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DOES PARTY COLOUR MATTER?
THE EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT PARTISANSHIP ON PLEDGES' LEFT-RIGHT
LOCATION

Abstract

Despite extensive research on the 'politics matter' hypothesis, the findings achieved so far remain ambiguous. Inspired by that hypothesis, this research focuses on electoral promises, a chief but as yet untested indicator. It examines whether government party colour explains the adoption of an ideologically committed policy agenda in electoral manifestos. To answer this goal the research looks at the left-right placement of manifesto pledges of the Portuguese governing parties between 1995 and 2019. The results indicate that partisanship significantly explains the executive's party agenda-setting and that this relationship prevails over time. Findings also suggest that the partisan effect is mediated by issue salience.

Key-words: electoral pledges, government partisanship, left-right, issue salience, party manifestos, Portugal

Introduction

The 'politics matter' hypothesis postulates that the party composition of a government matters for the public policies that are implemented (Castles & Mckinlay 1997; Schmidt 1996). Since the late 1970s, a large body of research on this hypothesis has focused on diverse government outputs, such as spending, taxation, legislation or regulation. The corresponding empirical results have, however, been highly dissonant. It is puzzling that a relationship as expected and theoretically grounded as the colour of the government determining its policy could have been so widely questioned by research. One of the reasons for such ambiguity in results seems to be the type of outputs that have been studied: different government outputs have had underlying different results (Bandau and Ahrens 2020). Looking at some of this research we can see that, on the one hand, party composition of the cabinet has been found to matter for the type and number of public policies that are adopted (Schmidt 1996; Allan and Scruggs 2004; Schmitt, 2016; Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019; Staff & Wenzelburger 2021). Studies referring to the post-war period and up to the 1980s have also demonstrated that government colour was important for welfare spending (Hicks & Swank, 1992) and for macroeconomic policies (Boix 2000). In this vein, there is also evidence that Western European parties offer different (and stable) policy packages to electors (McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5; Klingemann & Budge 2013), and make promises (expansionary or tax cut) according to parties' ideological stances (Thomsson et al., 2019).

On the other hand, several studies conclude the opposite. Two meta-analyses show either that there is no left-right partisan effect on any kind of government output (Imbeau, Petry & Lamari 2001), or that this effect has been losing importance (Bandau and Ahrens 2020). Similarly, others demonstrate that partisanship may have been important to determine spending patterns or macroeconomic policies in the post-war period, but that it is no longer relevant (Boix 2000; Potrafke 2009; 2017). Similarly, some research shows that there is only a small or no effect either on public spending (Verma 2000), welfare legislation (Jensen & Wenzelburger, 2020) or in other policy outputs (Kim & Fording 2002). In turn, literature on policy attention corroborates that no substantial policy differences are expected across government policy priorities (Baumgartner,

Brouard & Grossman 2009; Mortensen et al. 2011). The effect of party colour has, therefore, ranged from significant and positive, to residual or non-existent.

Contributing to the lack of clarity in results is the fact that much of the research is substantiated by macroeconomic policies and indicators (Boix 2000), where the effect of ideology may be confounded with other factors. For instance, in an economic recession unemployment can be more readily explained by external factors than by government colour, since, in such a context, governments lose decision-making ability (Verma 2000; Kingdon 2014, chap.5). For similar reasons, research on public expenditure may also be highly conditioned by non-ideological factors (Jensen & Wenzelburger 2020, p. 125), which explains why this research is less supportive of the partisan effect (Bandau and Ahrens 2020). For example, spending on pensions may be more dependent on the portion of the elderly population, than on a government option. Since the ambiguity in research is largely contingent on the way the dependent variable has been operationalized, it is important to find innovative and effective ways of measuring it (Allan, & Scruggs 2004, p.497; Bandau and Ahrens 2020). Straightforwardly analysing party policy stances seems to be the more valid option to the study of the ‘politics matter’ approach. Aligned with this idea, research focused on the implementation of public policies apparently better captures the effect of partisanship than aggregate outcome indicators, as seen before. For these reasons, this research focuses on party’s policy stances. If the colour of the government does matter, it should be primarily and directly visible in its policy positions.

Building on that prior work, this research aims at contributing to unveil the effect of partisanship in policy by originally assessing whether the left-right location of manifesto promises reflects the ideology of the government parties. The assumption here is that this effect should be especially observable in electoral commitments, a venue that has been widely neglected despite its relevance to the study of the topic (Bandau and Ahrens 2020: 43). Indeed, electoral promises are a traditional indicator of parties’ policy positions (Laver, 2014). This way, the study of promises may be a preferable option over that of actually implemented policies, given that external constraints on pledges making in manifestos are likely smaller than on policy-making, where peripheral factors may have a preponderant role. Such factors may be institutional, regarding characteristics of the

system that affect the friction between political actors at the decision-making stage, such as majority voting rules, limiting governments' leeway to decide (Jones, Larsen-Price & Wilkerson 2009). These factors may also relate to external events, such as an economic crisis or a natural disaster, that force governments to redirect their policy priorities (Kingdon 2014, chap.5). In both cases parties may be impelled to move away from their program and ideology. Parties are thus more likely to commit to their ideological base regarding their electoral platforms, being able to integrate the policy proposals that most genuinely (that is, without external constraints) reflect their position in terms of party competition. In other words, as manifestos are the official channel by which parties communicate their electoral programme (Benoit & Laver 2006, pp. 64-69; Laver 2014), the pledges in it represent a partisan policy commitment to voters, defining the parties' territory of electoral competition. Looking at pledges in manifestos is, thus, not only a valid option but even a core one as manifestos are authoritative statements of party policy (Klingemann & Budge 2013, p. 65; Allen & Bara 2021, p. 2). As put by Laver "if we want to measure policy positions of political parties, a natural way to start is to analyze official statements of these positions in election manifestos" (2014: 216).

Furthermore, there is wide evidence that, while in cabinet, government parties keep their word to a large extent, frequently accomplishing most of their electoral programmes (e.g., Thomson et al. 2017). Being substantiated by campaign pledges is, therefore, an optimal option for this research's goal since pledges are likely effectively conveying parties' policies. Moreover, this option allows for a broad assessment of the policy positions of governing parties, rather than focusing on sectorial policies as most of the research on the topic has done, when examining primarily welfare and macroeconomic indicators.

Thus, the main goal of the present research is to test whether the "politics matter" hypothesis is confirmed using a dependent variable that straightforwardly measures the policy positions of parties - electoral promises - using Portugal as a case study. The hypothesis is tested from three perspectives: 1) by estimating the existence of a partisan effect on promises' left-right location; 2) by assessing the prevalence of this effect over time; and 3) by assessing the mediating effect of issue salience in strengthening the partisan effect.

To meet these goals we rely on the study of a least-likely case: Portugal. In the European context, the two mainstream Portuguese parties - PS (the left-wing Socialist Party) and PSD (the Social Democratic Party, the centre-right party) - are considered to diverge little in their programmatic and ideological stances (Guedes 2012). This case is paradigmatic to test the effect of partisanship given the low variance of the independent variable - the ideological position of governing parties – making it less likely to support this effect. Consistently, in comparative research on the topic (on welfare spending in OECD countries) Portugal has already been identified as an outlier, presenting evidence opposing a partisanship effect (Potrafke 2009). Thus, if the hypothesis is proved with this least-likely case, the implication is that stronger or at least similar partisan effects are expected to be found in systems where the ideological distance between government parties is greater.

The stability of government formations in Portugal also contributes to Portugal being a good case study. Only two kinds of executives alternated in office between 1995 and 2019, the time span over which the research is based: right-wing coalitions formed by PSD and the conservatives (CDS, the Popular Party); and socialist executives (PS). Such stability allows to assess the effect of left and right-wing executives on the ideological commitment of promises over time, controlling for other possible effects arising from the constitution of governments. Finally, the availability of an exceptional longitudinal dataset covering pledges in eight legislatures, over almost 25 years (1995-2019), offers ideal conditions to undertake this research.

After a systematization of the main theoretical contributions in the field, the hypotheses to be tested are enunciated. Afterwards the data and methods of research are introduced, and the findings are presented and discussed. Finally, some concluding remarks are provided.

I. Literature and hypotheses

1.1. 'Politics matter' hypothesis: Theory and findings

Party competition theory has consistently reiterated that parties rely on different political and ideological stances. Schattschneider argued early on (1960) that the dynamics of politics originate in strife, with policy issues being a major underlying factor of the 'scope of conflict'.

Differentiation between parties' agenda is also posited by the Downsian spatial theory (Downs 1957). The 'responsible party model' postulates as well that parties are expected to present clear and differentiated electoral programmes (e.g., Pierce 1999, p. 9). In turn, the salience theory of party competition argues that in electoral competition political parties choose to give more emphasis to issues that are likely to give them advantage (Budge & Robertson 1987). Theory has thus been strongly supportive of parties offering and implementing distinct policy packages, being programmatically differentiated among each other. There is, consequently, strong theoretical support at the basis of the 'politics matter' approach, as it hypothesizes that parties compete by proposing distinct electoral programmes across ideological lines (Schmidt, 1996; Castles & Mckinlay 1997). The general expectation is, therefore, that different party ideologies will promote different policy packages.

To disentangle the inconsistency between the ambiguity of findings and the robustness of the theory underlying the 'politics matter' hypothesis requires taking the type of policy output into account, since it seems to matter for the results. Therefore, as the goal here is to examine party policies minimizing the interference of institutional or external factors, such as government being in minority or the economic context, this research strictly focuses on parties' agenda-setting. The assumption is that controlling for those institutional or external factors – something that happens when we rely on electoral pledges - facilitates the assessment of the effect of partisanship on policy. For these reasons, we focus on the literature that has studied that hypothesis based on the agenda-setting of parties and, in particular, on party manifestos.

Agenda-setting research has shown that policy issue emphasis in executives' agenda does not substantially vary in-between elections, and thus that their policy priorities are more events-driven than determined by party ideology. In general, the conclusion has been that party competition is fundamentally guided by a common focus on issue attention (Baumgartner, Brouard & Grossman 2009; Mortensen et al. 2011). This research aimed to draw inferences about the ideological basis of party agenda by looking at the emphasis placed on issues. It presupposes, for instance, that left-wing parties would place greater emphasis on welfare policies and that right-wing parties would place greater emphasis on defence and financial affairs (Green-Pedersen 2007, pp. 614-615;

Baumgartner, Brouard & Grossman 2009). However, this work was not able to straightforwardly conclude about the ideology of parties, but only on the extent to which their emphasis on issues allows them to be associated with the left or the right. Although a salience approach enables an approximation to parties' ideological commitments, as emphasizing some policy issues to the detriment of others says something about a party's left-right location (Giebler, Meyer & Wagne 2021), this approach is not able to fully capture the relationship between partisanship and policies. This is because the salience parties give to policy issues is quite diverse from the positions they take on the same issues (Benoit & Laver 2006, p.127; Newton and van Deth 2009, p. 293). For instance, a party may pay a lot of attention to public health but advocate restrictive policies in that area, being therefore connoted with the right-wing, rather than with the left-wing, as a mere reading of attention would suggest. Thus, failure to observe the ideological commitment underlying parties' agendas seriously constrains conclusions about the effect of party colour, as is the case with salience-based approaches. Only by measuring parties' commitments in relation to policy issues, identifying whether they propose to expand or restrict redistribution, taxes, privatizations, and so on, is it possible to assess whether the parties' agenda is ideologically determined.

Indeed, when agenda-setting research looks at the content of policies (e.g., Volkens et al. 2013), results are reversed. Research on manifestos has provided evidence that Western European parties offer different (and stable) policy packages to voters (McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5; Klingemann & Budge 2013), and that make expansionary and tax-cut promises that are consistent with the party's ideological stance (Thomson et al., 2019). In addition, no evidence was found in favour of a policy convergence hypothesis (McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5). Nevertheless, although analysing the content of policies, most of these studies were also based on an issue emphasis approach (an exception is: Thomson et al., 2019), supporting on the collection of quasi-sentences in manifestos mentioning policies. That is, the data on which they are based do not necessarily derive from the actual policy commitment of the party, but from the positive or

negative emphasis given by the party to the policy issue in the manifesto¹. Notwithstanding the contribution of this research to the study of the topic, it has been unable to fully capture the party's compromise to implementing policies as the electoral pledges do. Compared to this prior research, an analysis of pledges' left-right location allows to move one step forward in the study of the 'politics matter' approach by straightforwardly assessing the effect of government partisanship (Ralling 1987, pp. 1-2). Hence, we test the effect of partisanship on the left-right location of party pledges, the general expectation being that government parties' colour significantly explains differences in pledges left-right location.

1.2. The prevalence and meaning of the left-right schema

Although scholarly discussion about the end of ideology has long been overcome, a relative consensus prevails regarding the hollowing of the traditional left-right polarization. Differences between left and right poles have become substantially narrower, while the centre has steadily grown. The intensification of globalization, the dominance of the market economy and the deepening of European integration are, among others, factors commonly cited as having led to the blurring of the left-right divide. These factors will have raised constraints to government leeway to decide on the policies to adopt, making it more difficult to distinguish them according to party colour (for literature reviews see: Mair 2007, p. 216; Baumgartner, Brouard & Grossman 2009, pp. 77-78). Although it is rather consensual that the left-right division prevails in party competition, it may lose effectiveness if the differences between the two referents continue to fade away (Mair 2007, p. 220). Parties' ideological convergence is not a new issue and evidence suggests that this process may be in course (Green-Pedersen 2007; Potrafke 2009). Nevertheless, this is not consensual, as the gap between parties' ideologies could just as well be broadening (e.g., Potrafke 2017, p. 713; Allen & Bara 2021), or at least prevailing (McDonald & Budge 2005, p. chap.5). The prevalence of this discussion around the importance of ideology as a key factor of

¹ This research is supported by data from the Manifesto Project, whose methodological explanation can be found here: <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>.

party differentiation justifies deepening the investigation into whether ideology is still a driving force in government policies.

It is widely accepted that the left-right dimension simplifies the complexity of the political world (e.g., Mair 2007). However, identifying the policies that underlie this dimension is not an easy task. Left and right referents have been characterized as not having stable meanings over time and geographies (Huber & Inglehart 1995; Benoit & Laver 2006; Mair 2007; de Vries, Hakhverdian & Lancee 2013; Giebler, Meyer & Wagne 2021). It is thus difficult to establish a substantive and enduring policy division. An influential contribution in that regard is Bobbio's (1996). He asserts that the distinction between left and right is based on the prevalence of the values of equality and freedom. Equality prevails over freedom in the left-wing, and freedom over equality in the right-wing. Under this axiological umbrella, the distinction between left and right has been, to a great extent, traditionally based on more or less state intervention in the economy, and state as opposed to free enterprise (Downs 1957, p. 116; Budge & Robertson 1987). The economy has nevertheless lost importance with the pre-eminence of other issues, such as immigration, global warming or gender inequality (Huber & Inglehart 1995; de Vries, Hakhverdian & Lancee 2013).

Despite the dynamics of the meaning of left-right referents, the literature has been relatively consensual on a set of core prevailing features typically differentiating both poles (Mair 2007, pp. 213-214). The left has commonly been associated to government control, welfare policies, nationalization (or at least aversion to privatization), labour and minority groups, and to "new left" issues, such as environmental protection, minorities and women's rights. The right is seen as more concerned with government efficiency and performance incentives, privatization, the interests of the upper classes and entrepreneurs, and economic growth (Budge & Robertson 1987; Huber & Inglehart 1995; Kim & Fording 2002; McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5; Benoit & Laver 2006, pp. 132-138; Newton & van Deth 2009, p. 256; Potrafke 2017; Allen & Bara 2021, p. 6).

The core expectation underlying this research is that the 'politics matter' hypothesis will hold regarding pledges in party manifestos. Left-wing governing parties are presumed to be committed

to an essentially left-wing package of promises and right-wing parties to a right-wing package². Additionally, and according to that hypothesis, a process of ideological convergence is not expected to be taking place. That is, government parties are expected to remain differentiated from each other in terms of support for left-right policies over time. Therefore, two hypotheses to be tested are the following:

H1. A partisanship effect is expected to shape the ideological location of the electoral promises of government parties

H2. The partisanship effect on pledges left-right location is expected to prevail over time

Another claim is that partisan effects should differ across policy areas (Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019; Bandau and Ahrens 2020), depending on its salience. As the salience theory postulates, parties emphasise some issues to detriment of others (Budge & Robertson 1987), especially emphasizing the issues they are considered competent by voters (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Budge 2015). By giving more salience to certain issues, parties aim to increase their electoral fortunes (Budge and Farlie, 1983). Basing in the assumption that emphasizing some policy issues to the detriment of others says something about a party's left-right location (Giebler, Meyer & Wagne 2021), recent studies have highlighted the role of issue salience in partisan effects. Such interaction effects have seldom been tested (see, for exceptions: Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019, and Hille 2022). One major conclusion of this scarce research has been that partisan effects (on welfare policy) are dependent on the salience of economic issues in party competition: the more salient, the stronger the positive effect of left parties on welfare state generosity (2022). Building on this research, the final hypothesis to be tested posits that issue salience mediates the effect of partisanship in electoral pledges left-right location. That is, the most salient issues in the party competition should strengthen the partisan effect, especially the issues that are most dear to the

² The analysis is simply based on the traditional left-right, since the new (especially left-wing) issues underlying the materialist/post-materialist or libertarian-authoritarian dimensions are generally considered as extending the old left-right schema, rather than creating a new one (eg. Mair 2007).

two ideological wings: health, education or social welfare on the left, and finance, economics or justice on the right (eg. Green-Pedersen 2007, pp. 614-615; Baumgartner, Brouard & Grossman 2009).

H3. The partisanship effect on pledges left-right location is expected to be higher regarding the most salient policy areas in party competition, and especially regarding the most salient areas for the parties

II. Data and methods

2.1. Data

The analysis is based on manifesto pledges of Portuguese government parties from 1995 to 2019³. The method adopted to identify the promises is the same as that used by the most recent research on party pledges (Royed, Naurin & Thomson 2019). First, precise and objectively testable pledge statements were identified in party manifestos (non-testable vague commitments were withdrawn from the analysis). Pledges were then coded according to 20 policy areas⁴. Consistently with this method, a pledge is defined “as a statement committing a party to one specific action or outcome that can be clearly determined to have occurred or not” (Royed, Naurin & Thomson 2019, p. 24). For instance, statements such as ‘Adopt a 2030 Tourism Strategy’ (PS 2019) were not considered as pledges, and statements such as ‘Create 300 teams of forest fire fighters by 2013’ (PS 2009) were considered as pledges. In order to ensure the reliability of identification of promises, two coders worked simultaneously on different electoral programmes, and simple cross-validation tests were routinely run for each manifesto. The tests were based on the random selection of a sample of the pages of the programmes and took into account the identification and coding of

³ Project at: <http://www.comparativeagendas.net/portugal>.

⁴ The areas are the following: “Macroeconomics”, “Civil rights, minority issues and civil liberties”, “Health”, “Agriculture”, “Labor and employment”, “Education and culture”, “Environment”, “Energy”, “Transportation”, “Justice and home affairs”, “Social Welfare”, “Community, development and housing issues”, “Finance, industry and commerce”, “Defense”, “Science, technology and communication”, “Foreign trade”, “International affairs”, “Government and public administration”, “Natural resources”, and “Cultural events”.

each pledge, carried out by a different coder. The process was repeated until a consistency level greater than 90% was achieved.

2.2. Dependent variable

The dependent variable is electoral pledge left-right location. All the pledges within the selected policy areas were coded as 1 if the issue referred to a left-wing position, and 2 if the issue referred to a right-wing position; if the issue neither referred to a left nor a right-wing position it was considered as undetermined and coded as 3 (similar to Erikson, Mackuen & Stimson 2002, p. 330; or Thomsson et al., 2019: 49). Based on the core prevailing characteristics typically differentiating left from right-wing (e.g., McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5; Benoit & Laver 2006, pp. 132-138), pledges were coded as right-wing if they referred to: a smaller government⁵, cutting taxes, economic growth⁶, emphasizing security and fighting the crime⁷, a retrenchment or non-expansionist stance in education and health sectors, individual responsibility and performance incentives⁸, and a low or no emphasis on strengthening citizen representation⁹. Pledges were coded as left-wing if referring to: a bigger government¹⁰, increasing taxes, environmental protection¹¹, an expansionist stance in education and health sectors, emphasis on equality¹², on defending minorities and the underprivileged¹³, and on strengthening representation of citizens¹⁴.

⁵ Includes cutting the public budget and public spending in general (entailing: reduction of salaries, pensions and welfare; extinction or reduction of state departments; increased privatizations or reduction of the number of civil servants).

⁶ Includes measures to encourage private investment.

⁷ Comprises the strengthening of criminal sentences and increased material resources and budget on fighting crime and improving security. Corruption was not coded as it does not seem to structure the left-right dichotomy, being captured by both the populist left and right (eg. Ivarsflaten 2008).

⁸ E.g., merit awards, individual accountability of employees and managers for performance.

⁹ E.g., placing limits to public discussion and citizen participation in political decisions, or measures that discourage the connection between citizens and the political elite.

¹⁰ This is in opposition to the aforesaid smaller government, encompassing increased public budget, welfare and public spending in general.

¹¹ Includes measures aimed at reducing climate costs, such as the digitization of administrative processes or the replacement of polluting energies by non-polluting ones.

¹² E.g., measures aimed at equal treatment of employees, such as progression through seniority.

¹³ E.g., the elderly, women, children, poor or ethnic minorities.

¹⁴ E.g., measures stimulating public discussion and citizen participation in political decisions, or that improve the connection between citizens and political elites.

These issues have generally been found of relevance to disentangle left from right-wing among Portuguese parties (Guedes 2012).

An example of a pledge coded as left-wing is: “The strengthening of instruments for combating child poverty, namely increasing family allowances up to 6 years of age” (PS 2019); and an example of a pledge coded as right-wing: “The extinction of the Ministry of State and Administrative Reform” (PSD and CDS 2002). Finally, an illustration of a pledge coded as undetermined is: “Reformulation of the tax benefits profile” (PS 1999)¹⁵.

In accordance with the above-mentioned literature and coding procedure, a codebook was created with indicators for each policy area. For instance, for “government and public administration”, the most important indicators to identify a pledge as right-wing were: merit awards, individual accountability for performance, importance of budget control / smaller government (wages and pension cuts, the extinction of state departments, the reduction of deputies, among other cuts in public costs); administrative centralization; and less emphasis (or no emphasis) on citizen’s representation in public bodies. For the same policy area, the most relevant indicators to define a left-wing promise were: equal treatment of employees regardless of performance (eg progression through seniority), bigger government (increase in salaries and pensions, among other increases in public spending), emphasis on the representation of citizens in public bodies (unions’ participation in state departments, mechanisms to bring citizens closer to political decision, etc.). For “justice and home affairs” promises were coded as right-wing if they aimed at strengthening security and fighting the crime, as well as defending higher sentences. In turn, promises were coded as left-wing if they imply a decrease in the emphasis on security and fighting the crime, defend shorter sentences, or minorities and the underprivileged. In general, for the remaining policy areas, promises were coded as right-wing if generally proposing: more privatization and/or less state intervention, tax cuts, budget control, or more centralization. The promises were in turn coded as left-wing if they proposed: less privatization and/or more state intervention, higher taxes, more public investment, gender, minorities or immigrants’ equal rights, or more decentralization.

¹⁵ Generally, all issues related to the restructuring, revision, change or reformulation of administrative procedures or public bodies, and the review of legislation were coded as undetermined.

In order to ensure coding reliability, the codification was done only on the basis of the wording of the promise, and without any indication or data that could link it to the party that proposed it. Furthermore, the whole codification procedure was simultaneously carried out by two coders. Then, any disagreement between coders was discussed and consensually resolved, according to the codebook guidelines. After the codification, the initial percentage of disagreement was 10%, which was reduced to zero after discussion between coders. A total of 38.3% of the pledges (900 out of a total of 2349) were coded as left or right-wing (23.6% and 14.7%, respectively), and 61.7% (1449) were coded as undetermined.

2.3. Independent variables

Party left-right position has been commonly used to research partisanship (e.g., Jensen & Wenzelburger 2020). Despite its limitations regarding comparability across countries, it is considered adequate for a single case study such as the present one (Kim & Fording 2002). The main independent variable thus consists of a dummy in which 0 refers to the socialist party governments (PS, corresponding to the executives that took office in 1995, 1999, 2005, 2009, 2015 and 2019), and 1 refers to the right-wing coalitions (PSD/CDS, corresponding to the executives taking office in 2002 and 2011). The total amount of promises of the right-wing coalition was 32.4% (PSD with 19.1% and CDS-PP with 13.3%) and of the socialist executives 67.6%.

Governments are also individually included in the analysis as dummies in order to estimate the effect of partisanship over time (Schmitt, 2016). The dummy reference is the PSD/CDS coalition that took office in 2011. This executive was in office during the peak of the crisis in Portugal, being considered solidly anchored in the right-wing (Moury & Standring 2017). It is, for this reason, the most interesting executive to compare with the others.

Finally, the policy issues to which parties devote the most attention enter the analysis as dummies (“government and public administration”, “education”, “justice and home affairs”, “social welfare”, “health”, “macroeconomics”, and “finance, industry and commerce”). First, including them enables the comparative assessment of the importance of issues vis-à-vis partisanship in

explaining pledge left-right location. They enable, therefore, to establish a comparison between the result of the methodological approach followed in this research, and the previous work supported on the measurement of policy attention. Second, they also allow us to assess how issue salience mediates the effect of government colour on the left-right location of promises (to test H3) (see Table A1 for the distribution of the policy issues by party).

III. Governing party pledges in Portugal: Issue attention and pledges left-right location over time

The analysis begins with the examination of government policy attention across policy issues, between 1995 and 2019. Generally, attention in manifestos is concentrated on a few issues in both the socialist and the right-wing executives. Despite some differences, the most and least important issues are common across governments (see Table A1 in the Online Appendix). More in detail, Figure 1 presents the percentage of pledges in each government manifesto for each policy issue vis-à-vis the overall number of pledges in the manifesto. Many issues, despite being important in the left-right debate, have a low number of promises in manifestos. These issues are, for that reason, included in the analysis as “other policy issues”.

Figure 1 (ABOUT HERE)

This more detailed analysis shows that there is relative stability in policy attention across governments and over time. “Government and public administration” is the issue generally capturing the most attention from parties, “education and culture” is the second most salient, “justice and home affairs” the third. The issues that are less salient are just as common in the left-wing and right-wing.

Although there are some differences in issue emphasis between left and right-wing governments (for instance, attention to “government and public administration” is especially high among the right-wing coalitions), regarding most of the issues the pattern is either mixed across governments or quite undifferentiated. Taken as a whole, the analysis of pledge attention does not point to any

clear conclusion regarding the ideological dimension of manifestos, generally suggesting the inexistence of an ideological line differentiating PS from PSD/CDS governments. These findings confirm for pledges the results of previous work indicating that the governments platforms are relatively undifferentiated from each other in terms of policy attention (Baumgartner, Brouard & Grossman 2009; Mortensen et al. 2011; for Portugal: Guedes 2012).

Figure 2 (ABOUT HERE)

The scenario changes dramatically if we take into consideration the left-right location of promises. Figure 2 depicts the absolute number of pledges on the left-wing and on the right-wing for each government and policy issue¹⁶. The distributions provide evidence that the analysis of policy attention to some extent camouflages the ideological connotation of the promises. The fact that a party emphasizes certain issues that are usually associated with the left or the right, such as welfare, education or health, does not imply that the party does so in the sense of its expansion. Indeed, most often it implies expansion rather than retrenchment, but it may also entail precisely the opposite: containing investment in the sector; or a mix of both, expansion and retrenchment. Figure 2 shows, for instance, that the right-wing coalition attention to social welfare policies in 2011 does not especially translate in its expansion, but rather the opposite.

In general, a clearer distinction between left and right-wing governments is observable regarding issues such as “government and public administration”, “justice and home affairs” and “macroeconomics”. Right-wing governments present more right-wing pledges regarding these issues than left-wing governments. However, it is only when considering the joint representation of policy issues that it becomes clearer that there is a different pattern of pledge proposal on the right-wing compared to left-wing governments. The number of right-wing pledges is substantially higher for right-wing governments, just as the promises of the left to socialist executives.

¹⁶ The absolute number of pledges was considered instead of the relative number due to the small sample size in many policy issues/parties. Furthermore, culture was dropped from the “education and culture” area as a consequence of the coding guidelines of the promises.

Moreover, left-wing pledges seem to be more widespread across governments than right-wing pledges.

These descriptive results are consistent with the idea of parties offering alternative programmes across the left-right divide, which is consonant with H1. However, it must be borne in mind that about six in ten pledges in the Portuguese mainstream parties' manifestos (61.7%) were not able to be classified left or right. This is consistent with evidence stating that in Western democracies many issues in manifestos do not fit into a left-right cleavage (Kim & Fording 2002; Allen & Bara 2021), as well as pointing to a decline of left-right issues in manifestos (Green-Pedersen 2007, p. 616).

IV. Explaining manifesto pledge left-right location

In order to statistically test the hypotheses, the analysis now relies on a multinomial logistic regression, using left and right-wing location of pledges as dependent variables (undetermined pledges is the reference category). Multilevel modelling is used as the intra-class correlation coefficients of the intercept only models are not low for both variables, being the amount of variance explained at the year level 3.4% for left-wing and 14.7% for right-wing pledges¹⁷. Table 1 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 1 (ABOUT HERE)

Table 1 provides evidence that the colour of the government significantly explains the left-right location of pledges, supporting H1. First, model 1 shows that a right-wing government is more likely to propose a right-wing promise (comparing to an undetermined pledge) than a socialist government. In turn, a socialist government is more likely to make a left-wing promise. Second, by looking at governments individually, model 2 shows that all socialist executives have a

¹⁷ In order to validate the multilevel strategy and, consequently, the results of the analysis, the models were also run without resorting to this modelling. The results are very similar whether the multilevel strategy is chosen or not (these additional multinomial logistic regression models are shown in Table A2, in the Online Appendix).

significantly higher chance of proposing a left-wing promise in their manifestos than the right-wing coalition that took office in 2011. Conversely, the chances that these governments make a right-wing promise are always lower comparing to the right-wing coalition of 2011. The odds of the PSD/CDS coalition that took office in 2002 presenting a right-wing pledge is also lower than the 2011 coalition. Although being the same coalition as in 2011, as the parties in the executive are the same, these governments are quite different. Contrarily to the 2005 coalition, the 2011 executive was in office during the peak of the economic crisis in Portugal, and is manifestly considered as guided by a right-wing policy (Moury & Standring 2017).

Model 2 also shows that the effect of the government dummies is very stable over time, therefore discarding the idea of a move towards ideological convergence, as prior research has emphasized (McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5). This evidence supports H2.

Both models include as well seven dummies of the most salient policies (“other policy issues” is the reference). The main conclusion is that there do not seem to be typically left and right-wing issues that allow looking in ideological terms at the policy emphasis in the manifestos (as in Baumgartner, Brouard & Grossman 2009). Generally, these most salient issues significantly increase the odds of a party presenting either a left or a right-wing pledge in their manifesto, although coefficients are higher regarding the left-wing location of pledges on health, welfare and education, and regarding the right-wing location of the remaining issues. Moreover, although policy issues significantly contribute to explaining the left-right positioning of the promises, this contribution seems to less consistent than that of partisanship.

Finally, model 3 provides evidence to support H3 regarding the location of pledges to the right-wing, but less with regard to the left-wing. Compared to left-wing, right-wing executives seem to report more to their ideological line when defining their promises on the most salient issues (except for “health” and “finance, industry and commerce”). That is, the effect of partisanship is reinforced on the right when it comes to salient issues (interactions are significant and positive), but not on the left (where only health interaction is close to being significant). This is probably because left-wing pledges are more widespread across executive than right-wing, as before seen.

Table 2 (ABOUT HERE)

Consistent with these findings, Table 2 shows that the probability of a socialist government presenting a left-wing pledge is higher between 25 and 32 percentage points than that of presenting a pledge that is neither left nor right. In turn, the probability of the right-wing coalition making as well a right-wing pledge is higher than that of making an undetermined one: 24 and 32 percentage points respectively for the 2002 and 2011 executives. Furthermore, the difference between the probability of an executive presenting a promise from one wing or the other remains very stable across executives, showing no evidence of decline in more recent governments. These findings fully corroborate both H1 and H2.

Table 3 (ABOUT HERE)

Finally, Table 3 shows that the probability of a government presenting a right-wing pledge rather than an ideologically undetermined one is higher for right-wing governments notwithstanding the policy issue at stake. The probability is especially high for “macroeconomics”, “finance, industry and commerce”, and “justice and home affairs” (respectively 67%, 55% and 43%). Conversely, compared to an undetermined promise, left-wing governments have a lower probability of presenting a right-wing pledge, especially concerning “health”, “education” and “social welfare” (the probability is 4% or less). See in Table 4 the reversal of these trends in relation to both sets of issues. The distributions of probabilities in both tables demonstrate that the most salient issues reinforce the effect of partisanship, especially according to the issues that are more salient for each of the ideological wings (thus supporting H3).

An additional note reports to the difference of mean probabilities among left and right-wing. Differences indicate that although policy issues are differently mobilized by parties, thus contributing to explain government’s ideological differences with regard to party pledges, the issues that lead the parties to present promises more to the left or to the right are the same for both governmental formations. For instance, the probability of making a right-wing pledge on

macroeconomics is the highest both for left and right-wing executives, and of making it on education is the lowest. This means that the issues are important to identify the colour of the promises, but they are far from being decisive.

Conclusions

This research referred to the highly disputed ‘politics matter’ hypothesis focusing in a least-likely case to validate it: Portugal. The analysis examines manifesto pledges of the Portuguese governing parties over more than two decades. It looked into pledges left-right commitment in manifestos, a key and as yet untested indicator of public policies, assessing whether pledge left-right location significantly differs across governments. The results do not support the convergence argument hence evidencing that politics matter, also concluding that issue salience strengthens the partisan effect. The analysis found evidence that partisanship significantly explains the Portuguese executives’ agenda-setting when it comes to the left-right positioning of the most salient pledges. This effect is quite stable over time. Although left and right-wing governing parties give similar emphasis to the same issues, they propose a substantial amount of promises differently. Findings suggest that governments are clearly distinct in terms of the ideological anchoring of their packages of electoral promises.

Results also show that the emphasis parties give to policy issues is likely to be quite diverse from the positions they take on such issues (Benoit & Laver 2006: 127; Newton & van Deth 2009, p. 293), and that issue salience is an important mediator in the partisan effect. In particular, left-right issue salience noticeably increases the probability of an executive making a promise according to its colour; that is, left-wing governments make more left-wing-pledges when it comes to the most salient left-wing issues, and right-wing executives make more right-wing pledges on right-wing salient areas. These results reiterate the hypothesis on the prevalence of a partisanship effect.

Studying the Portuguese case, in which mainstream parties are seen as somewhat undifferentiated (Guedes 2012), enables suggesting that a partisanship effect on the pledged policies is likely to predominate in other more differentiated systems. The conclusions reached must, however, be read cautiously, as an important amount of the Portuguese governing party pledges – 61.7% - are

neither left nor right. That is, despite parties in government offering policy packages that are anchored in structuring left and right-wing policy issues, a substantial partisan transversality of policies prevails, which must be regarded as a drawback in the validation of the hypothesis.

Summing up, this research was able to demonstrate that an important portion of the promises presented in government parties' manifestos significantly follow the party colour, and consequently that Portuguese mainstream parties are far from being considered indistinguishable. These findings are convergent with evidence on Western Europe demonstrating that parties offer different and stable policies to electors (Klingemann & Budge 2013; McDonald & Budge 2005, chap.5). The study of partisanship effect on pledges adds knowledge about the role of party platforms, reiterating its importance. In particular, it echoes the centrality of the type of policy output in the results, reinforcing that research supported by party policy stances is likely to be more promising in backing the hypothesis than if supported by aggregated indicators. Of course, since this was a case study, more research is needed in order to consolidate the conclusions presented herein.

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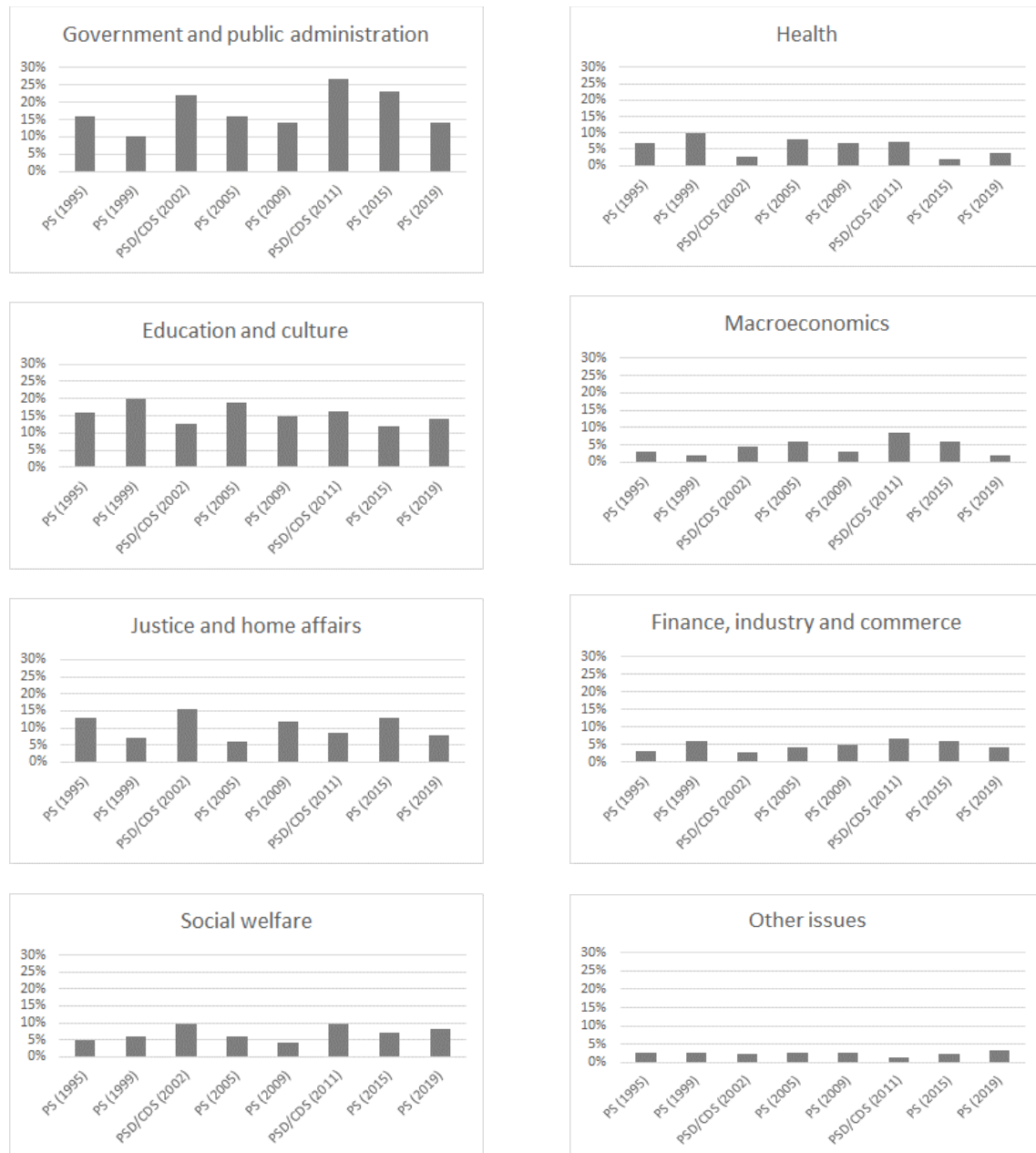
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Tables and figures

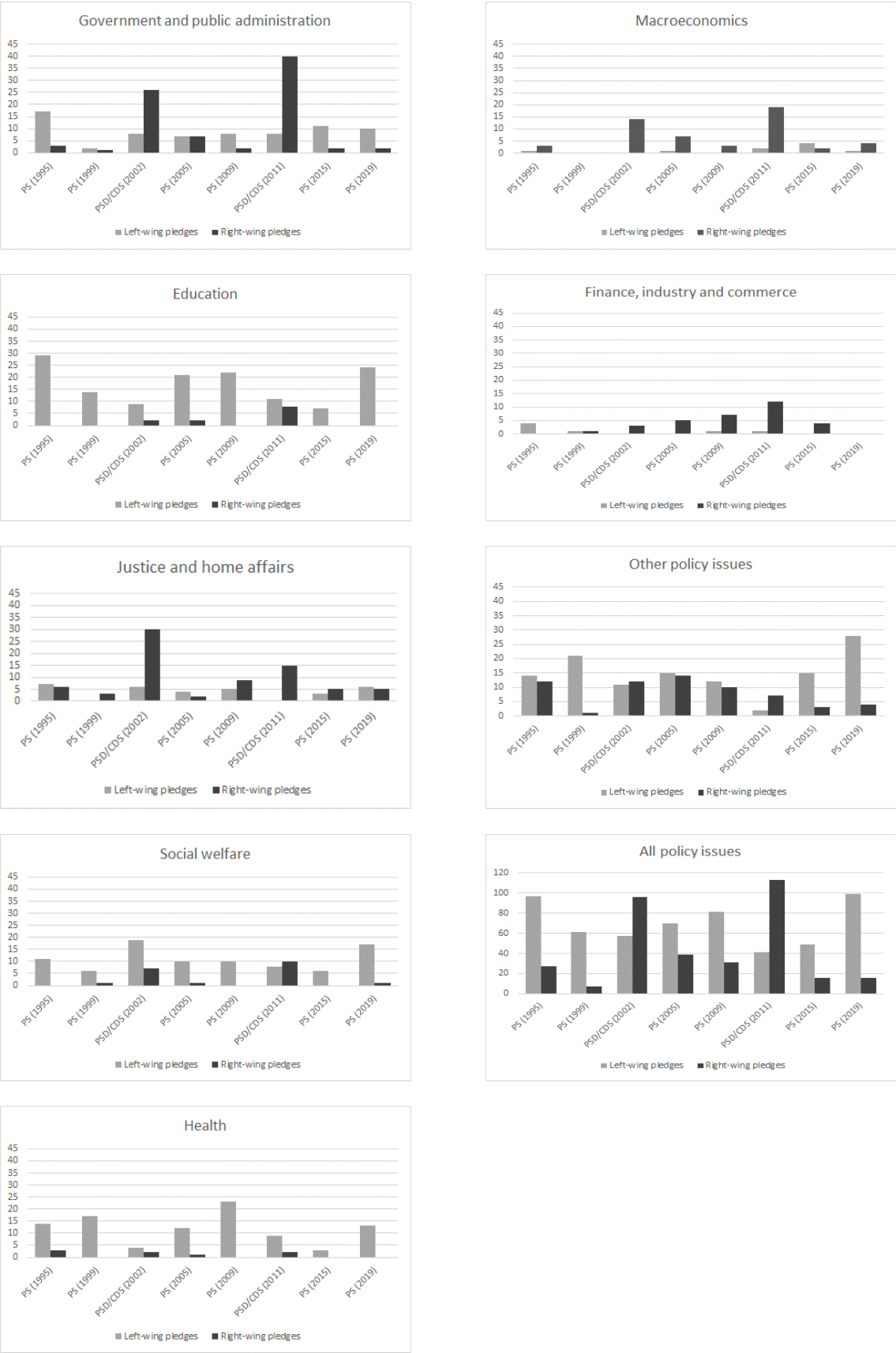
Figure 1. Issue attention in electoral pledges by policy and government party



Note: Values are the percentages of pledges in each policy issue regarding each government party(ies) manifesto(s) vis-à-vis all the pledges in the manifesto(s). N=2349.

Source: Portuguese government party manifestos. 1995-2019.

Figure 2. Party pledges left-right location by policy and government party



Note: Values are the absolute number of pledges regarding each issue and government party manifesto. N=900.
Source: Portuguese government party manifestos. 1995-2019.

Table 1. Parameter estimates for multinomial logistic regression of pledges left-right location in Portugal. 1995-2019 (reference category: ideologically undetermined pledges)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Government ideological position (right=1)	-1.06*** (0.16)	1.17*** (0.20)			-0.92* (0.39)	0.43 (0.27)
PS 1995 (=1)			1.10*** (0.03)	-0.85*** (0.04)		
PS 1999 (=1)			0.64*** (0.04)	-1.32*** (0.07)		
PSD2002 (=1)			0.21*** (0.03)	-0.35*** (0.02)		
PS2005 (=1)			0.68*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.04)		
PS2009 (=1)			0.74*** (0.04)	-0.90*** (0.04)		
PS2015 (=1)			1.19*** (0.05)	-0.96*** (0.02)		
PS2019 (=1)			1.03*** (0.05)	-1.04*** (0.05)		
Government and public administration (=1)	0.50* (0.24)	0.90* (0.37)	0.47* (0.22)	0.66# (0.34)	0.37 (0.25)	0.03 (0.16)
Education (=1)	1.44*** (0.25)	-0.71 (0.44)	1.48*** (0.27)	-0.01 (0.08)	1.46*** (0.27)	-1.77* (0.74)
Justice and home affairs (=1)	0.13 (0.24)	1.38*** (0.22)	0.22 (0.18)	1.15*** (0.22)	0.11 (0.27)	1.19*** (0.30)
Social welfare (=1)	2.14*** (0.23)	0.60* (0.27)	2.28*** (0.25)	0.76*** (0.11)	2.09*** (0.28)	-0.05 (0.45)
Health (=1)	2.67*** (0.38)	0.34 (0.38)	2.99*** (0.46)	1.00** (0.37)	3.02*** (0.51)	0.81 (0.63)
Macroeconomics (=1)	0.26 (0.41)	2.29*** (0.31)	0.66 (0.36)	2.31*** (0.36)	0.13 (0.48)	1.90*** (0.37)
Finance, industry and commerce (=1)	-0.27 (0.58)	1.68*** (0.23)	0.09 (0.35)	1.49*** (0.29)	-0.24 (0.64)	1.64*** (0.36)
Gov LR * Government					0.35 (0.57)	1.68*** (0.39)
Gov LR * Education					-0.25 (0.48)	1.81* (0.86)
Gov LR * Justice					0.01 (0.32)	0.60* (0.30)
Gov LR * S. welfare					-0.03 (0.29)	1.23* (0.49)
Gov LR * Health					-1.13# (0.66)	-0.61 (0.65)
Gov LR * Macroeconomics					0.44 (1.02)	1.01** (0.37)
Gov LR * Finance					-0.06 (1.02)	0.21 (0.43)
Intercept	-1.52*** (0.14)	-2.70*** (0.29)	-2.63*** (0.15)	-1.52*** (0.12)	-1.52*** (0.15)	-2.44*** (0.27)
AIC	19968.38		16473.24		19993.87	
BIC	19979.88		16484.73		20005.36	
N	2349		2349		2349	

Source: Portuguese government party manifestos. 1995-2019.

Notes: Models are GLMM (Generalized Linear Mixed Models). Probability distribution: Binomial. Link function: Logit. Standard errors in parenthesis. *** p<.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; #p<0.1. Highest VIF: 1.799.

Table 2. Mean predicted probabilities of pledges left-right location in manifestos by government party

	Left-wing pledge	Right-wing pledge	Undetermined pledge	Difference of means
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(b) – (a)
PS 1995	0.32 (0.19)	0.09 (0.08)	0.59 (0.17)	-0.23
PS 1999	0.28 (0.20)	0.03 (0.03)	0.68 (0.19)	-0.25
PSD/CDS 2002	0.14 (0.13)	0.24 (0.14)	0.62 (0.13)	0.10
PS 2005	0.25 (0.19)	0.14 (0.12)	0.61 (0.16)	-0.11
PS 2009	0.26 (0.19)	0.10 (0.08)	0.64 (0.16)	-0.16
PSD/CDS 2011	0.12 (0.11)	0.32 (0.18)	0.57 (0.15)	0.20
PS 2015	0.31 (0.17)	0.10 (0.08)	0.59 (0.14)	-0.21
PS 2019	0.31 (0.19)	0.05 (0.04)	0.64 (0.17)	-0.26

Source: Model 2 in Table 1.

Table 3. Mean predicted probabilities of a government presenting a right-wing electoral pledge by policy issue

	Left-wing government	Right-wing government	Difference of means
	(a)	(b)	(b) – (a)
Government and public administration	0.12 (0.04)	0.32 (0.04)	0.20
Education	0.02 (0.01)	0.08 (0.02)	0.06
Justice and home affairs	0.18 (0.05)	0.43 (0.05)	0.25
Social welfare	0.04 (0.02)	0.19 (0.04)	0.15
Macroeconomics	0.37 (0.09)	0.67 (0.05)	0.30
Health	0.02 (0.01)	0.14 (0.03)	0.12
Finance, industry and commerce	0.24 (0.08)	0.55 (0.04)	0.31
Other policy issue	0.05 (0.02)	0.16 (0.17)	0.11

Source: Model 2 in Table 1.

Table 4. Mean predicted probabilities of a government presenting a left-wing electoral pledge by policy issue

	Left-wing government	Right-wing government	Difference of means
	(a)	(b)	(b) – (a)
Government and public administration	0.24 (0.04)	0.08 (0.02)	-0.16
Education	0.47 (0.05)	0.22 (0.04)	-0.25
Justice and home affairs	0.17 (0.03)	0.05 (0.01)	-0.12
Social welfare	0.62 (0.05)	0.32 (0.05)	-0.30
Macroeconomics	0.14 (0.04)	0.03 (0.01)	-0.11
Health	0.73 (0.04)	0.45 (0.06)	-0.28
Finance, industry and commerce	0.11 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.09
Other policy issue	0.17 (0.03)	0.06 (0.01)	-0.11

Source: Model 2 in Table 1.

Online Appendix

Table A1. Pledges in Portuguese mainstream party manifestos by issue area (1999-2011)

Area	%		Cumulative %	
	PSD & CDS/PP	PS	PSD & CDS/PP	PS
Government and public administration	22,1	15,9		
Justice and home affairs	16,4	10,2		
Education and culture	11,7	15,8		
Social welfare	11,4	5,6		
Health	5,8	6,8		
Macroeconomics	5,7	3,9		
Finance, industry and commerce	4,3	4,7	77,4	62,9
Defense	3,5	2,0		
International affairs	3,3	3,5		
Transportation	2,8	4,6		
Civil rights, minorities and civil liberties	2,5	3,9		
Community development and housing issues	2,5	3,6		
Environment	2,0	2,3		
Agriculture	1,8	3,6		
Science, technology and communications	1,5	6,2		
Labor and employment	1,0	3,8		
Natural resources	0,6	1,3		
Energy	0,5	1,4		
Foreign trade	0,3	0,9		
Cultural events	0,3	0,0	22,6	37,1
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: Values are the percentages of pledges regarding each issue, computed separately for the socialist and right-wing coalition governments considering all the pledges in their manifestos between 1995 and 2019. N=2349.

Source: Portuguese government party manifestos, 1995-2019.

Table A2. Parameter estimates for multinomial logistic regression of pledges left-right location in Portugal, 1995-2019 (reference category: ideologically undetermined pledges)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Government ideological position (right=1)	-1.05*** (0.14)	1.10*** (0.13)			-0.90** (0.31)	0.35 (0.29)
PS 1995 (=1)			1.47*** (0.23)	-1.24*** (0.25)		
PS 1999 (=1)			1.00*** (0.23)	-2.31*** (0.42)		
PSD2002 (=1)			0.38 (0.24)	-0.37* (0.18)		
PS2005 (=1)			1.02*** (0.24)	-0.76*** (0.23)		
PS2009 (=1)			1.13*** (0.24)	-1.21*** (0.24)		
PS2015 (=1)			1.56*** (0.27)	-1.30*** (0.02)		
PS2019 (=1)			1.38*** (0.23)	-1.66*** (0.30)		
Government and public administration (=1)	0.51** (0.17)	0.94*** (0.19)	0.49** (0.17)	0.89*** (0.19)	0.38* (0.19)	0.08 (0.30)
Education (=1)	1.42*** (0.15)	-0.66* (0.33)	1.46*** (0.15)	-0.72* (0.33)	1.45*** (0.17)	-1.75* (0.73)
Justice and home affairs (=1)	0.15 (0.22)	1.37*** (0.20)	0.11 (0.22)	1.38*** (0.20)	0.13 (0.25)	1.19*** (0.26)
Social welfare (=1)	2.14*** (0.20)	0.62* (0.29)	2.16*** (0.20)	0.59* (0.29)	2.09*** (0.24)	-0.04 (0.62)
Health (=1)	2.63*** (0.22)	0.42 (0.41)	2.71*** (0.22)	0.34 (0.42)	2.98*** (0.28)	0.83 (0.57)
Macroeconomics (=1)	0.26 (0.38)	2.37*** (0.25)	0.28 (0.39)	2.78*** (0.26)	0.13 (0.44)	12.00*** (0.34)
Finance, industry and commerce (=1)	-0.30 (0.42)	1.74*** (0.27)	-0.25 (0.42)	1.69*** (0.28)	-0.27 (0.45)	1.64*** (0.33)
Gov LR * Government					0.32 (0.44)	1.67*** (0.42)
Gov LR * Education					-0.27 (0.42)	1.86* (0.84)
Gov LR * Justice					-0.00 (0.57)	0.58* (0.41)
Gov LR * S. welfare					-0.04 (0.45)	1.25# (0.73)
Gov LR * Health					-1.13* (0.53)	-0.54 (0.83)
Gov LR * Macroeconomics					0.41 (0.92)	0.97# (0.53)
Gov LR * Finance					-0.08 (1.06)	0.34 (0.55)
Intercept	-1.51*** (0.10)	-2.66*** (0.15)	-2.78*** (0.21)	-1.34*** (0.18)	-1.52*** (0.11)	-2.39*** (0.16)
Nagelkerke pseudo R ²	0,30		0,31		0,31	
N	2349		2349		2349	

Source: Portuguese government party manifestos, 1995-2019.

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis. *** p<.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; #p<0.1.