

**EXPLAINING MAINSTREAM-NICHE SWITCHING IN
THE 2019 EP ELECTION – EVIDENCE FROM EIGHT
WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

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Acknowledgments

I dedicate this project to my parents and my sister.

I thank professor Ana Maria Belchior for the help.

Abstract

Do voters who feel close to mainstream parties shift to niche parties in European Parliament elections when they perceive the latter to be the most competent? And to what extent do mainstream-voters switch to niche parties to signal the importance of niche issues, such as the environment and immigration?

Using data from the 2019 European Election Study (EES) Voter Study, the present research aims at answering the aforementioned questions. The results demonstrate that perceiving a mismatch between a mainstream party one feel close to and a niche party one considers to be the best at handling the most important issue leads mainstream-voters to shift to niche parties in the European stage. Additionally, many electors switch to niche parties in European Parliament elections to signal the importance of niche issues – particularly, the environment and immigration – to mainstream parties.

Keywords: vote-switching; niche parties; second-order elections; expressive tactical voting; electoral signalling; party identification

Resumo

Em que medida eleitores que se sentem próximos de partidos *mainstream* mudam o seu voto para partidos de nicho em eleições para o Parlamento Europeu quando os percebem como mais competentes? E até que ponto eleitores de partidos *mainstream* votam em partidos de nicho para sinalizarem a importância de *issues* de nicho, como o ambiente e a imigração?

Suportado em dados do European Election Study (2019) Voter Study, o presente trabalho visa responder a estas questões. Os resultados apresentam evidência de que reconhecer um *mismatch* entre o partido *mainstream* de que um indivíduo se sente mais próximo e o partido de nicho que considera mais competente leva eleitores de partidos *mainstream* a mudarem o seu voto para partidos de nicho no palco europeu. Adicionalmente, em eleições para o Parlamento Europeu, parte do eleitorado vota em partidos de nicho para sinalizar a importância de *issues* de nicho – em particular, ambiente e imigração – aos partidos *mainstream*.

Palavras-chave: troca de partidos; partidos de nicho; eleições de segunda-ordem; voto tático expressivo; voto de sinalização; identificação partidária

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Abbreviations of Political Parties Analysed for H3

France

LR: Les Républicains
PS: Parti Socialiste
RN: Rassemblement National
EELV: Europe Écologie Les Verts
LFI: La France Insoumise
GEN: Génération.s
LRM: La République En Marche!

Spain

PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero
Español
PP: Partido Popular
UP: Unidas Podemos
CIU: Ciudadanos
VOX: VOX
ERC: Esquerra Republicana de
Catalunya
CE: Compromís

Finland

SDP: Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen
Puolue
TF: Perussuomalaiset
KOK: Kansallinen Kokoomus
KESK: Suomen Keskusta
VIHR: Vihreä Liitto
VAS: Vasemmistoliitto
RKP: Suomen Ruotsalainen
Kansanpuolue

Germany

CDU/CSU: Christlich Demokratische
Union/Christlich-Soziale Union
SPD: Sozialdemokratische Partei
Deutschlands
FDP: Freie Demokratische Partei
GRÜ: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen
LIN: Die Linke
AfD: Alternative für Deutschland

PIR: Piratenpartei Deutschland

The Netherlands

VVD: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en
Democratie
PVV: Partij voor de Vrijheid
CDA: Christen-Democratisch Appèl
D66: Democraten 66
GL: GroenLinks
SP: Socialistische Partij
PVDA: Partij van de Arbeid
FVD: Forum voor Democratie

United Kingdom

CON: Conservative Party
LAB: Labour Party
LD: Liberal Democrats
GP: Green Party
SNP: Scottish National Party
UKIP: UK Independence Party
BP: Brexit Party

Sweden

SDLP: Sveriges Socialdemokratiska
Arbetspartiet
MOD: Moderata samlingspartiet
MP: Miljöpartiet de Gröna
LIB: Liberalerna
CENT: Centerpartiet
SWDE: Sverigedemokraterna
SWKD: Kristdemokraterna
VP: Vänsterpartiet

Ireland

FG: Fine Gael
LP: Labour Party
FF: Fianna Fáil
GPIE: Green Party
SF: Sinn Féin
SOL: Solidarity

1. Introduction

Do individuals switch to niche parties in European Parliament (EP) elections when they perceive a mismatch between the mainstream party they prefer and the niche party they consider to be more competent at dealing with niche issues? And do voters shift to niche parties to signal the importance of niche issues – specifically, the environment and immigration – to mainstream parties? Additionally, do stronger ties to mainstream parties explain mainstream-loyalty in EP elections, when compared to perceived niche competence?

By analysing data from the 2019 European Election Study (EES), the present study aims to answer these questions and explores a relatively uncharted territory in political science (Lindstam, 2019), that of vote-switching with signalling motivations. The research builds upon Franklin and colleagues' (1994) thesis, which reasoned that a segment of the electorate, called 'expressive tactical voters'¹, does not have traditional instrumental calculations, such as voting for a party expected to win the race in their constituency. Instead, these voters would cast their ballot expecting to send a message to a certain party or candidate, disregarding the outcome of the election.

Fundamentally, this project furthers the findings of Hong (2015) and Lindstam (2019). On the one hand, it improves Hong's work by studying two niche issues (the environment and immigration) in detail, and uncovering niche-switchers' likelihood to return to a mainstream party. On the other hand, it strengthens Lindstam's results by examining eight countries – six more than those included in her analysis – and also provides an account of mainstream-niche shifts in a post-crisis scenario. As scholars have shown, economic crises shape electors' behaviour, especially in a multi-level governance context, where responsibilities are shared by different political actors (Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012; Bellucci, 2014; Torcal, 2014).

The present research reached three important conclusions. First, it was concluded that mainstream-voters switch to niche parties in EP elections when they perceive a mismatch between the mainstream party they feel close to and a niche party they regard as more competent. Second, mainstream-niche shifts occur when voters consider niche issues – especially the environment and immigration – to be the most important. And third, mainstream-voters who shift to niche parties in EP elections exhibit a high probability of

¹ Throughout this project, the terms 'tactical vote(r)' and 'strategic vote(r)' will be used interchangeably.

returning to mainstream parties, when compared to anti-immigration, ethno-territorial, pirate, and special issue parties.

The dissertation is structured as follows: the first chapter reviews the relevant literature and explores the evolution of issues in party competition, the emergence of the environment and immigration as prominent issues, and changes in tactical voting over time. The second chapter details the dataset used and the methodology applied. Lastly, the third chapter explores the hypotheses in relation to the results and delves into the significance of these findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Party Competition and Issues

2.1.1. *How Issues Shaped Party Competition*

This section is dedicated to understanding how issues entered the political debate and shaped party competition. It starts by providing a general account of Downs' spatial model, followed by Stokes' critique and Rabinowitz and Macdonald's alternative proposal – the directional theory.

Downs, in his book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), proposes a model of party competition based on Hotelling's spatial theory – also known as proximity theory, rational choice, or 'least-distance' model (Norris, 2005:276). According to Downs, parties and voters are represented as points on a single left-right scale, and "a voter's utility is greatest for a candidate holding identical positions" (Merrill III & Grofman, 1999:20). This model, optimised in a two-party system (Kriesi, 2008), assumes that parties will move centripetally to stay away from the extremes while engaging with the majority of the voters – the so-called "middle-of-the-road voters" (Downs, 1957:117). The voter will, in turn, cast their vote for the party closest to them on the same scale, considering policy positions.

In 1963, Stokes presented the first critical analysis of Downs' axioms. Two points are of particular importance for the subsequent literature: the critique of unidimensionality and the critique of common dimensions. He argued that there should be a second, complementary axis to absorb a stratification that would otherwise be impossible. That is to say, an axis that captures, for example, how liberal a person is in a dimension other than the economic (Stokes, 1963:370).

Two types of issues are thus evoked: positional issues and valence issues. Even though drawing a line between the two is often complicated (De Sio & Weber, 2014), differences are worth noting. On the one hand, position issues refer to contentious elements of political debate, major conflicts in society (Freire, 2004:782), and topics on which parties endorse opposed policies (Klingemann, 1987:312). Following Downs' spatial theory, voters will decide whether or not to vote for a party based on positional congruence (Green & Hobolt, 2008:462). Immigration belongs to this category (Abou-Chadi, 2014). On the other hand, valence issues can be considered either goals to achieve or problems

to solve. For example, high employment and low inflation, as well as a low level of perceived corruption (Klingemann, 1987: 312; van der Brug, 2004:210).

The influence of this new approach was noticeable in Inglehart's *The Silent Revolution* (1977), where the author develops a thesis of changing values towards post-materialism. This change would imply a political transformation (the new politics) grounded on the blending of new policy issues with new cleavages. For individuals of different generations, the 'political' was more than the left-right divide introduced by Downs twenty years earlier. Later on, Inglehart and Rabier disputed the supremacy of the traditional class cleavage, arguing, instead, that several movements (such as the environmentalist, the women's, or the limits to growth movements) "had taken the centre of the stage in contemporary politics" (Inglehart & Rabier, 1986:458).

The implication of the new post-materialist approach was further expanded by Kitschelt and Hellemans' (1990) theory of pluralisation. This theory implies that the left-right spectre adapts to new conflicts and values that emerge in the political landscape, instead of simply becoming obsolete and being replaced by other cues, a new political language (Knutsen, 1995; Mair, 1997:26), as the irrelevance theory suggests (Kitschelt & Hellemans, 1990: 214).

Meanwhile, a new theory had risen. One which rejected the spatial model and proposed a cognitive, directional approach to voting. Rabinowitz and Macdonald's (1989; Rabinowitz et al., 1991) directional model prioritises the *symbolic* value of the issue, that is, the way each voter is affected by a certain topic. Hence, they attached two dimensions to the issue. The first, *direction*, asks whether one agrees or disagrees with the symbol (issue). The second, *intensity*, measures how intensely the person feels the policy issue. To illustrate how the model works, the authors provided the following example: the issue Health is measured on a scale ranging from -5 (government provides health insurance) to +5 (private companies provide health insurance). Person Y's position on the scale is -1, and parties A and B occupy positions -4 and +1. Following the proximity theory, person Y would vote for party B, as it is closer to them. However, according to the directional theory, the individual would cast their ballot for party A, since it is the party that stands on the same side of the issue (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989:97; Rabinowitz et al., 1991:1126).

In disagreement with the spatial theory, the directional theory posits that extreme candidates are viable when there is a clear directional preference that pushes them closer to the boundary of the region of acceptability (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989:111). In

certain circumstances, candidates benefit from taking stances that deviate from the median voter. The authors are careful enough to include a ‘region of acceptability’, which circumscribes the policy range a candidate may accommodate before being framed as “extremist”.

This segment showed how policy issues challenged the traditional left-right divide. Downs maintained that electors would vote for the party closest to them on a unidimensional scale to maximise their utility. Rabinowitz and Macdonald stated, otherwise, that proximity is not always crucial, for individuals vote for parties that stand on their side of the field. These two approaches inspired the ongoing debate about the importance of issue preferences in a voting decision, which are central to this research. The next section moves away from party competition influenced by issues to focus on competition between different issues.

2.1.2. The Salience and Ownership Theories of the Issue

The study of issue competition marks a departure from theories of party competition. This section delves into the relevant proposals of how issues are used by different political actors for their own electoral success. It first offers a minimal definition of issue competition and issue voting, and then explores the two predominant theories of issue competition: the salience theory and the ownership theory.

Carmines and Stimson (1986, 1991) proposed a model of issue competition, according to which parties, during electoral campaigns, seek to maximise the good reputation they have on a certain issue(s) and minimise the media exposure of topics the opposition is considered more competent or, more broadly, advantageous.

Issue competition (on the side of parties) is linked to issue voting (on the side of voters). Following Carmines and Stimson (1980:82), the process of issue voting encompasses two steps: 1) electors assess their issue preference; and 2) calculate the relative positioning of parties and candidates. Hence, parties will campaign on different policies and voters will evaluate them based on their perceived competence to handle the issue, instead of ideological position. According to this perspective, voters focus more on valence than on positional issues when deciding who to vote for.

In detail, two theories have shaped the debate on issue competition. In 1983, Budge and Farlie advanced their salience theory as a way of explaining the political use of issues. Accordingly, each party emphasises topics they have a good reputation for (Budge & Farlie, 1983:23; van der Brug, 2004:211) or for which they have been considered

competent by the majority of voters (Budge & Farlie, 1983:24; Abou-Chadi, 2014:419), and conversely will disregard all others.

Petrocik, in turn, built on the work of Budge and Farlie to present his issue ownership theory. The author divides the source of ownership of an issue into two categories: performance-based ownership (also known as ‘competence’) and party constituency ownership of the issue (also credited as ‘association’²). The first category encompasses the short-term evaluation of the government’s performance. For example, if economic performance indicators do not favour the incumbent, challengers may try and profit from those issues to question the competence of the ruling side (Petrocik, 1996). Conversely, party constituency ownership of the issue refers to a long-term appropriation structured not only on the social characteristics of individuals and groups but also on the “issue handling reputations” of each party (Petrocik, 1996:826).

In the United States, for example, since Democrats are seen as being the best party to solve welfare problems, they will have the advantage over Republicans on this issue. By the same token, Republicans are linked to solving criminal problems and protecting moral values, and will therefore benefit if performance issues are neutral (Petrocik, 1996:831). Walgrave and colleagues (2012) rightly summarise Petrocik’s somehow archaeological approach to issues: issue ownership is defined by considering competence but has its origins in the attention a party has devoted to that issue in the past.

The salience and ownership theories showed that issues are not simply placeable on a scale of proximity; they depend on multiple factors: a history of attention to the issue, personal attachment to the issue, an association of the issue with certain parties, and so on.

Hence, the transition from a ‘calculable/mechanical’ object into a ‘psychological’ entity is of utmost importance for the present study. For example, Downs (1957:131) is right when he claims that a right-wing party *C* with extremist positions can force party *B* to shift to the right. However, this project is not much interested in this mechanical effect. Rather, it will examine how assigning competence to party *C* explains voting for the said party instead of the most-preferred party *B*. The next section explores this competence dimension of the issue, as well as the associative dimension – associating an issue with a party.

² For an exhaustive analysis of the two terms, see Walgrave et al. (2012).

2.1.3. *Coming into Prominence: The Associative and Competence Dimensions of the Environment and Immigration*

Issue ownership produced several sub-categories, such as issue convergence (Sigelman & Buell, 2004) and issue trespassing (Damore, 2004). This theory was found to be a suitable complement of Downs' spatial model (Green & Hobolt, 2008; Spoon & Klüver, 2019), for it served as a way to explain how parties seek to win votes, and how voters choose parties.

Recently, Walgrave and colleagues (2009) proposed a distinction between two sides of issue ownership: an associative side and a competence side. Simply put, the former refers to an issue that is automatically associated with a specific party. For example, one would likely think of a Green party when the environment is brought up. On the other hand, competence ownership of the issue occurs when a party is perceived as better at handling a specific issue.

The distinction between the two sides is important for this project, since it is predominantly interested in the competence dimension of the issue. For example, voters might spontaneously associate immigration with anti-immigration parties, but that does not mean they see them as the most competent (Walgrave et al., 2009:156; Abou-Chadi, 2014:421). One of the objectives of this work is to assess if the perceived competence of niche parties to deal with niche issues explains vote switching to said parties in second-order elections.

Empirical evidence on party competence shows that considering a party to be competent does increase its electoral fortunes (Bellucci, 2006; Bélanger & Meguid, 2008; Green & Hobolt, 2008). Importantly, Hong (2015) and Lindstam (2019) proved that electors switch from mainstream to niche parties in second-order elections when they perceive the latter to be more competent at handling an issue they find very important. Other scholars separate association and competence but connect both in a consequential fashion. Provided that a party has credibility in dealing with an issue, voters will logically associate that party's handling reputation with the issue (Damore, 2004:391; Bellucci, 2006).

Shifting to issue ownership, authors find mixed evidence with regards to a party's ability to appropriate an issue. On the one hand, Walgrave and colleagues (2009) found that by focusing on an issue owned by an opposing candidate, one may, to an extent, claim it as their own. This finding is refuted by Tresch and colleagues (2015), who show that parties cannot fake a history of attention toward an issue, and are unable to steal

issues owned by others. That is to say, the authors find no evidence that points to a change in perceptions of associative and competence ownership in the eyes of the electorate. Finally, Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) develop an approach of Petrocik's performance-based ownership of the issue in a multiparty setting and demonstrate that opposition parties have increased chances to continuously focus on favourable issues than incumbent parties, for the latter are forced to respond to topics raised by the party-system agenda.

The following paragraphs gloss over the associative dimension of the issue and the so-called 'contagion effect'. The latter is important in understanding how a niche party position on an issue it owns influences mainstream parties' stances on the same issue.

Unsurprisingly, the environment is predominantly associated with Green parties, while radical right parties are the face of immigration (Meguid, 2005:351; Ezrow, 2008:207; Abou-Chadi, 2014; Spoon et al., 2014; Han, 2015; Tresch et al., 2015; Spoon & Klüver, 2019). But how do parties react to these associative dynamics? Do they pursue a dismissive tactic regarding such issues or, conversely, do they interact with them either with an adversarial or accommodative fashion?

Spoon and colleagues (2014) showed that the electoral success of ecological parties led to an increase in environmental policies in the remaining parties. However, this thesis did not hold in Abou-Chadi's (2014) study. It is exactly the opposite: a vote share increase by the Greens represented a decrease in environmental policies by mainstream parties. Interestingly, when radical right parties saw an increase in their vote share, established parties³ augmented the number of immigration policies (Abou-Chadi, 2014; Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018).

In terms of mainstream parties, other scholars found that under certain circumstances they not only talk about the issues owned by the radical right parties but also adopt their positions (Bale et al., 2010; Dahlström & Sundell, 2012; Han, 2015). As Van Spanje (2010) argues, mainstream parties are vulnerable to a 'contagion effect' due to electoral pressure from radical right parties. In the same vein, Wagner and Meyer (2016) confirm a rightward shift in the mainstream side of the field, in both the economic axis as well as the new politics dimension (a reference to GAL/TAN; Hooghe et al., 2002). This conclusion is not unanimous, though, as a group of authors concluded that there is no shift in mainstream parties' behaviour caused by radical right parties (Williams, 2006; van

³ Abou-Chadi uses 'mainstream' and 'established' to describe the same phenomenon.

Heerden et al., 2014; Mudde, 2016:302). For example, van Heerden and colleagues (2014) argue that the attention devoted to the issues immigration and integration had already been significant before the political breakthrough of radical right parties. The authors illustrate their point with the Dutch party CDA, which doubled the number of sentences dedicated to both issues in its programmes between 1994 and 1998.

This section began by reviewing the associative and competence dimensions of the issue. It showed that parties are rewarded when they are regarded as the most competent to solve a certain issue. The literature denotes that the green issue is associated with green parties, while immigration is owned by radical right parties. Evidence that testifies the existence of a contagion effect is slimmer, but the general consensus is that radical right parties have been successful in increasing their mainstream counterparts' attention to immigration. Especially as mainstream parties not only talk about those issues but, on some occasions, also adopt anti-immigration positions.

2.2. Niche Parties, Tactical Voting and Second-order Elections

2.2.1. *Niche party: introduction to a contested concept*

To this day, the literature still lacks a consensual definition of 'niche party' (Elias, 2009; Wagner, 2011; Bischof, 2015; Meyer & Miller, 2015; Grittersová et al., 2016:277; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016:4). So far, Meguid's (2005, 2008) baseline classification is preferred over others. According to the author, niche parties share three characteristics: they reject the traditional class cleavage – that is, they neglect economic issues; they bring forth novel issues to the public debate, cross-cutting settled party alignments; and they campaign on a limited set of issues. With this in mind, Meguid postulates three kinds of parties that belong to this typology: green, radical right, and ethno-territorial parties. Conversely, Adams et al. (2006) present a definition rooted in Downs' spatial model, and state that niche parties exhibit a non-centrist ideology – such as the greens – or extremist views – as communist and radical right parties. In their view, these parties benefit electorally by setting themselves apart from mainstream parties, hence not targeting Downs' 'middle-of-the-road voter'.

Although Meguid's approach tends to prevail in the literature, Meyer and Miller (2015) contest some of her claims. Specifically, they argue that issues need not be novel and niche parties need not be restricted to non-economic issues. The Norwegian Progress Party, according to the authors, is evidence enough of a niche party solely focused on

economic issues; put another way, all other policy areas rely on the party's economic position. For example, immigrants are portrayed as a threat both to the national economy and the national workforce, which leads to an economic-based anti-immigration stance. Meyer and Miller also reject the dichotomous approach (niche *versus* non-niche) that Meguid employs. They propose, instead, a continuous scale to measure a party's nicheness. Hence, Meyer and Miller posit that green parties are "the most obvious niche parties, followed by special-issue, ethnic-regionalist, and nationalist parties" (2015:264).

As seen before, offering a satisfactory and concise definition of 'niche party' can be demanding. Parties are dynamic political actors shaped by the electorate and society at large, which naturally motivates unexpected shifts in their policy positions. The fact that the boundary between niche and mainstream is yet to be specified makes it increasingly complicated to objectively and empirically determine when a party jumps to the other side.

2.2.2. *Discussion of Arguments Against Meguid's Definition of Niche Party*

A group of scholars has offered valid objections to Meguid's typology. The objections' validity lies not much on them providing alternative proposals, but on them detecting contradictions in her exposition. This section examines scholars' arguments in detail.

Is the Scottish National Party (SNP) a niche or a mainstream party? According to Meguid (2008), it belongs to the niche group; conversely, other scholars claim it is indisputably mainstream (Elias, 2009; Hepburn, 2009; McAngus, 2015). What about nationalist parties in Spain, such as the Republican Left of Catalonia and the Basque Nationalist Party? Meguid refers to them as niche, but the same group of scholars refrains from adopting such classification.

To answer these questions, this section begins by identifying the two general problems the literature incurs when analysing niche parties, the first being conceptual and terminological confusion. The terms 'challenger' and 'niche'⁴ are often, mistakenly, used interchangeably. In their study, Hobolt and De Vries (2012) draw the conceptual distinction between the two: challenger parties are defined based on their officeholding experience, while niche parties are determined based on party family considerations (Hobolt & De Vries, 2012:21; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016:16). Other authors also find it crucial

⁴ And, to an extent, 'outsider' (McDonnell & Newell, 2011)

to note that not having government experience does not imply a challenger party is niche (Van de Wardt et al., 2014:992; Van de Wardt, 2015:97).

The second problem refers to Meguid (2005, 2008) and Wagner's (2011:2) assumption that niche parties neglect economic issues and have no definite position on the economy, for it belongs to the mainstream parties' scope of action. Meguid claims that niche parties are single-issue parties, even though the number of issues covered by these parties has increased. The author fails to set a maximum amount of issues a niche party is allowed to cover until it becomes mainstream, and critics have exploited this vulnerability (Elias, 2009; Hepburn, 2009; McAngus, 2015). Having laid down the fundamental problems, the remainder of this section discusses them by referencing the literature.

Ethno-territorial parties are mainstream parties. This is the main takeaway Hepburn, Elias, and McAngus attempt to convey. First, Meguid defines niche parties based on three conditions, one of which is their rejection of the traditional class-based cleavage. As Hepburn notes, British ethno-territorial parties have historically portrayed themselves either on the economic centre-left or centre-right (Hepburn, 2009:485). Similarly, McAngus ascertains that the SNP has not been a niche party for decades, given its ideological position (McAngus, 2015:8), while Elias also distances Plaid Cymru and the Basque Nationalist Party from the said category (Elias, 2009:540).

The authors are correct when they highlight the rigidity of Meguid's condition. However, other scholars have put forth distinct and more sophisticated theoretical frameworks. For example, Wagner (2011) criticises the alleged niche-mainstream binarism: a party may have its priorities without completely disregarding other issues – including the economy. Miller and Meyer (2015) also contest Meguid's stance, allowing for a less binding categorisation. Moreover, a party's professionalisation and commitment to a larger set of issues should not be interpreted as a departure from its fundamental values and niche positioning. If that were the case, France's *Rassemblement National* would be a prominent mainstream party – which it is not (Ivaldi, 2014:4).

The second condition exploited by Hepburn is the novelty of the issue. Recalling Meguid's proposal, apart from novel, an issue must also not coincide with existing lines of political division (2005:248). According to Hepburn, if ethno-territorial parties own issues that have been in the centre of the stage for decades, how can they be considered niche parties? Meyer and Miller respond to this by proposing a definition that rejects the novelty condition. Adding insult to injury, the idea that niche issues are necessarily new

“assumes that all attractive ‘old’ issues are occupied by mainstream parties”, which need not be the case (Meyer & Miller, 2015:261).

Government experience is perhaps Hepburn (2009) and McAngus’s (2014) capital safeguard. Their argument states that if a niche party is in government, then it must have abandoned its commitment to non-economic issues, for it needs to address a large range of topics, including performance indicators typically associated with the economy and public finance. Therefore, it must have lost its nicheness and embraced the mainstream side. This point is relevant, particularly in the British case. Both the SNP and Plaid Cymru have entered government as central actors – the SNP, for example, jumped from a minority cabinet in 2007 to a majority government in 2011. Yet, considerations should target the supply, not the status; that is, the electoral programme, not the electoral success. If niche parties were exclusively opposition parties, the Dutch Party for Freedom would be a mainstream party. As seen before, there is an important distinction between challenger and niche parties.

McAngus suggests, somewhat controversially, that the perception of competence is also a decisive criterion⁵. Placing the cut-off in competence assumes all niche parties are perceived as incompetent. Empirical studies reject this assumption by showing that a segment of the electorate shifts from mainstream to niche parties, for the latter are considered better at handling a specific issue (Hong, 2015; Lindstam, 2019).

Finally, Elias (2009) argues that ethno-territorial parties have abandoned their initial demands related to the centre-periphery cleavage; that is, they have de-emphasised their original nationalist/independentist vindications. Despite that, when examining the programmes of both the SNP and Plaid Cymru, it becomes clear that regionalism and nationalism still prevail. The Scottish party’s key pledge, for example, is the country’s independence⁶. Elias is right to point that the SNP covers a wide range of topics, which brings it closer to the mainstream side. However, niche parties can and do have core issues that overwrite all others – as will be discussed in the following sub-chapter. In this case, it is Scotland’s independence. The argument for the Welsh party goes the same way: even though it could be considered a typical social-democratic party, its focus on independence from the United Kingdom sets it apart⁷.

⁵ “The SNP’s success at the 2007 Scottish election was evidence of just how much the party had become a mainstream political force given that their electoral success was based, largely, on the notion that they were perceived by the electorate as the most competent and able potential party of government in relation to Labour” (McAngus, 2014:10).

⁶ “We believe that the best future for Scotland is to be an independent, European nation.” (SNP, 2019 programme)

⁷ “Our mission is to convince the people of Wales that independence is not merely desirable, but actually vitally necessary to tackle our problems and improve our standard of living.” (Plaid Cymru, where we stand)

As it is difficult to classify niche parties, deciding which can be included in the ethno-territorial group can be equally demanding. The cases mentioned above are mere examples of how complicated it is to draw a line dividing niche and mainstream parties. Sinn Féin (Ireland) is another dubious case. Like the SNP, Sinn Féin also pledged to achieve a territorial goal – Irish unity. The party goes as far as to affirm it is its “core political objective” (Sinn Féin, General Election Manifesto 2020). The next section aims to offer a more encompassing definition of niche party.

2.2.3. *Niche Parties: Definition and Segmentation*

Following the previous discussion, I should now be able to propose a definition of a niche party that will then allow list the party families belonging to the niche category. Before proceeding, I should note that my definition is concerned with policy positions, thereby dismissing party characteristics (age, size, internal structure, government/opposition, *etc*). Additionally, I posit, in concordance with Wagner (2011:6), that ‘niceness’ should not be considered a static category. That is, two niche parties may very well possess different degrees of niceness, one being much closer to mainstream parties than the other.

I base my conceptualisation on Meyer and Miller’s (2015:261) ‘minimal definition’: “A niche party emphasises policy areas neglected by its competitors”. My definition is different from theirs in three ways. First, the two authors state that niche parties *emphasise* areas disregarded by their competitors. However, “emphasis” implies a degree, and that degree is difficult to ascertain. For example, a social democratic party and a green party may both emphasise the environment, but that does not make the social democratic a green party. I, on the other hand, underline the importance of the *core* issue of the party and how it shapes the overall programmatic supply. The core issue of the green party is the environment, while the core issue of the social democratic party ranges from social to economic policies. The former is a niche party while the latter is not.

Second, Meyer and Miller’s definition including “competitors” implies that there is only one niche party for each issue. For example, Germany has two green parties – the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and the Ecological Democratic Party. According to Meyer and Miller’s definition, neither would be a niche party. Assuming that ‘competitor’ is a party other than the reference party competing in an election, if a niche party emphasises issues neglected by its competitors, and two parties are emphasising the same issue, then that issue is not neglected, and there are no niche parties. I propose that the attention devoted

to a niche issue is higher for the niche party than for parties with a different core. This phrasing allows for multiple niche parties focusing on the same niche issue.

Third, Meyer and Miller (2015:261) claim that “niche parties can lose their status if rival (mainstream) parties react by emphasising similar issues”. Again, I believe that the core issue is the best indicator for assessing a party’s nicheness. For example, if two social-democratic parties start emphasising the environment, does the sole green party competing in that election lose its niche status? That seems unpalausible. The definitional elements should lie within the party and be independent of adjustments by its competitors.

Hence, according to my definition, a niche party differs from its mainstream counterpart for two reasons:

- 1) It has a non-economic core issue, be it old or new, that guides and influences all other policy positions. The core niche issue may be framed in economic terms, provided that it is the party’s only issue or that it is the baseline of the remainder of the programme – for example, a party that uses the economy/welfare state as an argument against the influx of migrants;
- 2) The attention devoted to that niche issue is higher for the niche party than for parties with a different core.

A mainstream party will thus be characterised by its lack of a core niche issue, and its balanced commitment to economic and non-economic issues.

I will hold on to the view of Meguid (2005, 2008) and Meyer and Miller (2015), and set forth the following party families: green parties, anti-immigration parties, ethno-territorial parties, and special issue parties (i.e. cyberlibertarian or religious parties)⁸. Because radical right parties are more than anti-immigration parties (Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007), I will use the term ‘anti-immigration’ to refer to parties whose core issue is immigration in an adversarial fashion. However, this option does not assume, as Fennema (1997:475) claims, that these parties are single-issue.

I will exclude these cases from the analysis:

- The German Die Partei, since its programme does not fit in any of the categories above. It is a satirical party whose policy proposals set it apart from any existing family – including the special issue;

⁸ A list containing all parties analysed in the present study, divided into mainstream and niche, can be found in [Appendix 1](#). A list specifying the core issue of each niche party can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

- Independent candidates, specifically France’s “divers gauche” and “divers droite”, UK and Ireland’s “independents”, and Germany’s “freie Wähler”. Régionalistes in France will also be excluded;
- The electoral alliance between the ChristenUnie and SGP (the Netherlands) for the 2019 EP election, since the former is a mainstream party while the latter belongs to the niche segment;
- Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party, Finland’s Seitsemän tähden liike, and Ireland’s Independents 4 Change and Independent Alliance, for neither party has a programme or manifesto available.

2.3. Tactical Voting

2.3.1. *Defining Tactical Voting*

Electoral behaviour as a field of study has its roots in Duverger’s *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Duverger’s law states that a plurality system for nation-wide elections always favours a two-party system, while multi-seat districts lead to multiparty systems (Duverger, 1963). This is explained by two effects: one mechanical and the other psychological. Although Duverger himself defines neither, Blais and Carty suggest the following: a mechanical effect refers to “electoral systems’ systematic underrepresentation (...) of ‘third’ parties”, that is, “the impact it has on the seat/vote ratio” (Blais & Carty, 1991:91); on the other hand, the psychological effect is “the tendency for voters, realising that votes for minor parties are not effectively translated into seats, to rally to what they consider the least unacceptable of the two major parties” (Blais & Carty, 1991:79).

Downs, too, sets forth criteria for tactical voting. In accordance, a rational voter must decide which party will benefit them the most – lend the highest utility –, estimate the party’s chances of winning, and finally vote in a way that their vote is not wasted (Downs, 1957:48). A different approach, influenced by Duverger and close to Downs’, states that a strategic vote in a plurality setting means voting for a weaker candidate that one believes is stronger, rather than for a stronger candidate that one believes is weaker (Cox, 1997:71; Blais & Nadeau, 1996; Blais et al., 2001:344; Blais et al., 2005:164).

Fisher’s (2004:153) definition posits that a vote is tactical if it respects the following criteria: a voter must have short-term instrumental motivations – intention to influence the outcome of the constituency race; a voter must vote for a party other than their first

preference; the vote should be consistent with the expectations of the constituency result. Furthermore, in single-member districts with only three parties, the vote must be cast according to game-theoretic reasoning, that is, choosing the second-preferred party if the most preferred is understood as ranking third (Cox, 1997:72).

2.3.2. Tactical Voting in Plurality and Proportional Representation Systems

Duverger's law has been tested and confirmed multiple times, in different countries and orders (Cain, 1978; Blais & Nadeau, 1996; Evans et al., 1998; Burden, 2005; Alvarez et al., 2006; Muller & Page, 2015). The study of strategic voting under proportional representation systems, however, is more ambiguous. The Leys-Sartori conjecture, which assumes that "the smaller the district magnitude the more strategic voting we should expect at the primary district level" (Gschwend, 2009:290), proved that these systems could also be accounted for their permeability to strategic motivations (Leys, 1959:139; Sartori, 1968:278; Cox, 1997:10).

Since then, studies have shown that plurality and proportional representation systems provide identical incentives for strategic voting (Kedar, 2005; Abramson et al., 2010). However, it was the proportional systems' propensity for coalition governments that drew scholars' attention and changed the focus of analysis.

A variety of authors has focused on this dynamic (Meffert & Gschwend, 2010; Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2012; Ganser & Veuger, 2014). Shikano et al. (2009) demonstrated that voting expectations in a proportional set do not depend exclusively on the conversion of votes into seats, but also the anticipation of possible coalitions. Blais et al. (2006) showed that part of the electorate with strong partisan bonds votes strategically to include their preferred party in a future coalition. Herrmann (2013), in turn, provided evidence that the centrist segment of the German electorate votes differently, according to whether they perceived the centre-left or the centre-right coalition to be leading. Identical results were achieved by Hobolt and Karp (2010), and Armstrong and Duch (2010), who have proved that seeking to strengthen a party in government or opposition is a predictor of strategic behaviour.

2.3.3. *Tactical Voting in Second-Order Elections: Problematisation, Goals and Hypotheses*

The prevalence of issues over ideology, and their dominant position in the political debate, complemented the classical spatial theory grounded on Downs' left-right spectrum. Post-materialist concerns came forth, bringing new policy issues to centre stage. Unsurprisingly, new parties and party families rose to prominence, including green parties – belonging to the New Left (Kitschelt, 1988) – and radical right parties – belonging to the New Right (Ignazi, 2003; Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007; Kitschelt, 2007). The electoral fortune of the greens in the 1989 EP election was reflected in the national elections that followed and led to a reassessment of the assumed mainstream party hegemony (Curtice, 1989; Franklin & Rüdig, 1992; Bomberg, 1998:34).

The growth of these new parties induced voters to behave differently in elections of different orders. According to Reif and Schmitt (1980; Reif, 1984), the European stage became increasingly important for voters with strategic motivations. The two authors were the first to classify these EP elections as second-order elections (Schmitt, 2005:651). Their position is justified with four observable arguments: turnout is lower in comparison to national elections; campaigns are dominated by domestic issues and parties use them to seek domestic political advantage; government parties suffer electoral losses as voters desert them for smaller parties – more generally, “big-parties-lose” (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; see also: Norris, 1997:112-114). Another defining characteristic is the perception that less is at stake in second-order elections (Reif, 1984). In the case of EP elections, it can be explained by the fact that there is no directly elected executive body (Van der Eijk et al., 1996:150), and the EP itself is found to be abstract, distant, and complex (Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2015:382). Hence, as Schmitt states, “first-order voters of big parties are assumed to abstain from European elections in greater numbers, or to follow their hearts rather than their heads and vote for competing parties” (1990:171). These assumptions were confirmed by subsequent studies (Ferrara & Weishaupt, 2004; Hix & Marsh, 2011; Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2015; Boomgaarden et al., 2016).

However, to a large extent, vote-switching centred on individual motivations remains relatively untouched (Carrubba & Timpone, 2005:262), and modalities such as signalling⁹ are yet to be furthered. For instance, policy issues seem to play a determinant role in tactical voting. Carrubba and Timpone (2005) showed that many voters shifted to green

⁹ My understanding of ‘signalling’ is that of Franklin et al. (1994) – electors to parties –, not to be confused with the model purposed by Aytimur et al. (2013) – electors to electors.

parties in the 1994 EP election. In particular, individuals further to the left. Interestingly, the effect of policy concerns was significantly higher for green party voters than for all others. Lindstam (2019) focused on the mismatch between a voter's preferred party and a party they perceived as better at dealing with the most important issue. The author found evidence that some voters switched from mainstream to niche parties in the 2014 EP election, for they considered the niche party to be more competent.

The current project will reconduct Lindstam's test using data from 2019. This reassessment of Lindstam's findings is useful for two reasons. First, it analyses eight countries (six more than she did). And second, it studies mainstream-niche shifts related to policy mismatches in a post-crisis scenario. Because the European Union (EU) and its member states operate in a multi-layered fashion, blame-shifting and blame-sharing are not uncommon (Vasilopoulou, 2011:237; Bellucci et al., 2012:471; Magalhães, 2014). Focusing on the 2008 economic crisis, scholars have shown that compliance with the European institutions' rules was a divisive political issue, and national economic voting diminished when the EU was held responsible for the economy (Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012; Bellucci, 2014; Torcal, 2014). Approaching mainstream-niche shifts where economic constraints are no longer at stake offers a new perspective of niche party voting. Hence, I put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: Voters were more likely to switch to niche parties in EP elections when they perceive a mismatch between the mainstream party they prefer and a niche party that is better at dealing with the most important issue.

A widely accepted explanation for strategic desertion in EP elections is offered by Van der Eijk and colleagues. Accordingly, voters either “put in the boot” or “vote with the heart” – i.e. either penalise the government or choose to vote for their favourite party (1996:157).

However, Franklin and colleagues offer an alternative interpretation of mainstream party abandonment. They reason that “[s]ometimes a voter might expressively vote for a small party to show support for the policies espoused by that party in the hopes that the voter's preferred party might be induced to adopt them” (Franklin *et al.*, 1994:552). This signalling behaviour, coined ‘expressive tactical voting’, is similar to that described by Meguid (2005, 2008). While the latter understands signalling as a process from the parties to the electorate – for instance, dismissing an issue to signal its insignificance –, the

former point to a process through which voters signal policy preferences to their most preferred party. In this sense, expressive voting is not merely an act of ‘voting with the heart’, but a tactical, sophisticated arrangement to show support for certain policies, or to communicate the importance of specific issues.

This hypothesis was tested and confirmed by different scholars (Erlingsson & Persson, 2011; Hong, 2015). Hong, on the occasion of the 2009 EP election, showed that a segment of the electorate switched to niche parties when they attached the strongest importance to a niche issue.

This project will take that analysis a step further and study not only niche issues but also the two predominant niche issues in the 2019 EP election: the environment and immigration. Bakker and colleagues (2018) did a similar exercise with data from the 2014 EP election. Even though their study examined whether party-voter incongruence toward immigration explained voters’ shifts to a different party (not necessarily a niche party) in the 2014 EP election, the present research is interested in assessing whether the perceived niche party competence in dealing with immigration explains shifts to niche parties in EP elections.

It will also attempt to complete the signalling cycle and test whether voters who had switched to niche parties in the EP election would return to mainstream parties in a future election. If that is the case, then niche-switching was due to signalling motivations.

Here, it should be explained how this project will approach the ‘returning’ of voters, and how other studies have done it. To measure switchers’ likelihood of voting for a mainstream party in a future election, one would avail of a question assessing prospective voting – i.e. which party voters would cast their ballots for if a hypothetical general election was held the next day. This approach was adopted by Lindstam (2019), on what she calls ‘arena-specific switching’ – isolating voters who claimed they would not vote for the party they switched to in the second-order election.

As such item was not included in the 2019 edition of the European Election Study, this work will make use of Q10, where respondents are asked to evaluate *the probability (0-10) of ever voting for each party*. The wording makes a significant difference on what it is possible to infer from the analysis. Since respondents are not asked to name *one* party, but to indicate the voting probability for *multiple* parties, analyses are likely to be less precise and more ambiguous. Even though this item is not ideal to fully capture signalling propensity, its merits should not be neglected. After all, it will allow for assessing whether

switchers exhibit a higher likelihood of returning to mainstream parties than staying loyal to niche parties.

With this background, I set forth two additional hypotheses:

H2: Voters with signalling motivations are more likely to switch to a niche party in EP elections when they perceive a niche issue to be the most important.

H3: Voters with signalling motivations will have a higher probability of voting for a mainstream party than for a niche party in a future election, even though they perceive a niche issue to be the most important.

The last hypothesis relates to party identification. According to Campbell (1960), political partisanship refers to an individual's psychological attachment to a party, which determines the likelihood that they resist changing sides. Electors with weak partisan ties are "less stable in their partisan positions from year to year" (Campbell, 1960:399), and thus more likely to shift between parties.

Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) confirm Campbell's concept of party identification by demonstrating that, in the USA, 'strong Democrats' had a lower probability of voting for the Republican Party than 'weak Democrats' (3% vs 15%). Similarly, studies have shown that voters with weaker partisan bonds have a higher chance of changing parties between national and EP elections (Franklin et al., 1994; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Bakker et al., 2018).

The present research expects that party identification explains mainstream-loyalism in the EP elections. Put differently, the likelihood that first-order mainstream-voters stay loyal to the same party in the second-order election is higher for individuals who feel close to a mainstream party than for those who do not feel close to any party. Not only that, party identification is expected to explain mainstream-loyalism even when individuals perceive a niche party to be better at handling the most important issue.

Including niche-party competence in the formulation introduces a challenging element to the traditional party identification thesis. If a voter feels close to a mainstream party, one would assume that, excluding instrumental considerations, they would vote for a mainstream party. However, that might not be the case when mainstream-partisans attach a stronger competence to a niche party. What determines their vote? The assumption here is that, regardless of niche-competence, partisan bonds prevail which explains loyalism to mainstream parties (Campbell, 1960; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). Simply put, the goal is

to assess whether partisanship nullifies tactical voting. Therefore, the last hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Voters in EP elections are more likely to remain loyal to the mainstream party they voted for in the last general election when they feel close to a mainstream party, even if they perceive a niche party to be better at solving the most important issue.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Sources

To test all four hypotheses, this research will acquire data for both voters and parties. In the case of voters, data on the individual level is required to study individual motivations. For that reason, this work resorts to the 2019 European Election Study (EES). This post-election study consists of more than 100 questions about the following topics such as party choice at the EU and national level, and party preferences and propensity to support particular parties. The EES 2019 was conducted in all 28 EU member states, and its sample size is of 1000 interviews per country.

Ideally, one would rely on panel data, in which voters report their vote on two occasions, immediately after each election, to study vote recall (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Lindstam, 2019:4). However, because the EES surveys respondents on a single occasion, it is dependent on long-term vote recall – which risks being flawed (Waldahl & Aardal, 2000). Despite this constraint, the analysis will be carried out using the EES.

Because this project revolves around niche and mainstream parties, both parties will be classified according to the criteria stated in sub-chapter 2.3.3. Arguably, the Manifesto Project (MP) is the “dominant actor” in studies where it is necessary to estimate programmatic positions (Dolezal, 2008:66), as shown by the considerable body of literature that has used it to assess parties’ policy positions (Carey & Hix, 2011; Armstrong & Duch, 2010; Lynch & Whitaker, 2013; Abou-Chadi, 2014).

However, as scholars have noted, the MP is not without its flaws (Zulianello, 2013). For example, parties are often missing from the MP, which constitutes a major setback (Kitschelt, 2007:1180; Norris, 2005:30). For this research, a total of 41 parties would be left out were the MP employed.

To keep consistency, the present study will assess policy positions through a content analysis of all parties considered (Mudde, 2007:39). First, the programmes or manifestos every party put forth for the general election prior to the 2019 EP election were consulted. In cases where parties were already campaigning for a general election after the EP election and previous manifestos were unavailable, up-to-date documents were considered. From that point on, parties were segmented according to their nicheness (economic *versus* non-economic issues), and finally their core issue.

Parties' core issues were grasped by looking at the placement of every issue in their programmes, and evaluating which guided the others. To illustrate the procedure, two examples will be provided. First, the German NDP's guideline is that "Germany must remain the land of the Germans", followed by a rejection of a multicultural model of society (NPD Parteiprogramm, 2013:8). From this starting point, the programme asks for the end of the "globalised economy", which should be replaced by "domestic and regional economic cycles", and the reintroduction of the Deutsche Mark to re-establish national sovereignty and protect the interests of Germany (NPD Parteiprogramm, 2013:10). Furthermore, the party has a secondary program dedicated to contesting Islam's space in Europe and Germany. This nationalist approach makes it an anti-immigration party.

A second example is the Swedish Feministiskt initiativ (FI), whose target is to create an "open and equal society, free from discrimination, with policies that put human rights first" (Partiprogram för Feministiskt initiativ 2019-2021:8). Feminism is the cornerstone of its programme – it is at the forefront of every policy position. For instance, the party defends a "feminist economy", arguing that "[f]eminist economists have long criticised the traditional economy for relying on patriarchal assumptions about economic behaviour, and has thus contributed to (re)creating and reinforcing structural inequalities" (Partiprogram för Feministiskt initiativ 2019-2021:10). This party belongs to the special issue category.

Following the discrimination of each niche party, different codes were applied according to their core issues: environment, ethno-territoriality, immigration/nationalism, corruption, Euroscepticism, Brexit, and special issues. Some parties can be interpreted as having two cores (for example, immigration/nationalism and Euroscepticism). Such cases are highlighted in [Appendix 2](#). By process of elimination, mainstream parties are those that do not fit in these categories.

To finish this section, a few comments are added about niche parties whose classification is dubious or has been open to debate in the literature:

- The Ulster Unionist Party (Northern Ireland) is considered a mainstream party, given its support for a unified United Kingdom instead of the Irish unity¹⁰;
- Apart from the British parties Sinn Féin, Plaid Cymru and SNP, the group of ethno-territorial parties will also include the Spanish parties Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, Partido Nacionalista Vasco, Junts per Catalunya, EH Bildu, Compromís, Coalición Canaria and Navarra Suma;
- The French party Génération.s is considered a green party in this study, despite its programme hinting at it being a post-capitalist party – which would make it a special issue party. Even though the party resorts to Bernard Stiegler’s “economy of contribution” (2010:108) to support its economic and environmental policies, it does not go further enough to detach itself from the greens;
- The German and Dutch Pirate parties will also be included in the niche category as special issue parties, focusing on cyberlibertarianism (Hartleb, 2013; Zulianello, 2017). Some scholars claim that these parties are single-issue (Niedermayer, 2010, cited in Otjes, 2019), yet a quick examination of their programmes gives a different account. In reality, both the German and the Dutch Pirate parties address an extensive number of issues, ranging from the economy to healthcare. Following my definition, I will assume that niche parties need not be single-issue, and therefore will include Pirate parties in this typology, even though their core issues are civil rights (privacy) and transparency¹¹.

3.2. Cases

This study focuses on a sample of eight European countries: France, the United Kingdom¹², Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Finland, and Sweden. For a country to be selected, it must comply with the following criteria: 1) It must be a Western European country¹³ – EU member state before 2004; 2) It must have at least one of the

¹⁰ “There is no doubt whatsoever - not only in my mind but that of nearly all rational observers - that Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales are far stronger together than we would ever be apart. The Ulster Unionist Party is best placed to promote the message that a strong, confident and prosperous United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is an integral part, is the best outcome for us all.” (UUP, Westminster Manifesto 2017)

¹¹ According to the Piratenpartij (the Netherlands), “[c]ivil rights are the agreements we have made with each other so we all live well and safely. Piratenpartij sees that other parties protect such rights to a lesser degree” (PPNL, 2017 election programme).

¹² Since the UK is a country with intense ethno-territorial tussles, I will include it in the analysis, even though it fails to meet the double 5% threshold.

¹³ Eastern European countries were discarded, for they exhibit significant differences from Western European nations (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Mair, 1997; Bakke & Sitter, 2005).

following party-family pairs competing in the relevant elections: green & anti-immigration, green & ethno-territorial, anti-immigration & ethno-territorial; 3) Each party of each pair must have received at least 3.5% of the votes in the 2019 EP election¹⁴; 4) A country's voting-age must be of 18 years old – which excludes an otherwise acceptable Austria; 5) A country's voting must not be compulsory – which excludes an otherwise acceptable Belgium; 6) finally, niche and mainstream parties cannot run in the same party list. Criteria 4 to 6 are employed for two reasons: they ensure uniformity among countries and control for the effect of variables of no interest to this study.

3.3. Operationalisation¹⁵

The variable SWITCHERS (*Switchers*) will be used to test H1, H2, and H3. It captures vote-switching between general and EP elections. Respondents are coded as 1 if they voted for a mainstream party in the last general election, but cast their vote for a niche party in the EP election. Conversely, coding 0 corresponds to those who voted for a mainstream party in both elections.

To study the likelihood that green and anti-immigration *Switchers* return to a mainstream party (H3), two variables are employed: GREEN SWITCHERS (*Green Switchers*) and ANTI-IMMIGRATION SWITCHERS (*Anti-immigration Switchers*). The coding is straightforward. For the first variable, respondents are coded as 1 in case they voted for a mainstream party in the last general election but switched to a green party in the 2019 EP election. For the second variable, individuals are attributed the coding 1 if they voted for a mainstream party in the last general election but chose an anti-immigration party in the 2019 EP election. In both cases, 0 is having voted for a mainstream party in both elections.

The fourth dependent variable, LOYALISTS (*Loyalists*), will be used to test H4, where the focus is on individuals who remained loyal to a mainstream party in the EP election. Hence, 1 is whether a respondent voted for a mainstream party in the last general election and stated that they voted for the same party in the EP election. On the other hand, 0 refers to those who chose a mainstream party in the last general election and voted for a party other than that in the EP election.

¹⁴ A threshold of 3.5% excludes parties that did not perform well in the EP election. For example, the Greek Ecologist Greens gathered only 0.87% of the votes, and with no threshold in place Greece would have been included in the analysis. However, with such a slim result, it seems implausible that the party would lend significant support to the hypotheses tested in this project. Finally, 3.5% enables the inclusion of the Scottish SNP, thereby making the analysis of the UK feasible.

¹⁵ A table with specifications about each variable can be consulted in [Appendix 3](#).

To put the hypotheses to the test, this study uses six independent variables. The first, POLICY MISMATCH (*Policy Mismatch*), will be used for H1. Code 1 is assigned if the respondent is close to a mainstream party, but names a niche party as better at solving the most important issue; and 0 if the respondent is close to a mainstream party and considers a mainstream party to be the best at handling the most important issue (Lindstam, 2019).

As for the second independent variable (used in H2), each answer to Q1 (string variable)¹⁶ was converted into a numerical variable coded 1-24. The 24 codes were then split into two categories: niche and mainstream issues, where niche issues are given code 1 and mainstream 0. This final classification corresponds to the variable MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE (*MII*), whose distribution is as follows:

Table 1: *MII* Distribution¹⁷

	Percentage	n
1 / Niche Issues	44,9	2620
0 / Mainstream Issues	55,1	3221
Total	100,0	5841

EES 2019

Two issues, the environment¹⁸ with 726 cases and immigration/refugees¹⁹ (henceforth referred to as ‘immigration’ for the sake of simplicity) with 1018 cases, stand out among all niche issues. Given the prevalence of these two issues, this study will also include models where the environment and immigration are analysed separately, with two independent variables. The first, MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE – ENVIRONMENT (*MII-Environment*), is coded as 1 for the issues environment and animal welfare, and 0 for all others. The second, MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE – IMMIGRATION (*MII-Immigration*) is coded as 1 for immigration/refugees, racism/discrimination, and terrorism, and 0 for all others. By doing so, it should be possible to estimate the effect of both issues on the dependent variable. That is, whether attributing increased importance to one or the other explained vote-switching between elections.

¹⁶ Q1: “What do you think is the most important issue or problem facing [COUNTRY] at the moment?”

¹⁷ Niche issues include: environment, immigration/refugees, racism/discrimination, terrorism, corruption, populism, Gilets Jaunes, media/social media, European Union, Brexit, independence/separatist movements, animal welfare. Mainstream issues include: inequality/material poverty, economy, employment, politicians/political crisis, healthcare, social security/services, education, security/crime, values, demographic problem/ageing population, justice, foreign affairs.

¹⁸ Also considering the single case for animal welfare.

¹⁹ Also considering racism/discrimination and terrorism.

However, because ‘Brexit’ is a predominant issue in the UK and Ireland²⁰, it was necessary to confirm if this had inflated niche issues’ scores in those countries. Indeed, 66.1% of the (valid) British and 20.1% of the Irish respondents claimed Brexit was the most important issue their country was facing. As such, I tested whether excluding ‘Brexit’ from the logistic regression elicited better results. For this purpose, I recoded the three independent variables *MII*, *MII-Environment* and *MII-Immigration* withdrawing the cases where Brexit was reported by voters as being the most important issue. I concluded that including Brexit drastically reduced the significance levels of the variables²¹, and so decided to leave it out of the analysis. From this point on, variables *MII*, *MII-Environment* and *MII-Immigration* all exclude Brexit.

In order to test H4, this study makes use of two other independent variables. The first, MAINSTREAM PROXIMITY (*Mainstream Proximity*) was constructed based on the question asking respondents to name the party they feel close to, and provides a first assessment of whether individuals who felt close to a mainstream party remained loyal to such a party in the 2019 EP election. Code 1 represents voters who feel close to a mainstream party, while 0 represents those who do not feel close to any party. This variable is needed to ensure that the next step is viable, for the second independent variable assumes that voters remained loyal to a mainstream party in the EP election when they felt close to a mainstream party.

Once this step is cleared, the variable of interest becomes MAINSTREAM PROXIMITY AND NICHE COMPETENCE (*Mainstream Proximity and Niche Competence*). This variable explains mainstream-loyalism when a voter close to a mainstream party considers a niche party as better at handling the most important issue. The variable has its roots in two variables: Q25 – which party one feels close to; and Q2 – which party solves the most important issue. 1 refers to individuals who feel close to a mainstream party but name a niche party as better at solving the most important issue, whereas 0 are those who do not feel close to any party and name a niche party as better at solving the most important issue.

²⁰ Apart from these two countries, I reported only one respondent answering “Brexit” to Q1.

²¹ Binary Logistic Regression for *MII*, *MII-Environment* & *MII-Immigration* with Controls: *MII*^{0.257}=1.293; 0.140 $p > 0.05$ | *MII-Environment*^{0.470}=1.600; 0.44 $p < 0.05$ | *MII-Immigration*^{0.115}=1.122; 0.603 $p > 0.05$

The main dependent and independent variables are distributed as follows:

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of the Dependent and Independent Variables

	Percentage	n
<i>Switchers</i>	19.5%	630
	80.5%	2600
<i>Green Switchers</i>	10%	288
	90%	2600
<i>Anti-immigration Switchers</i>	4.9%	108
	95.1%	2077
<i>Loyalists</i>	67.1%	2143
	32.9%	1051
<i>Policy Mismatch</i>	12.9%	278
	87.1%	1879
<i>MII</i>	37.5%	1930
	62.5%	3223
<i>MII-Environment</i>	14.1%	726
	85.9%	4427
<i>MII-Immigration</i>	19.8%	1018
	80.2%	4135
<i>Mainstream Proximity</i>	100%	3232
	100%	1796
<i>Mainstream Proximity and Niche Competence</i>	50.8%	284
	49.2%	275

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Additionally, this study includes a group of variables to control for the influence of extraneous factors and alternative explanations: satisfaction with national democracy, government approval, and trust in the EP, opinion on EU membership. These three indicators allow for dissatisfaction with the EU and punishment of national governments in the EP election to be controlled (Lubbers et al., 2002; Hix & Marsh, 2007; Kitschelt, 2007; Hobolt et al., 2009; De Vries & Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hong, 2015; Bakker, 2018). It is also expected that voters interested in politics will be more likely to change parties, for they should have stronger incentives and resources to vote in a more sophisticated fashion (Inglehart, 1977:67; Carmines & Stimson, 1980:80; De Vries et al., 2011). Party size will also be included in line with the argument that larger parties tend to lose votes in second-order elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk *et al.*, 1996; Ferrara & Weishaupt, 2004; Hix & Marsh, 2007; Ford et al., 2012; Hobolt & Spoon,

2012). With gender, age, and education it is possible to determine sociodemographic differences according to the electoral behaviour of voters (Lindstam, 2019). Finally, this research includes a variable to measure the effect of the family's standard of living²² (van der Brug, 2004).

Binary logistic regressions were conducted to test hypotheses 1, 2, and 4, since the dependent variables are dichotomous (Garson, 2014:15). To assess H3, four paired-samples t-tests were applied, each examining a specific component of the analysis. T-test 1 estimates the difference between the mean probability that *Switchers* would vote for a mainstream party and the mean probability that they would vote for a niche party. T-test 2 estimates the difference between the mean probability that *Switchers* who consider a niche party to be better at dealing with the most important issue (*Switchers-MII*) would vote for a mainstream party and the mean probability that they would vote for a niche party. Because t-test 2 examines the segment of returning voters with signalling motivations, it will make it possible to gauge expressive tactical voting (Franklin et al., 1994; Lindstam, 2019).

As aforementioned, the two main niche issues, the environment and immigration, are associated with green and anti-immigration parties, respectively. As such, t-tests 3 and 4 will tell if voters who switched to green parties (*Green Switchers*) and those who switched to anti-immigration parties (*Anti-immigration Switchers*) would return to a mainstream party or remain loyal to a niche party in future elections. This step is important to understand the behaviour of the two predominant cohorts of niche electors.

Sample size considerations are fundamental. Since this segment of the analysis is interested in a very specific group of voters, the base sample is fairly small²³. For that reason, only pairs with $n > 23$ were considered. A threshold lower than 23 would mean analysing pairs ranging between 5 and 17, which is too low. On the other hand, a threshold higher than 23 – for example, 30 – would reduce the number of countries in t-tests 1 and 2. In fact, the latter would be limited to Germany. Hence, 23 rules out extremely low values while enabling analyses with multiple countries.

Additionally, some countries are missing green and anti-immigration parties²⁴. Consequently, the following countries were omitted from this analysis: t-test 2: Spain, the

²² Ideally, 'income' would be used as a control, but such variable was not incorporated in the 2019 EES.

²³ T-test 1 – Highest n : 198 (UK); lowest n : 26 (Spain) | T-test 2 – Highest n : 53 (Germany); lowest n : Spain (5).

²⁴ For Spain, this variable does not include an ecological party; for the UK and Ireland, there is no anti-immigration party.

Netherlands, Sweden, and Ireland; t-test 3 (*Green Switchers*): Spain, the Netherlands, and Sweden; t-test 4 (*Anti-immigration Switchers*): Spain, Finland, Germany, Sweden, the UK, and Ireland²⁵.

4. Explaining Vote-switching: Policy Mismatch, Signalling Motivations and Party Identification

4.1. Testing the Effect of Policy Mismatch on Vote-switching

This section tests whether perceiving a policy mismatch between a mainstream party one feels close to and a niche party perceived as better at handling the most important issue explains vote-switching to niche parties in EP elections. It begins by examining the correlation between the dependent variable *Switchers* and the independent variable *Policy Mismatch* (Model 1). Following this first assessment, a set of controls is included to evaluate the effect of extraneous factors (Model 2).

As Model 1 of Table 3 shows, individuals who feel close to a mainstream party but name a niche party as the most competent are 7 times more likely to switch to a niche party in EP elections than individuals who feel close to a mainstream party and regard a mainstream party as better at solving the most important issue.

Even when including controls (Model 2), the relationship between the two variables remains significant, positive, and robust. Albeit slightly weaker, the results tell that the odds for switching to a niche party in EP elections are 6.377 times higher for individuals who perceive a policy mismatch than for those who do not perceive a mismatch. H1 is thus corroborated. These findings are consistent with those of Lindstam (2019), who showed that switching to niche parties is more likely among individuals who perceive a mismatch between party and policy preferences.

The model also predicts additional explanations of vote-switching in EP elections. Individuals are more likely to shift parties when they understand EU membership as a ‘bad thing’ and distrust the EP. These results back up scholars’ conclusion that voters are more prone to change parties when they do not feel favourable towards the EU (Hix & Marsh, 2007; Hobolt et al., 2009; Hong, 2015). Additionally, the data confirms that larger parties lose votes to smaller parties in EP elections (Reif & Schmitt’s, 1980; Hix & Marsh,

²⁵ Raw data for each dispersion graph can be found in [Appendixes 4, 5, 6 and 7](#).

2007; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). In this case, a vote-drain from mainstream to niche parties. Voters interested in politics are also more likely to switch parties than those who are not (Inglehart, 1977:67; Carmines & Stimson, 1980:80; De Vries et al., 2011). In the same vein, being a woman is observed to be a predictor of niche-switching.

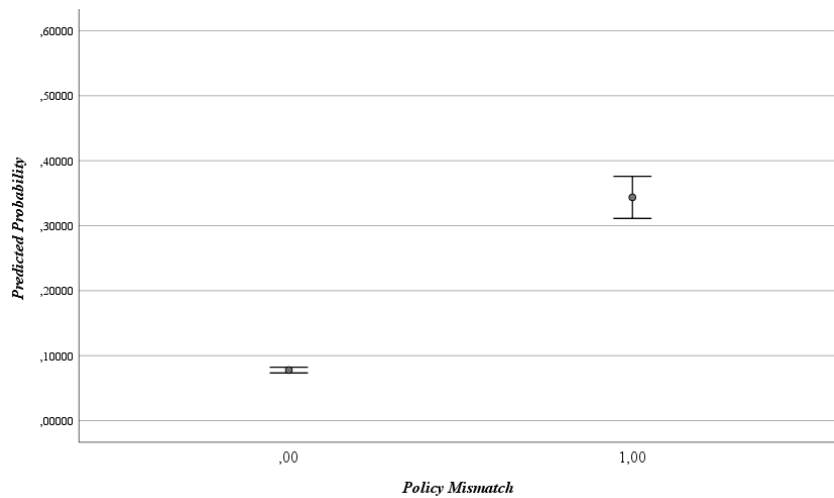
As for the predicted probability (constructed based on Model 2), Figure 1 demonstrates that the likelihood of feeling close to a mainstream party but naming a niche party as better at solving the most important issue explains 35% of vote-switching in EP elections.

Table 3: H1 – Binary Logistic Regression for *Policy Mismatch*. Dependent Variable: *Switchers* (1=Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a niche party in the EP election)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>
<i>Policy Mismatch (1=Mismatch)</i>	7.160	1.968 (.225)	.000	6.377	1.853 (.253)	.000
<i>Satisfaction with Nat. Democracy (1=Not at all satisfied; 4=Very satisfied)</i>				1.030	.029 (.139)	.834
<i>Government Approval (1=Approves)</i>				.825	-.192 (.248)	.438
<i>Trust in the EP (1= No, not really; 5=Yes, Totally)</i>				.769	-.263 (.114)	.021
<i>EU Membership (1=A good thing)</i>				.284	-1.258 (.278)	.000
<i>Interest in Politics (1=Not at all; 4=Very)</i>				1.349	.299 (.145)	.039
<i>Party Size</i>				1.027	.025 (.009)	.004
<i>Gender (1=Male)</i>				.589	-.530 (.218)	.015
<i>Age</i>				.989	-.011 (.007)	.099
<i>Education</i>				.994	-.006 (.013)	.658
<i>Family's Standard of Living (1=Poor family; 7=Rich family)</i>				1.063	.061 (.093)	.510
Constant	.083	-2.483	.000	.204	-1.589 (.814)	.051
Nagelkerke R ²		0.109			0.256	
N		1229			1229	

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Figure 1: Predicted Probability that Mainstream-voters who Perceive a Policy Mismatch Switch to Niche Parties in EP Elections



4.2. Testing Expressive Tactical Voting: Signalling the Importance of Niche Issues to Mainstream Parties

4.2.1. *Switching to Signal the Importance of the Environment and Immigration*

The present segment constitutes the first step of the expressive tactical voting hypothesis. This first stage estimates the likelihood that perceiving niche issues as the most important, with emphasis on the environment and immigration, explains shifts to niche parties in EP elections. Models 1 and 2 of Table 4 are correlations between the dependent variable *Switchers* and *MII* without and with controls, respectively. Models 3 and 4 estimate the relationship between *MII-Environment* and *MII-Immigration* without and with controls, respectively. Finally, Model 5 tests *MII*, *MII-Environment* and *MII-Immigration* simultaneously with controls. Model 1, *Switchers* and *MII* are strongly and positively correlated. The results indicate that voters who perceive a niche issue to be the most important are 42.7% more likely to switch to a niche party in EP elections than those who consider a mainstream issue the most important. When controlling for third factors (Model 2), the percentage increases to 49.4%. These findings are aligned with those of Hong (2015), who found that attaching importance to niche issues explained shifts to niche parties in the 2009 EP election.

The present study attempts at going beyond Hong's assessment of a general account of issue voting in the EP election. Because the environment and immigration were the prominent niche issues, Models 3 and 4 are devoted to studying them in detail. Model 3 shows that voters concerned with immigration (*MII-Immigration*) are 75.7% more likely

to switch to niche parties in EP elections than those worried about mainstream issues. Similarly, the likelihood of switching to niche parties is 67.1% higher for voters with a strong preference toward environmental issues (*MII-Environment*) than for those who consider a mainstream issue to be the most important.

For Model 4, *MII-Environment* and *MII-Immigration* are put to the test together with controls. The two variables are the two strongest predictors. Those who consider the environment the most important issue are twice as likely to switch to a niche party in EP elections than those who regard a mainstream issue as the most important. As for individuals whose most important issue is immigration, the likelihood of switching to a niche party is 67.7%.

Model 5 finds that *MII*, *MII-Environment*, and *MII-Immigration* are significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variable *Switchers*. However, the explanatory power is higher for *MII-Environment* and *MII-Immigration* than for *MII*. Specifically, the odds of switching to a niche party in EP elections are almost 5.3 times greater for individuals whose main concern is the environment, and almost 4.36 times larger for those worried about immigration, when compared to individuals who view a mainstream issue as the most important. H2 is thus confirmed.

Controls are consistent in the three models in which they were employed. In line with the existing literature, disapproving of the government's record, not trusting the EP, and opposing EU membership explains vote-switching to niche parties in EP elections (Hix & Marsh, 2007; Hong, 2015). Finally, being a woman and of a younger age increases the likelihood of voting for a niche party in the said election, as does having voted for a larger party in the last general election (Reif & Schmitt, 1980).

Figures 2, 3 and 4 (based on Model 5) show the predicted probabilities that each independent variable explains the dependent variable *Switchers*. Accordingly, considering a niche issue the most important (Figure 2) explains 25% of the shifts to niche parties in EP elections. By the same token, finding the environment the most important issue (Figure 3) explains 24% of vote-switching to niche parties. Lastly, perceiving immigration to be the most important issue (Figure 4) explains 30% of shifts to niche parties.

Table 4: H2 – Binary Logistic Regression for *Issue, Issue Environment Excluding Brexit & Issue Immigration Excluding Brexit*. Dependent Variable: *Switchers* (1=Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a niche party in the EP election)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>
<i>MII (1=Niche issues)</i>	1.428	.357 (.137)	.009	1.494	.402 (.144)	.005							.366	-1.005 (.480)	.036
<i>MII-Environment (1=Environment & animal welfare)</i>							1.671	.514 (.183)	.005	2.042	.714 (.193)	.000	5.321	1.672 (.504)	.001
<i>MII-Immigration (1=Immigration/refugees, racism/discrimination & terrorism)</i>							1.757	.563 (.176)	.001	1.677	.517 (.188)	.006	4.362	1.473 (.501)	.003
<i>Satisfaction with Nat. Democracy (1=Not at all satisfied; 4=Very satisfied)</i>				.925	-.078 (.097)	.417				.912	-.092 (.098)	.345	.911	-.094 (.099)	.342
<i>Government Approval (1=Approves)</i>				.522	-.651 (.167)	.000				.520	-.654 (.168)	.000	1.927	.656 (.168)	.000
<i>Trust in the EP (1= No, not really; 5=Yes, Totally)</i>				.788	-.239 (.076)	.002				.790	-.236 (.077)	.002	.793	-.232 (.077)	.003
<i>EU Membership (1=A good thing)</i>				.642	-.443 (.202)	.028				.630	-.462 (.204)	.024	1.610	.476 (.205)	.020
<i>Interest in Politics (1=Not at all; 4=Very)</i>				1.089	.086 (.092)	.353				1.087	.084 (.093)	.367	1.080	.077 (.093)	.409
<i>Party Size</i>				1.018	.018 (.007)	.010				1.018	.018 (.007)	.009	1.018	.018 (.007)	.008
<i>Gender (1=Male)</i>				.613	-.489 (.143)	.001				.612	-.491 (.144)	.001	1.632	.490 (.144)	.001
<i>Age</i>				.986	-.014 (.005)	.002				.986	-.014 (.005)	.002	.986	-.014 (.005)	.001
<i>Education</i>				1.010	.010 (.007)	.170				1.011	.011 (.007)	.128	1.012	.012 (.007)	.096
<i>Family's Standard of Living (1=Poor family; 7=Rich family)</i>				.995	-.005 (.061)	.935				.997	-.003 (.061)	.959	1.002	.002 (.061)	.971
Constant	.192	-1.650 (.072)	.000	1.035	.034 (.497)	.945	.184	-1.693 (.070)	.000	1.002	.002 (.498)	.996	.206	-1.580 (.598)	.008
Nagelkerke R ²		0.007			0.113			0.015			0.123			0.128	
N		1581			1581			1581			1581			1581	

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Figure 2: Predicted Probability that Voters who Consider a Niche Issue the Most Important Switch to Niche Parties in EP Elections

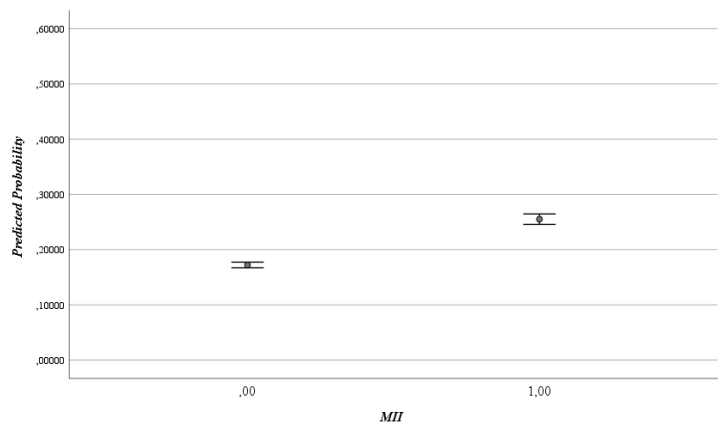


Figure 3: Predicted Probability that Voters who Consider the Environment the Most Important Issue Switch to Niche Parties in EP Elections

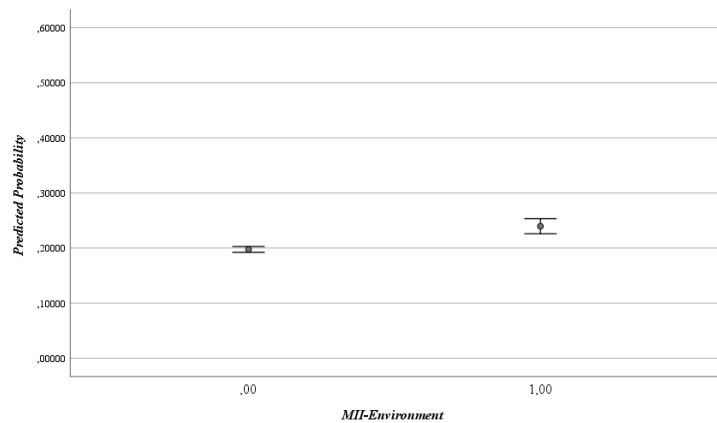
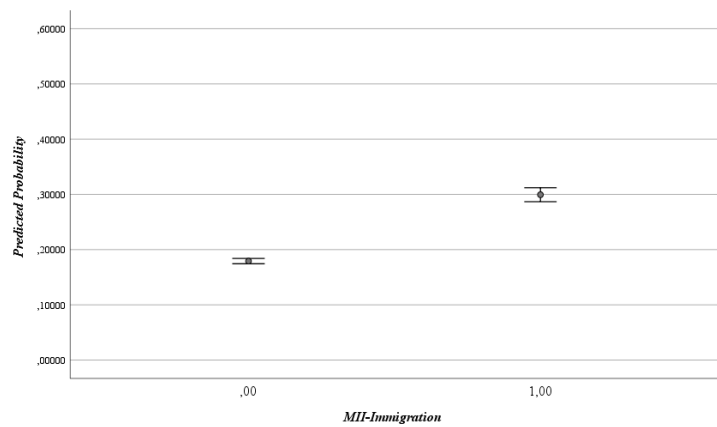


Figure 4: Predicted Probability that Voters who Consider Immigration the Most Important Issue Switch to Niche Parties in EP Elections



4.2.2. *Testing the Probability that Switchers Return to a Mainstream Party*

While the previous section showed that mainstream voters who perceive a niche issue to be the most important tend to switch to niche parties in EP elections, this segment attempts to examine whether these voters would return to a mainstream party in a future election (confirming the expressive tactical voting hypothesis – H3).

T-test 1 (Figure 5) examines the difference between the mean probability that *Switchers* would return to a mainstream party and the mean probability that they would remain loyal to a niche party. If the difference is positive, then the voter exhibits a higher probability of voting for a mainstream party. If the difference is negative, then they would stay loyal a niche party.

Results for t-test 1 (Figure 5) show that the significant and negative mainstream-niche pairs outnumber the significant and positive ones (25 *versus* 23). This indicates that *Switchers* are more likely to remain loyal to a niche party than to return to a mainstream party in future elections. T-test 1 also shows that except for four cases, direct comparisons between mainstream and green parties lend the latter a higher probability of receiving a vote in a future endeavour.

As for other niche parties, an interesting case is that of the German *Switchers*, who would rather vote for any mainstream party than for the anti-immigration AfD. Additionally, with three significant matchups, the Netherlands is the only country where *Switchers* exhibit a higher probability of voting for an anti-immigration party (FvD) than for a mainstream one.

As for t-test 2, Figure 6 presents the difference between the mean probability that *Switchers-MII* would return to a mainstream party and the mean probability that they would remain loyal to a niche party. The results should be observed cautiously, as the narrowing of the sample further reduces the number of cases – the *n* is lower than 30 for all countries but Germany.

Once more, niche parties prevail over their mainstream equivalents by a thin margin: nine positive pairs *versus* 10 negative pairs. Looking at party families, nine out of those 10 negative pairs refer to cases where green parties overtake their mainstream counterparts. Put differently, *Switchers-MII* intend to remain loyal to green parties in future elections. The results are particularly salient in France and Germany: in the former, Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV) leads over every mainstream party; in the latter, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (GRU) takes the advantage in each combination. Conversely,

Switchers-MII show a higher probability of returning to a mainstream party when compared to any niche party other than the greens.

H3 does not hold convincingly, as results of t-tests 1 and 2 are twofold. On the one hand, they show that *Switchers* and *Switchers-MII* can be expected to remain loyal to a mainstream party when compared to anti-immigration, pirate, special issue, and ethno-territorial parties. On the other hand, these voters have a higher probability of voting for a green party when compared to a mainstream one.

However, it should be noted that there might have been an inflation of niche-party prospective voters, since the data for the EES 2019 was collected right after the 2019 EP election – where *Switchers* had just voted for niche parties. This is why panel studies, where individuals are followed over the years and surveyed after each election, are preferred when studying voting behaviour.

Figure 5: H3 – Paired-Samples T-Test 1

Difference Between the Mean Probability of Voting for a Mainstream Party and the Mean Probability of Voting for a Niche Party: *Switchers*

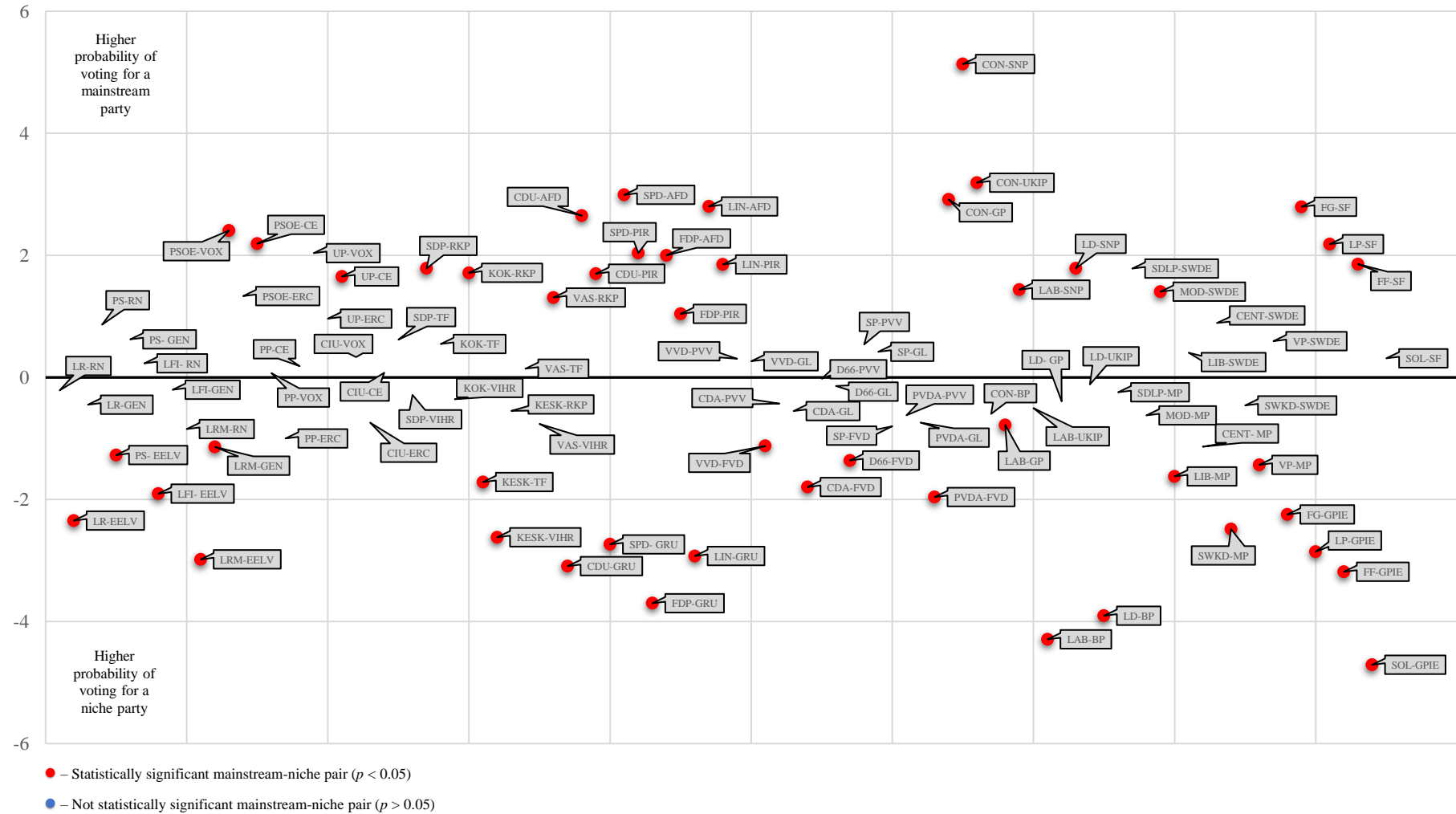
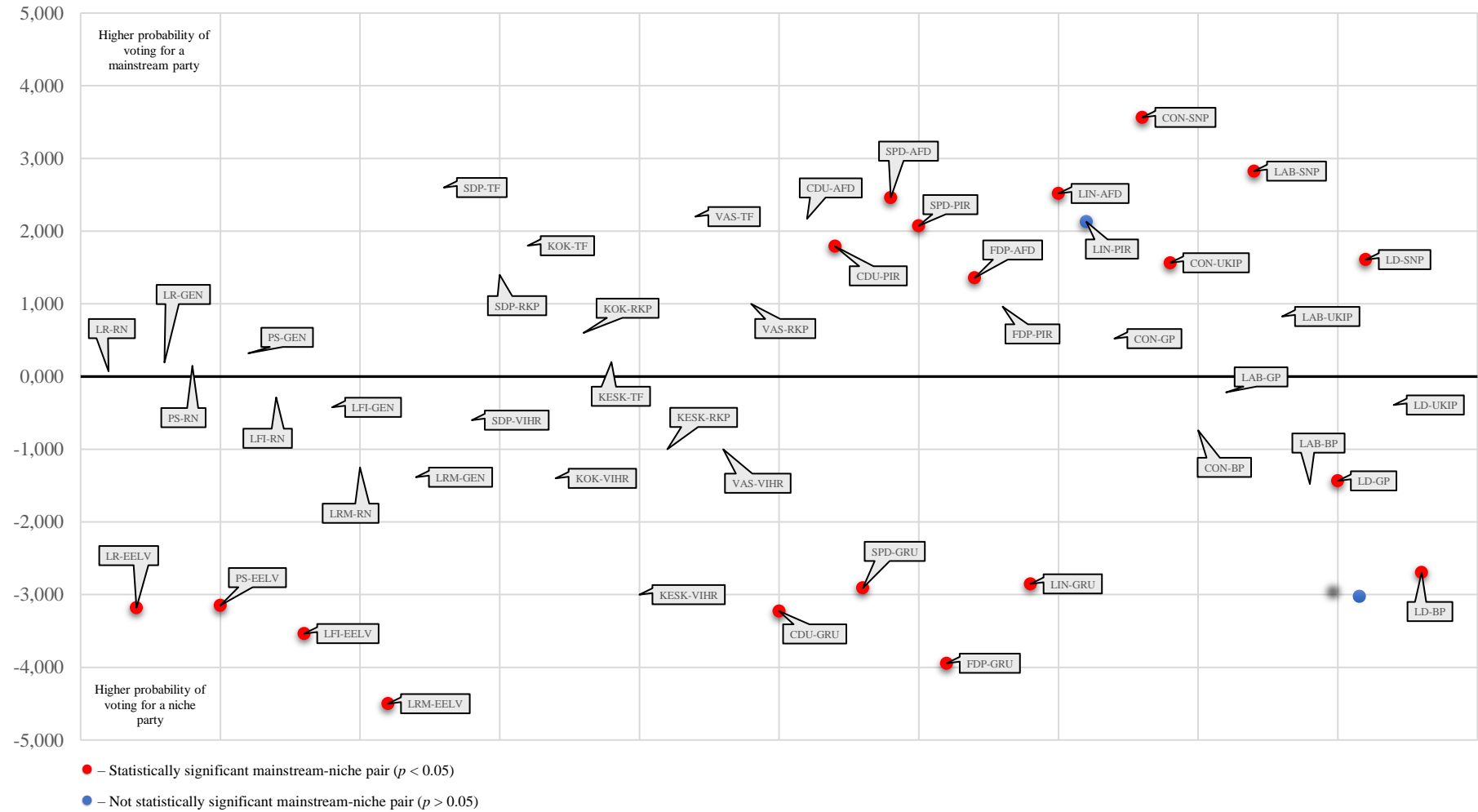


Figure 6: H3 – Paired-Samples T-Test 2

Difference Between the Mean Probability of Voting for a Mainstream Party and the Mean Probability of Voting for a Niche Party: *Switchers-MII*



Since the environment and immigration were the prevalent niche issues in the 2019 EP election, it is important to study whether mainstream-voters who switched to green parties and anti-immigration parties in the said election would return to a mainstream party in the future. This is an important assessment, as it allows for a detailed understanding of the two prominent groups of niche voters.

T-test 3 (Figure 7) examines the difference between the mean probability that *Green Switchers* would return to a mainstream party and the mean probability that they would remain loyal to a niche party in future elections. The results show that there are no statistically significant cases of *Green Switchers* claiming they would rather vote for a mainstream party when compared to a green one. Therefore, individuals who had voted for a mainstream party in the last general election but switched to a green party in the EP election have a higher probability of remaining loyal to the new party family in future elections.

T-test 4 (Figure 8) ascertains the difference between the mean probability that *Anti-immigration Switchers* would return to a mainstream party and the mean probability that they would stay loyal to a niche party in the future. Strikingly, the sample is shorter than that for *Green Switchers*. However, the results are similar. Individuals who had voted for a mainstream party in the last general election but shifted to an anti-immigration party in the EP election have a statistically significant probability of staying loyal to the new party family. Of all the 13 negative and statistically significant pairs, 12 favour an anti-immigration party over a mainstream one. And again, there are no cases of *Anti-immigration Switchers* depositing a higher voting probability on a mainstream party over an anti-immigration counterpart.

Figure 7: H3 – Paired-Samples T-Test 3

Difference Between the Mean Probability of Voting for a Mainstream Party and the Mean Probability of Voting for a Niche Party: *Green Switchers*

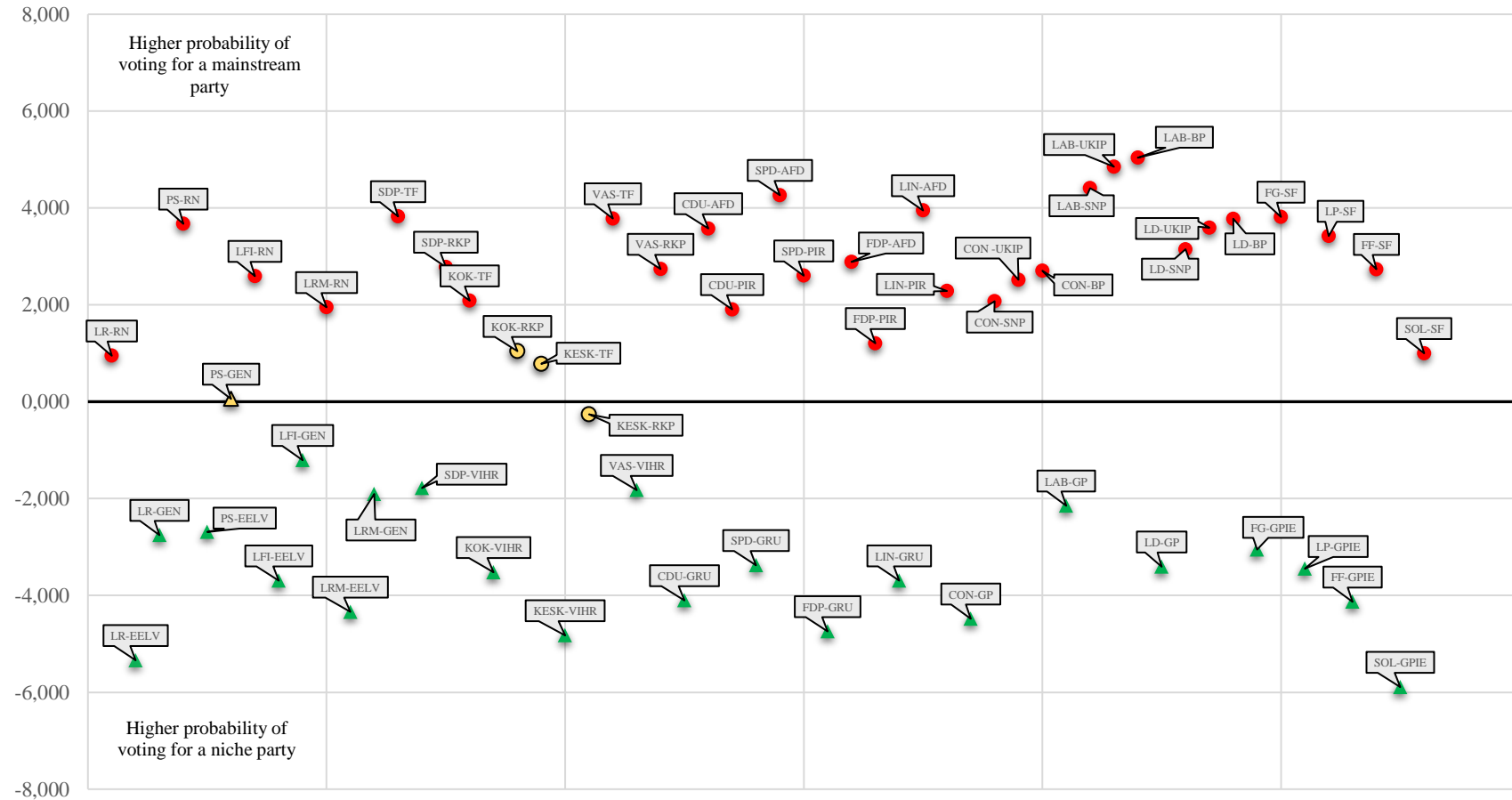
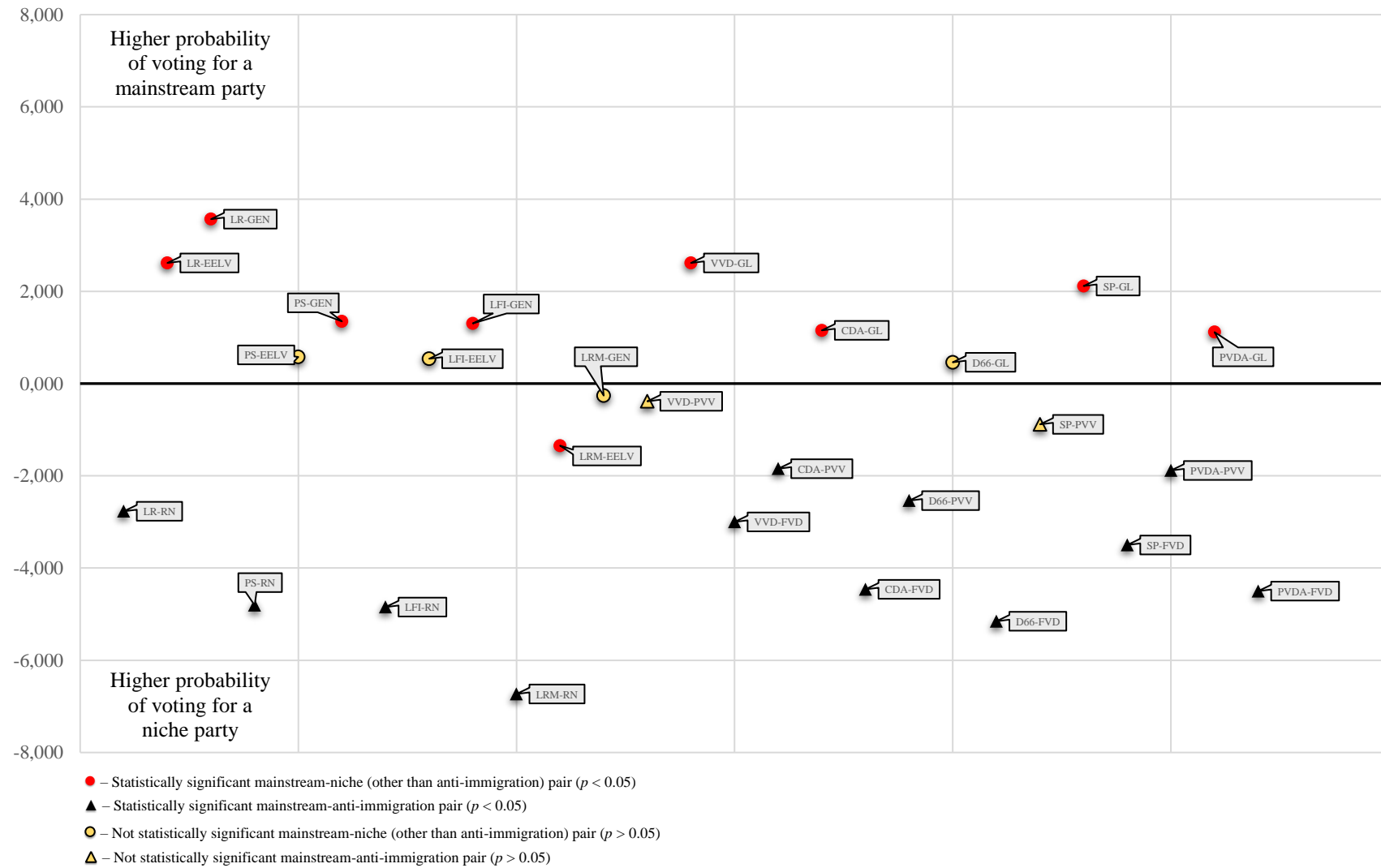


Figure 8: H3 – Paired-Samples T-Test 4

Difference Between the Mean Probability of Voting for a Mainstream Party and the Mean Probability of Voting for a Niche Party: *Anti-immigration Switchers*



4.3. Explaining Mainstream Loyalism through Party Identification

This last section is interested in assessing whether voters close to a mainstream party remain loyal to a mainstream party in EP elections despite considering a niche party as the better at solving the most important issue.

Models 1 and 2 of Table 5 show that there is a positive and strong relationship between *Loyalists* and *Mainstream Proximity*. Feeling close to a mainstream party is the prime explanation of mainstream-loyalism in the EP elections, considering the variables included in Model 2.

For Model 3 *Mainstream Proximity* was replaced by *Mainstream Proximity* and *Niche Competence*. The result suggests that voters are not significantly likely to remain loyal to a mainstream party in EP elections when they feel close to a mainstream party but regard a niche party as better at solving the most important issue. However, the small sample size ($n=169$) should be taken into account when examining this result. A larger sample size could have lent a higher level of significance.

Model 4 presents a more robust analysis of H4. It shows that when controlled for extraneous factors, *Mainstream Proximity* and *Niche Competence* still lacks explanatory power. Conversely, the results estimate a higher likelihood for voters who trust the EP to cast their votes for the same mainstream party in both the last general election and EP elections. Specifically, there is a 66.3% likelihood that those electors remain loyal to a mainstream party in EP elections. Thus, the model does not suffice to confirm H4, showing, alternatively, that a different predictor explains mainstream-loyalty.

Table 5: H4 – Binary Logistic Regression for *Mainstream Proximity*, and *Mainstream Proximity and Niche Competence*. Dependent variable: *Loyalists* (1=Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for the same party in the EP election)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	<i>p</i>
<i>Mainstream Proximity (1=Feels close to a mainstream party)</i>	3.627	1.288 (.123)	.000	3.651	1.295 (.132)	.000						
<i>Mainstream Proximity and Niche Competence (1=Feels close to a mainstream party & names a niche party as better at solving the most important issue)</i>							1.748	.559 (.247)	.107	1.177	.163 (.408)	.690
<i>Satisfaction with Nat. Democracy (1=Not at all satisfied; 4=Very satisfied)</i>				.926	-.077 (.078)	.326				.948	-.053 (.269)	.844
<i>Government Approval (1=Approves)</i>				1.344	.296 (.130)	.023				1.692	.526 (.423)	.214
<i>Trust in the EP (1= No, not really; 5=Yes, Totally)</i>				1.193	.177 (.062)	.004				1.648	.500 (.222)	.025
<i>EU Membership (1=A good thing)</i>				2.161	.771 (.165)	.000				1.830	.604 (.542)	.265
<i>Interest in Politics (1=Not at all; 4=Very)</i>				.814	-.206 (.074)	.005				.970	-.030 (.236)	.899
<i>Party Size</i>				.986	-.014 (.005)	.007				.977	-.023 (.016)	.134
<i>Gender (1=Male)</i>				1.397	.334 (.114)	.003				1.108	.102 (.369)	.782
<i>Age</i>				1.011	.011 (.003)	.002				1.014	.013 (.012)	.245
<i>Education</i>				1.003	.003 (.006)	.649				.975	-.025 (.024)	.287
<i>Family's Standard of Living (1=Poor family; 7=Rich family)</i>				.956	-.045 (.048)	.349				.805	-.218 (.156)	.163
Constant				.465	-.766 (.417)	.066	.500	-.693 (.250)	.006	.398	-.921 (1.315)	.484
Nagelkerke R ²		0.055			0.155			0.275			0.275	
N		1976			1976			169			169	

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5. Conclusion

The objectives of this project were manifold. First, it aimed at examining whether perceiving a policy mismatch between a mainstream party one feels close to and a niche party regarded as better at solving the most important issue explains vote-switching from mainstream to niche parties in EP elections. Additionally, it set itself the task of exploring the existence of expressive tactical voters (Franklin et al., 1994). Because expressive tactical voters have signalling motivations, paired-samples t-tests were applied to assess whether this segment of the electorate would return to mainstream parties. The last hypothesis concerned party identification and party competence. The goal here was to understand if voters remain loyal to mainstream parties in EP elections when they feel close to a mainstream party, but consider a niche party to be better at solving the most important issue.

Overall, the results lent evidence to suggest that policy mismatches, that is, being close to a mainstream party but viewing a niche party as better at dealing with the most important issue, explains shifts to niche parties in EP elections. Importantly, mainstream-voters perceiving a mismatch between their most preferred mainstream party and a niche party they believe is better at solving the most important issue are 6.377 times more likely to switch to a niche party than those who do not perceive a mismatch.

In the same vein, individuals preoccupied with niche issues – specifically, the environment and immigration – show a higher likelihood of moving to a niche party in EP elections than those worried about a mainstream issue. Evidence for returning voters is mixed. On the one hand, *Switchers* and *Switchers* who perceive a niche issue to be the most important can be expected to remain loyal to a mainstream party when compared to anti-immigration, pirate, special issue, and ethno-territorial parties. On the other hand, these voters have a higher probability of voting for a green party (and anti-immigration party in the case of the Netherlands) when compared to a mainstream one.

Additionally, this study found no evidence that voters who feel close to a mainstream party but assign more competence to a niche one are more likely to remain loyal to the mainstream side of the field in EP elections.

Future research could incorporate more countries and explore niche issues further. For instance, including corruption and independence movements in the statistical models would offer a more robust assessment of voters' relationships with niche parties. Segmenting mainstream parties into social democratic, Christian democratic, socialist,

etc., would also provide a more detailed account of electors' behaviour in second-order elections, as researchers would be able to assess signalling motivations for supporters of different mainstream parties. For example, would voters of social democratic parties have a higher likelihood of switching to a green party than those of Christian democratic parties (when both considered the environment the most important issue)?

Changes in operationalisation could also be done. For example, examining whether the propensity to shift to niche parties increases as the time between domestic and EP contests grows. For example, whereas Kousser (2004) finds that voters are most likely to switch to major parties when some time has passed between national and EP elections, Hobolt and Spoon (2012) assert that the election cycle does not have any statistically significant effect.

There is also room for theoretical improvements. Crucially, the current literature is lacking a convincing and consensual definition of niche party – often confused with challenger and outsider party. Meguid's proposal is widely respected, but it is not without its flaws. The definition put forward in this study maintained that the dismissal of a party's core issue severely damages the prospect of reaching an acceptable definition of a niche party. This is particularly relevant since niche parties in Western European democracies, as discussed earlier, have released extremely encompassing policy programmes, reaching a wide range of topics. That is to say, the rigid mainstream-niche dichotomy, insistently grounded on economic considerations, should be revisited.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Parties Analysed

Country	Category	Mainstream Parties	Niche Parties
France	Last general election (first-order)	-Extrême Gauche -Parti Communiste -La France Insoumise -Parti Socialiste -Parti Radical de Gauche -La République en Marche MoDem -Union des Démocrates et Indépendants -Les Républicains	-Europe Ecologie Les Verts -Front National
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-La France Insoumise -République en Marche et MoDem -Parti Socialiste et de Place Publique -Lutte Ouvrière -Parti Communiste Français -Républicains	-Patriote et Gilets Jaunes -Urgence Écologie -Debout La France -Frexit -Génération.s et Dème-Diem 25 -Rassemblement National -Alliance Jaune -Europe Ecologie
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-Les Républicains -Parti Socialiste -France Insoumise -La République en Marche	-Rassemblement National -Europe Écologie - Les Verts -Génération.s
	Party you feel close to	-Les Républicains -Parti Socialiste -France Insoumise -La République en Marche -Lutte Ouvrière -Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste -Parti Communiste -Place Publique -Nouvelle Donne -MoDem -Union des Démocrates et Indépendants	-Rassemblement National -Europe Ecologie - Les Verts -Génération.s -Debout la France -Les Patriotes -Union Populaire Républicaine
United Kingdom	Last general election (first-order)	-Conservative Party -Labour Party -Liberal Democrats -Ulster Unionist Party -Social Democratic & Labour Party	-Green Party -Scottish National Party -United Kingdom Independent Party -Plaid Cymru -Sinn Féin
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-Conservative Party -Labour Party -Liberal Democrats -Ulster Unionist Party -Social Democratic & Labour Party	-Green Party -Scottish National Party -United Kingdom Independent Party -The Brexit Party -Change UK – The Independent Group -Plaid Cymru -Sinn Féin
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-Conservative Party -Labour Party -Liberal Democrats	-Green Party -Scottish National Party -United Kingdom Independent Party -The Brexit Party

			-Change UK – The Independent Group
	Party you feel close to	-Conservative Party -Labour Party -Liberal Democrats	-Green Party -Scottish National Party -United Kingdom Independent Party -The Brexit Party
Spain	Last general election (first-order)	-Partido Socialista Obrero Español -Partido Popular -Ciudadanos -Unidas Podemos	-VOX -Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya -Partido Nacionalista Vasco -Junts per Catalunya -EH Bildu -Compromís -Partido Animalista contra el Maltrato Animal -Coalición Canaria -Navarra Suma
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-Partido Socialista Obrero Español -Partido Popular -Unidas Podemos -Ciudadanos	-VOX -Ahora Repúblicas -Coalición por una Europa Solidaria -Junts -Compromís per Europa -Partido Animalista contra el Maltrato Animal
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-Partido Socialista Obrero Español -Partido Popular -Unidas Podemos -Ciudadanos	-VOX -Ahora Repúblicas -Compromís per Europa
	Party you feel close to	-Partido Socialista Obrero Español -Partido Popular -Ciudadanos -Podemos -Izquierda Unida	-VOX -Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya -Partido Nacionalista Vasco -Junts per Catalunya -EH Bildu -Compromís -Partido Animalista contra el Maltrato Animal -Coalición Canaria -Unión del Pueblo Navarro
Finland	Last general election (first-order)	-Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue -Kansallinen Kokoomus -Suomen Keskusta -Vasemmistoliitto -Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit -Sininen tulevaisuus -Liberaalipuolue -Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue -Kommunistinen Työväenpuolue	-Perussuomalaiset -Vihreä liitto -Suomen ruotsalainen kansanpuolue -Piraattipuolue -Kansalaispuolue -Feministinen puolue -Eläinoikeuspuolue -Itsenäisyyspuolue -Suomen Kansa Ensin
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue -Kansallinen Kokoomus -Suomen Keskusta -Vasemmistoliitto -Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit	-Perussuomalaiset -Vihreä liitto -Suomen ruotsalainen kansanpuolue

		-Sininen tulevaisuus	
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue -Kansallinen Kokoomus -Suomen Keskusta -Vasemmistoliitto	-Perussuomalaiset -Vihreä liitto -Suomen kansanpuolue ruotsalainen
	Party you feel close to	-Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue -Kansallinen Kokoomus -Suomen Keskusta -Vasemmistoliitto -Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit	-Perussuomalaiset -Vihreä Liitto -Suomen kansanpuolue ruotsalainen
The Netherlands	Last general election (first-order)	-VVD -CDA -D66 -SP -PvdA -Christen Unie -DENK	-PVV -GroenLinks -SGP -Partij voor de Dieren -50Plus -Forum voor Democratie
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-VVD -CDA -D66 -SP -PvdA -DENK -Volt Nederland	-PVV -GroenLinks -Partij voor de Dieren -50Plus -Forum voor Democratie -De Groenen -Piratenpartij -Jezus Leeft
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-VVD -CDA -D66 -SP -PvdA -Christen Unie	-PVV -GroenLinks -Forum voor Democratie
	Party you feel close to	-VVD -CDA -D66 -SP -PvdA -Christen Unie -DENK	-PVV -GroenLinks -SGP -Partij voor de Dieren -50Plus -Forum voor Democratie
Germany	Last general election (first-order)	-CDU/CSU -SPD -FDP -Die Linke	-Die Grünen -AfD -Piraten -NPD -Die Republikaner
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-CDU/CSU -SPD -Die Linke -FDP -Familien-Partei	-Die Grüne -Piraten -AfD -NPD -ÖDP -Tierschutzpartei
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-CDU/CSU -SPD -FDP -Die Linke	-Die Grüne -AfD -Piraten
	Party you feel close to	-CDU/CSU -SPD -Die Linke -FDP	-Die Grünen -Piraten -AfD

Sweden	Last general election (first-order)	-Vänsterpartiet -Socialdemokraterna -Centerpartiet -Liberalerna -Moderaterna -Kristdemokraterna	-Miljöpartiet de gröna -Sverigedemokraterna -Feministiskt Initiativ
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-Vänsterpartiet -Socialdemokraterna -Centerpartiet -Liberalerna -Moderaterna -Kristdemokraterna	-Miljöpartiet de gröna -Sverigedemokraterna -Feministiskt Initiativ
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-Socialdemokraterna -Moderaterna -Liberalerna -Centerpartiet -Kristdemokraterna -Vänsterpartiet	-Miljöpartiet de gröna -Sverigedemokraterna -Feministiskt Initiativ
	Party you feel close to	-Vänsterpartiet -Socialdemokraterna -Centerpartiet -Liberalerna -Moderaterna -Kristdemokraterna	-Miljöpartiet de gröna -Sverigedemokraterna -Feministiskt Initiativ
Ireland	Last general election (first-order)	-Fine Gael -Labour Party -Fianna Fáil -Socialist Party -Anti Austerity Alliance/Solidarity -Social Democrats	-Green Party -Sinn Féin
	European Parliament election (second-order)	-Fianna Fáil -Fine Gael -Labour Party -Solidarity -Social Democrats	-Green Party -Sinn Féin
	Party best at solving the most important issue	-Fine Gael -Labour Party -Fianna Fáil -Solidarity	-Green Party -Sinn Féin
	Party you feel close to	-Fianna Fáil -Fine Gael -Labour Party -Solidarity -Social Democrats	-Green Party -Sinn Féin

Appendix 2: Niche Parties and Respective Issues

Country	Niche Party	Env	Et	Im/N	C	Eu	B	Sp
Germany	Die Grünen	X						
	AfD					X ²		
	Piraten							X
	NPD			X ¹				
	Die Republikaner			X				
	ÖDP	X						
Finland	Tierschutzpartei	X						
	Perus			X				
	VIHR	X						
	RKP		X					
	PIR							X
	KP					X		
	FP							X
	EOP	X						
	IPU					X		
France	SKE			X				
	EELV	X						
	FN (RN)			X ¹				
	Génération.s	X						
	Les Patriotes/G.Jaunes					X		
	U.Écologie	X						
	Frexit/UPR					X		
	A.Jaune							X
The Netherlands	DLF					X ²		
	PVV			X ¹				
	GroenLinks	X						
	SGP							X
	De Groenen	X						
	PvD	X						
	50Plus							X
	FvD			X ¹				
	Piratenpartij							X
Spain	Jezus Leeft							X
	VOX			X ³				
	ERC ⁴		X					
	PNV ⁵		X					
	JPC		X					
	EHB ⁴		X					
	Compromís		X					
	PACMA	X						
	C.Canaria ⁵		X					
	Navarra Suma		X					
United Kingdom	UPN		X					
	Green Party	X						
	SNP		X					
	UKIP						X	
	Sinn Féin ⁶		X					
	Plaid Cymru		X					
	Brexit Party						X	
Sweden	CUK						X	
	Miljöpartiet de gröna	X						
	Sverigedemokraterna			X				
Ireland	Feministiskt Initiativ							X
	Green Party	X						
Ireland	Sinn Féin ⁶		X					

Abbreviations

<i>Env</i>	Environment
<i>Et</i>	Ethno-territoriality
<i>Im/N</i>	Immigration/Nationalism
<i>Eu</i>	Euroscepticism
<i>C</i>	Corruption
<i>B</i>	Brexit
<i>Sp</i>	Special Issues

¹	Programmatically, the party may also be included in the group of Eurosceptic parties.
²	Programmatically, the party may also be included in the group of anti-immigration parties.
³	Programmatically, the party may also be referred to as an anti-independence party.
⁴	The two parties shared a list for the EP election. As I restricted my analysis to first-order-election programmes, the coalition was not considered.
⁵	The two parties shared a list for the EP election. As I restricted my analysis to first-order-election programmes, the coalition was not considered.
⁶	Same party.

Appendix 3: Variables

Variable	Hyp.	Variable Name	Item(s) used*	Type	Values
Dependent Variables	H1 & H2 & H3	SWITCHERS (Switchers)	Q9 & Q7	Dichotomous	1 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a niche party in the EP election 0 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a mainstream party in the EP election
	H3	GREEN SWITCHERS (Green Switchers)	Q9 & Q7	Dichotomous	1 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a green party in the EP election 0 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a mainstream party in the EP election
		ANTI-IMMIGRATION SWITCHERS (Anti-immigration Switchers)	Q9 & Q7	Dichotomous	1 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a radical right party in the EP election 0 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a mainstream party in the EP election
	H4	LOYALISTS (Loyalists)	Q9 & Q7	Dichotomous	1 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for the same mainstream party in the EP election 0 – Voted for a mainstream party in the last general election & voted for a different mainstream or niche party in the EP election
Independent Variables	H1	POLICY MISMATCH (Policy Mismatch)	Q25 & Q2	Dichotomous	1 – Feels close to a mainstream party & names a niche party as better at solving the most important issue 0 – Feels close to a mainstream party & names a mainstream party as better at solving the most important issue
	H2	MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE (W/ BREXIT) (MII w/ Brexit)	Q1	Dichotomous	1 – Niche issues are the most important 0 – Mainstream issues are the most important
		MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE – ENVIRONMENT (W/ BREXIT) (MII-Environment w/ Brexit)	Q1	Dichotomous	1 – Environmental/animal welfare issues are the most important 0 – Every issue other than the environmental/animal welfare is the most important
		MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE – IMMIGRATION (W/ BREXIT) (MII-Immigration w/ Brexit)	Q1	Dichotomous	1 – Immigration-related issues are the most important 0 – Every issue other than an immigration-related is the most important
		MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE (MII)	Q1	Dichotomous	1 – Niche issues are the most important 0 – Mainstream issues are the most important 99 – Brexit
		MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE – ENVIRONMENT (MII-Environment)	Q1	Dichotomous	1 – Environmental/animal welfare issues are the most important 0 – Every issue other than the environmental/animal welfare is the most important 99 – Brexit
		MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE – IMMIGRATION (MII-Immigration)	Q1	Dichotomous	1 – Immigration-related issues are the most important 0 – Every issue other than an immigration-related is the most important 99 – Brexit

Control Variables	H ₃	VOTING PROBABILITY (<i>Voting Probability</i>)	Q10	Ordinal	0 – Not at all probable 10 – Very probable
	H ₄	MAINSTREAM PROXIMITY (<i>Mainstream Proximity</i>)	Q25	Dichotomous	1 – Feels close to a mainstream party 0 – Does not feel close to any party
		MAINSTREAM PROXIMITY AND NICHE COMPETENCE (<i>Mainstream Proximity and Niche Competence</i>)	Q25 & Q2	Dichotomous	1 – Feels close to a mainstream party & names a niche party as better at solving the most important issue 0 – Does not feel close to any party & names a niche party as better at solving the most important issue
		SATISFACTION WITH NATIONAL DEMOCRACY (<i>Satisfaction with Nat. Democracy</i>)	Q3	Ordinal	1 – Not at all satisfied 2 – Not very satisfied 3 – Fairly satisfied 4 – Very satisfied
		GOVERNMENT APPROVAL (<i>Government Approval</i>)	Q5	Dichotomous	1 – Approves 2 – Disapproves
		TRUST IN THE EP (<i>Trust in the EP</i>)	Q18	Ordinal	1 – No, not at all 2 – No, not really 3 – Neither trust nor distrust 4 – Yes, somewhat 5 – Yes, totally
		EU MEMBERSHIP (<i>EU Membership</i>)	Q22	Dichotomous	1 – A good thing 0 – A bad thing
		INTEREST IN POLITICS (<i>Interest in Politics</i>)	Q21	Ordinal	1 – Not at all 2 – A little 3 – Somewhat 4 – Very
		PARTY SIZE (<i>Party Size</i>)	Based on Q9's party coding	Continuous	-
		AGE (<i>Age</i>)	D4	Continuous	Date of birth (D4) subtracted from 2019
		GENDER (<i>Gender</i>)	D3	Dichotomous	1 – Male 0 – Female
		EDUCATION (<i>Education</i>)	D2	Continuous	“How old were you when you stopped full-time education?” Excludes respondents who were still studying, for their coding (97) would compromise the reading of the results.
		FAMILY'S STANDARD OF LIVING (<i>Family's Standard of Living</i>)	D11	Ordinal	1 – Poor family 7 – Rich family

*EES 2019

Appendix 4 for Figure 5: Paired-Samples T-Test 1

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LR-RN	-.212	3.189	.313	-.832	.409	-.677	103	.500
Pair 2	LR-EELV	-2.346	4.985	.489	-3.316	-1.377	-4.800	103	.000
Pair 3	LR-GEN	-.447	4.751	.490	-1.420	.526	-.912	93	.364
Pair 4	PS-RN	.864	5.269	.519	-.166	1.894	1.664	102	.099
Pair 5	PS- EELV	-1.272	4.005	.395	-2.055	-.489	-3.223	102	.002
Pair 6	PS- GEN	.624	3.277	.340	-.051	1.298	1.835	92	.070
Pair 7	LFI- RN	.231	4.736	.464	-.690	1.152	.497	103	.620
Pair 8	LFI- EELV	-1.904	4.370	.429	-2.754	-1.054	-4.443	103	.000
Pair 9	LFI-GEN	-.202	3.248	.335	-.867	.463	-.603	93	.548
Pair 10	LRM-RN	-.846	4.867	.477	-1.793	.100	-1.773	103	.079
Pair 11	LRM-EELV	-2.981	3.844	.377	-3.728	-2.233	-7.908	103	.000
Pair 12	LRM-GEN	-1.138	3.926	.405	-1.942	-.334	-2.811	93	.006
Pair 13	PSOE-VOX	2.407	5.699	1.097	.153	4.662	2.195	26	.037
Pair 14	PSOE-ERC	1.333	5.378	1.035	-.794	3.461	1.288	26	.209
Pair 15	PSOE-CE	2.192	4.699	.922	.294	4.090	2.379	25	.025
Pair 16	PP-VOX	.071	1.412	.267	-.476	.619	.268	27	.791
Pair 17	PP-ERC	-1.000	6.202	1.194	-3.453	1.453	-.838	26	.410
Pair 18	PP-CE	.185	5.463	1.051	-1.976	2.346	.176	26	.862
Pair 19	UP-VOX	2.037	6.560	1.263	-.558	4.632	1.613	26	.119
Pair 20	UP-ERC	.963	3.299	.635	-.342	2.268	1.517	26	.141
Pair 21	UP-CE	1.654	3.098	.607	.403	2.905	2.722	25	.012
Pair 22	CIU-VOX	.333	2.481	.477	-.648	1.315	.698	26	.491
Pair 23	CIU-ERC	-.741	6.162	1.186	-3.178	1.697	-.625	26	.538
Pair 24	CIU-CE	.077	5.245	1.029	-2.042	2.196	.075	25	.941
Pair 25	SDP-TF	.619	5.893	.909	-1.217	2.455	.681	41	.500
Pair 26	SDP-VIHR	-.286	3.570	.551	-1.398	.827	-.519	41	.607
Pair 27	SDP-RKP	1.786	4.387	.677	.419	3.153	2.638	41	.012
Pair 28	KOK-TF	.548	5.052	.780	-1.027	2.122	.702	41	.486
Pair 29	KOK-VIHR	-.357	5.660	.873	-2.121	1.407	-.409	41	.685
Pair 30	KOK-RKP	1.714	4.352	.672	.358	3.070	2.553	41	.015
Pair 31	KESK-TF	-1.714	4.645	.717	-3.162	-.267	-2.392	41	.021

Pair 32	KESK-VIHR	-2.619	3.844	.593	-3.817	-1.421	-4.415	41	.000
Pair 33	KESK-RKP	-.548	2.804	.433	-1.421	.326	-1.266	41	.213
Pair 34	VAS-TF	.143	6.554	1.011	-1.900	2.185	.141	41	.888
Pair 35	VAS-VIHR	-.762	3.392	.523	-1.819	.295	-1.456	41	.153
Pair 36	VAS-RKP	1.310	3.929	.606	.085	2.534	2.160	41	.037
Pair 37	CDU-GRU	-3.092	4.645	.424	-3.931	-2.252	-7.291	119	.000
Pair 38	CDU-AFD	2.650	4.315	.394	1.870	3.430	6.728	119	.000
Pair 39	CDU-PIR	1.700	4.568	.417	.874	2.526	4.077	119	.000
Pair 40	SPD- GRU	-2.736	3.598	.327	-3.383	-2.088	-8.363	120	.000
Pair 41	SPD-AFD	2.992	4.645	.422	2.156	3.828	7.085	120	.000
Pair 42	SPD-PIR	2.041	3.961	.360	1.328	2.754	5.669	120	.000
Pair 43	FDP-GRU	-3.700	4.388	.401	-4.493	-2.907	-9.237	119	.000
Pair 44	FDP-AFD	2.000	3.994	.365	1.278	2.722	5.486	119	.000
Pair 45	FDP-PIR	1.042	3.695	.337	.374	1.710	3.088	119	.003
Pair 46	LIN-GRU	-2.926	3.967	.361	-3.640	-2.212	-8.113	120	.000
Pair 47	LIN-AFD	2.802	4.668	.424	1.961	3.642	6.601	120	.000
Pair 48	LIN-PIR	1.851	3.358	.305	1.247	2.456	6.064	120	.000
Pair 49	VVD-PVV	.306	3.743	.535	-.769	1.381	.573	48	.570
Pair 50	VVD-GL	.265	4.829	.690	-1.122	1.652	.385	48	.702
Pair 51	VVD-FVD	-1.1224	3.8494	.5499	-2.2281	-.0168	-2.041	48	.047
Pair 52	CDA-PVV	-.429	3.623	.518	-1.469	.612	-.828	48	.412
Pair 53	CDA-GL	-.551	4.052	.579	-1.715	.613	-.952	48	.346
Pair 54	CDA-FVD	-1.7959	4.4205	.6315	-3.0656	-.5262	-2.844	48	.007
Pair 55	D66-PVV	-.020	4.644	.657	-1.340	1.300	-.030	49	.976
Pair 56	D66-GL	-.140	3.423	.484	-1.113	.833	-.289	49	.774
Pair 57	D66-FVD	-1.3600	5.2285	.7394	-2.8459	.1259	-1.839	49	.072
Pair 58	SP-PVV	.540	3.856	.545	-.556	1.636	.990	49	.327
Pair 59	SP-GL	.420	3.775	.534	-.653	1.493	.787	49	.435
Pair 60	SP-FVD	-.8000	4.7638	.6737	-2.1539	.5539	-1.187	49	.241
Pair 61	PVDA-PVV	-.620	3.801	.537	-1.700	.460	-1.154	49	.254
Pair 62	PVDA-GL	-.740	3.504	.496	-1.736	.256	-1.493	49	.142
Pair 63	PVDA-FVD	-1.9600	4.3937	.6214	-3.2087	-.7113	-3.154	49	.003
Pair 64	CON-GP	2.915	5.264	.373	2.179	3.650	7.811	198	.000
Pair 65	CON-SNP	5.136	4.165	.296	4.553	5.720	17.353	197	.000

Pair 66	CON-UKIP	3.191	4.238	.300	2.598	3.783	10.621	198	.000
Pair 67	CON-BP	-.598	4.477	.317	-1.224	.028	-1.884	198	.061
Pair 68	LAB-GP	-.779	3.000	.213	-1.198	-.359	-3.662	198	.000
Pair 69	LAB-SNP	1.439	3.087	.219	1.007	1.872	6.562	197	.000
Pair 70	LAB-UKIP	-.503	4.239	.300	-1.095	.090	-1.672	198	.096
Pair 71	LAB-BP	-4.291	5.428	.385	-5.050	-3.533	-11.154	198	.000
Pair 72	LD- GP	-.392	2.849	.202	-.790	.006	-1.941	198	.054
Pair 73	LD-SNP	1.788	2.646	.188	1.417	2.159	9.508	197	.000
Pair 74	LD-UKIP	-.116	3.837	.272	-.652	.421	-.425	198	.671
Pair 75	LD-BP	-3.905	5.290	.375	-4.644	-3.165	-10.412	198	.000
Pair 76	SDLP-MP	-.243	4.085	.672	-1.605	1.119	-.362	36	.719
Pair 77	SDLP-SWDE	1.784	5.396	.887	-.015	3.583	2.011	36	.052
Pair 78	MOD-MP	-.622	5.309	.873	-2.392	1.149	-.712	36	.481
Pair 79	MOD-SWDE	1.405	3.460	.569	.252	2.559	2.471	36	.018
Pair 80	LIB-MP	-1.622	4.132	.679	-2.999	-.244	-2.387	36	.022
Pair 81	LIB-SWDE	.405	4.752	.781	-1.179	1.990	.519	36	.607
Pair 82	CENT- MP	-1.135	4.001	.658	-2.469	.199	-1.726	36	.093
Pair 83	CENT-SWDE	.892	5.597	.920	-.974	2.758	.969	36	.339
Pair 84	SWKD-MP	-2.486	5.521	.908	-4.327	-.646	-2.740	36	.010
Pair 85	SWKD-SWDE	-.459	3.920	.644	-1.766	.848	-.713	36	.480
Pair 86	VP-MP	-1.4324	3.8045	.6255	-2.7009	-.1639	-2.290	36	.028
Pair 87	VP-SWDE	.5946	5.5149	.9066	-1.2442	2.4334	.656	36	.516
Pair 88	FG-GPIE	-2.245	3.603	.515	-3.280	-1.210	-4.362	48	.000
Pair 89	FG-SF	2.796	4.316	.617	1.556	4.035	4.535	48	.000
Pair 90	LP-GPIE	-2.857	3.021	.432	-3.725	-1.989	-6.621	48	.000
Pair 91	LP-SF	2.184	4.309	.616	.946	3.421	3.547	48	.001
Pair 92	FF-GPIE	-3.184	3.706	.529	-4.248	-2.119	-6.013	48	.000
Pair 93	FF-SF	1.857	4.291	.613	.624	3.090	3.029	48	.004
Pair 94	SOL-GPIE	-4.708	3.549	.512	-5.739	-3.678	-9.192	47	.000
Pair 95	SOL-SF	.313	3.123	.451	-.594	1.219	.693	47	.492

Appendix 5 for Figure 6: Paired-Samples T-Test 2

				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LR-RN	.071	3.161	.597	-1.154	1.297	.120	27	.906
Pair 2	LR-EELV	-3.179	6.007	1.135	-5.508	-.849	-2.800	27	.009
Pair 3	LR-GEN	.192	5.169	1.014	-1.896	2.280	.190	25	.851
Pair 4	PS-RN	.148	5.454	1.050	-2.009	2.306	.141	26	.889
Pair 5	PS-EELV	-3.148	4.231	.814	-4.822	-1.474	-3.866	26	.001
Pair 6	PS-GEN	.320	3.105	.621	-.962	1.602	.515	24	.611
Pair 7	LFI-RN	-.286	5.062	.957	-2.248	1.677	-.299	27	.767
Pair 8	LFI-EELV	-3.536	3.815	.721	-5.015	-2.056	-4.904	27	.000
Pair 9	LFI-GEN	-.423	2.386	.468	-1.387	.541	-.904	25	.375
Pair 10	LRM-RN	-1.250	4.543	.859	-3.012	.512	-1.456	27	.157
Pair 11	LRM-EELV	-4.500	4.069	.769	-6.078	-2.922	-5.852	27	.000
Pair 12	LRM-GEN	-1.385	3.601	.706	-2.839	.070	-1.961	25	.061
Pair 13	SDP-TF	2.600	4.879	2.182	-3.457	8.657	1.192	4	.299
Pair 14	SDP-VIHR	-.600	4.615	2.064	-6.331	5.131	-.291	4	.786
Pair 15	SDP-RKP	1.400	6.269	2.804	-6.384	9.184	.499	4	.644
Pair 16	KOK-TF	1.800	5.805	2.596	-5.408	9.008	.693	4	.526
Pair 17	KOK-VIHR	-1.400	5.030	2.249	-7.645	4.845	-.622	4	.567
Pair 18	KOK-RKP	.600	2.608	1.166	-2.638	3.838	.514	4	.634
Pair 19	KESK-TF	.200	4.207	1.881	-5.024	5.424	.106	4	.920
Pair 20	KESK-VIHR	-3.000	3.808	1.703	-7.728	1.728	-1.762	4	.153
Pair 21	KESK-RKP	-1.000	1.732	.775	-3.151	1.151	-1.291	4	.266
Pair 22	VAS-TF	2.200	6.140	2.746	-5.424	9.824	.801	4	.468
Pair 23	VAS-VIHR	-1.000	3.808	1.703	-5.728	3.728	-.587	4	.589
Pair 24	VAS-RKP	1.000	2.646	1.183	-2.285	4.285	.845	4	.446
Pair 25	CDU-GRU	-3.226	4.991	.686	-4.602	-1.851	-4.706	52	.000
Pair 26	CDU-AFD	2.170	4.349	.597	.971	3.369	3.632	52	.001
Pair 27	CDU-PIR	1.792	4.622	.635	.519	3.066	2.823	52	.007
Pair 28	SPD-GRU	-2.907	4.131	.562	-4.035	-1.780	-5.172	53	.000
Pair 29	SPD-AFD	2.463	4.721	.642	1.174	3.752	3.833	53	.000
Pair 30	SPD-PIR	2.074	3.565	.485	1.101	3.047	4.275	53	.000
Pair 31	FDP-GRU	-3.943	4.276	.587	-5.122	-2.765	-6.714	52	.000

Pair 32	FDP-AFD	1.358	4.081	.561	.234	2.483	2.423	52	.019
Pair 33	FDP-PIR	.962	3.747	.515	-.070	1.995	1.870	52	.067
Pair 34	LIN-GRU	-2.852	4.136	.563	-3.981	-1.723	-5.066	53	.000
Pair 35	LIN-AFD	2.519	5.042	.686	1.142	3.895	3.670	53	.001
Pair 36	LIN-PIR	2.130	3.464	.471	1.184	3.075	4.517	53	.000
Pair 37	CON-GP	.522	5.501	1.147	-1.857	2.901	.455	22	.654
Pair 38	CON-SNP	3.565	3.691	.770	1.969	5.161	4.633	22	.000
Pair 39	CON-UKIP	1.565	2.293	.478	.574	2.557	3.274	22	.003
Pair 40	CON-BP	-.739	3.545	.739	-2.272	.794	-1.000	22	.328
Pair 41	LAB-GP	-.217	3.516	.733	-1.738	1.303	-.297	22	.770
Pair 42	LAB-SNP	2.826	4.428	.923	.911	4.741	3.061	22	.006
Pair 43	LAB-UKIP	.826	6.250	1.303	-1.877	3.529	.634	22	.533
Pair 44	LAB-BP	-1.478	7.261	1.514	-4.618	1.661	-.976	22	.339
Pair 45	LD-GP	-1.435	3.028	.631	-2.744	-.126	-2.273	22	.033
Pair 46	LD-SNP	1.609	2.105	.439	.698	2.519	3.665	22	.001
Pair 47	LD-UKIP	-.391	3.652	.762	-1.971	1.188	-.514	22	.613
Pair 48	LD-BP	-2.696	5.414	1.129	-5.037	-.354	-2.388	22	.026

Appendix 6 for Figure 7: Paired-Samples T-Test 3

				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LR-RN	.949	2.080	.271	.407	1.491	3.506	58	.001
Pair 2	LR-EELV	-5.339	3.599	.469	-6.277	-4.401	-11.395	58	.000
Pair 3	LR-GEN	-2.755	4.080	.560	-3.879	-1.630	-4.915	52	.000
Pair 4	PS-RN	3.672	3.891	.511	2.649	4.695	7.189	57	.000
Pair 5	PS-EELV	-2.690	4.185	.550	-3.790	-1.589	-4.894	57	.000
Pair 6	PS-GEN	.058	3.455	.479	-.904	1.020	.120	51	.905
Pair 7	LFI-RN	2.593	3.281	.427	1.738	3.448	6.072	58	.000
Pair 8	LFI-EELV	-3.695	3.923	.511	-4.717	-2.673	-7.235	58	.000
Pair 9	LFI-GEN	-1.208	3.421	.470	-2.151	-.264	-2.569	52	.013
Pair 10	LRM-RN	1.949	2.843	.370	1.208	2.690	5.266	58	.000
Pair 11	LRM-EELV	-4.339	4.016	.523	-5.385	-3.293	-8.300	58	.000
Pair 12	LRM-GEN	-1.906	4.575	.628	-3.167	-.645	-3.032	52	.004
Pair 13	SDP-TF	3.826	4.141	.864	2.035	5.617	4.431	22	.000
Pair 14	SDP-VIHR	-1.783	2.392	.499	-2.817	-.748	-3.574	22	.002
Pair 15	SDP-RKP	2.783	3.643	.760	1.207	4.358	3.664	22	.001
Pair 16	KOK-TF	2.087	4.562	.951	.114	4.060	2.194	22	.039
Pair 17	KOK-VIHR	-3.522	4.305	.898	-5.383	-1.660	-3.923	22	.001
Pair 18	KOK-RKP	1.043	4.128	.861	-.742	2.829	1.212	22	.238
Pair 19	KESK-TF	.783	2.679	.559	-.376	1.941	1.401	22	.175
Pair 20	KESK-VIHR	-4.826	3.312	.691	-6.258	-3.394	-6.989	22	.000
Pair 21	KESK-RKP	-.261	2.750	.574	-1.450	.929	-.455	22	.654
Pair 22	VAS-TF	3.783	4.899	1.021	1.664	5.901	3.703	22	.001
Pair 23	VAS-VIHR	-1.826	2.933	.612	-3.095	-.558	-2.985	22	.007
Pair 24	VAS-RKP	2.739	3.732	.778	1.125	4.353	3.520	22	.002
Pair 25	CDU-GRU	-4.103	3.930	.399	-4.895	-3.311	-10.282	96	.000
Pair 26	CDU-AFD	3.577	3.744	.380	2.823	4.332	9.410	96	.000
Pair 27	CDU-PIR	1.907	4.345	.441	1.032	2.783	4.323	96	.000
Pair 28	SPD-GRU	-3.378	3.427	.346	-4.065	-2.691	-9.757	97	.000
Pair 29	SPD-AFD	4.265	3.317	.335	3.600	4.930	12.731	97	.000
Pair 30	SPD-PIR	2.602	3.705	.374	1.859	3.345	6.953	97	.000
Pair 31	FDP-GRU	-4.742	3.664	.372	-5.481	-4.004	-12.748	96	.000

Pair 32	FDP-AFD	2.887	3.075	.312	2.267	3.506	9.245	96	.000
Pair 33	FDP-PIR	1.206	3.406	.346	.520	1.893	3.488	96	.001
Pair 34	LIN-GRU	-3.694	3.682	.372	-4.432	-2.956	-9.932	97	.000
Pair 35	LIN-AFD	3.949	3.588	.362	3.230	4.668	10.895	97	.000
Pair 36	LIN-PIR	2.286	3.073	.310	1.670	2.902	7.363	97	.000
Pair 37	CON-GP	-4.481	4.611	.887	-6.305	-2.658	-5.050	26	.000
Pair 38	CON-SNP	2.074	4.349	.837	.354	3.795	2.478	26	.020
Pair 39	CON-UKIP	2.519	4.004	.770	.935	4.102	3.269	26	.003
Pair 40	CON-BP	2.704	3.998	.769	1.122	4.285	3.514	26	.002
Pair 41	LAB-GP	-2.148	4.148	.798	-3.789	-.507	-2.691	26	.012
Pair 42	LAB-SNP	4.407	4.576	.881	2.597	6.218	5.004	26	.000
Pair 43	LAB-UKIP	4.852	4.330	.833	3.139	6.565	5.823	26	.000
Pair 44	LAB-BP	5.037	4.265	.821	3.350	6.724	6.137	26	.000
Pair 45	LD-GP	-3.407	3.400	.654	-4.752	-2.063	-5.208	26	.000
Pair 46	LD-SNP	3.148	3.581	.689	1.732	4.565	4.568	26	.000
Pair 47	LD-UKIP	3.593	3.619	.696	2.161	5.024	5.158	26	.000
Pair 48	LD-BP	3.778	3.724	.717	2.304	5.251	5.271	26	.000
Pair 49	FG-GPIE	-3.053	3.377	.548	-4.163	-1.943	-5.573	37	.000
Pair 50	FG-SF	3.816	3.833	.622	2.556	5.076	6.136	37	.000
Pair 51	LP-GPIE	-3.447	2.758	.447	-4.354	-2.541	-7.706	37	.000
Pair 52	LP-SF	3.421	3.644	.591	2.223	4.619	5.788	37	.000
Pair 53	FF-GPIE	-4.132	3.363	.545	-5.237	-3.026	-7.574	37	.000
Pair 54	FF-SF	2.737	3.909	.634	1.452	4.022	4.316	37	.000
Pair 55	SOL-GPIE	-5.892	2.747	.452	-6.808	-4.976	-13.049	36	.000
Pair 56	SOL-SF	1.000	2.789	.458	.070	1.930	2.181	36	.036

Appendix 7 for Figure 8: Paired-Samples T-Test 4

				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LR-RN	-2.769	3.787	.743	-4.299	-1.239	-3.728	25	.001
Pair 2	LR-EELV	2.615	3.465	.680	1.216	4.015	3.849	25	.001
Pair 3	LR-GEN	3.565	3.941	.822	1.861	5.269	4.339	22	.000
Pair 4	PS-RN	-4.808	3.763	.738	-6.328	-3.288	-6.514	25	.000
Pair 5	PS-EELV	.577	3.337	.654	-.771	1.925	.882	25	.386
Pair 6	PS-GEN	1.348	2.806	.585	.134	2.561	2.304	22	.031
Pair 7	LFI-RN	-4.846	3.630	.712	-6.312	-3.380	-6.808	25	.000
Pair 8	LFI-EELV	.538	3.558	.698	-.899	1.976	.772	25	.448
Pair 9	LFI-GEN	1.304	2.204	.460	.351	2.257	2.838	22	.010
Pair 10	LRM-RN	-6.731	3.853	.756	-8.287	-5.175	-8.908	25	.000
Pair 11	LRM-EELV	-1.346	2.682	.526	-2.430	-.263	-2.559	25	.017
Pair 12	LRM-GEN	-.261	2.911	.607	-1.520	.998	-.430	22	.672
Pair 49	VVD-PVV	-.385	3.634	.713	-1.852	1.083	-.540	25	.594
Pair 50	VVD-GL	2.615	4.011	.787	.995	4.235	3.325	25	.003
Pair 51	VVD-FVD	-3.0000	3.3705	.6610	-4.3614	-1.6386	-4.539	25	.000
Pair 52	CDA-PVV	-1.846	2.796	.548	-2.975	-.717	-3.367	25	.002
Pair 53	CDA-GL	1.154	2.781	.545	.030	2.277	2.115	25	.045
Pair 54	CDA-FVD	-4.4615	2.9152	.5717	-5.6390	-3.2841	-7.804	25	.000
Pair 55	D66-PVV	-2.538	3.252	.638	-3.852	-1.225	-3.980	25	.001
Pair 56	D66-GL	.462	2.302	.451	-.468	1.391	1.022	25	.316
Pair 57	D66-FVD	-5.1538	2.9352	.5756	-6.3394	-3.9683	-8.953	25	.000
Pair 58	SP-PVV	-.885	3.788	.743	-2.414	.645	-1.191	25	.245
Pair 59	SP-GL	2.115	3.037	.596	.889	3.342	3.551	25	.002
Pair 60	SP-FVD	-3.5000	3.7121	.7280	-4.9994	-2.0006	-4.808	25	.000
Pair 61	PVDA-PVV	-1.885	3.351	.657	-3.238	-.531	-2.868	25	.008
Pair 62	PVDA-GL	1.115	1.946	.382	.329	1.901	2.923	25	.007
Pair 63	PVDA-FVD	-4.5000	3.2031	.6282	-5.7938	-3.2062	-7.164	25	.000