

The impact of opinion polls on party mandate fulfilment: evidence from Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

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Abstract

What is the effect of opinion polls on mandate fulfilment? This paper studies political parties' policy congruence between their pre-electoral manifesto and parliamentary speech. The expectation is that congruence depends on parties' performance in recent opinion polls, conditional on a party being in government or in opposition. The paper provides empirical evidence from Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (1997-2015). Based on Wordscores estimates of parties' pre- and post-electoral position, some support is found for the hypothesis that government parties show increased congruence the more their opinion poll support changes, while opposition parties show (marginally) decreased congruence.

Many studies have shown that the extent to which parties fulfil their pre-electoral pledges or programmes is imperfect, but better than generally thought. Variation in pledge fulfilment is related to the electoral system used, ministerial control over portfolios, inclusion in coalition agreements as well as consensus on specific policies (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994; Louwerse, 2012; Thomson et al., 2012). All of these explanations are related to the extent to which parties can implement their programme in a four or five year term of government. The reality of policy formation is, however, dynamic: parties in government and in parliament are subject to a variety of pressures (for example from civil servants, public opinion, lobbyists) and might take their electoral mandate more seriously during certain parts of the electoral cycle than others. To fully understand the role that the party mandate plays in policy making, we need to explore these dynamics of policy-making.

This paper is part of a project that seeks to combine the party mandate literature with the literature on policy responsiveness (Wlezien and Soroka, 2012; Stimson, Mackuen and

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Erikson, 1995). Whereas the former looks at the degree to which pre-electoral commitments are honoured, the latter is concerned with the degree to which governments (or parliamentary parties) respond to changes in public opinion. While both might be argued to be relevant from the perspective of political representation, they can offer conflicting demands to political parties, potentially raising discontent with both mechanisms of policy representation. This paper examines one aspect of the relationship between mandate and responsiveness by examining the impact of opinion polls on the party mandate.

The paper looks at the congruence of parties pre-electoral commitments in terms of the policy positions in their manifestos and parliamentary speeches, measured on the left-right scale. Thus, it looks at parties' *representative* mandate rather than their *government* mandate. I compare three countries that are different in terms of institutional design and the level of mandate fulfilment: Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Lijphart, 2012).

The party mandate

The party mandate model of political representation requires parties to present their (policy) plans before elections and act upon them afterwards. Three approaches have been taken to study the extent to which parties 'fulfil' their 'mandate': the pledge approach, saliency approach and spatial approach (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994; Louwse, 2011*b*; Royed, 1996). The pledge approach measures whether parties fulfil their specific election pledges in government. The saliency approach looks at the correspondence between policy priorities in manifestos and spending priorities after elections. The spatial approach looks at parties' policy positions on issue dimensions before and after elections. The last approach bears most resemblance to how congruence between citizens and representatives is usually studied: by comparing policy positions on issue dimensions (Powell, 2000; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Golder and Stramski, 2010). The advantage is that one can evaluate mandate fulfilment even when the political agenda changes.

Most studies of the party mandate look at whether parties are able to translate pre-electoral commitments into government action: their mandate for government. Alternatively, one might think of the party mandate as a *representative* mandate: a guideline to how party representatives should act in the legislative arena (Louwse, 2011*a*; Dalton, Farrell and McAllister, 2011, 7). Both perspectives are valuable; the added value of studying parties' representative mandate is that one can evaluate both how government and opposition parties behave. While opposition parties might be unable to translate their wishes into government action, we should still expect them to behave in line with their pre-electoral programme. Therefore, mandate fulfilment is defined in terms of the congruence between parties' pre-electoral and parliamentary issue positions.

Table 1: Overview of Hypotheses

		Type of effect	
		Similar for government and opposition	Different for government and opposition
Type of poll change	Up vs. down	Losers Drift Hypothesis	Conditional Losers Drift Hypothesis
	Absolute change	Poll Change Hypothesis	Conditional Poll Change Hypothesis

Opinion polls and the party mandate

The party mandate model brings a great democratic promise: that voters are able to influence policy-making by choosing between different policy programmes. In this view, parliamentary representation and governance should be about translating pre-electoral stances into actual policy. While previous research shows that mandate fulfilment, albeit imperfect, is generally higher than citizens seem to think (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Louwse, 2012; Naurin, 2002), parliamentary parties and government ministers are subject to a range of pressures that might impact their ability and willingness to implement their pre-electoral policy positions. Some of these pressures are related to the institutional setting, such as the type of executive (presidentialism versus parliamentarism) and the type of government (i.e. single party majority, coalition, single party minority), and are therefore constant across a parliamentary term. For example, in terms of the enactment of specific pledges, coalition systems are at a disadvantage (Thomson, 2001). Other pressures relate to factors that can change over the course of a parliament, such as pressure from within the bureaucracy, interest groups (lobbying) as well as the overall popularity of the government.

This paper focuses on the impact of parties' standing in opinion polls on mandate fulfilment. It builds on the idea that most governments will be interested in their re-election (Strøm, 1990, 1994). That is, we should expect parties not only to pursue certain policies, or to enjoy the spoils of office, but also to consider their chances at the next general elections (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010, 137). After all, their ability to obtain policy or office in the future does depend on their electoral fortunes. While motivations of party (leaders) are complex, the assumption that party leaders will be willing to change their policy positions to some extent in order to gain electoral support seems not too far-fetched (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). Somer-Topcu (2009) finds support for the hypothesis that parties change their manifesto positions more if they lost during the last elections. Similarly, we might expect that party leaders are willing to change their stance, during a parliamentary term, based on opinion poll results.

The literature on policy *responsiveness* finds some support for the idea that when government parties' polling margins decline, they will become more responsive to public opinion (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). This effect was particularly strong in the United States, although Hobolt and Klemmensen also found

support for this mechanism in Britain (rhetorical responsiveness) and Denmark (effective responsiveness). If parties become more responsive to the public wishes during a parliamentary term, however, they might feel the need to deviate from their pre-electoral stance. One argument is that a party's election mandate and public opinion will be (partially) at odds. At least some of a party's policy positions will not be in line with public opinion - even if that party won a majority in the election, as the Ostrogorski paradox shows (Thomassen, 1994). If this is the case a parliamentary party has to choose between fulfilling its electoral mandate and responding to public opinion. In that case, we would expect that increases in a party's poll numbers, and with that its electoral prospects, would increase its mandate fulfilment. But if a party grows more unpopular, it will reposition itself to match public opinion more closely, at the expense of its mandate:

Losers Drift Hypothesis Opinion poll losses decrease congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions

Alternatively, one might theorize that any change in polls, whether a win or a loss, will lead to a deviation from the party mandate. For parties that are losing electoral support, the above mechanism of finding a more suitable electoral position may come into play. But for winning parties one might like-wise argue that they would not exactly stick to their manifesto position. Increasing support in the polls may provide parties with the feeling of certainty about their election prospects and therefore the idea that they can afford a bit of leeway. After all, parties are not only interested in winning the next elections, but also in policy and office (Strøm, 1990). Just as parties that are gaining in the polls might be less responsive to public opinion, they might be more willing to deviate from their manifesto. After all, while election manifestos can be seen as an 'authoritative' statement of party policy preferences, they are not necessarily a 'pure' reflection of the leadership's genuine policy preferences. Manifestos are set in a strategic environment taking into account voters' and other parties' preferences (Budge et al., 2001, 77; Thomson, 1999, 3-5; Marks et al., 2007, 26-27). Moreover, there might be internal disagreement with regard to some of the policies pursued in the manifesto. Leaders might even believe that certain policies are the 'responsible' (Mair, 2009) thing to pursue, which is easier if the party is doing well in opinion polls, one might argue. Taken together, we might argue that any change in opinion polls (both comparing to the election result and quarter-on-quarter) will result in decreased congruence:

Poll Change Hypothesis Absolute changes in opinion poll scores decrease congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions

The hypotheses formulated above can be argued to be conditional upon parties position in government or opposition. Previous research has demonstrated that this distinction has a substantive impact on manifesto-parliamentary policy position congruence (Louwerse, 2012; Fivaz, Louwerse and Schwarz, 2014). The (majoritarian) logic of the 'responsible party model' dictates that parties that failed to win the election are 'out' and therefore need to find a new policy stance in order to appeal to voters at the subsequent elections

(APSR, 1950; Ranney, 1954). While this argument does not apply in all settings, especially when there are multiple opposition parties (Louwse, 2011*b*), one could make the argument that at least opposition parties have more of an incentive to adjust their policy positions, especially if they are losing in the polls. Similarly, government parties regularly see the necessity to abandon or dilute their pledges because of coalition politics, interest group pressure or opposition from within government departments. If that leads to a loss in popular support in the polls, government parties might remedy this by moving back towards their manifesto position:

Conditional Losers Drift Hypothesis Opinion poll gains decrease congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions for opposition parties, but increase congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions for government parties

Again, we might consider an alternative explanation, which states that the effect of polls is not so much in the winning or losing but rather in the absolute change (see Table 1). Parties that see changes in their electoral fortunes might respond to this by changing their policy position more than parties that are relatively stable in terms of electoral support in polls. This absolute ‘Poll Change’ effect can be argued to be conditional upon being in government or in opposition. When opposition parties are faced with changes in their electoral position, this might motivate them to pursue a different set of policies. For government parties, changes in their electoral fortunes might, however, signal either a need to ‘return to base’, certainly for coalition government parties that have compromised to get into government, or if things go well in the polls they might be able to use this as leverage to stick to their manifesto policies in the face of opposition from societal groups or government departments:

Conditional Poll Change Hypothesis Absolute changes in opinion poll scores decrease congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions for opposition parties, but increase congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions for government parties

Case selection, data and methods

The analysis focuses on the Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, three countries have been found to differ substantially with regard to pledge fulfilment, thus offering diversity in observations (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). Ideally the above hypotheses would be tested on a broad range of country cases, but limitations in the availability of parliamentary data in an accessible fashion necessitate a non-random case selection strategy. The Netherlands and Ireland both have electoral systems that result in proportional representation (and usually in coalition government), but the style of politics is consensual in the former and more adversarial in the latter. Moreover, politics in Ireland does to a lesser degree follow ideological differences, with both main parties being on the

centre right. The United Kingdom is a majoritarian democracy, often featuring single party governments. Thus, the hypotheses are tested in diverse settings (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

Policy congruence is operationalized in terms of the relationship between a party's manifesto and its parliamentary position on the left-right scale. The advantage of using parliamentary speech is that it provides a relatively detailed account of the policy stances taken by parties in parliament. This makes it well suited for the purpose of tracking parties' policy stances over the course of a parliament. I treat each quarter, defined as each period of 91 days since the election, as a time point. This leaves about 16 to 20 quarters (four to five years) per full parliamentary term, although the Dutch governments often failed to complete their term in office. We focus on the period between 1997 (Netherlands: 1998) and 2015, which includes 4 parliamentary terms for Ireland and the United Kingdom and 6 for the Netherlands¹.

Left-right policy positions are estimated through a Wordscores analysis of party manifestos and parliamentary speeches given by party members (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003). I use party manifestos as reference texts to estimate parliamentary positions. While one should be careful in comparing different types of political texts, in this case manifestos and parliamentary speech, Warwick (2014) suggests that this actually does provide reasonable estimates of party positions. The main problem the researcher is presented with when applying Wordscores is that estimates of virgin texts 'shrink' towards the mean because of common words that are plentiful in all texts analysed (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003, 316). Two transformations have been proposed: the Laver, Benoit and Garry (LBG) transformation, which assumes that the standard deviation of virgin and reference texts is equal, and the Martin and Vanberg (MV) transformation which assumes that the 'shrinkage' is equal for reference texts and virgin texts (Martin and Vanberg, 2007; Warwick, 2014). The latter assumption is problematic when using different types of texts: when using manifestos as reference texts, shrinkage was found to be smaller in manifestos than in parliamentary debates, most likely because manifesto state policy positions more concisely. For example, when estimating positions in the 2012 Dutch manifestos and subsequent parliamentary term, using 2006 and 2010 manifestos as reference texts, untransformed scores showed a range of 0.71 for the manifestos, but only 0.13 for the positions based on parliamentary debates. While we might expect some moderation of policy positions in parliament, it seems unreasonable to assume that party manifesto positions are five times more polarized than their parliamentary positions. The LBG transformation assumes that reference and virgin texts show the same degree of variance. Warwick (2014) rejects this approach for his purposes, which is to estimate government policy positions in budget speeches based on manifesto reference texts, as it might sweep any real moderation in budget speeches under the carpet. For the purposes of the current paper, the LBG assumption seems, however, less problematic, as I am comparing policy positions of all parties before and after elections. As we will see, the

¹The current terms in Ireland (2011-now) and the Netherlands (2012-now) are included up to the start of 2015. The 2010-2015 House of Commons in Britain is fully included.

analysis provides reasonable estimates of party positions in the parliamentary debates.

Source data for texts were obtained from the following sources. Irish and British manifestos were downloaded from the Polidocs archive, save for the most recent British manifestos, which were gathered from party websites (Benoit, Bräuninger and Debus, 2009). Dutch manifestos were obtained from published collections with recent manifestos downloaded from the party websites (Pellikaan, Voerman and van Holsteyn, 2003; Pellikaan et al., 2006). Manifestos that were not available in plain text format, were converted; page numbers, headers and footers, tables of contents and tables with numerical data were removed. For the Irish manifestos, any Irish-language text was deleted. The parliamentary debates were obtained from the Official Reports of the Houses of the *Oireachtas* (Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, 2014, 2015), the Parliamentary Parser Project for the UK (Parliamentary Parser Project, 2015) and *Officiële Bekendmakingen* for the Netherlands (Officiële Bekendmakingen, 2012). Additional data on MP affiliations was obtained from the database of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre (Parlementair Documentatie Centrum, 2010). All documents were stemmed and cleaned, i.e. changed to lower case, numbers removed and common stopwords as well as party indicators removed.

Chapel Hill Expert Survey estimates of parties' positions on the left-right scale are used to obtain the word scores (Bakker et al., 2012). To arrive at a more robust set of word parameters, I include the set of manifestos from the previous and subsequent elections as well, e.g. for the 2005 British elections, the 2001 and 2010 manifestos were included as well. The next step is to re-estimate the manifesto positions of the year of interest using these word parameters, which corrects for any impact the inclusion of previous and subsequent manifestos might have². Finally, the parliamentary positions were estimated, where the set of speeches by MPs for one party during one quarter was included as a single text³.

Polling data for the United Kingdom is based on the weekly ICM polls for *The Guardian* (Guardian Data, 2014), while for the Netherlands polls from *Ipsos* and its predecessors were used (partly obtained directly from the company and more recent polls gathered from their website by the author). For Ireland a set of opinion polls from various pollsters was used, collected by the author from pollsters' websites as well as the *Irish Opinion Poll Archive* (Marsh, 2015). Multiple polls in a quarter were averaged. I use four indicators of poll support. The first two are the change in party support since the last elections and its absolute value. The second pair consists of the change in party support since the previous quarter and the absolute value of that.

Parties for which manifesto, parliamentary voting data and polling data are available are included in the analysis. This means that for the United Kingdom Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are included; for Ireland Fine Gael, Labour, Fianna

²If this step is omitted the parliamentary documents are estimated using a different set of word scores than the manifestos of interest.

³Short sets of speeches in a quarter, for example quarters that overlapped heavily with the summer recess, were excluded from the analysis as these estimates are less robust. The criterion used is that the length of the speeches should be at least 50% of the mean speech length per quarter for that party.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Variable	n	\bar{x}	s	Min	Max
Party parliamentary position	1072	5.1	2.1	-0.8	11.8
Party parliamentary position _{t-1}	1022	5.2	2.2	-3.7	12.7
Party manifesto position	1072	5.1	1.9	1.4	10.8
Poll change since election _{t-1}	939	-0.3	4.6	-24.4	16.2
Absolute poll change since election _{t-1}	939	3.1	3.4	0.0	24.4
Poll change since last quarter _{t-1}	935	-0.1	1.8	-15.0	10.0
Absolute poll change since last quarter _{t-1}	935	1.2	1.4	0.0	15.0
Government party	1072	0.4	0.5	0.0	1.0

Fáil, the Gren Party, the Progressive Democrats, Sinn Féin; for the Netherlands: CDA, ChristenUnie, D66, GroenLinks, LPF, PvdA, PVV, SGP, SP, and VVD. The only party that has been excluded from the analysis is the Party for the Animals (Netherlands), because its focus on animal rights and related issues distorted the estimation of parliamentary positions: because it consistently dealt with those specific issues in its manifesto and in parliament, it was estimated to be much more left-wing than any other party. Descriptive statistics for the variables included in the analysis are available in Table 2.

Model

The strategy for estimating the effect of opinion polls on congruence, is based on Achen’s (1978) linear regression method for measuring responsiveness of politicians to voter preferences. This model is adapted to measure the predictive value of the manifesto position m_i for the parliamentary position p_i of a party i :

$$p_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 m_i + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Achen argues that in an ‘unbiased’ system, the intercept β_0 would equal zero and the slope β_1 would equal 1. Our hypotheses expect the effect of the manifesto will vary according to a party’s standing in the polls (o_i), which is modelled as an interaction effect:

$$p_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 m_i + \beta_2 o_i + \beta_3 m_i o_i + \epsilon \quad (2)$$

When this effect, in turn, is modelled as conditional on the party’s status as a government or opposition party (g_i), this results in a three-way interaction model:

$$p_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 m_i + \beta_2 o_i + \beta_3 g_i + \beta_4 m_i o_i + \beta_5 m_i g_i + \beta_6 o_i g_i + \beta_7 m_i o_i g_i + \epsilon \quad (3)$$

The data analysis strategy takes into account that our observations are organised in a multilevel fashion. Therefore, I am using a multilevel linear regression with a random intercept for the term-quarter (Gelman and Hill, 2007). Thus for each set of parties in a given term and quarter, the intercept of the model is allowed to vary. The discussion

of the effects will focus on the marginal effects, using the suggestions by Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006).⁴ I also include a lagged dependent variable in the model to correct for autocorrelation of parliamentary party positions between quarters.

Results

Figure 1 presents manifesto and parliamentary policy positions in one (typical) term in each country to give an idea of the amount of variation over time. In the United Kingdom (1997-2001) we see that the manifesto ordering of parties, Liberal Democrats - Labour - Conservative, is changed in parliament to Labour - Liberal Democrat - Conservative. Given the fact that Labour was in government at that stage, it is not so surprising to see that the LibDems would side more with the Conservative opposition, as is indeed seen in parliamentary voting behaviour (Spirling and McLean, 2007). We see that over time, the Liberal Democrats move towards the Conservatives, while Labour MPs also seem to drift towards the centre after the initial left-wing move.

In the Irish case we see another example of the impact of government-opposition patterns on parliamentary position-taking. Fianna Fáil, which had been in government since 1997 coalesced with the Green Party from 2007 onwards. For the Green Party this seems to imply an immediate shift towards their coalition party: they seemed to change their use of words significantly as a result of entering the coalition. Fine Gael, the largest opposition party, however, shifts from an ideological position almost identical to Fianna Fáil to a more centrist one. Labour and Sinn Féin seem relatively consistent in their policy position.

For the Netherlands the picture is more garbled with nine parties included in the 2003-2006 parliament. All in all, we see the emergence of three blocks: the government parties (CDA, VVD and D66), the left wing opposition (PvdA, SP and GL) and the right wing opposition (SGP, LPF and CU). One should not over-emphasize some of the changes in parties' positions, such as the strong shift of GreenLeft to the centre and then back, which does not seem to accurately reflect the parties' position-taking. Likewise, the smaller Christian parties (CU and SGP) seem to be located quite far to the right, while on many issues they are more centrist. This might be the result of their distinctive use of biblical terms as well as their issue ownership of medical-ethical issues on which they take very conservative positions (also see Louwerse, 2011a, 220). If these factors affect our estimation of party policy positions in parliament, at least this is done so similarly across a parliamentary term.

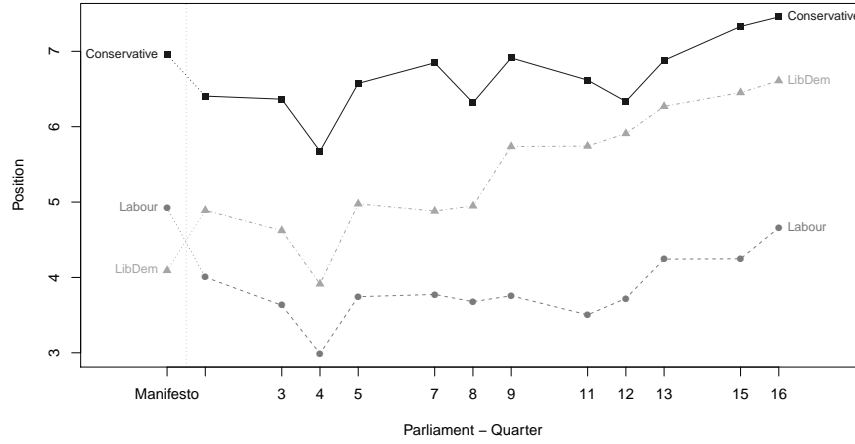
How polls affect congruence

Table 3 provides the outcome of regression analyses that test the Losers Drift Hypothesis (Models 1 and 3) and the Poll Change Hypothesis (Models 2 and 4). These models do not differentiate between government and opposition parties. As three-way interaction

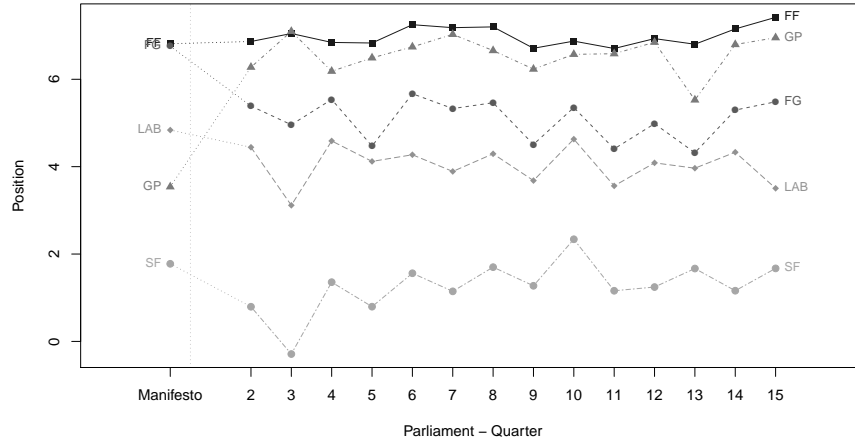
⁴The code for the interaction plots is based on Strezhnev (2013).

Figure 1: Manifesto and parliamentary positions

(a) United Kingdom, 1997-2001



(b) Ireland, 2007-2011



(c) The Netherlands, 2003-2006

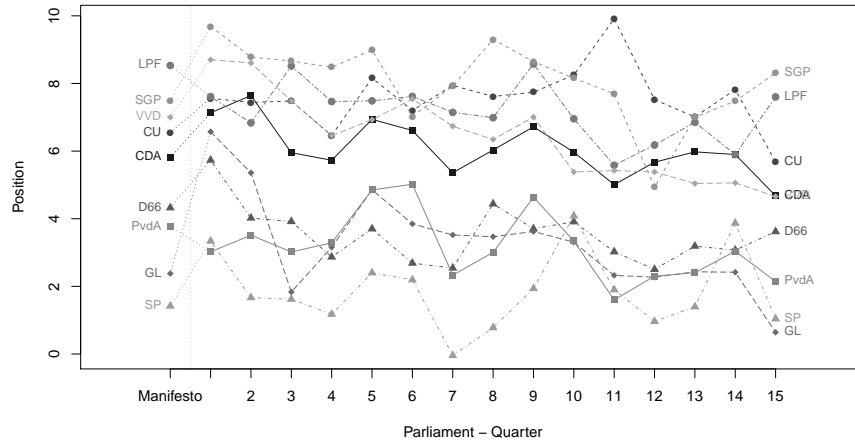


Table 3: Multilevel linear regression models of parliamentary policy positions

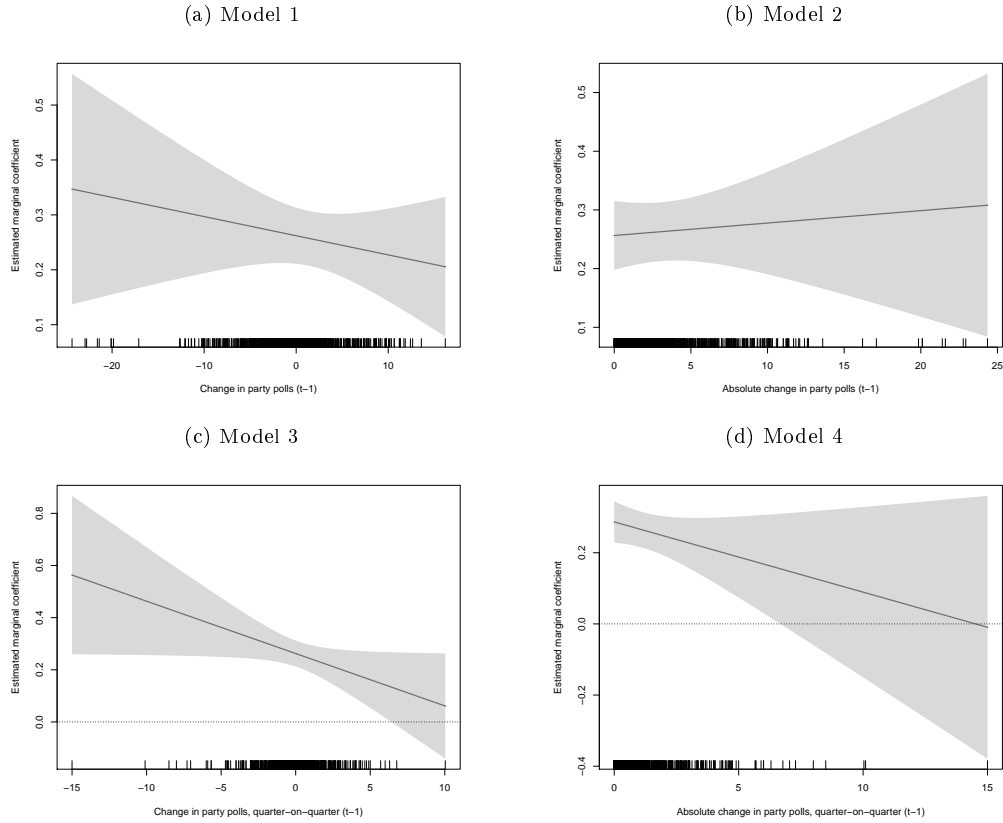
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	0.24*	0.32*	0.24*	0.17
	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.12)
Parliament position _{t-1}	0.68***	0.68***	0.68***	0.68***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Manifesto position	0.26***	0.26***	0.26***	0.29***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Poll change since election _{t-1}	0.01			
	(0.02)			
Manifesto * Poll change _{t-1}	-0.00			
	(0.00)			
Absolute poll change since election _{t-1}		-0.02		
		(0.03)		
Manifesto * Abs. poll change _{t-1}		0.00		
		(0.01)		
Poll change since last quarter _{t-1}			0.12*	
			(0.06)	
Manifesto * Poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1}			-0.02*	
			(0.01)	
Absolute poll change since last quarter _{t-1}				0.07
				(0.08)
Manifesto * Abs. poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1}				-0.02
				(0.01)
AIC	2610.77	2609.73	2596.04	2593.28
BIC	2644.68	2643.64	2629.92	2627.17
Log Likelihood	-1298.38	-1297.86	-1291.02	-1289.64
Num. obs.	939	939	935	935
Num. groups: term:quarter	177	177	177	177
Variance: term:quarter.(Intercept)	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
Variance: Residual	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

effects are difficult to interpret from the regression table, these effects are visualised in Figure 2.

Model 1 tests the Losers Drift Hypothesis operationalising opinion poll gains or losses as the difference between the election result and the (average of) current opinion polls (at $t - 1$). While both the lagged dependent variable as well as the manifesto position are significantly related to the current parliamentary policy position, I do not find that poll gains or losses significantly alter the marginal effect of the manifesto position on the parliamentary position. Model 2 tests the Poll Change Hypothesis and similarly finds no effect of parties absolute change in the polls on the congruence between manifesto and parliamentary positions. When we look at parties' change in polls *compared to the last quarter*, we do find a significant effect (Model 3). The marginal effect of manifesto scores is about 0.55 for the worst loss in the polls, while it is statistically indistinguishable from

Figure 2: Marginal effects of manifesto position on parliamentary position (Table 3)



zero when looking at the biggest quarter on quarter improvement in the polls. This effect is not statistically significant, however, if we delete five extreme cases with poll gains or losses over 7.5%. Therefore Model 3 at best provides tentative support for the Losers Drift Hypothesis. Model 4 does not find a significant interaction effect between manifesto support and the absolute change in poll numbers since the previous quarter.

One explanation for the findings in Table 3 might be that the effects of opinion polls are different for government and opposition parties and therefore cancel each other out. These conditional hypotheses are tested in Table 4 and the interaction effects are visually displayed in Figure 3. Model 1 suggests that change in party polls since the election does not have a differential effect on government and opposition parties' manifesto-parliamentary position congruence. Model 3 provides the same result when looking at quarterly change in the polls. Therefore, the analysis does not show support for the Conditional Losers Drift Hypothesis.

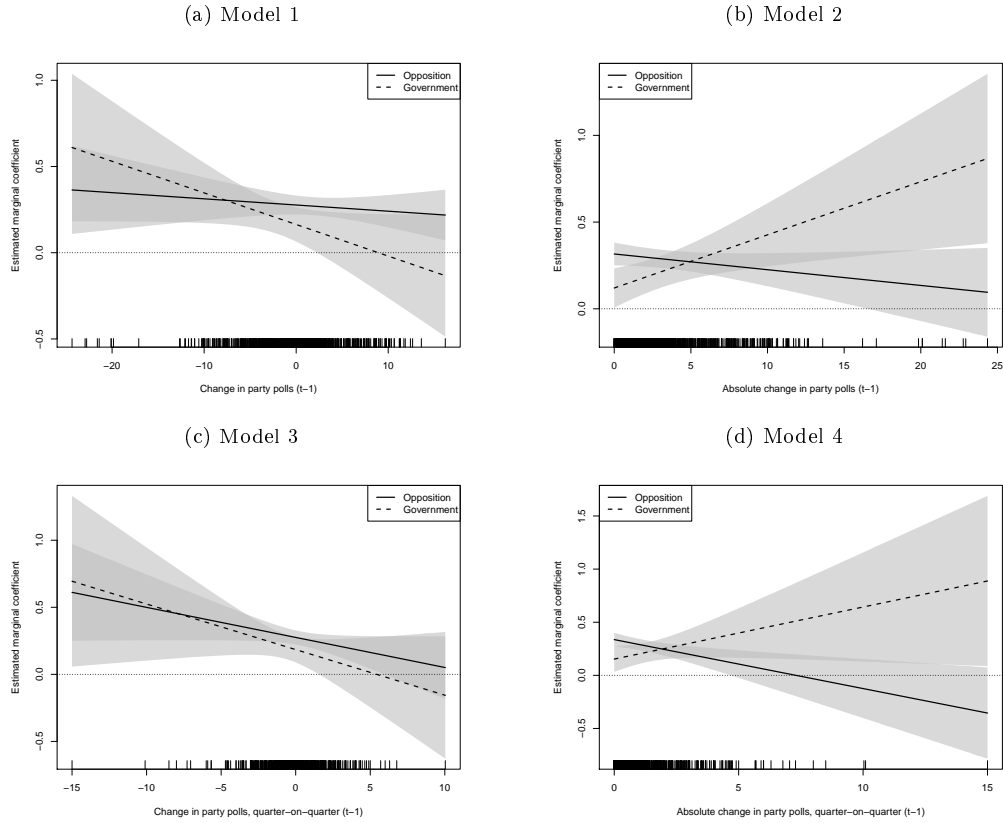
Models 2 and 4 show support for the Conditional Poll Change Hypothesis: government parties that see a lot of change in their polling numbers generally show a higher marginal effect of manifesto positions on parliamentary positions, but this is not true for opposition parties - if anything they show the reverse. This holds both for the change in poll numbers since the last election as well as changes in poll numbers compared to the previous quarter.

Table 4: Multilevel linear regression models of parliamentary policy positions (with government interaction effect)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	0.19 (0.11)	0.20 (0.13)	0.17 (0.10)	0.08 (0.13)
Parliament position _{t-1}	0.68*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)	0.68*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)
Manifesto position	0.28*** (0.03)	0.32*** (0.03)	0.28*** (0.03)	0.34*** (0.03)
Government party	0.63* (0.29)	1.00** (0.35)	0.52 (0.27)	0.91* (0.37)
Manifesto * Government	-0.11* (0.05)	-0.20** (0.06)	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.18** (0.06)
Poll change since election _{t-1}	0.01 (0.03)			
Manifesto * Poll change _{t-1}	-0.00 (0.00)			
Poll change _{t-1} * Government	0.10 (0.06)			
Manifesto * Poll change _{t-1} * Gov.	-0.01 (0.01)			
Absolute poll change since election _{t-1}		0.00 (0.03)		
Manifesto * Abs. poll change _{t-1}		-0.01 (0.01)		
Abs. poll change _{t-1} * Government		-0.18* (0.08)		
Manifesto * Abs. poll change _{t-1} * Gov.		0.04** (0.01)		
Poll change since last quarter _{t-1}			0.12 (0.07)	
Manifesto * Poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1}			-0.02 (0.01)	
Poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1} * Government			0.09 (0.15)	
Man. * Poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1} * Gov.			-0.01 (0.03)	
Absolute poll change since last quarter _{t-1}				0.14 (0.09)
Manifesto * Abs. poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1}				-0.05** (0.02)
Abs. poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1} * Government				-0.43* (0.21)
Man. * Abs. poll ch. lst qrt _{t-1} * Gov.				0.10** (0.03)
AIC	2634.44	2621.49	2618.32	2601.62
BIC	2687.73	2674.78	2671.57	2654.87
Log Likelihood	-1306.22	-1299.74	-1298.16	-1289.81
Num. obs.	939	939	935	935
Num. groups: term:quarter	177	177	177	177
Variance: term:quarter.(Intercept)	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
Variance: Residual	0.79	0.78	0.79	0.78

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Figure 3: Marginal effects of manifesto position on parliamentary position (Table 4)



The effect does not change substantively if we exclude extreme cases of changing poll numbers.

Discussion and conclusion

The empirical results suggest that opinion poll change mediates the congruence between manifesto and parliamentary policy positions of political parties. Whereas there are some tentative indications that poll losses are related to a higher degree of congruence, stronger effects are found when we look at the impact of the absolute poll change (i.e. gaining *or* losing). The data showed support for the Conditional Poll Change Hypothesis, which states that poll changes decrease congruence for opposition parties, but increase it for government parties.

Caution is, however, warranted in the causal interpretation of these results. Perhaps voters adjust their voting intentions (in polls) based on how parties perform their representative role. Larger change in opinion polls might be the result rather than the cause of policy incongruence. Most of the explanatory variables are lagged to account for this and a lagged dependent variable is included in an attempt to exclude this alternative

explanation.

Another concern might be that the current analysis is limited to a small number of countries and only one issue dimension, the left-right scale. Including a more extensive selection of countries might be helpful in exploring cross-country differences, which a relatively low number of observation per country made difficult here. Apart from extending the number of countries (and the time frame within countries), multiple issue dimensions could be included in the analysis. After all, left-right is a limited summary of political conflict in many countries.

Given that our analysis suggests that both big losses or big gains in the polls affect congruence, the most important challenge is to track parties' responses to opinion polls more in-depth. Parties seem to respond differently to opinion polls, depending on the exact circumstance they find themselves in. The current article looked at the distinction between government and opposition parties, but other factors could also play a role, such as the party type (catch all, single issue), party size and how well it performed at the last election. It is therefore relevant to complement large-N analyses of congruence with case studies to better track the exact mechanisms at work.

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