician or party transcending political conflict altogether. Clinton was not merely carving out a distinctive political identity, he "damns an opponent's motive by calling it political," thus placing himself – and his centrist image – as something beyond division itself. This conception of the constructed centre pairs well with the idea of a voter's symbolic ideology, discussed in the section on voters below.

Centrism and Populism

This section could not be complete without some discussion of the natural extension of this Clintonian characterisation of political centrism as technocratic, apolitical, and based on evidence rather than on ideological zealotry. Such a conception intersects a vast, complex literature on the topic of populism. In clear distinction to centrism, populism is often characterised as "extreme," not least because there is substantial overlap between those parties employing the populist style and those holding heterodox ideological positions generally outside the political mainstream (Bale, 2003). Naturally, if the descriptor "populist" implies that a party is extreme, then a party eschewing populism would be correspondingly considered centrist. Some commentators have gone even further, identifying populism and technocracy as the new "organising poles of politics in contemporary Western democracies" (Bickerton & Accetti, 2017, p. 186), a position that would seem to encourage the view of the technocratic

or anti-populist style as a potential source of the centrist image. Some recent scholarship has indeed made this connection, particularly in regard to Mario Monti's technocratic governing coalition in Italy (Giannetti, 2013; Marangoni & Verzichelli, 2015).

However, there has been enough scholarly work on this notoriously slippery concept to say that there is simply no consensus on this view of populism and whatever its inverse can be called (Weyland, 2001; Bale, Van Kessel, & Taggart, 2011; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013). While it is true that populism is often discussed and defined by scholars as an "ideology," there is a clear differentiation between the "full" ideologies of left or right or Christian democracy or social democracy and the "thin-centred" ideology of populism proposed by Mudde (2004). Therefore populism, while defined in ideological terms, is entirely tangential to the usual considerations of party and policy ideology that are the subject of this thesis. Even those scholars that do not agree with the description of populism as a "thin-centred" ideology and who instead treat it as a style and set of behaviours (e.g. Aslanidis, 2016), do concur with the latter implication that populism has nothing to do with traditional right-left perceptions of political space. This thesis largely follows the argument of Norris & Inglehart (2018), who reject the conflation of populism and spatial image as flawed and confusing; they even briefly comment on the phenomenon of centrist or technocratic populism, which has been identified by scholars in Central and Eastern European party systems (Buštíková & Guasti, 2019; Havlík, 2019) and described as a sort of "anti-elitism for moderates" (Stanley, 2017, p. 148). For these reasons, it is wholly appropriate that the technocratic, pro-system, or anti-populist tendencies of parties should have no bearing on this theory of stylistically centrist parties.[17] although it will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

[17] Although the subject of populism will be revisited in Chapter 4, as it pertains to a party's anti-establishment rhetoric and position on European integration.

In conclusion, stylistically centrist parties see the political centre as a brand in and of itself, distinct from its ideological position and party system context. This view presents a centrist image as something that can be constructed and adopted as a function of strategic communication, through the party's name, rhetoric, and framing. The centrist image is thus something that stylistically centrist parties believe should be cultivated for political advantage, in order to capitalise on the perceived political and social desirability of balance, moderation, equanimity, transcendence of political conflict, or some other associated quality. In the next chapter, some of the issues in attempting empirical, comparative testing of this theory will be discussed.

Parties: Conclusions

The theoretical justification for three broad types of centrist parties – ideological, middle, and stylistic – is an original response to the puzzle introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Since there is no universally accepted definition of centrism at the party level, only a theoretical framework, such as the one presented here, can paint the full picture of these important, yet understudied institutions.

The three types of centrist parties are distinct ways to conceive of one related concept. "Centrism" is commonly used as synecdoche in both scholarly and popular discourse as a reference to one of several individual ideas, ideas that have never before been brought under one theoretical umbrella. The first, ideological centrism, refers to a centrist image borne of overall centrist ideological positioning – additionally, since there are many ways to define an ideological position as "centrist," this chapter has advanced a novel typology to identify and categorise them. The second, middle centrism, refers to a party's place in its own party system, and the unique role it plays in its country's elections and government, quite separate from its

own ideological programme. The third, stylistic centrism, is concerned with a party's methods, approach, and rhetoric – the public face it puts on the substance of its ideology and role in the party system.

The concept of the centre is crucial to our understanding of a wide variety of party-related phenomena. It is important to bring the term out of the cloudy realm of shorthand, and into the light of a new theoretical perspective. That has been the overarching goal of this section.

Of course, parties are, by definition, elite associations, made up of highly informed, highly interested individuals and groups. The mass electorate is a horse of a different colour, and centrism plays a similarly important role in explaining the attitudes and behaviours of the public. This thesis could not live up to its title in investigating the nature of the political centre without a corresponding theory of centrism in the electorate, and so it now turns to outlining that contribution.

Defining Centrist Voters

If there is one key conclusion from the preceding section on the varieties of centrist parties, it is that centrism is not monolithic. Indeed, there is no one definition of centrism, and any comprehensive theory of the subject must be broad enough to encompass several different definitions that may sometimes compete. Theoretically, this chapter has advanced the argument that the centrist image itself is insufficient as a full description of a party's position, values, or methods, and that the same label – "centrist" – could convey different meanings about different parties at different times.

What is true for parties is also true for voters. As shown Chapter 1, scholars hold a number of competing conceptions about centrist voters – for the present purposes, those

voters that self-identify or self-place themselves at the centre of the ideological continuum. They are variously thought of as moderates, swing voters, niche partisans, the uninformed, and those embarrassed to admit their ignorance. This means that while there is a substantial share of the electorate that claims a common centrist orientation, those voters cannot be treated as a bloc – like parties, a voter's centrist label is not enough to treat her as typical of a cohesive ideological group. Therefore, in order to learn anything about how voters express their centrist identification, this study must be able to recognise and differentiate distinct types of centrist voters. If the goal is to evaluate the variation in the outputs of centrist voters – what they think and how they behave – then naturally, this inquiry should begin with the inputs – the factors that influence how a voter comes to identify as a centrist in the first place.

This section on voters begins with a discussion of the main concepts that should be used to categorise centrist voters – *intentionality* and *moderation* – as well as the core components making up each. It then proceeds to show how these variables could structure the mass of centrist identifiers through their approach to political ideology and the political values they espouse. Finally, the section ends with an exploration of the concept of symbolic ideology, which provides an alternative understanding to conventional theories of voter ideology.

The Ideological Voter

In their seminal work on ideological identification, Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) proposed that a voter's self-placement on the overall left-right continuum was a function of their relationship to two essential variables: an ideological component (subsequently referred to as the "values component" in later research for the purposes of clarity), and a partisan

component.[18] The typology that follows owes a great intellectual debt to their framework; it is arguably the logical conceptual starting point for any investigation into voter ideology. However, when considering the particular challenges of researching centrist voters specifically, two major theoretical problems soon emerge. First, as the preceding work on centrist parties showed, there is no single "centre ideology." Since claiming a centrist position can mean wildly different things in terms of values and beliefs, any conception of centrist voters must account for this variation. Second, while there have been substantial declines in party membership and identification overall since the 1970s, centrists specifically are far less likely to profess a party attachment than non-centrists (Schmitt et al., 2020).[19] This means that a current theory of centrist voters must also feature a way to deal with this reality.

The main theoretical challenge of this section is, then, to update and tailor the Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) framework for a specific group of voters who challenge the assumptions it depends upon – self-identified centrists. This original proposal therefore keeps the spirit of their theory, while modifying the components for better application to centrist voters. Therefore, the argument is that centrists in the electorate are chiefly delineated by two key variables – *intentionality* and *moderation*.

[18] In their research, Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) originally posited a number of other hypothesised components to ideological self-identification, which they then found lacking under empirical testing. One of the rejected hypotheses was a "social component," comprising a voter's structural, normative, and non-partisan organisational factors, such as class, religion, and membership of a trade union. While the hypothesis still has proponents (e.g. Freire, 2006; Freire, 2008), the bulk of the literature treats the social component as Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) did; as largely redundant in establishing ideological self-identification and overwhelmed by the partisan and values components.

[19] This data comes from the 2019 European Election Study Voter Study (Schmitt et al., 2020) and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Of importance here is that the share of centrists who report no attachment to a political party is substantially larger than that of any other ideological group; approximately a third larger than those on the moderate right or left, and well more than double those on the far right or left.

Intentionality

The first major variable conditioning centrist voters is what this thesis will call intentionality. For this purpose, intentionality is defined as a voter's quality of being conscious, purposeful, and affirmative of their political beliefs. When faced with the question of self-identifying one's ideology, a voter who is highly intentional provides an answer that is deliberate or considered – in other words, they have the capacity to understand the question, and can use reason to respond appropriately and accurately. Conversely, a low-intentionality voter is none of these things. Their answer to the self-identified ideology question is not necessarily inaccurate or untruthful, but it is not the product of a careful weighing of beliefs. It is arbitrary, potentially capricious, and the product of an uninformed decision process. In this framework, the intentionality variable acts a substitute for Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) partisanship component. It fulfils many of the same theoretical purposes – indeed, partisanship is included in the concept – but since it is more than simple partisanship, it is more applicable to centrist voters, who are far more likely to report affiliation with no party than any other ideological group.

Why is intentionality such an important variable in evaluating centrist voters? Scholars who have studied the specific phenomenon of centrist ideological self-identification have discovered that a substantial number of centrist voters are what Knutsen (1998a) referred to as "cognitive don't knowers" or "people who lack knowledge and possibly also the cognitive capacity to place themselves on the scale" (p. 304). Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) referred to choosing the centre position on an ideological scale as "a neutral position" and "a concealed form of nonresponse" (p. 247) and used these descriptions to justify using a scale without an exact midpoint for their own survey research.

These assertions bear some resemblance to Converse's (1964) pioneering work on political attitudes and behaviours, and thus necessitate some discussion. Converse's definition of the now-famous concept of "nonattitudes" posited that on some particularly niche or abstract questions of public importance, voters do not hold a considered, coherent view and instead express an ephemeral, spontaneous view with no underlying reasoning. In other words – on some issues, voters do not hold an opinion, and when asked about it, simply make one up "off the top of the head" (Taylor & Fiske, 1978) in order to avoid the embarrassment of admitting so. Zaller (1992) dramatically expanded upon this concept with provocative research that essentially struck down Converse's (1964) qualifiers, instead claiming that when it comes to virtually all issues, virtually all voters just "make it up as they go along." The debate over the pervasiveness of nonattitudes on the one hand and political sophistication on the other has persisted over both measurement issues (e.g. Achen, 1975), and the applicability of the theories (e.g. Krosnick & Petty, 1995). As Saris & Sniderman (2018) sum up, the literature points to citizens having either too few considered opinions and thus needing to invent some to tell pollsters; or too many as a result of a media environment saturated with political information and thus choosing a response according to the vagaries of question wording, salience, and sheer randomness. Either explanation is certainly consistent with existing research on political centrists, but neither fits perfectly. While a respondent's centrist self-identification certainly could be in lieu of an honest admission of ignorance, more is needed to understand why the centre is considered the substitute for a nonattitude. And while many centrists could indeed "possess opposing considerations on most issues that might lead them to decide [a public policy] issue either way" (Zaller & Feldman, 1992, p. 585), the same problem rears its head – why choose the centre position instead of any other?

While this thesis will not attempt to settle this debate, it must reckon with its implications – any theory of the centre must reckon with a voter's ability and willingness to provide an intentional answer about their ideological beliefs.

This point about knowledge, interest, and capacity is important in defining the concept of intentionality, given the range of similar terms and concepts that may prompt some confusion. For example, "sincerity" is a term often used in studies of public opinion to denote a respondent's authentic beliefs and evaluate a survey's ability to reveal them.[20] "Sincere beliefs" are generally contrasted with "expressive" answers on a survey, or those responses that represent either what the respondent wants to be known for thinking, or what the respondent thinks the researcher wants to hear (Berinsky, 2002; Bullock et al., 2013; Berinsky, 2017). While the sincerity of respondents is undoubtedly a concern in any empirical study of public opinion, including one of ideology, the fact that partisan attitudes and political interest are inherently expressive is accounted for in both in Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) theory and in the argument here. Indeed, a respondent's expression of identification is entirely the point; what this concept of intentionality is intended to measure are the respondent's underlying reasons (and the capacity to hold those reasons) for their expression.

Still though, this discussion of sincerity leads into another issue that must be reckoned with in the definition of intentionality: the fact that at present, there is simply no way to definitively identify and measure a person's intentions. Judging *why* a respondent gives a certain answer to a survey question, and if they do so with at least a threshold level of seriousness is obviously impossible. Therefore, this study will rely on another indicator that plainly relates to intentionality – that of political interest. This is based on the simple reason that those

[20] A case-in-point on the confusing possibilities of language; with apologies to the American literary critic Lionel Trilling (1973), "sincere" and "authentic" are meant as synonyms here, simply describing the true nature of a respondent's beliefs.

demonstrably interested in politics are far more likely to be intentional about their answer to political survey questions, including that of self-identified ideology; and those with little to no interest in politics are far less likely to have the capacity and willingness to do so – a logic that is echoed in the relationship between political interest and other indicators, such as political knowledge (e.g. Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954), party identification (e.g. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), and propensity to vote (e. g. Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996).[21]

Following the lead of scholars who have researched this subject in the past, this next section will propose that observable intentionality, as defined previously, has two main components – a respondent's identification with a political party, and their political interest – which will now be discussed in detail.[22]

Partisanship

Political party affiliation and the strength of that affiliation has a key role in ideological identification. Recall Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) landmark paper on ideological identification, where the authors posited that two fundamental components made up a voter's self-placement on the political spectrum: a values component and a partisanship component. Quite simply, this means that support for a centrist political party is a major element of why a

[21] While a link between low political interest and low intentionality is intuitively reasonable, it is certainly not universally applicable. As outlined below on the discussion of Iversen & Soskice's (2015) study, it is entirely possible for a low-interest voter to consciously – that is, "intentionally" – identify as a centrist as a rational response to a lack of political sophistication (even if it is also possible – and potentially more likely – for this calculation to be made subconsciously, and therefore not "intentionally"). In general, this thesis defines intentionality as the ability to hold a conscious, purposeful political identification arising from knowledge; rather than the ability to hold an equally conscious, purposeful political identification resulting from self-aware ignorance.

[22] Crucially, although political interest and partisanship are separate concepts, they are not necessarily independent of each other, and both are potentially endogenous to both the party system and the overall political context. A voter's propensity to vote – perhaps the clearest and most direct measurement of her political interest – has been shown to vary a great deal based on macro factors like polarisation and the number of parties, among other economic and institutional factors (e.g. Crepaz, 1990; Callander & Wilson, 2007; Wilford, 2017).

voter might identify as a centrist herself. This section will discuss partisanship, its importance in understanding the puzzle of voter ideology, and how the concept applies to centrist voters in particular.

In Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) contribution – findings reinforced by later research (e.g. Inglehart, 1984; Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990; Knutsen, 1997; Knutsen, 1998b; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Lachat, 2008) – party affiliation provides voters with ideological heuristics; or cues that provide a voter valuable information about parties' ideological views and beliefs. Essentially, a party loyalist may not necessarily know where she might place herself on a left-right scale, but if she knows where her party locates itself on that scale, she can then extrapolate her own beliefs as in line with her party. Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) found that not only was partisanship a key element in a voter's ideological identification, it was in fact the dominant one, overpowering the other major factor – the values component – and swamping minor factors like social and religious structures that had a strong theoretical link to ideology but were far less important upon empirical analysis.

Other scholars have since applied these insights to adjacent problems and have reached conclusions broadly in line with Inglehart and Klingemann (1976). For example, Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990) found that parties, through this strong connection to their supporters' ideological leanings, can alter the meaning of an ideological label, for example, the way that green parties successfully added environmental protection to the "standard" roster of left-wing issue positions.

Cues and heuristics are only a part of what parties bring to this model of ideological self-identification; parties also provide voters with an opportunity to simply express their views and beliefs. There is an ongoing debate over the nature of partisanship's effect on voter behaviour, roughly condensed into two positions: the instrumental model, and the expressive

model. The former sees partisanship as reflecting a voter's general approval of a party's leadership, positions, and success in governing (Fiorina, 1981; Franklin & Jackson, 1983; Dalton & Weldon, 2007). In contrast, the latter views partisanship as a social identity; a function of characteristics such as ethnicity, race, gender, and religion; and a psychological defence mechanism inured to shifts in party policy, leadership, and governing outcomes (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Gerber, Huber, & Washington, 2009; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015). In the enduring phrase of Campbell et al. (1960), partisanship is a coherent set of beliefs that hardens into a "psychological attachment;" something stronger and more lasting than a social relationship forged for mutual benefit. While as in other areas, this thesis will not settle this debate in one way or another, it aligns with its contours. For the present purposes, two specific points about it require discussion: the recent expansion of research on the expressive hypothesis; and the fact that the model advanced here comports with either the instrumental or expressive hypothesis in any event.

First, there is increasing evidence that the expressive model holds in a multiparty European context. The debate between the instrumental and expressive models of partisanship is often grounded in the American context, where the divide between Democrats and Republicans (or "liberal" and "conservative") presents a particular political setting that is not perfectly replicated in any European country. However, recent research on Europe makes it "clear that partisans in Europe exhibit many of the expressive attitudes and behaviors observed among American partisans, despite differing levels of partisanship and partisan identity across [Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK, the four European nations studied in the paper]" (Huddy, Bankert, & Davies, 2018, p. 194).

Secondly, Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) specifically use partisan identification in their model *in addition* to a voter's values and beliefs, implying that although the two

components may be broadly related, one does not determine the other, as an instrumental model would predict. In their discussion of the partisanship component of ideological identity, they write of "group loyalties" and the social characteristics of identity, showing a consideration for an expressive understanding of partisanship years before such a thing was formalised. Therefore, there is no question that a model based on theirs could cohere with either main strand in the partisanship literature.

Of course, these conclusions about the relationship between party affiliation and ideological views are only relevant insofar as party affiliation remains a defining feature of the electorate. Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) implicitly acknowledged as much in their work; respondents who did not claim a party identification were excluded from their study. Since that time, the concept of the electorate as the province of political parties has been under challenge as scholars have found increasing evidence of a dealignment of voters from parties (Särlvik & Crewe, 1983; Dalton, 1984; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009). Over the past few decades, evidence indicates that the affective bonds between parties and voters have gradually weakened, as both individual party supporters and a party's natural constituencies (e.g. trade unions for a social democratic party or the church for a Christian democratic party) are less willing to identify as affiliating with that political party. This evolution is jarring in formal terms – research has shown that party membership in Europe declined by approximately a third in the years between the 1960s and the late 1990s and has continued into recent times (Van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). More colourfully, noted historian and former UK Supreme Court Justice Lord Jonathan Sumption has pointed out that in the 1950s, Britain's Conservative Party was the largest voluntary civic organisation in the country, with more than 3 million members; but by 2012, the Royal Society for the Protection

of Birds had more members than the UK's three largest political parties combined.[23] During this same period, electoral turnout showed a similar consistent decline (Gray & Caul, 2000), and voters also displayed an increased willingness to change the party they supported from election to election, resulting in significant electoral volatility (Pedersen, 1979; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2011; Fieldhouse et al., 2019). While there is certainly evidence of country-level variation in the process of dealignment (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 2009), there is considerable scholarly agreement in the reality of the phenomenon. Even more pertinent to the present discussion, centrists are more likely than any other ideological group to express no attachment to any political party (Schmitt et al., 2020).

There is, however, wide-ranging scholarly debate on the implications of dealignment. One school of thought posits that dealignment frees the electorate from its partisan attachments, thus making voters both more discerning of their true values and beliefs, and more willing to vote on them (Rose & McAllister, 1986; Dalton, 2013). Such an electorate could potentially find itself with diminished differences in utility between different party choices, and a corresponding rise in partisan indifference echoing Bell's (1960) famous and controversial "End of Ideology" thesis. On the other hand, some evidence indicates that the weakening of party bonds is more likely to leave voters in a state of alienation from the political process and frustrated with the workings of democracy (Dalton, 2004; Albright, 2009; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2018). Both possibilities hold obvious and potentially major implications for the future of democratic government, but both also mesh well with possible conceptions of the political centre. In one conception, the centrist, nonpartisan voter owes her centrist identification to her intentionally moderate values alone; in the other, the nonpartisan

[23] For the birds. (2012, 9 September). *The Economist*. https://www.economist.com/britain/2012/09/29/for-the-birds

centrist's identification is the mark of her disengagement from politics altogether. These disparate possibilities highlight yet another reason to value an understanding of the political centre – greater knowledge of the subject could make a substantial contribution to the study of democratic theory, a subject discussed further in Chapter 7.

Of course, as the first half of this chapter makes plain, there are indeed such things as centrist political parties, all of which have their own adherents and sympathisers. And although the nonpartisan centrist must be accounted for in this model, many centrist voters do identify with one party or another, and many of those partisan identifications are with centrist parties. Therefore, as these questions of partisanship relate to centrism specifically, a return to the existing empirical work on the subject is in order.

Rodon's (2015) analysis indeed showed a significant role for what he termed the "party-component hypothesis" in influencing a respondent's centrist self-identification. He operationalised the issue by analysing self-identified centrists who supported a party of the centre, thus using their partisanship as a "mirror" for their declared ideology. His results indicated that attachment to a centrist party was one of the only two hypotheses to have a significant positive effect across the total sample, and behind only the "uninterested hypothesis" discussed previously. When each country was analysed individually, the party-component hypothesis was again highly significant, associated with the highest probability of a respondent self-identifying as a centrist in seven countries. Clearly, partisanship must be accounted for in the final theoretical model.

In conclusion, there is no question that any theory of ideological identification requires a mechanism for gauging a voter's relationship to politics. Partisanship, being a label of a voter's engagement with a political institution, as well as a cue for their beliefs and behaviours, is a necessary component of this theory. But in order to adapt the theory to an increasingly

nonpartisan world – and adapt it to a particular segment of the electorate that has abandoned party affiliation more than any other – the gap that dealignment has left behind must be filled with a measure of the voter's political interest, which is another mechanism that mediates a voter's relationship to political institutions and processes. Taken together, these components can provide a centrist's level of intentionality, allowing us to separate two very different voters with two very different sets of expected values and behaviours – the engaged, active centrist, and the alienated centrist-by-default.

Political Interest

Interest in politics is a key factor in understanding a voter's beliefs and predict her behaviours. As briefly mentioned above, political interest is linked to a whole host of consequential subjects. For example, it is strongly associated with political knowledge and sophistication (Atkin, Galloway, & Nayman, 1976; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978; Luskin, 1990), since the politically interested seek our political information and opportunities to discuss and learn about politics. Similarly, there is strong association between political interest and democratic participation; beyond the acts of voting or affiliating or identifying with a party, those with a high level of political interest are more willing to engage in more granular political conduct like attending meetings, donating money to parties or politicians, volunteering on campaigns, and in general, behaving in accord with coherent political opinions (Bennett, 1986; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Kohler, 2005; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008).

Of course, the causal relationship between interest and these other attitudes and behaviours is difficult to evaluate because of the endogenous nature of the relationship – are people more likely to vote because they are interested in politics, or are they interested in

politics because they are more likely to vote? However, the associations are strong and enduring over decades of research.

Importantly for the purpose of this study, political interest has long been apparent as a concept strongly linked with centrism. In writing on their choice to use an ideological scale without an exact midpoint for their survey research, Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) write that "a very disproportionate share of those who place themselves at the exact centre have little interest in politics" (p. 247). While noting that an earlier study of ideology, Deutsch, Lindon, & Weill's (1966) book on the French electorate, filtered out self-identified centrists with low political information and placed them in the same category as those who gave no response at all, Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) continue on to write that "low political interest is by no means limited to those who place themselves at the midpoint of a scale: one is left wondering whether some or all of those who place themselves elsewhere should also be filtered out" (p. 248).[24]

This linkage between interest, information, social networks, and ideology is particularly important at the centre of the ideological spectrum. Iversen and Soskice (2015) provide a model of how these forces interact to produce what they term the "centrist bias" among low-information voters. First, assume that every issue of public importance is organised on a linear continuum, and that every voter has a choice to associate herself with one of three positions on this issue: left, right, or centre. Next, consider how complex even the most salient public policy issues are, and the level of sophistication required to make an informed choice between the three positions. For example, on the elemental question of tax and public spending, where the left stands for more of both and the right stands for less of both, a voter must be able to

[24] Seen in this light, the relationship between political interest and centrism very much resembles the well-known psychological relationship between the intensity and extremity of preferences, including political preferences (e.g. Allport, 1933), about which more in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

identify her own economic interest, her future economic interest, and her relative economic interests among the population at large, all couched within the arcane framework of tax policy, the differential benefits of public services, and the enormously complex set of interactions between them that affect everything from climate change to their children's education. Finally, work through the probabilities and expected costs of an unsophisticated voter taking each position. For a voter unable or unwilling to make difficult assessments of public policy, the possibility of left, centre, or right being the "optimal" position is equal. Therefore, that voter should choose in a way that minimises the expected costs of any "wrong" decision of self-identification:

> "Standard spatial (proximity) voting now implies that if [uninformed voter] *i* votes L, the expected loss is:
>
> $$\frac{1}{3}0 + \frac{1}{3}(C - L) + \frac{1}{3}(R - L)$$
>
> ...where the first term is the (zero) loss if L turns out to be the "correct" party (i.e. the most representative of *i*'s interests), and the other two terms are the losses if either C or R is the best party. Similarly, if *i* votes C, the expected loss is:
>
> $$\frac{1}{3}(C - L) + \frac{1}{3}0 + \frac{1}{3}(R - C)$$
>
> It is easy to see that the only difference between the two expected losses is the last term, which is greater if *i* votes L than if *i* votes C. The same holds if we compare R with C, assuming symmetrical spacing. The stark conclusion is that *uninformed voters should always vote centrist*" (p. 1786).[25]

In other words, for the politically uninterested, identifying as a centrist is an entirely rational decision in the face of uncertainty. Indeed, this phenomenon seems to proceed from

[25] An important contribution, bearing in mind that the converse is not true – all centrist voters are not uninformed.

the same informal logic underlying much of the folk wisdom concerning the value of moderation.

When evaluating the plausible reasons for centrist self-identification, both Knutsen (1998a) and Rodon (2015) considered the lack of political interest to be a prime suspect, although they arrived at different findings using different methods. Knutsen (1998a), using a simple measure of political discussion found in the Eurobarometer survey, could not affirmatively link this variable to an increasing (contemporary) tendency for Western Europeans to self-locate at the ideological centre. However, that was the extent of his analysis – he did not compare these results to those using other hypotheses, and he focused on the trend of voters towards a centrist position rather than on the centrists themselves. Rodon (2015) addressed both of these critiques in his research on the European Social Survey, and accordingly found a much greater role for what he called the "uninterested hypothesis." When looking at the total sample (respondents from all 21 countries in his study together), the uninterested hypothesis had the largest effect of any variable tested and was one of only two significant variables overall (the party-component hypothesis was the other). When results were disaggregated by country, this uninterested hypothesis was the main reason for centrist self-identification in the consolidated democracies of Western Europe and explained a significant chunk of such responses in post-Communist European countries as well.

Simply put, there is no doubt that political interest plays a significant role in understanding the motivations of voters who claim the centre position. Therefore, it is likely that it also plays a significant role in understanding variation in the other tendencies of centrist voters.

Moderation

The second major variable conditioning centrist voters is moderation. "Moderation" is defined as the avoidance of extremes, or the tendency to hold centrist positions on various ideological dimensions and specific policy issues, thus making a moderate voter's particular views self-similar to their overall ideological position. Again, as intentionality replaces the partisanship component in this update to Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) model, moderation stands in for the values component for the simple reason that, as this thesis has shown, there is no single, universal centrist ideology.

In fact, there is the possibility of great complexity in the values underlying an ideological self-identification. Given its fundamental importance to a thesis on the political centre, it must be restated that European politics is predominantly structured on the left-right spectrum. Although perceptions of that spectrum vary from context to context (nation vs nation, national vs supranational, and party vs electorate) (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990; Huber & Inglehart, 1995), there is general consensus that the left-right scale is the best tool available for the purposes of making comparisons (Huber, 1989). As Benoit & Laver (2006) put it: "[T]he most time honored and universal way of using spatial language to describe the policy position of political actors has been to describe these as being to the 'left' or to the 'right'" (p. 129). However, as described above in the section on parties and issue dimensionality, party-level politics in Western Europe is structured on at least two dimensions; one economic, and one sociocultural (e.g. Hix 1999; Warwick, 2002). While debated more fiercely, a number of studies have shown that this is the case for voters as well (e.g. Kitschelt & Hellemans, 1990, Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009).

Scholars have attempted to resolve this apparent paradox between a metaphorical one-dimensional political spectrum and a metaphorical multidimensional political space in a

handful of ways. While furthering the recognisance of multiple issue dimensions throughout his entire career, Inglehart (and collaborators, e.g. Inglehart& Sidjanski, 1976; Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976) hypothesised that the left-right continuum could be characterised as a "super-issue" with the capacity to integrate new issues and cleavages over time, a theory advanced by later scholars as well (Van der Eijk, Schmitt, & Binder, 2005; De Vries, Hakhverdian, & Lancee, 2013). A few mechanisms for how this is achieved have been proposed, among them issue bundling – where existing parties fold in new issues and controversies, thus aggregating these issues into a dynamic left-right spectrum – and crowding out – where new issues supplant older ones in the public's mind, and salience plays a substantial role in redefining the meaning of the left-right spectrum (De Vries, Hakhverdian, & Lancee, 2013). Building on Weisberg's (1974) insight that scaling choices can affect the representation of a multidimensional space as unidimensional and vice versa, Lachat (2009) proposed that the left-right spectrum is actually perceived by voters as curvilinear, rather than strictly linear, thus allowing for multiple issue dimensions to be better represented by the single super-issue spectrum.

Given the ongoing nature of this research, this thesis will attempt to be as theoretically adaptable on this point as possible. Unless otherwise noted for the purposes of analysis, the standard assumption for the rest of this study is that political competition can be structured by either the unidimensional super-issue spectrum, or the two-dimensional plane comprising economic and sociocultural issues. Such a stance aligns with both the majority of research on the subject and also the majority of data collected in furtherance of that research – particularly the fact that no matter the metaphorical construction, political competition is animated by more than economic issues. That being said, these questions and the discipline's answers to them are dynamic and evolving – new political issues of temporary or even permanently high

salience do arise, and their relationship to either a unidimensional or a multidimensional political space may be disputed. It is therefore important to note that the arguments and insights about ideological centrism – among both parties and voters – can be similarly applied to a unidimensional, two-dimensional, or even more complex multi-dimensional space. Whatever the conception or mechanism, the studies discussed in the previous paragraph show that a voter can hold a wide variety of values and beliefs and still remain consistent with their overall ideological identification. And if this is true for voters on the right and left, it is surely true for voters in the centre.

As the section on parties above makes clear, there is more than one way to define a coherent set of policy and issue beliefs as a "centrist" programme. Some parties achieve this ideologically centrist image through a focus on their moderate position on the economic left-right dimension. However, some achieve their ideologically centrist image through a certain combination of immoderate positions that are generally considered "centrist" by experts.

There is no reason to believe that such competing conceptions of the centrist image are not held by voters, as well as parties and experts. Indeed, as the section on partisanship above lays out, there is a strong partisan component to ideological identification. If a self-described "progressive liberal" party marrying a right-wing economic position with an extreme libertarian sociocultural position – like the Netherlands' Democrats 66 – is widely considered centrist by both scholars and political elites, and membership of or support for that party is a major reason for a voter to self-identify as a centrist, then it stands to reason that said centrist voter may well share the positions of their party, as well as its overall orientation.

Why is moderation such an important variable in evaluating centrist voters? Again, the scholars who have studied the specific phenomenon of centrist self-identification recognised that specific patterns of issue beliefs have an impact on a respondent's overall choice of centrist

orientation. Both Knutsen (1998a) and Rodon (2015) tested what they called the "genuine" hypothesis, or the general tendency of a self-identified centrist to hold centrist views on specific policy issues. Both also tested what Rodon (2015) referred to as the "postmaterial" hypothesis, that self-identified centrists may consider the left-right continuum to be irrelevant as a functional description of their political beliefs and chose the centre position as a way of refusing to choose an obsolete label like left or right. In contrast to the "cognitive don't knowers" who lack the capacity to place themselves on the scale, Knutsen (1998a) referred to such respondents as "evaluative don't knowers," who are familiar with political concepts and terminology, but make a conscious decision to substitute the centre position for a refusal to answer what they believe to be an inapposite question. Finally, Rodon (2015) evaluated what he termed the "balance-out" hypothesis, which posited that a voter with extreme but opposite positions on specific economic issues might consider themselves a centrist on balance. For example, a voter who strongly favoured the right-wing policy of deregulation of industry and simultaneously favoured the left-wing policy of high taxes to finance expansive welfare provisions may consider her overall economic views broadly centrist.[26]

As a group, all three of these potential explanations for centrist self-identification were found to be weaker than those hypotheses now broadly grouped under the umbrella of intentionality. But relative weakness is not the same as irrelevance, and within the context of centrist voters specifically, there is obvious reason to maintain the distinction between overall moderates and non-moderates. A prototypical "genuine moderate" centrist, a "postmaterial" centrist, and a "balance-out" centrist would all share the same ideological self-identification,

[26] Although not in a European or multiparty context, Treier & Hillygus (2009) found evidence suggesting that many American centrist voters are indeed cross-pressured on competing issues and/or dimensions, with their overall ideological identification resembling something like the "balance out" hypothesis.

but they hold starkly different conceptions of what that means and would presumably demonstrate very different political behaviours.

This literature on centrist voters also makes clear the reason for omitting a key element of the theory concerning parties from the theory concerning voters – salience. The general consensus of prior studies of this subject is that centrist self-identification is fundamentally linked to a lack of some combination of political sophistication, capacity, knowledge, and interest. Whether is it Converse's (1964) "nonattitudes," Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) "concealed form of non-response," Knutsen's (1998a) "cognitive don't-knowers," or Iversen and Soskice's (2015) rational centrist bias, the driving force behind centrism is apathy and ignorance – something that can certainly not be said of centrists on the elite or party level. While there are likely some distinctions that can be drawn among voters who prioritise certain issues or dimensions over others and draw their ideological identification from that view, salience must clearly be a secondary concern in any model relying first and foremost on apathy and ignorance as a mechanism to explain an attitude. In other words, salience is an important factor in describing centrist parties, since party positions are consciously and intentionally taken, but since centrism among voters is ascribed to the exact opposite cause, salience has less power as an explanatory variable.[27]

Because of this variation, it is necessary that the final model of centrist voters differentiates between these possible flavours of centrist values in its categorisation. Moderation is thus the second half of the overall theoretical framework, and it will be based upon a voter's views on the economic and sociocultural dimensions of political conflict.

[27] In most public opinion research, it also seems to be the case that measuring the salience of the public's view on various policy issues is largely a secondary concern to identifying the public's position on those issues, limiting the data available for study.

Symbolic Centrism

There is one final theoretical issue of centrist ideology requiring discussion here, because it is an alternative source of the values component in the classical model above – *symbolic ideology*. Symbolic ideology has most famously been used to explain a paradoxical tendency of the American electorate (Ellis & Stimson, 2012). On the one hand, decades of polling have shown that Americans who identify as "conservative" consistently outnumber those who identify as "liberal." At the same time, however, Americans consistently prefer liberal policies to conservative ones (e.g. Free & Cantril, 1967; Jacoby, 2000; Stimson, 2004). This paradox has led to Americans being generalised as symbolically conservative and operationally liberal. In their lauded study of this so-called ideological "mismatch," Ellis & Stimson (2012) posit that conservative ideological identification owes more to a voter's perception of extra-political values, among them family, sex, and conformity (symbolic ideology), and less to conventional sources of political values like views on the size of government or opinions on the relevant political questions of the day (operational ideology). In their model, while a voter's symbolic ideological identification and their operational ideological views on public issues are certainly related (e.g. Jost, 2006), they are distinct concepts with distinct psychological origins.

There is very little empirical research concerning symbolic and operational ideology in the European context, where the conception of the left-right political spectrum is much more prominent than in the United States, and there appears to be no research on the subject as it concerns the political centre. Nevertheless, the characterisation of centrism as a symbolic ideology born of extra-political values is one that must be considered.

Thousands of years of philosophical literature has associated moderation with a number of objectively desirable extra-political traits: prudence; independence; equanimity;

harmony; reasonableness; balance; and self-control, among others (Crăiuţu, 2017). It is entirely possible that many, if not most, self-identified centrists claim the label out of a wish to personify or express these virtues, rather than an intent to qualify a political viewpoint or by way of a psychological reflex.

The possibility of a symbolic importance to the centrist label is heightened when considering some measurement effects of attempts to study ideological identification. The most widely used mechanism for identifying a survey respondent's ideological profile is a numerical scale, with one number (generally the lower bound) representing the left, and one number (generally the higher bound) representing the right.[28] Implied (but not explicitly stated) is that the midpoint of the scale represents the centre. However, this is not the only way to ascertain a respondent's self-identified ideology. Rather than a strictly numerical scale, some studies utilise a scale denoted by words, with options such as: "far left," "left," "slightly left," "centre," and so on. Not only might a word scale yield different results to a numerical scale, but it is also entirely plausible that appending labels to points of the scale may encourage a respondent's active, rather than passive identification, i.e. choosing the "centre" label more willingly and expressively than merely selecting the unmarked midpoint between "left" and "right" labels. The empirical research that follows is cognisant of this and other interactions between measurement effects and theory.

Symbolic centrism is notable in that it presents a completely different model of ideological self-identification than does research in the mould of Inglehart & Klingemann (1976). It is also a much newer strand of research, with relatively little previous application in studies of European electorates. For this reason, it exists in a sort of liminal space in this thesis;

[28] A wider discussion of this scale and the methodological issues inherent to its use can be found in the next chapter.

something that cannot be easily accounted for using traditional methods, but simultaneously cannot be ignored. At first blush, symbolic ideology cannot be reconciled with a model of ideology that is based in partisanship (or political attention, or in this case, intentionality) and values concerning political controversies. However, a theory of symbolic ideology need not necessarily conflict with such a model, but could lay outside it, providing a completely distinct source of the values underlying the model. This is unquestionably a promising avenue of research, and while its record in the literature is not a long one, the idea of centrism as a symbolic value in and of itself is one that is best borne in mind throughout this thesis and will be the main subject of Chapter 5.

Voters: Conclusions

Making use of the key factors that shape centrist identification, this theoretical framework of intentionality and moderation allows us – for the first time – to see the distinctions within a large, important, and poorly understood bloc of voters. These distinctions should prove valuable in assessing these voters' values, attitudes, behaviours, and the wider role they play in democratic politics.

A long strand of literature has associated the political centre with a lack of political sophistication, knowledge, and interest, meaning that any unifying theoretical framework must have a way of accounting for this. The variable of intentionality, derived from the related, but distinct concepts of partisanship and political attention, provides a new and parsimonious solution to the issue of an "ideology" long defined by apathy. In a similar way, the variable of moderation helps to disentangle a voter's overall ideological identification from their distinct political issue preferences. Together, these variables permit the differentiation of an important, yet often generalised bloc of voters that are not monolithic in their values and behaviours.

This chapter has also expanded upon a potentially critical alternative theory of centrism – symbolic ideology, or the idea that ideological identification is really a reflection of non-ideological traits and desires, rather than a function of views on traditional political subjects like the size and scope of government power. Both these theories and their implications will be discussed further and tested empirically in future chapters.

First though, the next chapter will show how the variables of intentionality and moderation can be operationalised and applied to public opinion data, revealing the broad outlines of a typology of centrist voters with vastly different qualities and behavioural expectations.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented two broad theories – one about the nature of party-level centrism, and one about the nature of voter-level centrism – based on the discipline's present grasp of party competition, voter behaviour, and political psychology.

On parties, it has proposed that the very definition of the term "centrist" is lacking because it actually defines three distinct, but related concepts rather than one. These concepts are three different manifestations of the centrist image: ideological, related to the cross-national set of party positions that are broadly seen as centrist; middle, related to the relative position a party inhabits and the role it plays in its national party system; and stylistic, related to the party's chosen brand and its relationship to the electorate's established conventions and expectations.

On voters, it has proposed that the prevailing components of ideological self-identification – partisanship and values – require subtle adjustment for adaptation to centrists. Therefore, centrist ideology is mediated by two key variables: a voter's intentionality in their

political decisions and identification, as a function of partisanship and political interest; and the moderate views on public issues that are the most likely source of centrist values.

The rest of this thesis will seek to apply these theories to both describe the state of centrist politics in advanced democracies, and to answer concrete empirical questions about centrist parties, centrist voters, and the implications of our greater understanding. The next chapter will focus on the first of those tasks, by operationalising the theory to actual observations and showing how the theory is manifested in the empirical world. It will take the theoretical framework developed for parties and show just how different parties with similar overall ideological ratings can be, based on their positions and emphasis of different political dimensions. It will demonstrate how to identify and measure the middle of a party system using the theoretical criteria defined in this chapter. And it will use the elements described here to categorise centrist voters and make predictions about their attitudes and behaviour. The descriptive work in the next chapter will complement the theoretical work done here, together building a foundation for the hypotheses and evaluation in the empirical chapters to follow.

Chapter 3: Descriptive Typology

This chapter opens much as the last one did, by asking: what does it mean to be centrist? In that previous chapter, the core theoretical contribution of this thesis was outlined with the answer to that question – there are numerous plausible definitions of that political label, both for parties and for voters.

Among parties, "centrist" could refer to an *ideological* tendency; a combination of party positions that results in a cross-nationally coherent centrist programme. It could refer to a *middle* tendency; a party's central role in its own national party system. Or it could refer to a *stylistic* tendency; the rhetoric, methods, and approach a party employs in selling itself to the electorate and beyond.

Among voters, "centrist" can refer to a wide variety of voters who answer to the term. Chapter 2 showed how centrist identity in the mass public is structured by two main elements: *intentionality*, the voter's capacity for interest and active participation in the formation of their political beliefs; and *moderation*, the voter's tendency towards the broad middle and away from the extremes of political values.

In this chapter, these theoretical constructs will be applied to empirical reality by demonstrating how the concepts manifest themselves among actual political parties and actual voters. The usefulness of the theoretical distinctions is shown by gauging how variations in the theory – for example, parties with different issue profiles on the two ideological dimensions – map important distinctions in observed data. And the stage will be set for the empirical chapters that follow by providing an overview of data, methods, and the subject at large.

This chapter, like the last, is divided into two sections: the first on parties, and the second on voters. In each, the operationalisation of the theory is explained, an empirical

typology is outlined, and the relevance of the theory to concrete questions of political science is demonstrated.

Analysis of Centrist Parties

Programmatic comparison of political parties across countries is a common area of research in comparative political science, and accordingly there are tools at hand to enable such studies. The core tool used here to analyse ideological centrist parties is the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES); a 20-year series of expert surveys rating European political parties on a number of ideological dimensions and policy issues (Bakker et al., 2020a; 2020b). Since 1999, and at least every five years since then (generally following the elections to the European Parliament), the CHES has collected data on European Union member states, candidate countries, and assorted non-members. The results of the most recent survey, conducted in 2019 after the European elections of that year, were published in the spring of 2020 and included in the data used here.

The decision to make heavy use of expert surveys, and the CHES specifically, underpins the validity of this entire analysis, and so requires further discussion. In general, expert surveys measuring party positions across time and national boundaries are a widely used method in comparative political science, largely because they have been shown a great deal of stability, reliability, and validity (Benoit & Wiesehomeier, 2009). First, expert surveys have proven to be generally convergent with each other, demonstrating relatively predictable results even with slightly differing methods and scopes (Whitefield et al., 2007). Expert surveys have also proven highly correlated with similar evaluations conducted among politicians themselves (Netjes & Binnema, 2007). And crucially, research has shown the evaluations of expert surveys to be at least as accurate as those derived from objective content analysis (Benoit & Laver,

2007). They are also impervious to the obvious drawbacks of manifestos – the fact that not all parties write a manifesto or use a common template, and the fact that manifestos are inseparable from the timing and circumstances of the electoral cycle.[29]

Specifically, the CHES itself has shown to conform with all of this evidence (Steenbergen & Marks, 2007; Marks et al., 2007; Hooghe et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2015), and has been described as "a reasonably valid and reliable source of information on party positioning on European integration and ideological positioning" (Hooghe et al., 2010, p. 13). Given these strengths, as well as its size, relatively long history, and common use in the field, the CHES is an entirely appropriate basis for the analyses appearing in this chapter.

However, there are two related technical concerns that must be discussed in any study of ideology. The first is the issue of differential item functioning; the possibility that different groups in a survey will have differing understandings of important, yet inherently subjective constructs, leading to bias or confusion in their responses based on that group identity. In this particular case, the concern is that experts from different nations or focussing on the politics of different nations will not share a common concept of "left" and "right," making a comparison of their evaluations fundamentally flawed.

Dispensing with expert surveys for a moment, there is indeed a deeper epistemological and semiotic problem surrounding the interpretation of any symbol that is particularly acute in studies of ideology – researchers can never be sure that even common abstract constructs like "left" and "right" maintain common meanings across time and geography (Almond & Verba, 1963). This subject is hotly debated within the discipline. While some studies – particularly in the realm of political psychology, and particularly of voters, rather than experts

[29] Evaluations by analysis of manifesto data have also shown a marked centralising tendency, rating extreme parties as more centrist than expert surveys do (Gabel & Huber, 2000).

– have questioned the validity of cross-national and historical ideological comparisons (e.g. Zechmeister, 2006; Benoit & Laver, 2007; Tavits & Letki, 2009; Bauer et al., 2017; Zuell & Scholz, 2019), the evidence above on the reliability and validity of expert surveys supplies plenty of reason to believe that party left-right ideology is in fact consistent enough across time and geography to facilitate comparisons (e.g. Gabel & Huber, 2000; Hooghe et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2015). Although this debate is far from settled, it is crucial to accept the potential limitations of these methods, while bearing in mind that much of comparative political science research is grounded in the (empirically defensible) assumption that such comparisons are possible and meaningful.

The second issue is one of measurement error. One aspect of this error is bias – the possibility that the political views of the surveyed experts are affecting their judgments of the political views of outside actors, in this case parties (Curini, 2010; Martinez i Coma & van Ham, 2015). Another aspect of measurement error presents an even more fundamental problem – the fact that expert surveys are essentially an appeal to an unverifiable authority. Since survey results are anonymised, there is simply no way for third-party researchers to verify the actual "expertise" of the surveyed population, leading to some scepticism of the true value lying beneath the veneer of an expert survey's superficial claim to authority.

In an attempt to bolster the robustness of their work, the researchers behind the CHES have incorporated policy vignettes into the last few versions of their survey. These vignettes are used as an anchoring device to ground surveyed experts in common conceptions of left and right, leading to highly consistent and reliable survey results (Bakker et al., 2014a; Bakker et al., 2014b). This means that the ideological ratings in the CHES are about as reliable as possible, and researchers can feel confident that a party in one country is reasonably

comparable to a similarly rated party in another.[30] Again, while the weaknesses of this approach must be acknowledged, so too must the realisation that no method is perfect, and that imperfections must not stop researchers from making the best possible comparisons they can. In the final analysis, this presents a defence of expert surveys echoing Churchill's famous apology for democracy – that they are the worst method for evaluating party ideology, excepting all others that have been tried.

Finally, the fact that the CHES is conducted virtually simultaneously with the European Election Studies' Voter Study (EES) – also every five years, following the elections to the European Parliament – makes it simple and reasonable to use the two data sources in tandem for these purposes.

The full sample of parties that will be analysed in this chapter are all the parties from those 18 countries that have been evaluated in the seven waves of the CHES conducted since the foundation of the study, and listed in Chapter 1: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The CHES oversaw full waves in 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019; as well as a smaller, less comprehensive intermediate wave in 2017. In total, the sample includes 910 party-issue evaluation units of analysis over two decades.

The first and most important of those party-issue evaluation units for the purposes of this chapter is a party's overall super-issue ideological rating, which will be a key variable in many of the analyses to come. The survey item on the CHES is the first in a section called

[30] Additionally, there is reason to believe that the increased level of supranational integration in Europe over the past thirty years extends somewhat to the European political culture. After all, the CHES is conducted in the wake of elections to the European Parliament, where MEPs sit in cross-national groups bound by shared ideology. It seems reasonable to assume that both European parties and voters have become more aligned in their conceptions of political space, rather than less, a subject discussed at great length in Chapter 6.

"ideological questions" and it is described as the "position of the party in 2019 in terms of its overall ideological stance." It is recorded as an integer from 0 to 10, with 0 representing the "extreme left" position and 10 the "extreme right" position. 5 is labelled as the "centre." Importantly, unlike many natural and social scientific phenomena that are measured on a continuous spectrum, the ideology of political parties does not follow a Gaussian distribution.[31] This means that centrist parties are relatively uncommon among all political parties. The distribution of the CHES' 910 parties by their overall left-right ideological rating is shown in Figure 3.1 below.

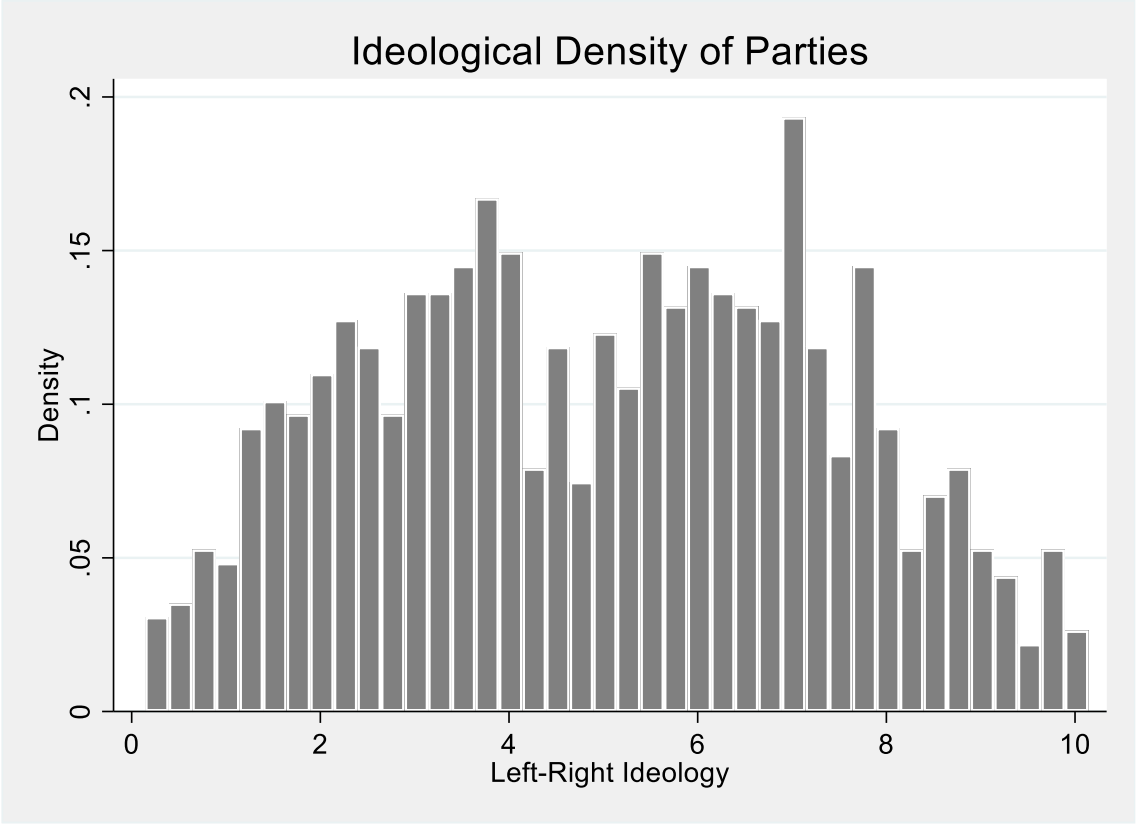

Figure 3.1: The distribution of parties in the CHES sample by overall left-right orientation. N = 910.

[31] This stands in direct contrast to the ideological distribution of voters, which is indeed roughly Gaussian and will be discussed in the second half of this chapter.

The distribution is clearly bi-modal, peaking in the approximate ranges from 3 to 4, and 6 to 7, largely corresponding to the centre-left and the centre-right. Between the peaks, there is an evident dip in the region between 4 and 6, where this thesis formally codes parties as "centrist," given that all CHES ratings are a mean of the individual experts' integer ratings.

This definition highlights an unavoidable operational problem. Under this categorical scheme, two parties with very similar ratings – say, 5.9 and 6 – will fall into different categories, thereby raising the possibility of errors in analysis. There are two important points to note on this subject. First, the CHES ratings themselves are an exercise in spurious precision, as they are seemingly exact numbers (often calculated to three or more decimal points) only because they are averages of many experts' integer ratings. There is therefore some fuzziness in measurement to begin with. Second, discontinuities are simply inevitable in this kind of classification scheme – boundaries between categories are necessary in order to make any distinctions meaningful. Bearing these caveats in mind, the chapter can progress to an exploration of the data.

In the next section, ideologically centrist parties – those that rate higher than 4 and less than 6 on the overall ideology score – are analysed, showing that despite the rather narrow definition, there is great variety among the group. Further categorisation is therefore needed to distinguish among different types of centrist parties, as outlined in the theoretical exploration of the previous chapter.

Ideologically Centrist Parties

Ideologically centrist parties are those whose centrist image is conferred upon them by the characterisation of their overall programmatic identity, i.e. centrist parties are those that have an overall centrist ideological position or programme of policies and values.

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, ideology is one of the core qualities that defines a political party – a "broad conceptual map of politics into which political events, current problems, electors' preferences and other parties' policies can be fitted" (Budge, 1994, p. 446). In another analogy, ideology is the window through which a party's worldview is seen; it is the set of foundational values and beliefs that influences most, if not all of a party's interactions with the wider world. And when comparing one party's values and beliefs to another, two important elements must be accounted for – multidimensionality and salience.

Multidimensionality refers to the nature of political space as highly complex, with a large variety of possible party positions on two (or more) dimensions. Although evidence for two dimensions – an economic and a sociocultural – is strong (e.g. Kitschelt, 1994; Inglehart & Baker, 2000), the specific issue composition of dimension is contested (e.g. Kriesi et al., 2006; Rovny & Polk, 2019). Furthermore, since most European party systems are still structured by the left-right economic/class cleavage (e.g. Hix, 1999; Costello, Thomassen, & Rosema, 2012), scholars are unclear how multiple dimensions are manifested in electoral choices, with some evidence that sociocultural and other issues are assimilated by an overall left-right "super issue" (e.g. Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976; Marks & Steenbergen, 2004). As mentioned in the previous chapter, since this thesis cannot settle the ongoing debate about the number or nature of political dimensions, the most it can do is be theoretically and operationally flexible. Granted, in keeping with the majority of scholarship and data collection in this field, a two-dimensional political space is operationally assumed here; but there is no reason the following classification scheme could not be adapted to incorporate an even more complex political space.

These positions are then conditioned by salience, which is the priority or emphasis parties place on an issue. Salience is a strategic decision, allowing a party to distinguish itself

through intense focus on an issue (e.g. Meguid, 2005), or to remain deliberately ambiguous through blurring its position (e.g. Somer-Topcu, 2015).

To operationalise these factors, four specific elements of the CHES are used. The first is the party's position on the left-right economic dimension, which is described as the party's position "in terms of its ideological stance on economic issues. Parties can be classified in terms of their stance on economic issues such as privatisation, taxes, regulation, government spending, and the welfare state. Parties on the economic left want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right want a reduced role for government." The item is scored on an 11-point scale running from 0 to 10, with 0 representing an "extreme left" position, 10 representing an "extreme right" position, and 5 as the exact midpoint, labelled "centre."

The second is the party's GAL-TAN (Green/Alternative/Libertarian – Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist) rating, which is the name the CHES gives to a party's position on the sociocultural dimension.[32] It is described as the party's position "in terms of their views on social and cultural values. 'Libertarian' or 'postmaterialist' parties favour expanded personal freedoms, for example, abortion rights, divorce, and same-sex marriage. 'Traditional' or 'authoritarian' parties reject these ideas in favour of order, tradition, and stability, believing that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues." Similar to the economic scale, GAL-TAN is measured on the same 11-point scale, with 0 representing an extreme "libertarian/postmaterialist" position, 10 representing an extreme traditional/authoritarian position, and 5 the "centre."

[32] Sadly, there is seemingly no evidence that the name is a cheeky allusion to John Galt, the hyper-individualist icon of Ayn Rand's 1957 novel, *Atlas Shrugged*.

The third element is a party's salience on their left-right economic position, and the fourth is a party's salience on their GAL-TAN position. Both are also measured on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 representing a position with "no importance" and 10 representing a position with "great importance." Together, these survey items allow for a construction of political space in line with the needs and expectations of the theory.

Categorising ideologically centrist parties – as previously described, those that score as greater than 4 but less than 6 on the overall ideology scale – is done by using these four survey items. A centrist position on the economic and/or sociocultural dimensions is defined in exactly the same way as overall ideology – greater than 4 and less than 6. And a party's tendency to emphasise economic or sociocultural concerns is operationalised by a comparison between their salience scores for each dimension – a party places greater importance on the dimension on which they score higher on salience.

Using the theories of political space outlined in the previous chapter as a guide, and applying those concepts using the operationalisation methodology just detailed, four distinct types of ideologically centrist parties can be revealed. As noted earlier, just as it is vital to delineate ideologically centrist parties from other kinds of centrist parties due to differences in qualities and behaviour, it is similarly important to show the substantial differences in parties that are viewed as ideologically centrist overall, but who vary significantly in a multidimensional ideological profile. Figure 3.2 shows the four types of ideological parties within the theoretical construct defined in the previous chapter.

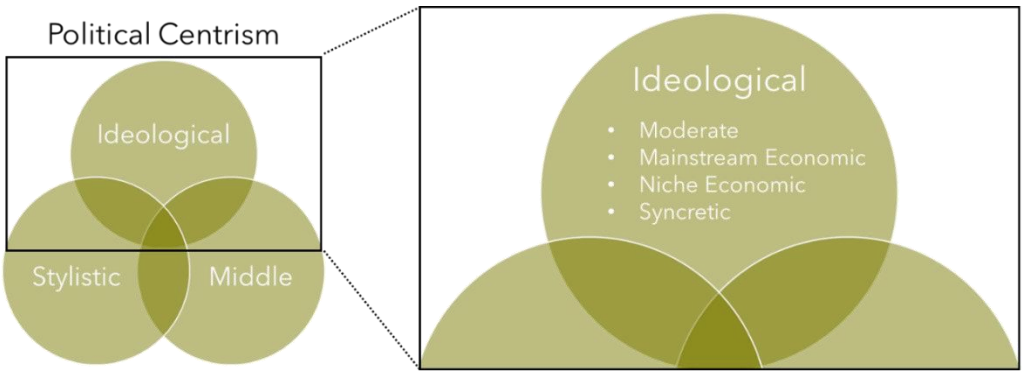

Figure 3.2: How the four types of ideological centrist parties situate in the context of all centrist parties (Venn diagram taken from Figure 2.1)

Grounded in that variance, four distinct types of ideologically centrist parties can be defined here: the *moderate*, *mainstream economic, niche economic,* and *syncretic*. Outlined separately, the four types of ideologically centrist parties appear quite distinct, often displaying clear differences in dimensional positioning, salience, size, governing record, and constituency, despite their overall ideological similarity. Those differences become easy to see when the four types are directly compared visually. Figure 3.3 shows all the ideologically centrist parties over 20 years of the CHES (again, parties that rate greater than 4 and lesser than 6 on the overall ideology scale), plotted by their positions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions. The parties are highlighted by type.

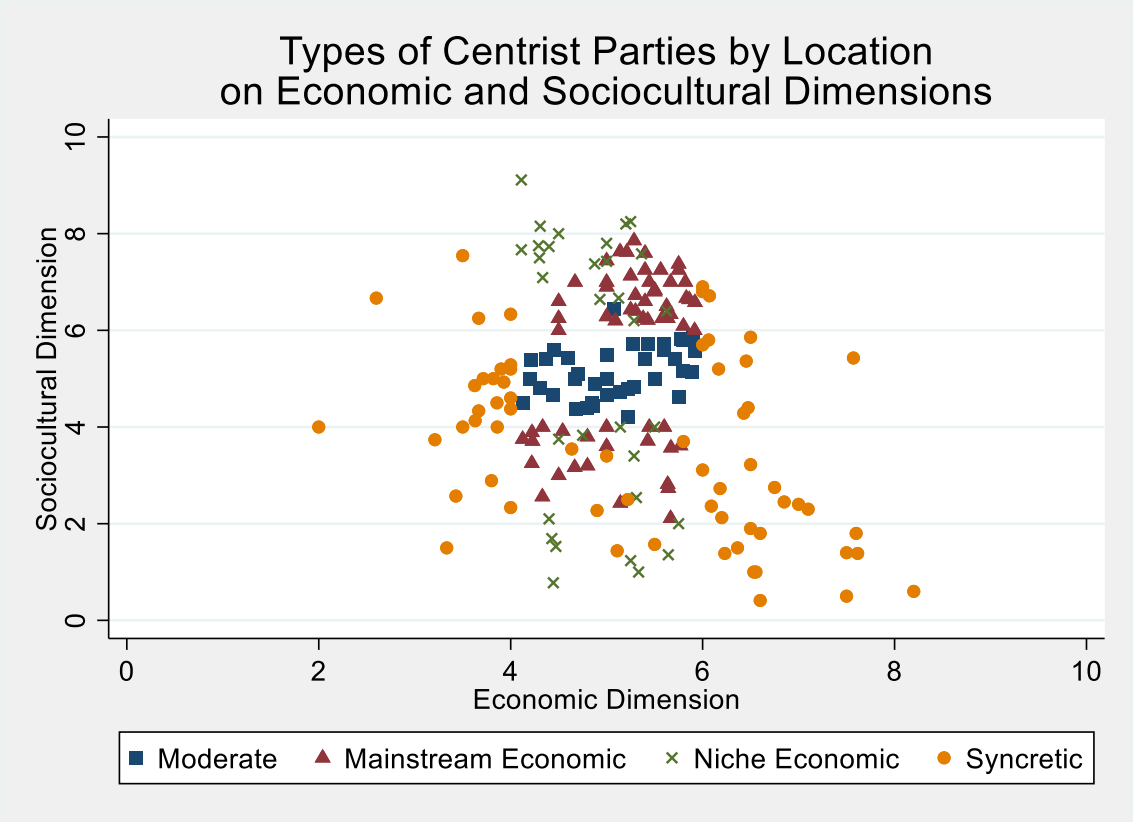

Figure 3.3: A graphical representation of ideologically centrist parties' dimensional profiles. The x-axis shows the economic dimension, with 0 as the extreme left and 10 as the extreme right. The y-axis shows the sociocultural dimension, with 0 as an extreme alternative/libertarian position and 10 as an extreme traditional/authoritarian position. The four types of ideologically centrist parties are distinguished by colour.

Figure 3.3 shows just how distinct the dimensional profiles of ideologically centrist parties are. The moderate centrist parties cluster around the midpoint of both axes. Mainstream economic centrist parties vary on either side of the centre-left and the centre-right of the sociocultural dimension. Niche economic centrist parties, although they are not theoretically distinguished from mainstream economic centrist parties by the extremity of their sociocultural positions (the difference is solely in terms of relative salience, as niche economic centrist parties emphasise their more extreme sociocultural positions than niche economic parties) do indeed generally have more extreme sociocultural views. And syncretic centrist parties do seem to fall

along a slope from the upper left to the lower right corners of the distribution, although economically and socially liberal parties greatly outnumber more interventionist, more traditional parties, a pattern that may well say something important about experts' conceptions of what is "centrist" and what is not.[33]

Additionally, it must be noted that there is much greater variance in centrist parties' positions on the sociocultural dimension than there is in their positions on the economic dimension. More than 76% of centrist parties hold a moderate – rated from 4 through 6 – position on the economic dimension, while less than 35% hold a moderate position on the sociocultural dimension. The natural inference to draw is that for centrist parties, overall ideology is more strongly associated with position on the economic dimension than it is for position on the sociocultural dimension.

A key concern for any classification scheme of this sort is its construct validity; or the degree to which these observations about party positions can be used to make inferences about the unobservable "nature" of their centrist ideology (Messick, 1989). While social scientists have written at length on this crucial concept, there is no single, universal test to confirm a concept's construct validity. This is not merely a problem for this thesis – indeed, all of the concepts and data underlying this thesis from expert surveys, to public opinion research, to the idea of "ideology" itself are useful only insofar as they enjoy the patina of assumed construct validity. The validity of this classification scheme relies upon two main factors. First, the rationale for this scheme is based in the obvious differences between centrist parties – recall the example given in Chapter 1, where three patently dissimilar parties, the Netherlands' biblically-oriented Christian Union, Greece's PASOK, and Italy's Five Star Movement all share a nearly identical overall super-issue ideological rating. The examples of each type given below

[33] This issue is discussed at much greater length in Chapter 4.

will continue to highlight the clear differences among ideologically similar parties in empirical reality. And second, the scheme is not the product of simple guesswork, but is built on a large body of scholarly research concerning ideology, dimensionality, and salience of issues, all of which have formed the foundation for similar party classification schemes like the familiar and widely accepted concept of party families.

Having discussed the operationalisation of the scheme and its justification, the next section will now describe each type of ideologically centrist parties in greater detail.

Moderate Centrist Parties

A moderate centrist party is one whose centrist image is defined by its consistent moderation on both ideological dimensions. In other words, there is a similarity between a moderate centrist party's overall centrist orientation and its positions on the individual ideological issue dimensions. While one position may be more salient than the other, that is irrelevant for the purposes of this definition, since both positions are similarly moderate. There are a number of plausible reasons a party might maintain this policy profile. A party may hold a philosophical commitment to moderation; or moderation may be the consequence of ambivalence; it may even be strategic calculation in furtherance of policy goals that are not accounted for by most scholarly conceptions of ideological dimensions.[34] No matter the reasoning, what defines a moderate centrist party is an overall centrist ideological rating due to a centrist rating on both the economic and sociocultural ideological dimensions. Figure 3.4 offers an illustration of this dimensional profile.

[34] A prime example of such an issue is the protection and expansion of the official status of the Swedish language in Finland, which is the overarching concern of the Swedish People's Party of Finland (SFP). The SFP has spent most of the last 40 years as a junior partner in various governments by virtue of its intentionally moderate ideological profile, allowing it to focus almost exclusively on its niche policy programme. See: Hallituksen ovea potkivalle kielipuolueelle jokainen päivä oppositiossa on liikaa – tällainen puolue on RKP. (2019, 17 March). *Yle* [Finnish Broadcasting Company]. https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10664643

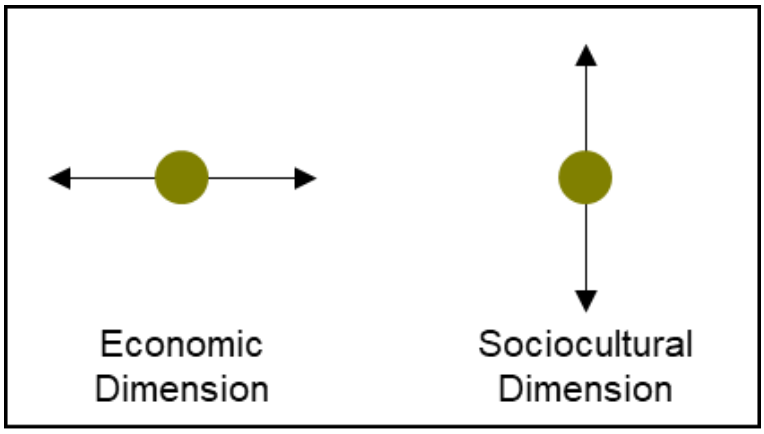

Figure 3.4: How a prototypical moderate party rates on both ideological dimensions

Perhaps the most notable feature of moderate centrist parties is how relatively unusual they are despite the intuitive connection between centrism and moderation. Of the 910 parties from the sample countries evaluated in the 1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys, only 37 qualify as moderate centrist parties, making up approximately 19% of all centrist parties.

The archetypal example of a moderate centrist party comes from the final days of France's Union for French Democracy (UDF) and the early days of its successor party, the Democratic Movement (widely known as "MoDem" per its French appellation, Mouvement Démocrate). Formed in the 1970s as the centrist component of an alliance of the centre-right, by the late 1990s, UDF comprised an amalgam of Christian democrats, social democrats, and liberals with a self-described "centrist" brand and moderate positions on both the economic and sociocultural dimensions (Safran, 2016). Its successor party, MoDem, maintained those positions when it was rated by the CHES following the 2007 French presidential election, in which its leader ran on a platform of constitutional reform and specific opposition to the left-right duopoly in French politics (Sauger, 2007).

Mainstream Economic Centrist Parties

A mainstream economic centrist party is one whose centrist image is defined by its moderate, high-salience position on the dominant left-right economic dimension. At the same time, it also holds a more extreme, low-salience position on the sociocultural dimension. Even though they hold a non-centrist position on sociocultural issues, these parties can be labelled centrist because of the primacy of the left-right economic dimension in ideological perceptions, as well as their emphasis on their moderate position on those issues. Figure 3.5 offers an illustration of this profile.

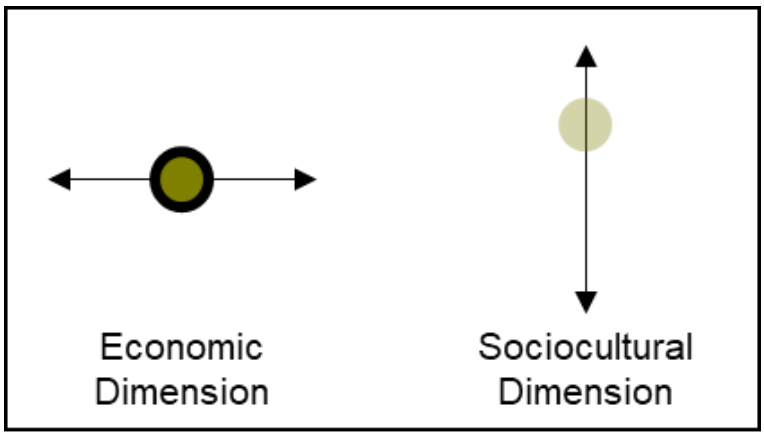

Figure 3.5: How a prototypical mainstream economic centrist party rates on both ideological dimensions. The transparency on the sociocultural dimension and bold outline on the economic dimension indicates relative salience.

The parties in this category tend to be large, established parties bleeding into the centre from the centre-left and centre-right. This is consistent with the literature on mainstream catch-all parties, which focus on left-right economic issues over others. Additionally, it must be noted that in emphasising economic issues, mainstream economic centrist parties are by extension emphasising their centrist position. There are 62 mainstream economic centrist parties in the 1999-2019 CHES sample, or nearly a third of all centrist parties.

The archetypal example of a mainstream economic centrist party is Greece's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). Formerly the dominant political party on the Greek centre-left, PASOK's electoral strength has declined precipitously since the Greek public debt crisis. Over the life of the CHES, PASOK has regularly rated as a centrist party overall, with very high-salience centrist economic positions and low-salience libertarian sociocultural positions. It is only one example of the aforementioned large (or recently large) catch-all parties dominating this category.

Niche Economic Centrist Parties

A niche economic centrist party is one whose centrist image is defined by its moderate, low-salience position on the dominant left-right economic dimension. At the same time, it also holds a more extreme, high-salience position on the sociocultural dimension. Even though they hold a non-centrist position on sociocultural issues, these parties can be labelled centrist because of the primacy of the left-right economic dimension in ideological perceptions. However, the relatively low salience of their economic position coupled with the relatively high salience of their sociocultural positions leaves them with a very different profile to mainstream economic centrist parties that hold generally similar positions on both dimensions. Figure 3.6 offers an illustration of this profile.

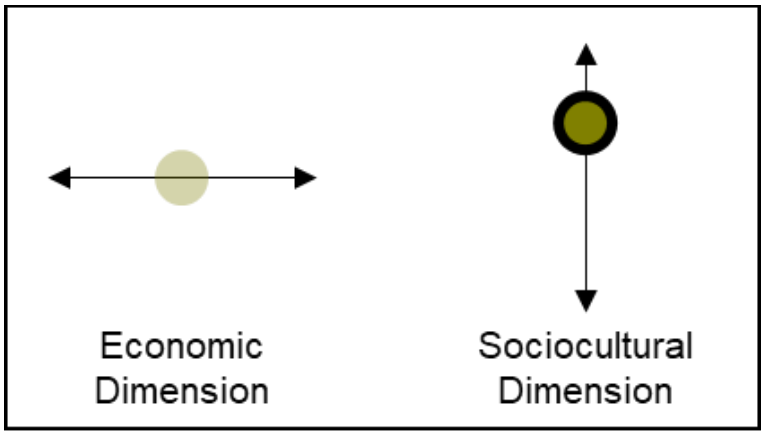

Figure 3.6: How a prototypical niche economic centrist party rates on both ideological dimensions. The transparency on the economic dimension and bold outline on the sociocultural dimension indicates relative salience.

Indeed, where mainstream economic centrist parties tend to fit the description of "mainstream" parties, niche economic centrist parties appear much more like "niche parties," or smaller, less established parties focusing on non-economic issues. Although they carry a centrist image overall – likely due in large part to their position on the left-right economic dimension – they tend to play those positions down in favour of emphasising their more extreme sociocultural views. Thus, despite similar positions to mainstream economic centrist parties, niche economic centrist parties appear to be a different breed altogether. Only 32 niche economic centrist parties appear in the sample, less than 17% of all centrist parties.

The archetypal example of a niche economic centrist party is the Finns Party (formerly known as the True Finns in English). In the early part of the past decade, the Finns Party rated as a centrist party in the CHES despite their contemporary general categorisation as a party of the radical right (Arter, 2010; Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). The divergence in assessments is likely due to the contrast between the party's low-salience, centrist position on the left-right economic dimension and their high-salience, extreme traditionalist-nationalist position on the sociocultural dimension.

Syncretic Centrist Parties

A syncretic centrist party is one whose centrist image is not defined by a moderate position on the dominant left-right economic dimension, but by positions on both dimensions that yield an overall centrist orientation on balance.[35] While moderate, mainstream economic, and niche economic centrist parties derive a centrist image due to genuine moderation (on both dimensions for moderate parties; on the economic dimension for the latter two), syncretic centrist parties are not moderate at all, and thus depend on an entirely different conception of what "centrist" means. In a sense, where the positions of moderate, mainstream economic, and niche economic centrist parties are thought centrist because they blur the lines between left and right (at least on the economic dimension), the collective positions of syncretic centrist parties are thought centrist because they are not cleanly recognisable as either on the left or right. Figure 3.7 offers an illustration of this profile.

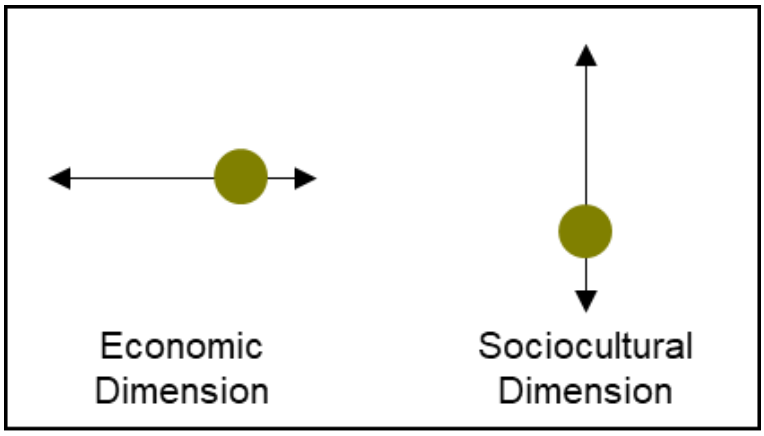

Figure 3.7: How a prototypical syncretic centrist party rates on both ideological dimensions.

[35] The term "syncretic" refers to an amalgamation or fusion of different belief systems, and it is used throughout this thesis to describe both parties and voters that hold a range of more extreme views that are considered centrist on balance, rather than the more intuitive and conventional set of moderate views. It is derived from Ancient Greek, by way of Latin, and originally referred to an unlikely alliance against a common enemy.

Syncretic centrist parties can be described as centrist "on balance" due to the way they fit into the overall ideological structure of European party systems. The increased importance of sociocultural cleavages to European political competition "has shifted the main axis of voter distribution from a simple alternative between socialist (left) and capitalist (right) politics to a more complex configuration opposing left-libertarian and right-authoritarian alternatives" (Kitschelt, 1994, pp. 30-31). Because of this general tendency for parties to cohere along the left-libertarian/right-authoritarian super-issue dimension, parties that take alternative combinations of dimensional positions – left-authoritarian or right-libertarian – can be viewed as centrist because those positions "balance" or "cancel out" a common left-wing quality with a common right-wing quality.

Importantly, this does not necessarily mean that the parties holding a syncretic combination of dimensional positions do so *because* they wish to balance or cancel out conflicting views. Indeed, in some political contexts, it is seen as entirely intellectually coherent for a party to be both liberal in economic and sociocultural matters – these positions are viewed as reinforcing, rather than conflicting. It is further true that although the larger European political landscape resembles the pattern described by Kitschelt (1994) above, not every individual party system will reflect those macro tendencies. However, the point remains that because of the left-libertarian/right-authoritarian structure of European party competition, there is a clear association between syncretic combinations of positions and the centrist image. This specific point is revisited and expanded upon in Chapter 4.

This category is dominated by the liberal family of parties – parties that blend liberal, rightward positions on the economic dimension with liberal, socially libertarian positions on the sociocultural dimension. This combination of party positions – often referred to as "Third Way" politics – is broadly considered centrist in both scholarly literature and popular discourse,

and that view is reflected in expert surveys (e.g. Giddens, 1994; 1999; Norris, 2001). The overwhelming share of syncretic centrist parties in the CHES share this "economic right – social left" ideological formulation. Approximately a third of centrist parties in the sample – 62 in total – rate as syncretic centrist parties.

Additionally, there is no clear pattern in how syncretic centrist parties emphasise issues on either dimension; some clearly emphasise one dimension or the other, but others do not.

The archetypal example of a syncretic centrist party is the Netherlands' Democrats 66 (D66). Founded as an expressly technocratic, non-ideological party, by the 21st century, D66 had positioned itself as a "progressive liberal" party that seeks to affirm individual liberties in both the economic and sociocultural realms (Voerman, 2019). Judged on the former, its positions would mark it as clearly a party of the right; on the latter, it is an extreme alternative-libertarian party. In concert, these positions grant it a centrist image (an image it shares with a number of similar parties in Northern Europe).

These four types of centrist parties prove the simple inadequacy of the word "centrist" as a term of description and analysis for any but the most superficial of purposes. These parties clearly do share a centrist image borne of their overall super-issue ideological rating – but it would be an overstatement to say that they share some universally centrist programmatic identity.

Middle Centrist Parties

Middle centrist parties are parties that derive their centrist image not from any cross-national comparison of positions, but from their location at or near the middle of their native party system, regardless of (or in addition to) their other characteristics. Therefore, any analysis of them requires a deeper look at the ideological topography of individual party systems.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the middle of a party system is defined as a "middle position between fundamental political alternatives" (Collier & Collier, 1991, p. 781); "a political space created by the appearance of fundamental political alternatives [rather than] as a geometric point between two extremes" (Scully, 1992, p.181); and the "area between the opposing alternatives of the major cleavage in the politics of a particular country" (Hazan, 1997, p.213). These definitions, written by different scholars in different contexts, share a common understanding of the middle of a party system – that it is bounded by the major alternatives that voters face, and it is therefore these major alternatives that require identification. As Hazan wrote on this very issue:

> "What is important here is the identification of the *major poles of electoral competition* [emphasis in the original], and the location of the middle between these two. This does not mean that the middle is simply the area between the two largest parties, because these two parties may not represent the major poles of electoral competition. In most cases the two biggest parties do indeed represent the major poles – as exhibited by the Communists and Christian Democrats in the [post-war] Italian case – but a smaller party may lie further to the right, or to the left, of one of the two biggest parties and represent one of the two competing poles – as the Dutch Liberals illustrate."

Another technical point on how to identify the poles followed:

> "In addition, a pole can be composed of more than one party. If two parties are very closely allied, making it impossible to form a governing coalition with only one, then both must be considered as forming the same pole. For example, the Rally for the Republic and the Union for French Democracy [before the two parties merged to form what is now The Republicans] would constitute one pole, whereas the Communist Party and the Socialist Party [in the post-war Italian case] do not."

With the help of this description, it becomes possible to operationally identify parties as the major poles of competition in a country: they are generally, but not always the largest parties in terms of votes and seats; they have a history of leading governments and setting public policy; and they fall on either side of the major cleavage of politics, which in most but not all countries is the left-right economic dimension. For most of the countries in the sample, the major poles of competition are obvious – they are both consistently the two largest parties in terms of votes and seats, and the only parties to have supplied the head of government over the past thirty years (in most cases, at least as long). This formula applies easily in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland[36], Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Party systems in France, Greece, and Italy have largely adhered to a similar pattern in recent decades, even when accounting for the frequent dissolution, merger, and re-branding of parties in France and Italy in particular; the major poles of competition on the centre-right and centre-left have generally remained very clear. However, in just the past few years, all three countries have seen new parties take the reins of government, upsetting the relative stability of the party system. Only time will tell if the party systems of these countries have been permanently realigned, but for the purposes of this thesis, the major poles of competition in each country will be regarded as the centre-left and centre-right blocs that have dominated over the thirty years prior to the victory of the insurgent party.

In Luxembourg, Finland, Norway, and the Netherlands, a liberal-conservative party joins both a social democratic party and a Christian democratic party in a sort of tri-polar party system, where the three parties are consistently the largest in terms of votes and seats, and have monopolised the leadership of government. The Belgian party system operates very

[36] The major poles of the Irish party system are indeed on either side of the country's major historical cleavage – that just happens to be on the question of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty that eventually created the modern Republic of Ireland, rather than the left-right economic spectrum.

similarly, but due to the federal nature of Belgian politics, the three poles are comprised of formal coalitions between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking counterparts. In all five cases, the liberal-conservative party forms the right pole of competition.

It is only in Iceland and Switzerland where this model breaks down. The long-term fracturing and factionalism of the Icelandic left has left the liberal-conservative Independence Party and the agrarian Progressive Party as the dominant forces of Icelandic politics for decades, but the two parties have historically governed in coalition with each other. This makes it difficult to identify any party as a major pole of competition, let alone two. As for Switzerland, Swiss federal politics are wholly unlike those in any other country in the sample, due to the "concordance system" regulating the composition of the government. This highly consensual arrangement has seen the same four parties in a near-permanent coalition on the Federal Council, in roughly the same proportions, for more than sixty years. As with Iceland, identifying any party as a major pole of competition using the criteria outlined above has proven impossible. Thus, neither system has middle parties, as they have been defined here.

The differences in the party systems described above allows for significant variance in the size of the system's middle area, and in the parties that inhabit it. Some party systems have a middle that is essentially congruent with the area in which an ideologically centrist party would lie, whether such a party actually exists there or not. Figure 3.8 provides a topographical diagram of the Austrian party system in 2014 that illustrates this possibility.

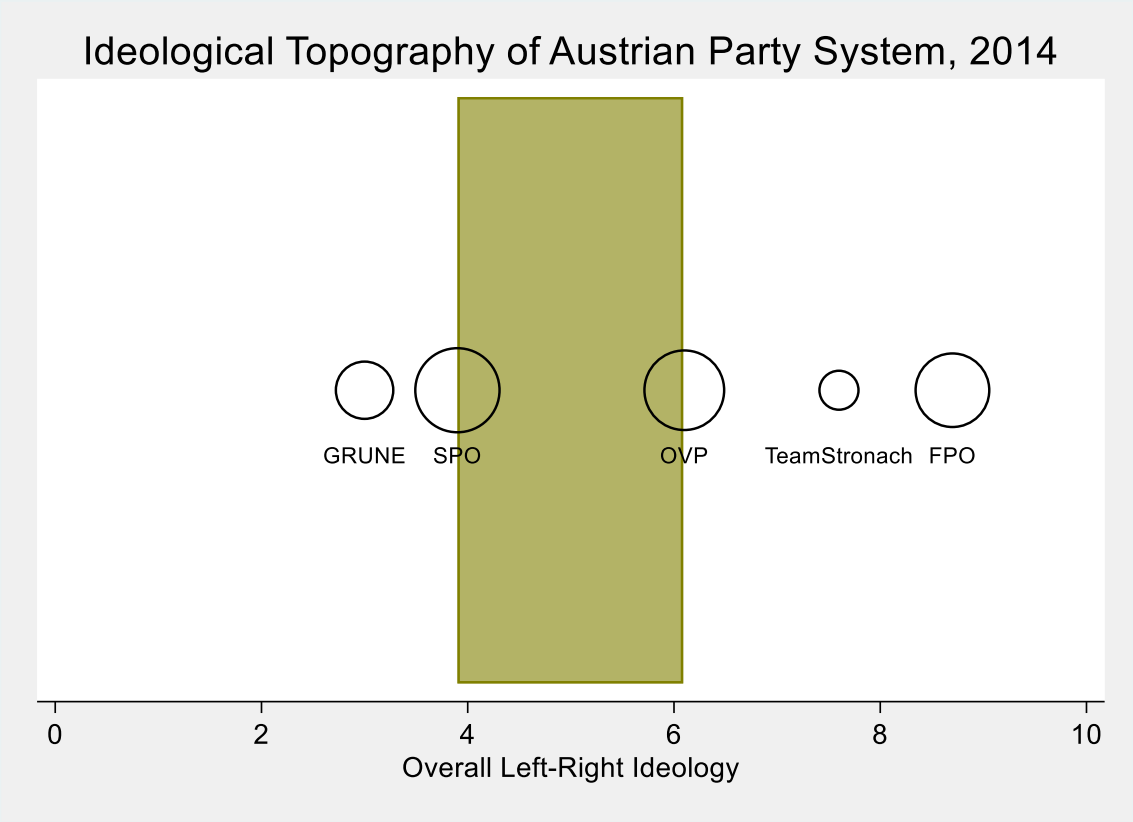

Figure 3.8: An illustration of the ideological topography of the Austrian party system in 2014. The x-axis shows overall left-right ideology with 0 representing the far left and 10 representing the far right. The size of the party's circle is weighted by vote share in the last domestic election, with a minimum of 5% of the vote for inclusion in the diagram. The shaded area is the middle area of the party system, between the major poles of electoral competition. Ideological ratings provided by CHES; vote shares provided by ParlGov database.[37] GRUNE = Austrian Green Party; SPO = Social Democratic Party of Austria; OVP = Austrian People's Party; TeamStronach = Team Stronach for Austria; FPO = Freedom Party of Austria.

The Austrian party system features two obvious major poles of competition in the Social Democratic Party (SPO) and the People's Party (OVP) on the centre-left and centre-right respectively, the only two parties to have held the chancellorship since World War II. They frame a middle area (the shaded area) roughly equivalent to the range of ideologically centrist parties, but no such party exists in the Austrian context. This is likely as a result of the

[37] Döring, H. & Manow, P. (2019). Parliaments and governments database (ParlGov): Information on parties, elections and cabinets in modern democracies. Development version.

two pole parties routinely governing in a grand coalition, which is what Hazan refers to as the great fear of a middle party (Hazan, 1997, p. 213), since it denies them the leverage of swinging between the pole parties to deliver government in coalition, thus obviating their *raison d'être*. Figure 3.9's depiction of the British party system in 2014 shows something similar to the Austrian example, but with an ostensible middle party.

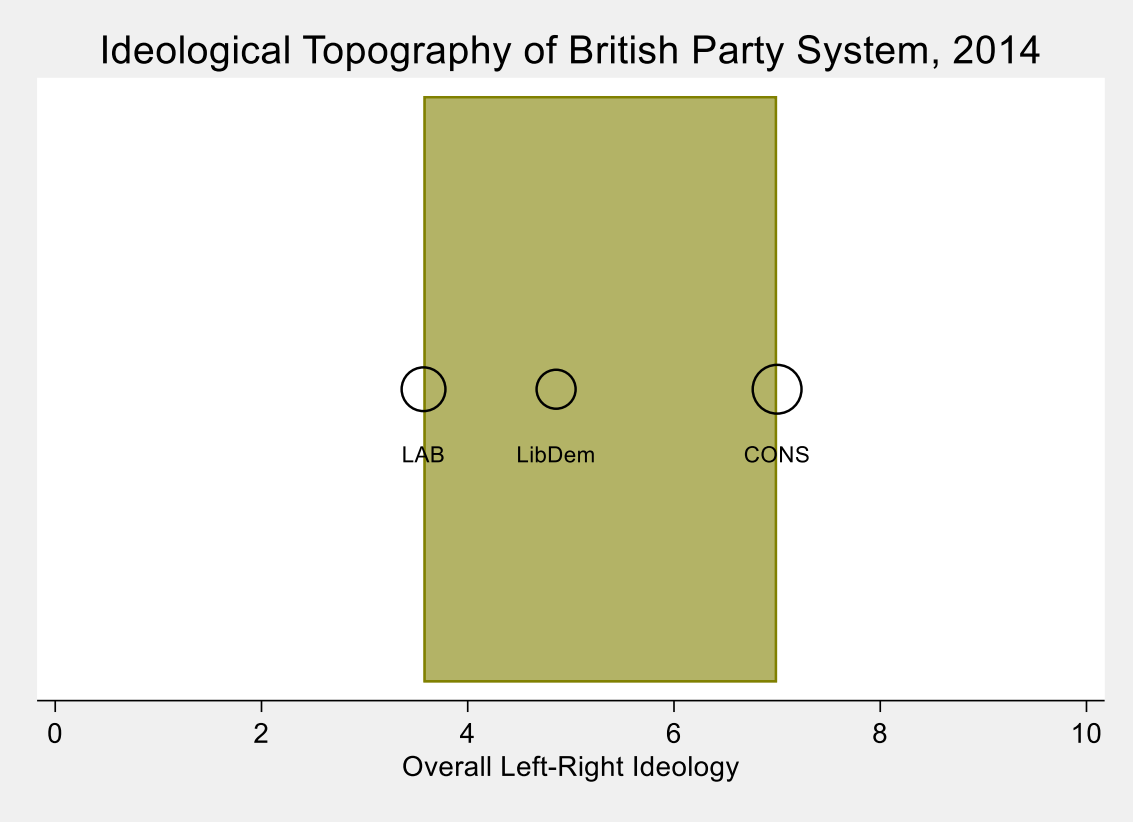

Figure 3.9: An illustration of the ideological topography of the British party system in 2014. The x-axis shows overall left-right ideology with 0 representing the far left and 10 representing the far right. The size of the party's circle is weighted by vote share in the last domestic election, with a minimum of 5% of the vote for inclusion in the diagram. The shaded area is the middle area of the party system, between the major poles of electoral competition. Ideological ratings provided by CHES; vote shares provided by ParlGov database. LAB = Labour Party; LibDem = Liberal Democratic Party; CONS = Conservative Party.

In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party are also the obvious poles of electoral competition, as they too have traded the reins of government since World War II. Since its 1988 formation in a merger between the old Liberal Party and former Labour dissidents in the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Democrats have rated as an ideological centrist party, and for most of that time have also been a middle centrist party (with the exclusion of some years in the late 1990s, where Tony Blair's Labour Party was perceived as being more ideologically centrist than the Liberal Democrats, both by scholars and in public polling).[38] Even though formal coalitions are rare in British politics, given the size of parliamentary pluralities under the UK's majoritarian electoral system, the Liberal Democrats have occasionally acted as an archetypal middle centrist party, open to coalition agreements with both major pole parties depending on the political circumstances. The Liberal Democrats have, at times, considered partnership with the Labour Party (for example, before general elections in 1997 and 2010), and actually governed in coalition with the Conservative Party (between 2010 and 2015).[39] This centripetal rhetoric and activity might be considered ironic in light of scholarly evidence that the Liberal Democrats' mere existence in the middle of the British party system is directly responsible for the polarised nature of that system, and in particular for the rightward shift of the Conservative Party during the 1980s (Adams & Merrill, 2006).

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[38] Smith, M. (2016, August 29). *The Leadership Effect – How Leaders Can Shift Perceptions of Parties*. YouGov. https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/19/which-leaders-have-most-successfully-shifted-publi/

[39] *Blair mooted Lib Dem coalition deal – Ashdown.* (2000, October 23). The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2000/oct/23/labour.labour1997to99

Abbas, M. (2010, April 27). *Lib Dems open to Labour coalition after UK election.* Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-48027520100427

Nick Clegg: I could work with Miliband if voters wanted. (2013, September 17). BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-24133260

Sometimes ideologically centrist parties are not simultaneously middle centrist parties. Figure 3.10 displays a diagram of the Greek party system in 1999, when a large, catch-all pole party simultaneously dominated the political centre and decimated any middle ground in the party system.

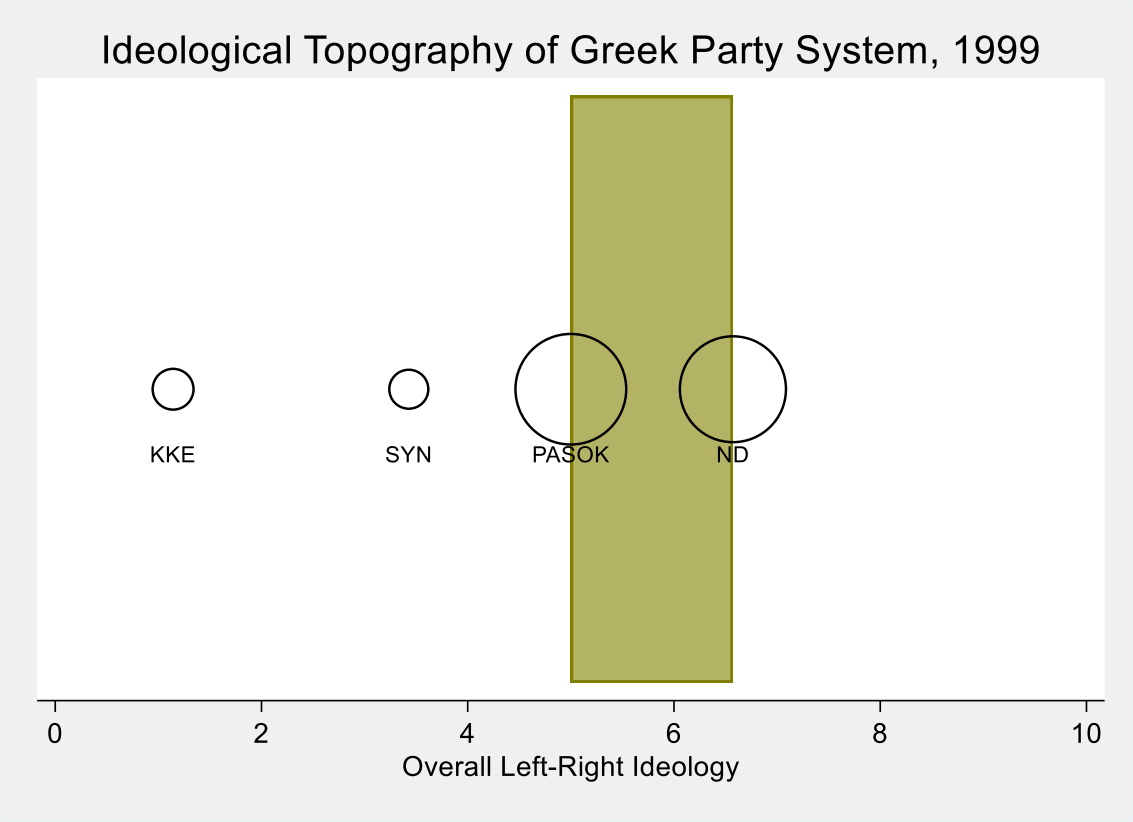

Figure 3.10: An illustration of the ideological topography of the Greek party system in 1999. The x-axis shows overall left-right ideology with 0 representing the far left and 10 representing the far right. The size of the party's circle is weighted by vote share in the last domestic election, with a minimum of 5% of the vote for inclusion in the diagram. The shaded area is the middle area of the party system, between the major poles of electoral competition. Ideological ratings provided by CHES; vote shares provided by ParlGov database. KKE = Communist Party of Greece; SYN = Coalition of the Left and Progress; PASOK = Panhellenic Socialist Movement; ND = New Democracy.

In this period, PASOK would meet virtually any operational definition of an ideologically centrist party based on expert surveys, as it scored an exact 5 on the CHES' overall

ideology scale. However, despite this, it was not a middle centrist party, as it served as a major pole of electoral competition in its party system, being one of the only two parties (along with its centre-right rival, New Democracy) to lead government since the fall of the junta and the establishment of the Third Hellenic Republic in 1974. Although the two parties had joined in "national unity" governments, such instances were infrequent and short lived. Nevertheless, the Greek party system at this time provided little middle area for a party to inhabit, due to the central position of one of the pole parties.

In contrast, in the "tri-polar" party systems of Northern Europe, there is a substantial middle area for middle parties to flourish. The Dutch party system in 2014 is a typical example; Figure 3.11 shows an illustration of its ideological landscape.

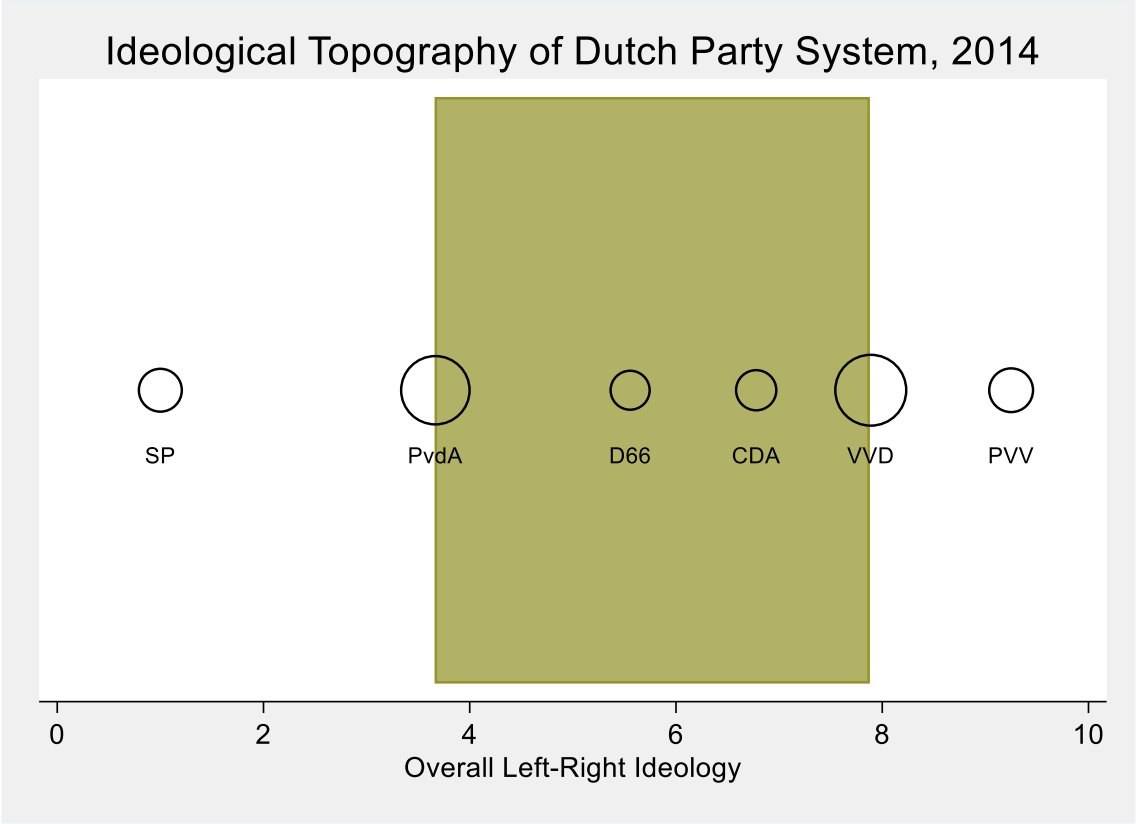

Figure 3.11: An illustration of the ideological topography of the Dutch party system in 2014. The x-axis shows overall left-right ideology with 0 representing the far left and 10 representing the far right. The size of the party's circle is weighted by vote share in the last domestic election, with a minimum of 5% of the vote for inclusion in the diagram. The shaded area is the middle area of the party system, between the major poles of electoral competition. Ideological ratings provided by CHES; vote shares provided by ParlGov database. SP = Socialist Party; PvdA = Labour Party; D66 = Democrats 66; CDA = Christian Democratic Appeal; VVD = People's Party for Freedom and Democracy; PVV = Party for Freedom.

Due to the presence of the liberal-conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) as the furthest-right pole party, the fractured Dutch party system allows for a large middle area and a number of middle centrist parties. Among them is the centre-right Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), formed out of the merger of several smaller Christian democratic parties in 1980. Owing to its middle position, the CDA (and its historical antecedents) has partnered in government with both the VVD and the Labour Party (PvdA), managing to maintain its leverage and stay in government for nearly its entire existence. This

is despite the fact that it is clearly a centre-right party, and Christian democratic parties are generally in electoral conflict with social democratic parties across Europe. Indeed, the CDA has both led and lent its support to coalitions with the VVD and the PvdA; in 1989, Prime Minister and CDA leader Ruud Lubbers dumped his coalition partner VVD after elections and replaced them with the PvdA, continuing in leadership for five more years.

These examples show four different kinds of party systems as they relate to centrist parties: one system with no middle centrist or ideologically centrist parties (Austria); one with a party that is ideologically centrist but not middle centrist (Greece); one with a party that is not ideologically centrist but is middle centrist (the Netherlands); and one with a party that is both an ideological and middle centrist party (the UK). Figure 3.12 shows one final example – that of a party system with no middle area whatsoever.

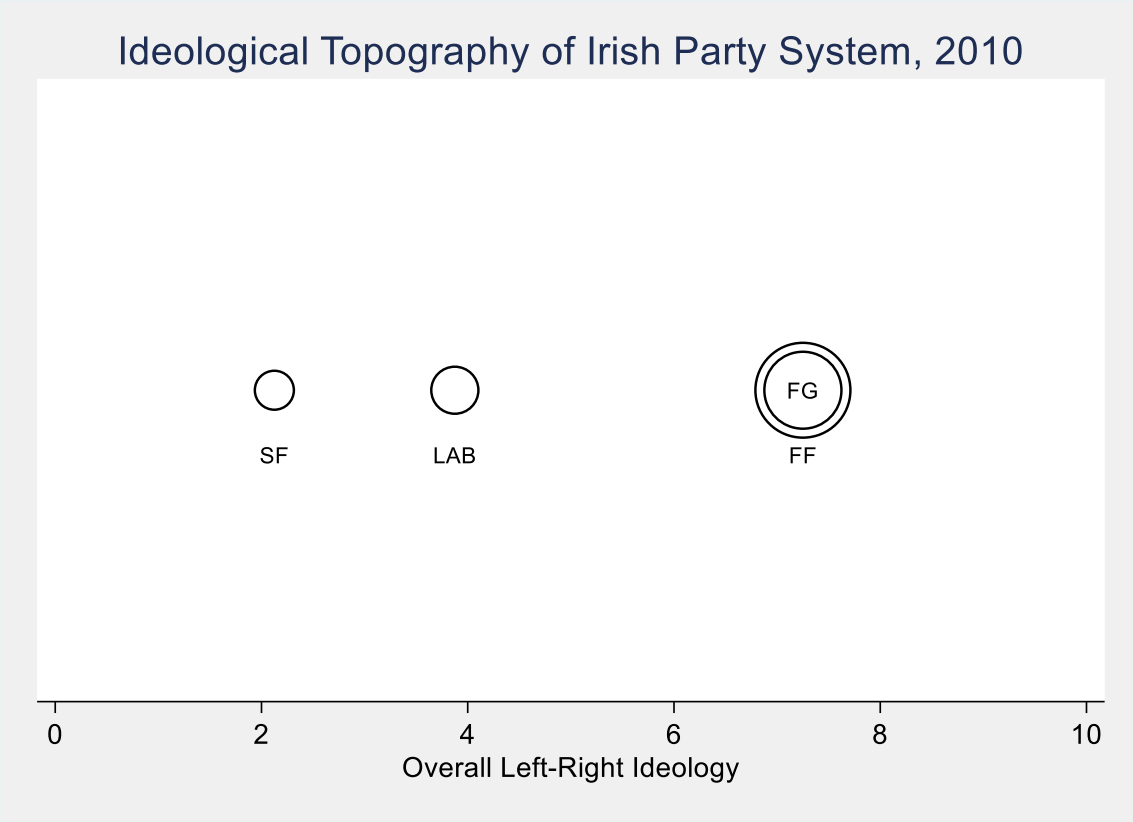

Figure 3.12: An illustration of the ideological topography of the Irish party system in 2010. The x-axis shows overall left-right ideology with 0 representing the far left and 10 representing the far right. The size of the party's circle is weighted by vote share in the last domestic election, with a minimum of 5% of the vote for inclusion in the diagram. There is no shaded area to indicate a middle area because the major poles of electoral competition are ideologically overlapping. Ideological ratings provided by CHES; vote shares provided by ParlGov database. SF = Sinn Féin; LAB = Labour Party; FF = Fianna Fáil; FG = Fine Gael.

The Irish party system of 2010 is emblematic of that country's politics for generations. Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG), the only two parties to lead government since the 1930s, unquestionably represent the major poles of electoral competition at this time. However, unlike in most European party systems, the main cleavage separating the Irish pole parties in is not the left-right economic divide or even an overall left-right ideological boundary (Carty, 1981). This means that although the two parties are fierce rivals, that rivalry is generally not based on dramatically divergent left-right ideological views, as their ideological positions are

generally rated as similar, if not indistinguishable as they were in 2010. As long as this dynamic persists (although it has shown some signs of weakness in recent elections), there is no space for a middle party to exist in the Irish party system.[40]

The examples provided show a range of different party system contexts: some with large middle areas and thriving middle centrist parties; some with small or virtually non-existent middle areas and thus no space for middle centrist parties to flourish in. What is important is that these examples show there is a clear theoretical and empirical thread running through the middle centrist parties depicted, evidence that middle centrist parties share common qualities and behaviours that distinguish them from both the major poles of competition and extreme parties on the fringes of the system.

But also, these examples show just how middle centrist parties differ from ideologically centrist parties. Both types of parties could plausibly be labelled as "centrist" in scholarly or practical discourse, and yet they have manifestly different meanings upon closer inspection. The empirical application of the theory continues to prove the necessity of this thesis' contributions.

Stylistic Centrist Parties

Unlike ideological or middle centrist parties, stylistic centrist parties cannot be evaluated in an easily comparative fashion. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First, there is no simple, formal way to operationalise a party's stylistically centrist language and behaviours – such things are not easily quantified, and no dataset of this kind is in existence. Second, while the concept of stylistic centrism can be applied universally, the

[40] At least, there is no middle area in the context of the left-right ideological spectrum. If one could describe the social and historical cleavage separating Fine Gael from Fianna Fáil as a spectrum, there could theoretically exist a middle area between the two large parties, and a middle party to operate within it.

specifics of language and political culture mean that centrist rhetoric in say, Britain and in English is not necessarily comparable to what passes for centrist rhetoric in Spain and Spanish. And finally, to exacerbate these difficulties, this thesis has obvious limitations in terms of time, resources, and expertise, making widespread cross-national data collection and analysis impractical. Therefore, this section will not contain a descriptive, comparative analysis of empirical observations like those above and below.

However, this section is an opportunity to outline what an operationalisation of stylistic centrism would look like, using several examples, including two that have been studied in precisely this context by other scholars – Tony Blair's New Labour, and Bill Clinton's New Democrats. The theory surrounding these examples is given in Chapter 2, the purpose here is to outline some of the specific strategies employed in the service of emphasising stylistic centrism. While different scholars have categorised these strategies differently according to their theoretical frameworks, operationally they seem to fall into four broad groupings: party name, an abstract embrace of the centre, policy framing, and "transcending" (Velasco, 2010) or "beyonding" (Burke, 1966) language.

The first and second classifications are perhaps the most intuitive – explicitly centrist naming and rhetoric. The most elemental example would be a party with "centre," "centrist," or some functional equivalent in its name, clearly signalling its intended branding in the most obvious way. Such parties are not uncommon; major parties such as Norway's Centre Party, Belgium's Humanist Democratic Centre (both of which classify as both ideologically and middle centrist parties), and Sweden's Moderate Party (which would not classify as either an ideologically or middle centrist party) make use of this label, as does the Centrist Democrat International, an international association of Christian Democratic parties.

Of course, a party's name is only the first layer of its rhetorical strategy. Stylistically centrist parties with any name can make definitive claims to the centre ground in abstract terms of values and philosophy. Before taking power in the 1997 General Election, Tony Blair left no doubt about his desire to advertise Labour as a centrist party. In a speech the year prior, the Labour leader said: "I believe the centre can be fertile ground for radical politics. The extremes, whether of left or right simply will not meet the real challenge. A modern party to be successful… must be in the centre, speaking for the mainstream majority." And later: "We need a new radical centre in modern politics that can answer the competitive challenge whilst enhancing social stability and cohesion. And today's Labour party, New Labour, is a party of the centre as well as the centre-left."[41] This kind of rhetoric is perhaps the quintessential example of stylistic centrism; it is difficult to imagine a party leader associating his party with the centre in more overt fashion.

French President Emmanuel Macron has also embraced the political centre; but unlike Blair, he has done so while avoiding naming it directly. The slogan of Macron's The Republic Forward! in the 2017 presidential election was obliquely centrist – "neither right nor left" – while in government, he pivoted to the similar but distinct "both right and left."[42] Interestingly, Macron's arch-rivals, the radical right National Front (now National Rally), embraced the "neither right nor left" language themselves in an attempt to reframe the French political spectrum as a contest between "globalists and patriots" rather than traditional right and left

[41] Brown, C. (1996, 12 April). *Blair: We're Centre Party Now*. The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/blair-were-centre-party-now-1304370.html

[42] Derviş, K. (2018, 10 May). *Macron's Internationalism and the New Politics*. Project Syndicate. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/macron-new-politics-of-globalization-by-kemal-dervis-2018-05?barrier=accesspaylog

parties.[43] Macron and his party are considered ideologically centrist by both scholarly and popular discourse, the National Rally is not, and neither clearly meet the description of a middle centrist party either.

In addition to abstract statements of values and philosophy, stylistically centrist rhetoric and framing can also be deployed to advance specific issues as centrist or moderate. For example, New Labour's policy on devolution of government power to the individual nations of the United Kingdom was regularly sold as a centrist initiative, splitting the difference between total control from Westminster and the dissolution of the country. In the words of Ron Davies, then-Secretary of State for Wales, devolution was indeed "…a middle way, but there's nothing necessarily wrong with the middle way if you know the extremes on either side are unworkable…"[44] On a similar note, Bill Clinton turned many times to a familiar formulation to sell a policy or advance a specific political goal – painting the opposition to any policy or proposal as the work of extremists, and by extension asserting the centre as his own. From the reaction to the Oklahoma City Bombing to the shutdown of the federal government towards the end of 1995, Clinton successfully connected anti-government extremist terrorism to anti-government extremist politics in Congress. One Clinton aide recounted: "We tried all year to say we're the mainstream and they're the extreme – now we can show that" (Drew, 1996, p. 200) While this strategy was executed sensitively in some ways – framing Congressional Republicans as motivated by the same philosophy that inspired domestic terrorists – it was far from subtle in others, as when Clinton inserted Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" and its warning that "the center cannot hold" into a speech on the federal budget.[45]

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[43] Accetti, C. I. & Bickerton, C. (2016, 18 February) *Neither Left Nor Right in France.* Foreign Affairs. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2016-02-18/neither-left-nor-right-france

[44] Davies, R. (1997, 29 June). Interview by Humphrys, J. *On the Record.* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC

[45] Clinton, W. J. (1995, 13 November). Speech given to the Democratic Leadership Council.

These strategies dovetail with one final stylistically centrist approach, referred to by Velasco (2010) as the "production of political transcendence," rhetoric that evokes "a space beyond politics to invent what are unmistakably political arguments" (Velasco, 2010, p. 10). In other words, such a strategy is meant to stress that the politician, party, policy, or value is self-evidently "mainstream" or "reasonable," thus placing it outside the realm of political contestation; essentially making the political appear apolitical. This concept is at the heart of what Clinton adviser Dick Morris called "triangulation," or rising above the usual political combat between right and left by fashioning a third position from a synthesis of right- and left-wing ideas.[46]

Since it is much more difficult to make a previously politically contested idea appear beyond politics, a stylistically centrist strategy tends to contrast the novelty or modernity of a party's ideas and leaders with the tired, stagnant nature of its opponents'. This focus on freshness and innovation is apparent in the names that Clinton and Blair gave to their political projects: New Democrats and New Labour, respectively. Consider the way Clinton spoke about his party and its programme: "The New Democrat message appeals to the vast political center… it is a new public philosophy – a synthesis of progressive ideas and non-bureaucratic approaches to governing, grounded in mainstream values."[47] And again: "We've got to have a message that touches everybody, that makes sense to everybody, that goes beyond the stale orthodoxies of left and right, one that resonates with the real concerns of ordinary Americans, with their hopes and their dreams."[48] Blair uses many of the same rhetorical themes in his

[46] Wills, G. (1997, 19 January). *The Clinton Principle.* The New York Times Magazine. https://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/19/magazine/the-clinton-principle.html

[47] From, A. (1993, 6 June). *Hey Mom – What's a New Democrat? From the DLC, a Policy Primer for a Centrist Clinton.* The Washington Post.

[48] Clinton, W. J. (1991, 6 May). Speech given to the Democratic Leadership Council.

repeated descriptions of Labour as a "modern, progressive political party"[49] that "moved beyond the old boundaries between Left and Right altogether."[50]

The goal of stylistically centrist strategies is to change the perceptions of the party's values, priorities, and policies, even when those underlying qualities have not changed. Policy is – in theory – independent of style, which is why ideological centrist parties and stylistically centrist parties are theoretically distinct. Granted, there is likely significant overlap between parties who take ideologically centrist positions and those who stylistically emphasise centrism – the Blair-era Labour party was rated as ideologically centrist by both the CHES and the public – but one is not necessarily conditional on the other.

And in fact, there are instances where a party that is neither ideologically nor middle centrist does attempt to fashion for itself a centrist image through a change in style. This highlights the analytical independence of message and language from policy and position. For one example, consider two Nordic parties that utilise the most obvious branding strategy possible to create a centrist image: Sweden's Moderate Party and Iceland's Centre Party. On the balance of the evidence, neither party could be defined as either an ideologically or middle centrist party.[51] The Moderate Party is unquestionably the major pole party on the right wing of the Swedish party system, while the Centre Party – while still young – has been broadly compared to radical right parties, with its strong emphasis on opposition to immigration, European integration, and international coordination to combat climate change (Thorhallsson, 2021). Despite their right-wing positions, both parties clearly trade on the centrist image

[49] Riddell, P. & Webster, P. (2000, 8 May). *Shaken and Contrite? Not a Bit of It*. The Times.

[50] Blair, A. (1995, 17 July). "Security in a World of Change." Speech given to the News Corporation Conference.

[51] Additionally, neither party could be defined as a traditional Nordic agrarian party, a number of which also use the word "centre" in their names (Arter, 2001).

suggested by their names – indeed, the Moderate Party changed its name from the "Conservative Party" in 1969 for just such a purpose (Lewin, 1988).

As described above, stylistic centrist strategies go well beyond a party's name, although the difference in political and rhetorical conventions within each individual country (and the present author's unfamiliarity with languages other than English) makes a full analysis impossible.[52] However, a brief review of the recent rhetoric employed by leaders of the UK's Conservative Party – a party that is plainly neither an ideologically or middle centrist party – illustrates the way a non-centrist party can try to construct a centrist image through style.

While the Conservatives did publicly embrace an initiative of "modernisation" under the leadership of David Cameron – a programmatic shift and re-branding exercise that was seen as an attempt to claim the political centre (Evans, 2008; Bale, 2009; Green, 2010) – by 2016's referendum on the UK's membership in the EU, the party seemed to have aborted the effort for reasons electoral, ideological, and institutional (Kerr & Hayton, 2015). Confirming this view, since 2010 the Conservatives have consistently rated as a clearly right-wing party on the CHES.

But despite this series of positions – and the political chaos and polarisation endemic to the Brexit process – appeals to moderation and the political centre continued apace in the following years. In remarks to the World Economic Forum in early 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May assailed the "parties of the far left and the far right" who feed off "the sense among the public that mainstream political and business leaders have failed to comprehend

[52] Of course, some attempts at stylistically centrist branding are unmistakeable, such as the campaign slogan of Germany's CDU throughout the Merkel era: "*Die Mitte*," meaning "the centre" or "the middle." In fact, throughout her chancellorship, Merkel herself has repeatedly employed stylistic centrist rhetoric to define her own party and assail her rivals, even as the CDU governed in grand coalition with the centre-left SPD for the majority of her tenure. In her 2007 party conference speech, Merkel told attendees: "There where the middle is, are we. And where we are, is the middle. The middle is us." See: Mrs Merkel triangulates. (2007, 4 December). *The Economist*. https://www.economist.com/certain-ideas-of-europe/2007/12/04/mrs-merkel-triangulates

their legitimate concerns for too long."[53] Beset by parliamentary paralysis at home in 2018, May doubled down on centrist rhetoric in a bid for the support of disaffected Labour supporters for her Brexit deal, writing: "I want voters who may previously have thought of themselves as Labour supporters to look at my government afresh. They will find a decent, moderate and patriotic programme that is worthy of their support."[54] She returned to the "decent, moderate, and patriotic" formulation several times in her premiership, including in her final statement upon stepping down in 2019.[55]

Although he is widely regarded as a divisive figure,[56] May's successor, Boris Johnson, has also repeatedly employed stylistically centrist strategies, pledging at the outset of the 2019 election campaign to preside over a "moderate and compassionate" government, even as he stressed the government's priorities as leaving the European Union – without a negotiated arrangement if necessary – and further liberalising the British economy.[57] Indeed, this speech came only weeks after Johnson removed the whip from 21 rebels in his own party who had voted against government policy on Brexit, and who were widely seen as moderates themselves.[58] After the election, Johnson regularly relied on more moderate members of his

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[53] May, T. (2017, 19 January). Speech given to the World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/theresa-may-at-davos-2017-her-speech-in-full/

[54] Helm, T. & Savage, M. (2018, 6 October). Theresa May bids for centre ground with appeal to Labour voters. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/oct/06/theresa-may-bids-for-centre-ground-with-appeal-to-labour-voters

[55] May, T. (2019, 24 May). Speech given outside 10 Downing Street. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/may/24/i-have-done-everything-i-can-theresa-mays-statement-in-full

[56] Blitz, J. (2019, 23 July). Why is Boris Johnson such a divisive figure? *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/bd03b736-ac7d-11e9-8030-530adfa879c2

[57] Parker, G. & Payne, S. (2019, 6 November). Johnson vows 'moderate' government at campaign launch. *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/2c24d322-006e-11ea-b7bc-f3fa4e77dd47

[58] Elliott, F. & Wright, O. (2019, 4 September). Moderates attack Boris Johnson after Tory rebels have whip removed. *The Times*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tory-rebels-defy-boris-johnson-in-historic-vote-hbnhhpzh7

cabinet as spokesmen to the media, reportedly in an attempt to moderate the Tory message.[59] And perhaps Johnson's favourite rhetorical device – his regular invocation of the "one-nation Conservative" tradition – could also be classified as a subtle attempt to stylistically claim the political centre for his party, although the concept's long history lends itself to a number of plausible definitions.[60]

It is important to note that while the concepts of ideological, middle, and stylistic centrism are analytically distinct, they are not necessarily empirically independent. In practice, it is impossible to know what effect a party's rhetoric has on the ideological rating it is assigned by an expert survey or content analysis. Is a party's brand several from its policies and positions, as some scholars have suggested?[61] Or is a party's style integral to its programme and its perceptions by outsiders, as constructivist thinkers might argue? This question cannot be settled by this thesis, but it is necessary to establish some theoretical limits on the concept of stylistic centrism.

On a related but different subject, it is important to consider that stylistically centrist strategies are not identical to the dimensional salience measured in the CHES and elsewhere. True, attempts to raise or lower the salience of an issue or dimension is indeed a strategy intended to emphasise the "positive" or "impactful" aspects of a party's appeal and deemphasise the "negative" or "irrelevant" aspects. And it is also true that stylistic centrism is a strategy intended to accomplish the very same goals. However, dimensional salience, as it is

[59] Gye, H. (2020, 9 February). Boris Johnson sets out his centrist ambitions by sending out Remainer ministers on the airwaves time and time again. *i*. https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/boris-johnson-centrist-ambitions-remainer-ministers-airwaves-395934

[60] Boris Johnson is reinventing one-nation Conservatism. (2020, 4 January). *The Economist*. https://www.economist.com/britain/2020/01/02/boris-johnson-is-reinventing-one-nation-conservatism

[61] Mudde, C. (2019, 2 October). The new Austrian government will brand itself as moderate – but don't believe it. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/02/the-new-austrian-government-will-brand-itself-as-moderate-but-dont-believe-it

measured in the CHES, is not capturing the effect of stylistic centrist strategies. Dimensional salience refers to the emphasis that parties place on the dimension itself, or *which issues* are important to that party and its supporters. Stylistic centrist strategies are agnostic to the dimension or issues themselves – they are instead focused on emphasising *centrist values*, which can be applied to any position on any dimension. In other words, a party can employ stylistically centrist strategies to promote a centrist or an extreme policy, on a high or low salience issue. Stylistic centrism is about how a party communicates its values in order to create a centrist image; it is independent from issue salience.

Given the constraints of time and data inherent to the doctoral thesis, it is impossible to provide a broad comparative analysis of stylistically centrist parties similar to those above on ideologically and middle centrist parties. This means that this thesis will neither advance nor test hypothetical claims relating to this type of centrist party. However, since other scholars have indeed shown the value of applying constructivist theories to the centrist phenomenon, this thesis has taken note of their work, and made sure to include it in its collection of theoretical explanations for the centrist image. While these limitations mean that stylistic centrism cannot be evaluated here in the same way that ideological and middle centrist parties can, it is a promising idea ripe for future research.

Parties: Conclusion

This descriptive analysis of centrist parties accomplishes two things crucial to any understanding of the political centre. First, it shows the application of the proposed theoretical definitions to the available empirical data, verifying that a framework built on prior scholarly work contains valuable insights on a notoriously slippery concept. On ideologically centrist parties, it has been demonstrated how they can be classified on the basis of their underlying

positions on two dimensions and the salience they place on each. Demarcating, for example, moderate centrist parties from syncretic centrist parties paints a more comprehensive picture of each type's values and behaviours than the adjective "centrist" can do on its own. On middle centrist parties, this chapter has shown how the concept applies to a variety of different party systems and how existence in the middle of a party system conditions a party's actions. And on stylistic centrist parties, the various strategies a party can execute to build its own centrist image, regardless of its party system or ideological positions, have been outlined.

The second accomplishment of this chapter is that it builds a foundation for further exploration of this subject. Now that the theoretical expectations in the previous chapter have been shown to have some grounding in reality, specific hypotheses about centrist parties' nature and behaviour can be proposed and rigorously evaluated.

That work will be continued in the chapters to come, but first the next section turns to a similar descriptive treatment of the theory on centrist voters.

Analysis of Centrist Voters

While there are many sources of data on the public's political attitudes, one source proved most appropriate to the task of analysing centrist voters for the purposes of this chapter: the European Election Studies' 2019 Voter Survey (EES). Like many long-running panel survey projects, the EES provides validated data on the estimation of voter political positions and ideology. But for this chapter's purposes, its main advantage comes from the context it shares with the CHES. Like the CHES, the EES is run on a quinquennial basis, directly following the elections to the European Parliament, meaning that the two surveys are conducted roughly concurrently. It draws its sample of more than 26,000 respondents from the 28 member states of the European Union who participated in those elections, with

approximately 1,000 respondents from each member state.[62] And the EES surveys its respondents on very similar questions of political values, allowing for a simple and relatively straightforward comparison of party and voter positions.

Although it is discussed above in the section on the limitations of expert surveys, the crucial issue of differential item functioning must now return. In this specific case, it is because of the possibility that respondents from different countries have divergent conceptions of abstract ideological conceptions like "left" and "right" (not to mention "green," "liberal," "radical," and a host of others) that threaten to make comparisons between these groups meaningless (e.g. Zechmeister, 2006; Benoit & Laver, 2007; Tavits & Letki, 2009; Bauer et al., 2017; Zuell & Scholz, 2019). While many scholars provide suggestions to improve the comparative study of the public's political attitudes,[63] the constraints of currently available and accessible large-sample size data make this a problem that must be acknowledged and monitored, rather than one that can be easily solved. Simply put, there is no simple, perfect way to compare one group's political context (or even one *individual's* political context) to another using abstract concepts without a fully common understanding.

However, while this complication is inevitable, there are two reasons why it might be less of an obstacle for this analysis than it appears. First, as mentioned above in the context of parties, there is almost certainly a more cohesive European political culture now than there ever has been before (Camia & Caramani, 2012). The EES is conducted in the wake of regular elections to the European Parliament, and in the 2019 vote, nearly 200 million Europeans – slightly more than half the eligible electorate, the highest share in decades – cast a ballot. The

[62] The exceptions are the three smallest EU states – Cyprus, Malta, and Luxembourg – where the sample was approximately 500 respondents per country. Of these, only Luxembourg appears in this analysis.

[63] For example, the aforementioned use of anchoring vignettes as in the CHES (Bakker, 2014a; Bakker, 2014b), or the employment of more specific, benchmarked survey questions rather than reliance on a respondent's self-association with abstract concepts like "conservatism" (e.g. Everett, 2013).

representatives returned in these regular elections organise the chamber in political party groupings based on ideology, they campaign on European issues in terms of ideology, and they largely vote on legislation along ideological lines (Noury, 2002). This speaks to the idea of a shared political and ideological culture across the continent; perhaps not as cohesive as a national political and ideological culture, but the proper analogy seems less apples-to-oranges than green-apples-to-red-apples.[64] While two given national groupings – or again, two individual respondents – could indeed have different understandings of the meaning of say, "the left," it is entirely reasonable to conclude that their conceptions are not so radically divergent as to prevent meaningful comparison.

And second, this thesis focusses on the political centre – certainly an abstract concept, but perhaps less abstract than "left" or "right" in practice. As the previous chapter discussed at length, the most common conclusion that scholars have drawn about centrist voters is that they are disinterested and/or ignorant about politics (e.g. Knutsen, 1998; Iversen & Soskice, 2015; Rodon, 2015). If so, disinterest and ignorance are concepts that travel well across national and cultural borders, requiring very little translation or local benchmarking – presumably, a disinterested centrist in Portugal identifies with the centre for the same reason as a disinterested centrist in Germany. Furthermore, this logic applies similarly to other hypothesised reasons for centrist self-identification. Granted, while a leftist self-identifier whose conception of "left" resembled "social democrat" and one whose conception of "left" resembled "Trotsky" would not be easily comparable, a centrist is very different. If a centrist self-identifier wishes to merely indicate her general moderation between "left" and "right," it does not matter if her conception of "left" is "social democrat" and "right" is "Christian democrat;" her fellow whose understanding of "left" is "Trotsky" and "right" is "Mussolini"

[64] Again, a subject that receives greater attention in Chapter 6.

is expressing an essentially similar motivation. Or if a respondent identifies herself with the centre because she wishes to disavow herself from whatever she conceives about the "left-right" continuum, that motivation will be essentially similar regardless of the precise nature of the conception. While acknowledging the imperfect nature of cross-national (and cross-temporal) comparisons of abstract ideological concepts is necessary, these two factors may ameliorate some of the concern.

Since the EES is limited to respondents from member states of the EU, three countries in the normal sample are omitted from the following analysis: Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.

First, all respondents were sorted by their answer to the EES question about ideological identity: "In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. What is your position?" As in the CHES questions about left-right ideology, 0 represents the furthest point left, and 10 represents the furthest point right, with 5 as an exact midpoint (although it is not labelled as such or termed "centre" by the question). Unlike a rating of parties, each individual response to this question is a self-identification, and not the average of a set of expert responses to the same question. This means that each individual response is an integer, and that the range required to identify centrist parties is unnecessary for identifying centrist voters. Therefore, for the purposes of this section – and for the purposes of identifying any centrist voter using this 11-point scaling methodology – centrists are those who respond with an exact 5 self-rating.

Even though self-identification helps avert one variety of spurious precision, it is again important to note that some amount of survey and measurement error is inescapable in this kind of public opinion research. Since respondents may misidentify themselves out of ignorance or response bias, it may seem overly restrictive to define a centrist as a 5 alone. However, broadening the definition of centrist threatens to dilute its conceptual meaning as a

point that is either *both* left and right or *neither* left or right; only the exact midpoint of a scale can serve this function. While "centrist" is a popular label for those that wish to use it as a proxy for "moderate" or "more towards the centre," the questions motivating this thesis are about the centre *sui generis*. Therefore, it seems entirely reasonable and defensible to be selective about this operational definition.

With the definition settled, the first point that must be made is one about the importance and ubiquity of centrist voters. As shown in Chapter 1, centrist voters are common, and potentially far more consequential in politics than one might assume from the volume of scholarship produced about them. Figure 3.13 is a reproduction of the earlier histogram showing the ideological distribution of European voters.

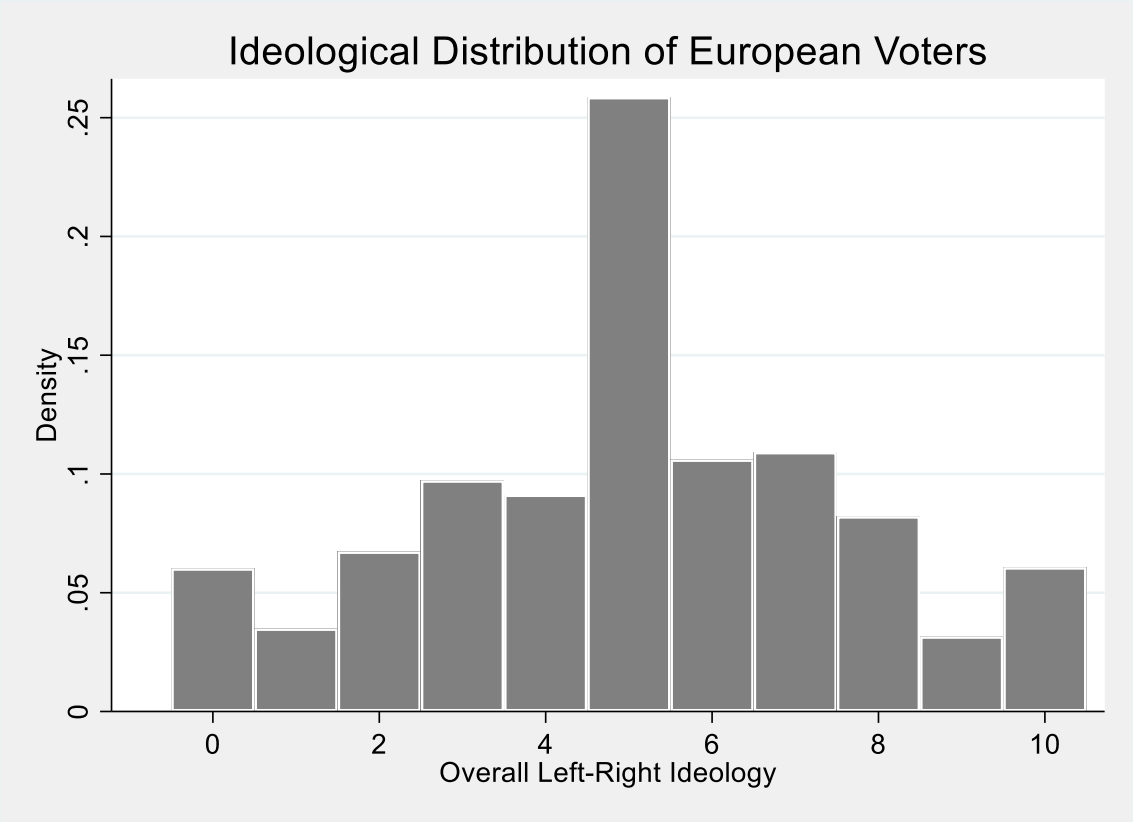

Figure 3.13: The distribution of voters in the EES sample by overall left-right orientation. N = 22,826

As is obvious, 5 is far and away the modal answer to this question, with more than 25% of the total sample self-identifying in the exact centre of the ideological spectrum. Although not shown here, this pattern largely persists in each country of the sample – 5 is the modal answer in every country studied and appears with similar frequency (20%-30%) in most. However, the share of centrists is substantially lower in Denmark and Finland among those surveyed, results that echo Iversen & Soskice's (2015) research on the links between economic inequality and ideological polarisation, where more equal economies – like those of the Nordic countries – feature a greater share of the population that broadly identifies as on either the left or the right.

While it is clear that centrists make up a sizable portion of the European electorate, this thesis is motivated by the idea that not all centrists are the same; that professing the centrist ideology means different things to different individuals.

As discussed at length in Chapter 2, two variables are generally thought to structure an individual's ideological self-identification: partisanship and values (Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976). Party affiliation is important because it provides a voter with a simple heuristic to determine where she stands on the ideological spectrum (e.g. Inglehart, 1984; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Values, on the other hand, are the beliefs about political issues and controversies that drive overall ideological orientation (e.g. Knutsen, 1997). Together, these components largely make up the "broad conceptual map of politics" (Budge, 1994, p. 446) that voters use to make sense of the public sphere, its actors, and the innumerable choices of preferences and behaviours that the political world offers.

But as also discussed in Chapter 2, there are significant problems applying this model of ideological identification to centrists. For one, the growing dealignment between parties and voters makes parties less able to provide the rules-of-thumb that voters once depended on to

conceptualise their own preferences (e.g. Särlvik & Crewe, 1983; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002); a phenomenon that is not unique to centrists but affects them more than any other ideological category. Figure 3.14 shows how partisan identification – or the lack of one – correlates with ideological identification.

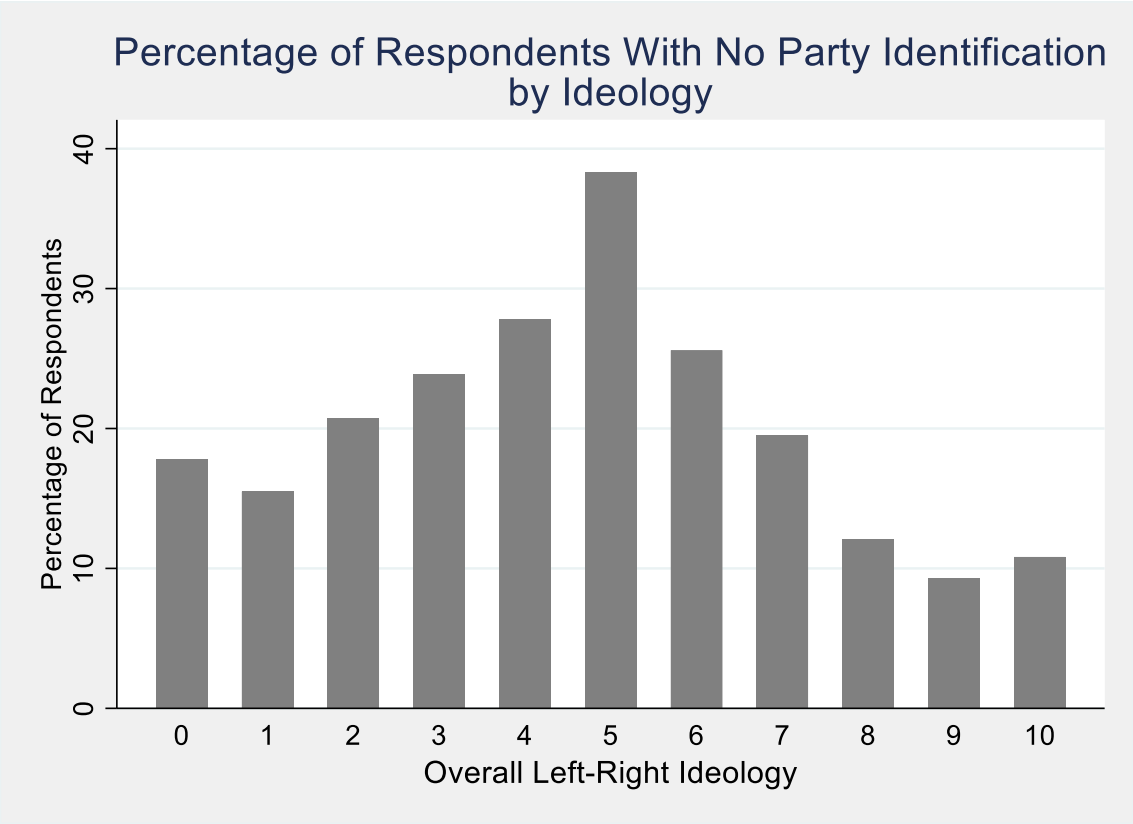

Figure 3.14: The share of each group of ideological identifiers who claim affiliation with no political party, with 0 representing the far left and 10 representing the far right. Data from EES. N = 22,826

Centrists are less likely to identify with a political party than any other ideological group. While there are indeed centrists who identify with centrist parties – and they are accounted for in the theoretical model – the theory must be flexible enough to include the large number of nonpartisan centrists.

An additional complication comes from the values component. As a reminder, Figure 3.3 above shows how centrist parties – all of which share a similar overall super-issue ideological rating – vary significantly in terms of their positions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions. From the point of view of elites – both those that make up the leadership of political parties and the experts that rate their political positions – there are many possible combinations of values that translate to a centrist overall ideology, with consistent moderation only one. Yet again, it is shown how the theoretical framework requires the flexibility to accommodate the unique qualities of centrists.

Therefore, Chapter 2 proposed two more inclusive variables to structure the range of centrist voters: *intentionality* – the interest and capacity to positively identify with a political ideology; and *moderation* – the values of consistently avoiding extremes. These variables will now be operationalised for empirical study.

Intentionality, as described in the previous chapter, has two main components: the familiar partisanship component, and a political interest component needed to compensate for the increasing dealignment of centrists from parties. First, partisanship is measured on the EES by a question asking respondents if they "consider [themselves] to be close to any particular party." A respondent will be considered high intentionality if they claim affiliation with an ideologically centrist party, measured just as in the section on parties above (i.e. a party with an overall ideological rating greater than 4 and less than 6 on the 2019 CHES). All others proceed to the second component – political interest. To measure this, the EES asks respondents "to what extent would you say you are interested in politics?" The response is structured as a 4-part Likert item, ranging from "very," to "somewhat," to "a little," to "not at all." Those responding that they are "somewhat" or "very" interested in politics are also

considered high intentionality; those that choose the other options are considered low intentionality. Figure 3.15 illustrates these operational definitions.

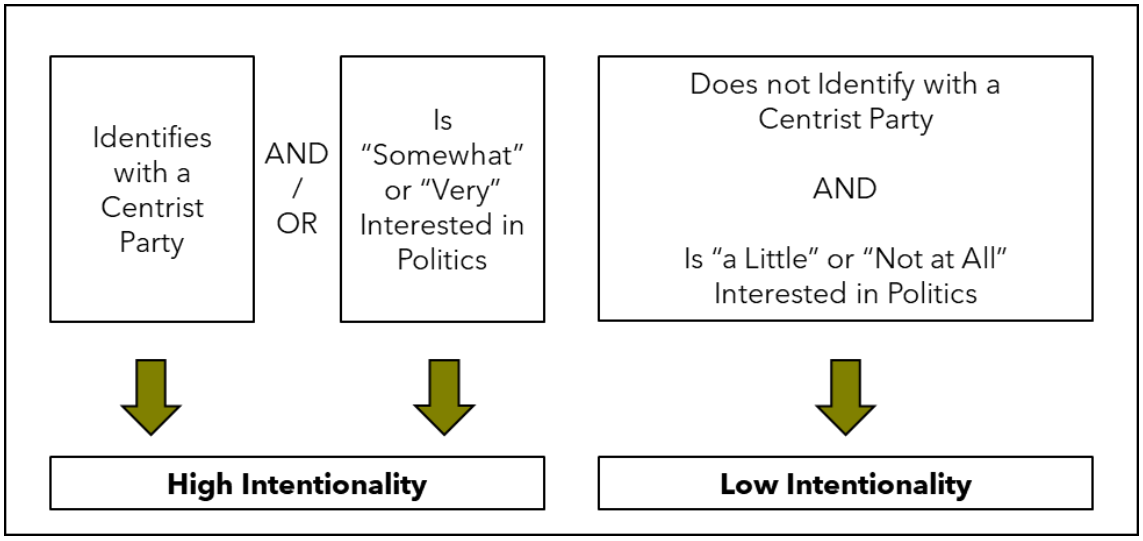

Figure 3.15: The set of operational definitions for high intentionality respondents and low intentionality respondents

Once the respondent's level of intentionality is determined, the second independent component of the theoretical model can be operationalised – a voter's moderation in political values. Along with the question about left-right ideology, the EES also asks several questions about specific policy preferences. Some concern classical economic issues, such as the state's role in the economy or the redistribution of wealth. Some are unquestionably sociocultural issues, such as same-sex marriage and the trade-off between civil liberties and security. Three others do not cleanly map onto either dimension, as discussed in the theoretical chapter – immigration policy, environmental protection, and European integration. While responses to all questions were structured on an 11-point scale between 0 and 10, with 5 as the exact midpoint, it seems clear that the electorate may not consider some questions as controversial as others, and thus their responses will be significantly unbalanced on that scale. Figure 3.16

shows the mean responses to these policy questions for three groups of voters: left voters (whose ideological self-identification runs from 0 through 4), centrist voters (whose ideological self-identification is exactly 5), and right voters (whose ideological self-identification runs from 6 through 10).

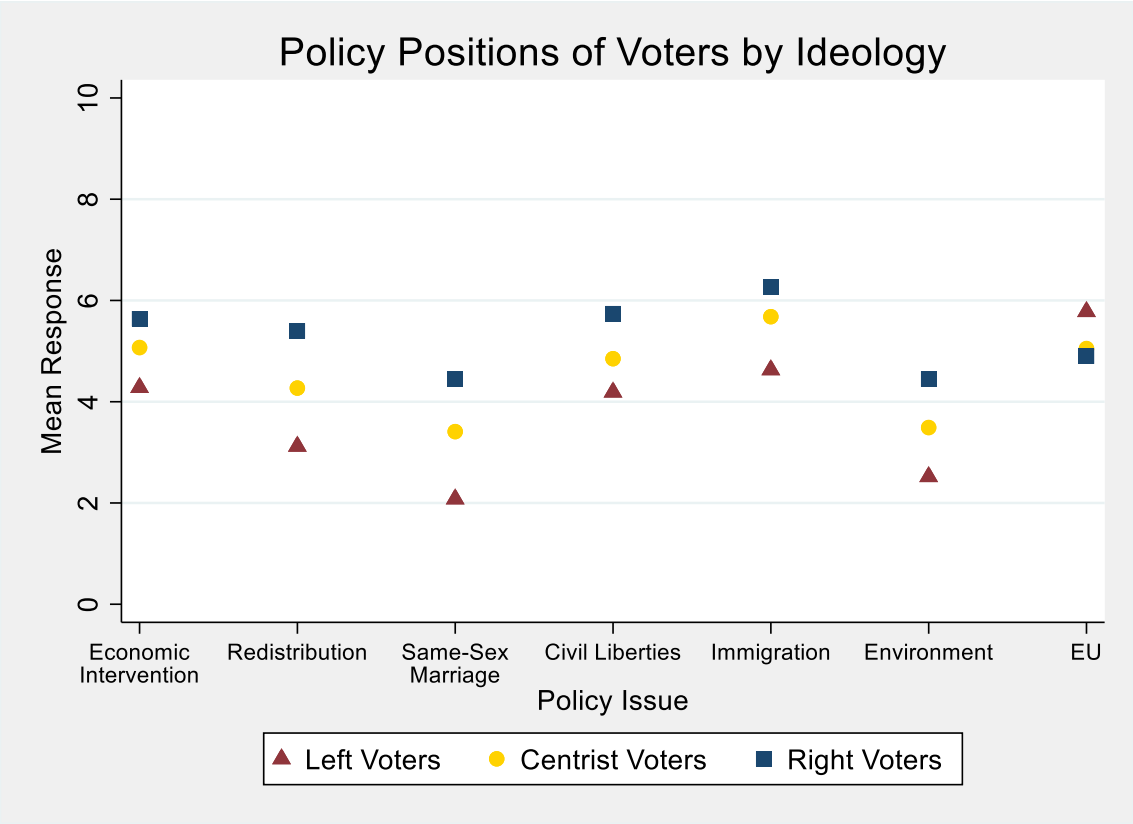

Figure 3.16: Mean responses to the EES' policy questions by ideological group. Left voters ideologically self-identify from 0-4, centrist voters ideologically self-identify as 5, and right voters ideologically self-identify from 6-10.

While centrist voters, on average, do lie between left voters and right voters on every issue, some issues clearly do not centre on or near the exact midpoint of the scale; this is particularly true for same-sex marriage and environmental protection. Using such questions to describe a voter's tendency towards moderation could easily lead to faulty or inaccurate results,

since the midpoint of the scale so clearly diverges from the approximate midpoint of the electorate's preferences. Therefore, to judge a respondent's moderation on the economic and sociocultural dimensions, a pair of representative questions that seem roughly in balance between the mean preferences of the population and the scale they are measured on is used – views on economic intervention, and views on the trade-off between civil liberties and security. Therefore, a respondent with consistently moderate views will hold a moderate position on both the economic intervention question and on the civil liberties question.

Categorisation

Combined, the two variables of intentionality and moderation allow for the segmentation of centrist voters into four groups: *genuine moderates* are centrist voters high in intentionality and high in moderation; *genuine syncretics* are centrist voters high in intentionality but low in moderation; default moderates are centrist voters low in intentionality but high in moderation; and default syncretics are centrist voters low in intentionality and low in moderation. Figure 3.17 is an illustration of the relationship of these groups to the key variables.

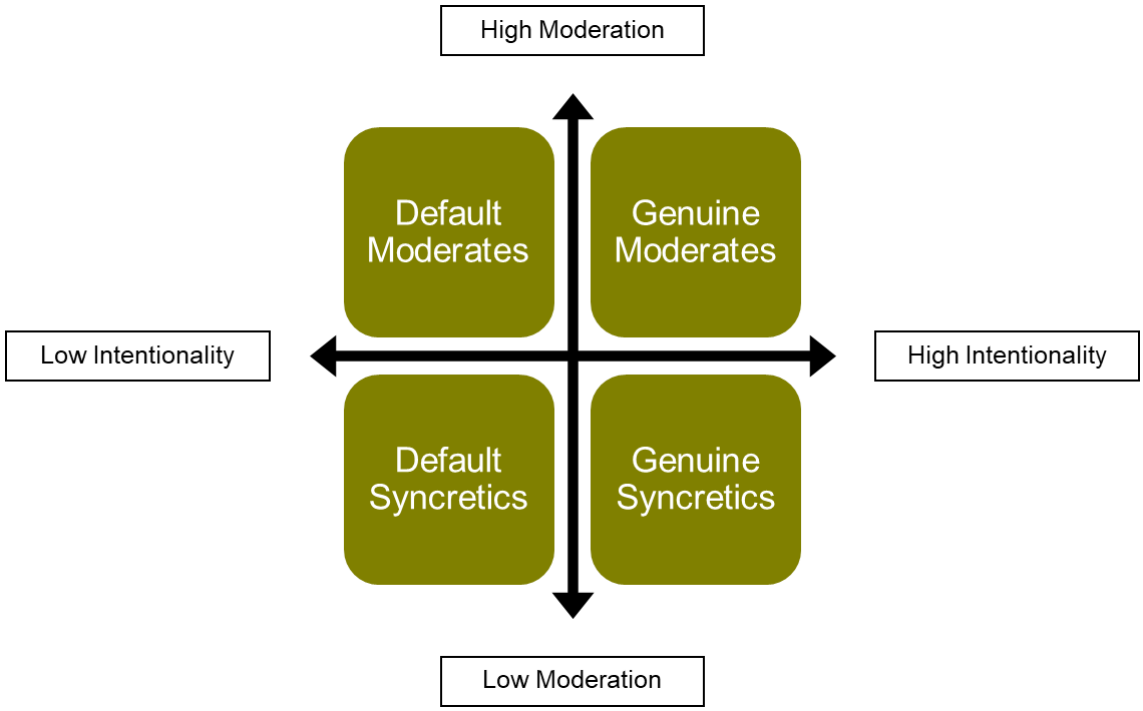

Figure 3.17: The categorisation of self-identified centrist voters by intentionality and moderation.

Genuine Moderates

Genuine moderates are centrist voters who are high in intentionality and high in moderation. This means that by virtue of their high political interest and/or their centrist party affiliation, they demonstrate a capacity for intentionally identifying as a centrist. Because of this capacity, their centrist self-identification can be described as "genuine," in the sense that it is likely authentic and considered, rather than a reaction to ignorance or indifference. Additionally, by holding moderate views on individual issues or separate political dimensions, their centrism can be viewed as the product of moderation, rather than an idiosyncratic combination of more extreme opinions that rate as centrist "on balance." In many ways, the genuine moderate category most resembles the centrist voter envisioned by Downs' (1957)

theory of spatial competition; the well-informed, rational voter with moderate preferences, whose vote in a competitive, frictionless election controls the outcome.

Genuine Syncretics

Genuine syncretics are centrist voters high in intentionality but low in moderation. Like genuine moderates, their high political interest and/or their centrist party affiliation provides evidence of their willingness and capacity to intentionally answer an ideological self-identification question and declare themselves in the centre. However, unlike genuine moderates, genuine syncretics are not broadly moderate in their views on specific policy questions or political dimensions. Instead, they hold a combination of immoderate views that from their perspective, aligns them with the political centre. These voters are therefore very much like the syncretic centrist parties outlined in the preceding section; they consider themselves centrists overall, while simultaneously holding some values associated with the right, and some associated with the left.

Default Moderates

Default moderates are centrist voters low in intentionality but high in moderation. Unlike genuine moderates and genuine syncretics, default moderates are centrist voters that display a lack of interest in politics and have no centrist partisan attachment. This quality means that we should be sceptical of their capacity and willingness to provide a considered, reasoned answer to an ideological self-identification question. In addition, these voters give their views on specific policy issues or political dimensions as essentially moderate. As described in Chapter 2, there is significant debate as to why a respondent with no interest in politics would admit to moderate beliefs: Converse (1964) or Taylor & Fiske (1978) might cite this as the kind

of "top of the head" answer that typifies a nonattitude; Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) or Knutsen (1998) might call this answer a "concealed form of nonresponse;" and Iversen & Soskice (2015) might argue that their answer is a perfectly logical response to a question they do not know the answer to. In any case, there is an internal consistency to the behaviour of default moderates; they give a centrist response to a question about their overall ideology, and a centrist response to specific questions about their views on specific issues or political dimensions.

Default Syncretics

Default syncretics are centrist voters low in intentionality and low in moderation. Like default moderates, default syncretics are low in indicators of intentionality – political interest and centrist partisanship – indicating their inability to provide an authentic, meaningful ideological self-identification. However, unlike their moderate counterparts, default syncretics do not hold moderate views on specific policy issues or political dimensions, instead marrying a centrist overall identification with more extreme beliefs. Theoretically, this quadrant of the matrix should hold the fewest number of voters, although it is certainly possible that some respondents might express their nonattitudes on political issues as random answers to survey questions.

Empirical Categorisation

To sum up the operationalisation of the two main variables – intentionality and moderation – a simple binary is constructed for each. A respondent is either high in intentionality (when they are a member of a centrist party or express that they are "somewhat" or "very interested" in politics) or low in intentionality (when they are not a member of a

centrist party and they are "a little" or "not at all" interested in politics). A respondent is high in moderation when both their responses to the sample values questions – one on state intervention in the economy and one on the trade-off before security and civil liberties – is a 5 on the 11-point scale; while one is low in moderation when both their answers are not. When intentionality and moderation are operationalised and each respondent is sorted into four groups based on their combination of traits, the theoretical categorisation above takes empirical shape, with results that do not neatly align with expectations. Figure 3.18 again shows the categorisation diagram, but this time with the percentages of the 2,961 centrists from sampled countries that meet each set of criteria.

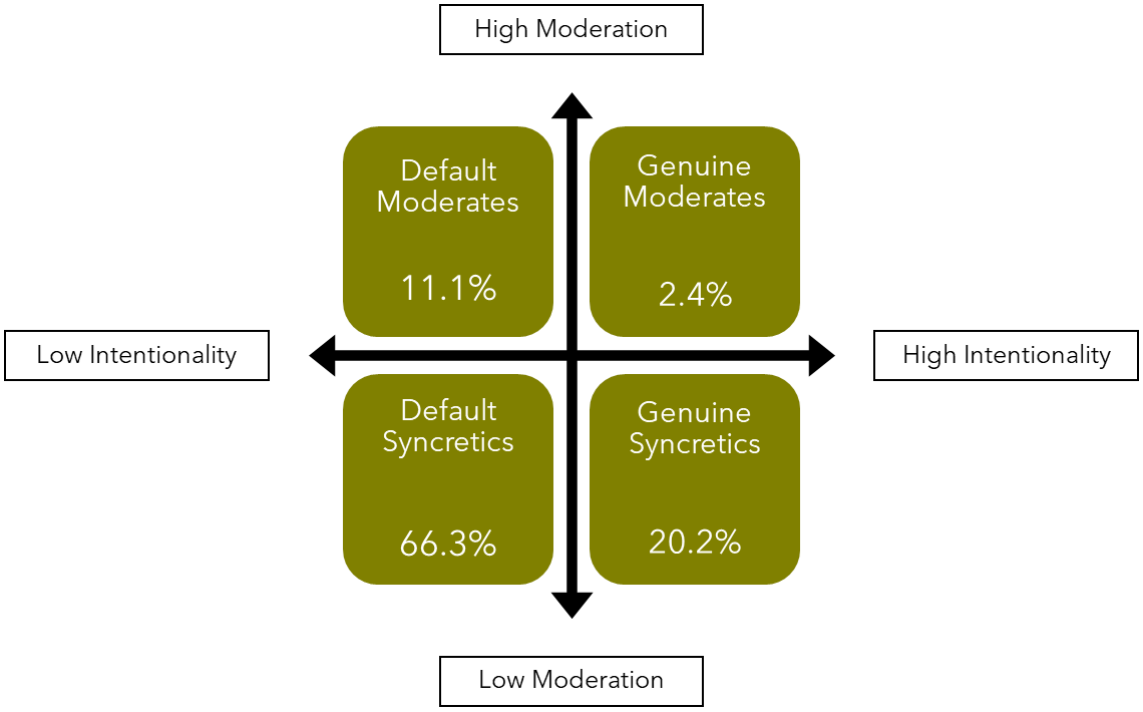

Figure 3.18: The categorisation of self-identified centrist voters by intentionality and moderation, including the percentage of self-identified centrists from sampled countries that meets each set of criteria. Data from EES.

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from these results. The first, unsurprising given prior research, is the negligible numbers of genuine moderates, which has significant implications for a wide variety of fields. But another conclusion conflicts with established research on the relationship between intentionality and moderation. Theory posited that there should be a generally negative correlation between these two variables. Some scholars (e.g. Iversen & Soskice, 2015) connected a lack of interest in politics – through the conversation and information that interest breeds – to moderate ideological views through what they called "the centrist bias." Some scholars (e.g. Knutsen, 1998) follow in Converse's (1964) footsteps, suggesting that moderate ideology is the default position for those who do not have a conscious political attitude. One of the expectations from a reading of this literature is that centrists will largely have low intentionality; the other is that this low intentionality should result in expressions of moderate preferences.

However, while the former certainly appears true – nearly 80% of centrist respondents rated as low intentionality – the latter does not. Less than 14% of respondents – all of whom self-identified as a 5 on the ideological scale – also chose 5 as a representation of their preferences on both state intervention in the economy and the trade-off between civil liberties and security. In other words, if they "defaulted" to the centre of the ideological scale out of a lack of capacity to answer the question, or simply made the answer up as the expression of a nonattitude, they largely did not do the same when asked more specific questions of political significance. Indeed, the largest of the four categories – by far – turns out to be default syncretics, or voters with both low intentionality and low moderation.

This lack of moderation is not merely the product of an overly restrictive definition. If the criteria for high moderation were expanded to include the possibility of answering both issue questions with a centre-left, centrist, or centre-right response – that is, both questions

with some combination of 4, 5, and 6, – then the share of self-identified centrists who are high in moderation only rises from 13.51% to 29.72%; a substantial increase, but still less than a third of the sample.

Under this methodology, it does not appear that centrists are consistently moderate at all; rather, it seems that the vast majority of centrists hold clear views on at least one of the two classic political dimensions – evidence echoing similar research performed on the American electorate (Treier & Hillygus, 2009). These results seem to indicate a divergence between voters' expressions of their overall ideology, and expressions of their values on significant political questions; a divergence that cannot be easily explained using longstanding theories of ideological identification but could plausibly be explained by a theory of symbolic ideology.

Voters: Conclusions

Much like the descriptive analysis of parties in the first half of this chapter, this descriptive analysis of centrist voters shows the relationship of theoretical definitions to empirical observations. And just as the analysis of parties shows the inadequacies of the common understanding of the label "centrist," the voters analysis indicates a fundamental disconnect between theories of centrist ideological identification and the expectations those theories set forth about centrist values. In this way, this chapter sets the stage for the empirical chapters on voters to come; it shows that the established assumptions about centrist voters may not hold and demonstrates the need for hypotheses and rigorous testing of those hypotheses to further challenge those assumptions. With the foundation laid by theory and descriptive analysis, this thesis can now move forward with that empirical work.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 surveyed the state of existing literature and showed how in concert, that literature created a set of theoretical expectations about the nature of centrist parties and voters. Chapter 3 then showed how those theoretical expectations cohere with empirical reality – for example, how to tangibly identify a theoretical middle centrist party, or how to operationalise the variables of intentionality and moderation that structure centrist voters. Together, these two chapters set a base of knowledge; a base that now serves as a launching point for original research on this vital political concept in the empirical chapters that follow.

The first of that set is the next chapter, which is concerned with centrist parties and ideology. In particular, it will attempt to investigate a puzzle with significant relevance, both for the way ideology is conceived of and measured in a scholarly context, as well as in the practical politics of modern-day Europe – the relationship between a centrist position on the overall super-issue dimension and a favourable view of European integration.

Chapter 4: Centrist Parties, "Centrist Ideology," and European Integration

What does it mean to say that a party is ideologically centrist? Ideologically centrist parties are united by that overall label, but as Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis detailed, there is no one, universal centrist "ideology," but multiple ways that a party's ideology can bestow a centrist image – as a function of their moderation, syncretism, and the salience they place on various issues.

This diversity of ideological views among centrist parties stands in contrast to the relative uniformity they show on a singular policy issue – the cause of European integration. While many studies have investigated how parties' characteristics – including ideology – relate to their position on this issue, none before have focussed specifically on centrist ideology.

The overall theme of this thesis is simple and straightforward – that the term "centrist" is far too broad in its application, and that it hides interesting and important variations between the parties and voters under its umbrella. The focus of this first empirical chapter is on centrist parties, and it seeks to answer two related conceptual questions. The first question asks why an extreme policy position – enthusiastic support for European integration – is so strongly associated with ideological centrism. The second question asks how the differences between centrist parties discussed in the previous chapters might affect that seemingly unifying characteristic. Together, these two questions form the basis of this chapter's exploration of centrist ideology.

This chapter therefore expands on the previous analysis of parties by examining a characteristic that unites centrist parties, rather than on those that divide them, in the service of a greater understanding of centrist ideology. The first part of the chapter will outline the puzzle, establishing what is known about both centrist ideology and that ideology's relationship

to the European integration issue. Then, through a review of the large literature on the latter subject, combined with the theoretical insights developed earlier in this thesis, a series of plausible arguments about centrist party characteristics – two concerning ideology, one concerning governing history and culture, and one concerning strategy – are developed to explain why centrist parties, despite all their diversity, might be allied to the integrationist cause, as well as how that diversity might explain the few exceptions to the rule. Finally, these explanations are tested using the wealth of data on party positions, including the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Global Party Survey, and Manifesto Project Database, all with an eye towards increasing our understanding of both the politically pivotal issue of European integration, as well as the nature and composition of political ideology.

Centrist Ideology and European Integration

What, if Anything, is "Centrist Ideology?"

Along with things such as history and strategy, ideology is a core characteristic of political parties. As a set of shared values, attitudes, and beliefs, a party's ideology provides a common worldview through which its members can organise political action. In other words, it is a system through which an impossibly complex world can be governed by the application of relatively simple heuristics (Sargent, 1969; Christianson et al., 1972). While party ideology is not limited to democracies – many anti-democratic and authoritarian parties around the world have strong ideological viewpoints – ideology is a major component of representative democracy, which is itself an overarching system of simplification: a collection of norms, rules, and institutions that allows for the practical translation of popular will into effective government.

Among parties as entities, as well as the elites and activists who make them up, ideology provides the terms and limits of political activity. It is an expression of what the party – as a community of those elites and activists, as well as supporters – stands for, and it furnishes an agenda for the party to follow in government. As Budge (1994) writes:

> "As it often defines itself by contrast to other ideologies, [ideology] provides a way of defining and partitioning policy space and of indicating the broad area within which a particular party should take its position. By suggesting the broad principles on which policy should be based, it simplifies problems and reduces costs of writing the policy statement which typically define the party position for each election" (p. 446).

On the elite and party levels then, ideology is both a way of fostering and reinforcing political tribal cohesion, as well as a blueprint for exercising governing power.

But how then does one define the centrist ideology? As theoretically detailed in Chapter 2 and descriptively illustrated in Chapter 3, the lack of clear answers to that question is what motivates this thesis.

Indeed, there is no single, overarching centrist ideology. As stated Chapter 1, centrism is not like socialism, conservatism, environmentalism, or any of the other great political ideologies (or "-isms") defined by a coherent philosophy and worldview – instead, ideological centrism denotes a spatial location, a position on a defined continuum, something that lies between other things. And the parties that inhabit that spatial location, though they share a common descriptor, do not necessarily share the same ideological characteristics or worldview.

Those earlier chapters outlined just how distinct those ideological characteristics and worldviews can be. One conception holds that ideological centrism is about moderation, and forging compromises between the ideals of the left and the right. Another holds that the political centre is simply a dumping ground for parties that do not easily conform to either the

popular or expert understanding of left and right, and which are attempting to stake out a paradigmatically different ideological ground. And yet another sees the centre as a place of transcendence between the divisions between left and right, borrowing ideas and policies from each to forge a synthesis of both.

It was these competing conceptions that prompted the creation of the typology of ideologically centrist parties. *Moderate centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is defined by their consistent moderation on both ideological dimensions. *Mainstream economic centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is defined by their moderate, high-salience position on the dominant left-right economic dimension. *Niche economic centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is defined by their moderate, low-salience position on the dominant left-right economic dimension. And *syncretic centrist parties* are those whose centrist image is not defined by a moderate position on the dominant left-right economic dimension, but by positions on both dimensions that yield an overall centrist orientation on balance.

If nothing else, this simple typology shows quite clearly that ideological centrism – like the overarching concept of party-level centrism itself – is not a monolithic, uniform political philosophy or programme, something that is necessarily constant in all times and places. And yet, these distinctions between ideologically centrist parties ironically raises the question underpinning use of the word "centrist:" if these parties have so many differences, what do they have in common? Why are they all grouped together at the middle of the ideological spectrum and often treated as a *famille spirituelle* that allows for the use of a shared ideological descriptor? Or to paraphrase Budge (1994), if ideologies are defined not only by their own qualities but by those that differentiate them from other ideologies, then what collective qualities do centrist parties have that distinguish them and give meaning to that label?

A well-established finding in the comparative study of European politics offers an answer to that question. The following sections introduce that finding and review the state of the scholarly literature on its interpretation.

Centrist Ideology and Issues

The concept of ideology, being an abstract quality, cannot be meaningfully separated from the method or construction used to measure and define it. There is no one, true way to define or measure political ideology, and empirical research into the subject can only be fruitful with an acceptance of that fact.

As discussed at length in the theoretical chapter, the primary axis of political conflict in Western Europe is over the state's role in the economy (e.g. Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990; Klingemann, Hofferbert, & Budge, 1994; Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Hix, 1999; Mair, 2007; Costello, Thomassen, & Rosema, 2012). In the industrial age, the way that capitalism was mediated and regulated by the state for the benefit of both individual citizens and economic classes became the foremost concern of politics, and once this overriding issue grafted onto pre-existing geographic and religious cleavages, political contestation "froze" along the left-worker-secular/right-owner-clerical axis (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

And yet, a great deal of research has demonstrated the high and increasing importance of non-economic issues in determining a party's ideological appeal to voters. As described in detail in Chapter 2, the salience of these non-economic issues has generally increased in the Western world over the past few decades (e.g. Allardt, 1968; Inglehart, 1977; Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Kriesi et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2008; Stoll, 2010).

While most scholars recognise the existence of two separate ideological dimensions, there is wide-ranging debate on the extent to which these dimensions relate to each other and

how they manifest in political systems like voting and government formation. Some scholars (e.g. Hix, 1999; Bakker, Jolly, & Polk, 2012; Prosser, 2016) have found significant analytical value in mapping political space in two dimensions, or even more. However, many others have advanced good reason for focussing instead on a unidimensional continuum dominated by economic issues as the true motivator of political decision-making, an all-but-ubiquitous construct in research on comparative political economy (Hellwig, 2008), where a strictly economic left-right scale is the standard assumption (e.g. Alesina & Angeletos, 2005; Pontusson & Rueda, 2010).[65]

Others prefer to square the circle by collapsing the entire range of ideological issues into one, overall "super-issue which summarizes the programmes of opposing groups" (Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976), a common approach in many studies of party ideology (e.g. Laver & Budge, 1992; Pierce, 1999; Gabel & Huber, 2000; Lachat, 2018).

There may well be no simple way to harmonise these competing findings, as these questions are highly dependent upon context, and much like the wave-particle duality of light, scholars tend to find what they go looking for, whether that is one dimension, two, or some alternative ideological construct. As Benoit and Laver (2012) eloquently write:

> "Scholars use low-dimensional conceptual maps of political spaces as parsimonious and useful ways to represent a huge amount of information about political preferences and, it is hoped, to screen out confusing and/or irrelevant detail. There is no such thing as the 'one true' conceptual map of any given political setting, waiting to be discovered if only we could find it. Just as physical maps are spanned by physical dimensions, conceptual maps are spanned by conceptual dimensions, which we use to provide substantive orientation. Just as there is not one true map, neither is there 'one true dimensionality' for any given political setting. Sometimes, as with London's

[65] It should also be noted that even more granular structural questions – say, which issues are important in constructing how many dimensions can be combined to further muddy the waters. For example, Kitschelt (2004) finds that political space is broadly one-dimensional, but that sociocultural issues are more important (and in fact, gaining in importance) in structuring that single dimension than other research indicates.

> Central Line, a one-dimensional map will tell us everything we want to know. Sometimes, as with London's Circle Line, it will not. Nearly always, we ignore potentially salient dimensions in the name of a parsimonious description of the world, just as we typically do not seek three-dimensional maps of London Tube stations – despite the fact that these stations do in fact have substantively meaningful geographical coordinates in three dimensions" (p. 216).

The conception of "overall" political ideology is perhaps best defined as the left-right "super-issue" dimension first coined by Inglehart & Klingemann (1976). In that view, overall ideology is a single dimension, fusing virtually all salient political issues – certainly, the economic issues that dominated European political competition in the post-war era, but also the then-emerging issues of social and cultural identity – onto one left-right continuum. Or as Kitschelt has written, the pace of sociocultural change in recent decades "has shifted the main axis of voter distribution from a simple alternative between socialist (left) and capitalist (right) politics to a more complex configuration opposing left-libertarian and right-authoritarian alternatives" (1994, pp. 30-31). While this conception of ideology is by no means universal, it is a common construct in models of both party competition and voter behaviour, as political conflict in Europe does empirically seem to be structured in the fashion these scholars describe. This can be demonstrated by a series of simple analyses of party positions taken from the 2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES).[66] The CHES records expert opinions on the positions of parties on both specific policy issues, as well as on the ideological dimensions that reflect those issues. Figure 4.1 shows four panels, each of which plots Western European political parties by their position on the overall (super-issue) dimension on the x-axis and their position on various specific policy issues on the y-axis. Also plotted is an ordinary least squares regression of the two variables for all included parties.

[66] Bakker, R., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., Polk, J., Rovny, J., Steenbergen, M., & Vachudova, M. A. (2020). *1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File.* v1.2. www.chesdata.eu

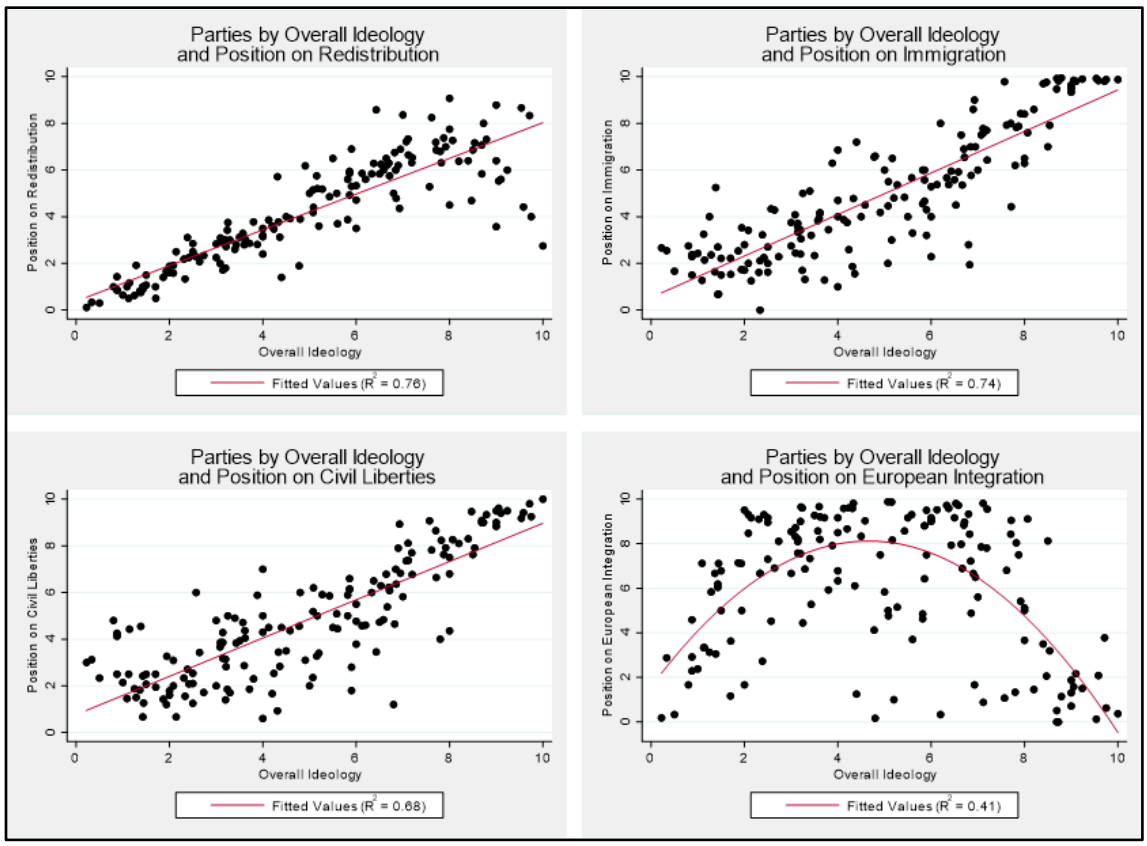

Figure 4.1: Anticlockwise from top left: parties graphed by overall ideology and position on redistribution, civil liberties, European integration, and immigration. Overall ideology is measured from 0 (representing the far left) to 10 (representing the far right). Position on redistribution is measured from 0 (strongly favours) to 10 (strongly opposes). Position on civil liberties is measured from 0 (strongly favours civil liberties) to 10 (strongly favours tough measures to fight crime). Position on European integration is measured from 0 (strongly opposed) to 10 (strongly favoured). Position on immigration is measured from 0 (strongly favours liberal policy) to 10 (strongly favours restrictive policy). All data from the 2019 CHES.

As Figure 4.1 illustrates, highly salient but distinct policy issues like the redistribution of income and wealth, the extent of civil liberties, and immigration policy have a roughly linear relationship with overall ideology, although the strength and consistency of that relationship varies. Virtually all other policy issues follow a roughly similar pattern, and the same is true for parties' positions on the economic and sociocultural ideological dimensions that reflect these policy preferences. This is the basis of the overall ideological dimension's validity.

However, the relationship of overall ideology to position on European integration is strikingly different. Not only is the correlation plainly weaker, but it is also noticeably curvilinear, with minima at the ideological extremes and a maximum near the ideological centre. Put simply, among parties, European integration is a policy issue entirely unlike others in terms of its relationship with the overall conception of ideology, a finding first reported by scholars in the early years following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty and the foundation of the European Union (e.g. Hix & Lord, 1997; Aspinwall, 2002; Marks, Wilson, & Ray, 2002).

The unusual nature of the European integration issue becomes even starker when compared against all other salient political issues and controversies. Figure 4.2 shows two panels comparing party positions on a selection of the most relevant issues. In the top panel, parties are broken down into three categories – left (rated 4 or lower on the CHES' overall ideology metric), right (rated 6 or higher), and centre (rated between 4 and 6). The bottom panel is similar, except that the most extreme left (rated 0-2) and right (rated 8-10) parties are eliminated from the analysis.

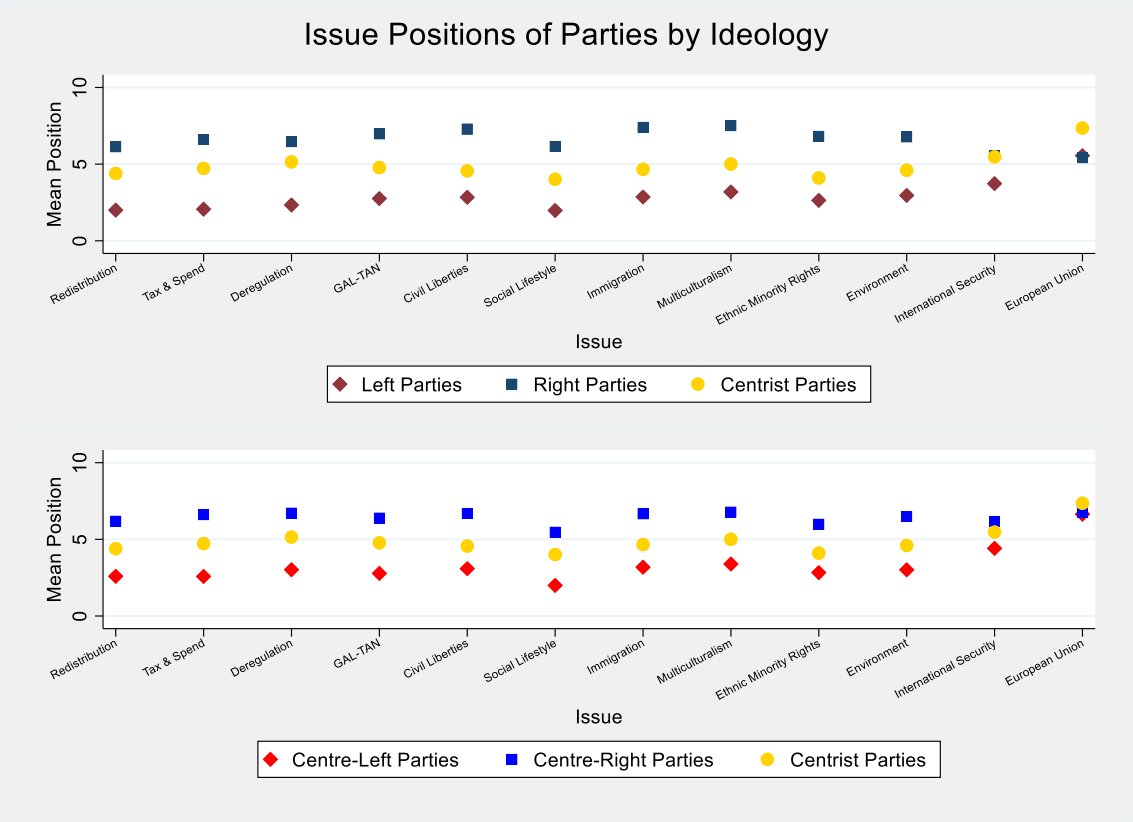

Figure 4.2: Top: comparison of party positions on issues, grouped by parties' overall ideology rating. Bottom: comparison of party positions on issues, excluding extreme parties. Data taken from 2019 CHES.

Figure 4.2 shows that centrist parties are – unsurprisingly, given their nomenclature – positioned roughly centrally between the parties of left and right, as well as the parties of the centre-left and centre-right on virtually every issue of consequence. Additionally, centrist parties also tend to hover around the midpoint of the scale on virtually every issue, also no surprise given the nature of the scale and the subjective measurement of experts. There is, however, one glaring exception – the issue of European integration, where centrist parties take both their most extreme position, and a position that is more extreme than any other ideological grouping of parties. The concept of the political centre, in terms of the overall left-

right super-issue dimension, breaks down on the issue of Europe, where centrist parties are anything but central.

Of course, these illustrations only scratch the surface of a large literature concerning European integration, ideology, and party positioning.

Starting in earnest in the 1990s, a number of researchers documented a rise in the salience of European integration as a political issue among European electorates (e.g. Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Franklin & Wlezien, 1997; Hix & Lord, 1997; Hooghe & Marks, 1999). While noting that in previous research, the European issue did not seem to be particularly important to voters in either domestic or European elections, Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) nonetheless referred to it as a "sleeping giant" with the potential to radically alter the shape of party competition on both the national and supranational scenes – a metaphor that swiftly took hold in the literature on the subject.

While there were and are some dissenters to this view – for example, Mair (2000) and Green-Pedersen (2012), who posited that Europeanisation of domestic politics was unlikely since "those who could wake [the giant] up generally have no incentive to do so and those who have an incentive cannot" (p. 115) – the majority of research has found a significant increase in the salience of European integration on the national electoral level (De Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Statham & Trenz, 2013; Hobolt, 2016).

Something that is generally uncontested is the superficial way that the European issue manifests itself in party competition; or the relationship between parties' overall ideology and their position on European integration (and many of the specific policies of the European Union) that was demonstrated in Figure 4.1. In short, the European issue is orthogonally oriented to overall ideology. In two-dimensional modelling, where parties are charted on the basis of their overall ideological positions and their positions on European integration, scholars

have consistently found a curvilinear relationship between the two, where support for European integration is highest among parties near the centre, and lowest at the extremes of left and right (Hix & Lord, 1997; Aspinwall, 2002; Marks, Wilson, and Ray; 2002; Aspinwall, 2007). This familiar "inverted U" pattern has been replicated in different studies using different data sources on party ideology produced by different methodologies (expert surveys, content analysis, etc.), and appears to be something of an expert consensus. [67]

However, exactly why the European dimension is structured in this way *vis-à-vis* overall ideology remains a matter of debate. Some scholars have posited that party positions on European integration are largely a function of positions on economic issues like common regulation (e.g. Tsebelis & Garrett, 2000). However, most research has found that positions on sociocultural issues like immigration and multiculturalism have greater association with a party's European views than economic ideology (e.g. Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Marks & Steenbergen, 2004; Kriesi, 2007). In the way that virtually any simple and elegant theoretical construct appears far more complex when applied to empirical facts, the way in which the European integration issue is politicised by any given country's national political actors is likely highly conditioned on the baseline salience of the issue, the chosen strategies of parties and politicians, and the way in which traditional ideological and partisan cleavages in that country conform to the European dimension (De Vries, 2007; Guinaudeau & Persico, 2013; Hoeglinger, 2016; Hobolt & Rodon, 2020).

There have been a number of important offshoots and implications of this research, from the different origins of Euroscepticism on the left – opposition to increasing market

[67] "The inverted U-form can be estimated with a second-order polynomial: European Integration = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ Ideology + β_2 Ideology^2, where $\beta_1 > 0$ and $\beta_2 < 0$. Notice that support for European integration has its maximum at Ideology = $-\beta_1/(2\beta_2)$ and, by definition, support by an extreme left-wing party is β_0 and by an extreme right-wing party is $\beta_0 + 10\ (\beta_1 + 10\beta_2)$" (Esteve-González & Theilen, 2018).

liberalisation – and right – opposition grounded in political and cultural nationalism (e.g. De Vries & Edwards, 2009); to the efficacy of anti-Europe appeals in the strategies of niche parties (e.g. Jensen & Spoon, 2010); to the strategic responses of mainstream parties (e.g. Meijers, 2017). However though, much of this literature could be characterised as explaining the Euroscepticism of the ideological extremes rather than the pro-European positions of the centre. Since Euroscepticism has been growing as a salient political issue and it is almost uniformly the province of extreme, anti-system, and protest parties, it is no wonder that academic attention has focused on explaining what Taggart (1998) memorably called a "touchstone of dissent" for the ideological fringes.[68] But that does not diminish the importance of understanding the centre's broad support for European integration.

The most common explanation for this phenomenon in the literature is the simplest – that the European Union is supported by centrist parties because it is "a centrist project" (Marks et al., 2006). This is self-evidently true in that the founding fathers of the European Union (Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi, Robert Schuman, etc.) were members of mainstream, "centrist" parties (the three pioneers mentioned were all Christian democrats, but others were liberals or social democrats).[69] In this way, European integration is – quite literally

[68] A note on populism is necessary here. As discussed at greater length in Chapter 2, the definition of "populism" is notoriously slippery, and particularly so for such a ubiquitous term (Bale, Van Kessel, & Taggart, 2011; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013). While there is no question that populism – vaguely defined as a political style emphasising anti-corruption and anti-elite appeals in an attempt to speak to a monolithic, nationalist conception of "the people" – overlaps heavily with both overall extremism and Euroscepticism (Polk et al, 2017), this thesis adopts the view of populism as a political style or method and entirely several from a party's spatial ideology (Mudde, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). In a study of populist rhetoric, Curini (2020) agrees, terming anti-corruption and anti-elite sentiment as a "quasi-valence" attribute, distinct from ideological positioning. Discussion on this point continues in the following section on governing.

[69] Importantly, the term "centrist" is often used to describe established mainstream parties like De Gasperi's Christian Democracy or Schuman's Popular Republican Movement, even if they were not truly in the centre of the ideological spectrum. Depending on the age of the source, this can be explained either as an artefact of the times – Christian democratic parties could easily be described as "centrist" in comparison to fascists and communists – or as the erosion of language and the imprecise definition of the word that partially inspires this thesis.

– the project of these centrists and their successors. However, there is another possible meaning of this phrase, similar but analytically distinct in its implications; the idea that the process of European integration has been carried out by centrists because *the idea itself* is inherently ideologically centrist. Quoting Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge (1994) in stressing that parties have "essential and indelible associations with particular issues and policies" (p. 24), Marks, Wilson, and Ray (2002) posit that European integration is one of those issues and policies comprising the centrist *Weltanschuung*.

Aspinwall (2002) pushes this concept further. In one of the early studies demonstrating the "inverted U-curve," he writes:

> "Centrist ideology is characterized by an acceptance of interdependence as a fait accompli; interdependence is viewed as a positive development, provided that states act in a responsible and cooperative manner. Centrists see interdependence as a byproduct of the increasing openness of the developed world, including increases in trade, investment and financial capital movement. They accept the liberal arguments associated with this openness, namely that it leads to aggregate welfare gains. The creation of binding rules within international organizations is a necessary and welcome consequence of interdependence because they lead to less free-riding, greater transparency, lower transaction costs and other important common benefits. Thus, centrists tend to take an instrumental, pragmatic view of integration, seeing it as a useful step to ensuring economic prosperity and peace" (p. 88).

In his conclusions, Aspinwall (2002) goes on to write that his study opens up another important avenue of research:

> "…ultimately it is worth investigating how governments come to be centrist in the first place. If member states with long-standing pro-European reputations have achieved this reputation *because they have centrist governments,* rather than because their histories or economies determine a national interest that is pro-European, a major challenge to the theoretical canon would be posed" (p. 106).

What he writes about the centrist governments of member states is *a fortiori* true about the centrist parties often making up those governments. And yet, it does not appear that his challenge has been taken up; there has been no significant scholarly exploration of this important topic since.

Therefore, the following hypotheses – all concerning party characteristics uniquely or particularly applicable to centrist parties – are offered as possible explanations for this fascinating and crucial puzzle. The first two hypotheses are ideological, positing that the specific ideological reason for a party's centrist image could be the reason for their position on European integration. The third concerns incumbency and government participation, the idea that the direct interaction with European institutions that centrist parties have more of than others is the cause. And the fourth, an original argument, considers party strategy in asking if centrist parties are single-issue parties whose zeal for integration is the point, rather than a by-product, of their centrist image.

The issue of European integration is highly complex, touching on a great number of policy questions and intersecting many ideological values, with myriad economic, sociocultural, and historical implications (Maag, 2015). While the issue's relationship with the political centre is undoubtedly similarly complex, it is too significant an intellectual riddle – and too important in both domestic and global politics – to be ignored in a thesis concerned with the nature of the centre.

Hypotheses

Moderation on the Economic Dimension

The first place to look for a connection between overall ideological centrism and support for European integration is a party's moderation on the economic dimension. The

theory posited here is that European integration is a "centrist project" in that it imposes a set of economically moderate policy outcomes upon its member states. However, before that theory is outlined, the relationship between overall ideology and economic ideology must be established.

Simply put, a party's overall ideology owes a great deal to its economic ideology. For much of the past several decades, scholars have largely buttressed Downs' (1957) assumption that party ideology in the advanced Western world – the signifier of a party's position on the main axis of political contestation in a society – is virtually coterminous with its views on the state's intervention in the economy, an assumption that has guided studies of political economy since. For one example, Huber and Inglehart (1995) found that in nearly all of the 42 countries they surveyed, issues of "economic or class conflict" were the primary component of the major axis of political competition. For another, in performing a factor analysis of Laver & Hunt's (1992) survey results, Warwick (2002) also found that economic issues were the main determinants of a party's overall ideological position. And in his own survey of 36 nations, Lijphart (2012) found that for the period from the end of World War II through the early part of the 21st century, the economic dimension was important in the politics of all 36, and the most salient issue dimension in nearly all of them. There is a clear scholarly consensus on the strong relationship between a party's overall ideology and its position on the economic dimension.

Of course, as previously discussed in this chapter and elsewhere, economic issues are neither the only important political controversies in the European public sphere, nor are they the sole component of the overall super-issue dimension – they are paired with sociocultural issues on both counts. Granted, there is no defined agreement on which specific issues comprise the sociocultural dimension (or even on the dimension's proper designation), nor on

the degree to which sociocultural issues impact party competition and vote choice in relation to economic issues. Inevitably, this means that even though economic ideology is obviously a major component of overall ideology, the exact terms of that importance (both in relation to other issues and over time) are hotly debated.

Regardless, for the purpose of this hypothesis, there appears to be significant overlap between an overall centrist ideology and moderation on the economic dimension. Of the 194 parties coded as centrist over the 1999-2019 course of the CHES in the descriptive analysis in Chapter 3 (those that had an overall ideology rating greater than 4 and less than 6), 131, or more than two thirds, had a similarly moderate rating on the economic dimension. Clearly, it is safe to say that moderation on the economic dimension is strongly correlated to a party's overall centrist ideology, and reasonable to say that the former is an obvious reason for the latter.

The question then becomes: why would economic moderation imply support for European integration? In short, this hypothesis argues that the economic policy of the European Union is neither strictly right-wing nor left-wing but appears to resemble a compromise between the two.

Weighing the volume of scholarly literature, the idea that European integration largely serves to advance the priorities of the economic right is far more common than the opposite conclusion (e.g. Fligstein & Mara-Drita, 1996; Gabel, 1998; Brinegar, Jolly, & Kitschelt, 2004; Hermann, 2007). The reasons behind this view are simple. The European Single Market – the internal marketplace made up of all EU member states plus the four countries of the European Free Trade Association – stands as the totemic achievement of economic liberalisation. At the core of the Single Market are the so-called "four freedoms" guaranteeing the free movement

of goods, services, capital and labour throughout the Union.[70] These in turn promote economic competition, specialisation of production, and greater efficiencies in price, choice, and quality – all of which have been lodestars of right-wing economic ideology for generations.[71]

And since political integration has not proceeded at the same pace as economic integration, the existing European institutions do not have the power to assert themselves in the market the way an interventionist, redistributive state can – using taxation and welfare provision to ensure economic equality and justice (Majone, 1997; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Indeed, the cherished "European social model" of economic progress and competitiveness married to that equality and justice, while rhetorically championed by the European Union, is largely the product of the individual member states, as most social welfare programmes are created and run by national governments (Scharpf, 2002; Geyer, 2000).

Together, these facts offer compelling evidence that European integration is a process driven by, and benefitting, those on the economic right.

However, this view is by no means complete, and a more comprehensive look at the EU's role in economic policy reveals many reasons to see European integration as a boost to the economic left. While there is no question that the EU is not a traditional welfare state, that does not mean that Brussels simply abandons Europeans to the mercy of unrestrained markets.

The most influential figure in European integration over the last 50 years, former Commission President Jacques Delors, promoted the EU as a guarantor of what he termed "regulated capitalism" (Ross, 1995), an ambition befitting an entity whose governance

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[70] European Commission. *The European Single Market.* Retrieved 18 April 2021 from https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market_en

[71] Interestingly, while the EU is often invoked as an exemplar of liberalised markets, trade between member states is treated very differently than trade between a member state and countries outside the bloc, particularly when it comes to agriculture. See: Von der Burchard, H., Barigazzi, J., & Oroschakoff, K. (2019, 17 December). Here Comes European Protectionism. *Politico.* https://www.politico.eu/article/european-protectionism-trade-technology-defense-environment/

structure and competences have allowed it to expand as a regulatory presence, rather than a "positive," fiscally interventionist or redistributive state (Majone, 1997). This vision sees European integration as a tool for ensuring economic fairness and equality, traditional aims of the left, through means other than direct state intervention. As Hooghe (1998) writes:

> "Proponents of regulated capitalism want to create a European liberal democracy capable of regulating markets, redistributing resources, and shaping partnership among public and private actors. They contend that the single market works more efficiently if political actors provide collective goods such as European-wide transport and communications infrastructure, information networks, workforce skills, and research and development" (p. 459).

Delors' vision, while only partially come to fruition, has reshaped the European Union along these lines. Regulated capitalism requires regulations, and Brussels has promulgated rules governing virtually every area of Europeans' economic life. In the workplace, European law lays down basic standards on individual workers' rights, mandates a degree of employee consultation, and enforces against discrimination in labour markets (Sapir, 2006). In commercial relations, European regulations entitle consumers to safe and healthy products, fair and transparent contracts, and processes for redress in the case of disputes (Weatherill, 2013). In the areas of competition and industrial policy, the EU has shown significant enthusiasm for using state power to break up monopolies and punishing unfair business practices (Stucke & Grunes, 2016). And in the nascent digital realm, the EU has led the rich world in establishing the data and privacy rights of individuals and reining in the ambitions of multinational technology companies (Goddard, 2017).

As Figure 4.2 shows, another priority of left parties, one that meshes well with their preference for state intervention and regulation in the economy, is the environment. Given the nature of many environmental problems, which produce externalities that transcend national

borders, supranational bodies are well-placed to deal with these challenges. The EU has taken to this responsibility, producing "green" regulations on areas ranging from climate change and emissions control (Jordan et al., 2010), to water pollution (Wurzel, 2002), to biodiversity (Baker, 2003). The EU has also been extremely active in promoting the causes of environmental sustainability and protection on the world stage (Wurzel & Connelly, 2010), to such an extent that it "has emerged as the undisputed leader in international environmental politics" (Keleman, 2010).

Whether they are designed to protect workers, consumers, or the environment, the EU bureaucracy presides over a mass of supranational regulations standing as a bulwark against the free market. Through these rules, Brussels oversees large swathes of the continent's economic activity, and it could not be fairly considered to have a light touch. In fact, due to the combination of its comparatively high regulatory requirements and the large, affluent population living under them, the EU is often the imperator of global regulatory standards, forcing other nations to raise their own if they wish to do business in Europe (Bradford, 2020).

All this being said, opinions of the EU are often grounded less in concrete reality, and more in its potential. Parties and voters view the EU not just by what it is and what it has done, but by what it can be and what it might do (DeVries, 2020). Thus, the idea that the EU has been, to this point, primarily a market-making institution – regardless of its objective veracity – is only one component in ideological attitudes towards integration. The cry for "more Europe, not less," has not been uncommon on the left during times of economic crisis, when markets fail and citizens are thought most vulnerable to the excesses of capitalism.[72] In this sense, the idea that the EU has already created and largely perfected a frictionless marketplace

[72] e.g. Schayan, J. (13 August 2012). *"We need more Europe"*. Deutschland.de. Retrieved 15 April 2021 from https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/politics/germany-europe/we-need-more-europe

could even be held as evidence that *future* integration will be mostly concerned with developing the institutional capacity for large-scale interventions in that market, on behalf of the poor and middle classes.

Recent developments show proof of the possibilities. Although the COVID-19 pandemic obviously had no effect on the views of European voters or the positions of European parties during the time period covered in this thesis, the most significant public event since the World Wars is a clear example of the promise that European integration has always held in terms of using state power to advance social welfare. NextGenerationEU, the €750 billion fiscal rescue plan disbursed to member states to prop up struggling economies was financed by the first-ever issuance of common European debt, the kind of strong governmental intervention in the market economy generally advocated by left-wing parties.[73] Early on in the pandemic, member states delegated responsibility for vaccine provision to the Commission, a massive increase in the central bureaucracy's powers and visibility. This step was taken with an eye towards efficient purchasing and the equitable distribution of jabs once they became available, thus making sure that pharmaceutical companies could not play member states against each other – another layer of insulation from the market.[74] And the current EU budget – the largest ever – also provides funds for unemployment reinsurance programs, environmental protection and sustainability measures, and reiterates the current Commission's call for a European minimum wage, all programmes meant to foster greater equality and inclusivity.[75]

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[73] Brunsden, J., Fleming, S., & Khan, M. (2020, 21 July). EU recovery fund: How the plan will work. *Financial Times*.

[74] Why the EU's covid-19 vaccination programme went wrong. (2021, 31 March). *The Economist*.

[75] European Commission. *Recovery plan for Europe*. Retrieved 14 April 2020 from https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

In addition to all these plausible reasons why the EU might be seen as an economically moderate institution, there is the matter of differential context. Research has consistently shown that national political context is important in colouring ideological perspectives towards European integration. For example, Ray (2004) found that right-wing citizens of countries with expansive welfare provisions were more supportive of integration, because they believed it would push their total experience of public policy to the right. But at the same time, right-wing citizens of countries with more modest welfare provision were more sceptical of integration because they believed it would push policy leftward. A similar conclusion has been reached by other studies (e.g. Brinegar et al., 2004; Garry & Tilley, 2009; 2015), showing that ideologically based attitudes towards European integration can vary due to the conditions of the local political economy. Naturally, this dynamic makes measuring the link between ideology and position on integration far more complex and may be responsible for the inconsistent results of research on the question, as the political and economic circumstances shift across countries and over time.

This uncertainty feeds into one final conception of European integration as an economically moderate project. When used as an adjective, "moderate" refers to a state of avoiding extremes, but as a verb, "moderate" gains an additional implication – acting to make something less extreme, or metaphorically, acting to flatten mountains and fill valleys. The European Union is unquestionably an institution of homogenisation. It sets common standards on its member states and where possible, acts on behalf of them all, as a community. In economic policy, it flattens mountains and fills valleys by constraining a diversity of approaches – countries may only spend so much, they must use the same medium of exchange, they must abide by the same rules in trade, and so forth. This is the basis of the EU's "level playing field," where outliers are smoothed away in the name of harmonisation and stability.

And from where does this institution of homogenisation derive its political legitimacy? From a parliament that has been dominated since its inception by a grand coalition of the centre-left and centre-right, compromising across the centre ground. There is thus good reason to believe that the more power European institutions hold over the continent's political economy, the more standardised, homogenous, and therefore "moderate" the bloc's economic policy will be.

Given that the European Union can be simultaneously – and pejoratively – characterised as "neoliberal" from the left,[76] and mocked for its "red tape" and "overbearing bureaucracy" from the right,[77] it is entirely plausible that a party's general support for European integration is due to its moderate position on the economic dimension. This allows for the statement of the first hypothesis of this chapter:

H_1: A centrist party's moderation on the economic dimension is associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

Syncretic Liberalism

Another possible explanation for the apparent link between an overall centrist orientation and support for European integration is a syncretic centrist party's liberal balance of positions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions. The theory posited here is that rather than a "centrist" project, European integration is a "liberal" construction, with institutions that advance both right-wing outcomes in the economic realm, and libertarian-

[76] e.g. Sabbah, D. (2018, 7 December). EU support for austerity opens door to far right, Corbyn says. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/07/eu-support-for-austerity-opens-door-to-far-right-corbyn-says

[77] e.g. Parker, G. (2020, 5 February). Sajid Javid to issue 'Brexit red tape challenge' to public. *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/4b0d8310-4353-11ea-abea-0c7a29cd66fe

leaning outcomes in sociocultural life. Since there is some overlap between the group of centrist parties (particularly syncretic centrist parties) and the liberal party family, it is through the connection between liberalism and European integration that centrist parties get their pro-integration reputation.

Two important notes must be made here. First, not all syncretic liberal parties are centrist parties. The argument in this hypothesis is that *enough* syncretic liberal parties are centrist parties to colour the view of observers that what is really a liberal phenomenon is a centrist phenomenon, when those two things are clearly not the same. And second, the converse is also true – not all centrist parties are syncretic liberal parties. Because of this, the first two hypotheses are interrogating separate groups of centrist parties because they derive their centrist images through different means. While different, these two explanations need not be in conflict – it is certainly possible that a puzzle as complex as support for European integration may be simultaneously accounted for by multiple, superficially competing explanations.

The first step in exploring this particular explanation is establishing the relationship between centrism and the fusion of left and right.

The theory in Chapter 2 and descriptive analysis performed in Chapter 3 demonstrate clearly that moderation on the economic dimension is not the only route to an ideologically centrist image, as not all centrist parties are particularly economically moderate. Instead, a party's ideologically centrist image can be derived from non-centrist positions that, in effect, balance each other out. This is possible because, as previously discussed, the main axis of contestation in European politics has shifted over the past several decades from one focussed largely on economics to one that also incorporates sociocultural issues, resulting in the overall super-issue continuum that runs between left-libertarian and right-authoritarian poles.

Therefore, a party combining two normally disassociated, generally opposed positions (left-authoritarian or right-libertarian) would plausibly be considered centrist on balance.

This concept has been mentioned in scholarly literature, but never fully explored. Certainly, the idea that the "Third Way" parties of the 1990s – electorally successful centre-left parties such as the UK's "New" Labour under Tony Blair, the US' Democrats under Bill Clinton, and Germany's Social Democratic Party under Gerhard Schröder[78] – pivoted to the political centre by adopting pieces of their opponents' policy program is prevalent in both academic and media discourse.[79] And it is also true as a matter of style that these leaders generally tended to embrace "the centre" while avoiding words like "moderate" to describe their positions. For example, Blair favoured the formulation "radical centrist" popularised by, among others, Wolfe (1996) and Giddens (1998), while Schröder preferred "Die Neue Mitte" or "the new centre;" indeed, Blair and Schröder co-authored a manifesto by that title in 1999.[80]

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[78] While these are the most famous examples, parties from many other countries – including Austria, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and a range of developing countries – are mentioned in both scholarly literature and news media as adhering to this philosophy. See the following note.

[79] For examples in scholarly work, see: Dahrendorf (1999); Giddens (2000); Powell (2000); Lipset (2001); Ryner (2002).

For examples in news media, see:

Edsall, T. (1998, 28 June). Clinton and Blair Envision a "Third Way" International Movement. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/28/clinton-and-blair-envision-a-third-way-international-movement/0bc00486-bd6d-4da4-a970-5255d7aa25d8/

Rodwedder, C. (2000, 5 June). Blair, Schroeder and Clinton Find Third Way May Be Passe. *The Wall Street Journal.* https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB960150762668805392

Mellbye, A. (2003, 10 February). A brief history of the third way. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/feb/10/labour.uk1

Walt, S. (2009, 19 November). The Third-Rate Third Way. *Foreign Policy.* https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/19/the-third-rate-third-way/

[80] Blair, A. & Schröder, G. (1999, 8 June). *Europe: The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte.* Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/19990819090124/http://www.labour.org.uk/views/items/00000053.html

And while Labour and the SPD are often considered social democratic parties that shifted to the centre during the aforementioned time period, other established or initially centrist parties – syncretic centrist parties by this thesis' typology – have made similar claims to the "radical centre," for example, the UK's Liberal Democrats (or at least their liberal wing, as opposed to their social democratic wing),[81] the Netherlands' Democrats 66,[82] and Spain's Citizens[83]. This identification is virtually always made in similar terms – that the party transcends the ideological divide between left and right by appropriating ideas and policy from both sides. In all these examples, the party's centrist image is an amalgamation of a position on the economic dimension generally associated with right-wing parties and a position on the sociocultural dimension generally associated with left-wing parties.

However, empirical research on how these positions translate into an overall centrist ideological image is scarce if it exists at all. The only academic study to touch on similar themes focused on voters. In Rodon's (2015) work on the reasons that survey respondents self-identify with the political centre, he tested a novel hypothesis – that centrists were those with extreme but conventionally opposing positions on the two ideological dimensions. By averaging out those positions, respondents could truthfully identify as centrists overall. Rodon tested this "balance-out hypothesis" as a predictor of centrist self-identification, along with a handful of alternative explanations, and found that although it was indeed a significant reason for centrist

[81] Stratton, A. & Wintour, P. (2011, 13 March). Nick Clegg tells Lib Dems they belong in 'radical centre' of British politics. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/mar/13/nick-clegg-lib-dems-centre

[82] Het radicale midden. (2011, 11 November). *HP/De Tijd.* https://www.hpdetijd.nl/2011-11-11/het-radicale-midden/

[83] Brown, S. & Von der Burchard, H. (2016, 8 June). Albert Rivera, Spain's 'radical centrist'. *Politico.* https://www.politico.eu/article/spains-sensible-citizen-plays-piggy-in-the-middle-catalan-independence-elections-corruption/

self-identification in some countries (Ireland and Spain, most prominently), the exact opposite was true in others (Finland and Sweden), with no effect overall.

There is good reason to think that a similar study focused on parties might yield different results. Not only are there obvious superficial examples of centrist parties claiming to hold such an ideological profile (and being evaluated as such by experts), but a significant alternative explanation for centrist ideology among voters – a lack of political interest leading to a lack of political sophistication – is clearly not a factor for parties.

A hypothesis requiring a view of the European Union as a "centrist project" because many centrist parties are syncretic liberal parties – though not all centrist parties are syncretic liberal parties and not all syncretic liberal parties are centrist – therefore seems plausible. But neither Rodon's (2015) "balance-out" hypothesis, nor the syncretic typology proposed in Chapter 2 necessitates that a centrist image only results from the combination of a right-wing economic position with a libertarian sociocultural position. Theoretically, a centrist image could also result from the combination of a left-wing economic position with an authoritarian sociocultural position. In other words, the mechanism translating extreme positions into centrist ones is the merging of generally opposing tendencies; the theory is agnostic on the direction of those paired opposing tendencies.

However, in empirical reality, this appears not to be the case. Figure 4.3 displays findings – that to the present author's knowledge are entirely novel and have not been previously published – proceeding from an attempt to quantify the syncretic centrist effect, or exactly how "opposing" ideological positions cancel or balance each other out, resulting in a centrist image. The graph charts all Western European parties rated by the CHES during the 1999-2019 period on two variables. The x-axis indicates overall ideology, and the y-axis indicates the party's syncretic score. This latter metric is an original invention calculated as the

difference between a party's ideological positions on the economic and sociocultural dimension. For example, an extreme right-authoritarian party would have an economic ideological rating of 10 – the most extreme right rating possible. It would also have a socioeconomic ideological rating of 10 – the most extreme authoritarian rating possible. Its syncretic score, subtracting the socioeconomic rating from the economic rating, is therefore 0. An extreme left-libertarian party, though having the opposite economic and sociocultural ratings – both 0 – would have the same syncretic score, also 0. This is because both hypothetical parties lie directly on the overall super-issue dimension, whereas a party with a high or low syncretic score deviates significantly from that axis.

Since both economic and sociocultural ideology are scored on an eleven-point scale from 0 to 10, the resulting syncretic metric runs from -10 – indicating a party combining an extreme left-wing economic position with an extreme traditional-authoritarian-nationalist sociocultural position – to 10 – indicating a party combining an extreme right-wing economic position with an extreme libertarian sociocultural position. Parties scoring a 0 offer a "standard" right or left super-issue programme, i.e. *laissez faire* nationalism or libertarian socialism.[84] Therefore, the further a party's syncretic score deviates from 0, the more syncretic it is, and the more it combines progressively more extreme "oppositional" positions.

[84] Bearing in mind that parties near 0 in syncretic score are not necessarily moderate – as long as their economic and sociocultural positions are matched in the common left-libertarian, right-authoritarian pattern, parties can be extreme and still rate with a neutral syncretic score.

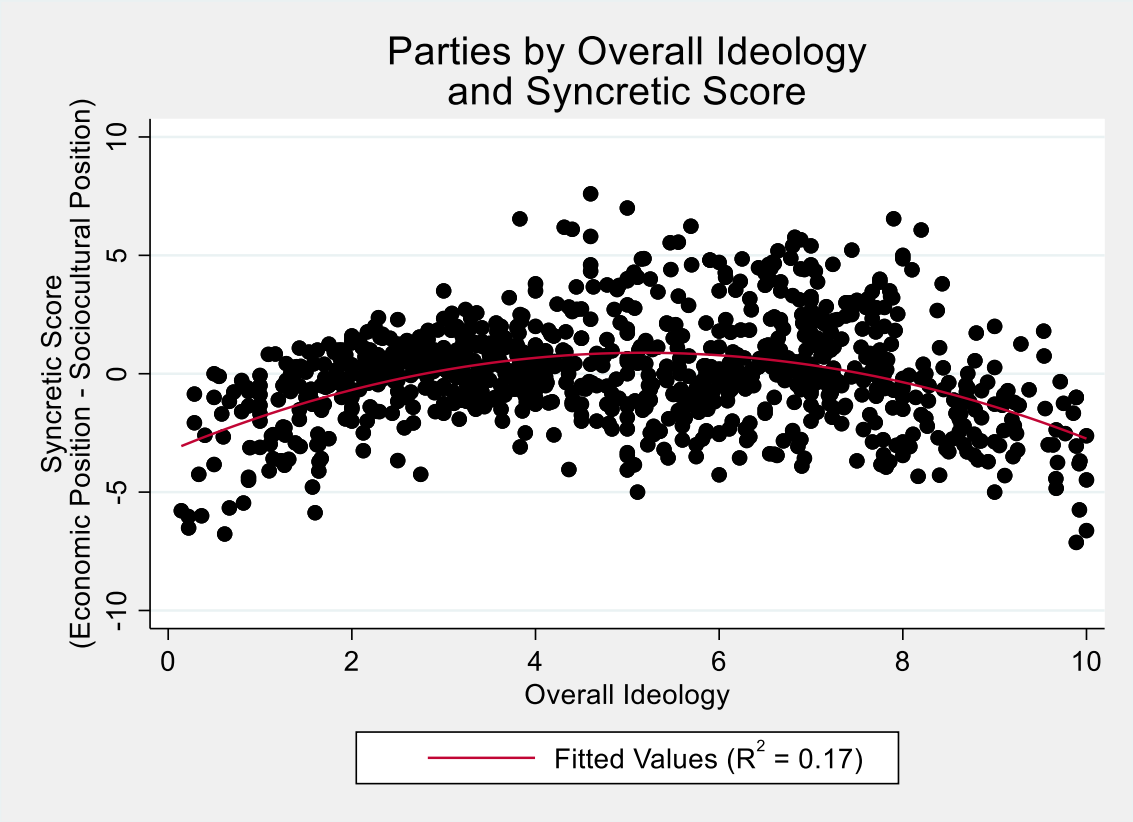

Figure 4.3: Parties charted by overall ideology and syncretic score – calculated as the difference between a party's ideological positions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions. A -10 syncretic score indicates a party combining an extreme left-wing economic position with an extreme traditional-authoritarian-nationalist sociocultural position. A 10 syncretic score indicates a party combining an extreme right-wing economic position with an extreme libertarian sociocultural position. A 0 syncretic score indicates a "standard" right or left combination of positions. Data taken from the CHES.

There is obviously much about the variance in overall ideology that syncretic score fails to explain, per the relatively low coefficient of determination. However, there is an unmistakable pattern to the results showing that parties with negative syncretic scores – combining traditional-authoritarian-nationalist sociocultural positions with left-wing economic positions – are associated with political extremism, while parties with positive syncretic scores – combining libertarian sociocultural positions with right-wing economic positions – are associated with political centrism.

In other words, combining left-wing positions with right-wing positions as Third Way or "radical centrist" parties claim to do only results in a centrist image if the party combines traditionally *sociocultural left* positions with traditionally *economic right* positions. A party that does the inverse does not enjoy a centrist image "on balance" – on the contrary, it is viewed as extreme.

Effectively, this means that while the most moderate parties in Europe are considered centrist, *so too are the most extreme* – but only because they are extreme in a liberal direction. This is certainly an unexpected finding, with significant implications for how political ideology is viewed and measured, which will be discussed further on.

However, those implications are irrelevant to the current hypothesis, which specifies syncretic liberalism as the mechanism connecting centrism to European integration. Therefore, this theory relies also on a conception of the European Union as an economically right-wing and socioculturally green-alternative-libertarian institution. The former was discussed in the previous section and remains applicable here – that because the European Single Market guarantees the free flow of goods, services, capital, and labour across the borders of member states, it serves the market-liberalising principles of economically right-wing parties. The latter is potentially manifested in at least four different ways.

The first concerns the European Convention on Human Rights and its progeny, the European Court of Human Rights (popularly known as the Strasbourg Court). The Convention and its associated Court have had a significant impact on a multitude of issues generally conceived as being facets of the sociocultural dimension, including criminal justice and capital punishment; the right to privacy; the decriminalisation of homosexuality; protections for ethnic and religious minorities; the national security powers of the state, and many more (Keller & Stone Sweet, 2008). This impact is generally regarded as expanding the

scope of individual rights and limiting the power of governments to curtail them, a condition welcomed by sociocultural libertarians.[85] And although the European Communities and their successor, the European Union, are entirely several entities from the Convention and Court,[86] they are all part of the wider trend towards supranational European integration and are best understood as one larger political issue, thereby linking support for European institutions with a general sociocultural libertarian outlook.

The second way European integration favours a green-alternative-libertarian sociocultural outlook envelops the first but expands beyond it. All European institutions require some delegation of sovereignty from the national governments party to its creation. The most obvious example is the common currency. Countries adopting the Euro – and aside from Denmark and the erstwhile member United Kingdom, adoption of the Euro is a non-negotiable condition for joining the European Union, even if, in practice, enlargement of the Eurozone is on indefinite hold – permanently lose control of national monetary policy. There are many more. Among others: national governments may not contravene European regulations with their own; national governments must abide by the rulings of the European Court of Justice; and national governments may not abrogate the four freedoms – again, the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour throughout the Union (Chalmers & Arnull, 2015). These features, by definition, reduce the power of national governments and favour internationalism and multilateralism, a prospect generally appealing to socioculturally alternative or libertarian parties and generally disparaged by highly nationalist or traditionalist parties.

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[85] Sumption, J. (2019, 8 June). *Human Rights and Wrongs.* Reith Lectures. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0005msd

[86] The terms of the EU's accession to the ECHR have been under negotiation for years and remain ongoing at this writing.

European integration's third obvious appeal to socioculturally green-alternative-libertarian parties lies in its identification with a multicultural, universalist ethos. While the various European institutions are in substance multilateral constructions of national governments, they are pervasively linked with the social construction of a European identity or identities (Kohli, 2000). The idea that the various European peoples share a common heritage, narrative, and destiny is unquestionably an alternative to – and perhaps purposefully hostile to – nationalist sentiments localised in the member states (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009). Through this lens, European integration could certainly be seen as a force for multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, and opposition to these values is a core feature of the political appeal of traditional-authoritarian-nationalist parties.

The fourth and final potential connection between European integration and sociocultural liberalism is very likely the strongest. By far the most contentious of the four freedoms is the movement of people, a principle that has encouraged massive, asymmetric "internal" migration from the newer, less developed member states to the longstanding, more developed member states.[87] The immigration issue's place in the ideological dimensional structure has been disputed, understandable given the fact that immigration has significant ramifications on both economic and sociocultural life. While earlier research indicated that public attitudes towards immigration were a function of personal economic interest (e.g. Scheve & Slaughter, 2001; Mayda, 2006; O'Rourke & Sinnott, 2006), later studies have rebutted that conclusion, showing that views of immigration are primarily shaped by sociocultural values and concern for its sociocultural impact on the nation (e.g. Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007;

[87] Evidence suggests that the free movement principle is responsible for approximately 28% of intra-European migration over the past 60 years, an estimate not including the even larger effect of wage differentials between member states. See: Rojas-Romagosa, H., & Bollen, J. (2018, 7 December). *Estimating migration changes from the EU's free movement of people principle*. VoxEU. https://voxeu.org/article/impact-eu-s-free-movement-people-principle-migration

Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). While the precise terms of this debate are certainly not settled, and some scholars reject what they see as a false dichotomy (e.g. Gidron & Hall, 2017; Adler & Ansell, 2020; Dancygier & Margalit, 2020), there is certainly overwhelming evidence in favour of the idea that even though it is an impossibly complex issue, immigration is highly politically salient, strongly linked to the sociocultural dimension, and a major driver of electoral support for extreme right and other anti-immigration parties (Golder, 2003; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Rydgren, 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). Mass immigration can be clearly related to the three previously discussed reasons that European integration could be considered a socioculturally liberal project, since increasing social diversity stokes demand for ever-increasing liberal pluralism; the ability to control immigration policy is perhaps the single most obvious example of national governments ceding sovereign authority to a supranational body; and support for immigration goes hand-in-hand with attitudes towards cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Immigration is, in many respects, the signal political issue of the 21st century, and unquestionably associated with both European integration and sociocultural liberalism.

However, a theoretically important but technically tricky distinction on the subject of immigration must be mentioned. There is significant difference between "internal" migration – the flow of peoples within Europe – and "external" migration – the inflow of non-European peoples to Europe (Geddes & Scholten, 2016). From an economic perspective, this is plain to see. The poorest member states of the EU (by 2019 GDP per capita) tend to be the formerly communist nations of Eastern Europe, but even they are several times richer than most countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia – countries where millions of would-be economic immigrants and refugees to Europe originate.[88]

[88] Economic data from: International Monetary Fund. *World economic outlook database, October 2019*. Retrieved 15 April 2021 from https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2019/October

The distinction is often more obvious from a sociocultural perspective. While it is true that the concept of pan-European identity is often dismissed by socioculturally authoritarian parties when it is expressed in terms of modern European integration, the idea of a shared set of European sociocultural values – primarily values at least rhetorically rooted in Europe's classical or Christian past – is prevalent on the right (Wodak, 2015). This means that across the ideological spectrum, a contrast can be drawn between the flow of EU citizens and immigration from outside the EU, and therefore, distinguishing parties on the basis of their positions on "immigration" can be technically difficult.

Figure 4.4 attempts to illustrate both the distinction between internal and external migration, as well as the challenges in disentangling one from the other. The panel on the left shows a party's syncretic score – introduced above as the difference between a party's economic and sociocultural ideological ratings – and its position on immigration policy. The further to the right on the x-axis, the more economically right and socioculturally libertarian the party – the further the left, the more economically left and socioculturally authoritarian. The panel on the right shows a party's syncretic score and its position on the EU Single Market, a variable specified by the CHES as "free movement of goods, services, capital and labor."

Migration data from: European Commission. *Statistics on migration to Europe.* Retrieved 15 April 2021 from https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en#overall-figures-of-immigrants-in-european-society

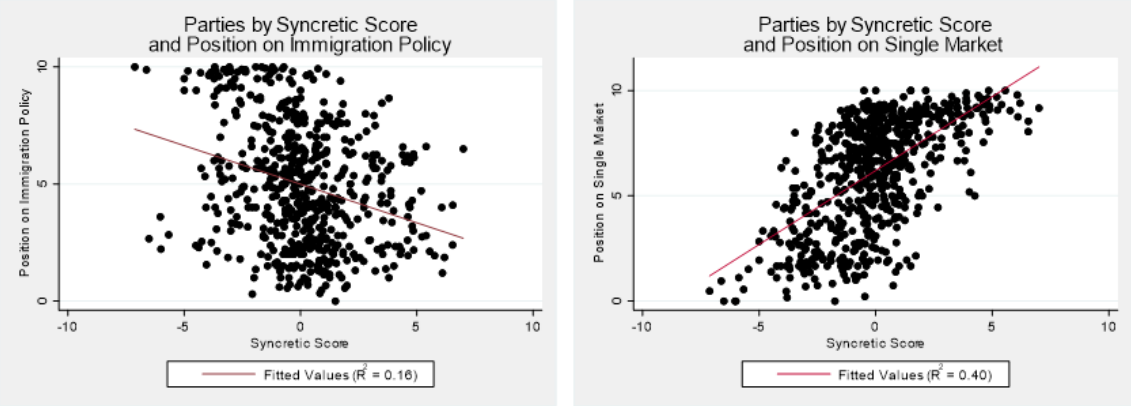

Figure 4.4: Left, parties graphed by position on immigration policy and syncretic score. Right, parties graphed by position on the European Single Market and syncretic score. Position on immigration is measured from 0 (strongly favours liberal policy) to 10 (strongly favours restrictive policy). Position on the Single Market is measured from 1 (strongly opposes) to 7 (strongly favours). Syncretic score is calculated as the difference between a party's ideological positions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions. A -10 syncretic score indicates a party combining an extreme left-wing economic position with an extreme traditional-authoritarian-nationalist sociocultural position. A 10 syncretic score indicates a party combining an extreme right-wing economic position with an extreme libertarian sociocultural position. Data taken from the CHES.

While there is a slight relationship between syncretic score and position on immigration policy – a negative syncretic score is weakly associated with a restrictive immigration policy and a positive syncretic score is associated with an expansive immigration policy – the relationship between syncretic score and position on the Single Market, which includes the free movement of people throughout the EU, is substantially stronger, with a more syncretic liberal ideological outlook linked to higher approval of the Single Market.

Granted, there is no question that parties can make a distinction between rejecting the free movement of people on the one hand, and embracing the free movement of goods, services, and capital on the other; the UK's Conservative Party made just that attempt to disaggregate the four freedoms during the negotiations over Brexit.[89] It is further true that no

[89] Parker, G., Foster, P., & Brunsden, J. (2020, 19 May). Britain's vision for EU trade deal prompts claims of cherry-picking. *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/134d5e8f-0fd3-4997-b4d8-897f7ca51326

such disaggregation is possible with the data available, and indeed no disaggregation is possible in principle, as Michele Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, repeatedly reminded his British counterparts; there can be no Single Market without the free movement of people. But all that being said, the fact that there is a relationship between centrism and syncretic liberalism, and a corresponding relationship between syncretic liberalism and support for the Single Market – and not necessarily to non-EU immigration policy – is an indication that this hypothesis is well-founded.

Taken altogether, there is every reason to think that the centrist affinity for European integration is, in actuality, a liberal affinity for European integration. Thus, the second hypothesis of the chapter:

H_2: A centrist party's syncretic liberalism is associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

Centrism and Governing

Another explanation for the apparent link between centrism and support for European integration is a party's experience in government. The logic underpinning this hypothesis is that since governing parties are more supportive of European integration and centrist parties are more likely to participate in government, then governing is the mechanism through which centrist parties favour integration more than extreme parties. Following this line of argument, the EU is not a "centrist project" per se, but a project created and sustained by the parties in government, which most often happen to be centrist.

The initial condition of this hypothesis is that governing parties are more supportive of European integration. There are at least two plausible reasons why.

First, there is the historical and institutional argument discussed previously in this chapter, as the most direct and literal explanation of European integration's description as a "centrist project." In this view, since the modern institutions of European integration were founded by a group of centrist politicians – officially recognised as the eleven founding fathers or pioneers of the European Union[90] – those institutions will forever be linked to the political traditions created by those men. Through their leadership, both in the European arena and in the national politics of the Inner Six member states (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), support for integration became intertwined in the mythological and programmatic fabric of their political parties, and that support continues to the present day.

While this argument is certainly persuasive, it does not completely suffice as an explanation. For one reason, many of the parties that the founding fathers represented no longer exist. While there are undoubtedly Italians on the centre-right who maintain the political traditions of De Gasperi's Christian Democracy, the active operations of that party ceased following the *Mani pulite* corruption scandal of the 1990s (Kalyvas & Van Kersbergen, 2010). France's entire political and constitutional structure changed in the years after the Treaty of Paris created the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, and parties on the French centre-right have merged, folded, re-formed, and dissolved many times since then (Knapp, 2003). Additionally, as previously discussed, whether these parties could truly have been described as "centrist" is debatable. Because the political spectrum in democracies of the time (or ostensible democracies, in the case of interwar Germany and Italy) included violent extremist movements like fascist and communist parties, social democratic and Christian

[90] European Union. *EU Pioneers*. Retrieved 18 April 2021 from https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/eu-pioneers_en

democratic parties may have been considered centrist by comparison, but their successors are not necessarily viewed in the same image. It is certainly questionable how much these facts might influence different parties, composed of different individuals, under different circumstances, more than 60 years later.

A second argument is more operational, dealing with a party's interactions with European institutions through their participation in government. As Adams, Bernardi, & Phillips (2020) summarise: "By attending European Union summits; by publicly meeting and consulting with European Union representatives; and by incorporating European directives into national legislation, governing parties respond to political and institutional constraints to act responsibly in line with and in support of the European Union" (p. 3). In this view, what matters is not political tradition or historical connection to the early European institutions, but the fact that a party is engaged with the regular conduct of government affairs.

The reasons why this would be the case are not entirely clear. Participation in government does require a party to be accountable for policy, and there is certainly no way that the national government of an EU member state can competently manage policy while avoiding interaction with European institutions. However, there seems to be no logical reason why these interactions would necessitate approval of European integration and support for European institutions. As the saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt," and working constantly with the European bureaucracy could easily provoke many ineluctable frustrations among national policymakers, making them less, rather than more supportive of both the European Union and integration in general.

Another possibility is cultural. By participating in government for the first time, parties become members of an exclusive "club" of parties that have been entrusted with the national interest by the electorate. In so doing, they also become important stakeholders in the

European project, and are slowly folded into the culture and ethos of the community. The change in perspective that accompanies the move from outside of national government to inside the Council of the European Union ought not be dismissed as a potential source of influence upon a party's position on integration.

Regardless of the mechanism, empirical evidence certainly supports the notion that governing parties are more pro-European integration than others (e.g. Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009; Statham et al., 2010; Conti & Memoli, 2012; Hobolt & DeVries, 2015). This dovetails with corresponding evidence that parties who have never participated in government – sometimes known as long-term opposition parties or challenger parties – strongly tend towards Euroscepticism; what Taggart (1998) referred to as a "touchstone of dissent" in domestic politics or that Sitter (2001) has called the "politics of opposition," whereby "opposition to government policy may sometimes be cast in terms of opposition to integration" (p. 24).

In his seminal book on this subject, Haas (1958) held it both ways: that the European communities were indeed built by politicians of the centre (largely liberals and Christian democrats), but more as a function of elites' economic imperatives and governing responsibilities than political ideology.[91]

The second condition – that centrist parties are more likely to participate in government – is difficult to formally prove, in that it entails some circular reasoning. "Centrist" parties are more likely to form government – in that the parties that have consistently formed government in the modern era are the most likely to be viewed by observers as the "centre" of politics. The term "mainstream party," though commonly used in scholarly research (and

[91] Haas (1958) also traces the pro-integrationist development of initially Eurosceptic parties like Germany's SPD through a process of policy accommodation in government, rather than through shifts in ideology.

generally formally defined), suffers from the same weakness – parties in the mainstream have *defined* the mainstream as the positions of those parties.

Nevertheless, it is self-evident that centrist parties tend to form government more frequently than extreme parties. Long-term opposition parties or challenger parties are not simply more Eurosceptic than governing parties – they are more extreme on the overall ideology scale (Taggart, 1998). The concept of middle centrism is also instructive here. As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, by virtue of their central location on the overall ideological continuum, many ideologically centrist parties are often in the centre of their party system, making them middle centrist parties. Since middle centrist parties lie between the major poles of competition in a party system, their opportunities to serve as a coalition partner are roughly double those of parties more extreme than the major poles, because a middle centrist party makes a plausible coalition partner for a government headed by either major pole. In short, their likely ideological centrism (since more middle centrist parties are also ideologically centrist parties) makes them attractive for parties looking to broaden cabinet composition through compromise and collaboration.

One final aspect of this hypothesis must be discussed, and that is the relationship between a party's actual service in government, and its expressed attitudes towards the institutions of the government – representative democracy, free and fair elections, constitutional order, the civil service, and other political parties, to name just a few. This is important in that it provides another metric by which to gauge the "governing potential" of a party and enrich the current hypothesis.

At its core, anti-establishment rhetoric signifies a party's rejection of the established political system of the country, even as it presumably engages in some aspects of it, such as elections. The heavy use of anti-establishment rhetoric is a well-known characteristic of long-

term opposition parties or challenger parties (e.g. Schedler, 1996; Barr, 2009; De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). This makes obvious sense, in that since challenger parties have been, by definition, excluded from governing power, they have a significant incentive to rail against the established *status quo* and essentially no incentive to avoid damaging the institutions of government that they have had no responsibility for stewarding (Engesser et al., 2017). Because of this, challenger parties tend to maintain their anti-establishment rhetorical strategy even when they take a share of governing power, and mainstream parties do not turn to such rhetoric simply because they fall out of power (Akkerman, De Lange, & Rooduijn, 2016).[92] In this way, the use of anti-establishment rhetoric may provide a better way to evaluate the spirit of the current hypothesis than a simple recording of which party was in power when – the overarching question is not strictly the relationship between a party's support for European integration and its participation in government, but the relationship between a party's support for European integration and its participation in the *established system of government.* "Governing parties" are therefore more than simply the parties in government; they are the parties that accept the government's legitimacy, the necessary limits on the government's power, and the standards of conduct that enable responsible government.

There is obvious overlap between this specific party strategy and the concept of populism. Although populism was discussed in Chapter 2 – particularly as it is sometimes associated with ideological extremism, as opposed to ideological centrism – that exploration merits reiteration here. Much like "centrist," "populist" is an adjective with many meanings in

[92] Ceron, Gandini, & Lodetti (2020) indicate that there is a slight reduction in parties' anti-establishment rhetoric upon forming government, but the effect is not consistent and relatively small overall. And while mainstream parties do not automatically turn to anti-establishment rhetoric upon losing an election, there is certainly evidence to indicate that they may adopt such rhetoric for other reasons, for example, the resonance of the strategy on specific issues or electoral competition from an anti-establishment rival (e.g. Rydgren, 2005; Bale et al., 2010; Mudde, 2013).

scholarly literature (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013).[93] It is formally used to denote a plethora of political concepts: from a "thin-centred" ideology (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008); to a personal characteristic of leadership (Weyland, 2001); to a method of communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Aslanidis, 2016).

As a study of ideology, this thesis has embraced the latter definition for one simple reason. Universal to all scholarly definitions, populists are focussed on the idea that they are the sole authentic political voice of "the people," a sacred truth used as justification for anything the populist might do, including rejecting liberal democratic norms (Werner-Müller, 2017). This means that populism can coexist easily alongside any political ideology – not simply the left or right, but also the centre or any other conceivable system of belief (Bale, 2013). This observation is most easily conducive to conceptualising populism as a method or style of politics, rather than a system of belief itself. As Norris & Inglehart (2018) write:

> "In the political sphere, populist arguments challenge the legitimacy of intermediate power structures linking citizens and the state in liberal democracies, including that of elected representatives, mainstream political parties, elected assemblies and parliaments, as well as the courts, judges, and rule of law, and public sector bureaucrats and mainstream media, along with the broader range of policy technocrats, professional think-tanks, academic opinion-formers, and scientific consultants… In this regard, populism is treated not as a distinct type of leadership, or even a family of political parties, as it is often assumed, but rather as a discourse about governance that can be adopted by actors across the entire ideological spectrum. We reject the notion that populism, in itself, makes other ideological claims about substantive or programmatic claims about what should be done; instead it is a rhetoric about the rightful location of governance authority in any society" (p. 216-217).

[93] This is to say nothing of the myriad uses the term "populist" has in popular discourse, where it is used "freely and imprecisely," and carries no systematic definition beyond a near-universal negative connotation (Bale, Van Kessel, & Taggart, 2011).

Importantly, while this thesis has theoretically cohered with this definition, it is not dependent upon it, and other theoretical approaches to populism could fit equally well with the conception of the centre as a political ideology found here.[94] Regardless of the theoretical connection between populism and anti-establishment rhetoric, the empirical connection is clear, and some research has linked a party's emphasis of anti-establishment rhetoric with a Eurosceptic position, although disentangling this factor from other, often overlapping party characteristics has obviously proven difficult (e.g. Polk & Rovny, 2017). However, that overlap presents an opportunity in this study, to operationalise the concept of a "governing party" through an emphasis on party rhetoric rather than simply through the party's electoral record. In other words, "governing parties" may be better defined and operationalised as those parties that refrain from attacking their country's established system of governing and sociopolitical institutions, rather than strictly those who form government.

Altogether, the idea that participation in and respect for government and the established political system is what links centrist parties to support for European integration is thoroughly plausible, and worthy of confirmation alongside other hypotheses concerning party characteristics. Thus, the third hypothesis of the chapter:

H_3: Centrist parties' experience in government – and their rhetorical support for government and its institutions – are associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

[94] Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2, even when populism is defined as an ideology in itself, it is conceptualised as entirely distinct from fuller, more developed ideologies. As Mudde (2004) writes, "populism can be easily combined with very different (thin and full) other ideologies, including communism, ecologism, nationalism or socialism" (p. 544).

European Integration as a Single Issue

One final possible explanation for the close relationship between centrist ideology and support for European integration is somewhat tautological; that centrist ideology is *entirely* concerned with supporting European integration, thus making centrist parties single-issue parties. This would mean that there is no mediating factor between centrist ideology and a pro-integrationist position; but that centrist parties exist solely (or overwhelmingly and primarily) to advance the cause of European integration and largely disregard other issues. Consider an analogy – this hypothesis posits that what green parties are to environmental causes, centrist parties are to European integration.

There is no consensus, formal definition of a single-issue party, and many of the definitions proffered in the literature do not necessarily fit the observed nature of centrist parties. Rogowski (1981) attempted such a formal definition based on the party or movement in question appearing quickly and without warning, grounding its political appeal on a highly restricted policy platform, and drawing support from across the existing political landscape. He also included in his definition the rapid demise of such an organisation when its goal had been accomplished or the issue otherwise lost salience with the electorate, a criterion that clashes with other early attempts to classify radical right parties like France's National Front (Mitra, 1988). Clearly, none of these criteria generally seem to describe centrist parties as a type.

That being said, there are parallels in the more recent literature on niche parties, as these are generally outlined as: appealing to voters on the basis of extremely limited issues; focusing on those issues that cross-cut existing cleavages; and being ignored by the mainstream parties (Meguid, 2005). But again, there are significant problems applying this definition to centrist parties. Additionally, not only is there a simple lack of definitional clarity concerning

the terms "niche," "single-issue," and "new" parties (Wagner, 2012), but some definitions specifically exclude centrist parties on the basis of their ideology by insisting that niche parties are necessarily extremist (Adams et al., 2006).

The most widely cited attempt at formulating formal criteria for single-issue parties comes from Mudde (1999): "(1) having an electorate with no particular social structure; (2) being supported predominantly on the basis of one single issue; (3) lacking an ideological programme; and (4) addressing only one all-encompassing issue" (p. 182). It seems possible these criteria could plausibly describe centrist parties if their single issue is European integration.

This possibility emerges more clearly when Mudde's (1999) definition is dovetailed with one of Rodon's (2015) theories about centrist self-identification among voters. Drawing on the possibility of different voters emphasising different issues or dimensions in formulating their ideological identity, he proposed that voters might describe themselves as centrist if they were simply disinterested in the political issues making up the left-right super-issue spectrum but held strong views on issues that they did not feel were represented on that continuum. This would make them appear effectively ideologically "neutral" due to the way the question was asked, even if these voters might contest that label in another context. In his study, Rodon (2015) found little support for this proposition among centrist voters; however, it is another concept that will be extended here to parties.

Essentially, this hypothesis suggests that centrist parties are expressly pro-European vehicles to the exclusion of most or all other issues, with their insouciance on these other issues creating the appearance of an overall centrist orientation. The implications of this idea are significant, as it would turn most of what is discussed in this thesis on its head. Instead of being thought intentionally moderate on issues besides European integration, centrist parties would

be recast as largely indifferent on those issues. This indifference could be a by-product of zeal for their single issue, or even an intentional strategy to avoid pointless ideological battles on "unimportant" issues for the sake of building political coalitions to advance European integration.

Granted; if this hypothesis held it would seem to be an unusual case of single-issue enthusiasm. Consider the profile of some other single-issue parties. The United Kingdom Independence Party's self-evident primary goal was the UK's exit from the European Union. It complimented this policy proposal with a full suite of fairly standard right-wing economic and traditional-authoritarian sociocultural positions. Green parties throughout Europe (and beyond) marry a focus on environmental protection with generally alternative-libertarian sociocultural positions that seemingly have no connection to their *raison d'être*. Some regionalist or separatist parties, such as Ireland's Sinn Fein, the UK's Scottish National Party, and Italy's Lega Nord (before dropping the "Nord") have staked out clear, non-centrist positions on most relevant public policy issues beyond nationalism, with none of the three mentioned here plausibly being considered centrist.[95]

Perhaps the model for centrist parties best fitting this hypothesis is the Swedish People's Party of Finland (SFP), first mentioned in Chapter 3. A party chiefly dedicated to expanding and protecting the official status of the Swedish language (natively spoken by approximately 5% of the Finnish population), it has enjoyed tremendous success for what could be considered a niche concern. Between 1979 and 2015, the SFP was a continuous presence in the Finnish cabinet; and with very few exceptions, it had a member in governments

[95] There are indeed some examples of ideologically centrist regional parties, although it is not clear if their centrism is the result of genuinely centrist inclinations or a tactical decision to focus attention on their regional priorities. Interestingly, regionalist and separatist parties tend to be in favour of European integration, seemingly for instrumental purposes (Jolly, 2007).

going back to 1956. This history is all the more remarkable given that the SFP has not achieved as much as 6% of the popular vote in a general election since 1962. Their centrist "ideology" is largely a strategy – sometimes criticised by other parties – to preserve the possibility of serving as a coalition partner in any government that will defend the prerogatives of the Swedish-speaking minority.[96]

If this evidence and reasoning is correct, there may be nothing anomalous about centrist enthusiasm for European integration; in fact, such enthusiasm may be by design. Therefore, the final hypothesis of the chapter:

H_4: Centrist parties' favourable position towards European integration is associated with single-issue party criteria of salience and intraparty unity.

Centrist Parties and the Electorate

Before the four hypotheses are tested, one final consideration must be noted – the position of centrist voters and centrist party voters on European integration.

While this chapter is concerned with party characteristics – features such as ideology, history, strategy, and so on – rather than the linkages between parties and voters, there is certainly plenty of literature on the relationship between parties' positions on European integration and the electorate's. The results of this research have been decidedly mixed, with some studies finding a general responsiveness from parties on the issue (e.g. Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1991; Carrubba, 2001; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2007), while others have found significant divergence between parties and voters on either a general view of integration (e.g.

[96] Hallituksen ovea potkivalle kielipuolueelle jokainen päivä oppositiossa on liikaa – tällainen puolue on RKP. (2019, 17 March). *Yle* [Finnish Broadcasting Company]. https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10664643

Mattila & Raunio, 2006; Mattila & Raunio, 2012) or on specific policies and the specific shape that integration ought to take (Thomassen & Schmitt, 1997; Hooghe, 2003).

While the scholarly debate on this subject is nuanced and wide-ranging, virtually all studies proceed from the established finding that superficially, elites and parties on the centre-left, centre-right, and centre tend to be much more favourable towards European integration than the electorate in general. The purpose of this note is to simply acknowledge this fact in the context of centrist parties' position on the subject.

The four panels of Figure 4.5 illustrate the views of the electorate on European integration, broken down by ideology. On the 2019 version of the European Election Studies' Voter Survey,[97] respondents were asked to rate their position on European integration using fairly standard language indicating that integration "should be pushed further" or "has gone too far already." By separating respondents into three groups based on their overall left-right self-identification – classing respondents rated 0-4 as left, 6-10 as right, and 5 as centre – a rough portrait of the electorate's views on European integration can be drawn along these lines.

[97] Schmitt, H., Hobolt, S. B., van der Brug, W., & Popa, S. A. (2020). *European Parliament Election Study 2019, Voter Study*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7581 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.13473.

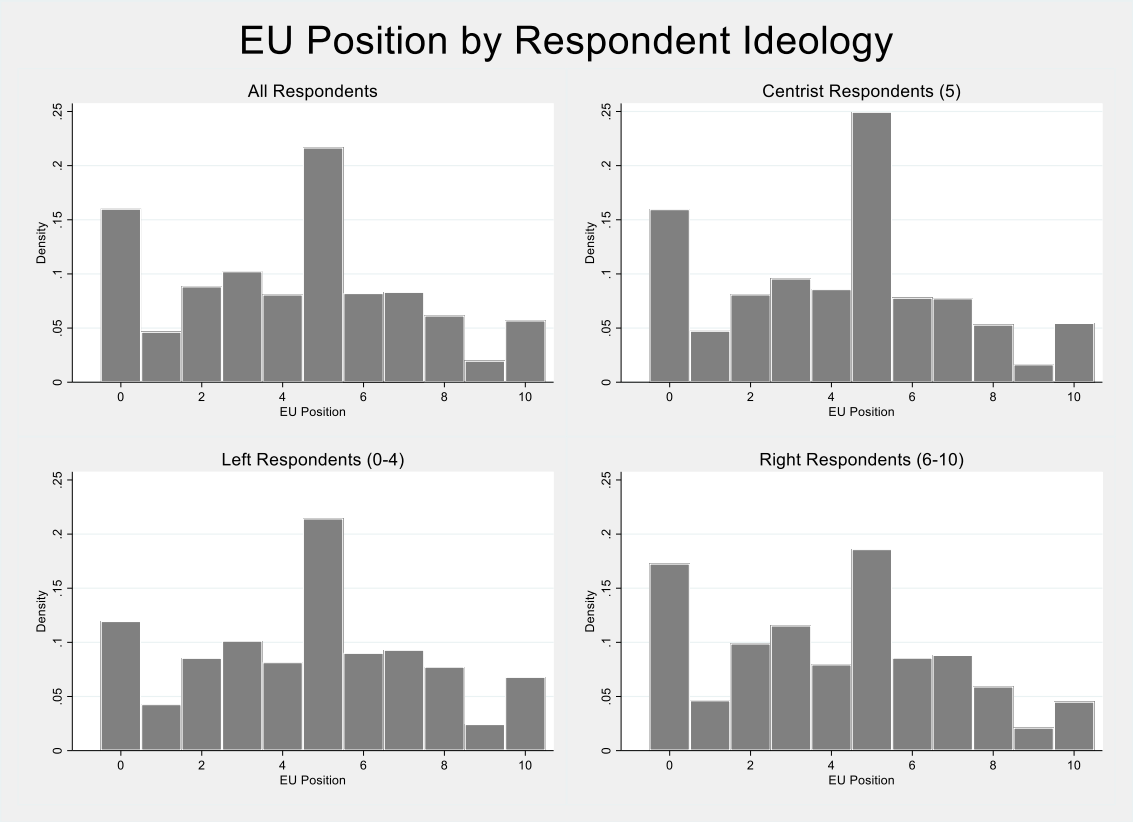

Figure 4.5: Clockwise from top left: distribution of all respondents' position on European integration; for centrist respondents; for right respondents; and for left respondents. Data from 2019 EES.

While centrist respondents do tend more towards moderation on the issue of European integration than any other ideological class, there is very little deviation between their distribution of positions and the distribution among the electorate as a whole.

Additionally, the views of self-identified ideological centrists are exceedingly similar to those respondents who reported voting for a centrist party (defined by CHES rating) in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Figure 4.6 plots the responses of both centrist respondents and centrist party voters on a suite of policy questions the EES asks to gauge the public's opinions on issues germane to the election: redistribution of wealth, the trade-off

between taxation and spending on public services, deregulation, the extent of civil liberties, same-sex marriage, immigration policy, environmental policy, and European integration.

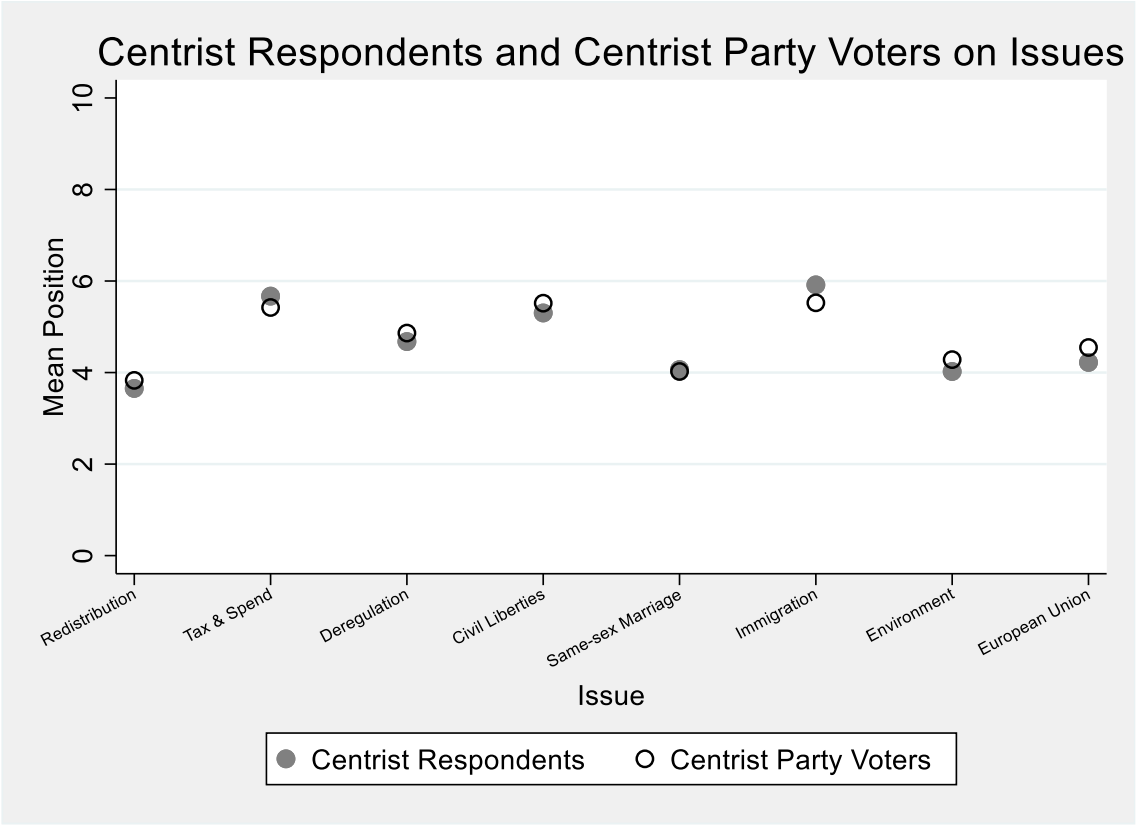

Figure 4.6: Comparison of mean positions of centrist respondents and centrist party voters on salient issues. Data taken from the 2019 EES.

The positions of centrist respondents and respondents who voted for a centrist party are nearly indistinguishable, although centrist party voters are slightly more favourable towards European integration. However, the final step of this analysis is to compare those who voted for centrist parties to the positions of those parties themselves.

Figure 4.7 does this by overlaying elements of Figure 4.6 with Figure 4.2 (which compared the policy positions of parties by overall ideology). The positions of centrist party voters are shown on the right axis, with data taken from the EES. The positions of centrist

parties are shown on the left axis, with data taken from the CHES, on the eight survey items corresponding to those on the EES.

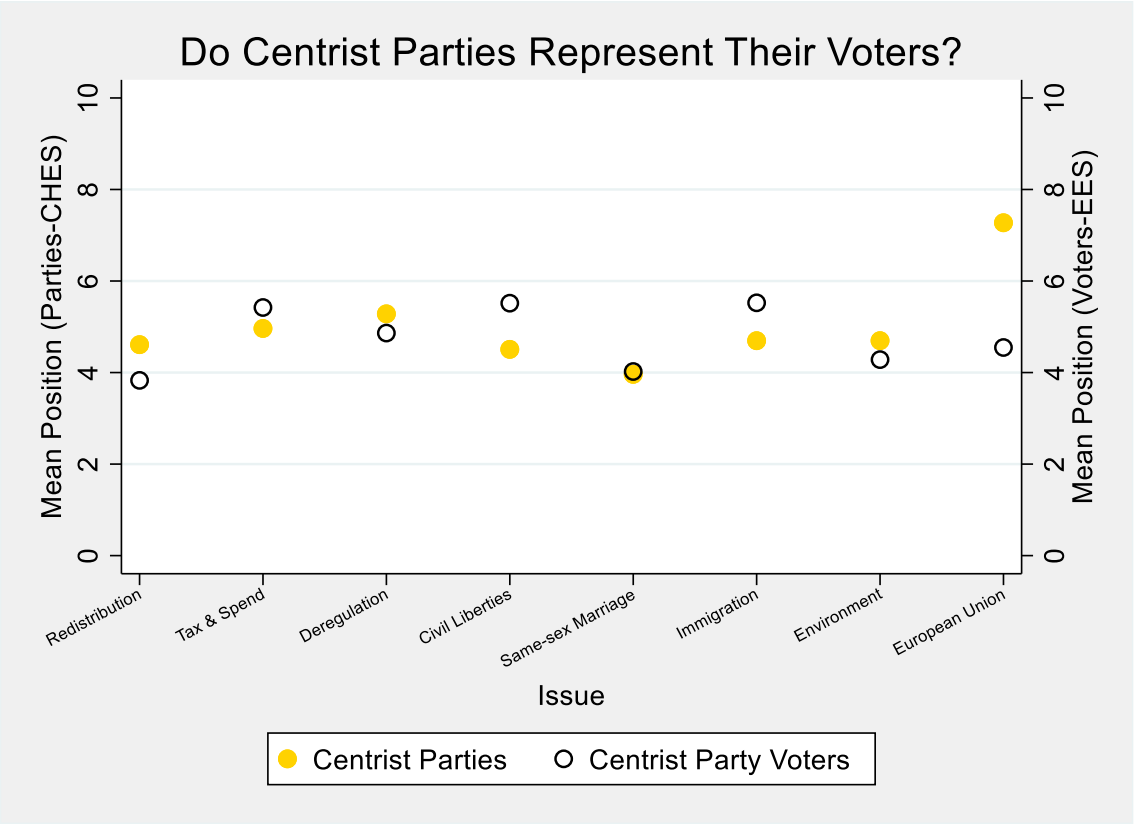

Figure 4.7: Comparison of mean positions of centrist parties and centrist party voters on salient issues. Party data taken from the 2019 CHES; voter data taken from the 2019 EES.

Simply put, Figure 4.7 shows that there is no policy issue where the opinions of centrist parties and their voters diverge more than European integration. This accords with the general evidence about the gap between elite attitudes towards Europe and the mass public's.

Altogether, while there is a great deal of research into the linkages between party positions on issues and public opinion, party characteristics are generally grouped into a separate category of explanations for a party's position on European integration (Arnold, Sapir, & De Vries, 2012). Additionally, concerns about the potentially endogenous role that

characteristics like ideology play in mediating between parties and voters (e.g. Przeworski & Sprague, 1986; Przeworski, 2007; Zuckerman, 2009) made a compelling reason for this study to focus on the explanatory power of the characteristics themselves, while still acknowledging the significant but separate effects that voters play on party positions.

Data and Methods

Testing the four hypotheses above requires detailed information concerning the positions of European political parties on various policy issues and ideological dimensions. To maximise the robustness of the analysis, this information is sourced from three different origins. The first two data sources are expert surveys of party positions – the 1999-2019 versions of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the 2019 Global Party Survey (GPS).[98] The third is the objective content analysis of the second 2020 version of the Manifesto Project (now collected by the group currently known as the Manifesto Project on Political Representation or MARPOR).[99] Although the MARPOR data extends back before the creation of the European Communities in many cases, this analysis is limited to the same timeframe as the CHES – 1999 to present – for both logistical and theoretical reasons, as the late 20th century marked the hypothesised end of what scholars refer to as the "permissive consensus" era of European integration (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970).

Although largely discussed in the descriptive analysis in Chapter 3, a reiteration of the strengths and weaknesses of these data selection choices is warranted here. First, expert surveys are a widely used data source in comparative political science research, due to their high degree

[98] Norris, P. (2020). *The Global Party Survey, 2019*. v1.0. www.globalpartysurvey.org

[99] Volkens, A., Burst, T., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., Weßels, B., & Zehnter, L. (2020). *The Manifesto Data Collection, Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR).* v2020b. https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu

of stability, reliability, and validity, all of which hold up well in comparison to alternatives like mass surveys and content analysis (Benoit & Wiesehomeier, 2009; Cooley & Snyder, 2016). The CHES itself has been exhaustively researched, and as the longest-running project of its kind, is highly regarded for its accuracy and robustness (e.g. Steenbergen & Marks, 2007; Netjes & Binnema, 2007; Marks et al., 2007; Hooghe et al., 2010; Bakker et al., 2015). And importantly for the purposes of using multiple expert surveys together, despite some differences in method, survey population, and timing, they have proven to produce very similar estimates in general (Whitefield et al., 2007), with the CHES and GPS specifically showing a great deal of correlation in results (Norris, 2020).[100] While similarities abound, and in fact the CHES team was involved in developing the research design of the newer GPS, those aforementioned differences are meaningful, warranting the inclusion of both surveys in the name of comprehensive analysis.

The use of content analysis to judge the political positions of parties is also widespread throughout the discipline. MARPOR's data on the pre-election manifestos often published by parties serves as an archetype of this method, with hundreds, if not thousands of citations (McDonald & Budge, 2014). Just as with expert surveys, there is common acceptance of the reliability and validity of manifesto data and its suitability for a wide variety of applications (e.g. Budge, 2001; Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Ray, 2007; Dinas & Gemenis, 2010).

However, there has been plenty of scholarly debate on the appropriate uses and limitations of MARPOR's data,[101] particularly concerning its overall ideology measurement, known colloquially as "RILE." This measurement is not independently taken; it is instead produced by the addition of various other manifesto elements together – an approach that has

[100] The fact that the two surveys were conducted at almost identical times also lends value to their use in tandem.

[101] See Gemenis (2013) for an overview.

been criticised as producing an unrealistic and unrepresentative final product (Pelizzo, 2003; Gemenis & Dinas, 2010; Mölder, 2016). The chosen resolution to this issue is discussed further below.

Of course, as previously discussed, no method is perfect, and both expert surveys and content analysis are vulnerable to two general problems that plague all attempts at comparative research. The more stubborn issue is semiotic – the challenge of measuring "universal" abstract concepts like "left" and "right" across national and temporal contexts (Almond & Verba, 1963). While this concern is endemic to any study of comparative ideology, there are ways to mitigate the issue. At the source, the CHES has incorporated policy vignettes into recent versions of their survey. These vignettes are used to "anchor" the survey population in an attempt to ground various conceptions of left and right in a common paradigm (Bakker et al., 2014a; Bakker et al., 2014b). As the GPS ratings are similar to those from CHES, we should expect that both surveys are about as reliable as possible under the circumstances. As an additional layer of insulation, the following models incorporate a fixed effect for country, to account for these semiotic differences.[102]

The other issue is one of measurement error. MARPOR data has been criticised both for non-systemic errors resulting from the text generation process (Benoit, Laver, & Mikhaylov, 2009), as well as for systemic errors resulting from misclassification in the text coding process (Mikhaylov, Laver, & Benoit, 2012). Similarly, expert surveys have been criticised for their own measurement biases, arising not only from the familiar differences in political or cultural context (not merely from country to country but from expert to expert); but from the complexity of the subject matter, as well as from the shared personal

[102] Controlling for country also brings unrelated benefits, as will be discussed in the section on controls.

characteristics of the survey population, particularly pertaining to their political views (Curini, 2010; Martinez i Coma & Van Ham, 2015).

The GPS has published data on its surveyed experts, attempting to dispel concerns about the latter two issues. First, it showed that the experts considered the survey questions to be fairly straightforward and easy to answer, thereby answering criticism of the expertise of "experts" and the complexity of the matter at hand. Second, the data showed that while there is indeed a slight leftward skew to the ideological distribution of survey experts (the modal ideological self-identification was 4 rather than the 5 common among mass public samples), the mean ideological position was 4.75, just below the midpoint (Norris, 2020).[103] While no such data has been published concerning the experts surveyed in the CHES, the overlap of the two projects' leadership and their generally similar results makes it unlikely that the ideological composition of their survey population is substantially different.

Naturally, there is one final way to combat the structural weaknesses of any given data set – the use of multiple data sets, collected by different people, using different methods, at different times. Relying upon a diversity of data sources can only enhance the robustness of this chapter's findings, even as the inherent and intractable limitations of a comparative analysis – both from a semiotic perspective and a measurement perspective – must be borne in mind.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is a party's position on European integration, the policy position hypothetically related to ideological centrism through the mechanisms detailed in the preceding sections. The three data sources measure this in different ways.

[103] The following analysis of GPS data was performed both with and without an adjustment for this slight leftward skew of GPS experts. There were no significant differences in the findings.

The CHES directly asks expert respondents to rate the "overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration." That orientation is scored on a 1-7 scale, with 1 indicating that the party is "strongly opposed," 7 indicating that it is "strongly in favor," and 4 indicating that it is neutral.

Since it has a wider scope than simply Europe, the GPS does not ask directly about European integration. Instead, it asks a broader question concerning multilateralism and nationalism, describing those two concepts in the following fashion: "Those favoring multilateralism seek to respect international treaties, engage with United Nations agencies, and collaborate with regional organisations like the EU, OAS, AU, ASEAN, and OSCE. Those favoring nationalism reject these ideas." A party is rated from 0, indicating that it "strongly favors nationalism" to 10, indicating that it "strongly favors multilateralism."

While this latter question is very clearly not identical in that it includes other multilateral institutions relevant to European nations (both directly named, like the UN, and unstated, like NATO), this is simply the most equivalent question the GPS provides. Given the enormous importance of the European Union in the politics of Western Europe, it seems fair to assume that expert respondents weighed a party's view on European integration very heavily in answering the question.

MARPOR data specifically codes for positive and negative mentions of the European Community/Union in general. Positive mentions include the desirability of "the manifesto country joining (or remaining a member);" "expanding the European Union;" "increasing the ECs/EUs competences;" and "expanding the competences of the European Parliament." Conversely, codings for negative mentions include opposition to "specific European policies which are preferred by European authorities;" and "the net-contribution of the manifesto country to the EU budget." This European integration spectrum is formulated and scaled in

accordance with the discussion below concerning the creation of ideological dimensions from MARPOR data, with one major difference – manifestos with no mention of European integration are excluded from the analysis.[104]

With the dependent variable for each model chosen, operationalisation of the independent variables for each specific hypothesis is discussed separately.

Independent Variables

H_1: A centrist party's moderation on the economic dimension is associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires a variable measuring a party's ideological position on the economic dimension, an obviously important quality recorded in all three data sets.

The CHES asks experts to rate the party position on economic issues, stating that "[p]arties on the economic left want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right emphasize a reduced economic role for government: privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, and a leaner welfare state." The ratings run from "extreme left" to "extreme right" with "center" denoted as the midpoint.

The GPS asks for a party's "current stance on economic issues" using virtually identical language and coding.

MARPOR data, on the other hand, does not directly measure economic ideology – indeed, it does not directly measure ideology at all, a concern with manifesto data previously mentioned. Instead, data is collected on party positioning on specific economic and

[104] This approach was taken by Prosser (2016) in his study of the relationship between a party's ideology and its position on European integration and proved necessary because of the large number of manifestos displaying the "structural zero" problem of no mentions of a specific issue. The analysis below was performed both with and without those cases, with no substantive changes to the results.

sociocultural policy issues, a number of which are then simply aggregated in an overall, unidimensional left-right ideological rating.

There has been widespread discussion of MARPOR's overall ideology metric in the literature, and as discussed above, scholars have taken a mixture of supportive and critical views. However, for the purposes of this analysis, there is one key problem obviating the use of this ideological variable – it is unidimensional, combining data on a party's economic and sociocultural positions. To remedy this issue, other studies have derived alternative ideological scales from MARPOR data, both in one and multiple dimensions. Some scholars have used a simple "common sense" additive method in the creation of their scales (e.g. Benoit & Laver, 2007), while others have used a principal component analysis method (e. g. Bakker & Hobolt, 2013). Prosser (2014) critiques these methods, both for theoretical reasons – for example, they are not independent to irrelevant alternatives – and for logistical ones – they are susceptible to the "structural zero problem" where a manifesto is stripped from the analysis due to too much "missing" data, biasing the final estimates. Instead, he recommends a blend of Kim & Fording's (1998) ratio method and Lowe et al.'s (2011) logarithmic technique, with components chosen through an iterative process of comparing referential content validity. While he echoes Benoit & Laver's (2012) assertion that there is no ideological metric that is technically flawless and most appropriate for every application, Prosser's (2014) scales do rate as having incrementally more reliability and face validity, making them the choice for this analysis. Table 4.1 displays a list of the MARPOR components used in the creation of the economic scale.

Left	Right
403 Market Regulation: Positive	401 Free Enterprise: Positive
411 Technology and Infrastructure	407 Protectionism: Negative
412 Controlled Economy: Positive	414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
413 Nationalisation: Positive	505 Welfare State Limitation: Positive
503 Social Justice	507 Education Limitation: Positive
504 Welfare State Expansion: Positive	702 Labour Groups: Negative
506 Education Expansion: Positive	
701 Labour Groups: Positive	

Table 4.1: Components of an economic ideology scale derived from MARPOR data using an iterative referential content validity method, taken from Prosser (2014).

These elements were then translated into scales utilising Lowe et al.'s (2011) logarithmic ratio technique, formalised as:

$$\theta^{L} = log\frac{R + 0.5}{L + 0.5}$$

…where R is the total number (not the fraction) of manifesto statements coded as "right" under Table 4.1's classification, and L is the number of total manifesto statements coded as "left."[105]

Since a logarithmic scale has no defined midpoint or endpoints, this distribution was then re-scaled for its use in common with both the sociocultural and European integration scales in the model below.

[105] An essentially identical technique was used to create the European integration scale used as the dependent variable.

H_2: A centrist party's syncretic liberalism is associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires not only further use of the variable on a party's ideological position on the economic dimension, but also a variable denoting the party's ideological position on the sociocultural dimension. Operationalisation of this sociocultural ideology variable was achieved by following a very similar process to the one that produced the economic ideology variable.

The CHES directly asks experts to rate parties on their GAL-TAN scale, which they describe as a function of the party's "views on democratic freedoms and rights," with parties on the green-alternative-libertarian side of the spectrum favouring "expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation." On the other end, those on the traditional-authoritarian-nationalist end "reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues."

The GPS again asks a similar question regarding their "social liberalism-conservatism" scale in nearly identical language.

As was the case with economic ideology, MARPOR does not directly collect data on parties' sociocultural ideology. This again called for the use of Prosser's (2014) technique for producing ideological scales from manifesto data. Table 4.2 displays the components of that metric.

There is one significant difference between the economic and sociocultural scales taken from Prosser (2014). In his original configuration, the sociocultural scales included components relating to positive (for the libertarian) and negative (for the authoritarian) mentions of internationalism. However, for the purposes of this analysis, which uses ideology

to predict views on European integration, it is vital that the ideological variable be independent of that dependent variable. This necessitated the removal of those two components from the final scales. Since scales built from manifesto data are highly robust to missing or miscoded elements, this adjustment makes no practical change to the results (Prosser, 2014).

Libertarian	Authoritarian
105 Military: Negative	302 Centralisation
106 Peace	305 Political Authority: Positive
201 Freedom and Human Rights: Positive	601 National Way of Life: Positive
202 Democracy: Positive	608 Multiculturalism: Negative
301 Decentralization	
416 Anti-Growth Economy	
501 Environmental Protection	
502 Culture	
602 National Way of Life: Negative	
607 Multiculturalism: Negative	
704 Middle Class and Professional Groups	
705 Underprivileged Minority Groups	
706 Non-economic Demographic Groups	

Table 4.2: Components of a sociocultural ideology scale derived from MARPOR data using an iterative referential content validity method, taken from Prosser (2014).

The metric for syncretic liberalism is the same as discussed before Figure 4.3 – the difference between a party's economic ideology and its sociocultural ideology. Since both are scored on a 0-10 scale using all three data sources, the resulting metric runs from -10 to 10, with more right-libertarian parties rating positive scores, more left-authoritarian parties rating negative scores, and parties roughly conforming to the left-right super-issue dimension rating at or near zero.

H_3: Centrist parties' experience in government – and support for government and its institutions – are associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires a variable reflecting parties' history of participation in government. In the models below, this is represented as a binary variable, with 1 indicating that the party was in government at the time of the survey, and 0 indicating that the party was not – either in opposition or in a confidence and supply arrangement with the government. This data is taken from the invaluable ParlGov database of elections and government formation.[106]

Anti-establishment rhetoric is obviously a more subjective measurement and is currently only measured through expert surveys. The CHES has recorded several characteristics related to anti-establishment rhetoric in their most recent surveys. The metric most theoretically consistent with this hypothesis – as well as the longest-running of the survey's party characteristics questions, thus maximising sample size – is described as the "salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric." This characteristic is measured on an 11-point scale, with 0 indicating that such rhetoric is "not important at all," and 10 indicating it is "extremely important."

The GPS measures anti-establishment rhetoric "minimally," in accordance with Norris & Inglehart's (2018) streamlined definition of populism, described earlier. Such rhetoric "typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasises that the will of the people should prevail." This is contrasted with "pluralist" rhetoric, which "rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power." This concept

[106] Döring, H. & Manow, P. (2020). *Parliaments and governments database (ParlGov): Information on parties, elections and cabinets in modern democracies*. Development version. www.parlgov.org

is measured on an 11-point scale, with 0 indicating that the party "strongly favors pluralist rhetoric" and 10 indicating that it "strongly favors populist rhetoric."

Unfortunately, MARPOR does not currently measure rhetoric theoretically applicable to this hypothesis. While it does measure a few variables that are at least theoretically adjacent to anti-establishment rhetoric, none was sufficiently similar to warrant inclusion.[107]

H_4: Centrist parties' favourable position towards European integration is associated with single-issue party criteria of salience and intraparty unity.

Testing this hypothesis necessitates measuring the "single-issue" nature of a party – a novel task, since as described above, there is no consensus, formal definition of a single-issue party. This lack of consensus calls for a simple, parsimonious set of criteria that exclude parties from being single-issue parties, rather than a more comprehensive definition that could identify single-issue parties affirmatively. To this end, two intuitive criteria – inherent to any reasonable conception of single-issue parties – were identified.

First, a single-issue party must obviously emphasise that single issue. While it should presumably emphasise that single issue over any others, the issue should at least have very high salience in the party's appeals.

And second, a single-issue party must be internally united on its views of that issue. If a party has significant divisions between its leadership and its wider membership on an issue;

[107] Chief among the considered options were items counting favourable mentions of "democracy" as well as those counting positive and negative mentions of constitutionalism. These proved unworkable for theoretical reasons – for example, both populist and pluralist parties rhetorically support "democracy" and "the constitution," while having very different conceptions of what that support means – as well as for logistical reasons – the "structural zero" problem, whereby large numbers of manifestos make no mention of these subjects, positively or negatively, was particularly acute with these higher-order issues, as opposed to policies on taxes or crime.

or if the membership itself is divided on the issue, then clearly that issue cannot be the sole organising principle of the party.[108]

In other words, if centrist parties are indeed single-issue parties focused on European integration, then by any reasonable definition of that term, they must *at least* be internally united on the issue and place a heavy emphasis upon it in their programme and public statements. If centrist parties cannot even meet those two thresholds on this issue, then they certainly could not be considered single-issue, pro-European integration parties, regardless of any further criteria.

Only the CHES has collected data on these two subjects. While manifesto data – and really, any data taken from a party's public communications, like advertisements or speeches – is technically a measure of the party's emphasis rather than its position on that issue (it is, after all, a simple count of references), it is generally treated as a translation of the party's position, rather than the issue's salience. And concerning European integration specifically, if MARPOR data on favourable and unfavourable references to European integration were taken as a measure of salience rather than position, there would be no way to derive the party's position itself. Therefore, this hypothesis is tested solely on the basis of CHES data and separately from the first three.

The CHES asks surveyed experts to rate parties on two characteristics that relate to the selected criteria. The first, concerning issue emphasis, is the "relative salience of European integration in the party's public stance;" rated from 0, indicating that "European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned," to 10, indicating that "European Integration is the most important issue." The second, concerning issue unity, is the "degree of dissent on European

[108] A party divided on an issue could still be a single-issue party – it just couldn't have that issue be its single focus.

integration" within the party's ranks; rated from 0, indicating complete unity, to 10, indicating extreme division.

Interacting these two items in a model allows for the creation of a metric – a single-issue score – measuring a party's single-issue potential.

Controlling for Variation Within Countries

Finally, support for European integration is not evenly distributed throughout the continent. This study includes parties from countries where general popular support for the country's membership in the EU is high (e.g. Ireland and the Netherlands),[109] parties from countries that have recently left the EU under contentious circumstances (the UK), and parties from countries that have never joined the EU (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland). Most parties in the study come from countries that have adopted the common currency, but some do not (those from Denmark, Sweden, and the UK). And crucially, the costs and benefits of EU membership can vary significantly between nations.[110] While a full accounting of the "costs and benefits" of EU membership would veer into unquantifiable territory, and the highest net beneficiaries tend to be the former communist nations excluded from this analysis, there are still substantial differences between Germany's share of quantifiable costs and benefits and Portugal's or Greece's or Italy's, leading to very different national political and institutional contexts regarding European integration. This variation mandates the use of a fixed effect to control for the systemic factors affecting different countries differently.[111]

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[109] European Commission & European Parliament, Brussels (2019): *Eurobarometer 89.2 (2018).* Kantar Public [producer]. en-one-year-before-2019-eurobarometer-report.pdf (europa.eu)

[110] Kovacevic, T. (2019, 28 May). EU budget: Who pays most in and who gets most back? *BBC News.* https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48256318

[111] A technique that will also help control for the semiotic differences between conceptions of "left" and "right" across the analysed countries.

Model

Since each data set allows for the testing of different hypotheses – all can be tested with CHES, but the GPS and MARPOR lack salience and party unity data, and MARPOR lacks anti-establishment rhetoric data – the ordinary least squares model presented below is used with the CHES and is simplified as needed for use with the other data sources.

$$\begin{aligned} &Predicted\ Position\ on\ European\ Integration \\ &= regress\,\{\beta_0 + \beta_1(Economic\ Moderation) \\ &+ \beta_2(Syncretic\ Liberalism) + \beta_3(Government\ Indicator) \\ &+ \beta_4(SingleIssue\ Score) + \beta_5(AntiEstablishment\ Rhetoric) \\ &+\ \alpha(Country) + \mu\} \end{aligned}$$

Finally, for the benefit of comprehensive analysis, the regressions were run multiple times with each data set. The first set of results comes from a "bare bones" version of the model, where anti-establishment rhetoric is omitted (where that data is available). The second set of results includes anti-establishment rhetoric. There are two reasons for this. First, since the CHES only started collecting data on anti-establishment rhetoric in their 2014 survey, omitting that variable from the analysis preserves sample size, one of the CHES' strengths. Second, the negative correlation of anti-establishment rhetoric with a party's position on European integration has been documented as strong (Polk & Rovny, 2017), a statistical effect that could potentially drown out the effect of other variables.

As a robustness check, those regressions were run one final time on a sample that excluded "extreme parties," which in all three data sets were coded as those with overall (or economic, if overall ideology was unavailable) left-right ideological ratings of 2 or less, or 8 or

higher. The reason for excluding both far left and far right parties is the potential for non-linear relationships between variables. For example, a look back at the super-issue distribution of European integration positions in Figure 4.1 or the super-issue distribution of syncretic positions in Figure 4.3 shows that the associations of those variables are stronger towards the ideological fringes than they are towards the ideological centre. Analyses including all parties are likely to show much higher effects than those excluding the ideological fringes; if those effects are meaningful even when centrist parties are being compared to centre-left and centre-right parties, that will provide even stronger evidence in favour of the hypotheses.

Results

Table 4.3 displays the results of the analyses performed on CHES data.

	Standard Model		Anti-Establishment Rhetoric		Excluding Extreme Parties	
Variable	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**
Economic Moderation	0.82 ***	(0.06)	0.38 ***	(0.08)	0.21	(0.14)
Syncretic Liberalism	0.72 ***	(0.04)	0.50 ***	(0.04)	0.37 ***	(0.05)
Governing	1.19 ***	(0.17)	-0.05	(0.22)	-0.13	(0.24)
Single-Issue Score	-0.02 ***	(0.00)	-0.01 **	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)
Anti-Establishment Rhetoric	-	-	-0.63 ***	(0.04)	-0.58 ***	(0.05)
Constant	4.09 ***	(0.28)	8.20 ***	(0.43)	7.79 ***	(0.63)
N	**813**		**318**		**225**	

Table 4.3: Results of ordinary least squares regressions performed using CHES data. The first model excludes anti-establishment rhetoric; the second includes it; and the third excludes extreme parties. A country-level fixed effect was used. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

The standard analysis – the one that excludes anti-establishment rhetoric – shows that all four variables are highly significant elements of the model, which burnishes the hypothetical

expectations concerning economic moderation, syncretic liberalism, and governing. However, the single-issue score's coefficient is negative, indicating that the more united and emphatic a party is about the European integration issue, the less likely it is to be in favour.

Once anti-establishment rhetoric is added in, both ideological variables maintain their high significance, although economic moderation loses a great deal more of its predictive power than syncretic liberalism does. The latter also shows a substantially narrower standard error than the former. The single-issue score remains significant, if slightly less so, but also remains negative. The major change is to the significance of governing, which dramatically drops in value to the model, while anti-establishment rhetoric displays massive significance. This is arguably evidence that the two variables are measuring something similar, but that the latter is far more sensitive a metric.

Finally, when extreme parties are eliminated from the analysis, leaving only parties that could be fairly considered centre-left, centrist, and centre-right, economic moderation loses its statistical significance, which is an indication that it is far more helpful as a predictor of pro-integration sentiment when comparing extreme parties to more relatively centrist ones than it is when the contrast weakens. Syncretic liberalism fares much better, maintaining its strong significance as a predictor variable throughout. The governing and anti-establishment rhetoric variables perform similarly to the last analysis, with the latter showing far more relevance to the dependent variable than the former. And a party's single-issue score fades in significance altogether.

Moving on to analysis of the GPS data, Table 4.4 contains the results. Recall that since data on parties' internal unity on and strategic emphasis of the integration issue is unavailable in this data set, the single-issue score variable has been omitted from the model.

	Standard Model		Anti-Establishment Rhetoric		Excluding Extreme Parties	
Variable	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**
Economic Moderation	0.36 **	(0.18)	0.03	(0.12)	0.34 *	(0.18)
Syncretic Liberalism	0.62 ***	(0.08)	0.22 ***	(0.06)	0.31 ***	(0.07)
Governing	0.47	(0.40)	-0.18	(0.27)	-0.29	(0.28)
Anti-Establishment Rhetoric	-	-	-0.75 ***	(0.06)	-0.77 ***	(0.06)
Constant	4.27 ***	(0.54)	9.20	(0.53)	8.20	(0.68)
N	**149**		**148**		**118**	

Table 4.4: Results of ordinary least squares regressions performed using GPS data. The first model excludes anti-establishment rhetoric; the second includes it; and the third excludes extreme parties. A country-level fixed effect was used. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

While the GPS data is limited to only one survey conducted in 2019, the results of this analysis are broadly similar to those from analysis of the CHES data; a fact that is both unsurprising and a point in favour of the analyses' validity.

As before, the standard model sees both ideological variables – economic moderation and syncretic liberalism – showing strong statistical significance, although the latter has both a much higher coefficient and a lower standard error. However, unlike the CHES analysis, governing is not a significant variable in the standard model. This is perhaps to be expected, since the short and recent history of the GPS may obscure the effect of governing upon position towards multilateralism in two ways. First, since the GPS has only observed one period in time, the sample of parties that held government is much smaller, and many pro-integration parties that have formed government repeatedly over the past twenty years – but not in 2019 – are therefore uncaptured by this metric. Additionally, the GPS is recent, and it was conducted at what could be considered the electoral high-water mark of Eurosceptic parties, thereby potentially occluding a relationship between governing and pro-multilateralism sentiment that would be more evident if the survey had been done in 2010 or 2015.

Once anti-establishment rhetoric is added to the model, the results again bear a rough similarity to those in Table 4.3 from the analysis on CHES data. On the ideological variables, the effect of economic moderation shrinks to below the significance threshold, but syncretic liberalism continues to show strong statistical significance in its effect. And on the governing variables, the pattern repeats again – anti-establishment rhetoric is a strong negative predictor of a party's position on multilateralism, but presence in government shows no significant value to the model.

Finally, when extreme parties are excluded from the sample, we see syncretic liberalism and anti-establishment rhetoric maintain their strong effect, but economic moderation returns to some statistical significance, as the coefficient and standard error for that variable in that model resemble those from the standard model.

It should be noted that the sample of parties in the GPS is substantially smaller than in the CHES, which could account for the slight variations in results. But there are also some small differences in the way the data was collected that may also be responsible. The most obvious is the fact that the dependent variable in the GPS model is a party's position on multilateralism vs nationalism. While this seems to be an acceptable proxy for a party's position on European integration, it is formally not the same thing, and a party with an unfavourable view of European integration but a highly positive view of NATO – for example, the UK's Conservative Party – rates somewhat differently on the dependent variables between the two datasets.

The final set of results comes from data produced by means other than an expert survey. Table 4.5 contains the results of the final pair of analyses, conducted on MARPOR data. Recall that since data on party salience and unity on the European integration issue is not collected, nor data on anti-establishment rhetoric, those variables have been omitted.

	Standard Model		Excluding Extreme Parties	
Variable	**Coefficient**	**Standard Error**	**Coefficient**	**Standard Error**
Economic Moderation	0.16	(0.09)	0.26 **	(0.12)
Syncretic Liberalism	0.38 ***	(0.07)	0.40 ***	(0.07)
Governing	0.90 ***	(0.18)	0.88 ***	(0.18)
Constant	4.63 ***	(0.36)	4.15 ***	(0.48)
N	**718**		**667**	

Table 4.5: Results of ordinary least squares regressions performed using MARPOR data. The second model excludes extreme parties. A country-level fixed effect was used. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

Given the fact that MARPOR data is very different from CHES and GPS data, some differences were to be expected in the results. However, there are enough similarities with the previous analyses to note the broad reappearance of a pattern.

In the standard model, economic moderation is not at all a significant predictor of a favourable position towards European integration, which is different from the previous sets of analyses. However, syncretic liberalism and governing are both highly significant, echoing the prior results.

Both variables maintain that high significance upon the exclusion of extreme parties, while economic moderation jumps in statistical significance. This last point is somewhat puzzling but is perhaps better understood as an artefact of the idiosyncrasies of manifesto data than useful signal.

Those idiosyncrasies are certainly important to discuss. Manifesto data is generally noisier than expert survey data, in that the observed positions of parties on various issues tend to change more dramatically from manifesto to manifesto than they do in the opinions of experts – a fact that could be considered an indication of either reliability or insensitivity (Benoit & Laver, 2007; Bakker & Hobolt, 2013). Another potential wrinkle comes from the

way that policy and dimensional scales are constructed. The Lowe (2011)/Prosser (2014) method of deriving relevant categories and calculating a scale from logarithmic ratios means that the distribution of parties on the MARPOR ideological dimensions is much tighter than on the CHES or GPS scales. This can be easily seen in the second model in Table 4.5, where the share of extreme parties among all parties – those that were excluded from the second model – is substantially smaller than with the corresponding models based on expert survey data. Additionally, the same technique, used to formulate the European integration scale, necessitated the omission of a large number of manifestos that did not make any coded mentions of European integration. This could also skew results, as the final sample was more representative of parties with relatively more extreme positions – in either direction – on the issue.

Findings

H_1: A centrist party's moderation on the economic dimension is associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

On balance, the evidence is not particularly supportive of this hypothesis. While economic moderation was indeed a statistically significant variable in the standard analyses of both CHES and GPS data, it lost significance both when anti-establishment rhetoric was added to the models and when extreme parties were excluded from the analysis. Figure 4.8 shows the marginal effects of a party's economic moderation score on its position on European integration from the most comprehensive analysis of each data set – the one including anti-establishment rhetoric (where possible) and including all parties in the sample.

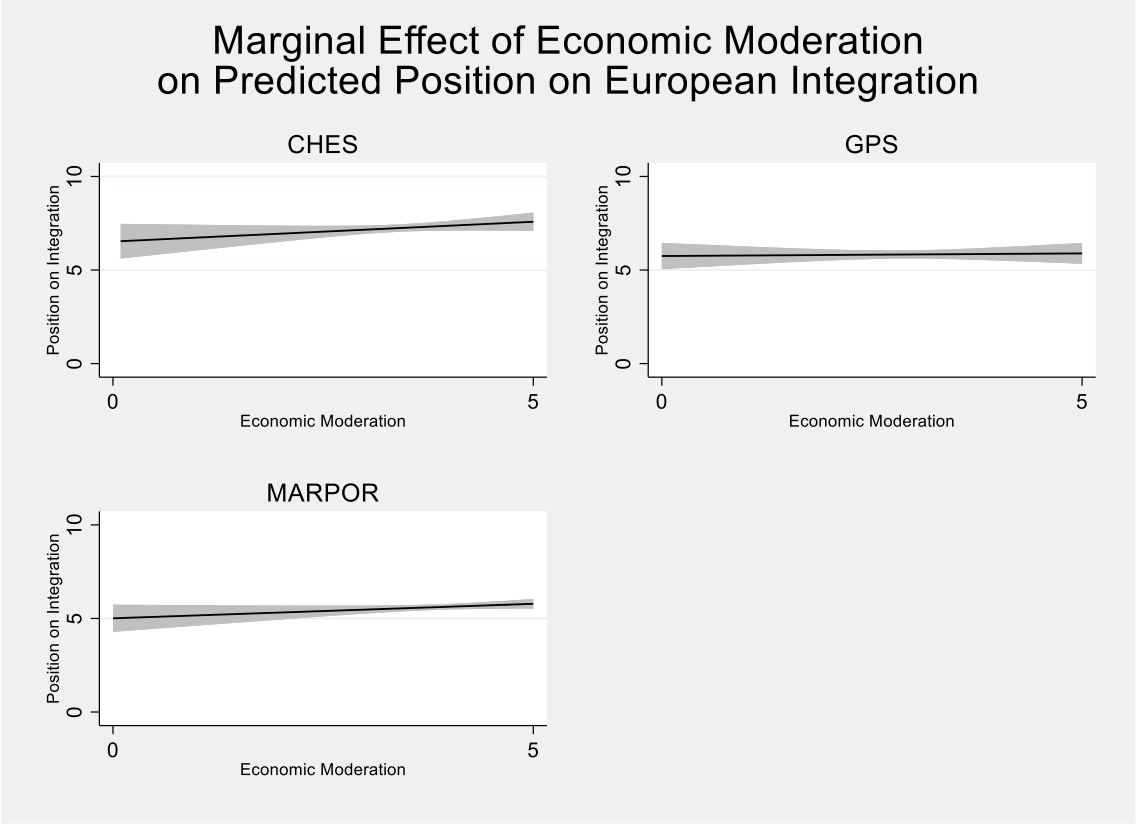

Figure 4.8: Marginal effects of economic moderation variable on a party's predicted position on European integration. Clockwise from top left, analysis of CHES data; GPS data; and MARPOR data. Economic moderation is scored from 0, indicating an extreme left or right economic ideological position; to 5, indicating a perfectly centrist economic ideological position. Position on integration is scored from 0, indicating maximal opposition; to 10, indicating maximal favourability.

As is clear from the graphs, the effect of economic moderation upon a party's position on European integration is not statistically significant when the other variables in this analysis are accounted for and all parties were included in the sample.

However, it must be noted that the results of all analyses were not unanimous. Indeed, economic moderation showed a statistically significant effect in the most elementary analyses of both CHES and GPS data, with sizable coefficients.

What can explain this discrepancy? One highly likely reason would appear to be that economic moderation is highly correlated with other characteristics of pro-integration parties

– particularly an aversion to anti-establishment rhetoric – that lends it the appearance of statistical significance when those other factors are not included in the model, an appearance that fades away once the latter characteristic is accounted for, causing economic moderation to lose much of its explanatory value. Another reason for the divergence in results is that since economic ideology is highly correlated with overall ideology, the significance of economic moderation decreases among a sample of parties selected as moderate overall.

Both explanations share the same root mechanism – the idea that an economic position closer to the centre reflects a party's presence in the "mainstream" of the established political system, just like the lack of anti-establishment rhetoric. As discussed above in the section on populism, economic position is an ideological quality, while rhetorical choices are a strategic one, and thus in theory, they are independent of each other, i.e. nothing prevents a centrist party from employing anti-establishment rhetoric or a party with outlying ideological views from abstaining from it. But in practice, these two elements do tend to overlap, and understandably so – a party with "fringe" views on economic policy may naturally find the proponents of "consensus" policy suspect, and variations on that consensus, i.e. centre-left or centre-right, as too narrow to present a practical alternative.

In totality, the results do not entirely support this conclusion – for example, economic moderation gains a statistically significant effect in the analysis of MARPOR data when extreme parties are excluded, in contradiction with most other evidence.[112] It would therefore be unwise to dismiss economic moderation entirely as an explanation for a pro-integrationist

[112] It is also true that MARPOR's metric for a party's pro-European integration position – the dependent variable in the analyses – is substantially noisier than comparable metrics on the CHES or GPS. In particular, the structural zero problem eliminates the large number of manifestos that don't mention Europe at all from the analysis, which may have the effect of softening more extreme positions.

position. But what does seem to be a defensible claim is that the evidence in support of this hypothesis is considerably weaker than it is for some others.

This is a meaningful finding, indicating that if the EU could be considered a "centrist project," it is not chiefly because it is an economically moderate project. This illustrates the need for greater precision in the application of the centrist label, as one of the most common definitions of the term – and perhaps the most prevalent in public or scholarly discourse – is to connote moderation, particularly on the left-right spectrum of economic ideology that many scholars have identified as the main theatre of electoral competition in advanced Western democracies.

H_2: A centrist party's syncretic liberalism is associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

In direct contrast to the results on economic moderation, the evidence in support of the importance of syncretic liberalism appears very strong. In all the analyses performed, syncretic liberalism was associated with a pro-integration position to a highly significant degree. Figure 4.9 shows the marginal effects of this variable on the party's predicted position on European integration from the most comprehensive analysis of each data set – the one including anti-establishment rhetoric (where possible) and including all parties in the sample.

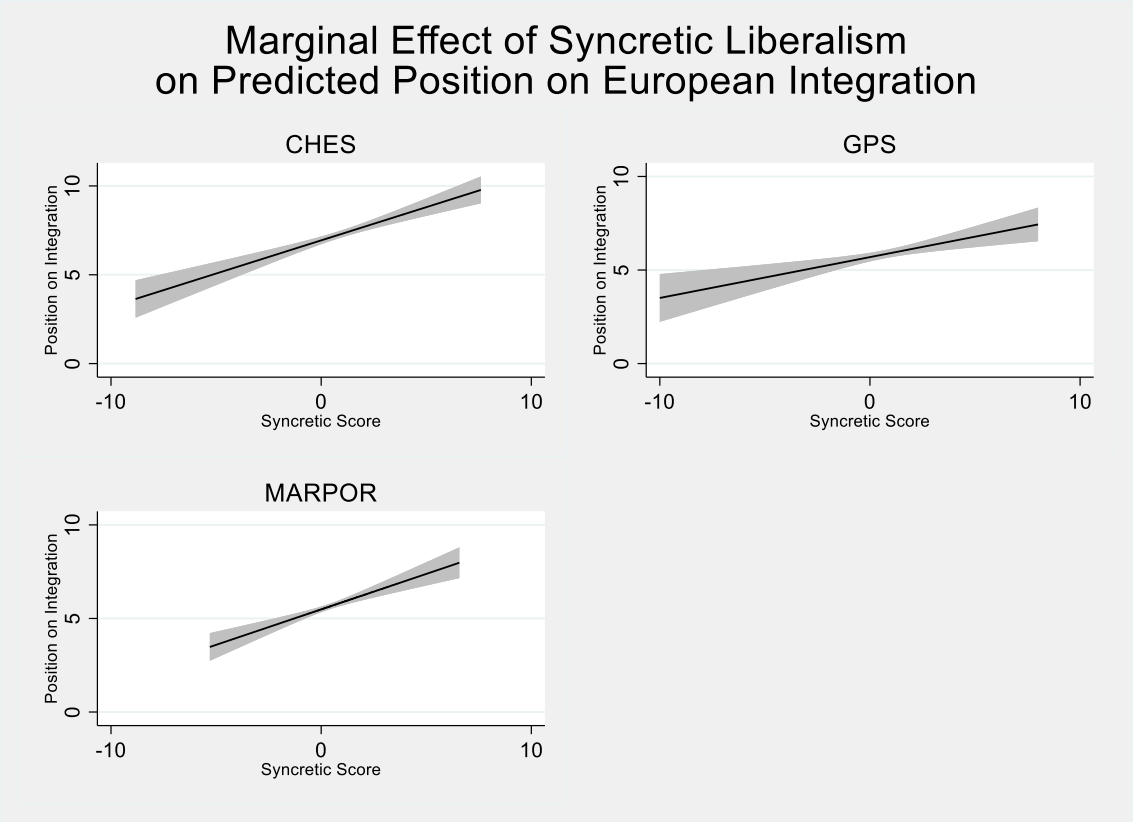

Figure 4.9: Marginal effects of syncretic liberalism variable on a party's predicted position on European integration. Clockwise from top left, analysis of CHES data; GPS data; and MARPOR data. Syncretic score is scored from -10, indicating an extreme left-wing economic position combined with an extreme authoritarian sociocultural position; to 10, indicating an extreme right-wing economic position combined with an extreme libertarian sociocultural position. Position on integration is scored from 0, indicating maximal opposition; to 10, indicating maximal favourability.

As the graphs indicate, syncretic liberalism has a strong positive correlation with a pro-European integration position. Conversely, this means that syncretic statism – a blend of left-wing economic ideology and authoritarian sociocultural ideology – is associated with an unfavourable position on European integration.

Similar statistically significant effects were present in every model run on all three data sets, meaning that the explanatory power of syncretic score was essentially robust to the

inclusion of other highly relevant variables included in the analysis, making it quite different from economic moderation.

The comparison between these two ideological variables – economic moderation and syncretic liberalism – is telling. Although some analyses did show that both economic moderation and syncretic liberalism were significant predictors of a pro-integration position, the effect of the latter was almost always stronger than the former, as their associated coefficients can attest. Additionally, even when anti-establishment rhetoric was included or the sample curtailed to exclude extreme parties, syncretic liberalism's effect always maintained statistical significance, although the size of that effect was predictably diminished.

The decrease in the size of the effect was unsurprising though, since much as economic moderation is, syncretic liberalism is also clearly correlated with a party's "mainstream" character, a fact cohering with historical analysis showing that the liberal party family – along with the Christian democratic, social democratic, and conservative families – have largely dominated the governments of European countries since World War II (Von Beyme, 1985). If "the establishment" could be described as comprising party families, the liberal family would certainly qualify.

This fact also squares well with the relationship between syncretic politics and the overall left-right super-issue dimension. Earlier in this chapter, Figure 4.3 showed that syncretic liberalism is associated with a centrist image in terms of that super-issue dimension, while its inverse, syncretic statism, is associated with extremist left and right orientations. Together, the two analyses – one linking overall ideology to syncretic politics, and the other linking syncretic politics with position on European integration – are strong evidence that syncretic liberalism is an important mechanism through which overall centrism and a pro-integration position are connected and mediated.

All in all, it seems appropriate to draw the conclusion that European Union can be more accurately described as a "liberal project" than as a "centrist project," at least in terms of its ideological leanings. The EU's modern development into a freer, more efficient marketplace with a cosmopolitan, multicultural ethos is certainly appealing to centrist parties in general – but substantially more to syncretic centrist parties than moderate ones.

H_3: Centrist parties' experience in government – and support for government and its institutions – are associated with a favourable position towards European integration.

On the whole, the analyses show significant support for this hypothesis, although the way in which it is operationalised in the data can lead to varying conclusions. Figure 4.10 shows the marginal effects of the more significant governing variables – anti-establishment rhetoric in the case of the CHES and GPS data, and the government binary variable in the case of MARPOR – on a party's position on European integration from the most comprehensive analysis of each data set – the one including anti-establishment rhetoric (where possible) and including all parties in the sample.

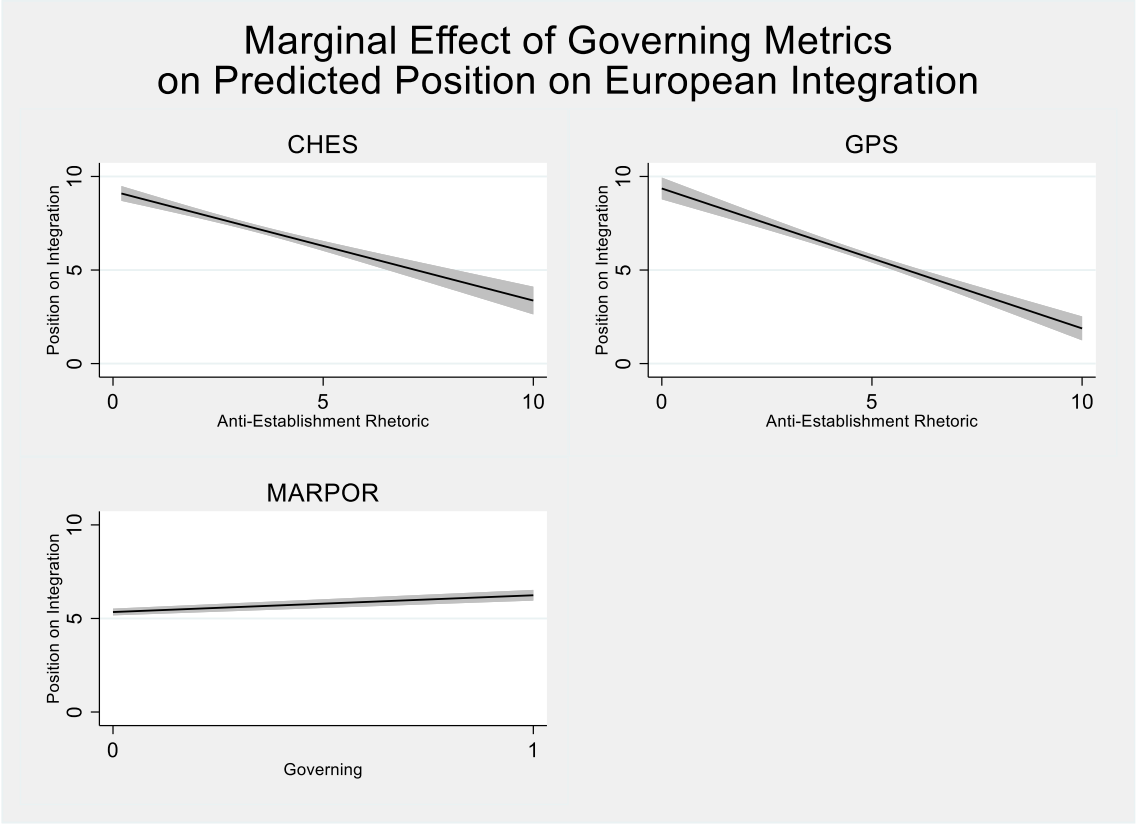

Figure 4.10: Marginal effects of relevant governing variables on a party's predicted position on European integration. Clockwise from top left, analysis of CHES data; GPS data; and MARPOR data. On the CHES and GPS graphs, anti-establishment rhetoric is scored from 0, indicating no such rhetoric; to 10, indicating heavy use. On the MARPOR graph, governing is a binary variable, with 0 indicating a power not in government, and 1 indicating a party in government. Position on integration is scored from 0, indicating maximal opposition; to 10, indicating maximal favourability.

The MARPOR analysis shows the significant and positive effect of the party's participation in government, just as in the standard analysis of CHES data. While this was not repeated in the GPS analysis, the previously discussed short history of that survey is a plausible reason for the divergence in results. This is certainly evidence that governing positively effects a party's position on integration, but it is simultaneously an illustration of the inadequate nature of the variable's overly specific operationalisation.

This latter observation is highlighted by the introduction of anti-establishment rhetoric to the model, since although the simple governing variable had a positive and statistically significant effect in most of the elementary analyses, that effect of the latter pales in comparison to that of the former.

In every analysis that included it, anti-establishment rhetoric was the most significant variable present, from both a statistical and practical perspective. There is an unmistakeable inverse relationship between a party's use of such rhetoric or the salience it places upon it and the party's position on European integration. The effect dwarfed any effect from the ideological variables – economic moderation and syncretic liberalism – even when the statistical significance of those effects persisted.

Even more interestingly, when anti-establishment rhetoric was introduced into analysis, the binary variable for the party's actual presence in government lost all explanatory power. While it is no surprise that the two variables correlate, this is strong evidence for the idea that the two metrics are measuring a very similar factor, but that the former shows more fidelity and sensitivity to that underlying factor.

This makes a great deal of sense and coheres with the expectations of the hypothesis. If, as discussed, the quality of being a "governing party" is interwoven into the fabric of a party's culture rather than a simple, literal descriptor attached to the parties in government, then a direct measure of that cultural characteristic – the party's hostility towards the established system of government – will be a much better predictor of any related outcomes than a simple binary variable. As an example, the Social Democratic Party of Austria is not meaningfully less pro-European integration when it is out of governing power (as it is at this writing) than when it was last in power (in 2017) – or theoretically, when it will next be in power – due to actually being in government or not. Whatever explanatory power its

participation in government may hold is due to the party repeatedly assuming responsibility for government, its willingness to deal with European issues and institutions while there, its commitment to upholding an international framework that has been a defining feature of continental politics for more than 60 years, and crucially, its expectation that it will return to power to fulfil those roles again in future. This cultural characteristic seems to be better captured through focusing on anti-establishment rhetoric than through the historical record of which party participated in cabinet when.

H_4: Centrist parties' favourable position towards European integration is associated with single-issue party criteria of salience and intraparty unity.

Finally, the results offer no support for the single-issue hypothesis; in fact, they suggest the hypothesis' exact opposite. Figure 4.11 shows the marginal effects of a party's single-issue score (derived from the interaction of its emphasis and internal unity on its position on European integration) on its integrationist views. This is taken from the most comprehensive analysis – the CHES model including all parties and the anti-establishment rhetoric variable.

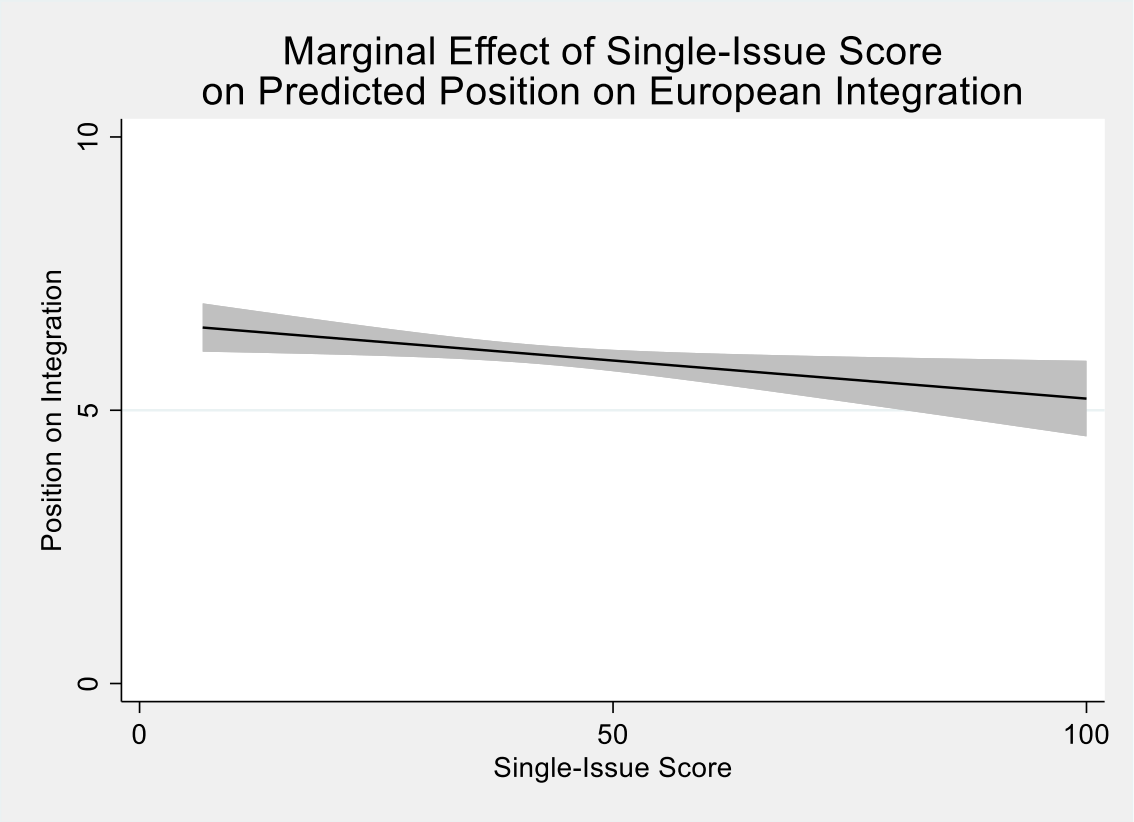

Figure 4.11: Marginal effects of relevant governing variables on a party's predicted position on European integration. Single-issue score is scored from 0, indicating a party completely divided on an issue unimportant to the party; to 100, indicating a party completely united on an issue of crucial importance to the party. Position on integration is scored from 0, indicating maximal opposition; to 10, indicating maximal favourability.

As single-issue score increases, there is a clear decline in the party's predicted favourability towards European integration, a corroboration of theoretical and empirical research that has shown that while salience of the integration issue is indeed highest among parties with extreme positions on the issue, the effect is stronger among Eurosceptic parties (e.g. RePass, 1971; Netjes & Binnema, 2007; Rovny, 2012). Assuming that the baseline criteria to be considered a single-issue party used to operationalise this hypothesis are reasonable –

salience and intraparty unity – then if a party is indeed built around the single issue of European integration, it is far more likely to be opposed than in favour, all things being equal.[113]

This finding also coheres with a number of the proposed definitional criteria of single-issue parties. For one, single-issue parties tend to appear in response to a mismatch between the democratic supply of a political issue – the issue's prominence in public policy or in debate among parties – and the democratic demand – the electorate's level of concern about the issue. Since this analysis – and others – has shown that Europe's governing parties have been rather consistently pro-integration over recent decades, the divergence between democratic demand and supply would only invite parties opposed to integration into the arena. Relatedly, if single-issue parties draw support from across the ideological spectrum, this would also seem to work in favour of Eurosceptic parties – which could appeal to anti-integration voters on the left, right, and centre – but generally not for single-issue pro-integration parties, which would be competing across the spectrum with mainstream pro-integration parties.

The two criteria used in this specific analysis – salience and intraparty unity on the integration issue – also seem to be a poor fit for centrist parties. The strategic appeal of an ideologically centrist position lies in its spatial proximity to most voters, who cluster around the centre ground.[114] Underlying this logic is the electoral virtue of being broadly acceptable to many different kinds of voters, a virtue that would likely be undermined by a hyper-focus on

[113] Granted, this does not mean that there are no such things as pro-integration single-issue parties. For example, Volt Europa is a coordinated transnational alliance of parties that have been described as single-issue parties promoting European federalism (Leruth, 2021). But the Volt parties are new parties, with very little electoral success at the time of writing, meaning that they fall under the thresholds to be evaluated by either the CHES or the GPS. Theoretically, many such pro-integrationist single-issues may exist to contest this newly prominent electoral cleavage, but since they would be generally younger and (ironically) less established than their Eurosceptic counterparts, they'd be unaccounted for in this analysis.

[114] Whether this is truly an advantage is the subject of Chapter 6 of this thesis.

any one issue, to the point of discouraging either intraparty dissent or strategic ambiguity on that issue.

Unquestionably, centrist parties tend towards support of European integration – that is the observational foundation of this chapter. But it does not appear that they are nearly as united and emphatic about the issue as Eurosceptic parties, and therefore unlikely to be classified as single-issue parties by any reasonable criteria.

Conclusions

In investigating the pro-European integration position of centrist parties, this chapter has shed light on an important, but largely overlooked corner of a much larger puzzle. The findings and contribution can be summarised into two broad categories.

First, this chapter has confirmed prior research showing the impact of governing – and the "governing culture" – on a party's position on integration. While other studies may consider actual governing experience and a party's strategy and rhetorical appeals to be theoretically distinct variables, their empirical association with pro-integrationist values seems to be beyond question.

Secondly this chapter makes a novel contribution to studies of ideology by showing that syncretic liberalism has a more prominent relationship with a party's position on integration than economic moderation – an association that survives even when the very strong statistical effect of governing culture is accounted for. This certainly suggests that depictions of the EU as a "centrist project" are at worst inaccurate and at best imprecise, since the parties most favourable to contemporary integration are syncretic liberal parties, rather than centrist parties as a whole, and the use of "centrist" to describe mainstream parties that support the established political system is not necessarily theoretically coherent.

A final caveat is necessary to both frame these results and also to potentially bind them together. This entire subject – how an abstract theoretical concept like the political centre became associated with a specific policy idea – is a largely endogenous puzzle, defying scholars' ability to make strong causal claims. This chapter has advanced an argument that fits the observed facts, but it cannot untangle the social and historical enigma whereby certain ideological views came to be called "centrist" – by definition, in the mainstream – and why others carry the label of "extreme" and thus out of the mainstream. Is support for European integration mainstream because it is an inherently centrist idea? Is a political party centrist because it supports mainstream ideas? What is the determination of either a mainstream or centrist idea in the first place? And as it pertains to these findings specifically, is there a hidden factor underlying both syncretic liberalism and governing culture, thus making the two variables different manifestations of the same force? To the extent that they can be considered, these questions will be discussed at greater length in the concluding chapter to this thesis.

First, however, the next chapter will continue the exploration of the variety and diversity hidden by the word "centrist," but moving from the realm of centrist parties to that of centrist voters.

Chapter 5: Centrism as an Expression of Symbolic Values

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis focused on theoretically classifying and descriptively illuminating the distinct groups of parties and voters that are often grouped together under the broad banner of "centrism." Chapter 4 continued that process by exploring how the variations between centrist parties, described in those previous chapters, could help explain a key tendency of centrist parties – in that case, their support for European integration. Now in this chapter, the focus shifts to centrist voters, and an investigation of the varied models used to understand why voters identify as centrists.

This chapter begins by evaluating a key puzzle about centrist voters, raised in the theoretical chapter – the difference between their symbolic and operational ideology. In short, can centrist identity be better explained in terms of symbolic, non-ideological values than it can in terms of more conventional political beliefs concerning economic and sociocultural issues? Is centrist self-identity more about abstract principles than what is normally considered political ideology?

To answer this question, this chapter advances an argument for why centrist identity might be better understood in symbolic terms than operational ones – the well-documented inverse relationship between the intensity and extremity of preferences. Building on that foundation, a number of values that cohere with that construct are then discussed in detail: compromise, pro-elite sentiment, flexibility in thinking, and attachment to the political *status quo*. These values then form the basis of a model predicting centrist identity and are tested alongside more conventional, operational markers of centrism – political interest and moderate views on public policy issues. Finally, the model is tested using data on British voters, provided by the British Election Study's panel survey of UK citizens. This chapter therefore continues

with the core mission of this thesis – illustrating the differential effects of ideology and showing ways in which ideological centrism is unlike other political ideologies.

Symbolic and Operational Ideology

Symbolic ideology, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the idea that ideological identity is based in abstract ideals and symbolic concepts, rather than on operational political beliefs, which are defined as substantive beliefs on concrete political or policy issues like taxes or immigration (Ellis & Stimson, 2012). In the United States, this distinction between symbolic ideology and operational ideology – what people commonly think of as "political" beliefs, such as preferences on tax, spending, civil liberties, immigration, and other public issues – has been used to explain the well-established "mismatch" between voters who simultaneously claim a "conservative" identity and yet embrace "liberal" policy views on taxes for high earners and spending on public services (e.g. Free & Cantril, 1967; Jacoby, 2000; Stimson, 2004). As shown in the descriptive chapter, a very similar – if somewhat less well-established – mismatch exists among a large share of European centrist voters, in that they identify as ideological centrists, but do not seem to hold centrist views on economic or sociocultural political issues.

These facts then raise an obvious question: if these "mismatched" centrists are not justifying their ideological identity on their policy views, what then is the basis of their ideological identification? The theory of symbolic ideology would suggest they are instead grounding it in more abstract, non-ideological values. What then are these values? And why might they be particular to centrists?

Answering these questions means taking a non-linear view of ideology, treating the centre as distinct in nature from the left and right – a conception borne out in empirical reality, but not always accounted for in scholarly research.

Many models of political attitudes and behaviours treat ideology as a simple variable that mediates other variables in constant, equal, predictable ways; in other words, voters on the left are affected by their ideology in the same manner that voters on the centre and on the right are affected by theirs. Indeed, Downs' (1957) famous spatial theory of party competition – perhaps the most influential social science construct of the past century – and much of its progeny adhere to this tendency, with ideology exerting a common, even influence on all voters; a sort of sliding scale of values. Examples of this assumption are legion in scholarly work. Often, it is unstated and implied, as in Riker's (1990) study testing the impact of rhetoric and persuasion upon voters. Sometimes it is mentioned, but dismissed, as in Hinich and Pollard's (1981) work on political labelling and spatial cues. Even when the spatial model is being critiqued and tested, studies have relied on assumptions about how ideologically diverse voters consistently and equally perceive the political spectrum (Iversen, 1994).

These underlying assumptions have been remarkably resilient, despite a significant body of evidence calling them into question, much of it from the realm of political psychology. Nearly a hundred years of psychological studies (e.g. Allport, 1935; Suchman, 1950; Key, 1963; Krosnick & Schuman, 1988) have documented at least one consistent asymmetric effect of beliefs – the connection between the extremity of preferences and the high intensity of those preferences. While scholarly attention has often focused on those extreme preferences, the inverse conclusion – that those with moderate preferences tend to hold them weakly – is just as worthy of study.

As stated, there is significant recent research on the differential effects of ideology in the discipline of psychology. One example is the so-called "prejudice gap" – research showing that political conservatives display measurably greater intolerance towards out-groups than political liberals (Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013). Another is the prevalence of

dogmatic beliefs among different political groups, and evidence showing that belief superiority is largely predicated on both ideology and specific issues (Toner et al., 2013). The same debate about salience and specificity turns on questions of complexity, where new research has challenged previously accepted studies showing conservatives to be more "simple-minded" than liberals, and therefore less predisposed to understanding the complexity of some political issues (Conway et al., 2016). Differences persist even when scholars focus on the mere perceptions of extreme beliefs and their adherents among the general public. For example, views of political polarisation in the United States are often linked to the intensity of political beliefs (Westfall et al., 2015). Additionally, after testing respondents' reactions to a wide spread of political stimuli, including politicians, social networks, and media, Lammers et al. (2017) find that regardless of the stimulus used, "people on both political extremes categorise stimuli in the political domain more strongly than do moderates" (p. 618). However, as promising as this vein of research is in the field of social psychology, it remains largely untapped in the cause of understanding the nature of political ideology.

Insofar as research has focused on the low intensity of moderate views, findings support the extension of the extremity-intensity theoretical construct to ideology. Deutsch, Lindon, & Weill (1966) described the general tendency for French centrists to be less politically knowledgeable than other French voters and showed that the centrists' voting decisions did not have any clear relationship to their reported ideology. Converse & Pierce's (1986) study, also in France, showed that parties' ideological appeals were more effective in motivating non-centrists to vote than centrists. In an experimental study twenty years later, Tomz & Van Houweling (2008) essentially confirmed this logic among American voters, with evidence showing that centrists discount party ideologies far more than more ideologically extreme voters.

Comporting with this research, other scholars have argued that centrists are marked by comparatively greater concern for non-ideological issues than other voters. Valence issues – defined by Stokes (1992) as "issues on which parties or leaders are differentiated not by what they advocate but by the degree to which they are linked in the public's mind with conditions or goals or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves" (p. 143) are widely considered to gain in importance as ideological conflict decreases, a conception that holds obvious meaning for understanding centrists. Some studies argue that ideological centrism is indeed a predictor of a non-ideological, high valence approach to voting (Green, 2007; Green & Hobolt, 2008). Galasso & Nannicini (2011) found that Italian parties tended to recruit high-valence candidates for more contestable seats, thus confirming the expectations of their theoretical model that centrist voters would care more about a candidate's non-ideological credentials. And in an adjacent vein, Zur (2017; 2019) has shown that centrist parties, unable to alter their ideological platforms, are particularly susceptible to changes in their valence ratings among voters, suggesting the possibility that centrist voters may in fact hold these considerations in higher esteem than their more ideological fellows.

In one of the few studies specifically focussed on centrists, Adams et al. (2017) show that moderate voters in the United States are less responsive to politicians' ideological positioning than other voters. The authors use data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) to locate centrist voters in two ways: through both a standard self-identification measure – which they term "symbolic" – and a series of policy questions – which they describe as "operational ideology." By comparing centrist voters in different districts to the ideological positioning of the candidates in those districts, they show that moderates are clearly less moved by ideological proximity to a candidate than more non-moderate voters. The authors succinctly summarise the conclusion of their analysis: "Simply put, moderate

voters appear qualitatively different from liberals and conservatives, a finding that has important implications for candidate strategies and for political representation" (p. 205).

The full scope of these "qualitative differences" is yet to be determined, and the aim of this chapter is to investigate a possible source for these hypothesised dissimilarities – the foundations of symbolic ideology. As discussed at the beginning of this section, symbolic ideology represents the idea that a voter's self-identified ideology is a function of non-ideological values, rather than their preferences on public policy and political controversies (Ellis & Stimson, 2012). In this context, the values tested in this chapter are intuitively reasonable predictors for centrist identity, as they carry obvious connotations of balance and moderation; values that dovetail well with the literature on the relationship between the extremity and intensity of preferences just discussed.[115]

Additionally, the study of these values intersects with the typology of centrist voters outlined in the theoretical and descriptive chapters. That typology is delineated on the basis of two variables – intentionality and moderation – which could alter the power of non-ideological values in predicting a voter's centrist identity. These mediating factors will be detailed immediately following discussion of the four hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Compromise

The above discussion on symbolic ideology raises the question of exactly which symbolic, non-ideological political values might be connected to centrist identity. Implicitly

[115] Importantly, the list of non-ideological values discussed and tested here is not exhaustive. These examples were chosen due to their inclusion in the BES and therefore their availability for analysis, but there are certainly other plausible non-ideological values associated with symbolic centrist identity – reasonableness, independence, and equanimity, among others.

flowing from the logic of the relationship between extremity and intensity of preferences, a number of possibilities present themselves. The first, and perhaps most intuitive is the value of compromise.

There is very little scholarly work on voters' views of compromise, and what little there is largely focuses on the United States (e.g. Fiorina, 1992; Bauer, Harbridge, & Krupnikov, 2017). This is perhaps unsurprising given the structure of American governing institutions, which were designed to reward compromise and consensus-building (Gutmann and Thompson, 2014). Since the Westminster parliamentary system structures political incentives very differently, it is easy to understand why the concept of compromise is mentioned far more in the works of James Madison than in the writings of Walter Bagehot, and why the concept captures the attention of American political practitioners and commentators, if not of scholars. In principle, compromise is politically salient and popular in the American electorate (Pew, 2014), even if that esteem varies based on survey respondents' ideological leanings and is slipping overall (Pew, 2018). Recent developments aside, compromise as a source of political virtue is a well-known element of the American "civic religion," and it is omnipresent in the platitudes of parties and candidates (Gutmann and Thompson, 2014).

In a comparative context, the closest thing to a study of the subject is Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove's (2014) work on populist tendencies among the Dutch mass public, which includes compromise as one of a number of pluralistic values in opposition to populism. However, that study – just as this thesis – treated populism as a singular theoretical construct, distinct from and independent of traditional left-right ideological identification, and ideology was not a factor in the research design. The article functions well as a spur for further research, if not quite as a foundation upon which to build another study of compromise.

Even with this relative absence of literature, the connection between compromise and centrism seems reasonable and intuitive. All compromises (political and otherwise) tend towards more moderate or balanced outcomes as a matter of definition, either by moving opposing viewpoints towards a more consensual position, or by balancing out alternatives. In game theory, any game featuring a dispute over any unidimensional or multidimensional set of resources or values that ends in compromise will result in a position between all the players, thus satisfying no extreme preference (Tijs & Otten, 1993; Börgers & Postl, 2009). This core axiomatic logic creates the basis for a wide range of concepts, from the "zone of possible agreement" born out of negotiation analysis (Fisher & Ury, 1981), to the outcomes derived from the veto players theory of government action (Tsebelis, 2002).

Additionally, research into political party organisation provides some reasoning why more extreme ideological voters are opposed to compromise.[116] In their examination of the American partisan structure, Fiorina & Abrams (2009) detail the divergent fortunes of two groups of party activists. The first group are the pragmatists that once dominated party politics, those that held a personal, material stake in electoral victory and governing power – jobs, patronage, and influence. This group has diminished in power over recent decades due to the increasing regulation and professionalisation of government, such as reforms to campaign financing and the civil service. The other group has ascended as the first has declined – citizens with strong ideological and principled commitment to particular political outcomes and who use their participation in political parties to advance that ideological agenda. While Wilson (1962) called this group the "amateurs" (in contrast to the aforementioned "professionals"), Fiorina and Abrams (2009) prefer the term "purists," originally coined by Wildavsky (1965) to

[116] Again, this research is largely focused on the United States, but the base logic underlying it works reasonably well in understanding the generally more ideological European parties.

describe the ideologically committed followers of archconservative U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater. These purists are strongly opposed to compromise and largely responsible for the increased ideological polarisation of the American political system. As La Raja and Schaffner (2015) write:

> "While Hobbesian pragmatists concerned with material gains are more likely to compromise when necessary to get half a loaf, Kantian purists are less likely to do so. Compromise devalues the moral underpinnings of their commitments and dissipates the passion of followers. Better to lose a standoff and use that fear-inducing loss to raise more money from membership, than to allow politicians to compromise far short of the policy goals sought by activists" (p. 14).

Given the literature and reasoning, the theoretical expectation seems clear – that compromise as a political virtue should be more popular among centrists than ideologically polarised voters. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this chapter is:

H_1: Compromise is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Pro-Elite Sentiment

Another symbolic, non-ideological political value that may intuitively relate to centrism is pro-elite sentiment.

This idea is grounded in the theory of democratic elitism, which holds that the classical theory of democracy – with its informed, deliberative, ethical, and engaged citizenry at the wheel of public policy – is not an accurate description of democratic reality. Critiques of this classical theory focus on the undesirability or impossibility of popular mass democracy and emphasise instead – to different degrees – the role of elites in sustaining democratic society,

be they experts, aristocrats, or some other kind of hierarchical authority (Dahl, 1966; Walker, 1966). While the validity and usefulness of this theoretical approach is debated by political theorists, substantial empirical work has been done on the views and tendencies of elites in contrast to those of voters (e.g. Zaller, 1990; Classen & Highton, 2009; Bullock, 2011).

Recent literature on elites is largely within the context of populism, unsurprising given that topic's salience in contemporary Western political affairs. Despite ongoing debate about a precise and unifying definition of the term, populism is generally considered inextricably interwoven with anti-elitism (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Barr, 2009). From Kitschelt and McGann's (1995) pioneering work on the subject: "In political terms, populism signifies the effort to destroy established institutions of interest intermediation and elite control and to put in their place some kind of 'direct' voice of the people, embodied in the leader of the populist party" (p. 160).

While there is a necessary connection between perceptions of elites and populism, the bridge between populism and political extremism is less clear. As discussed in both Chapters 2 and 4, there is significant overlap between many parties academically defined as populist and those defined as politically extreme. This is particularly true for many parties on the extreme (or far, or radical) right (Betz, 1994; Mudde, 1996), but is also true for some on the extreme left (March, 2012; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). However, this commonality does not appear to be universally agreed-upon, as a number of scholars have posited the existence of "centrist" or "liberal" populist parties or even "virtue" parties (Demker, 2008), particularly in the post-communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe (Učeň, 2007; Pop-Eleches, 2010; Bornschier, 2011). Such parties share extreme populists' scepticism of elites by focusing on political themes such as anti-corruption and anti-clientelism, both of which can be broadly described as anti-establishment in nature. However, these parties are also reformist rather than

revolutionary, and programmatically "committed to mainstream models of liberal democracy and the market economy" (Hanley & Sikk, 2012, p. 2). Of course, as the previous chapter showed, any such parties are also in favour of European integration, which is generally considered a marker of ideological centrism among parties in advanced Western Europe. However, relatively little research has been conducted on the views of voters specifically towards elite paternalism – the view that elites should govern in the interest of voters, without the active input of voters.

Where a centrist connection to compromise was based on the notion of "extremity" in the relationship between the extremity and intensity of preferences, the willingness to defer to elites meshes perfectly with the latter component, intensity. If centrists were moderate in preferences, but intense in the strength of those preferences, evidence would likely indicate that centrists were just as ideologically driven as more ideologically extreme voters. However, centrists' lack of passion for their moderate "convictions" logically implies that they may be willing to defer their political prerogatives to those with stronger opinions and potentially greater political sophistication – elites. Empirical literature underpinning this possibility is again thin. Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014) used public opinion data to evaluate the Dutch electorate on a number of constructed indices, such as populism, pluralism, and elitism. They did show evidence of a relationship between populist values and support for extreme parties, and a corresponding relationship between elitist values and support for mainstream parties. However, that study used party preference as their dependent variable, and not self-identified ideology, so while it seems reasonable to propose a link between ideology and populism and elitism, there is still an obvious gap in this literature.

There is another reason to consider this hypothesised link between centrism and pro-elite views – the nature and actions of political parties. As also shown in the previous chapter,

research also shows a substantial curvilinear relationship between party ideology and the salience of anti-elite appeals, not at all dissimilar to the relationship between ideology and views on European integration. This is clear and persuasive evidence that extreme parties place a high value on anti-elite rhetoric to motivate their political base – and clear and persuasive evidence of the converse claim, that centrist parties are the least likely to resort to anti-elite appeals.

In a similar vein, the connection between elites and mainstream parties provides another supporting argument. Although there are many differentiated types of elites, many political elites are formally associated or informally identified with established, historical parties of government (Keller, 1963; Best, Higley, & Cotta, 2018). Even if the definition of "elite" is itself rather fuzzy, one might find the preceding sentence tautological – an elite is only so by virtue of their established position of power. Furthermore, these established, governing parties favoured by elites tend to be more ideologically centrist than anti-establishment challenger parties (Schedler, 1996; Hazan, 1997; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016). From this, it can be argued that a centrist voter associating with a more centrist, governing party is *a fortiori* allying herself with centrist, governing elites.

With any connection at all between the ideology of parties and the ideology of voters, it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that centrists should have a higher opinion of political elites than more extreme voters. Thus, the second hypothesis of this chapter:

H_2: Pro-elite sentiment is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Flexibility in Thinking

A third symbolic, non-ideological value that might be associated with self-identified centrism is flexible thinking, or the ability to reflect and reason without resorting to intuitive heuristics.

The concept of flexibility in thinking is one with a considerable history in the discipline of psychology. Baron (1991) described flexible thinking as a key part of a wider definition of idealised cognition he termed as "actively open-minded" and "consists of search that is thorough in proportion to the importance of the question and fairness to possibilities other than the one we initially favor" (p. 172). Stanovich and West (1997; 2007) formalised this conception as the Actively Open-Minded Thinking scale (AOT) and developed a questionnaire used to measure it for use in psychological research. Their concept and methods have been widely used throughout the discipline, with dozens of scholars adopting and adapting the questionnaire to predict critical reasoning skills (Heijltjes et al., 2014), learning ability (Haran, Ritov, & Mellers, 2013), and susceptibility to bias (West, Toplak, & Stanovich, 2008), among other phenomena.

A high score on the AOT, and highly flexible thinking in particular (a subset of the AOT), is relevant in studies of political ideology because it measures a person's ability to think outside the bounds of established heuristics. Indeed, the classical definition of a political ideology is a system of relatively simple heuristics that helps citizens understand the incredibly complex world of public affairs (e.g. Sargent, 1969; Christianson et al., 1972). Voters with strong ideologies are those who have accepted a relatively rigid worldview that informs their political outlook and a matching set of relatively rigid rules that govern their political decisions. In other words, ideological voters are inflexible in their thinking, resistant to opposing evidence and arguments, and unwilling to countenance changing their minds.

There is some empirical evidence to justify this theory. Voters rating highly on the AOT have been shown to be less prone to "illusory explanatory depth –" the illusion that one understands something fully, leading to a failure to grasp contradictory arguments and unwarranted overconfidence – a trait linked to political extremism (Fernbach et al., 2013). Baron (2019) reasons that actively open-minded thinking should decrease political polarisation and fanaticism, since it defuses the belief that any one party, politician, or ideology is correct at all times and in all situations. He has gone so far as to call actively open-minded thinking a necessary social norm for democratic functioning (Baron, 2018).

The inverse idea – that ideologues, and particularly ideological extremists, rate low in actively open-minded thinking – is common in the literature. Extremists of both left and right have been shown to be equally likely to avoid engagement with opposing ideas (Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017). A similar pattern has been demonstrated in ideologues' ability to process those ideas (Ditto et al., 2019). In some studies, ideologues on both sides of the spectrum appear to be equally dogmatic (Van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017), and intellectually simplistic (Lammers et al., 2017), making them more rigid and less flexible than centrists (Zmigrod, Rentfrow, & Robbins, 2020). This is by no means a settled debate, and there certainly are scholars who reject this view for any number of reasons: they actually find centrists as inflexible due to ignorance or indifference (e.g. Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2003; Pennycook & Rand, 2018); or that there is no ideological symmetry and that conservatives are simply far less reflective in their thinking than liberals, famously known as the "rigidity of the right" hypothesis (e.g. Tetlock, 1984; Jost et al., 2003); or that ideological extremism is unrelated to actively open-minded thinking at all and rather reflects social affinity behaviours (e.g. Kahan, 2012). However, a lack of consensus is no reason to dismiss the possibility of a causal relationship between actively

open-minded thinking and political centrism. Therefore, the third hypothesis of this chapter can be stated:

H_3: Flexibility in thinking is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Attachment to the Status Quo

One last symbolic, non-ideological value that could plausibly relate to centrism is an inertial attachment to the political *status quo*, or in other words, the quality of opposing political radicalism.

The empirical foundations of this hypothesised relationship lie in the massive scholarly debate between proponents of proximity theories of voting, where voters vote for parties that share their preferences (e.g. Downs, 1957; Westholm, 1997; Blais et al., 2001) and those espousing directional theories, where voters vote for parties with more extreme preferences than they hold themselves, because those parties lie along the same ideological vector (e.g. Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Macdonald, Listhaug, & Rabinowitz, 1991). In an important contribution to this ongoing debate, Grofman's (1985) early attempts at unifying these theories led to what is now called the "discounting" theory of voting, where voters evaluate parties and politicians spatially, but adjust the ramifications of those positions according to the *status quo*. Other studies have since replicated these findings (e.g. Kedar, 2005).

Moving to centrists specifically, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that centrists are more attentive and attracted to the *status quo* than other voters. In a paper using an experimental questionnaire to evaluate the three most common theories of issue voting (spatial, directional, and discounting), Tomz and Van Houweling (2008) find centrist voters are much more likely to apply discounting to their vote preferences than ideological voters:

> "Voters in the center of the political spectrum – judged either by their self-professed ideology or by their failure to identify with either major political party [this study focused on American voters] – are twice as likely as more committed voters to take existing policy into account. Thus, politically moderate citizens appear quite attentive to the political environment. This finding, which may seem surprising, comports with the claim by Fiorina (1992) and others that moderates make relatively sophisticated electoral choices aimed at dividing power between extremists and forcing policy compromise" (pp. 315-316).

Given that Tomz and Van Houweling's (2008) research was conducted in a two-party presidential system without a centrist party, there would be scholarly value in any finding that could confirm this general attitude on the part of centrists in a different national setting. Additionally, Fiorina's (1992) research on policy-balancing and the preference of moderates for divided government in the American federal context, already cited as evidence of a relationship between centrism and compromise, also dovetails neatly with the possibility of a link between centrism and efforts to preserve the *status quo*.

Although the relationship between extremity and intensity has been largely established, the literature is largely agnostic on what constitutes an "extreme" preference – and therefore what constitutes a "moderate" preference. Given that Downs' (1957) original model of proximity voting called for each voter to hold an internal counterfactual argument about the policy impact of the current government and the policy impact of the most likely alternative, it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that an extreme preference is one that differs substantially from the current *status quo*, and that a moderate preference is one very close to the *status quo*, if not the *status quo* itself.

In this sense, this argument owes much to the school of political philosophy associated with the 18th century Anglo-Irish statesman and intellectual Edmund Burke. In this conception, non-ideological centrism is a manifestation of a (small "c") conservative scepticism; a general

preference for the current state of public affairs over any given radical alternative (Burke, 1790). Given this background, the fourth and final hypothesis of this chapter can be advanced:

H_4: Attachment to the *status quo* is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Symbolic Values and Types of Centrists

The literature and reasoning outlined above advances a compelling case that these four symbolic values – compromise, pro-elite sentiment, flexibility in thinking, and anti-radical sentiment – should be held in higher esteem by centrists than by more ideologically extreme voters and may plausibly be a core factor in determining centrist self-identification. However, along those same lines, there is good reason to suggest that the symbolic values may vary in their importance among centrists based on the typology detailed in the theoretical and descriptive chapters.

That typology was based on two distinct variables – intentionality and moderation – which are this thesis' adaptations of the variables classically used in the Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) model of ideological identification – a "partisan component" and a "values component." Essentially, this means that in both the classical and updated models, there are two main routes to centrist self-identification: caring very little about politics, and/or having moderate views on political issues. This current chapter is exploring a third route – that of symbolic ideology, or the possibility that centrist self-identification is grounded in a strong attachment to abstract, centrist, non-ideological values.

Therefore, it follows that the centrists who are *least* predicted to be centrists by the classical model – high intentionality, low moderation voters, or what are termed Genuine Syncretics in the previous chapters – should be the *most* attached to centrist symbolic values.

Indeed, if they resist the usual definitions in that they care about politics and do not have moderate views, what other reason could they have for identifying as centrists?

By the same token, it should be expected to find the least attachment to centrist symbolic values among those respondents who most fulfil the classical predictions – those who are low intentionality and high moderation, or Default Moderates. Their self-identified centrism is the easiest to explain, since they do not care about politics, and likely "split the difference" on political issues because of it; in their case, there is no gap in the classical model for symbolic ideology to fill.

That leaves two groups of centrists – Genuine Moderates and Default Syncretics – who should be expected to experience the cross-cutting effects of intentionality and moderation. Notably, this includes the single largest bloc of centrists, the Default Syncretics. If symbolic values are a notably better predictor of centrist self-identification in one group, that might reveal valuable information about the relative impacts of both intentionality and moderation.

Again, as this section on hypotheses makes clear, centrists – on the whole – ought to rate higher in these symbolic, non-ideological values than respondents on either the left or the right. But disparate results within the centrist category might also communicate interesting information about the development and effects of ideology among the electorate.

Data and Methods

In order to evaluate these hypotheses, this chapter makes use of the 2014-2023 version of the British Election Study (BES), comprising 20 waves at the time of writing, with the first

starting in February 2014, and the 20th concluding in June 2020.[117] Each wave surveyed approximately 30,000 respondents over an approximately two-week period, with generally impressive retention rates across waves.[118]

There are three key reasons why the use of BES panel data is such an obvious choice for this study. First, given this chapter's focus on specific attitudes of specific ideological and partisan sub-groups, there is a need for significant sample sizes. Over this set of panels, the BES has collected data on more than 90,000 respondents, allowing for the analysis of large numbers of observations focussed on specific sub-groups. Second and for the same reasons, this study demands specific and relevant variables to address the hypotheses. Spanning those 90,000 respondents, the BES has collected data on thousands of variables, including a number that proved valuable to this analysis. Finally, the panel design makes it possible to analyse changes over time, allowing for a research timeline spanning years.

With the source of data chosen, the individual elements of the model can be discussed, starting with the dependent variable.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is the probability that a respondent self-identifies as a centrist.

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[117] Fieldhouse, E., Green, J., Evans, G., Mellon, J., Prosser, C., De Geus, R., Bailey, J., Schmitt, H., & Van der Eijk, C. (2020). *British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1-20*. https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-objects/panel-study-data

[118] Wave 3 represented the low of the sample, with 27,839 respondents, while Wave 16 was the high, with 37,959 respondents. Further details about the BES' methods, including sampling, weighting, representativeness, survey design, and survey execution found in: Fieldhouse, E., Green, J., Evans, G., Mellon, J., Prosser, C., De Geus, R., Bailey, J., Schmitt, H., & Van der Eijk, C. (2020). *British Election Study Internet Panel Codebook*. p. 12.

In keeping with the rest of this thesis, centrists have been classified on the basis of their self-identification on an 11-point scale, where 0 denotes the farthest point left, 10 denotes the farthest point right, and 5 is the exact midpoint.

This definition is maintained, even as the dependent variable is shifted in terms for the purposes of executing as robust a study as possible. In some versions of the model, the dependent variable is binary, with 1 denoting a centrist self-identification, and 0 denoting any other, non-centrist, response. However, others use a categorical variable to classify voters more precisely. This variable has five possible states, each one indicating the voter's general ideological grouping. Those identifying as a 0, 1, or 2 on the 11-point overall ideological scale are categorised as far left; those rated 3 or 4 are categorised as moderate left; those rated 5 are categorised as centrist; those rated 6 or 7 are categorised as moderate right; and those rated 8, 9, or 10 are categorised as far right. While this method is vulnerable to the problem of spurious precision in discriminating between two very similar voters separated by a discontinuity between categories, it does have one clear advantage over a binary variable – it does not rely upon the assumption of symmetry on either side of the ideological spectrum, an assumption that is clearly called into question by the literature. For that reason, a categorical variable is an appropriate tool for a study evaluating the differential origins of ideology.

Two further notes on these operationalisation decisions are necessary. First, the BES itself includes an alternative method of surveying respondents' left-right ideology, based on their answers to a set of questions about values regarding economic "fairness." This variable results in a similar 11-point scale derived from the respondent's answers to five such questions. This measure is rejected for use in this chapter for two reasons. First, this chapter concerns the differences between symbolic and operational ideology on the basis of non-ideological values, or those nominally separate from the normal course of left-right political conflict. An

implied metric of ideology based on a respondent's views on policy controversies is clearly inappropriate for this purpose. Secondly, these observations are strictly concerned with economic ideology, while research has shown that self-identified overall ideological ratings are highly responsive to many issues beyond the economic realm, such as immigration, abortion, and other sociocultural questions (Middendorp, 1992; De Vries, Hakhverdian, & Lancee, 2013).

Finally, the "centrist" category is restricted only to those respondents self-rating as a 5 on the 11-point scale. While the term "centrist" is often used to describe citizens who are "not extreme" or more towards the centre than others, this thesis' *raison d'être* is an argument for the importance of the distinction between the ideological position at the exact centre, and those at the centre-left and centre-right. As discussed in the theoretical and descriptive chapters, the midpoint could be fairly construed as a position either equally left and right, or one that is neither left nor right – something that could not be said about the centre-left and centre-right. This distinction is made in some research – for example Iversen & Soskice's (2015) theory that uninformed voters have a bias towards identifying with the exact ideological midpoint as opposed to one merely close, or Converse's (1964) concept of nonattitudes, which might be most purely expressed as a "neutral" response – and will be made throughout these empirical chapters.

The dependent variable is taken from responses to the ideological self-identification question on Wave 13 of the BES, even though that question appears on every wave. The independent variables, in contrast, are all sourced from questions on Wave 7. The theoretical reasoning behind this is simple – any attempt to predict identification should come temporally before that identification. However, the justification for the choice of these two specific waves is logistical. Given that people with interest in politics – and the time to repeatedly report their

views to researchers – are inherently over-represented in a survey of this kind, the team behind the BES have provided a number of post-stratification weights for use in analyses like this chapter. The only weight available that covers solely Wave 7 and a single following wave, therefore maximising the sample size and properly weighting the demographics of that sample, is one for Waves 7 and 13. This seemed as good a reason as any to code the dependent variable from Wave 13.

Any respondent who gave a "don't know" response or refused to answer the ideological self-identification item in Wave 13 is excluded from the analysis, a treatment extended to similar situations concerning all the independent variables as well.

Those independent variables are now discussed in turn.

Independent Variables

H_1: "Compromise" is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires a variable indicating the respondent's attitude towards political compromise. Such a variable is derived from responses to a question on the BES questionnaire concerning that specific concept.[119]

Although this question appeared on multiple waves of the BES – a pattern that is repeated for a number of other survey items used in this analysis – only responses from Wave 7 are used here, for three reasons. First, Wave 7 contained a number of other items that proved valuable to this study, and the maintenance of consistency by taking all independent variables from the same wave was both simple and appropriate. Secondly, as described above, the

[119] Although there are several questions on the BES that superficially deal with compromise, including those asking about one's preferred party "sticking to its principles" and the electoral benefits of "compromising on values," these items appeared unsuitable for principal component analysis, with both their Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic and Cronbach's α lower than 0.6, as well as the analysis returning only one significant factor, but with an eigenvalue less than 1.

availability of sampling weights made Wave 7 a logistically ideal source of data. Finally, the specific timing of Wave 7 made it particularly attractive for research. By the standards of any advanced democratic society, the 2014-2020 period in British history – the timeframe of the current BES – was marked by significant political upheaval. Between the referendum on Scottish independence, the referendum on European Union membership and its interminable fallout, three general elections, and three Prime Ministers (notwithstanding many other major political events between elections), the United Kingdom experienced a great many electoral shocks in recent years, fuelling an era of significant electoral volatility (Fieldhouse et al., 2019). Among all the options, Wave 7 was conducted at the most relatively placid time – between general elections and before the extremely consequential and polarising referendum on EU membership – suggesting that its responses may be the least influenced by the volatility of the time and making it the best choice for this exercise.

The specific survey item used here as an operationalisation for the value of compromise leads with a prompt asking for the respondent's degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "What people call 'compromise' in politics is really just selling out one's principles."

Responses were scored on a standard five-point Likert scale with a "don't know" option, ranging from "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" on the extremes, to "disagree" and "agree," and finally to "neither agree nor disagree."

The scale has been reversed and normalised, so that 0 denotes a respondent least favourable towards compromise, and 1 denotes a respondent most favourable towards compromise. Respondents not providing an answer or responding "don't know" have been ignored.[120]

[120] "Don't know" answers make up approximately 9% of all responses.

H_2: Pro-elite sentiment is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires some metric of respondents' attitudes towards political elites. Such a metric is derived here from responses to four different items on the BES questionnaire evaluating the respondents' views of experts, the proper role of "the will of the people," and the trade-offs between the delegate and trustee models of political representation. Although all four of these questions appear on multiple waves of the BES, only responses from Wave 7 are used.

The items lead with a prompt asking for the respondent's degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements. First: "The politicians in the UK Parliament need to follow the will of the people." Second: "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions." Third: "I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician." And finally: "I'd rather put my trust in the wisdom of ordinary people than the opinions of experts."

All four items are scored on the same five-point Likert scale with a "don't know" option, ranging from "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" on the extremes, to "disagree" and "agree," and finally to "neither agree nor disagree."

Given that the core attitude of interest here intuitively seems to be measured by multiple survey questions, the final variable is a factor score of responses to all four items. There are five distinct advantages to this approach. First, it provides the most information; in general, the more responses included in the analysis, the stronger the conclusions. Second, it is more comprehensive; using multiple questions allows for a wider, fuller look at the underlying attitude being measured. Third, it is simplest; including everything is the most parsimonious use of the data, particularly when there are no overwhelmingly persuasive arguments to privilege one question over others. Fourth, it decreases the impact of outlying

answers; if a respondent has generally consistent attitudes but gives a wildly incompatible answer due to an error or a lark, using all their answers in the metric will prevent the outlying response from poisoning the analysis. Fifth and finally, it is based on observed empirical validation of the structure of the data, i.e. the loadings of items on the same factor.

Responses to the question group's Cronbach's α is 0.8393, making them highly internally reliable, and justifying creation of the factor variable. All four questions were scored on the same 5-point Likert scale, and all followed the same attitudinal direction-of-travel, adding to the ease of analysis.

The scales for all questions were reversed and normalised to facilitate easy interpretation. This means that the final factor variable runs from 0, representing minimal favourability to elites; to 1, representing maximal favourability to elites. Since all three questions share an ordinal response structure, an exploratory factor analysis was performed utilising a polychoric correlation matrix. The analysis returned only one common factor with a significant eigenvalue, making up more than 100% of the variance accounted for by the analysis. After a conservative varimax rotation, the loadings and scoring of the four items into one factor are listed in Table 5.1:

Variable	Loading	Uniqueness	Scoring
Item 1 (will of the people)	0.6456	0.5832	0.1880
Item 2 (people, not politicians)	0.8153	0.3352	0.4003
Item 3 (citizen representation)	0.7689	0.4088	0.3100
Item 4 (anti-intellectualism)	0.6320	0.6006	0.1819

Table 5.1: Factor loadings for pro-elite sentiment variable, following principal component analysis and varimax rotation. Eigenvalue of the retained factor = 2.0722. Proportion of variance explained = 1.1656. N = 6,743.

Respondents not providing an answer or responding "don't know" to any of the four component questions have been ignored.[121]

H_3: Flexibility in thinking is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires a metric measuring the respondent's regard for flexible thinking. Such a metric is derived here from responses to six different items on the BES questionnaire, measuring the respondents' views and attitudes towards thinking and how it should best be done. This group of survey questions was asked during Wave 7 of the study.

The items lead with a prompt asking for the respondent's degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements. First: "Allowing oneself to be convinced by an opposing argument is a sign of good character." Second: "People should take into consideration evidence that goes against their beliefs." Third: "People should revise their beliefs in response to new information or evidence." Fourth: "Changing your mind is a sign of weakness." Fifth: "It is important to persevere in your beliefs even when evidence is brought to bear against them." And sixth: "One should disregard evidence that conflicts with one's established beliefs."

All six items are scored on the same five-point Likert scale with a "don't know" option, ranging from "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" on the extremes, to "disagree" and "agree," and finally to "neither agree nor disagree."

These six items are part of the Actively Open-Minded thinking questionnaire developed by Stanovich & West (1997; 2007); more specifically, they form part of the "flexible

[121] "Don't know" answers make up approximately 5-10% of responses to each question.

thinking" sub-scale of that questionnaire, the segment "most directly intended to measure AOT" (Baron, 2019, p. 11).[122]

All questions were scored on the same 5-point Likert scale, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth items were reversed in their scoring to match the first three. And again, as above, the resulting mean was normalised to facilitate easy interpretation. This means that the final variable runs from 0, representing no regard for flexible thinking; to 1, representing maximal regard for flexible thinking.

While there is indeed an ongoing debate over the internal validity of the AOT scale (an essentially ubiquitous development concerning any psychometric construct), it is a common tool in psychological research and has been validated many times over by the standards of that discipline. The Cronbach's α for this suite of responses has been reported as very high in dozens of studies, regularly exceeding 0.8, indicating that the survey items themselves are highly internally consistent.[123] In keeping with the approach detailed above in the section on pro-elite sentiment, a respondent's attitude towards flexible thinking is expressed as a factor variable comprising their responses to the six underlying survey questions. This variable was again derived from an exploratory factor analysis performed utilising a polychoric correlation matrix. The analysis returned only one common factor with a significant eigenvalue, making up more than 100% of the variance accounted for by the analysis. After a conservative varimax rotation, the loadings and scoring of the six items into one factor are listed in Table 5.2:

[122] There is an additional AOT survey item included in the BES, but it is not part of the "flexible thinking" sub-scale, according to Baron (2019). Therefore, it was not used for this analysis.

[123] For responses to these six questions, specifically, $\alpha = 0.9056$

Variable	Loading	Uniqueness	Scoring
Item 1 (being convinced is a sign of good character)	0.4419	0.7505	0.0947
Item 2 (weigh evidence that contradicts beliefs)	0.7476	0.4194	0.2642
Item 3 (revise beliefs in response to new evidence)	0.7094	0.4521	0.2394
Item 4 (changing your mind is a sign of weakness)	0.5985	0.6201	0.1505
Item 5 (important to persevere when faced with conflicting evidence)	0.6145	0.5831	0.1598
Item 6 (disregard evidence that conflicts with beliefs)	0.7603	0.3814	0.2962

Table 5.2: Factor loadings for flexibility in thinking variable, following principal component analysis and varimax rotation. Eigenvalue of the retained factor = 2.5712. Proportion of variance explained = 1.0915. N = 6,871.

Respondents not providing an answer or responding "don't know" to any of the six component questions have been ignored.[124]

Two final issues concerning the AOT require discussion. First, it must be noted that the questions used by the BES to approximate the AOT are not specific to politics (e.g. a question about the importance of changing one's mind to reflect new evidence is not asked specifically in the context of voting or other political decisions). However, the fact that the BES is an explicitly political survey (indeed, the word "election" is in the title) should certainly provide enough context about the question's aims to reasonably infer that responses can be applied to politics. And secondly, although there is a clear conceptual difference between a personality trait and a symbolic value, there is good reason to think that in practise, the AOT technically measures the latter. True enough – the questions are designed to serve as evidence of a respondent's cognitive quality, and evidence of that quality is not the same as evidence that an abstract value is held in high regard by that same respondent. That being said, since the

[124] "Don't know" answers make up approximately 3-7% of responses to each question.

AOT is measured through a survey of self-reported attitudes, what is truly being measured is a respondent's *self-reported attitude towards flexible thinking,* rather than an experimental method that might measure flexible thinking itself. Therefore, it is coherent to treat flexible thinking as an abstract value, coherent with the other values tested in this analysis.

H_4: Attachment to the *status quo* is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Evaluating this hypothesis requires a metric measuring the respondent's appetite for political radicalism. Over the years, the BES has included a few questions plausibly linked to this value; however, there are significant differences between these questions, requiring two different ways of operationalising this variable.

The first method draws on a question about radicalism in politics, seemingly the most direct way of measuring the hypothesised value. The question asks for the respondent's degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "We need to fundamentally change the way society works in Britain."

Responses were scored on the same five-point Likert scale with a "don't know" option, ranging from "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" on the extremes, to "disagree" and "agree," and finally to "neither agree nor disagree."

The scale has been reversed and normalised, so that 0 denotes a respondent most eager for radical change, and 1 denotes a respondent most averse to radical change.

Complementing this approach, a question about the respondent's appetite for risk is also used in the analysis. While it is not directly related to political outlook, it is also plausibly linked to respondents' attachment to the *status quo*.

The question reads: "Generally speaking, how willing are you to take risks?" The four possible responses – very and somewhat willing; very and somewhat unwilling – comprise a symmetrical Likert scale, without either a middle option or a "don't know" option.

The scale has been reversed and normalised, so that 0 denotes a respondent least risk-averse, and 1 denotes a respondent most risk-averse.

Once more, although both questions appear on multiple waves of the survey, responses are limited to those from Wave 7 for the purposes of this analysis. And respondents refusing to answer or responding "don't know" have been ignored.[125]

Unlike the analyses on pro-elite sentiment or flexibility in thinking, the data in this case is unsuitable for factor analysis on the grounds that these two questions are too dissimilar, and potentially measure different underlying attitudes. They have therefore been included separately.

Classical Predictors

The intent of this study is to evaluate the predictive power of symbolic, abstract concepts in determining centrist self-identification. In order to do so, those concepts must be tested alongside other variables relating to centrist self-identification. As discussed both in Chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, those mediating variables are intentionality and moderation, and their operationalisation for use in this analysis is outlined here.

First, since a centrist's intentionality is grounded in two things – her interest in politics and her identification with a centrist political party – both must be accounted for. The BES makes measuring both relatively straightforward.

[125] "Don't know" answers make up approximately 3% of all responses to the question on fundamentally changing society. A "don't know" option was not provided on the question regarding risk-taking.

Political interest is measured by a question asking: "How much attention do you generally pay to politics?" Responses are scored from 0 to 10, and per usual, respondents who refuse to answer the question or answer "don't know" are excluded from analysis.

Identification with a centrist party is also measured on the basis of self-identification, prompted by a BES question asking: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?"

Naturally, the classification of a party as "centrist" is more complex than it appears (a point underlying the scholarly value of this thesis). However, for this purpose, justifying the Liberal Democrats as the party of the British centre is a fairly simple matter. As the data show, both in scholarship and public perception, the Liberal Democrats were clearly the centrist party in Britain during the active life of the survey.[126]

From both an ideological and middle centrist perspective, the Liberal Democrats have consistently been rated as a centrist party by experts. Their rating on the CHES' overall ideology scale in 2014 (the last survey before Wave 7 of the BES was conducted) was 4.86, very near the midpoint of 5, and substantially closer to that midpoint than any other British party.[127] This was not a fleeting occurrence. On the 2010 survey, the party rated a perfectly centrist 5, while the 2017 partial survey again rated them as the UK's most centrist party with a 4.5, well ahead of their competitors.

Public opinion data confirms the general perception of the Liberal Democrats as a centrist party. Since 2006, British polling firm YouGov has mapped the public's ideological

[126] The only other plausible contender was the short-lived Independent Group for Change, also known as Change UK, which was formed (and dissolved) in 2019, well after the survey waves in question.

[127] They were also the only party between 4 and 6 on the overall ideology scale, comporting with Chapter 3's coding for a centrist party.

impressions of the three major parties on a 200-point scale.[128] The Liberal Democrats have scored between Labour and the Conservatives on every one of their surveys and rated much closer to the centre than either of those rivals.[129]

Media reports corroborate this measurement of the public's views. Outlets from across Britain's politically diverse journalistic landscape have contemporaneously noted the Liberal Democrats as a centrist party, and indeed, as *the* centrist party in the country.[130]

Altogether, the full sweep of the evidence confirms the overall perception of the Liberal Democrats as the only major centrist party in the UK.

Therefore, the variable controlling for partisanship in the OLS model is categorical, with three distinct categories. The base category is identification with no party, another category is identification with the Liberal Democrats, and the third category is identification with any other party. In the multinomial logistic model, given that centrists will be compared

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[128] Smith, M. (2016, 9 August). *The Leadership Effect – How Leaders Can Shift Perceptions of Parties*. YouGov. https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/19/which-leaders-have-most-successfully-shifted-publi/

[129] YouGov also collected data on the public perception of party leaders' ideological position. Then-Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg rated at the exact centre in 2011. Interestingly, while Labour has consistently rated as further to the left than the Liberal Democrats since YouGov started asking respondents about party ideology in 2006, Labour leader Tony Blair was plainly thought more centrist than Charles Kennedy, his Liberal Democrat counterpart, in those years. This meant that the Labour Party as a whole was considered significantly further to the left than its centrist leader, a divergence that ended quickly under Gordon Brown's leadership. This gap between the perceptions of the party and its leader could certainly be explained by the theory of stylistic centrism.

[130] Grice, A. (2018, 7 September). If MPs from Labour and the Lib Dems want to form a new party, the time to do it is now. *The Independent.* https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/vince-cable-liberal-democrats-labour-centre-brexit-jeremy-corbyn-boris-johnson-a8527391.html

The Guardian view on the Lib Dems: missing their moment. (2018, 13 September). *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/13/the-guardian-view-on-the-lib-dems-missing-their-moment

Payne, S. (2018, 8 September). A new Liberal Democrat leader won't solve the party's problems. *Financial Times.* https://www.ft.com/content/346d7b90-b288-11e8-99ca-68cf89602132

Warry, R. (2017, 15 May). Guide to the parties: Liberal Democrats. *BBC News.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2017-39852084

Elledge, J. (2018, 8 September). What is the point of the Liberal Democrats?. *New Statesman.* https://www.newstatesman.com/2018/09/what-point-liberal-democrats

with other ideological categories, the symmetrical assumptions of the political spectrum are no longer appropriate and so the party variable is simply categorical, with each major party its own category. No party identification is again the base category.

The second variable conditioning the typology of centrist voters is moderation; the idea that voters self-identify as centrists due to their generally moderate beliefs on policy issues. Two BES questions were selected to serve as quantifiers of respondents' policy moderation – one dealing with the economic dimension, and one dealing (largely) with the sociocultural dimension.

The former question concerns the redistribution of income. It reads: "Some people feel that government should make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal. Other people feel that government should be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are. Where would you place yourself and the political parties on this scale?" The latter question is on immigration policy. It reads: "Some people think that the UK should allow *many more* immigrants to come to the UK to live and others think that the UK should allow *many fewer* immigrants. Where would you place yourself and the parties on this scale?"

Both questions are scored on a 0 to 10 scale. In order to judge how moderate a respondent's views are, their answers have been re-scaled to represent an absolute distance away from the exact midpoint of the scale. In other words, the highest score (5) represents an exactly centrist position, while the lowest score (0) represents a maximally extreme position, either on the left or right.

Controls

Finally, four controls are included in the model, all variables with clear relationships to self-identified ideology.

First, age in years is coded as a discrete, integer variable pegged to February of 2014.

Second, gender is coded as a binary variable, with female coded as 1, and male coded as 0.[131]

Third, education level is a categorical variable, with six distinct tiers: no qualifications; below GCSE; GCSE; A-level; undergraduate degree; and postgraduate degree. "No qualifications" is the model's baseline assumption, so all education categories are compared to that.[132]

And finally, social class is also a categorical variable with six distinct tiers corresponding to the National Readership Survey classifications: E representing the non-working, D representing the working class, C2 representing the skilled working class, C1 representing the lower middle class, B representing the "middle" middle class, and A representing the upper middle class. Grade E represents the model's baseline assumption. Because respondents tend to be much more willing to answer questions about class than they are about income, social class is a common proxy for a respondent's material circumstances in social science research (e.g. Svallfors, 2004; Iversen & Soskice, 2006).

Models and Results

A concern with attempting to predict a highly complex outcome like political ideology is the sheer number of variables that could plausibly be included in the model as predictors.

[131] While men in the sample are significantly more likely to identify on the political right than women, women are only somewhat more likely to identify on the political left – however, they are significantly more likely to self-identify as centrists. This is also needed to comport with evidence showing women as more inclined to compromise (the well-known "women and peace" thesis posited by Conover and Sapiro, 1993; Togeby, 1994; Wilcox, Hewitt, & Allsop, 1996) and more deferential to perceived elite authority (e.g. Del Giudice, Booth, & Irwing, 2012).

[132] Higher education has an inverse (almost centrifugal) relationship with centrism; a higher education level is clearly associated with a smaller likelihood of identifying as a centrist.

Given that the hypotheses propose a degree of correlation between the non-ideological values and other predictors of centrism like moderate views on political issues, it is therefore prudent to build the analysis one step at a time, adding blocs of related variables in sequence.

The first step in the analysis is to check for the most obvious sources of covariance. If the hypotheses are all true, the non-ideological values being tested here could be highly correlated. Table 5.3 presents the correlation matrix for these variables.

Variable	Compromise	Pro-Elite Sentiment	Flexible Thinking	Anti-Radical Sentiment	Risk Aversion
Compromise	1	-	-	-	-
Pro-Elite Sentiment	0.51	1	-	-	-
Flexibility in Thinking	0.30	0.20	1	-	-
Anti-Radical Sentiment	0.22	0.29	0.00	1	-
Risk Aversion	0.00	0.01	-0.06	0.03	1

Table 5.3: Correlation matrix for five variables representing non-ideological values.

While some variables do show some slight intercorrelation, others – particularly risk aversion – show none or nearly none.[133] None of the variables are correlated to a significant enough degree to obscure potential findings.

However, in keeping with the cautious approach outlined above, the next step in analysis is a simple, manual, hierarchical set of regression analyses, where the dependent variable – centrist self-identification – is first regressed against the group of variables representing non-ideological values, second against the previous variables plus centrist ideological predictors like political interest and moderation, and finally against all the previous variables plus demographic controls.

[133] The lack of correlation with anti-radical sentiment is particularly telling and confirms as correct the original decision to separate the two variables.

This set of three models was run twice, once using ordinary least squares regression, and once using the logistic method commonly used with binary dependent variables but debated among methodologists. Table 5.4 represents the findings from the set of OLS models, as the findings from the logistic regression were not meaningfully different.

Variable	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Compromise	-0.10 ***	(0.04)	-0.06	(0.04)	-0.06	(0.04)
Pro-Elite Sentiment	-0.10 **	(0.04)	-0.06	(0.04)	-0.05	(0.04)
Flexible Thinking	-0.22 ***	(0.04)	-0.18 ***	(0.05)	-0.14 ***	(0.05)
Anti-Radical Sentiment	0.02	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.00	(0.03)
Risk Aversion	0.04	(0.03)	-0.04	(0.03)	-0.05	(0.03)
Centrism Predictors						
Economic Moderation			0.02 ***	(0.00)	0.02 ***	(0.00)
Immigration Moderation			-0.02 ***	(0.00)	-0.01 ***	(0.00)
Political Interest			-0.03 ***	(0.00)	-0.03 ***	(0.00)
Partisanship: None			-	-	-	-
Liberal Democrat			-0.06 *	(0.03)	-0.08 *	(0.03)
Other Party			-0.21 ***	(0.02)	-0.24 ***	(0.02)
Controls						
Age					0.00 ***	(0.00)
Gender					0.01	(0.02)
Education Level: None					-	-
Below GCSE					0.03	(0.05)
GCSE					0.05	(0.04)
A-Level					0.02	(0.04)
Undergraduate					0.01	(0.04)
Postgraduate					-0.01	(0.04)
Social Grade: E					-	-
D					-0.01	(0.04)
C2					0.03	(0.03)
C1					-0.05 *	(0.03)
B					0.00	(0.03)
A					0.00	(0.03)
Constant	0.46 ***	(0.04)	0.76 ***	(0.05)	0.64 ***	(0.07)
N	**3,301**		**3,068**		**2,806**	

Table 5.4: Results of ordinary least squares regression upon binary dependent variable for centrist ideological identification. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

In the first and simplest run of the model, including only the non-ideological value variables of interest, three values show statistically significant associations with centrist self-identification. However, all three associations display an inverse relationship with centrism, directly contradicting theoretical expectations. With no other variables present, the findings indicate that as the value a respondent places on compromise, pro-elite sentiment, and flexible thinking increases, their likelihood of identifying as a centrist decreases.

When the model becomes more complex, including the theoretical elements detailed in Chapter 2, the significance of all non-ideological values but one drops, with both compromise and pro-elite sentiment dropping below the significance threshold. Only flexible thinking remains as a statistical predictor of centrism, but even though the size of the coefficient decreases, it is still clearly negative.

The classical predictors also carry some surprising results, the most obvious being the effect of moderation on the immigration issue, as it is a significant negative predictor of centrism, even as moderation on the economic issue is a significant positive predictor. Another surprise is that identification with the Liberal Democrats is a statistically significant negative predictor of centrism, indicating that even though they are the centrist party, identification with no party at all better predicts non-centrist ideological identification.

With demographic controls then included and the model reaching fully-fledged status, very little changes from the previous analysis. Again, only flexible thinking remains as a statistically significant predictor of centrist identification among the non-ideological values, although it retains its negative association. The classical predictors are essentially unchanged, lending further credibility to their associations.

For an illustration of these relationships – or lack thereof – Figure 5.1 plots the predicted probabilities of identifying as a centrist, as a function of each non-ideological value.

These predicted probabilities are taken from the final run of the model, which includes classical centrist predictors and demographic controls.

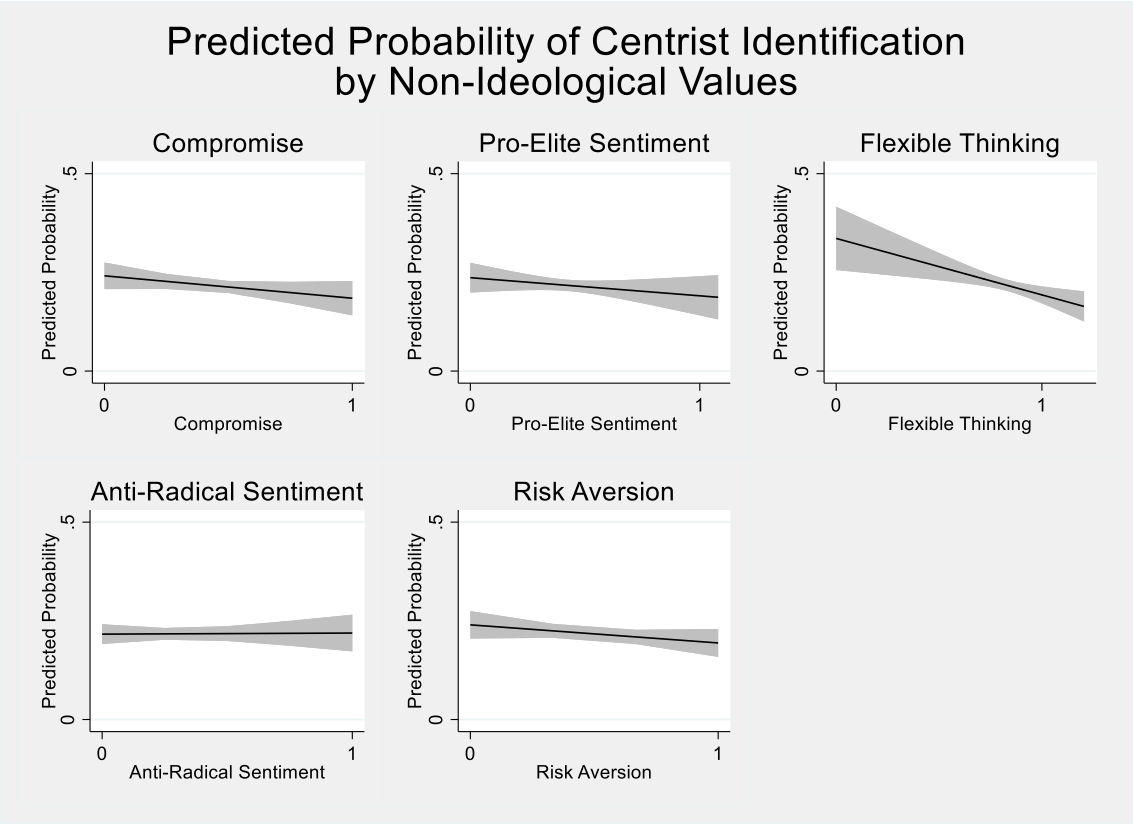

Figure 5.1: Clockwise from top left: predicted probabilities of ideological identification as a function of compromise, pro-elite sentiment, flexible thinking, risk aversion, and anti-radical sentiment following OLS regression with binary dependent variable, with classical predictors and demographic controls.

As indicated in table form, only flexible thinking evinces a statistically significant relationship. The inconclusive nature of the other results is not meaningless – on the contrary, the failure of hypothesised relationships to materialise is indeed counterintuitive and interesting, but a fuller discussion of the reasons behind them can only come after a look at the totality of the ideological spectrum.

Preventing that view in the current analysis is the use of a binary dependent variable. However, given that this entire chapter is predicated on the differential effects of ideology, and that not all the literature in this sphere has found evidence of symmetry between left and right extremes around the centre, the next phase of analysis attempts to isolate comparisons of the centre with other specific ideological groups.

This next phase is a multinomial logistic regression analysis, with a categorical dependent variable for ideological identification. As a reminder, this variable has five possible states, each one indicating the voter's general ideological grouping. Those identifying as a 0, 1, or 2 on the 11-point overall ideological scale are categorised as far left; those rated 3 or 4 are categorised as moderate left; those rated 5 are categorised as centrist; those rated 6 or 7 are categorised as moderate right; and those rated 8, 9, or 10 are categorised as far right.

The results of the multinomial logistical regression analysis are shown in Tables 5.5 and 5.6, where each table shows the comparison between a respondent identifying either as centrist or as one of the four other ideological categories (far left, moderate left, moderate right, and far right). Table 5.5 shows the comparison of centrists to the far left and moderate left, and Table 5.6 shows the comparison of centrists to the moderate right and far right.

	Far Left		Moderate Left	
Variable	**Coefficient**	**S.E.**	**Coefficient**	**S.E.**
Compromise	1.55 ***	(0.39)	0.62 *	(0.34)
Pro-Elite Sentiment	-0.45	(0.46)	0.31	(0.40)
Flexible Thinking	2.70 ***	(0.51)	2.85 ***	(0.44)
Anti-Radical Sentiment	-1.95 ***	(0.41)	-0.74 **	(0.31)
Risk Aversion	0.11	(0.33)	0.79 ***	(0.28)
Centrism Predictors				
Economic Moderation	-0.37 ***	(0.05)	-0.01	(0.05)
Immigration Moderation	0.29 ***	(0.05)	0.23 ***	(0.04)
Political Interest	0.25 ***	(0.04)	0.12 ***	(0.03)
Partisanship: None	-	-	-	-
Conservative	-1.93 ***	(0.66)	-0.65 **	(0.26)
Labour	2.65 ***	(0.24)	2.06 ***	(0.19)
Liberal Democrat	0.57 *	(0.34)	0.97 ***	(0.23)
Scottish National Party	2.33 ***	(0.44)	1.79 ***	(0.39)
Plaid Cymru	1.32	(1.25)	1.04	(1.01)
UKIP	1.12 **	(0.47)	-0.11	(0.47)
Green	2.38 ***	(0.45)	1.74 ***	(0.40)
Other	2.20 ***	(0.67)	1.21 **	(0.59)
Controls				
Age	-0.02 ***	(0.01)	-0.02 ***	(0.00)
Gender	0.60 ***	(0.16)	0.00	(0.14)
Education Level: None	-	-	-	-
Below GCSE	-0.08	(0.63)	-0.51	(0.54)
GCSE	-0.29	(0.42)	-0.44	(0.33)
A-Level	0.30	(0.41)	-0.17	(0.33)
Undergraduate	0.36	(0.40)	0.03	(0.32)
Postgraduate	0.71	(0.46)	0.50	(0.37)
Social Grade: E	-	-	-	-
D	0.18	(0.36)	-0.16	(0.31)
C2	-0.21	(0.30)	-0.42	(0.26)
C1	0.58 **	(0.29)	0.50 **	(0.25)
B	-0.25	(0.32)	-0.04	(0.26)
A	-0.59 *	(0.35)	-0.38	(0.28)
Constant	-5.84 ***	(0.80)	-4.34 ***	(0.64)
N	**2,806**		**2,806**	

Table 5.5: Results of multinomial logistic regression upon categorical dependent variable for centrist ideological identification. This table shows coefficients of comparison between centrist respondents and far and moderate left respondents. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

	Moderate Right		Far Right	
Variable	**Coefficient**	**S.E.**	**Coefficient**	**S.E.**
Compromise	0.22	(0.32)	-0.48	(0.38)
Pro-Elite Sentiment	0.37	(0.38)	0.31	(0.44)
Flexible Thinking	-0.20	(0.42)	-0.84	(0.52)
Anti-Radical Sentiment	0.54 **	(0.28)	0.60 **	(0.32)
Risk Aversion	0.30	(0.27)	-0.10	(0.32)
Centrism Predictors				
Economic Moderation	-0.06	(0.04)	-0.25 ***	(0.05)
Immigration Moderation	0.04	(0.04)	-0.22 ***	(0.05)
Political Interest	0.09 ***	(0.03)	0.30 ***	(0.04)
Partisanship: None	-	-	-	-
Conservative	1.76 ***	(0.17)	2.41 ***	(0.23)
Labour	-0.56 ***	(0.22)	-0.28	(0.30)
Liberal Democrat	-0.38	(0.27)	-1.38 **	(0.68)
Scottish National Party	0.19	(0.46)	-0.89	(0.90)
Plaid Cymru	-0.91	(1.46)	-11.79	(497.35)
UKIP	1.11 ***	(0.25)	1.65 ***	(0.29)
Green	1.00 **	(0.40)	-1.48	(1.87)
Other	-1.44	(1.21)	0.28	(0.96)
Controls				
Age	-0.01 ***	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)
Gender	-0.54 ***	(0.13)	-0.09	(0.15)
Education Level: None	-	-	-	-
Below GCSE	-0.50	(0.38)	-0.26	(0.43)
GCSE	-0.64 **	(0.28)	-0.22	(0.32)
A-Level	-0.61 **	(0.28)	0.03	(0.33)
Undergraduate	-0.54 **	(0.27)	-0.23	(0.32)
Postgraduate	-0.51	(0.34)	-0.45	(0.43)
Social Grade: E	-	-	-	-
D	0.08	(0.30)	0.36	(0.35)
C2	-0.27	(0.24)	-0.11	(0.28)
C1	0.16	(0.24)	0.42	(0.28)
B	0.04	(0.25)	-0.17	(0.30)
A	0.17	(0.26)	0.36	(0.31)
Constant	0.58	(0.58)	-1.34 *	(0.73)
N	**2,806**		**2,806**	

Table 5.6: Results of multinomial logistic regression upon categorical dependent variable for centrist ideological identification. This table shows coefficients of comparison between centrist respondents and far and moderate right respondents. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

Given the amount of information in the tables, Figure 5.2 shows the effect of the five non-ideological value variables upon the predicted probability of a respondent identifying with each of the ideological categories for the purposes of illustration and presentation.

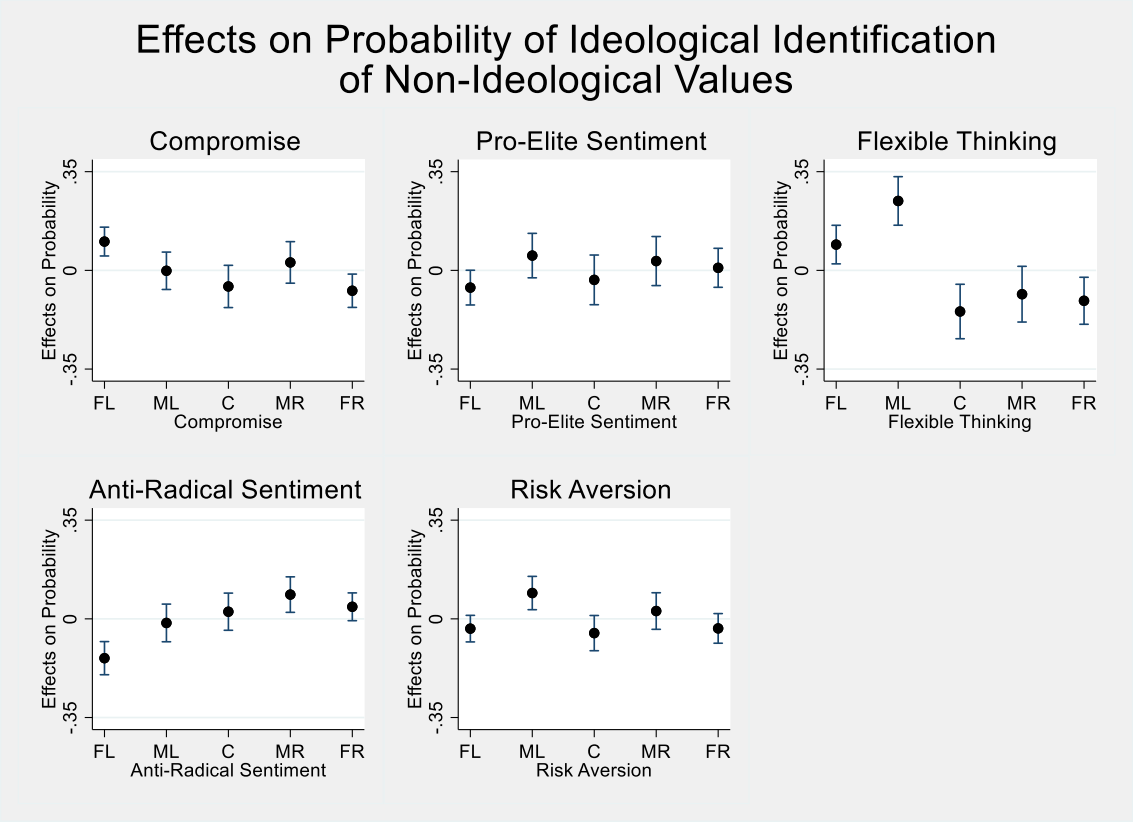

Figure 5.2: Clockwise from top left: predicted probabilities of ideological identification as a function of compromise, pro-elite sentiment, flexible thinking, risk aversion, and anti-radical sentiment, following multinomial logistic regression with categorical ideological variable. FL = far left. ML = moderate left. C = centre. MR = moderate right. FR = far right.

The results of the multinomial logistic regression paint a far more nuanced picture from that created by the OLS regression. In a number of areas – discussed directly in the sections on each hypothesis below – the non-ideological values are indeed positive predictors of identifying as a centrist as opposed to one other ideological category. For example, the most eye-catching result is the effect of flexible thinking – centrists are indistinguishable from

moderate and far right respondents on the basis of flexible thinking, and all three of those groups are much less likely than moderate and far left respondents to hold that value in high regard.

Compromise shows a similar, although more muted effect, with high regard for compromise associated with moderate and particularly far left respondents, and centrists showing no distinction from the moderate and far right groups on the basis of that value.

Another clear result comes from the analysis of anti-radical sentiment. Higher anti-radical sentiment is a statistically significant predictor of centrist identification as opposed to identification on the far or moderate left, and lower anti-radical sentiment is also a statistically significant predictor of centrist identification as opposed to identification with the far or moderate right.

These results show that the shape of many of the effects of these non-ideological variables were hidden in analyses using binary variables (those where a respondent identified as either a centrist or non-centrist), likely obscured by the asymmetry of the ideological scale.

However, the overall impression left by the results is that *none* of the hypothesised non-ideological values are particularly associated with centrism compared to all other ideological categories. And at least one non-ideological value – flexibility in thinking – has exactly the inverse relationship as hypothesised.

Altogether, these findings are indeed a departure from theoretical expectations, but in a way that is no less illuminating of centrist voters. A full discussion of the results for each hypothesis and their implications follows in turn.

Findings

H_1: Compromise is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

As the results indicate, compromise only has a significant effect upon the likelihood of identifying as an ideological centrist in the simplest version of the OLS analysis, without other controls, but it is a negative effect, with higher regard for compromise predicting a non-centrist identification. More complex analysis provides a more detailed understanding – identifying with the moderate and far right is no more or less likely due to a respondent's regard for compromise. However, the probabilities of identifying with the moderate and far left show the most significant changes, with substantial increases associated with a rise in the regard for compromise.

Three potentially interrelated explanations for this counterintuitive outcome seem plausible. First is the effect of political interest, as centrists are, on the whole, less politically interested (and thus less political sophisticated) than more ideological voters. By definition, the art of political compromise requires an understanding of different political viewpoints and the legitimacy of a diversity of values; a level of nuance and sophistication that may be beyond many centrists, leading them towards a more uncompromising mindset.

Second, political partisanship must be a consideration. Political compromise is often the work of political parties, which can be expressed in two ways. While parties do sometimes need to form coalitions in order to assume government – a possibility that would have been apparent to these respondents, given the recent coalition government between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats – parties are themselves internal coalitions of competing interests that must compromise in order to form a cohesive vehicle for electoral success. As shown in the descriptive chapter, centrists are far and away the ideological category most likely to report having no partisan allegiance; their lesser degree of familiarity and engagement with

the political process very likely has an impact on centrists' views of compromise, given that the statistical significance of the variable evaporated when classical predictors like partisanship were included in the models.

A final explanation is bound up in the possibility of the centre having an entirely different symbolic "profile" than the one hypothesised here. Fuller discussion on this appears both at the end of this chapter and in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

H_2: Pro-elite sentiment is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

On the surface, the results on pro-elite sentiment show some similarity to those on compromise. In the simplest version of the model, an OLS regression without classical predictors or demographics, pro-elite sentiment was a significant, but negative predictor of centrism, a counterintuitive finding. However, upon further analysis, this non-ideological value shows no statistically significant relationship with centrist ideology once more variables are accounted for. This finding held true in the multinomial logistic analysis as well, where there was no statistically significant differentiation between centrists and any other ideological category.[134]

In terms of explaining this deviation from theoretical expectations, much of the same explanation for the results on compromise may apply in this case as well, with some concurrent effects from the same general causes of political interest and partisanship, unsurprising given the substantial decrease seen in the pro-elite sentiment variable's effect when more classical predictors of ideology were included in the model.

[134] Granted, this says nothing about any possible effect pro-elite sentiment might have in differentiating between two other ideological groups.

Concerning the low political interest that signifies low political sophistication, there may be something of a political Dunning-Kruger (1999) effect at play – unsophisticated respondents, ironically unaware of that shortcoming, are predisposed to dismiss political elites more easily than more sophisticated, more ideological respondents. There may also be something of an affinity bias at play here, with more interested, sophisticated ideologues identifying with more interested, sophisticated elites in general.

And on partisanship, political parties are composed of and led by elites, almost by definition. The far right, even with its deep rhetorical connection to anti-elite politics, is not inherently opposed to political parties or elites in practice, as long as they are the right parties and elites. Only approximately 5% of far right respondents report that they have no party allegiance, a rate that is some *six times higher* among respondents in the centre category, which could easily go some distance in explaining centrists' scepticism towards elites.[135]

H_3: Flexibility in thinking is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

Here, the balance of the evidence seems to support one longstanding hypothesis mentioned in the literature review over another. As far as centrists are concerned, flexibility in thinking, represented by the AOT factor variable, was a statistically significant variable in virtually all analyses – often the only one of the non-ideological values tested – and associated with a clear decrease in the probability of a respondent identifying as a centrist. However, the results from the multinomial logistic model tell a more nuanced story, that nearly all of that probability change comes from a substantially increased likelihood of the respondent

[135] Of course, the far right category is dominated by supporters of parties that have displayed rhetorical hostility to elites. While the nakedly anti-elite United Kingdom Independence Party is indeed more popular among far right voters than in any other category, more than 70% of far right respondents report themselves as supporting the Conservative Party.

identifying on the left as a function of increased regard for flexible thinking. The probability of identifying as a centrist is statistically indistinguishable from the probability of identifying on the far or moderate right, making centrists joint-lowest in their valuation of flexible thinking, rather than the leader among ideological categories.

In the broad sweep, these results do seem to burnish the "rigidity of the right" hypothesis detailed by the likes of Tetlock (1984) and Jost et al. (2003), as well as tarnish the ideological extremity hypothesis positing that the ideological extremes will be similarly associated with the dogmatic, closed-minded, "intolerance of ambiguity" that these authors find much more characteristic of the political right than the left.

However, this fails to explain why there is no significant difference between the far right and the centre concerning their regard for this value. One possibility lies in the different reasons why the politically disinterested centre and the politically interested right might rate low in flexible thinking.

In those studies confirming the "rigidity of the right" thesis, the direct cause of a low AOT score on the right is generally due to right-wing respondents' unwillingness to stay open to new information that may contradict their beliefs, thus defying the "open minded" component of actively open-minded thinking. This dynamic has been linked to right-wing scepticism of the science underpinning anthropogenic climate change (Kahan & Corbin, 2016). In contrast, there may be an entirely distinct cause of centrists' low AOT ratings. There is some evidence that AOT is a predictor of performance on estimating and forecasting tasks, largely due to the mediating influence of information acquisition (Haron, Ritov, & Mellers, 2013). Since AOT predicts the tendency and willingness to collect new information – the "active" component of actively open-minded thinking – and centrists are generally those less interested in politics and public affairs, these results might be explained by the possibility that where the

right is sceptical of or hostile to new information that contradicts their beliefs, the centre is simply too passive to collect new information altogether.

H_4: Attachment to the *status quo* is a symbolic value that predicts centrist self-identification.

The results of the analysis with a binary variable seemed to show essentially no effect of either variable meant to represent attachment to the *status quo* – anti-radical sentiment and risk aversion. While further analysis confirmed that impression as it pertains to general risk aversion – which seems to have essentially no statistical or practical significance as a predictor of political beliefs – a more complete picture was revealed concerning anti-radical sentiment. Results show that the latter is a clear positive predictor of moderate and far right identification, rather than centrist identification, and at the same time, a clear negative predictor of moderate and far left identification in relation to centrists. This non-ideological value retained significance, even when obviously relevant demographic controls like age, social class, and differential partisanship were included in the analysis.

Two plausible explanations for these results seem most likely. The first is a different application of the concept of political "discounting" discussed in the above review of literature. At the time this survey question was asked as part of the BES (spring of 2016), the United Kingdom was governed by the Conservative Party, who held a large majority in the House of Commons. In this sense, the *status quo* could be construed as government from the right, thus encouraging right-wing respondents and Conservative partisans (of which there is significant overlap) to oppose radical change while provoking left-wing respondents and those who disliked that government to favour it. In this sense, support for "radical change" is merely a proxy for support for changing the government of the day, raising the spectre of an interesting counterfactual. If it were possible to ask this question of a representative sample of the British

electorate in say, 2001, after Labour's second consecutive landslide general election victory, then following this logic, the results of analysis would be essentially reversed.

Another possibility is that partisans of the Conservative Party (who do tend to be right-wing in their ideological beliefs) view their party as a small-c conservative party – by definition, opposed to "radical" change in society as a matter of philosophical commitment, a view often encouraged by contemporary party leader David Cameron (Bale, 2010). Cameron was widely seen as intending to soften the party's rigid ideological image,[136] telling one elite audience that to be a conservative is to "recognise the complexities of human nature," and to be "sceptical of grand schemes to remake the world."[137] While this argument is theoretically and rhetorically persuasive, it strains credulity to believe that the Conservative Party had much attachment to the *status quo* of the Wilson and Callaghan-led Labour governments of the 1970s, or at any other time when the party was out of power. For one, Margaret Thatcher was hardly shy in her support for radical, right-wing policy solutions by the time she became Tory leader (Bale, 2012). Indeed, in a famous campaign speech in 1979, Mrs Thatcher "announced that she stood for sharp change as the only viable alternative to 'going on as we have been going and continue down.'" She continued: "I am dubbed a reactionary. Maggie Thatcher, reactionary. Well, there's a lot to react against."[138] This being said, this chapter is devoted to the study of non-ideological values as meaningful in ideological identification; it would be entirely plausible if right-wing voters held a symbolic attachment to anti-radical feeling, and that said feeling was

[136] A clear example of stylistic centrism employed by a party on the right.

[137] Cameron, D. (2006, 11 September). *A new approach to foreign affairs: Liberal conservatism*. J.P. Morgan Lecture given to the British American Project. Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/c0d5ee34-428b-11db-8dc3-0000779e2340

[138] Apple Jr., R. W. (1979, 19 April). Thatcher speech warms up the British campaign. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1979/04/19/archives/thatcher-speech-warms-up-the-british-campaign-first-major-address.html

instrumental to their symbolic ideological identification, even if it was not necessarily reflected in political rhetoric or operational policy views.

In any event, this section's results are the only plausible example in this chapter of a value being mediated by the relationship between intensity and extremity, as the centre position seems to be something of an inflection point between left and right on the question of radical change in society – the left is in favour, the right is opposed, and the centre position lies somewhere in between.

Centrist Types

One final issue remains to be discussed – the effects of the classical predictors and possible differentiation between centrists as it pertains to these non-ideological values.

On the former, it is clear that the classical predictors of centrism – partisanship, political interest, and moderate values – are superior in that function to any of the non-ideological values tested here, as each was statistically significant in almost every analysis. However, one variable stood out for its counterintuitive relationship with self-identified centrism.

Moderation on the immigration question was a strong negative predictor of centrist identity. Indeed, moderation on immigration was associated with a strong likelihood of identifying on the far left or moderate left as opposed to in the centre. This stands in contrast to moderation on the economic policy question, which was much more predictable in its effects – it was a statistically significant predictor of identifying in the centre as opposed to the far left or far right but had no effect in differentiating between centre and moderate left or moderate right. This is an interesting finding, showing that centrist voters – at least, the centrist voters in this sample – are certainly not moderate in all their views. This could certainly be

interpreted as evidence in favour of the primacy of the economic dimension in voters' considerations of their overall ideology, as that variable "behaved" quite as expected, but it could also be a sign of greater divergence between symbolic ideology and operational ideology than commonly thought, given the power of the immigration issue in motivating voters.

Since moderation in values is one of the two key mediating factors – along with intentionality – in differentiating different types of centrists, this point segues perfectly into a discussion of how those factors might relate to centrists' adoption of the non-ideological values tested in this chapter.

Table 5.7 shows the results of five regression analyses – one for each non-ideological value. The variables tested are intentionality – based on high political interest, identification with a centrist party, or both – and general moderation – defined as holding broadly moderate positions on both the economic and immigration policy questions. The sample under analysis is limited to self-identified centrists, so the model differentiates only between centrists on the basis of intentionality and moderation.

	Compromise		**Pro-Elite Sentiment**		**Flexibility in Thinking**		**Anti-Radical Sentiment**		**Risk Aversion**	
	Coeff.	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**	**Coeff.**	**S.E.**
Low Intentionality/ Low Moderation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
High Intentionality	0.06 ***	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)	0.03 **	(0.01)	-0.04 ***	(0.01)	-0.06 ***	(0.01)
High Moderation	0.09 **	(0.04)	0.06 *	(0.04)	-0.05 *	(0.03)	0.07 ***	(0.02)	-0.00	(0.02)
High Intentionality/ High Moderation	-0.02	(0.05)	0.01	(0.05)	0.04	(0.04)	0.00	(0.03)	0.02	(0.03)
Constant	0.32 ***	0.02	0.36 ***	(0.02)	0.78 ***	(0.01)	0.34 ***	(0.01)	0.54 ***	(0.01)
N	**646**		**610**		**620**		**2,533**		**2,566**	

Table 5.7: Results of ordinary least squares regression of intentionality and moderation upon non-ideological values, for centrist respondents. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

High intentionality is statistically associated with an increase in the regard for compromise and flexibility in thinking, relatively unsurprising given the higher rates of partisanship among more interested voters and the associated greater likelihood of actively searching out information to help process those beliefs. Interestingly, it is also associated with significant decreases in both anti-radical sentiment and risk aversion, a fact that may be explained by the sample size issues discussed below, and the outsized share of the surveyed centrist population that codes as genuine syncretics – high intentionality, low moderation voters.

On moderation, high moderation is also statistically associated with an increase in the regard for compromise, again unsurprising. However, the other clear result lies in an increase in anti-radical sentiment, which makes intuitive theoretical sense. Centrists with moderate views – and especially those with relatively little intentionality behind them – would certainly seem more likely to oppose dramatic changes to public policy than centrists with more syncretic views.

Of perhaps greatest relevance is the fact that high moderation is associated with increases in the regard for a number of non-ideological values, showing that perhaps these abstract values are accompaniments to moderate political values in respondents' centrist identification, rather than a substitution, contrary to theoretical expectations.

However, while these findings are interesting, a word of caution in their interpretation is necessary. A study reliant upon respondents who have taken even one lengthy survey about their political views is vulnerable to selection bias in terms of those respondents' interest in politics; a study of respondents who have taken at least two waves of such a survey – and very possibly all five waves in-between, as this chapter's analysis is done on data from Waves 7 and 13 of the BES – is even more vulnerable. Although the team behind the BES compensates for

this attrition as best they can by providing sampling weights, their warning must be heeded: "Panel attrition is not random and respondents who have taken very large numbers of waves should still be analysed cautiously."[139] An analysis of centrist self-identification, such as this one, should be more cautious than most, since a key component of that analysis – political interest – may be perhaps the most difficult variable to control for in a long-running panel study.

Indeed, the "demographics" of centrists based on intentionality and moderation is radically different on these waves of the BES than it was on the 2019 EES, at least based on political interest. Only 12% of BES respondents in the wave in question identified themselves as less than somewhat interested in politics – 4 or lower on a 0-10 scale. The equivalent figure on the EES – the share of respondents choosing the lower two options in a 4-point Likert scale – checks in at over 40%, with a similar figure for British EES respondents.[140] This is not to normatively compare one survey to another – only to point out the differences in surveyed population in terms of political interest and explain why sample sizes for the present analysis are not robust enough to make anything but qualified claims.

Conclusions

In the final analysis, none of the non-ideological values hypothesised related to centrism in the way the theory justifying this study predicted, as none of them were more associated with centrism than any other ideological position. While some of them did show statistical significance in predicting centrist self-identification, they either served as negative

[139] Fieldhouse, E., Green, J., Evans, G., Mellon, J., Prosser, C., De Geus, R., Bailey, J., Schmitt, H., & Van der Eijk, C. (2020). *British Election Study Internet Panel Codebook*. p. 12.

[140] Of course, the equivalence of these two metrics lies in the eye of the researcher, but alternative coding schemes only narrow the differences between the political interest of the two surveyed populations – they do not eliminate it.

predictors or as differentiators between right and left than between the centre and the extremes. This last point is highlighted by the fact that with the possible exception of anti-radical sentiment, none of the tested values seem to conform to the pattern connecting the extremity and intensity of preferences.

On the surface, these results could be seen to support a strong critique of the symbolic ideology theory as it applies to centrists, the idea that centrist self-identification is bound up in symbolic, non-ideological values rather than operational preferences concerning political issues. However, a narrower interpretation sees these results as a strong critique of the symbolic ideology hypothesis among centrists *as it pertains to these specific values.*

It is certainly possible that the values tested in this study may simply not be those that centrists base their symbolic ideological identity upon. It is also entirely possible that the sample used in this study is less representative of centrists than it is of more extreme ideologues precisely due to attrition of the politically disinterested. It may also be true that statements of support on surveys are not the best way to measure fidelity to abstract values.

However, one implication of these results looms particularly large – the possibility that these non-ideological values are poor predictors of centrist self-identification because centrists have explicitly rejected them. This could mean that the increasing centrist identification – and increasing partisan dealignment – is actually a sign of the public's increasing alienation from democratic politics, with its unavoidable and difficult trade-offs.

Since much democratic theory places centrists – ostensibly the swing voters in any electorate – in a prominent role in enforcing democratic accountability, their rejection of fundamentally political ideas like compromise, open-mindedness, and elite representation could have significant repercussions on scholars' views of democracy and its functioning. A fuller discussion on this subject can be found in Chapter 7.

The next chapter aims to continue in this vein of research by investigating the connection between centrist voters and centrist parties. In particular, it leans on the exploration of the extremity-intensity relationship from this chapter to set the stage for a study that posits that centrists may be less likely than others to vote for parties that ostensibly share their ideological leanings, another key question highlighting the need for a greater understanding of the political centre.

Chapter 6: Can Centrist Parties Rely on Centrist Voters?

The core motivation of this thesis lies in a desire to explore centrist politics beyond the superficial level of the label itself. While the word "centrist" may have value as an umbrella term, the descriptor does not do justice to the diverse array of political actors that lie beneath it. The previous two empirical chapters have demonstrated some of the features that make centrist voters and parties qualitatively different from their non-centrist fellows and have shown them to be far more complex than commonly assumed, requiring much more analysis and individual attention than they generally receive from the scholarly community.

This final empirical chapter closes the circle by linking the analysis of voters with the analysis of parties, evaluating a famous puzzle of political science as seen through a centrist lens – the spatial model's expectation that centrist parties should be the electoral beneficiaries of centrist voters' support; an expectation that is generally not borne out in empirical reality.

This is a large and multifaceted puzzle, and this chapter advances an argument to explain it, situated within the evidence provided by other scholars. Then, bringing together data about parties' ideological positions – the Chapel Hill Expert Survey and Manifesto Project Database – and similar data about voters' – the European Election Studies' Voter Survey – a crucial element of that argument will be tested. Specifically, do Europe's centrist voters weigh a party's ideology less than other voters do when marking their ballot? The answer has wide implications not only for our understanding of the centre, but our insight into virtually all aspects of democratic competition, given that the centre is the fulcrum of that electoral contest.

The Empty Centre

The spatial model of party competition has dominated political science for more than 60 years. Since Downs' (1957) pioneering work on the subject, the theoretical framework that expects citizens to vote for the party "closest" to their policy preferences and parties to therefore offer policy programmes meant to appeal to the median voter has been arguably the most influential idea in the discipline. Although it is not without its critics, the spatial model has proven itself highly resilient, and it has been adapted, modified, and expanded upon to incorporate many other disparate theories and concepts of political competition and voter behaviour (e.g. Davis, Hinich, & Ordeshook, 1970; Enelow & Hinich, 1984; Poole & Rosenthal, 1985; Adams, Merrill, & Grofman, 2005).

However, throughout its long period of ascendancy, the spatial model has been repeatedly called into question for failing to adequately explain a simple divergence between its expectations and empirical reality – the fact that parties tend to stake out more extreme positions than the distribution of voter preferences would seem to warrant, a development often referred to as the "empty centre" phenomenon (Inglehart, 1984; Dalton, 1985; Budge, Robertson, & Hearl, 1987; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Iversen, 1994).[141] Many scholars have proposed answers to this question, some of the more famous including the power of activists to shape the party's ideological programme (Aldrich, 1983), and the endogenous nature of preference formation (Przeworski & Sprague, 1986).

However, while there is a great deal of research on why parties adopt more extreme positions than the electorate in the context of the spatial model, there is relatively little on a key facet of the puzzle that if better understood, might shine a new light on this mystery. Some

[141] Although the term "empty centre" seems to have originated with Rabinowitz & Macdonald (1989) in their landmark paper on directional voting, the term is widely used to describe the phenomenon, even by scholars who dispute the directional voting theory.

parties do not adopt more extreme positions than their presumed core voters – centrist parties.[142] And yet, despite the fact that that in every Western European country, the voter distribution is unimodal and concentrated around the centre position (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009) – a fact that should yield enormous electoral advantage for centrist parties according to Downsian expectations – centrist parties in most of those countries tend to attract fewer votes than a spatial model would predict (Schofield & Sened, 2005; Adams, Merrill, & Zur, 2020). Indeed, many centrist parties are smaller, "niche" parties that may join governments in coalition but generally do not lead them.

What can explain this divergence from expectations? The volume of research would indicate that the solution to an ideological conundrum is to be found in examining non-ideological factors. Valence issues – those defined by Stokes (1992) as issues "on which parties or leaders are differentiated not by what they advocate but by the degree to which they are linked in the public's mind with conditions or goals or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves" (p. 143) – can take many forms. Some of these non-ideological values, such as integrity, are attractive for their own sake, as qualities universally agreed-upon as desirable in leaders (Mondak, 1995). Others, like trustworthiness, not only fit the same description as common virtues, but are also a screening method for voters who cannot police every action and decision of their representatives and need some policy-agnostic proxy for an official's performance (Bianco, 1994). Competence is another non-ideological quality that bridges the gap to policy, in that it is not only a generalised, positive attribute, but also a specific reputational feature of a politician or party's relationship to a particular issue (Green & Hobolt, 2008; Green & Jennings, 2017). In general, and in numerous specific national, geographic, and

[142] This statement is true in terms of the overall super-issue dimension, since in generally, centrist parties do take an extreme position on European integration, as discussed in Chapter 4.

electoral contexts, valence has been shown to be highly relevant to a party's success or failure at elections (e.g. Groseclose, 2001; Green, 2007; Clark, 2009; Stone & Simas, 2010; Bleck & Van de Walle, 2013).

The possibility that valence is of particular importance to centrist voters and centrist parties has received some scholarly attention of late. Galasso and Nannicini (2011) showed that candidates running for election to the Italian parliament from highly competitive districts tended to have higher valence profiles than those in safe districts, thus implying that Italian parties believe that valence is more important in more ideologically divided – if not necessarily moderate – constituencies overall. In a case study of Germany's Free Democratic Party, Zur (2017) demonstrated that the electoral failures of that centrist party in the 2013 federal election were strongly linked to a collapse of its valence image over the prior four years, and concurrently, that as a centrist party it could not easily shift policy positions because it was boxed in by its rivals.[143] A study of the UK's Liberal Democrats came to a similar conclusion – that the party's 2015 electoral evisceration was largely the result of its plummeting reputation for competence, following the landslide defeat of the party-promoted alternate vote referendum; and trustworthiness, after the party famously reversed its opposition to the imposition of tuition fees (Cutts & Russell, 2016).

Some research indicates that persistently low valence is a problem particular to centrist parties specifically, providing at least a part of the solution to the "empty centre" enigma. Zur (2019; 2021) documents the fact that centrist parties receive fewer votes than one would predict based on the ideological distribution of the electorate, and that centrist parties must be

[143] By the same token, there is some evidence to suggest that an overall centrist orientation is less of an advantage for a party than it appears, because the terms of political conflict are set not by the centrist party – which has no room for ideological maneuver – but by more extreme competitors. For example, the success of the UK's Liberal Democrats is largely tied to the depth of ideological divergence between the two main pole parties, rather than a function of its own strategic decisions (Adams & Merrill, 2006; Nagel & Wlezien, 2010).

therefore burdened by a negative public perception of their non-ideological attributes. He goes on to offer evidence that centrist parties have a multidimensional disadvantage in compensating for their poor valence image, with no obvious single or combination of policy shifts that would improve their electoral position.

The reasons for this deficiency are not yet well understood. One possibility lies in the way that many centrist parties exercise governing power. For example, the aforementioned Liberal Democrats are thought to have suffered significantly from their participation in a coalition with Britain's main right-wing party, the Conservatives (Johnson & Middleton, 2016). Granted, evidence indicates that this is a common outcome for the junior partners in a coalition regardless of their ideology, since the junior partners generally accomplish very little of their own governing priorities, receive very little credit for whatever are considered the government's successes, and yet still take blame for the government's perceived failures (Fortunato & Adams, 2015; Spoon & Klüver, 2017; Klüver & Spoon, 2020). But while it is certainly not true that all junior coalition parties are ideologically centrist parties, it is the case that – as a matter of spatial logic – ideologically centrist parties are likely to have more opportunities to participate in governing coalitions formed according to ideological proximity. This is particularly true for ideologically centrist parties that are also middle centrist parties, those that inhabit the space in a party system between the major poles of competition.[144] Indeed, the ability to present a "viable coalition partner for either pole" is a definitional criterion of middle parties (Hazan, 1997). Therefore, it is highly possible that one reason for

[144] As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, ideological centrism and middle centrism are not theoretically coterminous. However, in practise, many middle centrist parties are ideologically centrist parties since it is obviously more likely that parties in the middle of any given party system would also be considered broadly centrist through a cross-national ideological perspective.

the persistently low valence of centrist parties is that they are commonly junior members of governing coalitions.

Another possibility is that centrist parties do not reap much in the way of valence gains from their centrist position. Johns & Kölln (2020) report experimental findings that justify a long-time truism of party politics – that ideologically moderate parties are viewed by voters as more competent than ideologically extreme parties.[145] However, their work also reveals that the valence benefits from a moderate ideological position accrue equally to centre-left, centre-right, and centrist parties. This means that while centrist parties might enjoy an inherent valence edge over ideologically extreme rivals, that advantage dissipates against their closer ideological competitors.[146]

As persuasive as much of this evidence is, the importance of valence in understanding the relatively poor performance of centrist parties is only one part of an explanation for the apparent disconnect between centrist voters and centrist parties. As shown in Chapter 3, regardless of their valence images, centrist parties are still spatially located closest to the median and modal voter in virtually every European country. The theory that centrist parties are unsuccessful because of their low valence begs the question – why should valence be so

[145] For decades, this assertion was justified by evidence that moderate, "catch-all" parties de-emphasised ideology in order to emphasise competence (Kirchheimer, 1966; Allen, 2009). Katz & Mair (2009) memorably described this tendency as the "cartel parties" intentionally downplaying ideological issues "in the name of 'realism' and 'responsibility'" (p. 758). They also write of the "restriction of policy competition," whereby parties "take issues out of the realm of party competition by delegating them to non-political agencies like independent central banks, courts, or the EU Commission, by privatizing previously public functions (e.g., pension reform or health care reform), and by the increasingly common acceptance of various models of governance, new public management, and the regulatory state, all of which privilege questions of technical and managerial expertise over those of values or political preference" (p. 758). While this process need not be couched in ideological terms, the glorification of technocracy and managerialism as a way to "transcend" (Velasco, 2010), or "beyond" (Burke, 1966) normal ideological conflict is a hallmark of the political practice described in Chapter 3 as stylistic centrism.

[146] Johns & Kölln's (2020) results dovetail nicely with the findings in Chapter 4 of this thesis. While a party seen as more willing to compromise is also seen as more competent, it is centre-left and centre-right voters who have a higher abstract regard for this quality – not centrists.

important to their electoral fortunes, given what would appear to be a large ideological advantage?

This chapter aims to fill that gap in current understanding, by investigating not simply the linkage between centrist parties and voters in general, but the linkage between centrist parties and their natural base of core support – centrist voters. In this complementary analysis to the research detailed above, the key point concerns the way centrist voters relate to their ideology, how their ideology may influence their voting behaviour, and what impact that might make upon the "empty centre."

Hypothesis

Put simply, the hypothesis to be tested in this chapter is that centrist voters do not support centrist parties on the basis of ideology – or more specifically, that centrist voters do not support ideologically similar parties to the degree that more extreme voters do. Justifying this hypothesis begins with a review of the literature on the differential effects of ideology.

There is relatively little research into the qualitative differences between centrist voters and others, but the literature that does exist indicates that ideology has a differential effect on voting behaviour. In two classic studies conducted among French voters, scholars found that centrist voters tended to be less politically sophisticated, and that their voting choices were less reflective of their self-identified ideology (Deutsch, Lindon, & Weill, 1966; Converse & Pierce, 1986). More recently, an experimental study of American voters provided evidence that agreed with the assessment that centrists' vote choices did not seem particularly motivated by ideology, but neither were they motivated by valence issues like character and trustworthiness, leading the authors to characterise centrists' process of decision – "diplomatically" – as "disconcerting" and "idiosyncratic" (Mondak & Huckfeldt, 2006). Another study of American

voters came to very different conclusions. Its findings showed that centrists are indeed concerned with the ideological positions of their chosen candidates – but that rather than take them at face value, they make relatively sophisticated judgements about how those ideological positions will translate into real policy, with current policy conditions as a baseline (Tomz & Van Houweling, 2008).

Indeed, even simple descriptive analysis shows that only a relatively small share of voters identifying as centrists hold operational views consistent with that identification. Analysis of the 2019 EES in Chapter 3 showed that less than 30% of self-identified centrist respondents to that survey held broadly moderate positions on core economic and sociocultural issues. These findings were echoed by the analysis of British voters in Chapter 5, which showed that moderation on the issue of immigration is actually a negative predictor of centrist self-identification. Naturally, this raises significant questions both about how centrists relate their ideology to their views on issues, as well as how those factors influence voting decisions.

While all of this evidence does offer some indication that ideology's effect on voting behaviour is not constant across the ideological spectrum, none of them directly touch on a likely theoretical reason for that variation in ideology – the relationship between the extremity and intensity of preferences – despite its well-established provenance in the social sciences.

The relationship between the extremity of preferences and their intensity was discussed at length in Chapter 4 as a justification for the possibility that centrists held symbolic values like compromise, pro-elite sentiment, flexible thinking, and attachment to the *status quo* in higher regard than non-centrists. However, in this chapter, the extremity-intensity relationship will be examined as it pertains to voting behaviour.

To reiterate: for decades, psychologists have consistently shown that the more extreme a person's preferences, the more intensely they tend to hold them (e.g. Allport, 1935; Suchman, 1950; Key, 1963; Krosnick & Schuman, 1988). While this effect manifests itself in a number of personality and attitudinal differences studied in that discipline, its impact upon political choices has been given very little scholarly attention by political scientists (Adams et al., 2017).

That being said, a similar conception of centrist voters has been proposed by scholars advancing the "directional model" of voting (e.g. Matthews, 1979; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Macdonald, Listhaug, & Rabinowitz, 1991; Macdonald, Rabinowitz, & Listhaug, 2007). In that view, self-identified centrists are effectively neutral on the issue at hand, and therefore do not use the candidates' view on that issue – or their ideological heuristic – as a voting decision rule. However, while this conception is superficially similar to that being presented here, there is an important theoretical distinction. Centrists need not be politically indifferent simply because their centrist preferences are weakly held – and in empirical reality, they are not (Granberg & Gilljam, 1997). Although the macro debate over models of voter behaviour continues apace, the overall weight of the evidence proffered to this point clearly points toward the greater empirical applicability of the spatial model.

Returning to one of the few studies to show that the extremity-intensity relationship had relevant implications upon voting, Adams et al. (2017) offered persuasive evidence both that the extremity-intensity relationship extended to political ideology, and that there might be a link between that tendency and voting decision rules. In the study, the authors compared the ideological ratings of American voters and candidates in competitive U.S. House of Representatives elections. By applying a simple spatial model to voting patterns in a sample of competitive congressional districts and differentiating voters by their ideology, the authors demonstrated that centrist voters were significantly less likely to vote for the candidate that

was ideologically proximate to them than non-centrist voters. Not only does this study provide a meaningful sign that centrist voters may not be particularly motivated to vote on the basis of their centrist ideology, but it also comports well with research in the section above on centrism and valence.

Naturally, this raises an important question: if this puzzle has already been solved, why revisit it? Is there a compelling argument for further investigation? Of course, Americans are definitively not Europeans, and the distinctiveness of American political culture makes it particularly fraught to simply assume that a property of the American electorate extends to the European electorate. Although this is obviously true in many ways, there are at least three good reasons to expect that specifically, the effects of ideology upon voting are different on either side of the Atlantic, and therefore three good reasons to build on Adams et al.'s (2017) research.

First, while the scholarly debate over the ideological polarisation or sorting of American voters seems no closer to ending than it ever has (e.g. Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008), there is certainly evidence to indicate that European politics is more "ideological" than American politics. By at least one definition – the share of the electorate claiming a non-centrist ideological identification – European electorates are more comfortable taking a non-centrist ideological stance than the American citizenry (Iversen & Soskice, 2015). In addition, the two main American parties have historically been considered pragmatic coalitions of social groups with wildly divergent ideological perspectives, rather than ideologically coherent political organisations (Key, 1942; Schattschneider, 1942; Hartz, 1955; Rossiter, 1960; Gerring, 2001).[147] Along with the American public's pervasive individualism –

[147] For example, for decades, the Democratic Party included a longstanding political alliance between socially progressive Northeastern intellectuals and segregationist Southern whites.

traditionally described as a sort of civic religion (Tocqueville, 1835) – this fact led many scholars to label American politics as largely non-ideological compared to Europe's, or in Duverger's (1954) typically memorable language, "a conflict without principles, a struggle between the ins and outs which never becomes fanatical and creates no deep cleavage in the country" (p. 418). While it is widely agreed-upon that American elites have become increasingly ideologically polarised and the parties themselves have become more ideologically homogenous in recent decades (e.g. McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006; Theriault, 2008; Levendusky, 2009), the legacy of this "ideological innocence" lives on among the public, suggesting that American voters may well have a dramatically different relationship to their political ideology than European voters (Bishop, 2005; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017).

Secondly, the U.S. has entirely different electoral rules than most European countries, and an entirely different party system. With the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, there are now no EU member states that employ the first-past-the-post electoral system to elect the lower house of the legislature.[148] Relatedly – or not, depending on one's view of Duverger's Law (Duverger, 1954) – this homogeneity in electoral regimes has also produced multiparty systems in every single member state, although most countries feature two dominant parties, if not strict two-party systems. These last two factors combine to give European politics a much more expansive ideological topography than American politics. As the Global Party Survey technical notes show, not only are the ideological choices of American voters compressed into only two parties, but the ideological range of the party system is clearly shifted towards the economic right.[149] This accords with historical and

[148] Elections to the European Parliament are also conducted in accordance with the principle that representation should be proportional.

[149] Norris, P. (2019). *The Global Party Survey*. v1.0. www.globalpartysurvey.org

sociological evidence documenting the failure of a strong leftist labour movement in to emerge in the US, as well as the absence of socialist ideas and rhetoric from mainstream political discourse – a phenomenon often considered as a core component of "American exceptionalism" (e.g. Aronowitz, 1973; Lipset, 1996). This means that the ideological conflict in American politics – to whatever extent it exists – is very likely to be narrower in scope than it is in Europe.

Finally, and obviously crucially for the purposes of this thesis, the vast majority of European party systems feature viable parties in the ideological centre (as well as the electoral middle, which as Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, are not identical concepts). These parties provide both encouragement and a professionalised vehicle for ideological centrism, something that is entirely lacking in the US. The voting behaviour of American centrists may well be radically different from that of European centrists due to this factor alone.

Altogether, these reasons set forth a highly convincing case for not simply assuming that Adams et al.'s (2017) findings concerning American voters should necessarily apply to Europeans. This topic therefore seems to merit additional research and presents an intriguing opportunity to make a genuine scholarly contribution. Therefore, the hypothesis tested here can be stated as:

H_1: Centrist voters are less likely to vote for ideologically proximate parties than non-centrist voters.

Data and Methods

The research design employed here is an adaptation of the one used by Adams et al. (2017) in their study of the behaviour of American voters in elections to the US House of

Representatives. For that paper, the authors chose a sample of competitive House districts and compared the ideological positions of the candidates in those districts to those of the voters. Since candidates vary in their ideological leanings – some Republicans are closer to the centre and some are further to the right, while some Democrats are more centrist and others more towards the left – this design allowed for a comparison of voters across districts. For example, two voters in two districts might have different ideological identifications yet have identical spatial distance to the candidates; or *vice versa* – two voters in two districts might be ideologically similar but have different spatial relationships to the candidates. These comparisons showed that the importance of relative ideological proximity to a candidate was higher among non-centrists than centrists in terms of voting decision rules.

On the surface, the subject of this chapter's study – the 2009 and 2014 elections to the European Parliament – are wildly different to US congressional elections. Most obviously, the latter are held within the same country and feature the same parties, while the former are not. However, while the parallels are admittedly not exact and there are corresponding limitations to the validity of the analysis – limitations that must be acknowledged and borne in mind – the comparison is more apt than it appears upon first glance.[150]

First, both sets of elections share many of their unifying characteristics. They are both elections to a single, common body, where the elected representatives sit in groups according to their ideology, meaning that a vote for one's own representative often serves to empower that representative's group as much or more than the representative herself. Both of those common bodies have limited powers, as much governing power over the citizenry is held by

[150] Certainly, theoretical and empirical comparisons between the US Congress and the European Parliament are legion (e.g. Marsh & Norris, 1997; Fabbrini, 2004; Hix, 2004; Hix & Høyland, 2013). While what matters here is the general electoral experience of the voter – and the way ideology influences their voting decision – the similarity of the bodies themselves is certainly a point in favor of their comparability.

more local bodies – the governments of the member states in the European context, and the several state governments in the American. Both sets of elections are held virtually simultaneously across all districts and employ universal voter eligibility criteria. Both sets of elections are processed using virtually identical electoral rules – the principle of proportional representation in Europe, and the first-past-the-post system in the US.[151] Both sets of elections are competitive – Adams et al. (2017) selected only competitive House districts for their analysis, while proportional representation diminishes the potential for "wasted" votes in European Parliament elections. Turnout in both sets of elections were similar, reflecting similar – and relatively lower – voter enthusiasm, compared to domestic general elections in Europe and presidential elections in the U.S.[152]

Just as importantly, the differential characteristics of these two sets of elections are overstated. While it is certainly true that Germans are culturally different from Portuguese in many ways that could conceivably affect voters' perceptions of political ideology, so too are Alabamians from Alaskans. This is also true from a party ideology perspective. While there are unquestionable differences between the ideologies of the Labour Party of the Netherlands and the Labour Party of the UK, there are also clear and often intense ideological disagreements between Democratic Party officials and candidates in South Carolina and Oregon – differences which make the original analysis possible and worthwhile.[153] Granted, domestic issues and

[151] According to rules that predate the first popular elections to the European Parliament, all participating nations must use either a party list or single transferable vote as the basis of their ballot system, so as to preserve the principle of proportional representation. All countries surveyed for this analysis used a party list system for their elections. Most country-by-country variation is found in the size of constituencies – while most nations employed a single, country-wide constituency, a few opt for relatively large, sub-national constituencies or an *ex post facto* regional allocation. These minute differences should make no practical difference to the voter's electoral experience.

[152] Approximately 43.2% of eligible voters participated in the 2009 European Parliament elections, and 42.5% five years later. Turnout in the 2010 House of Representatives elections was 40.9%.

[153] The federal nature of American politics also means that the state parties formally furnishing congressional candidates are also financially and organisationally distinct from the national parties. Much like European politics,

national politics certainly intrude upon the European Parliament elections, factors that lend a local quality to each member state's elections. However, despite recent superficial evidence showing a sharp increase in the nationalisation of congressional elections and the harmonisation between congressional vote preferences and presidential vote preferences, each House election is also subject to local issues and personalities, and ticket-splitting for both ideological reasons and the specific local circumstances of the race remains common (Jacobsen, 1989; Alesina & Rosenthal, 1995; Burden & Kimball, 2002; McGhee, 2008). Altogether, single-member districts, the first-past-the-post system, and the separation of powers combine to make US House elections arguably less party-focused, less ideological, more local, and more strategic in character than European Parliament elections.

Specific to the issue here, Suchman (1950) speculated that the relationship between intensity and extremity of preferences is universal, and much psychological research since that time (detailed at length in Chapter 4) has done nothing to dispel that supposition. There is very good reason to believe that a research design revealing the effect of that relationship upon voter behaviour in US House elections might well uncover the same tendency in European Parliament elections, and if not, will highlight the structural or sociological reasons why.

While this point-by-point description is crucial in justifying the comparability of European Parliament elections to US House elections, it is also instructive in showing why this study could not be alternatively structured on a sweep of national European elections – or even on a single national European election, depending on the case. As described previously, Adams et al.'s (2017) analysis was built on the foundation of comparisons between sets of voters across districts and their relative ideological distance from the sets of candidates in those

while there is some coordination of message at the highest level, the elections themselves are actually contested by distinct entities.

districts. In order for these comparisons to have any analytical value, they must fall within a very narrow window – similar enough so as not to strain the analogous quality, but not so similar as to eliminate any variation between them and thus lose scientific interest. European Parliament elections pass that test; European national elections do not, for at least three reasons.

The first reason is temporal. As mentioned, while European Parliament elections and US House elections are both technically several events, independently conducted by constituent parts of the Unions, they are widely considered to be a single, unified event because they take place virtually simultaneously. This is clearly untrue for national elections, and thus the political context surrounding, say, the German and French elections will be completely different by virtue of timing alone.

The second and related reason is the electoral rules governing the contests. To return to the example, the elections to France's National Assembly are conducted using a two-round system in single-member constituencies, while elections to Germany's Bundestag combine a first-past-the-post element with a party list element. These differing procedures shape their party systems in dramatically different ways and create vastly different incentives for voters' decisions, making it far more difficult to fairly evaluate the ideological – rather than strategic – "character" of a vote.[154]

The third reason follows on from the second – the distinct issue landscape of each country. National elections are dominated by local – even local to the nation – issues to a far greater extent than European elections. National governments have a far wider set of

[154] The electoral rules could also easily eliminate candidate ideological variation and could therefore complicate replication of the Adams et al. (2017) research design, even within a single European country. By centering the party, rather than an individual candidate, as the focus of the election, party list systems can decrease or even wash out the ideological differences between candidates of the same party – the very phenomenon the study depends upon.

competencies than the EU, and therefore elections to those bodies are fought over a much wider scope of issues. Some of those strictly national issues can be politically dominant, with very little relevance on the European stage; as an obvious example, public health is an issue largely left to national governments. The difference in political context is not limited to issues, but also to personalities. National elections are often contested at the level of the party leadership, and party leaders are often the commanding presence in campaigns – unsurprising given that the leader of the victorious party often becomes prime minister and installs the rest of the cabinet. Although the European political parties did name prospective party leaders in the run-up to the 2014 European Parliament elections – the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* – those leaders were poorly known, played a very limited role in the campaign, and had essentially no effect on the outcome of the race (Hobolt, 2014).[155] Leaving leadership aside, even the outcomes of national elections and European Parliament elections are different – the legislatures of virtually every Western European country have an order of magnitude more electoral volatility than the European Parliament, which until 2019 had seen the same two party groups – European People's Party and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and its predecessors – run the chamber in grand coalition since its inception.[156]

Together, all these factors make European national elections far less appropriate in comparison with US House elections than European Parliament elections, even given their contested analytical value as second-order elections (Clark & Rohrschneider, 2009). They appear more than apposite for analysis.

[155] And although the 2019 European Parliament elections are not analysed in this chapter, it should be noted that the *Spitzenkandidat* of the winning European People's Party, Manfred Weber, was not ratified as president of the Commission, throwing the future of the process into doubt.

[156] The sole possible exception being Switzerland, where the partisan composition of the Federal Council has been only minimally altered over the past 60 years.

With the conceptual justification detailed, the question of data moves to the fore. First, although the data used must obviously be different, the choice of data sources preserves the spirit of the original analysis. Adams et al. (2017) selected four data inputs for their study: a mass survey of voters' self-identified ideology (from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES); a series of policy-based questions asked to the same group of voters as part of the same survey; an independent, original expert survey conducted by the authors concerning the ideology of a group of randomly selected candidates for that year's House elections; and another independent survey of those candidates' policy positions, conducted by Project Vote Smart.

The end result of this data selection was to – from as many different angles as possible for the sake of comprehensive analysis – estimate the ideology of both voters and candidates on one unified scale. In a sense, it can be thought of as two overlapping sets of paired ideology measurements: two data sets on voters and two on candidates; two directly taken (although one is self-identified, and one is subjectively evaluated by experts) and two implied by policy position.

This conception can be replicated by using some of the very same data sources interrogated in earlier chapters of this thesis, thereby switching the focus from the 2010 US House of Representatives elections to the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections. The European Election Studies' Voter Surveys (EES) for those years asks respondents both to self-identify their ideological position and to answer a suite of questions regarding their views on various key policy issues.[157] The 2010 and 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (CHES) provide a

[157] Van Egmond, M., van der Brug, W., Hobolt, S. B., Franklin, M., & Sapir, E. V. (2013): *European Parliament Election Study 2009, Voter Study*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5055 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.11760

direct evaluation of party ideology by experts.[158] And the Manifesto Project Database (MARPOR) has collected measurements of the parties' stated positions on policy issues during the time of those European Parliament elections, allowing for a translation of policy preferences into an implied ideological rating.[159] Table 6.1 is a matrix showing the comparability of these European data sources to their American counterparts, structured using the pairwise conception mentioned in the previous paragraph.

	Directly Measured	**Implied**
Voter Ideology	Self-ID on CCES *Self-ID on EES*	Policy questions on CCES *Policy questions on EES*
Party Ideology	Original Expert Survey *CHES*	Survey by Project Vote Smart *MARPOR*

Table 6.1: Matrix comparing American data sources used in Adams et al. (2017) to European sources used in this analysis (in italics), on the basis of whose ideology is measured and how.

All of these data sources – the CHES, the EES, and MARPOR – have been used elsewhere in this thesis, and the various strengths and weaknesses of each data source were discussed at length where the data source has been introduced. The aim of using them all together in one analysis is to dilute as much as possible of the systemic biases that may distort results derived from a reliance on a single data source.

Finally, just as the original study made clear, the importance of external, independent determinations for the ideologies of candidates and parties must be reiterated. Voters are prone

Schmitt, H., Hobolt, S. B., Popa, S. A., Teperoglou, E., & European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, Public Monitoring Unit (2016)*: European Parliament Election Study 2014, Voter Study, First Post-Election Survey.* GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5160 Data file Version 4.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12628

[158] Bakker, R., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., Polk, J., Rovny, J., Steenbergen, M., & Vachudova, M. A. (2020). *1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File.* v1.2. www.chesdata.eu

[159] Volkens, A., Burst, T., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., Weßels, B., & Zehnter, L. (2020). *The Manifesto Data Collection, Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR).* v2020b. https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu

to systemically misidentifying the ideology of parties in two distinct ways: assimilation, whereby the voter tends to identify a preferred candidate or party as closer to her own position; and contrast, whereby the voter tends to identify an opposition candidate or party as further away from her own position (Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Parducci & Marshall, 1962). By using ideological ratings independent of voter perception – expert surveys, content analysis data, or in this case, both – the analysis avoids the significant methodological problems associated with compensating for voter bias (e.g. Markus & Converse, 1979; Gerber & Green, 1999; Merrill, Grofman, and Adams, 2001).

With the data sources chosen, the next theoretical and methodological issue must be resolved – the question of political dimensionality. The analysis in Adams et al. (2017), as is standard in much of the literature on spatial theory, treats ideology as a unidimensional continuum reflecting only the voters' and candidates' positions on economic issues. While this is a reasonable decision for the purpose of formal modelling, it is clearly in conflict with evidence showing that voters are moved by more than economic issues and that sociocultural issues have risen in political prominence (e.g. Inglehart, 1977; Kitschelt, 1994; Flanagan & Lee, 2003; Kriesi et al. 2006). Given that there is no scholarly consensus on the question of exactly how ideology is structured (i.e. one, two, or more dimensions; which components fit which dimensions; differences in the perceptions of voters and parties), this analysis will essentially be conducted twice: once assuming an overall, "super-issue" dimension comprising both economic and sociocultural issues (*à la* Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976) and using the directly measured data (the CHES' overall ratings and the EES' overall self-identifications), and once assuming an ideological continuum based solely on economic issues and using the implied data (the MARPOR derived economic scale and the EES' policy questions). These choices hopefully lend a "best of both worlds" quality to the analysis and accomplish several goals at

once – preserving the spirit of the original analysis, maintaining the parsimonious methodological standards common to this subfield, finding a way to include non-economic issues in keeping with many of the arguments of this thesis, and performing the widest, fullest possible study using the data available. How these ideological ratings are to be operationalised is the next point needing discussion.

To facilitate the comparison on which this analysis is based, all ideology ratings (both strictly economic and overall) must be made on an identical scale – in this case, the 11-point scale with 0 indicating an extreme left position, 10 indicating an extreme right position, and 5 as the exact centre. The self-identification question on the EES does so, reading: "In political matters people talk of 'the left and 'the right'. What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on an 11-point scale." Party ideology ratings from the CHES are very similar, asking respondents to place parties on that same scale in terms of their "overall ideological stance."

Implied ideology scales built upon answers to policy-based questions or content analysis must reflect these same base characteristics. In the case of voters' economic ideology, this is measured using two series of questions from both the 2009 and 2014 EES. The two questions on the 2009 version of the survey ask for the respondent's degree of agreement with the following statements: "Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy;" and "Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people." Both items are scored on a standard 5-point Likert scale with "neither agree nor disagree" in the middle. The three questions on the 2014 version ask for the respondent to rate her position on each item on an 11-point scale, with 0 indicating that the respondent is "fully in favour" of the item and 10 indicating that she is "fully opposed" to the item. The items read: "state intervention in the economy;" "redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor in [our country];" and the

continuum between "raising taxes to increase public services" and "cutting public services to cut taxes." A simple average of these scores – with the 2009 responses re-scaled on a 0-10 scale for conformity with the other data – provides a deductive, reasonable metric for the respondent's economic ideology, consistent with the literature on capturing ideological attitudes from public opinion data (Ansolabehere, Rodden, & Snyder, 2008; Rovny & Marks, 2011).

Deriving party ideology scales from MARPOR data is accomplished in exactly the same way as outlined in Chapter 5. Once again, those scales are built using the logarithmic ratio method adapted from Kim & Fording (1998) and Lowe et al. (2011), with inputs chosen using Prosser's (2014) iterative process of comparing referential content validity. The manifestos used for each analysis are those taken from the party's last domestic election prior to the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections, respectively. The reason for drawing upon manifestos from domestic elections as opposed to manifestos specifically written for those European Parliament elections lies in the question of intended use. Since the sole purpose of this data is to locate parties on an economic ideology scale, regular domestic election manifestos are perfectly appropriate to the task. On the other hand, manifestos for European Parliament elections are often substantively different, focusing on many issues unrelated to economic ideology, thereby potentially clouding the data and obscuring the desired information.

Table 6.2 displays the components for the economic dimension, which has been re-scaled to fit the common 0-10 spectrum. This operationalisation results in an identical product to that used in Chapter 5 – the same components and the same scaling.

Economic Left	Economic Right
403 Market Regulation: Positive	401 Free Enterprise: Positive
411 Technology and Infrastructure	407 Protectionism: Negative
412 Controlled Economy: Positive	414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
413 Nationalisation: Positive	505 Welfare State Limitation: Positive
503 Social Justice	507 Education Limitation: Positive
504 Welfare State Expansion: Positive	702 Labour Groups: Negative
506 Education Expansion: Positive	
701 Labour Groups: Positive	

Table 6.2: Components of an economic ideology scale derived from MARPOR data using an iterative referential content validity method, taken from Prosser (2014).

The operationalisation of ideology from the four data sources results in the creation of two ideological "maps" showing the ideological locations of both parties and voters – one map of stated overall ideology, based on the directly taken measurements, and one of implied economic ideology, based on attitudes towards policy. These maps form the foundation of the analysis, as they provide a way to compare the ideological positioning of voters and parties. These constructs furnish the key independent variables present in the model discussed below. However, the first step in so doing is to outline the dependent variable.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is the probability that a voter voted for their country's main party of the centre-right – in the 2009 or 2014 European Parliament elections, respectively – or what was described earlier in this thesis as one of the "major poles of competition" (Hazan, 1997). Self-reported vote choice is a staple question on the EES. Importantly, only voters who voted for either that party or the opposing centre-left pole are included in the analysis. All others – including voters who voted for any other party, as well as

non-voters – were excluded. There are several reasons to anchor the analysis to these two parties. First, this decision echoes Adams et al.'s (2017) relative proximity metric, which was calculated in relation to the Republican and Democratic candidates. Second, as the historically largest catch-all parties in each country, these parties are the most well-known, best-supported parties across the ideological spectrum, meaning that they are the likeliest parties to draw from both the ideological centre and the fringes. This maximises the possibility of finding comparisons from which to draw meaningful conclusions. Additionally, both parties have a history of leading governments, diminishing concerns about differential path dependence and electoral inertia – the tendency for large, governing parties to remain large and participate in government, and small, challenger parties to remain small and outside government. These factors also make it more likely that voters are familiar with these parties' general and relative ideological positions.

Granted, since the Republicans and Democrats dominate American politics to a much greater degree than the equivalent pole parties in European countries, the subgroup of respondents in each country who voted for the pole parties is significantly smaller, thereby decreasing the sample for analysis. However, in almost every country in both years, the total share of the European Parliament vote held by the two pole parties comes to at least 40%, and in many cases is substantially higher, providing samples plenty large enough to underpin statistical analysis.

Determining the major poles of competition in every country was done in accordance with the definitions describing them as "fundamental political alternatives" (Collier & Collier, 1991; Scully, 1992) and "opposing alternatives of the major cleavage in the politics of a particular country" (Hazan, 1997). As described in Chapter 3, they are generally, but not always, the largest parties in terms of votes and seats; they have a history of leading governments and

setting public policy; and they fall on either side of the major cleavage of politics, which in most, but not all, countries is the left-right economic dimension. For most of the countries in the sample, the major poles of electoral competition are obvious – they are both consistently the two largest parties in terms of votes and seats, and the only parties to have supplied the head of government over the past thirty years (and in many cases, at least as long). In a few others, a third party meets the historical criteria, meaning that the pole parties are the two most extreme of the group (and the third is, by definition, a middle centrist party). These parties are listed in Table 6.3.

Country	Centre-Left Pole	Centre-Right Pole
Austria	Social Democratic Party of Austria	Austrian People's Party
Belgium (French)	Socialist Party	Reformist Movement
Belgium (Flemish)	Socialist Party Differently	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats
Denmark	Social Democracy	Venstre, Denmark's Liberal Party
Finland	Social Democratic Party of Finland	National Coalition Party
France	Socialist Party	Union for a Popular Movement
Germany	Social Democratic Party of Germany	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
Greece	Panhellenic Socialist Movement (2009) Coalition of the Radical Left (2014)	New Democracy
Italy	Democratic Party	Forza Italia (People of Freedom)
Luxembourg	Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party	Christian Social People's Party
The Netherlands	Labour Party	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy
Portugal	Socialist Party	Social Democratic Party
Spain	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	People's Party
Sweden	Swedish Social Democratic Party	Moderate Party
United Kingdom	Labour Party	Conservative Party

Table 6.3: A listing of the countries and parties included in the analysis. French-speaking Belgium and Flemish-speaking Belgium are included as two separate countries since they maintain separate elections and party systems. Luxembourg is only included in the 2014 analysis due to availability of data.

Every party pairing listed in Table 6.3 shares an important common characteristic. According to the CHES overall super-issue ideology metric, every single centre-left pole party is to the left of every single centre-right pole party, as well as to the left of the centre itself. The same is true for the centre-right pole parties in reflection. This means that the "meta-system" constructed for the purpose of comparison here is self-similar to each of the constituent parts, with a left-centre pole party, the centre, and the right-centre pole party arrayed in the same fashion.

The sample of 14 countries analysed here is largely similar to that studied elsewhere in this thesis.[160] However, a few omissions were required. Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland are not member states of the EU, and therefore do not participate in European Parliament elections. Ireland was omitted because the major historical and sociological cleavage of Irish politics is not the left-right spectrum, and therefore the pole parties of the system are not as ideologically distinguishable as in the other countries (Carty, 1981). And Luxembourg is only included in the 2014 analysis, as the CHES did not include that nation's parties in their study before then.[161]

The only other case requiring discussion is Greece. The Greek party system sustained a significant shock between 2009 and 2014, as the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (commonly known as PASOK), the country's main centre-left pole party since the restoration of democracy in 1974, suffered an unprecedented collapse in electoral support in response to the Greek public debt crisis. The main beneficiary of this erosion was the Coalition of the Radical

[160] Belgium is counted as two "countries" in this construct, as the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking regions of the countries have different party systems.

[161] Unique among the parties in the sample, the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party has never supplied the head of government. (This is technically true of the Flemish socialists as well, but the Belgian francophone and Flemish-speaking parties are, in practice, cooperative wings of the same political movement.) However, they are often the second largest party in the legislature and there is no reasonable argument for any other party as the centre-left pole.

Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA), an admittedly far left party that came first at the 2014 European Parliament elections. At this writing, PASOK has not recovered its electoral standing, and its future as a major pole party of the Greek party system is in question.

While Greece is the only party system in this sample to see change in the major poles of competition between these elections, there is no theoretical reason why this change should affect the analysis. The hypothesised ideological insensitivity of centrists should be just as apparent in a study contrasting voters for far right and far left parties as in one contrasting voters for centre-right and centre-left parties; the only reason to prefer the latter is to maximise sample size. Since SYRIZA came first in the 2014 elections, sample size should not be affected by their inclusion in the model, and perhaps just as importantly, an unusual case ought not be dismissed solely because it is unusual, where there is no theoretical or logistical justification.[162]

A final note on voting in European Parliament elections – they are generally regarded as "second-order" elections where voters are believed to vote more ideologically "sincerely," since they are freed from the considerations of national policy and coalition forming (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Reif, Schmitt, & Norris, 1997; Hix & Marsh, 2007). It is also noteworthy that sociocultural questions like immigration, multiculturalism, and nationalism are found to be more salient in European elections (e.g. Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hobolt & DeVries, 2016), making them an appropriate medium for expanding the scope of ideological research beyond just the economic dimension. Additionally, a core expectation of the "second-order" nature of these elections is that the large, traditional parties of government are punished (Hix & Marsh, 2007; Hix & Marsh, 2011). Since the major pole parties are generally the largest parties in their

[162] Additionally, even though they were a new and unfamiliar party to many voters in 2014, a party named "Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance" is rather transparent about its ideology, making it unlikely to be missed or mistaken by voters.

system and those that tend to furnish the head of government, the comparison between the two poles need not be adjusted to account for this tendency.

Independent Variables

The first independent variable is the voter's relative ideological proximity to the pole parties of the centre-right and centre-left. This is calculated as the difference between the absolute value of the voter's ideological distance from the centre-left pole party and the absolute value of the voter's ideological distance from the centre-right pole party. In formal terms:

$$Relative\ Proximity = |(Ideology_v - Ideology_{cl})| - |(Ideology_v - Ideology_{cr})|$$

This term provides a single measurement of where each voter lies in relation to the pole parties – how close they are to the closer and how distant they are from the further. Since distance between the voter and the centre-right pole is the subtrahend, the voter lies closer to the centre-right when the metric is positive; closer to the centre-left when the metric is negative; and equidistant from the two poles when the metric is zero.

The second independent variable is the one that indicates the voter's ideological identification. Just as in Adams et al.'s (2017) original study, this takes the form of a binary variable, with a 1 indicating a non-centrist voter and a 0 indicating a centrist voter. In the economic analysis, respondents whose implied economic ideology rates between 4 and 6 are coded as centrists, and those whose implied economic ideology rates as 4 or lower or 6 or higher are coded as non-centrists.

Both self-identified overall ideology and implied economic ideology reveal similar proportions of centrists to non-centrists. In the 2009 data, 26.43% code as centrist by the self-identified method; 28.38% by the implied method. In 2014, the figures are 28.42% and 33.59% respectively.

The final independent variable of interest is the key term in the analysis – an interaction between the previous two variables, the voter's relative ideological proximity to the pole parties, and the binary ideological variable indicating the voter's own ideological position. A significant result for this term will therefore highlight any fluctuation in a voter's probability to vote on the basis of ideological proximity due to their specific ideological views.

Controls

To gain the clearest possible picture of the effects of the independent variables, a number of control variables are added to the analysis to account for non-ideological variables that affect vote choice.

First is a control for party identification. Since the dependent variable is expressed in terms of the probability to vote for the centre-right pole party, this item is a binary variable with 1 indicating that the respondent self-identifies with the centre-right pole party.

Second, the respondent's age is a continuous variable measured in years.

Third, gender is measured as a binary variable, with male coded as 1, and female and other genders together coded as 0.

Fourth, class is rendered as a categorical variable, where for the 2009 analysis, 1 indicates "working class;" 2 indicates "lower middle class;" 3 indicates "middle class;" 4 indicates "upper middle class;" and 5 indicates "upper class." This item was simplified for the 2014 survey, so in that analysis, 1 indicates "working class," 2 indicates "middle class" and 3

indicates "higher class." In lieu of data concerning income or wealth, social class is generally accepted as a reasonable proxy for a respondent's material circumstances (e.g. Svallfors, 2004; Iversen & Soskice, 2006).

Fifth, the respondent's age when they stopped full-time education is used as proxy for a university education. It is a binary variable, with 0 indicating a respondent whose answer is 19 years or younger, and 1 indicating a respondent whose answer is 20 or older. While imprecise, a similar method has been employed in other studies to control for education (e.g. Kuhn, Solaz, & van Elsas, 2017).

Sixth is a control indicating the respondent's personal relationship with trade unions. It is a binary variable, with a 1 indicating either that the respondent is a member of a trade union or someone in their household is a member (or both).

The seventh control concerns the regularity of religious worship. It too is a binary variable, with a 1 indicating a respondent that attends religious services at least once a week, excepting weddings and funerals.

The final control is a variable concerning political interest. In both 2009 and 2014, the EES asked respondents: "To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? Very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?" This four-point Likert item is converted into a binary variable, where "very" and "somewhat" are coded as 1, and other answers are coded 0.

Centrifugal, Centripetal, and "Backwards" Party Systems

Finally, it is necessary to discuss an important structural issue that impacts the final results – the spatial distribution of the centre-left and centre-right pole parties in each party system.

In a more centrifugal party system, the centre-left and centre-right pole parties are a greater distance apart, with a much larger middle area between them. In a more centripetal party system, the centre-left and centre-right pole parties are relatively close together, bunched toward the centre of the ideological spectrum. While the distributional structure of the party system is relevant to many aspects of party competition, the argument advanced in this chapter is agnostic on this point in principle – the hypothesis that centrist voters weigh party ideology less than non-centrist voters when casting their ballot should have no relation to the structure of the party system, since the underlying mechanism of the intensity-extremity relationship is thought to be universal. However, the specific structure of the party system is highly relevant to the results of this analysis because of the way that data is recorded.

As a reminder, the relative proximity metric used in the below models is defined as follows:

$$Relative\ Proximity = |(Ideology_v - Ideology_{cl})| - |(Ideology_v - Ideology_{cr})|$$

Importantly, the ideology of parties – taken either from the CHES or MARPOR data – is recorded on a continuous scale, the former because it is an average of survey responses, the latter because the positive and negative mentions of specific policies in manifestos has no upper bound. This means that their ideology scores can be any number between 0 and 10.

But the ideology of voters, being a single response, takes the form of an integer from 0 to 10. This means there is notably less precision in the voter ideology score.[163]

[163] This is not a problem, in and of itself. It is entirely reasonable to suspect that any greater specificity in the voter's response would fall into the category of spurious precision.

Additionally, given the way in which relative proximity is calculated, all voters ideologically to the right of the centre-right pole have the same relative proximity score. The same is true for all voters ideologically to the left. This makes theoretical sense in this model, since a voter who is barely to the right of the centre-right pole and one who is far to the right of the centre-right pole have no meaningful difference in their spatial relationship to the parties – both are clearly closer to the centre-right pole.

Altogether, what this means is that in a hypothetical centrifugal party system, like the one modelled in Figure 6.1 below, where the pole parties are relatively far apart, there is an accompanying greater differentiation in voters' relative proximity to the parties. For example, in the party system shown in Figure 6.1, voters rating 0-2 would have the same relative proximity, but voters rated at 3 would have a unique relative proximity, as would voters at 4, 5, 6, and 7. Voters rating 8-10 would have the same relative proximity.

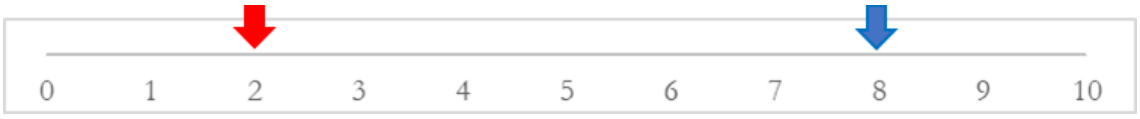

Figure 6.1: A hypothetical centrifugal party system, modelled on the 0-10 overall left-right dimension.

The differentiation between voters is good for the model, as it allows for greater sample sizes, more comparisons, and will therefore yield richer results – if centrists are indeed distinct from other voters in the way they are hypothesised, that distinction would be highlighted in a centrifugal party system.

The opposite is true in a centripetal party system, like the one modelled in Figure 6.2 below. Since the pole parties are so close together, there is substantially less differentiation in voters' relative proximity. In this example, voters rated 0-4 would all have the same relative

proximity, voters rated 6-10 would also all have the same, and only voters rating 5 would have a unique relative proximity. Analysis of a party system like this would tend to dull any results.

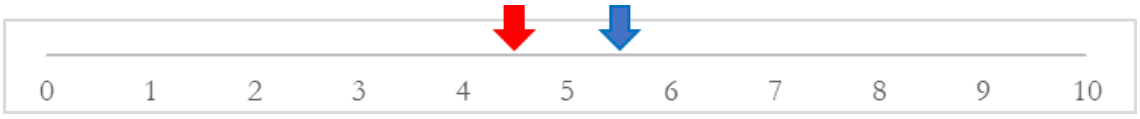

Figure 6.2: A hypothetical centripetal party system, modelled on the 0-10 overall left-right dimension.

The difference in how ideology is recorded can exacerbate this issue – a system where the centre-left pole party rates at 2.9 and the centre-right pole party rates at 7.1 will provide more meaningful data than one where the centre-left pole is at 3 and the centre-right pole is at 7, even though there is essentially no practical difference between those systems.

To compensate for these differences, two of the four models – CHES/self-identified 2009 and 2014 – will be run twice, once with all the countries in the sample, and once excluding the most centripetal party systems, defined as those with four or fewer unique relative proximity measurements among their electorates. In 2009, this only excludes Denmark, Greece, and Portugal. In 2014, this excluded Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, and Portugal. In all cases, sample size was more than adequate for analysis.

Because parties are much more tightly clustered on the economic ideological scales derived from MARPOR data, the distinction between centripetal and centrifugal party systems is much less practical to make in those cases. That being said, since the ideology of individuals is an average and therefore no longer necessarily represented by an integer, the measurement concern is substantially lessened. Therefore, such an adjustment is not done for those models.

However, the 2009 MARPOR/implied model is run twice to adjust for a different problem – the fact that the far noisier estimates from MARPOR data do not always rate the

centre-left pole party to the left of the centre-right party. Therefore, the first model includes all parties, and the second excludes Greece and Italy, which display this "backward" tendency. No adjustment was necessary for the 2014 data.

Model, Results, and Findings

The final model appears as such:

$$
\begin{aligned}
&Probability\,(Vote\ for\ CR\ Pole\ Party) \\
&\quad = logit\,\{\beta_0 + \beta_1(Relative\ Proximity) \\
&\quad + \beta_2(Ideological\ Identification) \\
&\quad + \beta_3(Relative\ Proximity * Ideological\ Identification) \\
&\quad + \beta_4(CR\ Party\ ID) + \beta_5(Age) + \beta_6(Gender) + \beta_7(Class) \\
&\quad + \beta_8(Education) + \beta_9(Trade\ Union\ Membership) \\
&\quad + \beta_{10}(Religiosity) + \beta_{11}(Political\ Interest) + \mu\}
\end{aligned}
$$

As described previously, this model is run on four sets of data, once using the direct measurements of overall ideology (the CHES' overall ratings and EES' self-identifications), and once using implied measurements of economic ideology (the MARPOR derived economic scale and EES' economic policy questions); and once for each of the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections. The two models using CHES data are run twice, with the second excluding the most centripetal party systems, as is the model using the 2009 MARPOR data, with the second excluding the "backwards" party systems.

Table 6.4 shows the first batch of results, from the analysis using the 2009 CHES data and self-identified overall ideology from the 2009 EES. Immediately following, Table 6.5

shows the results of the second analysis, similarly using the 2014 CHES data and self-identified overall ideology from the 2014 EES.

	2009 (all Western countries)		2009 (no centripetal systems)	
Variables	**Ratio**	**SE**	**Ratio**	**SE**
Relative Proximity	1.45 **	(0.21)	0.99	(0.16)
Non-Centrist	0.73 **	(0.11)	0.84	(0.13)
*Relative Proximity * Non-centrist*	1.20	(0.18)	1.73 ***	(0.28)
Controls				
Party ID	113.91 ***	(29.51)	122.88 ***	(43.13)
Age	0.99 ***	(0.00)	0.99 ***	(0.00)
Gender	1.07	(0.12)	1.12	(0.15)
Class	1.33 ***	(0.08)	1.38 ***	(0.10)
Education	1.23 *	(0.15)	1.14	(0.16)
Trade Union	0.59 ***	(0.07)	0.51 ***	(0.07)
Religiosity	0.94	(0.16)	0.99	(0.20)
Political Interest	0.69 ***	(0.08)	0.69 ***	(0.10)
Constant	0.50 **	(0.14)	0.63	(0.20)
N	**3,684**		**2,696**	

Table 6.4: Results of logistic regression upon voting for a centre-right party, by relative proximity, non-centrist identity, the interaction of relative proximity and non-centrist identity, and controls. Ideological data taken from EES self-identification and CHES overall ratings. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

	2014 (all Western countries)		2014 (no centripetal systems)	
Variables	**Ratio**	**SE**	**Ratio**	**SE**
Relative Proximity	1.11	(0.14)	0.89	(0.14)
Non-Centrist	0.64 ***	(0.09)	0.63 ***	(0.11)
*Relative Proximity * Non-centrist*	1.62 ***	(0.22)	2.07 ***	(0.33)
Controls				
Party ID	153.94 ***	(39.36)	200.53 ***	(78.11)
Age	1.00	(0.00)	1.01 *	(0.01)
Gender	0.75 **	(0.10)	0.64 ***	(0.10)
Class	1.93 ***	(0.25)	1.53 ***	(0.23)
Education	1.41 **	(0.20)	1.27	(0.22)
Trade Union	0.77 *	(0.11)	0.85	(0.15)
Religiosity	1.15	(0.24)	0.91	(0.23)
Political Interest	1.17	(0.17)	1.61 ***	(0.27)
Constant	0.08 ***	(0.03)	0.09 ***	(0.04)
N	**3,453**		**2,435**	

Table 6.5: Results of logistic regression upon voting for a centre-right party, by relative proximity, non-centrist identity, the interaction of relative proximity and non-centrist identity, and controls. Ideological data taken from EES self-identification and CHES overall ratings. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

Results from these analyses are broadly similar, with one major exception. Three of the four analyses – 2009 data adjusted to exclude centripetal systems and both 2014 models – show that relative proximity to the parties has no significant effect on the predicted probability of voting for the centre-right party as opposed to the centre-left, a finding that, on its face, would be a major point against the ubiquitous spatial theory of voting. However, in all three models, the significance of relative proximity jumps past the highest significance threshold once the voters' centrist ideology is accounted for, even when controlling for a wide variety of known predictive variables like partisanship and trade union membership.

In other words, in those three analyses, relative proximity is a very strong predictor of vote choice among non-centrist voters but holds no predictive value for the decisions of centrists – substantial evidence in favour of the hypothesis.

This effect is clearly illustrated by plots of the marginal effect of relative proximity. Figure 6.3 shows the graphs for two 2009 analyses – with and without centripetal party systems – and Figure 6.4 shows the very same for the two 2014 analyses.

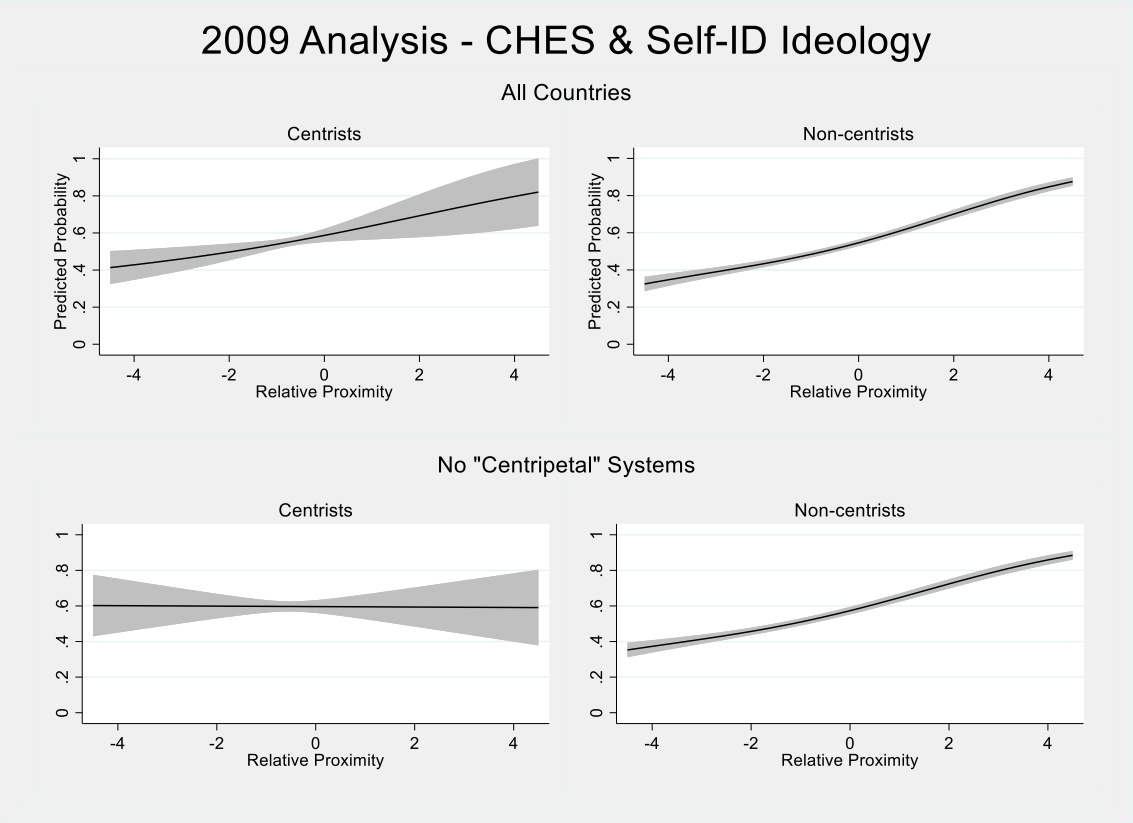

Figure 6.3: Graphs of relative proximity's effect on the predicted probability of voting for a centre-right party, for centrist voters (left) and non-centrist voters (right). Top shows the analysis of 2009 data including all countries; bottom shows the analysis excluding centripetal party systems. Shaded areas indicate 95th percentile confidence intervals.

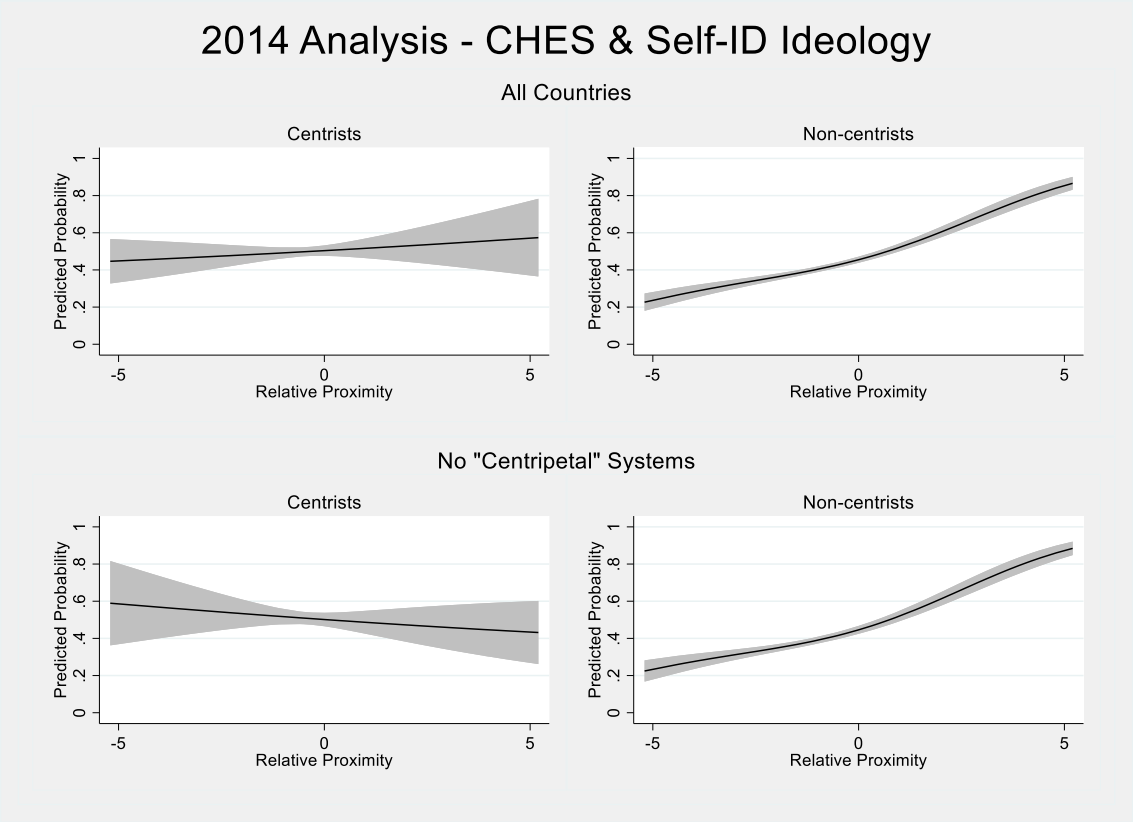

Figure 6.4: Graphs of relative proximity's effect on the predicted probability of voting for a centre-right party, for centrist voters (left) and non-centrist voters (right). Top shows the analysis of 2014 data including all countries; bottom shows the analysis excluding centripetal party systems. Shaded areas indicate 95th percentile confidence intervals.

All of the graphs show that as relative proximity "increases" – meaning that the voter in question is ideologically closer to the centre-right party and correspondingly farther away from the centre-left party – the average non-centrist is significantly more likely to vote for the centre-right party. The result is even more pronounced as relative proximity "decreases" – meaning that the voter is ideologically closer to the centre-left party and correspondingly distant from the centre-right party – as non-centrists are clearly more likely to vote for the centre-left party.

For the 2009 adjusted graph and both 2014 graphs, centrists are no more or less likely to vote for the centre-right party as a function of relative proximity, in stark contrast to the

non-centrists, although the wider confidence intervals towards the extremes are an artefact of sample size – predictable given that there are few situations in which a centrist voter will actually be that much closer to one major pole party than another.

The outlying result in this group is that from the analysis of all countries in the 2009 data, which showed that relative proximity helped predict the voting behaviour of all voters, with the effect on centrists and non-centrists being statistically indistinguishable. Naturally, one possible reason for this null result is indeed the adjustment detailed above to compensate for the issues with ideological measurement and the ideologically compressed nature of some party systems. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that the unadjusted result was on the knife's edge of statistical significance, and that eliminating any one of the three centripetal party systems – Denmark, Greece, or Portugal – thrust the interaction term to the highest significance level, much less all three. However, there are certainly other possibilities.

First, the electorate may have changed in some qualitative way during the five years between the 2009 and 2014 elections. While it is not evident in the EES, it is possible that centrists have become increasingly ideologically insensitive over time, and therefore the split between the two analyses is meaningful. The other likely possibility is that there is something particular about Danish, Greek, or Portuguese voters or their party systems that makes their politics more ideological than fellow nations, although this seems unlikely.[164] The interaction of the two – year and party system – could be responsible, the idea being that some specific factor about that year's elections in those countries might alter the ideological sensitivity of the electorate at that time, although no obvious culprits present themselves.

[164] It seems particularly unlikely that the centripetal nature of the three party systems is to blame. The idea that centrists would be *more* ideologically attuned in an election where the major pole parties were *less* ideologically indistinguishable makes little sense.

There is no question that the overall findings are somewhat weaker due to this null result, although it is possible that it is merely an accident of statistics. The results from the analysis performed using the implied "map" of economic ideology taken from MARPOR data and EES policy questions may help contextualise these findings. Table 6.6 contains the results for the 2009 data – both overall and adjusted to exclude the "backwards" party systems that violate the logic of the study – and Table 6.7 shows the results for the 2014 data, which required no adjustment.

	2009 (all Western countries)		**2009 (no "backwards" systems)**	
Variables	**Ratio**	**SE**	**Ratio**	**SE**
Relative Proximity	1.08	(0.10)	0.95	(0.09)
Non-Centrist	0.69 ***	(0.08)	0.73 **	(0.09)
*Relative Proximity * Non-centrist*	1.00	(0.11)	1.30 **	(0.15)
Controls				
Party ID	233.52 ***	(60.33)	190.79 ***	(54.66)
Age	1.00	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)
Gender	1.09	(0.11)	1.10	(0.12)
Class	1.36 ***	(0.07)	1.34 ***	(0.08)
Education	1.09	(0.11)	1.12	(0.13)
Trade Union	0.58 ***	(0.06)	0.50 ***	(0.06)
Religiosity	1.01	(0.15)	0.99	(0.17)
Political Interest	0.63 ***	(0.07)	0.66 ***	(0.08)
Constant	0.31 ***	(0.08)	0.44 ***	(0.12)
N	**3,521**		**2,837**	

Table 6.6: Results of logistic regression upon voting for a centre-right party, by relative proximity, non-centrist identity, the interaction of relative proximity and non-centrist identity, and controls. Ideological data implied from EES policy questions and MARPOR economic ratings. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

	2014 (all Western countries)	
Variables	**Ratio**	**SE**
Relative Proximity	1.04	(0.08)
Non-Centrist	0.96	(0.11)
*Relative Proximity * Non-centrist*	1.41***	(0.13)
Controls		
Party ID	283.81 ***	(68.76)
Age	1.00	(0.00)
Gender	0.77 **	(0.09)
Class	1.93 ***	(0.22)
Education	1.43 ***	(0.18)
Trade Union	0.77 **	(0.10)
Religiosity	1.05	(0.20)
Political Interest	0.85	(0.11)
Constant	0.07 ***	(0.02)
N	**3,298**	

Table 6.7: Results of logistic regression upon voting for a centre-right party, by relative proximity, non-centrist identity, the interaction of relative proximity and non-centrist identity, and controls. Ideological data implied from EES policy questions and MARPOR economic ratings. * = p < 0.1 ** = p < 0.05 *** = p < 0.01

Similar to the previous set of analyses, the results from the adjusted 2009 data and the 2014 data display a clear pattern of adhering to theoretical expectations. In both analyses, relative proximity is not a statistically significant predictor of voting behaviour unless the ideology of the voter is accounted for. And in both cases, relative proximity only holds predictive power among non-centrists, who are clearly more likely to vote for centre-right parties the closer they are to their spatial position, while that factor seems to have no effect on centrists.

Again, the illustration of the marginal effect of relative proximity on the predicted probability of voting for a centre-right party is telling in graph form. Figure 6.5 shows the graph for the analysis of 2009 data – adjusted and unadjusted – and Figure 6.6 shows the graph for the analysis of 2014 data.

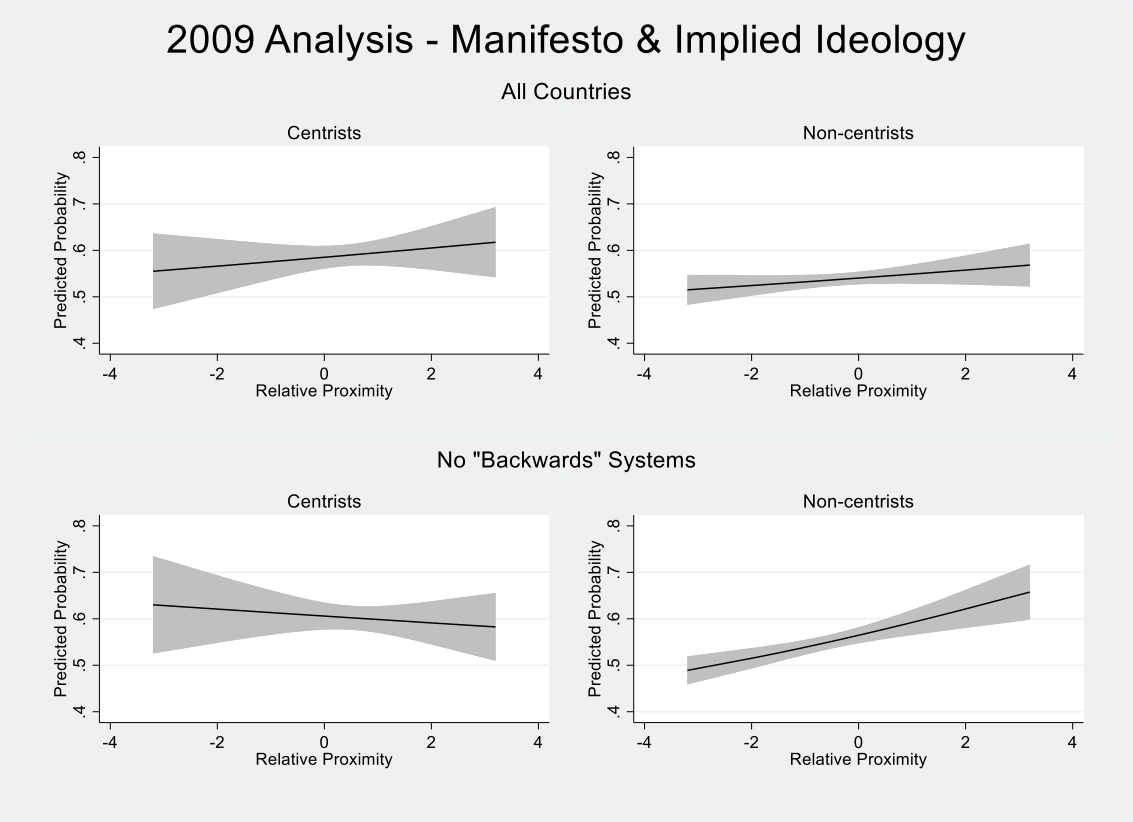

Figure 6.5: Graphs of relative proximity's effect on the predicted probability of voting for a centre-right party, for centrist voters (left) and non-centrist voters (right). Top shows the analysis of 2009 data including all countries; bottom shows the analysis excluding "backwards" party systems. Shaded areas indicate 95th percentile confidence intervals.

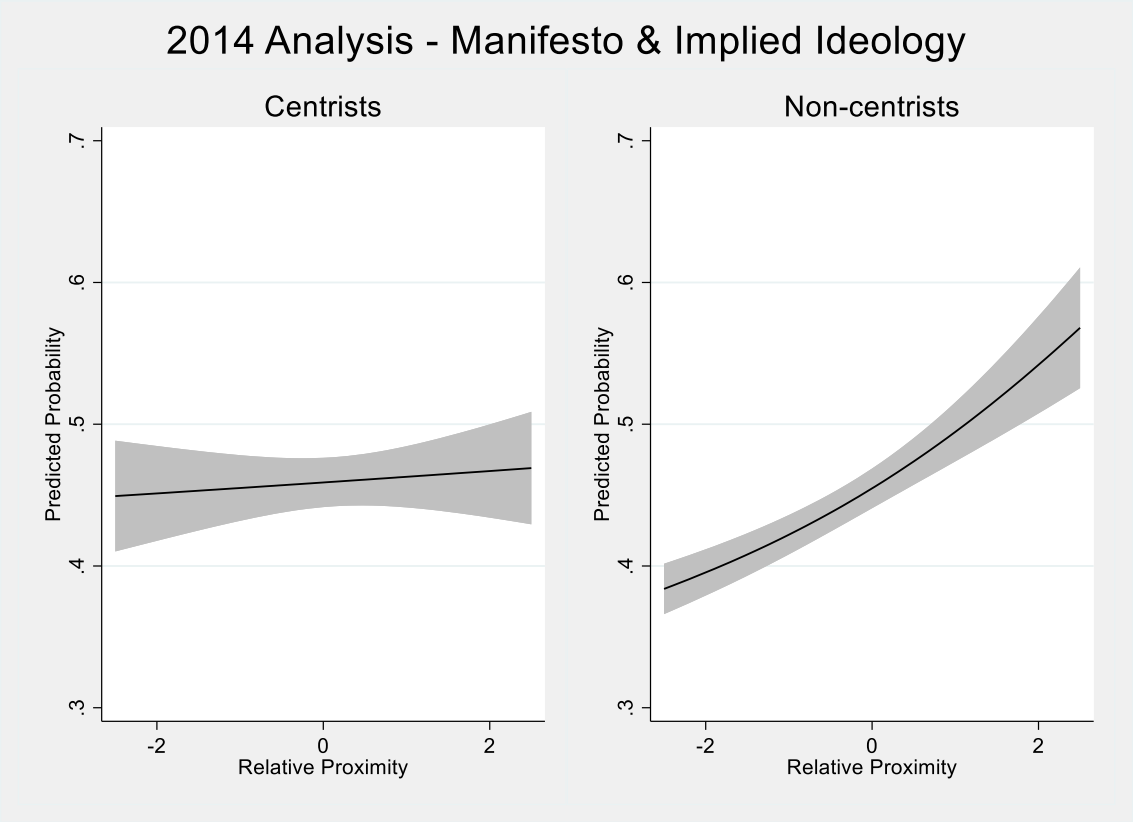

Figure 6.6: Graphs of relative proximity's effect on the predicted probability of voting for a centre-right party, for centrist voters (left) and non-centrist voters (right). Shaded areas indicate 95th percentile confidence intervals.

While the results of these analyses are unquestionably more muted, with effects being noticeably "flatter" than the previous analysis, this can largely be explained by the more compressed nature of the data. MARPOR's ratings of economic ideology are clustered together much more closely than those taken from CHES – the fact that CHES uses a defined, objective scale for its ratings encourages experts' use of the full spectrum. Additionally, operational measures like policy questions also tend to result in more tightly clustered estimates of ideology than self-identification. And while the results here are not as contrasting as the analysis of CHES/self-identified data, the adjusted 2009 and 2014 analyses do show statistically significant effects.

Again, however, the 2009 data from all countries delivers a null result. While this may superficially seem to reinforce the idea that the 2009 elections were qualitatively different from 2014 in a way that altered centrists' ideological sensitivity, it seems more likely that this is another result of measurement error. First, note that although there is no significance to the interaction term, there is also no significance to the relative proximity term overall. This result would indicate that in the 2009 European elections, ideology played no significant role in explaining vote choice – a result that would not only strain credulity on its own but is also contradicted in the 2009 analysis of CHES/self-ID data, which ended in the much more likely finding that relative proximity affected all voters regardless of their own ideology. And further, consider the adjustment made – the elimination of the two party systems where the relative proximity measure would actually have been the reverse of any other, with the "centre-left" party actually further to the right of the "centre-right" party. It is entirely reasonable to conclude that the inclusion of such party systems poisoned the results beyond recognition by making spatial position appear irrelevant, and therefore, the adjusted results are a much more accurate representation of reality.

All that being said, it is indeed possible that there was something unusual about the 2009 elections in the one country excluded in both of the adjusted 2009 analyses – Greece. As mentioned above, the Greek party system underwent a major shock between 2009 and 2014 – provoked by the contemporary debt crisis – but there is no indication that the impending political shock was evident at the time of the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. Combined, the two major pole parties won nearly 70% of the vote, with PASOK winning a slight plurality. And in the country's legislative elections held only four months later, PASOK won one of the largest victories in the party's history and took an overall majority of seats in the Hellenic Parliament. It is difficult to pinpoint a reason why Greece's inclusion might

substantively alter the present results on its own, and the adjustments made to the data are neither arbitrary nor capricious but solve concrete problems of measurement. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out, and must be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

Conclusions

The results from this chapter's analysis make an important contribution to one of the largest, most important puzzles in political science – why voters cast their ballots. While the behaviour of centrist voters in particular may seem to be a niche concern on the surface, the large number of centrists in Western democracies and the significantly different expectations that this study suggests they ought to be held to belies that impulse.

Simply put, the broad findings of this chapter indicate that spatial ideological proximity is indeed a statistically valuable tool in predicting the voting patterns of non-centrists but has no substantive predictive value for centrists. Overall, this is strong evidence in favour of this chapter's hypothesis that although voters on the left and right are motivated by ideology in making their voting decisions, centrists are not.

While the results were not unanimous, and the simplest version of some models did not return the results expected, after adjustments were made – adjustments designed to correct simple problems arising from imprecision and measurement error in the data – all analyses did cohere to the theoretical expectations driven by the relationship between intensity and extremity of preferences.

Additionally, those analyses were performed on very different data, enhancing the validity of the findings. Whether party ideology was taken from an expert survey evaluating the overall left-right super-issue dimension or implied from content analysis of party statements on economic policy, it made no difference in the results. The same is true for voter

ideology; either supplied by the voter themselves or implied from their policy preferences, the results held firm.

Of course, the analysis has its limitations. As a function of the research design, large numbers of voters were excluded – those that voted for any party other than the major pole parties of the centre-left and centre-right. In theory, this should not affect the results, and there is every reason to suggest that a similar analysis anchored to extreme parties (if sample size allowed) would have similar results.

Where the limitations may be most problematic is in inferring implications from these findings, a subject that will be discussed at greater length in the concluding chapter. In short though, these results certainly lend some credence to the idea that centrist parties are electorally disadvantaged by the ideological insensitivity of centrist voters, but nothing about this analysis speaks directly to that argument.

The next and final chapter of this thesis is that conclusion, where the contributions made therein are summarised, the potential implications for politics and political science are debated, and an agenda for further research is offered.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Discussion

This chapter summarises the contributions of the thesis, considers questions of generalisability, limitations, theoretical and empirical implications, and also considers avenues for further research.

This chapter first restates the theoretical contribution proposed in the opening three chapters, before moving on to the empirical chapters. The section on each empirical chapter unfolds in the same way, beginning with a restatement of the results of the analysis and discernment of the main findings. That is followed by a review of how those findings relate to the theory and motivations for the study outlined in the initial chapters. Next is a speculative discussion on the potential implications of the findings – how they might fit into other relevant literatures and puzzles, and what they might portend for future study. Each section ends with a consideration of the limitations of each analysis and suggests ways that further research might be structured to build upon their findings.

The chapter ends with a short reflection on the value of this kind of research, and the enormous potential rewards that lie in greater professional interaction between empirical social science researchers and their cousins in the realm of political theory.

Theoretical Contribution

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in the way it conceptualises the political centre, bringing many – often competing definitions – together into one tent, and accommodating multiple perspectives on what the centre can mean. This was done with the end goal of showing, first, how centrist political actors differ from their counterparts on the left and right, and second, how centrist political actors differ among themselves.

In response to the gap in the literature outlined in Chapter 1, this thesis advanced a theoretical framework to collect all of the various definitions of party-level centrism, ground them within a single context, and distil them into three distinct, but related types – the *ideological*, *middle*, and *stylistic*.

To reiterate, ideologically centrist parties are those with an overall policy programme marking them as broadly centrist from a cross-national, comparative perspective. Middle centrist parties are those operating within the middle area of their party system, between the major pole parties of electoral competition. And stylistic centrist parties are those that strategically choose to construct and inhabit the centrist political position through means like rhetoric and leadership.

The typology went a level deeper with regard to ideologically centrist parties, showing how different combinations of dimensional positions could confer an overall centrist image upon a party, with the result that parties with wildly different programmes and values might superficially appear to hold a similar position on the ideological super-issue dimension. *Moderate* centrist parties accomplished this through a set of individually moderate positions; *mainstream* and *niche economic* centrist parties did so by virtue of a centrist position on the left-right economic ideology dimension, albeit with different salience strategies; and *syncretic* centrist parties synthesised an overall centrist position through a blend of more extreme positions on the constituent dimensions.

On voters, the opening chapters proposed and explained an update to Inglehart & Klingemann's (1976) classical model of ideological self-identification, tailored for the particular qualities of centrists. Replacing the party component – less useful for a largely de-aligned population like self-identified centrists – and the values component – too imprecise for a group with no single defining set of views – were the concepts of *intentionality* and *moderation*.

Intentionality, derived from both political interest and partisanship, is a measure of a voter's capacity and authenticity to hold a meaningful ideological identification. And moderation, defined as the avoidance of extreme positions on the underlying issues and controversies that make up a coherent political worldview, is a description of centrist values.

Along with the companion possibility of a symbolic ideology built on abstract, non-ideological values, this model and these variables can account for the wide diversity of explanations for centrist self-identification found in the literature, permitting researchers the flexibility to investigate centrist voters without being confined to a conceptual straitjacket.

Indeed, the empirical chapters that followed these theoretical arguments and their descriptive analysis sought to do just that – exploring how centrist parties and voters differ from others, and how different conceptions of centrism might differentiate them from each other.

Centrist Parties, "Centrist Ideology," and European Integration

Findings

This chapter on the connection between parties' overall centrist image and their generally supportive position on European integration both made key findings and reinforced key findings of previous research.

Most notably, for the first time, this study showed that while a party's overall ideological stance is indeed superficially associated with its position on European integration, the more important factor in determining the latter is the party's syncretic combination of green/alternative/libertarian sociocultural ideology and right-wing economic ideology. Since many parties with this fusion of positions are considered ideologically centrist parties overall, this is a major factor driving the orthogonal nature of the European integration dimension

when compared to the overall super-issue ideological dimension, resulting in the inverse U-curve described by scholars (e.g. Hix & Lord, 1997; Aspinwall, 2002; Marks, Wilson, & Ray; 2002).

This effect stands in contrast to the much more muted effect of moderation on the economic dimension upon position on European integration. While there is a statistically significant association between these two variables, that association grows weaker when other variables are added into the model or more extreme parties are filtered out of the analysis – a dilution that is not observed with the effect of syncretic liberalism, at least not to the same degree. One likely explanation for this is that moderation on the economic dimension functions as a signifier of a party's "mainstream" nature, which is highly relevant to its position on integration. However, that signifier loses much of its predictive value when other, better metrics of mainstream party behaviour – like record of governing and the use of anti-establishment rhetoric – were included in the study.

This leads to the other main finding, the reinforcement of the association between governing – and support for the established system of governance – and a pro-integration position. Clearly, parties that serve in government are more favourable towards European integration, but the effect goes well beyond actual participation in the cabinet. More crucial is the party's cultural acceptance of the norms that underpin the political, economic, and social institutions of liberal democracy, reflected in their use or eschewal of anti-establishment rhetoric. The statistical significance of the association between this latter variable and position on integration drowned out that of a party's governing history, suggesting that the cultural norms at play are related to experience in government, but are somewhat divorced from the actual composition of the government at any given time.

Together, these two findings present a far more detailed portrait of a subject that is widely assumed to be more simplistic than it actually is – that centrist parties support European integration because it is an intrinsically "centrist" project.

Connection to Theory and Motivations

That overly simplistic conception is the essence of the motivation behind this thesis. Indeed, the contrast in results between moderation on the economic dimension – one way an ideologically centrist party receives its centrist image – and syncretic liberalism – another distinct way an ideologically centrist party arrives at that centrist image – shows the necessity of the theoretical typology outlined in Chapter 2. Without the kind of nuanced, specific definitions provided by the typology, "centrist" parties would remain bunched up under one theoretical and descriptive umbrella, regardless of the significant ideological differences that exist among them.

In this case, without a formalised conception of centrist ideology – or more precisely, the various ideological cocktails that result in the veneer of the centrist image – it would not be theoretically possible to discern the effects of moderation from the effects of syncretic liberalism while still relating both ideas to the overarching centrist image that they often share. The typology therefore provides theoretical justification for the empirical finding that centrist parties are anything but monolithic institutions, a fact that should condition our view of the value of constructs like the left-right overall super-issue spectrum, or really any political space defined by any number of dimensions.

While helping to delineate various strands of party-level centrism, the typology is also helpful in setting centrism apart from other ideologies – one of the definitional criteria of a political ideology, according to Budge (1994) – and also from other concepts that have become

intermingled with the shorthand of "centrism" over the years. Certainly, there is some overlap between parties that make heavy use of anti-establishment rhetoric and those that espouse an extreme ideology, just as the inverse is also true. But these are clearly separate concepts, with vastly different implications. In this way, the theory advanced here helps to buttress empirical evidence from recent research, showing how centrist anti-establishment parties attract support both from voters with low levels of trust in the mainstream parties of government, as well as from those holding ideologically centrist views (Havlík & Voda, 2018; De Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Engler, 2020).

Implications

Most directly, the findings of this study indicate that the European Union – and its associated supranational institutions – is not really the "centrist project" that it has been described as in both scholarly and popular discourse. It would be far more precise to suggest that support for European integration is associated with multiple factors that sometimes overlap: a syncretic liberal ideological outlook, combining right-wing economic ideology with libertarian sociocultural ideology; and a political culture that respects and upholds the established post-war democratic order that accepts integration as a *fait accompli* that political actors can reasonably challenge and reform, but not reject.

Indeed, these findings put paid to a notion of the EU as a creation of the ideological centre, as long as that latter concept is defined as a specific ideological position comprising policy values. Instead, the findings here argue for an idea of European integration as a creation *across* the ideological centre, in that it is a product of innumerable compromises, trade-offs, creative solutions, and lowest-common-denominator-type thinking. Given that the governments of European nations have largely been dominated by parties from the Christian

democratic, conservative, liberal, and social democratic families since 1945 (Von Beyme, 1985), it should be no surprise that an institution created by these parties should share some features from each of its parents, as well as some features that they hold in common. Certainly, there is plenty of reason to consider the present-day EU a market-friendly, socially cosmopolitan institution, most appealing to the political ideology of liberals, a reality reflected in the findings. But as discussed in Chapter 4, there are many competing visions of a united Europe, and the investment that various non-liberal parties and politicians have made in such visions over decades is perhaps an even larger factor in ongoing support for integration. This study therefore argues for a much clearer, more precise reading of the political motivations behind the history and future of European integration.

More broadly, however, since research has shown the growing salience of the integration cleavage in party competition, as well as the growing importance of the issue to voters, these findings should be read as further encouragement towards a re-examination of the use of common ideological constructs as an explanatory variable in social science. While current models – such as the overall super-issue dimension, and various flavours of multidimensional models – largely perform well in describing party competition in European countries, they are far less reliable as ideological maps of public attitudes.[165] The transformation of the European issue from a niche concern barely represented in the Palace of Westminster into a salient driver of British political identity is a warning to scholars about the inadequacy of our current conception of ideology and its impact on political competition (Hobolt, Leeper, & Tilley, 2020). The rise of new cleavages creates fertile ground for political entrepreneurs (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020) and other provocateurs of electoral volatility (Fieldhouse et al., 2019),

[165] A point continued in the section on Chapter 5.

all of which should push scholars to question old assumptions and consider new alternatives to current ideological models.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

By far, the biggest limitation of this analysis is the endogenous nature of the relationship between parties' ideological and issue positions, a knot that cannot be untangled easily (Przeworski, 2007). Because of this factor, the analysis in Chapter 4 is limited to uncovering statistical associations rather than making claims about the direction of causality between the centrist image, ideological positioning, and support for European integration.

Perhaps the most obvious issue lies in the association between syncretic liberalism and centrism, an association that does not make much sense if contextualised in spatial terms. As Figure 4.3 showed clearly, some of Europe's most extreme parties – measured by their positions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions – are somehow considered centrist when rated on the overall super-issue dimension that structures most party competition in the West. While the idea of extreme tendencies cancelling or balancing each other out to result in a "neutral" centrist image is mathematically and intuitively reasonable, it is clearly not necessarily the case, since parties that combine the inverse tendencies – left-wing economic ideology and traditional/authoritarian/nationalist sociocultural ideology – are generally considered extreme on that same overall super-issue dimension. While quantitative analysis of the kind offered in this thesis can identify this pattern, it cannot properly explain it. This is far more likely to be the province of qualitative, historical research into the origins of our modern ideological regime.

There is some precedent for this vein of work. In a paper seeking to trace the underlying reasons for the predominance of the "containment" strategy that NATO and the

wider West sought to impose on the Soviet Union and transnational communism during the Cold War, Martill (2019) finds that historical and institutional links can affect our subjective perceptions of ideology, and *vice versa.* He writes, concerning that containment strategy:

> The key to understanding the success of containment, I contend, lies in its liberal heritage and, in consequence, the location of its supporters at the center of West European party systems. This afforded proponents of the liberal view of security distinct institutional advantages over their competitors, namely: increased likelihood of government membership, greater influence in governing coalitions, and increased strength vis-à-vis the opposition. By privileging the political center, proportional parliamentary systems afforded increased influence to the liberal strategy of containment over the disengagement alternative endorsed by socialists and conservatives. Thus containment did not dominate because it was logical, but because the ideological constituency most supportive of its precepts was empowered by parliamentary institutions of West European states.

And later:

> The curvilinear relationship between the traditional left–right ideological spectrum and foreign policy issues, in which both left and right oppose the center, can be witnessed in a host of contemporary issue-areas, including human rights and intervention, democratization, trade policy, global governance, and contemporary strategy, including the Western response to the Russian resurgence. By acknowledging the nonlinear politics of international order, we uncover a more significant role for political parties and ideology than has hitherto been acknowledged.

While this research certainly bears on the politics of European integration through its inclusion in the realm of foreign policy, it also touches on the issue of how liberalism as an ideology came to be seen at the centre of the mainstream political continuum following the World Wars, when there is no definitive, intrinsic reason that it had to have been. In this way, this can be seen as something of an intersection between the realms of ideological centrism and stylistic centrism – after all, as Hindmoor (2004) wrote, political positions "are not

inherently left-wing or right-wing" (p.38). The fact that the political victors over fascism and communism might style themselves as part of the political "mainstream," thereby defining statism as "extreme" and centring liberalism at the fulcrum of the most common conception of political ideology is not merely an accident of history, but surely owes at least something to the strategic choices of interested actors. This and related historical questions are undoubtedly relevant to modern puzzles of ideology, which this thesis makes evident.

Centrism as an Expression of Symbolic Values

Findings

This chapter on centrists and non-ideological values also made and reinforced some important findings concerning the differential effects of ideology and the meaning of voter-level centrism. The findings can be grouped into three broad categories.

First, the study failed to confirm any of the hypothesised relationships between self-identified centrist voters and the non-ideological values evaluated – compromise, pro-elite sentiment, flexibility in thinking, and attachment to the *status quo*. Based on the established inverse connection between the intensity and extremity of preferences, there was good reason to suspect that each of these qualities would be a predictor of a respondent's identification as a centrist. However, that pattern held for none of the four non-ideological values, two of which showed no relationship to ideology whatsoever once classical predictors like partisanship, political values, and political interest were taken into account.

The second main finding follows from the first. Two of the four non-ideological values did show clear predictive utility with regards to ideological identification, but neither in the hypothesised direction. Flexibility in thinking had the largest effect and yet the pattern displayed was very different from that expected based on the intensity-extremity relationship.

Instead of finding that centrists rated more highly on the actively open-minded thinking scale than the ossified and blinkered ideologues of left and right, the analysis showed that it was in fact voters on the left who were differentiated by their embrace of this value, while there was essentially no difference between centrists and right-wing respondents on that score.[166] This means that the analysis confirms the "rigidity of the right" hypothesis advanced by Tetlock (1984) and Jost et al., (2003).

Attachment to the *status quo* also demonstrated some effect, at least in terms of respondents' expressed anti-radical sentiment, but not the one that was predicted. Moderation on this value was a significant predictor of self-identified centrism, just as lower levels were a significant predictor of left identification and higher levels a significant predictor of right identification. Whether this is an authentic ideological distinction or a proxy for approval of the government of the day remains in question.

Finally, the analysis showed that while centrist self-identification is indeed somewhat linked to moderate values on political issues, that was only true for issues reflecting the left-right economic ideology dimension. Not only was it not true for the issue of immigration policy, but empirical observations were the exact opposite of theoretical expectations, as moderation on the immigration issue was far more predictive of a voter identifying on the far or moderate left as opposed to in the centre.

Altogether, these results have significant meaning for our understanding of both symbolic and operational ideology and are consistent with a number of highly consequential and wide-ranging implications.

[166] As discussed in Chapter 5, the reasons behind this are unproven, but speculation that posits voters on the right as especially hostile to information that contradicts their worldview and centrists as too apathetic to search out any new information at all seems plausible.

Connection to Theory and Motivations

The most obvious relation between the results and the theory lies in the need for alternative models to explain centrist self-identification. The core reason for the proposed typology in Chapter 2 was the inadequacy of the Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) model that relied upon a party component and a values component to explain a voter's ideological identity.[167] The findings in Chapter 5 clearly demonstrate the inapplicability of such models to centrists.

First, the party component. While this chapter's empirical finding is limited to British voters and therefore, British parties, identification with the only plausible centrist party in the British party system – the Liberal Democrats – was actually a negative predictor of centrist self-identification, with LibDem affiliation actually pointing to the respondent's identification on the far or moderate left. In all cases, having no party identification whatsoever was a statistically significant predictor of centrist self-identification.

The values component, though its performance was superior to the party component, was also hardly dispositive. Moderate views on the economic dimension were strongly predictive of centrist identity, but moderate views on the immigration issue were strongly negative predictors. This certainly raises the question of what constitutes "moderate values," and what relationship they have to ideological identification.

However, what can be surmised is that centrist self-identification is unlikely to always be the result of a "nonattitude" (Converse, 1964), since if centrism was merely the product of a nonattitude, we would expect to see centrist, neutral, non-expressive responses to all ideological and issue-related questions. Or alternatively, we could expect random responses

[167] Recall that in that seminal work, the authors purposely excluded self-identified centrists from their model.

"off the top" of the respondents' heads, rather than a statistically significant pattern of issue attitudes.

Implications

The first and most obvious implication of these findings is that the popular conception of the ideological structure of the European mass public requires re-evaluation. Both in popular discourse and in much scholarly research – indeed, even in the study in Chapter 6 of this thesis – the ideological landscape of the party system, with its left/green-alternative-libertarian and right/traditional-authoritarian-nationalist axis, is assumed to roughly mirror the ideological landscape of the electorate. While this may well be true for many voters, and particularly for those on the left and right, the pattern seems to break down at the centre as opposed to the extremes.[168] This issue is clearly compounded by the discussion above, about the ways in which centrists seem to match neither the partisan component nor the values component of classical models of ideology.

In this vein, these findings complement other research showing that there are significant differences between the ways parties and voters seem to view the ideological spectrum. In one example, Dolezal et al. (2013) found that in Austria, while two of the many models of the ideological landscape – in particular, Kriesi et al.'s (2008) two dimensional economic-globalisation model and Bakker, Jolly, & Polk's, (2012) three-dimensional model including a supranational integration cleavage – seemed to empirically describe the party system more accurately than others, none of the commonly used models fit the issue attitudes of the public at large. Along similar lines, Treier & Hillygus (2009) found that the American

[168] Of course, there is also an endogeneity problem inherent in this construction – do the parties reflect the distribution of voters they depend upon for power? Or do voters – particularly politically active and sophisticated voters – adopt the political battle lines of "tribal" elites?

electorate is largely structured along multiple dimensional axes that are not particularly well-represented by the system of party competition. They also found that moderate voters tended to be those that felt cross-pressured by intersecting, orthogonally aligned ideological dimensions, and so responded with a "neutral" self-identification.[169] Broockman (2016) faulted the scaling choices of researchers, suggesting that these play a large role in distorting the true American ideological landscape.

This difficulty in even describing the structure of the public's ideological beliefs calls existing research into question. Downs' (1957) median voter theorem has generally withstood theoretical scrutiny for over 60 years – but if the public simply does not perceive "left," "right," and especially "centre" in the way that social scientists and elites see the party system, its application to the real world is far more complex than assumed.

This problem may be enough to drive ideology scholars in circles – two in particular. The first is Lachat's "circleland" hypothesis, a highly creative way of envisioning the "same" political spectrum from different vantage points – by bending the unidimensional left-right continuum into a curvilinear form through two dimensions. While unorthodox, it posits a novel solution to a problem that has clearly defied easy categorisation. The second is London's Circle Line, the eloquent analogy employed by Benoit & Laver (2012) to explain the possibility that there may be no one, true, and objective way to conceptualise something as multifaceted and complex as the issue structure of a society's political beliefs. Instead, all we can do is use tools that are appropriate enough to the limited task before us, bearing in mind that the choice

[169] This evidence fits well with Rodon's (2015) "balance-out" hypothesis concerning European centrist voters, and contrasts significantly with the concept of syncretic centrist parties, which are only centrist because they combine a right-wing economic position with a libertarian sociocultural position, and not because they simply hold opposing tendencies that cancel each other out. Otherwise, syncretic statist parties – those with left-wing economic positions and authoritarian sociocultural positions would also be considered centrist, which they are clearly not.

of models in this realm can influence empirical observations – a sort of anthropic principle for political science.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

The single-nation scope of Chapter 5 was clearly narrower than the comparative scope of other chapters, which certainly creates some question as to the results' generalisability. There are a number of reasons why the British electorate may not be necessarily representative of European, much less Western voters on these subjects. For example, compromise may be considered a more pertinent political value among voters in countries with more consensual or fragmented political systems. For example, voters in the United States or France, where it is not uncommon to find the levers of government power simultaneously held by different parties, may be more attuned to the benefits of compromise as a political virtue.[170]

Another possible limitation comes as part and parcel of a panel survey – that method's inescapable measurement issue with regards to political interest. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is inevitable that long-running panel surveys oversample respondents with high levels of political interest, and it is simply a fact that the later waves of the BES paint a starkly different picture of the political attention of British voters than similar surveys like the EES. Certainly, this is a subject that could be investigated using alternative methods.

A similar issue that plagues all surveys is the fact that survey questions can only capture what the respondent chooses to reveal, a particular problem given that this study was researching abstract qualities. For example, asking a question about compromise cannot truly evaluate how "compromising" a person is in their daily life, or how much they truly care about

[170] Perhaps cheekily alluded to by the domestic nickname given to divided government in France – *"cohabitation*," in inimitable French style.

the virtue. Nor can a question about risk aversion – even an experimental question – objectively measure that quality. More robust experimental methods applied to measuring these values would certainly be welcome, perhaps along the lines of those employed by Johns & Kölln (2020), who utilised an experimental set of vignettes to investigate voters' view of parties' valence attributes.

Finally, as mentioned in the conclusion to Chapter 5, the fact that centrists do not seem to strongly hold these particular values does not necessarily mean that centrists are not qualitatively different in their symbolic attachments than other voters. Further research on voters' ideological identifications, underlying issue attitudes, and the connection between them is absolutely necessary to view this puzzle from all angles.

Can Centrist Parties Rely on Centrist Voters?

Findings

The results of this study are both novel and build upon insights established elsewhere in the literature. By adopting the research design of Adams et al. (2017) and the theoretical justification concerning the intensity-extremity relationship and adapting those elements to a new and innovative empirical context, the analysis in Chapter 6 revealed that ideological insensitivity in vote choices extends to European centrists, matching American centrists and burnishing the hypothesis that such qualities are universal throughout the democratic world (Suchman, 1950).

Specifically, the main finding of the study is the fact that centrist voters were significantly less sensitive to the spatial ideological "distance" between themselves and the respective major pole parties when deciding whether to cast their ballots for their country's

centre-left or centre-right major pole parties in the 2009 and 2014 elections to the European Parliament.

This insensitivity – although the reasons behind it have not been conclusively demonstrated – coheres extremely well with the theoretical expectations created by the intensity-extremity relationship. In short, the theoretical claim of the analysis – with which the empirical results are entirely consistent – is that centrist voters, being less intense about their centrist preferences, are less prone to voting for the party ideologically "closer" to them than non-centrist voters with the same relative proximity to the parties.

On its own, this is a result of genuine significance. If nothing else, it shows that models of voter behaviour that are in any way conditioned on a constant and uniform effect of voter ideology are suspect, since there is now mounting evidence indicating that those effects are differential in at least one important context.[171] However, this is only the most direct of the potential implications, with more discussed below.

Connection to Theory and Motivations

In some ways, these findings could not be more reflective of the motivations for the thesis spelled out in Chapter 1 – to show the necessity of a greater understanding of the centre and centrist political actors. This analysis, along with others, forms a nascent literature demonstrating that centrist voters are not simply like the voters of every other ideological stripe, just more moderate – they are qualitatively different from their counterparts on the right and left in ways that meaningfully affect their attitudes and behaviours.

[171] Naturally, this is not to claim that such models are useless, or that there are not contexts where the effect of ideology is constant or uniform. Rather, the results in Chapter 6 are simply reinforcement that at least some effects of ideology are indeed differential based on the ideology in particular, and in meaningful circumstances.

In particular, the results of the analysis based on implied economic ideology show that centrist voters – or at least, some centrist voters – cannot merely be defined solely by criteria with overtly ideological or political overtones. By using voters' positions on specific issue questions to create a proxy for an ideological scale rather than simply using self-identification, the analysis showed that the values component, used in most classical models of ideology since coined by Inglehart & Klingemann (1976) is also not constant or uniform in its effects across the ideological spectrum. This shows that not only are self-identified centrists qualitatively different from other voters, but so too are *moderate* voters, regardless of their level of interest in politics.

Implications

Much like the other two empirical chapters, which focused on parties and voters individually, this chapter, combining the two elements of the democratic process, suggests that there are significant holes in our understanding of the ideological structure of Western societies, particularly at the centre ground. As mentioned in Chapter 1, research on the nature of centrism has the potential to touch every subfield in the social sciences that is theoretically reliant upon an ideological continuum as an explanatory variable. If the centre does not merely comprise a group of voters who have moderate preferences – or who are not particularly interested in or attentive to politics – but also those who are not even "faithful" to their own ostensible ideological allies come election day, then the implications for the entire democratic model of governance are extensive. Clearly, the results here are only one pebble thrown into a very large pond, but as stated repeatedly throughout this thesis, further research on this pressing topic is needed.

A more immediate reverberation of this research concerns centrist parties specifically. While the reasons behind parties' ideological positions are much debated, there is a cohort of scholars who have argued that winning elections by appealing to the broadest coalition of voters is an overarching motivation of parties' positions (e.g. Adams et al., 2004). Following this logic to its conclusion suggests that a central location in the ideological space ought to present significant electoral advantages, and that the generally poor performance of centrist parties at the polls thus constitutes the paradox known as the "empty centre." Indeed – if voters vote for parties that share their views, and there is a large bloc of voters at the centre of the ideological distribution, centrist parties ought to be far larger and stronger than they tend to be in observed reality.

However, if the voters in the centre are not – or not only – expressing an ideological preference but also their relative ambivalence about that preference in their vote choice, such a fact would both go some distance towards explaining the empty centre phenomenon and upend the political strategy of centrist parties that relies upon appealing to a "silent" plurality of ideologically moderate fellows who are willing to vote on that basis. These results then dovetail nicely with some of the recent research, cited in Chapter 6 and others, indicating that the electoral performance of centrist parties is far more dependent upon valence than ideology or policy, and further, that centrist parties are therefore more at the whim of the valence attributes of their opponents than other parties that have a stronger ideological rapport with their voter base (e.g. Zur 2017; 2019).

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Although the analysis did account for many of the most plausible confounding variables, there are some inherent limitations of the research design which may limit the results' ability to explain some of the wider implications.

First, the study focused only on a subset of all voters – those who marked their ballot for the major poles of competition in their country, the dominant parties of centre-left and centre-right. While, in theory, there should be no difference in the results with any pair of parties that together straddle the political centre ground – assuming a sample size large enough to facilitate analysis, which is by no means assured or even likely – there may well be something particular about centrist and/or non-centrist voters who voted for the major pole parties that affects the results. One speculation concerns the nature of the major pole parties as "catch-all" parties that intentionally de-emphasise ideology in their electoral appeals (e.g. Kirchheimer, 1966; Allen, 2009). If these parties have ingrained a non-ideological approach to campaigning, then their voters may have done the same in internalising a relatively non-ideological approach to taking voting decisions.

Another significant limitation of the study comes from the relatively small group of cases. The paper that largely inspired the research design for Chapter 6 (Adams et al., 2017) made use of 100 different US House of Representatives districts, allowing for a much wider set of comparisons. While the number of cases used in the present study was certainly sufficient for statistical analysis, the results might only be more conclusive with more data. The challenge is in finding elections that meet the necessary criteria – those that are focused enough on candidates that they permit some ideological variation between candidates from the same party in different districts.

One final limitation speaks to the hypothesised implications of the study, rather than the results themselves. As discussed above, one of the major ramifications suggested by the results concerns the electoral fortunes of centrist parties. However, it must be noted that centrist parties play essentially no part in the study – strictly construed, this study focussed on the major pole parties and those that voted for them. While it is entirely reasonable to suggest that European centrists' relative lack of emphasis on ideology in voting ought to have significant second-order effects on centrist parties, the actual particulars of this study can only hint at that conclusion.

Therefore, there are three obvious avenues for further research in the same vein. The first, if possible, is a similar study that includes both a large number of districts and a relatively candidate-centric electoral process, in order to more fully replicate the research design used in the Adams et al. (2017) study. While this was impossible in the broader context of European Parliament elections – and perhaps impossible throughout most of Europe, due to the preponderance of party list electoral rules – it may be possible within countries, either at the national or sub-national level. Finding the appropriate context for study may be even more likely outside of the party-centric nature of most European political systems – perhaps in Latin America or East Asian countries.

The second is a study that is somewhat different in terms of its research design, in that it would include the ideological positions of centrist parties in its explanatory model. Naturally, the construction and execution of such a formal model would be more mathematically complex, but inclusion of a "third pole" into an analysis like the one offered here would theoretically be able to speak to the ideological appeal of centrist parties specifically, making for a genuine improvement.

Finally, while research like Chapter 6 and the scholars cited therein are building a persuasive case that centrist parties are indeed persistently low valence (if valence can be simply defined as political appeals of a non-ideological nature), the question of why is yet to be addressed. Studies like the aforementioned paper from Johns & Kölln (2020), which used experimental methods to investigate what exactly voters appreciate about the democratic qualities of their political parties – and how those views might be shaped by their own ideology – holds the promise to help understand puzzles concerning not only centrist parties and centrist voters, but also the appeal of populist rhetoric and anti-system entrepreneurs, plausibly the most relevant subject in the discipline at present.

Political Philosophy and Social Science

In their paper, *Democratic Theorists and Party Scholars: Why They Don't Talk to Each Other, and Why They Should*, Van Biezen & Saward (2008) write that it is "regrettable that, despite their importance to one another, the current literatures on political parties and normative democratic theory continue to develop to an extraordinary degree in mutual isolation" (p. 22). By showing how theoretical insights can guide empirical research and how empirical evidence can improve the quality of theoretical reasoning, they make a compelling argument for much greater interaction between political theorists and comparative party scholars:

> "In order to address the fundamental tension between the centrality of parties and their marginalization in an area quintessential to any modern democracy, both normative theories of democracy and empirical studies of political parties are of vital importance. In particular when faced with the challenges of consolidating more recently established democracies, resolving problems arising from the changing nature of parties in the established democracies, or addressing the democratic deficit of the European Union and other transnational organizations, it is imperative that empirical observations can take guidance from normative theories and that normative claims are grounded in empirical reality. For that reason, the literatures on political parties and

> democratic theory should engage more frequently, substantially, and imaginatively with one another" (p. 31).

Of course, the idea that both social science and philosophy have something to teach each other is not altogether uncommon (e.g. Gunnell, 1986; Dryzek, 2000; Mansbridge, 2003), and it did inspire the development of perhaps the most famous undergraduate course in the world, Oxford's Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (Harrison, 1994). But in the present author's (admittedly limited) formal experience with scholarly training, the possibility that political theory might prove valuable to empirical research was rarely mentioned around the seminar room. This is truly unfortunate, particularly for the researcher writing an empirical study of the centre, as there are few theses that could benefit more from the combination of rigorous social scientific methods and political theory.

Indeed – moderation, centrism, and the avoidance of extremes have been important topics among political and social thinkers for thousands of years, even before the birth of democracy (Crăiuțu, 2017). Aristotle wrote on the virtue of moderation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Two of the Buddha's major teachings are collectively known as The Middle Path. Many of history's great minds have written eloquently on the subject, from Maimonides and Montaigne to Burke and Berlin – the latter, evoking Duverger's formulation, is purported to have placed his own politics at the "extreme right edge of the left-wing movement."[172]

Democratic theorists of the past and present have written about the special role that centrist actors ought to play in the normative functioning of democracy (e.g. Dahl, 1956; Starzinger, 1991). Through compromise, collaboration, and fidelity to moderation over the lure of excess, centrist parties and factions ought to help to build broad governing coalitions

[172] Brooks, D. (2020, 13 August). This is where I stand. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/opinion/conservative-radicals.html

acceptable to large majorities of the population; while centrist voters are to swing their support to reward competence and enforce democratic accountability. The results in this thesis carry a number of implications that directly relate to this theoretical literature.

For only one example, consider what has been shown here about centrist voters. First, while they may self-identify as centrists overall, as a group, centrists do not appear to be particularly moderate on important matters of public policy, like immigration, calling into question their reasons for claiming a "neutral" position on the political spectrum. Further, while the extremity-intensity relationship gave cause to expect centrists to be marked by high regard for values like compromise and open-minded thinking – and democratic theory demands it for the sake of a functioning representative democracy – neither appears to be true, and in the case of open-minded thinking, analysis indicates the exact opposite conclusion. Then, combine these findings with those from Chapter 6, evincing that centrist voters are significantly less sensitive to party ideology when casting their ballots, suggesting that perhaps while they may value other qualities like competence, trustworthiness, or other valence attributes, they may be unable or unwilling to enforce ideological moderation on the political system.

One possible implication of these findings is that centrists, far from embodying the platonic ideal of the democratic citizen, are actually expressing their rejection of or withdrawal from the system of representative democracy; what some scholars have referred to variously as "anti-politics" (Schedler, 1997; Fieschi & Heywood, 2004), "unpolitics," or what Taggart (2019) has called "the repudiation of politics as the process for resolving conflict."

Consider: by choosing the centre position on the political spectrum despite holding non-moderate views on issues; disclaiming affiliation with political institutions, like parties, that help mediate between the public's wishes and public policy; turning up their nose at

invariably messy values like compromise and the legitimacy of opposing views; and voting for parties without regard for the extremity of their ideology, centrists could be signaling their increasing alienation from many of the core tenets of representative democracy. If so, they could certainly not serve as democracy's rock, tethering politics to the broadly held views of society – instead, they may play a part as agents of electoral chaos.

Granted, this is mere speculative theorising. There are many possible explanations for the findings in this thesis, and many possible avenues for further examination of these subjects. As this thesis has outlined, there are plenty of scholarly disagreements on the nature of the centre – far too few of which have been properly investigated.

The point is simple – these are absolutely fundamental questions, for both scholars and the public at large. These are questions that demand the attention of researchers – they are timely, relevant, important, and intellectually fascinating. And the exploration of these questions – collectively asking how democracy actually works – can be best guided by a familiarity and interaction with a literature that has concerned itself with the vital matter of how democracy ought to work.

In a 1958 speech to the Book and Author's Club, then-US Senator Jack Kennedy closed his remarks with an anecdote:

> "'Don't teach my boy poetry,' an English mother recently wrote the Provost of Harrow. 'Don't teach my boy poetry; he is going to stand for parliament.' Well, perhaps she was right – but if more politicians knew poetry, and more poets knew politics, I am convinced the world would be a little better place to live on this 20th day of February, 1958."[173]

[173] Kennedy, J. F. (1958, 20 February). Speech given to Book and Author's Club, Cleveland, Ohio. https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/cleveland-oh-19580220

There are relatively few instances in life where depth is unquestionably preferred to breadth – the writing of a DPhil thesis or other scholarly research project may be one of them. And the lesson about the power of interdisciplinary thinking applies to virtually every intellectual endeavour conceivable, not just in the social sciences. But in terms of the study of politics – at any level – it is firmly the opinion of the present author that the world would be a little better place to live if more theorists knew Norris, and more empiricists read Niebuhr.

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Chapter 3

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 7

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