

# Voter Perceptions of Parties' Left-Right Positions: The Role of Party Strategies

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## **Abstract**

Left-right semantics help voters simplify the complex political reality as they reduce party views on a variety of issues to a single dimension. Less studied, however, is the question of how voters arrive at parties' left-right positions and how parties can influence voter perceptions. In this article, I demonstrate that the party can shape the voter's understanding of the content of its left-right ideology by using three strategies: avoidance, ambivalence, or ambiguity. Specifically, the party may avoid or de-emphasize, embrace a conflicting position, or becloud its position on the controversial issue; by so doing, it induces voters to place less weight on this issue when perceiving the party's left-right position. The empirical analysis connects voter and party data from 21 European democracies in the period 1996-2014 and finds empirical support for the effectiveness of these strategies. In particular, the study finds robust empirical evidence that strategic avoidance, ambivalence, and ambiguity strongly moderate the association between the party's perceived ideological brand and its underlying issue content.

Keywords: Left-right; party positions; voter perceptions; party strategies; ambiguity

# 1 Introduction

According to the responsible party model, political parties should match the preferences of their voters for democratic representation to be meaningful (Schattschneider, 1960; Powell, 2019). Matching preferences requires that voters and candidates speak in common terms to signal their preferences to each other, a purpose for which the ideological labels ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ are arguably the most useful. Scholars seem to agree that left-right semantics help voters simplify the complex political world as they reduce party views on tens of issues to a single dimension (Downs, 1957; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Hinich and Munger, 1996; Mair, 2007; Freire, 2006; Warwick, 2002; Van der Eijk et al., 2005). Despite its theoretical importance, less attention has been paid to the question of how voters arrive at parties’ left-right position and how parties manage their left-right image. This gap is unfortunate for our understanding of elite-masses linkages since, as McGraw (2003) argues, “a complete understanding of what ordinary citizens think about politicians will be out of reach until political psychologists take into account the strategic interplay between elites and the mass public.” (p.395)

This article investigates how political parties control their left-right image in elections. More specifically, it examines how party strategies moderate the association between the parties’ left-right ideology and the issue content underlying this ideology. According to Downs, parties take positions on different issues, each of which can be placed on the left-right dimension, but the “party’s net position on this scale is a weighted average of the positions of all the particular policies it upholds.” (1957, p.132) The present study argues that by placing different weights on different issues, parties induce the voter to consider some issues and discount others from the party’s ideological brand.

The central argument is that political parties can fashion the saliency of their signals by controlling two features of the message: frequency and clarity. Frequent and clear messages are expected to be conspicuous in the party system, whereas occasional, inconsistent, or

ambiguous messages are easily subdued. In this regard, I proposes three strategies the party can employ to control the weights voters may assign to its signals: avoidance, ambivalence, and ambiguity. The party that de-emphasizes or ignores a given issue (i.e., avoidance), embraces a conflicting position by emphasizing two opposite sides (i.e., ambivalence), or entirely beclouds its position on the issue say by not committing to precise policies (i.e., ambiguity) will induce the voter to pay less attention to it when making inferences about the party's left-right ideology. Since voters take their cues from parties to reduce information cost (Zaller, 1992) especially during election times (Gelman and King, 1993; Andersen et al., 2005; Adams et al., 2020), parties can manage the issues underlying their left-right position by strategically employing these tactics.

The connection between the three strategies is context-dependent: it depends on the situation facing the party. However, the article expects that, since evasiveness can be costly (Rogowski and Tucker, 2018; Cahill and Stone, 2018; Shepsle, 1972), the party will first prefer avoiding the controversial issue altogether. It will, however, resort to controlling the clarity dimension when it has to address the issue by employing one of the two substitutes, ambivalence or ambiguity.

To test these hypotheses, the study connects voter data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and party data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) that cover 133 political parties from 21 European democracies in the period 1996-2014. The findings come in line with these hypotheses. In particular, the empirical analysis substantiates that voters perceive the party's left-right ideology less in terms of its economic views to the extent that the party (1) pays less attention to the economy, (2) emphasizes market and planned economy policies in the same elections, or (3) beclouds its position on economic issues. More generally, the findings suggest that political parties are the 'masters' of their ideological image, as they may induce the voter to

consider issues and discount others from the party’s ideology.<sup>1</sup>

Investigating the role of party strategies in shaping voter perceptions is fundamental to our understanding of democratic representation. Research shows that voters, especially in advanced industrial democracies, use left-right terms to orient themselves in politics and to vote for the party closest to their views (Aldrich et al., 2009,0; Best and McDonald, 2011; Maurer and Schneider, 2019; Noël and Thérien, 2008; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008; Simas, 2013). Since parties are motivated first and foremost by attracting more votes, studying how party strategies affect voter judgments is essential to understanding the origins of the ideological congruence between voters and their representatives which representative democracy is a mirage without (Powell, 2019).

The findings bear important implications for the literature on the substantive meaning of left-right; particularly, they help explain why voters may comprehend the content of left-right ideological labels differently for different political actors (Dalton et al., 2011; De Vries et al., 2013; Meyer and Wagner, 2018; Giebler et al., 2019; Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Zechmeister, 2006; Schmitt and van der Eijk, 2009). The findings demonstrate that political parties can themselves color voters’ perceptions of their ideological brand to maximize their electoral gains.

More broadly, the findings speak to the recent debates on whether voters pay attention to party rhetoric. While Adams et al. (2011) find that voters do not update their perceptions of party positions, other recent studies find that voters are attentive to party policy statements (Fernandez-Vazquez, 2019), especially after major leadership changes (Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu, 2019). The current study contributes to this debate; in particular, it substantiates that voters perceive the content of parties’ ideology following the party’s rhetoric:

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<sup>1</sup>Nevertheless, some caveats are in order. First, the argument presented here does not overlook the fact that some voters do not closely follow electoral campaigns, whereas others are sophisticated enough to form their opinions independently. It is however expected to operate within the majority of voters who have average political knowledge and interest and who follow political debates nearby elections. Second, parties might also have different capacities depending on party resources and size in a party system.

to the extent that the party’s position is stated emphatically and unequivocally, voters do listen and comprehend the meaning of parties’ ideologies accordingly.

## 2 Party left-right positions and voter perceptions

A large body of literature posits that the Left-Right dimension is a fundamental heuristic device that helps achieve voter-party programmatic connection. For some, voters are only able to practice their role as sovereigns if they can employ left-right heuristics while deciding their vote (Aldrich et al., 2009).

Recent debates on voter perceptions have especially focused on two fundamental questions. First, do voters observe parties’ policy positions? There are still unsolved divides: while a part of the literature casts doubts in voters’ attentiveness to party rhetoric (Adams et al., 2011), another segment in the literature finds empirical evidence that voters listen to parties and perceive their policy positions following what they say in campaigns (Fernandez-Vazquez, 2019) or do in office (Ansolabehere and Jones, 2010).

Second, once this Rubicon is crossed, how do voters learn about party positions? Recent research substantiates that voters learn about parties’ policy positions from several sources, such as the media (Sommer-Topcu et al., 2020), from elite interactions and debates especially around national elections (Adams et al., 2020), from the ideological formation of governmental coalitions (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013; Adams et al., 2016), and from party policy statements following a major leadership change (Fernandez-Vazquez and Sommer-Topcu, 2019). What all these studies have in common is placing the party at the center of the voter’s perception and information.

### 2.1 Variations in the meaning of left-right

The current article agrees with the literature on the centrality of party rhetoric to voters’ perceptions. Moreover, it argues that party rhetoric and strategies do not only matter for

voters' perception with regard to locating the party on the left-right ideological space; they also shape the perceived content or substance of this ideology. This aspect has received relatively little attention in the literature (two notable exceptions are [Meyer and Wagner, 2018](#) and [Giebler, Meyer and Wagner, 2019](#)).

Scholars and analysts commonly consider the left-right labels as abstract and malleable concepts with no predetermined substance. This quality is corroborated by several studies that find their meaning varying across voters, countries, and over-time ([Conover and Feldman, 1981](#); [Freire, 2006](#); [Freire and Belchior, 2011](#); [Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990](#); [Jahn, 2011](#); [Schmitt and van der Eijk, 2009](#); [Zechmeister, 2006](#)). More importantly, scholars observe that the meaning of left-right also varies among political parties. For example, [Dalton et al. \(2011\)](#) observe that “the terms Left and Right can have different meanings for different political actors as well as change over time” (p. 82). “[...] when voters say a party is leftist (or rightist),” they elaborate, “this can also have different meanings. The leftism practiced by the German Greens is different from the policy emphases of the Linke, and different again from the policy emphases of the Social Democrats.” (p. 124)

Variations in the perceived meaning of left-right is also observed over-time within the same political actor. [Giebler et al. \(2019\)](#), for example, find that German voters placed the AfD on the left-right dimension ideology closer to its perceived economic position when the party first emerged in 2013. Only three years later, the party's ideology became more strongly associated with its perceived position on migration issues.

What explains this variation in the perceived content of left-right? The literature has paid attention to individual-level factors, such as education, political sophistication, interest in politics, exposure to the media, and left-right self-placement ([Bauer et al., 2017](#); [Freire and Belchior, 2011](#)) and party-system characteristics, such as political polarization ([Lachat, 2008](#); [Dalton, 2008](#); [Van der Eijk et al., 2005](#); [Freire, 2008](#)) and issue salience ([De Vries et al.,](#)

2013; Meyer and Wagner, 2018; Giebler et al., 2019).

More related to the current study, a number of scholars contended that parties can influence the meaning of left-right concepts. Meyer and Wagner (2018) argue that the parties' left-right ideology is the sum of parties' positions on two sub-dimensions: economic and cultural. The importance of each dimension to the party's ideology varies as a function in its salience to the party and in the party system as a whole. For example, if the economic dimension is more salient to the party and the electorate, the party's left-right ideology is filled with economic content. Giebler et al. (2019) apply this theory to the case study of the German AfD just mentioned above. The authors find that German respondents placed the party on the left-right dimension closer to its migration views – as they themselves perceive it – after Germany was hit by the refugee crisis in 2015 (i.e., issue salience to the voter, demand-side) and when migration issues became central to the party's programmatic orientation (i.e., issue salience to the party, supply-side). Similar arguments were made for issue entrepreneurs on the other side of the ideological spectrum; for example, Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990) claim that the rise of Green parties gave the ideological left a new meaning to party militants who defended green politics yet self-identified with the ideological left.

In short, scholars suggest that parties and elites can indeed influence the underlying meaning of the left-right labels. Notwithstanding, the role of party strategies has not been fully investigated. If voters place parties on the left-right dimension closer to the issues most important to the party (Meyer and Wagner, 2018; Giebler et al., 2019), we still do not know how parties induce voters to consider certain issues more than others when thinking of the party's ideology. By identifying priming strategies the party employs to color the voters' perception, the present study seeks to fill this lacuna.

## 2.2 The Role of Party Strategies

The previous section has shown that parties can shape the content of their brand, but the strategies parties may adopt to manage the content of their ideology has found little attention from researchers. This section suggests three electoral strategies that parties might adopt to manage their brand: avoidance, ambivalence, and ambiguity.

I pay close attention to electoral strategies because elections are the time when parties have to reveal information about their positions on a variety of issues and they invest resources to broadcast this information through a variety of means to voters. Likewise, it is the time when citizens pay more attention to politics. Even though political scientists claim that voters are generally disinterested in politics (Zaller, 1992), they find their pursuit of political information intensifies as elections approach (Gelman and King, 1993). Indeed, Andersen et al. (2005) introduce evidence from British elections that voters' information about party policy positions peaked around times of elections. Likewise, Adams et al. (2020) demonstrate that voters pay closer attention to inter-elite rhetoric around elections times and update their perceptions of party positions accordingly (see also Hansen and Pedersen 2014).<sup>2</sup> Thus, even if the voter may receive information throughout the year through, for instance, following the news (Merkley and Stecula, 2020), it seems more warranted to expect the voter's attention to politics to boost around election periods.

I consider left-right labels as empty vessels that parties fill with whatever issues they decide on, and that party decisions are ruled by strategic considerations. In Warwick's (2002) words, issues are the pieces from which the left-right dimension is constructed (p. 104). Spatial theorists expect that voters use the party's policy signals to map its positions on a latent ideological dimension, extending from right-wing (or conservative) to left-wing (or liberal). Accordingly, the party's net position could be considered as a weighted average of all the issue positions it upholds (Downs, 1957). It is during this stage that party leaders

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<sup>2</sup>However, some scholars believe that campaigns do not matter for voter judgments (Kalla and Broockman, 2018)



seek to convince the majority of voters that their party stands close enough to their position. I argue that parties can do so by the way they address the issues underlying the left-right dimension in elections. In particular, parties are motivated to make the voter perceive their ideological image in terms of the issues that advantage the party while avoiding other issues on which the party is clearly disadvantaged.

The party can assign different weights to its policy signals by managing two main features of the message: frequency and clarity. I suggest that the frequency and clarity of party messages will have important consequences for voters' perceptions; in particular, frequent and clear signals will be conspicuous in the party system, whereas signals that are only occasional or obscured will be subdued. Therefore, the party will be identified with the issues it emphasizes regularly and addresses clearly, while avoiding issues it mutes or obfuscates. There are several reasons to expect the frequency and clarity of party signals to affect the voter's perception. First, searching for information on specific issues will be taxing to the voter, increasingly so when the party purposefully mutes or blurs these issues. Since voters are information-economizing ([Downs, 1957](#)), they will use the signals readily available – that is, frequent and clear messages – to infer where the party stands ideologically ([Kuklinski et al., 2000](#)). Second, party statements are generally conveyed through the mass media. Therefore, the media will most likely amplify the messages that best match its style; that is, simple, clear, and catchy messages ([Bischof and Senninger, 2018](#)). When the message is, by contrast, subtle, obscured, or hard to disentangle, it will end up overlooked or ignored. Third, because election periods teem with political information that exceeds the voter's ability to process, the voter's perceptions will pass through an editing process, during which the voter will restrict her attention only to relevant and salient pieces of information, while 'pruning' irrelevant or muddy ones ([Lau and Redlawsk, 2006](#), p.27). Previous research has extensively shown how cue-taking from parties affects voters' perceptions ([Vössing, 2020](#)), a process I may extend to forming the substance of party ideologies. Therefore, clear, consistent, and recurrent sig-

nals have better chances to influence the voter's perceptions than noisy or occasional signals.

I suggest three priming strategies that parties adopt to manage its ideological profile. First, the party may downplay controversial issues by simply ignoring or avoiding discussing them in public. The party may strategically select issue to emphasize because they are salient to the party (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996; Walgrave and Swert, 2007), or because they are salient to the public and therefore ignoring them can be penalizing (Ansolabehere, S., & Iyengar, 1994; Sigelman and Buell, 2004; Sides, 2006; Spoon and Klüver, 2014). More fundamentally, the party has limited resources and cannot emphasize all issues at once; hence, it has to selectively choose issues to emphasize and others to mute or neglect. Since voters take their cues from political parties (Zaller, 1992), these tactics of emphasizing or avoiding issues will therefore shape the perceived content of the party brand: the more frequent the party speaks about an issue, the more it will be distinctive and the the party will be identified with this issue. Such frequent emphasis will be amplified and highlighted by the mass media and therefore attached to the party brand. By contrast, the more the party ignores or neglects the issue, the more likely it will be detached from the party brand.

**Avoidance hypothesis (H1):** as the party avoids a given issue, its perceived left-right ideology will be less associated with this issue.

However, elections often involve pressing issues that the party cannot completely avoid. For instance, the party cadres could be directly asked to address thorny issues they would have otherwise ignored, either by media interviewers or by challengers who wish to expose the party in public. In such cases, the party may resort to modifying the *clarity* dimension by employing one of two substitutes: ambivalence or ambiguity.

One strategy the party can employ in such cases is to 'go ambivalent' on controversial topics. The party may downplay the saliency of its message by speaking about positive and

negative aspects of the issue or by signaling that it is flexible enough to possibly endorse one action or its opposite. For example, the Labour party’s ‘Final Say on Brexit’ provides a clear example of ambivalence employed on a highly controversial issue. The party states that “Only Labour will offer the choice of remaining in the EU, or leaving with a sensible deal.”<sup>3</sup> When the party sends competing statements or mixed-messages, the substance of the message is muddled, and the party’s stand on this issue is muted (Steenbergen et al., 2007; Ray, 2003). In addition, emphasizing two sides of the controversy may induce the voter to think of the party as a moderate or indifferent. Consequently, the party views on this issue will be indiscriminate, while other issues which the party emphasizes emphatically will be noteworthy. Therefore, I expect that the party’s perceived position will be less attached to issues on which the party sends a mixed message, while it will be more strongly attached to issues the party emphatically addresses.

**Ambivalence hypothesis (H2):** as the party emphasizes two conflicting sides of an issue, its perceived left-right ideology will be less associated with this issue.

An alternative and a more general strategy to address controversial issues is to ‘go vague’ about them. For example, the party may make general statements that are hard to argue against, emphasize the valence side without committing to clear and definite policy proposals, attack the challenger without declaring a position, or even sneakily and skilfully alter its position on the controversy. Generally, the ambiguity of the party will evoke disagreement and confusion with regard to where the party stands on the controversy (Rovny, 2012; Bräuninger and Giger, 2018). When asked about certain issues, candidates’ strategic answers similar to ‘we will aim for the good of our country’ or ‘we will do what our people decide’ are ubiquitous in everyday politics. Such obscured messages will require high levels of political awareness and knowledge to be disentangled and internalized to the voter’s

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<sup>3</sup><https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/the-final-say-on-brexit/>. Access date: 10/03/2020

belief. For example, the voter will need to think carefully about the message, recall the history of party positions, or use party positions on other issues to make inferences about the party intentions. However, these qualities lack the greatest majority of voters. Research shows that voters hardly recall political information from their memory. Rather, they tend to make political judgments based on the information readily available at the time of the decision (Lodge et al., 1995).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, I expect that obscured messages will most likely be ignored, whereas clear-cut messages will stand out to the voter's perception. Therefore, the party brand will be less attached to the issues which the party obfuscates.

**Ambiguity hypothesis (H3):** as the party beclouds its position on a given issue, its perceived left-right ideology will be less associated with this issue.

To summarize, the party's perceived brand will be less strongly attached to the issues which the party avoids or blurs by going ambivalent or vague. Although these strategies do not exhaust the range of tactics that parties can employ, they represent important elements in the party's toolkit that could be used for shaping the voters' perceptions.

It is worth mentioning that the relationship between these strategies is far from being deterministic: in some situations, they can be substitutes, while in others they can complement each other, depending on the political situation facing the party. For example, a party that avoids an issue at all cannot be inconsistent or vague on this issue. By contrast, greater issue emphasis does not only mean that the party will speak too much about the issue, but also will vocalize its position clearly and consistently. In that sense, they can be substitutes. On the other hand, these strategies could also be complementary. The party may generally avoid the issue, but obscures its views when the party is obliged to address it. Likewise, the

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<sup>4</sup>There is a debate in the literature between memory-based and on-line perception processes. However, there is more evidence supporting the latter over the former. See Lodge et al. (1995) and the discussion of Lau and Redlawsk (2001) for more elaborate discussions on this topic.

party that does not have a unified position might decide to not address the issue in public at all. Whether these strategies are substitutes or complementary will, therefore, depend on the political situation facing the party.<sup>5</sup> However, since evasiveness is not without a cost (Shepsle, 1972), it is most sensible for the party to always avoid unfavorable issues when it can do so. The party will however go vague or ambivalent when the issue cannot be otherwise ignored. The above-mentioned case of the Labour party is a relevant example of ambivalence adopted on highly-salient and unavoidable issues.

It is also important to note that ambivalence and ambiguity are different from the wide-appeal (Sommer-topcu, 2015) and catch-all strategies (Kirchheimer, 1966). First, the main target of wide-appeal and catch-all is to free the party from a distinctive ideological label at all (de-ideologizing the party in Kirchheimer's words); hence, appealing to voters with heterogeneous ideological predispositions and interests. The purpose of party strategies highlighted in the current study is, by contrast, managing the substance of the party's distinctive brands in a way that favors the party. Second, more fundamentally, there are individual differences between ambivalence and ambiguity, on the one hand, and the wide-appeal and catch-all on the other. For example, wide-appeal entails that the party might take clear and distinct positions, but these positions are inconsistent in left-right terms. For example, the party might adopt pro-welfare economic policy (i.e., economically left-wing), but simultaneously endorses anti-immigration stands (i.e., culturally right-wing). Ambivalence, by contrast, relates to emphasizing two opposite sides of the same issue. Likewise, catch-all and wide-appeal relate to blurring the overall party ideology, whereas the current study employs ambiguity on individual issues underlying the party ideology. Finally, while the wide-appeal and catch-all strategies seek to maximize parties' vote share, the strategies highlighted in the current study focus on how the party fashions its brand. Whether these strategies are effective

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<sup>5</sup>While the aim of the current study is to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies on shaping the ideological brand of the party, investigating the contextual factors encouraging or discouraging the party from using them is an important question that could be tackled by future research.

tive electorally or not is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, although these strategies are theoretically similar, they are different with respect to the purpose and mechanisms.

## 3 Empirical Design

### 3.1 The Link Between Left-Right Ideology and Issue Content

The outlined theory implies that party strategies *moderate* the relationship between parties' left-right position and the issue content underlying this position. Therefore, evaluating the theory requires looking at party positions on some underlying issues to left-right. I rely on party positions on economic issues. Literature on the dimensionality of political competition postulates that competition in Europe is structured by at least two dimensions: economic and 'new politics' or cultural issues (Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006,0; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). The former relates to the traditional class cleavage that contrasts the leftist protectionists to the rightist capitalists. New politics, on the other hand, relate to a variety of cultural issues such as individual liberty, environment protection, same-sex marriage, views on multiculturalism and immigration, etc. Despite these differences, the left-right dimension structures both, as affinity emerged between the economic left and culturally libertarian (or progressive) on the one hand, and between the economic right and the cultural authoritarian (or traditional) on the other. Therefore, the left-right dimension can be now thought of as an umbrella dimension that includes diverse economic and non-economic content (Inglehart, 1984, p.37).

This article relies on economic issues for two reasons. First, economic issues are the most strongly associated with left-right, which is supported by both empirical findings (Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Marks and Steenbergen, 1999; Freire, 2015) and philosophical arguments (Bobbio, 1996). Busch (2016), for example, finds that “[.] from the voter’s perspective, the economic sub-dimension is linked more strongly to the concept left-right ideology, whereas the non-economic, value-oriented sub-dimension’s relationship to left-right ideology is less

clear” (p. 168). Likewise, (Meyer and Wagner, 2018) substantiate that the effect of economic sub-dimension on voter perception of party left-right position is as twice as big compared to the cultural sub-dimension. The data employed in this article, which I discuss later, support these conclusions as shown in Figure 1. The figure shows a very strong correlation between the party’s economic position and its perceived left-right ideology (Pearson’s correlation = 0.78). This means that any investigation that tests whether party strategies can weaken this association is a highly conservative test. If a party succeeds in making economic content less associated with its left-right position, it can potentially succeed in doing the same for other issues that are traditionally less associated with left-right. Second, new political issues are very diverse and less coherent than economic policies which makes operationalizing ambivalence and ambiguity on such aggregate sub-dimension problematic and unclear. This is not to say that the strategies presented earlier are exclusive to economic issues. Rather, it is only warranted to expect that economic issues are comparable across countries and over time, whereas cultural issues are more likely to be context-dependent. On this basis I proceed.



Note: Economic position (CHES) is plotted on the horizontal axis, and the party’s left-right position as perceived by voters (CSES) is plotted on the vertical axis. The shades represent 95% confidence interval.

Figure 1: The association between the party’s economic position and the perceived left-right ideology

### 3.2 Data and Measurement

The empirical analysis triangulates voter data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES - Modules 1–4) with party data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES, waves 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014) (Bakker et al., 2018) and the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Volkens et al., 2018). The merged data-set includes 133 political parties from 21 European countries in the period 1996-2016. The full list of countries and elections is provided in Table A2 in the Appendix.

The empirical analysis requires the following three pieces of information to evaluate H1



- H3: voters' perceptions of the parties' left-right ideology, parties' positions on the economic sub-dimension, and measures of the three proposed strategies, namely how much the party emphasizes the economy (H1), the extent to which the party emphasizes market and planned economy concurrently (H2), and the uncertainty surrounding the party's position on the economy (H3).

The *dependent variable* (*perceived L-R ideology*) comes from the CSES. The CSES includes data from nationally representative post-election surveys in a number of democracies, making it an appropriate source for measuring voters' perceptions following national elections. Respondents were asked to place the main parties in their national countries on a 0-to-10 scale, where 0 means extreme left-wing to 10 means extreme right-wing. The exact CSES question used to measure the dependent variable reads as follows: "*In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place [PARTY A-E] on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*" Since the data is structured at the voter level, I measure the dependent variable as the average voters' placement of the party in the current year.

The *independent variable* of interest (*party economic position*) is derived from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, particularly the waves 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014. The CHES project calibrates party positions by asking several political experts to judge their national parties' stands on several issues underlying the left-right super-dimension. In particular, I employ experts' judgments of the party's position on the economic sub-dimension. The exact CHES characterization of economic positions reads as follows: "*Parties can be classified in terms of their stance on economic issues. Parties on the economic left want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right emphasize a reduced economic role for government: privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, and a leaner welfare state.*" Experts are then asked to place parties on a similar

11-point scale that ranges from 0 (extreme economic left-wing) to 10 (extreme economic right-wing). Thus, the party’s position on the economy is measured as the average experts’ placement of the party in the current year.

The CHES data-set presents objective – and, arguably, comprehensive – measures of party positions. Specifically, political experts depend on a variety of complementary sources while judging the party, such as party manifestos, elite interactions, media coverage, websites, etc., and therefore represent what is generally known about the party with regard to its views on the economy (Adams et al., 2014). One alternative to using party positions from CHES could be employing manifesto data to measure party position on the economy. However, using CMP to capture party economic positions will lead to confusion between party position on the economy, on the one hand, and ambivalence, on the other. Specifically, the CMP coding scheme was originally developed to test a saliency theory of electoral competition (Gabel and Huber, 2000, p.96); therefore, party positions from CMP are constructed by simply comparing the attention the party pays to two opposite sides of issues. Thus, party position on the economic sub-dimension retrieved from manifestos will be theoretically and empirically confused with ambivalence on the economy, which is central to the current study.<sup>6</sup>

The three proposed strategies, hypothesized to *moderate* the association between the perceived party ideology and the party’s economic position, are operationalized as follows. I employ CMP data to measure avoidance (H1) and ambivalence (H2). The CMP data-set is well-suited to measure these strategies for several reasons. First, manifestos are documents that parties release in the run-up to election campaigns; hence, they summarize party views on salient issues. Second, party elites confirm that manifestos streamline the campaign and guide the party elites while addressing issues (Eder et al., 2017; Adams et al., 2011). Third, the CMP data is originally coded with the purpose of testing a salience theory of party

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<sup>6</sup>To test if the findings are only specific to party positions driven from expert surveys, Tables A12 and A14-A15 in the Appendix replicate the analysis while employing party economic position from manifestos and national election campaigns (PolDem) (Kriesi et al., 2020).

competition (Gabel and Huber, 2000); therefore, it is most suited to measure the attention parties give to issues. Beside, CMP categories can be divided onto two sides, positive and negative, and are therefore pertinent to capture the inconsistency of party positions.

First, I operationalize the first strategy (*economy emphasis*) as the extent to which the party makes statements on the economy in the current elections in its manifesto. CMP coders match up quasi-statements in parties' manifestos to 56 issue categories which reflect party priorities. To measure how much the party emphasizes the economy, I aggregated all categories that include economic content, which sum up to 22 categories: Table A3 in the Appendix lists these categories. Thus, the party's economy emphasis is measured as the sum proportion of the manifesto quasi-statements related to the economy in the current year. This variable theoretically ranges from 0 (no statements on the economy) to 100 (the whole manifesto is dedicated to the economy).

Second, measuring party ambivalence requires observing party emphasis on two clearly defined categories that reflect party views on economic protectionism and economic liberalism. Therefore, I sort the CMP economic categories to either economic right-wing (R) or left-wing (L) as listed in Table A4 in the Appendix. I measure the second strategy (*economy ambivalence*) by taking the *absolute* difference between both aggregate measures scaled by their sum. Formally, this measure can be expressed as follows:

$$Ambivalence = \frac{|R - L|}{R + L},$$

where R and L are the sum proportions of the manifesto dedicated to right- or left-wing economic issues, respectively.

The logic underlying this measure is that if the party emphasized only either left-wing or right-wing economic policies in the manifesto (R = 1 and L = 0, or vice versa), the score should be one. By contrast, if the party made equal statements on L and R (R = 0.5 and L = 0.5), the overall score should therefore be zero. I reversed this variable so that 1 indicates perfect ambivalence and 0 indicates perfect clarity.

In contrast to avoidance and ambivalence, ideological ambiguity is hard to measure as it contains several forms. For example, the party might emphasize the valence side of the controversy, mention vague and general statements that are hard to understand, attack the challenger without stating a position, or even change its position over time. Therefore, previous literature employs the perceptual disagreement among experts while placing the party on a certain ideological scale as a proxy to calibrate ambiguity. The logic underlying this proxy is that political experts are the most politically sophisticated among the electorate. If the party is emphatically clear, there should be little to no disagreement among experts; thus, if experts disagree, this is because the party does not convey information clearly and concisely, in other words it is being deliberately ambiguous. However, it is, of course, likely that experts may disagree for other reasons. For example, they may disagree on small parties more than the mainstream well-known parties. They may also manifest more disagreement on parties that have not been to office than on parties serving in government or with prior cabinet participation. Luckily, these factors could be accounted for using appropriate controls, such as party size and government status. Hence, after controlling for these appropriate covariates, the party's strategic action is considered the cause of this disagreement (Rovny, 2012,0; Somer-topcu, 2015; Cahill and Stone, 2018; Han, 2018; Rogowski and Tucker, 2018).<sup>7</sup> I therefore follow past literature and measure the third strategy, the ambiguity of party stands on the economy (*economy ambiguity*), as the standard deviation of expert evaluations of the party's position on the economic sub-dimension (CHES). Specifically, I use experts' disagreement on the same question used to measure party economic positions. The number of experts who evaluated the parties ranges from 3 to 23, while the average is 10.8 expert evaluating each party and the standard deviation is 4 experts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>For elaborate discussions on this, please see the web appendix of Rovny (2012)

<sup>8</sup>Since the variable is right-skewed as shown in Figure A1, all empirical models use the logged version of expert disagreement.

The analysis, in addition, includes several control variables. I control for party size using the party's *vote share* in the current elections. I also control for the party's *government* status. Compared to small and challenger parties, bigger and incumbent parties have more reputation on economic issues and as a result their ideology is more expected to be filled with economic content (Rovny, 2013).

Since parties may pay more attention to the economy at times of economic deterioration, I control for the change in *inflation* rate, measured as the difference between inflation rate in the current year (t) and in the previous year (t-1). Moreover, since parties have limited resources and therefore cannot speak about all issues, I control for emphasis on new politics issues (*GALTAN emphasis*). Similar to economy emphasis, GALTAN emphasis is the sum of CMP quasi-statements dedicated to new cultural issue categories, as listed in Table A3 in the Appendix. I also control for the party's position on new politics (*GALTAN position*), for which I use the CHES question on the GALTAN sub-dimension. Besides, I control for the time-difference between the CHES survey and the closest national elections before the survey. Finally, I estimate country fixed effects to control for other unobserved cross-country differences.

## 4 Analysis and Results

The theory suggests that facing unfavorable issues, the party, first, will avoid addressing the issue altogether by keeping silent, since evasiveness can be harmful. If the party cannot avoid a controversial issue, it resorts to one of two substitutes to control the clarity of the message, namely ambivalence or ambiguity. This two-step argument is reflected in the empirical design as follows: I first evaluate the effectiveness of avoidance (H1) and ambivalence (H2). Next, I evaluate the effectiveness of ambiguity (H3), while controlling for avoidance. Since ambivalence and ambiguity are two substitutes that seek to control the clarity of the message

and are therefore unlikely to be adopted together, the empirical test investigates their effect separately while controlling for how frequently the party speaks about the economy.

Table 1: The effect of economic position, moderated by avoidance (H1) and ambivalence (H2)

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R ideology</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Baseline	Avoidance	Ambivalence	No controls	Controls	Full
Economic Position	0.715*** (0.033)	0.502*** (0.105)	0.779*** (0.066)	0.544*** (0.111)	0.216* (0.102)	0.334** (0.106)
Economy Emphasis		-0.040* (0.016)		-0.045** (0.015)	-0.027* (0.013)	-0.022 (0.014)
Eco. Pos. × emphasis		0.006* (0.003)		0.007** (0.003)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)
Economy Ambivalence			3.336*** (0.778)	3.520*** (0.774)	1.898** (0.700)	1.795* (0.719)
Eco. Pos. × ambivalence			-0.413** (0.130)	-0.447*** (0.130)	-0.204+ (0.116)	-0.164 (0.120)
Constant	1.628*** (0.176)	2.969*** (0.553)	0.882** (0.276)	2.331*** (0.561)	1.214+ (0.706)	0.773 (0.838)
Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	296	296	296	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.614	0.623	0.639	0.650	0.778	0.808
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.613	0.619	0.636	0.644	0.767	0.782

Note:

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

#### 4.1 Avoidance and Ambivalence Hypotheses (H1 & H2)

To test the avoidance and ambivalence hypotheses, I first estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Perceived L-R ideology} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ party economic position} + \beta_2 \text{ economy emphasis} + \beta_3 \\
 & \text{economy ambivalence} + \beta_4 \text{ party economic position} \times \text{economy emphasis} + \beta_5 \text{ party} \\
 & \text{economic position} \times \text{economy ambivalence} + \text{Controls} + \epsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

The theory expects positive  $\beta_4$  and negative  $\beta_5$ , indicating that the more the party emphasizes the economy, the stronger its L-R ideology will be associated with its economic

position (H1), and the more the party simultaneously emphasizes left- and right-wing economic issues, the less its ideological label will be associated with its economic position (H2), respectively.

I present the results of this model in Table 1.<sup>9</sup> In the baseline model (column 1), I regress the perceived L-R ideology on party economic position. In columns 2 – 3, I estimate a separate model that interacts party economic position with economy emphasis (column 2), and economy ambivalence (column 3), separately. These two models only include the constitutive and interaction terms with no control variables. Column 4 tests avoidance and ambivalence together with no controls, while Column 5 adds the control variables specified above to the model. Finally, Column 6 estimates the full model, including the full set of control variables and the country fixed effects.

In line with Figure 1, the baseline model in Table 1 shows a strong and positive correlation between the party’s economic position and voters’ perceptions of its ideology. Specifically, economic position alone accounts for 61% of the variation in the perceptions of left-right ideology. The effect magnitude is large and highly significant, indicating that a one-point increase in party’s economic position on the 0–10 scale is associated with a 0.715-unit shift to the right on the 0–10 left-right dimension. Thus, voters seem to strongly utilize party stands on the economy to make inferences about its position on the latent left-right scale.

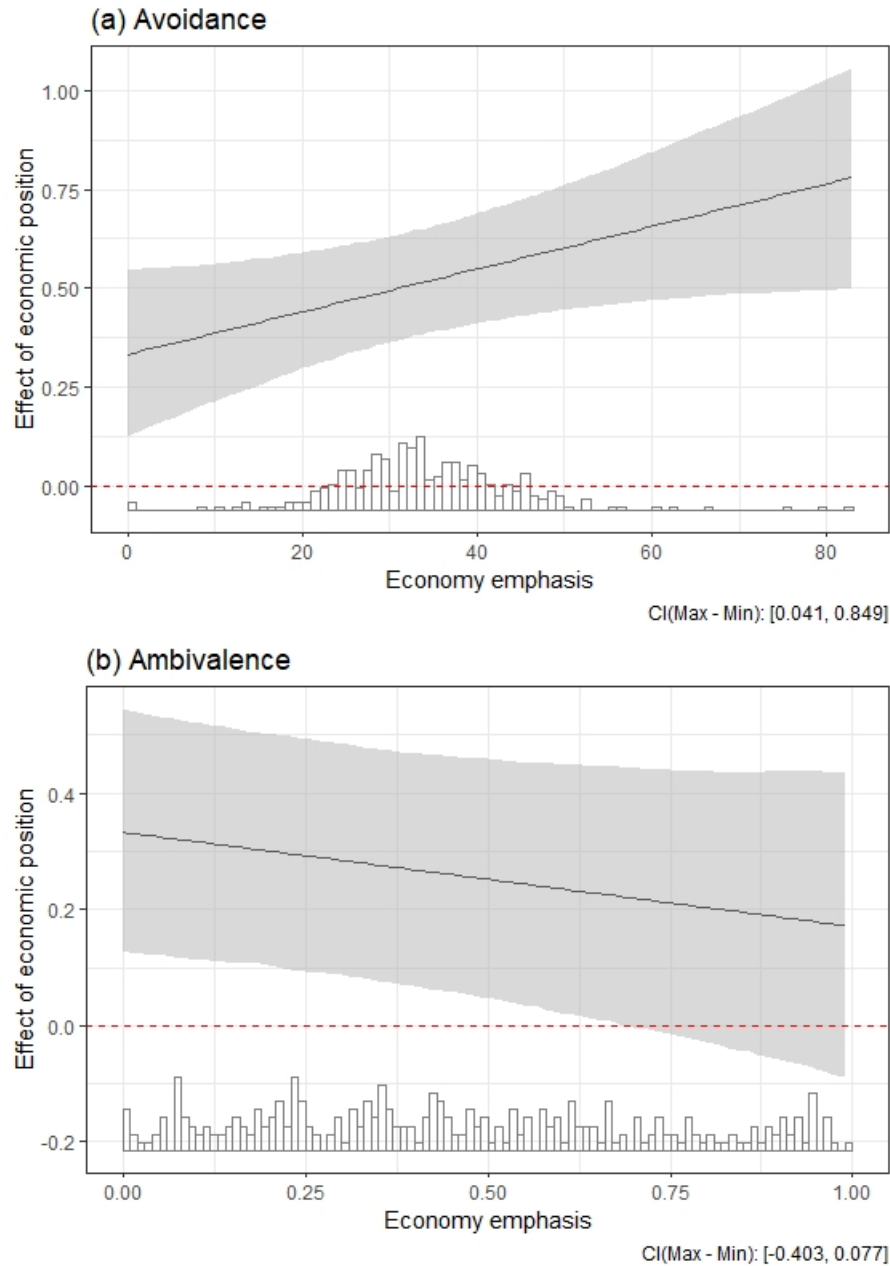
Hypothesis 1 expects that voters will perceive the party’s ideology in terms of a given issue, in this context the economy, to the extent that the party emphasizes this issue. Confirming this hypothesis, the table shows a positive and statistically significant interaction term between economic position and economy emphasis. This positive effect substantiates that voters’ perceptions of party ideologies become more strongly associated with its economic stands the more the party emphasizes the economy by making more frequent statements.

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<sup>9</sup>The full report of the results is presented in Tables A5 and A6 in the Appendix

The effect is consistent and significant after controlling for ambivalence (column 4), adding control variables (column 5) and country fixed effects (column 6). Figure 2 shows the conditioning effect in the full model graphically: it plots the marginal effect of economic position on voters perceptions, moderated by the number of statements the party makes about the economy in its manifesto (panel a). The moderating effect of electoral statements is striking: at the very low levels of economy emphasis, the effect of economic position is close to 0.3. The effect increases to the extent that the party dedicates its manifesto to economic issues. At the highest levels of economy emphasis, the effect of economic position increases to 0.75, indicating a 150% increase. This finding fits nicely with the literature: previous studies find that parties' emphasis on given issues increases their saliency in the party system as a whole (De Vries et al., 2013). These findings imply that, in addition, the party's emphasis also prompts voters to use these emphasized issues to infer the party's ideology. In other words, the party gets ideologically 'defined' by the issues it emphasizes in the party system.





Note: The marginal effects of party economic position are plotted on the vertical axes. Values of two moderators, avoidance (a) and ambivalence (b), are plotted on the horizontal axes. The figures represent the marginal effect of party economic position (solid line) with 95% confidence intervals (shades) across values of the two moderators (horizontal axis). The theory expects positive slope for avoidance and negative slope for ambivalence.

Figure 2: The marginal effects of economic positions on the perceived left-right ideology, moderated by avoidance (H1) and ambivalence (H2)

Turning to hypothesis 2, I expected that the party that goes ambivalent on the issue prompts voters to attach it less strongly to the party's ideology. Supporting the hypothesis,

the interaction term between economic position and economy ambivalence is statistically significant and negative, suggesting that voters perceive the party's ideology less in terms of economic policy to the extent that the party emphasizes market and planned economy in the manifesto. Column 3 – a simple model that includes no control variables – shows a negative and strong conditioning effect of ambivalence on economic position. For example, the effect of economic position declines by 0.4 points for every one unit increase in the ambivalence score. The standard deviation of the outcome variable is 2, indicating that the effect substantially large. This conditioning effect holds after controlling for how much the party addresses the economy (column 4), but becomes marginally significant after adding the set of control variables (column 5). Besides, the interaction term falls short of significance in the full model that includes country fixed effects (column 6). Nonetheless, it retains the negative direction of the effect as expected by the hypothesis. Therefore, the support for H2 is so far unemphatic.

To show this conditioning effect graphically, Panel b in Figure 2 plots the conditioning effect from the full model: it plots the marginal effects of economy position on voters' perceptions through the full range of the economy ambivalence variable. Although the interaction falls short of statistical significance after adding country dummies, the effect of economic position declines as ambivalence increases. Specifically, the effect of economic position – revolving around 0.33 – is positive and significant at low levels of ambivalence. This effect declines as ambivalence increases, and becomes indistinguishable from zero at the highest levels of ambivalence. The effect therefore comes as expected in hypothesis 2. The findings, thus, implies that emphasizing two opposite sides of issues can make the party signal muddy: the voter pays less attention to the party's economic stand while inferring its ideology the more the party pays equal attention to the two opposite sides of economic policy.

## 4.2 Ambiguity Hypothesis (H3)

Table 2: The effect of economic position, moderated by ambiguity (H3)

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ambiguity	No controls	Controls	Full model
Economy Position	0.675*** (0.034)	0.402*** (0.104)	0.172+ (0.095)	0.307** (0.100)
Economy Emphasis		-0.045** (0.015)	-0.032* (0.013)	-0.027+ (0.015)
Eco. position × emphasis		0.008** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.006* (0.003)
Economy ambiguity	1.433*** (0.422)	1.606*** (0.421)	1.170** (0.352)	1.141** (0.365)
Eco. position × ambiguity	-0.151+ (0.085)	-0.186* (0.085)	-0.189** (0.070)	-0.172* (0.072)
Constant	1.816*** (0.180)	3.371*** (0.550)	2.044** (0.720)	1.482+ (0.866)
Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	296	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.639	0.650	0.780	0.808
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.635	0.644	0.768	0.782

*Note:* + p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

So far, the analysis has shown support for H1 and a partial support for H2. To evaluate H3, concerning the moderating effect of ambiguity, I estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Perceived L-R ideology} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ party economic position} + \beta_2 \text{ economy emphasis} + \beta_3 \\
 & \text{economy ambiguity} + \beta_4 \text{ party economic position} \times \text{economy emphasis} + \beta_5 \text{ party} \\
 & \text{economic position} \times \text{economy ambiguity} + \text{Controls} + \epsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

The model is identical to the one utilized above, except that it replaces economy ambiguity with economy ambivalence. Also similar to the previous test, the theory expected negative  $\beta_5$ , indicating that the more the party blurs its economic position, the less its L-R ideology becomes associated with its economic position (H3).

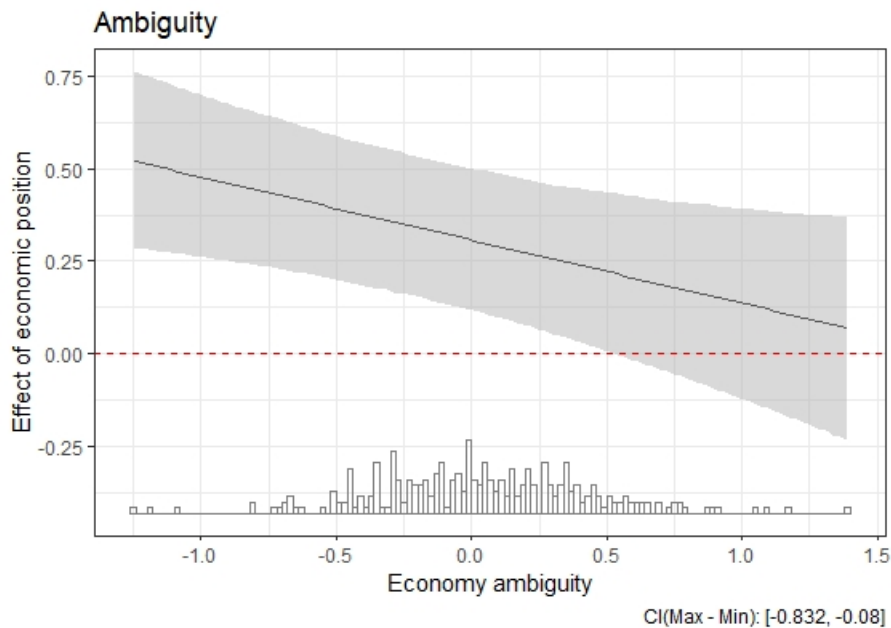
Table 2 presents the estimates for this model. The table shows that the conditioning effect of ambiguity is negative and statistically significant. Looking at column 1, the interaction term is negative, showing that the voters’ perceptions of parties’ ideology becomes less strongly attached to their economic views the more they blur economic issues. Specifically, the effect of economic position declines by 0.15 on the 0–10 scale for every one percent increase in economic ambiguity (logged). The effect holds after controlling for avoidance (column 2), adding controls (column 3) and country fixed effects (column 4): the moderating effect remains negative and statistically significant. This interaction effect is depicted in Figure 3. The figure shows a strong conditioning effect of ambiguity: at low ambiguity levels, the effect of economic position is strong and positive, revolving around 0.5. This effect, however, declines as ambiguity increases, and washes out at the highest values of economic ambiguity. The figure shows that the effect of economic position almost drops by 200% by moving from the minimum to the maximum values of ambiguity. The finding therefore implies that the party that increases uncertainty around its position by blurring or obfuscating, the voter refrains from using this position to make inferences about the party’s ideology.

### 4.3 Robustness Tests

The findings stand robust against several robustness checks which I report in the Appendix. First, Table A12 utilizes CMP data to estimate party position on the economic sub-dimension. I calculate party positions on the economic sub-dimension following a variation of the *logit rile* index suggested by [Lowe et al. \(2011\)](#). Second, Tables A14 and A15 utilize data from actual national election campaigns - PolDem [Kriesi et al. \(2020\)](#). While these two alternative data-sets employ radically different data-generating processes, they nonetheless give very similar results to the findings reported above. Third, instead of party position on the general economic sub-dimension, I employ the CHES party position on the

specific issue of *redistribution* to test the consistency of the results. As Table A9 shows, this alternative measure also gives identical results.

Fourth, Table A4 in the Appendix reports estimation from a multi-level regression model. Finally, Table A5 evaluates the hypotheses by employing individual-level data that contain 200,000 observations. The data are organized as voter-party dyads, meaning that each voter enters the data as many times as the parties she was asked to evaluate. These two tests give identical results. The individual-level analysis includes, in addition to the full set of controls, a number of individual-level variables which give interesting findings. For example, Figure A7 shows that the association between economic position and left-right ideology increases with higher levels education, household income, and biological age.



Note: The marginal effects of party economic position are plotted on the vertical axes. Values of ambiguity are plotted on the horizontal axes. The figure represents the marginal effect of party economic position (solid line) with 95% confidence intervals (shades) across values of the moderator (horizontal axis). The theory expects a negative slope. Note that the logged values of ambiguity are used.

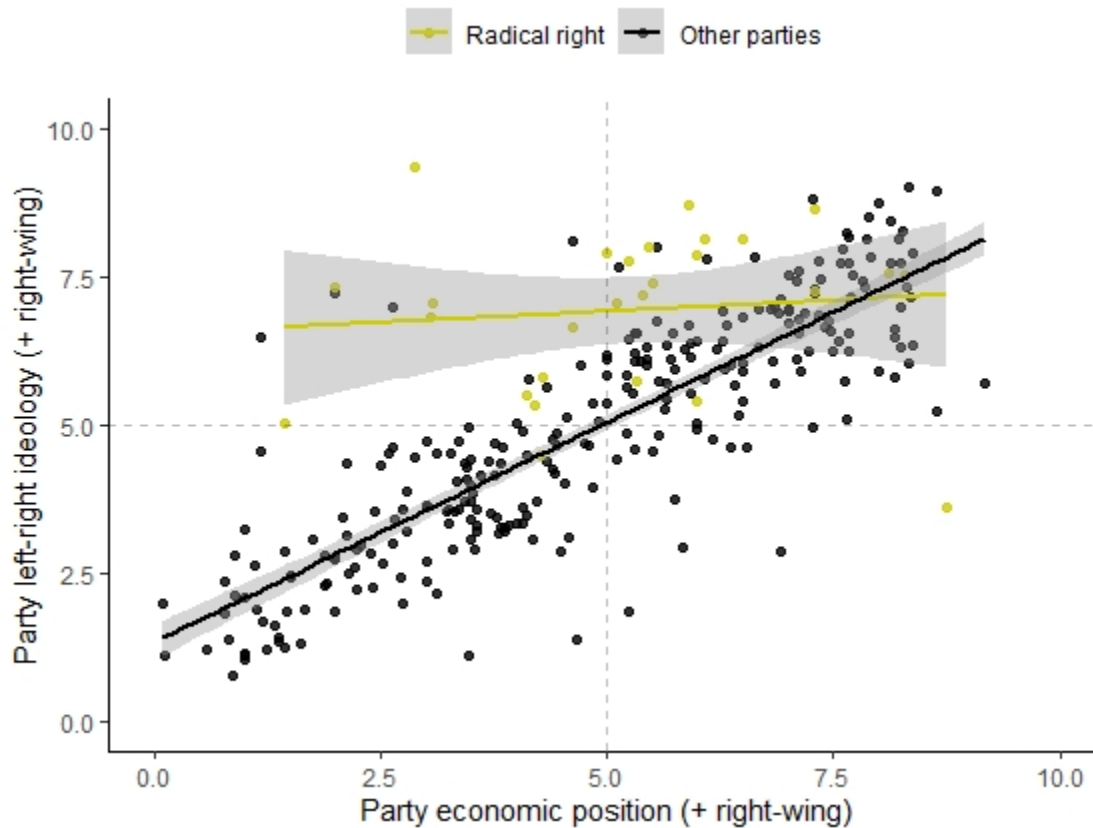
Figure 3: The marginal effects of economic positions on the perceived left-right ideology, moderated by ambiguity (H3)

#### 4.4 Further implications: the Radical Right

The findings have manifested that the party's perceived ideology is less attached to the economy when the party avoids or blurs the economy by going ambivalent or ambiguous. I now briefly pay closer attention to one implication of these findings. Specifically, I analyze how voters perceive the ideology of the Radical Right Parties (RRPs) in relation to their stand on the economy. The literature argues that the RRPs appeal to voters with heterogeneous economic interests; therefore, this party family tends to obscure their position on the economy and rather campaign on other issues such as nationalism and immigration (Rovny, 2012). The data employed in the present study also supports this argument: as Figure A2 in the Appendix shows, the radical right party family scores the highest on economic ambiguity variable, the lowest on economy emphasis, and among the moderately-high league on economy ambivalence.

Accordingly, the findings entail the following empirical expectation: if the radical right constantly blurs or mutes economic issues, voters should perceive its ideological labels away from the economy in comparison to other party families with more discernible economic positions.

To evaluate this expectation, Figure 4 plots parties' economic position against the perceived left-right ideology. The figure compares RRPs (in yellow) with all other parties (in black). The figure strongly supports the outlined expectation: it shows a striking difference between the radical right, on the one hand, and the other party families, on the other. In particular, the black line manifests a very strong and positive correlation between economic positions and the perceived left-right ideology. By contrast, the slope is almost zero for the radical right family, indicating that its perceived ideology is almost independent from its economic views. Taken together, the analysis above as well as the comparison between the radical right and other party families support the main hypotheses: party strategies seem to manage the substance of its ideology.



Note: Party economic position (CHES) is plotted on the horizontal axis, and the party's perceived left-right position (CSES) is plotted on the vertical axis. The figure represents the association between economic position and left-right ideology for the radical right (in yellow) and other parties (in black) with 95% confidence intervals (shades). The other parties include conservatives, christian democrats, socialist, extreme left, liberal, and green parties.

Figure 4: The association between economic position and the party's perceived ideology for the Radical Right and other parties

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Left-right semantics are considered of high importance to political competition, to the extent that it is hard to think of politics without employing the concepts left and right. However, these concepts are flexible enough to the extent that they accommodate different issue content for different political actors. The current study demonstrated that parties can shape voter understanding of their ideology by employing different electoral strategies. Specifically,

it proposed three political strategies that parties can adopt for this purpose: avoidance, ambivalence, and ambiguity. The empirical analysis established that voters comprehend the party's left-right position less in terms of economic policies to the extent that the party makes less statements about the economy in its electoral manifesto (i.e., avoidance), equally emphasizes protectionist and free-market economic policies (i.e., ambivalence), or when the party blurs its position on the economy, which is captured by greater expert disagreement on party economic position (i.e., ambiguity).

What implications do these findings have for democratic governance as we know it today? Generally, these findings lead to mixed optimistic and pessimistic implications. On the positive side, they imply that voters do listen to what parties say in electoral campaigns to the extent to which the party's message is visible and clear. The literature has hitherto introduced mixed evidence for whether voters pay attention to party messages. On the one hand, [Adams et al. \(2011\)](#) cast doubts in voters' ability to update their perception of party positions. Looking at party manifestos, the authors find that when political parties adjust their ideological positions over-time, voters do not update their perceptions accordingly. On the other hand, other studies challenge this conclusion and find that voters do listen to party electoral statements ([Fernandez-Vazquez, 2014](#); [Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu, 2019](#); [Somer-Topcu et al., 2020](#)). The current study helps establish the connection between these studies: it suggests that voters listen to party rhetoric and understand the party's ideology accordingly when the message is conveyed emphatically and clearly. In short, this is good news for democracy.

Nonetheless, the findings may have some bad news for democracy. They show that the voter perceives the party's ideology in terms of the issue the party strategically decides on; hence, the voter – especially the average voter with limited political knowledge – may vote for a party that has a similar ideological orientation to her own, but does not necessarily represent her policy preferences on other issues. Putting it differently, the voter might im-



pute this position to other policy domains that the party did not address (Dahlberg and Hartevelt, 2016), which may make the voter eventually cast the wrong ballot (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). In Powell's (2019) words, that would make political representation 'go astray'.

Finally, one fundamental aspect that the current study did not address is the systematic effect of party strategies. It is likely that when the party alters voters' understandings of its ideology, it does not only change voters' perception of the party, but also modifies the general mapping of the left-right ideology with its underlying issue content. While one aspect of this systematic effect has been studied for example in the case of issue entrepreneurs (Kitschelt and Hellemans, 1990), the question has not been yet fully investigated. Therefore, how the highlighted party strategies could change the mapping of left-right and its substance beyond the focal party is still an open question for future research to investigate.

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# **Voter Perceptions of Parties' Left-Right Positions: The Role of Party Strategies**

On-line Appendix

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# 1 Descriptives

## 1.1 Distribution of Main Variables

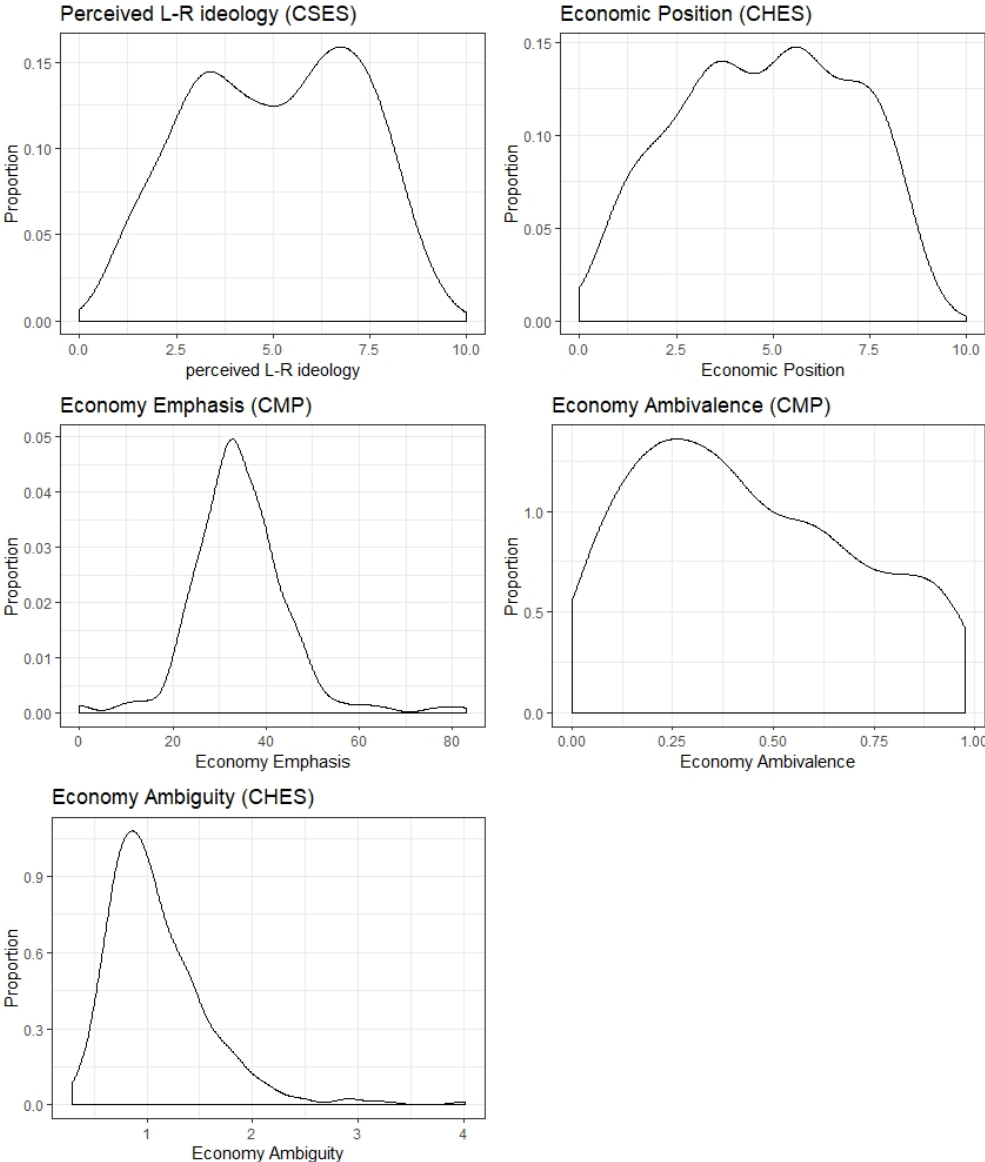


Figure A1: Distribution of Main Variables

## 1.2 Main Variables by Party Family

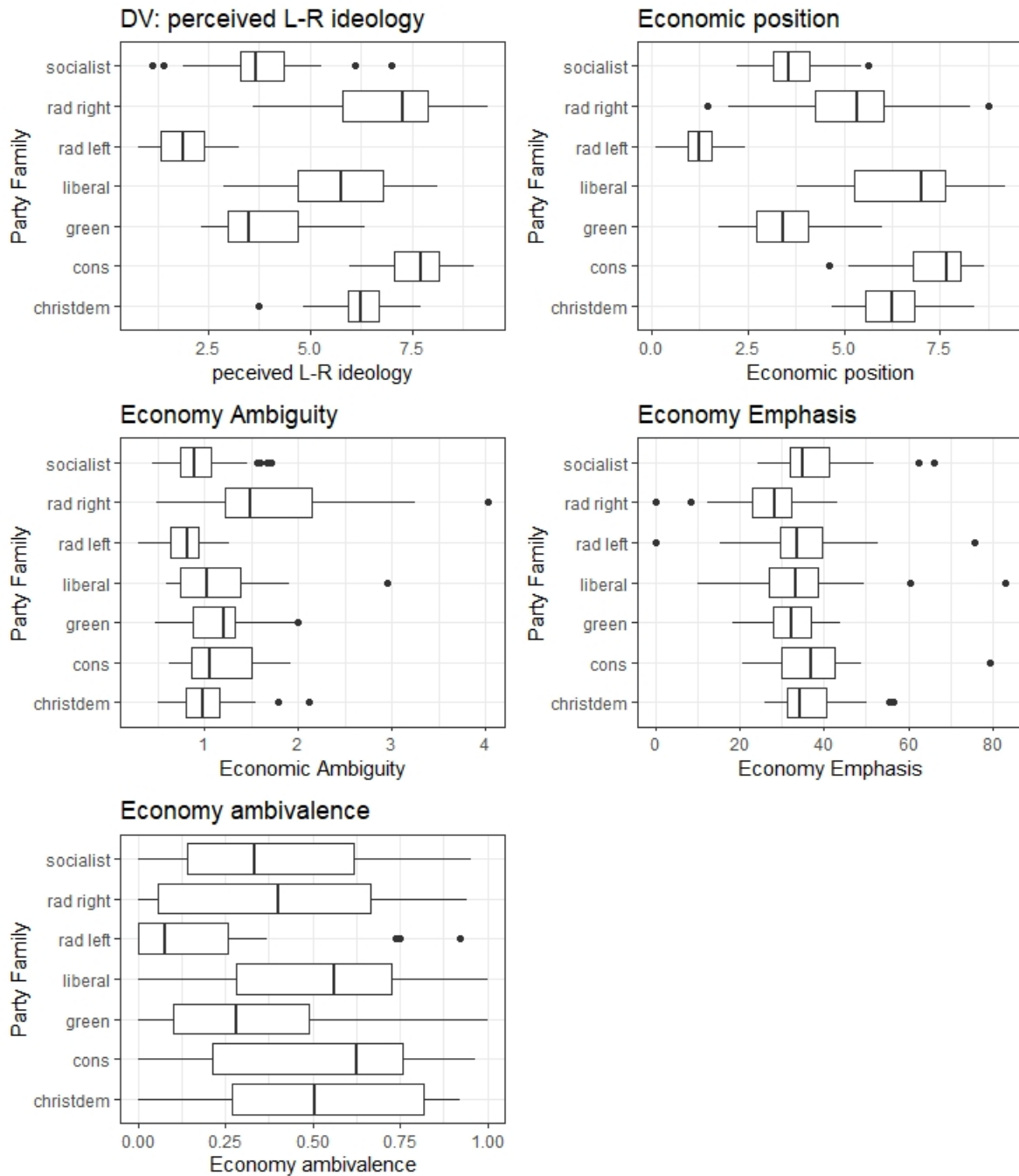


Figure A2: Main Variables by Party Family

### 1.3 Summary Statistics

	Var	n	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Range	SE
Perceived L-R position	1	296	5.08	2.02	0.77	9.35	8.59	0.12
Economic position	2	304	4.82	2.21	0.09	9.18	9.09	0.13
Economy emphasis	3	304	33.90	10.44	0.00	82.93	82.93	0.60
Economy ambivalence	4	304	0.45	0.27	0.00	0.99	0.99	0.02
Economy ambiguity	5	304	1.12	0.47	0.29	4.02	3.73	0.03
Vote %	6	304	15.07	11.88	0.60	45.00	44.40	0.68
Gov. (binary)	7	304	0.40	0.49	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.03
Inflation $\Delta$	8	304	-0.09	1.42	-3.37	7.33	10.70	0.08
GALTAN position	9	304	5.08	2.40	0.17	10.00	9.83	0.14
GALTAN emphasis	10	304	26.05	9.49	0.00	61.70	61.70	0.54
Time diff.	11	304	1.28	1.14	0.00	3.00	3.00	0.07

Table A1: Descriptive statistics

## 2 Empirical Design

### 2.1 Sample

<b>Country</b>	<b>National Elections</b>
Austria	2008, 2003
Belgium	1999
Bulgaria	2001, 2014
Czech Republic	2002, 2006, 2010, 2013
Denmark	1998, 2001, 2007
Estonia	2011
Finland	2003, 2011
France	2002, 2007
Germany	1998, 2002, 2005, 2009
Greece	2009, 2012
Hungary	2002
Latvia	2011, 2014
Ireland	2002, 2007, 2011
Netherlands	1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Poland	2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Portugal	2002, 2005, 2009
Slovakia	2010
Slovenia	2004, 2008
Spain	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Sweden	1998, 2002, 2006, 2014
United Kingdom	1997, 2005

Table A2: The countries & elections included in the analysis



## 2.2 CMP Categories

<b>Economic issues</b>	<b>Cultural issues</b>
per401: Free Market Economy	per104: Military: Positive
per402: Incentives: positive	per105: Military: Negative
per403: Market Regulation	per201: Freedom and human rights
per404: Economic Planning	per202: Democracy
per405: Corporatism/Mixed Economy	per501: Environmental Protection
per406: Protectionism: positive	per502: Culture: Positive
per407: Protectionism: negative	per601: National Way of Life: Positive
per408: Economic Goals	per602: National Way of Life: Negative
per409: Keynesian Demand Management	per603: Traditional Morality: Positive
per410: Economic Growth: positive	per604: Traditional Morality: Negative
per412: Controlled Economy	per605: Law and Order: Positive
per413: Nationalization	per607: Multiculturalism: Positive
per414: Economic Orthodoxy	per608: Multiculturalism: Negative
per415: Marxist analysis	per705: Underprivileged Minority Groups
per416: Anti-Growth Economy	
per503: Equality: positive	
per504: Welfare State Expansion	
per505: Welfare State Limitation	
per506: Education Expansion	
per507: Education limitation	
per701: Labour Groups: positive	
per702: Labour Groups: negative	

Table A3: CMP Categories

<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
per403: Market Regulation	per401: Free Market Economy
per404: Economic Planning	per402: Incentives: positive
per405: Corporatism/Mixed Economy	per407: Protectionism: negative
per406: Protectionism: positive	per410: Economic Growth: positive
per408: Economic Goals	per414: Economic Orthodoxy
per409: Keynesian Demand Management	per505: Welfare State Limitation
per412: Controlled Economy	per507: Education limitation
per413: Nationalization	per702: Labour Groups: negative
per415: Marxist analysis	
per416: Anti-Growth Economy	
per503: Equality: positive	
per504: Welfare State Expansion	
per506: Education Expansion	
per701: Labour Groups: positive	

Table A4: Left-wing and right-wing economic categories

### 3 Main analysis: The full tables

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R ideology</i>					
	(1) Baseline	(2) Avoidance	(3) Ambivalence	(4) No controls	(5) Controls	(6) Full
Economic Position	0.715*** (0.033)	0.502*** (0.105)	0.779*** (0.066)	0.544*** (0.111)	0.216* (0.102)	0.334** (0.106)
Economy Emphasis		-0.040* (0.016)		-0.045** (0.015)	-0.027* (0.013)	-0.022 (0.014)
Eco. Pos. × emphasis		0.006* (0.003)		0.007** (0.003)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)
Economy Ambivalence			3.336*** (0.778)	3.520*** (0.774)	1.898** (0.700)	1.795* (0.719)
Eco. Pos. × ambivalence			-0.413** (0.130)	-0.447*** (0.130)	-0.204+ (0.116)	-0.164 (0.120)
Inflation $\Delta$					-0.342** (0.111)	-0.359** (0.111)
Eco. Pos. × inflation $\Delta$					0.062** (0.022)	0.065** (0.022)
Vote %					-0.051** (0.016)	-0.044** (0.016)
Eco. Pos. × vote %					0.012*** (0.003)	0.011*** (0.003)
In Gov.					0.773* (0.363)	0.800* (0.368)
Eco. Pos. × in gov.					-0.137* (0.066)	-0.151* (0.067)
GALTAN					0.192* (0.075)	0.222** (0.075)
GALTAN Emphasis					0.017 (0.016)	0.034* (0.017)
GALTAN × GALTAN emphasis					0.003 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Time diff (CHES)					0.083 (0.053)	0.011 (0.086)
Constant	1.628*** (0.176)	2.969*** (0.553)	0.882** (0.276)	2.331*** (0.561)	1.214+ (0.706)	0.773 (0.838)
Country FE	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	296	296	296	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.614	0.623	0.639	0.650	0.778	0.808
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.613	0.619	0.636	0.644	0.767	0.782

Note:

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A5: Main findings: full report

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Baseline	Avoidance	Ambiguity	No controls	Controls	Full model
Economy Position	0.715*** (0.033)	0.502*** (0.105)	0.675*** (0.034)	0.402*** (0.104)	0.172+ (0.095)	0.307** (0.100)
Economy Emphasis		-0.040* (0.016)		-0.045** (0.015)	-0.032* (0.013)	-0.027+ (0.015)
Eco. position × emphasis		0.006* (0.003)		0.008** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.006* (0.003)
Economy ambiguity (logged)			1.433*** (0.422)	1.606*** (0.421)	1.170** (0.352)	1.141** (0.365)
Eco. position × ambiguity			-0.151+ (0.085)	-0.186* (0.085)	-0.189** (0.070)	-0.172* (0.072)
Inflation Δ					-0.358** (0.110)	-0.374*** (0.111)
Eco. position × inflation Δ					0.068** (0.022)	0.071** (0.022)
Vote %					-0.045** (0.016)	-0.040* (0.016)
Eco. position × vote %					0.011*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)
In Gov.					0.752* (0.357)	0.823* (0.364)
Eco. position × In gov.					-0.138* (0.065)	-0.159* (0.066)
GALTAN					0.197** (0.075)	0.235** (0.075)
GALTAN emphasis					0.007 (0.016)	0.023 (0.017)
GALTAN position × GALTAN emphasis					0.003 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Time diff (CHES)					0.051 (0.053)	-0.010 (0.087)
Constant	1.628*** (0.176)	2.969*** (0.553)	1.816*** (0.180)	3.371*** (0.550)	2.044** (0.720)	1.482+ (0.866)
Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	296	296	296	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.614	0.623	0.639	0.650	0.780	0.808
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.613	0.619	0.635	0.644	0.768	0.782

Note:

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A6: Main findings: full report



## 4 Robustness tests

### 4.1 Alternative model-specification: Multi-level Model

Table A7: Main findings: multi-level model

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>			
	Avoidance & Ambivalence		Avoidance & Ambiguity	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Economic position	0.587*** (0.110)	0.262** (0.101)	0.476*** (0.104)	0.231* (0.095)
Economy emphasis	-0.044** (0.015)	-0.027* (0.014)	-0.044** (0.015)	-0.031* (0.014)
Eco. position × Eco. emphasis	0.005+ (0.003)	0.007** (0.002)	0.006* (0.003)	0.008** (0.002)
Economy ambivalence	3.304*** (0.773)	1.810** (0.697)		
Eco. position × Eco. ambivalence	-0.379** (0.130)	-0.169 (0.116)		
Economy ambiguity (logged)			1.575*** (0.414)	1.192*** (0.350)
Eco. position × Eco. ambiguity			-0.184* (0.083)	-0.184** (0.069)
Inflation $\Delta$		-0.346** (0.108)		-0.362*** (0.108)
Eco. position × Inflation $\Delta$		0.062** (0.021)		0.069** (0.021)
Vote %		-0.047** (0.016)		-0.042** (0.015)
Eco. position × Vote %		0.012*** (0.003)		0.011*** (0.003)
In gov.		0.794* (0.357)		0.774* (0.352)
Eco. position × In gov.		-0.147* (0.065)		-0.148* (0.064)
GALTAN Position		0.205** (0.074)		0.212** (0.073)
GALTAN Emphasis		0.024 (0.016)		0.013 (0.016)
GALTAN. position × Emphasis		0.002 (0.002)		0.002 (0.002)
Time diff (CHES)		0.053 (0.064)		0.022 (0.064)
Constant	2.347*** (0.573)	1.050 (0.718)	3.253*** (0.565)	1.878* (0.735)
Observations	296	296	296	296
Log Likelihood	-481.209	-448.947	-482.756	-449.450
AIC	978.417	933.895	981.513	934.900
BIC	1,007.940	1,000.321	1,011.036	1,001.326

Note: + p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

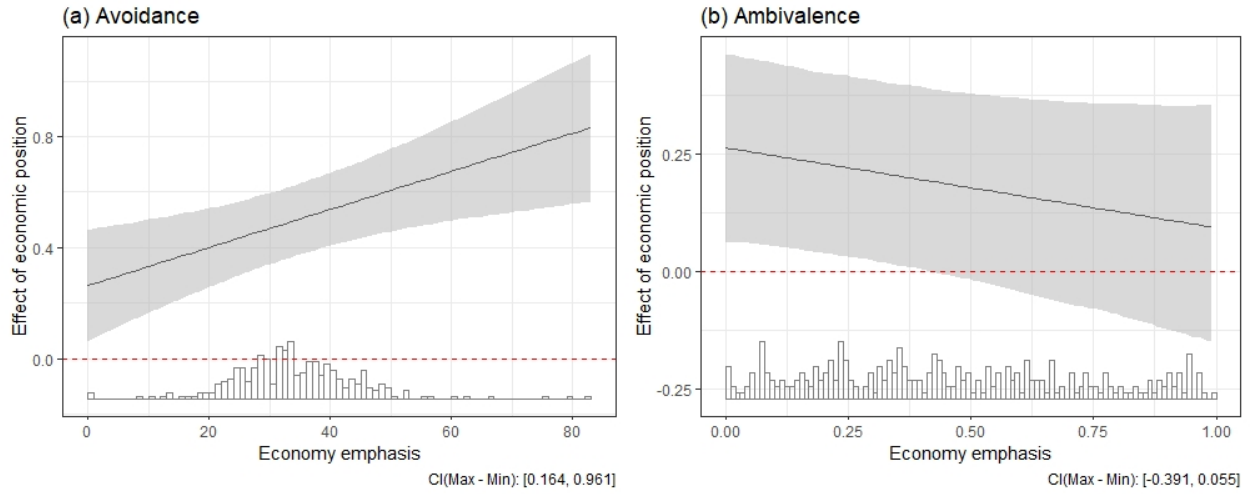


Figure A3: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A7 – Column 2

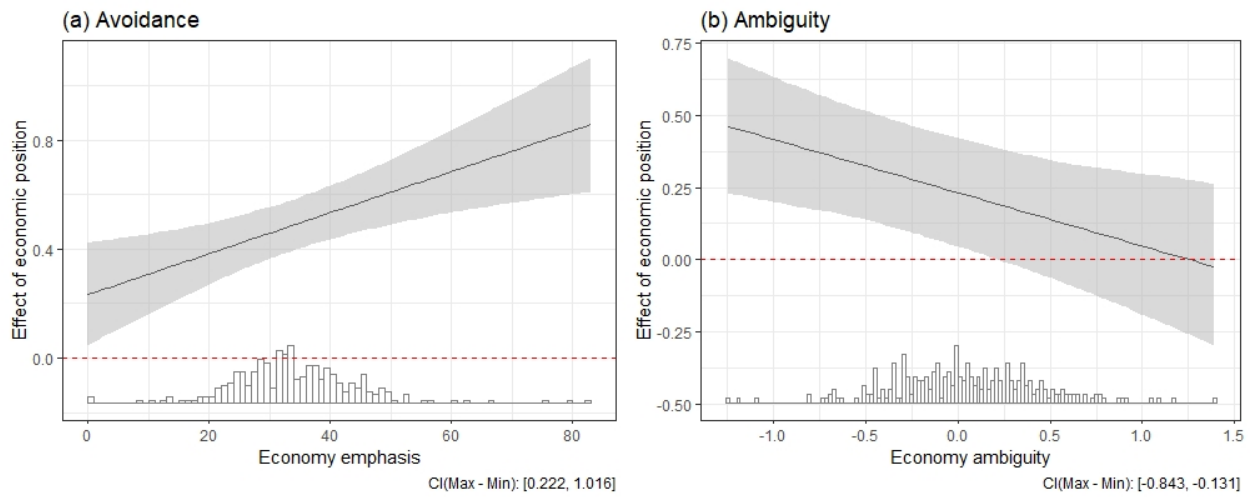


Figure A4: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A7 – Column 4

## 4.2 Alternative data-structure: Individual-level

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>			
	Avoidance & Ambivalence		Avoidance & Ambiguity	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Eco. position	0.443*** (0.007)	0.057*** (0.013)	0.405*** (0.007)	0.087*** (0.013)
Eco. emphasis	-0.049*** (0.001)	-0.022*** (0.001)	-0.055*** (0.001)	-0.026*** (0.001)
Eco. position × emphasis	0.007*** (0.000)	0.008*** (0.000)	0.010*** (0.000)	0.009*** (0.000)
Eco. ambivalence	1.307*** (0.056)	1.364*** (0.067)		
Eco. position × ambivalence	-0.051*** (0.009)	-0.057*** (0.010)		
Eco. ambiguity			1.118*** (0.029)	0.902*** (0.034)
Eco. position × ambiguity			-0.089*** (0.006)	-0.114*** (0.007)
Inflation Δ		-0.448*** (0.011)		-0.489*** (0.011)
Eco. position × inflation		0.086*** (0.002)		0.095*** (0.002)
Vote %		-0.101*** (0.001)		-0.104*** (0.001)
Eco. position × vote		0.020*** (0.000)		0.021*** (0.000)
In gov.		2.057*** (0.038)		2.185*** (0.037)
Eco. position × gov		-0.373*** (0.006)		-0.395*** (0.006)
GALTAN position		-0.303*** (0.008)		-0.292*** (0.008)
GALTAN emphasis		-0.047*** (0.002)		-0.052*** (0.002)
GALTAN × <i>GALTANemphasis</i>		0.015*** (0.000)		0.014*** (0.000)
Education		-0.053*** (0.010)		-0.035*** (0.010)
Eco. position × education		0.021*** (0.002)		0.018*** (0.002)
Age		-0.005*** (0.001)		-0.004*** (0.001)
Eco. position × age		0.001*** (0.000)		0.001*** (0.000)
Income		-0.066*** (0.009)		-0.073*** (0.009)
Eco. position × income		0.016*** (0.002)		0.017*** (0.002)
Time diff.		-0.070*** (0.008)		-0.109*** (0.008)
Constant	2.897*** (0.040)	4.674*** (0.095)	3.440*** (0.041)	5.060*** (0.095)
Country FE	NO	YES	NO	YES
Observations	243,072	201,524	243,072	201,524
R <sup>2</sup>	0.381	0.446	0.385	0.445
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.381	0.446	0.385	0.445

*Note:*

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A8: Main findings from individual-level data



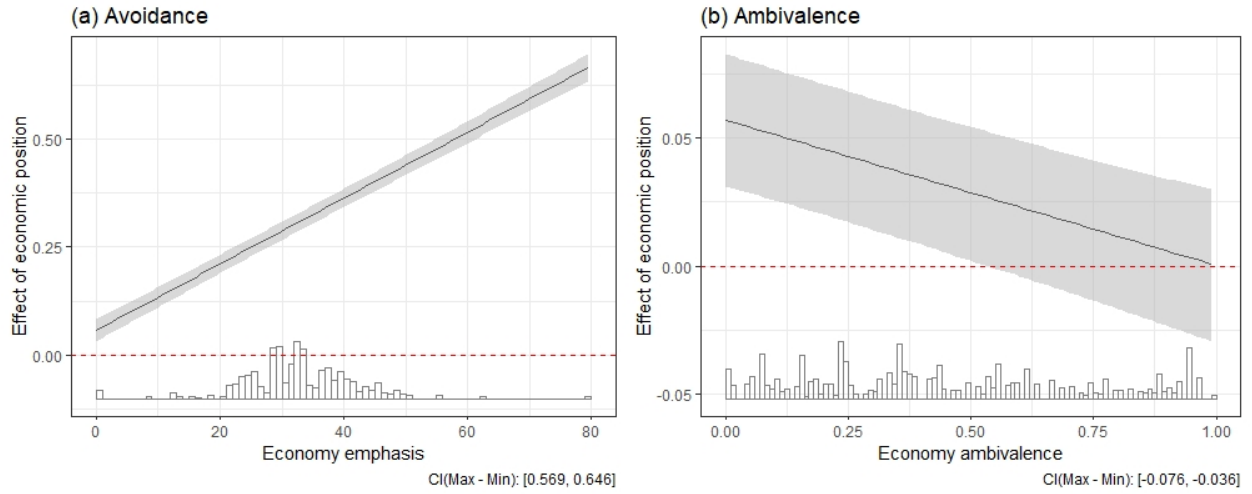


Figure A5: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A8 – Column 2

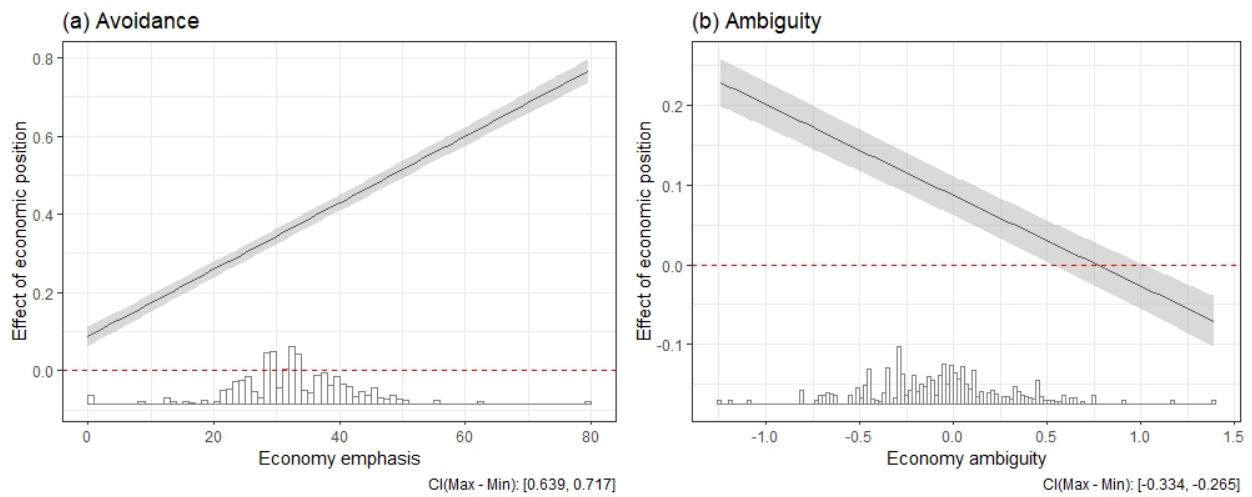


Figure A6: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A8 – Column 4

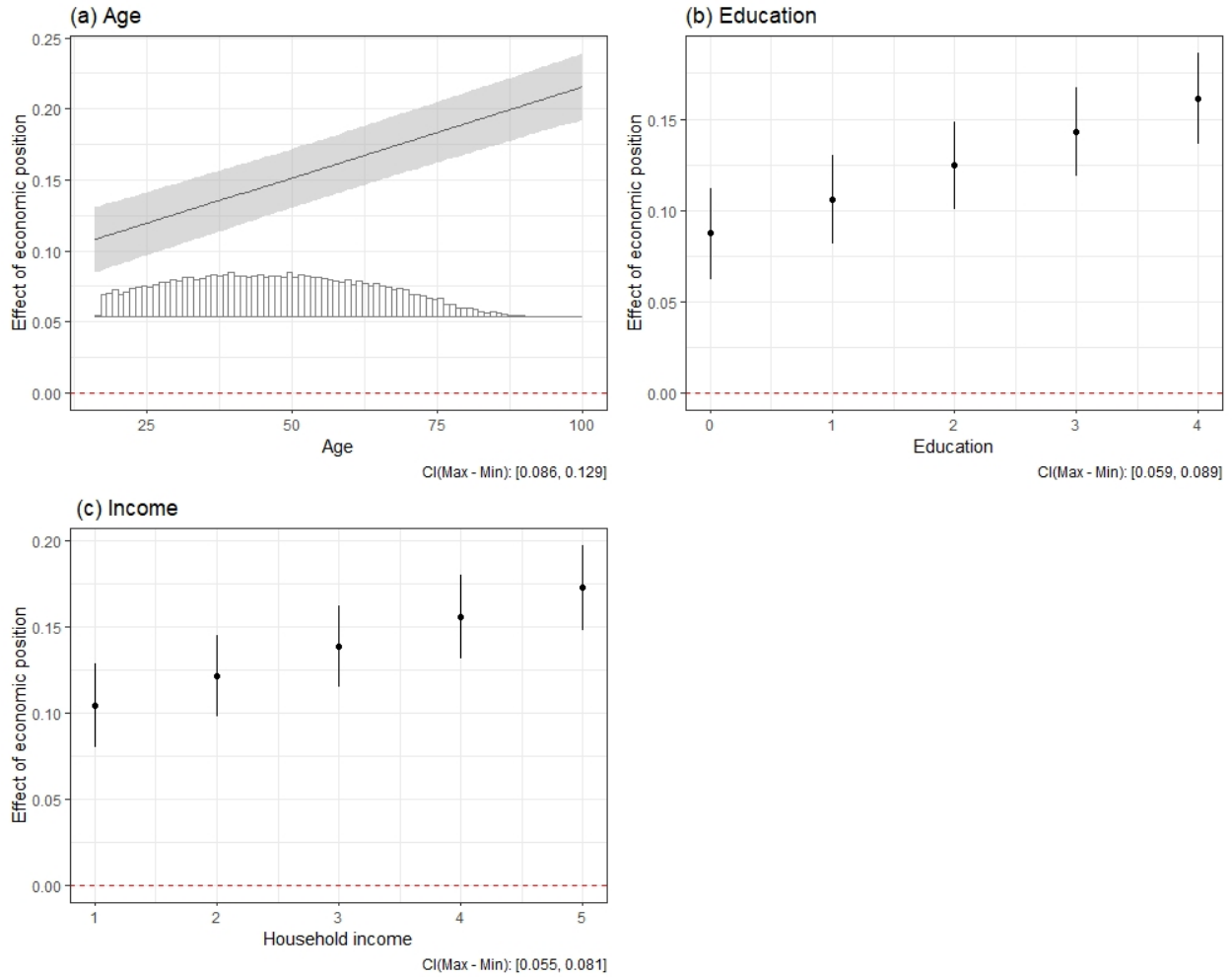


Figure A7: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A8 – Column 4

### 4.3 Alternative independent variable: Redistribution

Table A9 below utilizes an alternative measure of party economic position: instead of using expert assessments of the party's general economic views (LRECON), I utilize expert evaluations of the party on the specific issue of redistribution. The other aspects of the main analysis remain unchanged.

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>			
	Avoidance & Ambivalence		Avoidance & Ambiguity	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Redistribution (+R-wing)	0.519*** (0.140)	0.303* (0.130)	0.331* (0.130)	0.236* (0.113)
Economy emphasis	-0.042** (0.016)	-0.029+ (0.016)	-0.039* (0.016)	-0.031* (0.015)
Redist. × Eco. emphasis	0.010** (0.003)	0.009** (0.003)	0.011** (0.003)	0.009** (0.003)
Economy ambivalence	3.720*** (0.884)	2.258** (0.788)		
Redist. × Eco. ambivalence	-0.570*** (0.159)	-0.306* (0.140)		
Economy ambiguity (logged)			1.699*** (0.444)	1.540*** (0.370)
Redist. × Eco. ambiguity			-0.236* (0.096)	-0.248** (0.079)
Inflation $\Delta$		-0.306* (0.133)		-0.321* (0.130)
Redist. × Inflation $\Delta$		0.061* (0.027)		0.069* (0.027)
Vote %		-0.009 (0.017)		-0.005 (0.016)
Redist. × Vote %		0.006+ (0.003)		0.005 (0.003)
In Gov.		0.480 (0.409)		0.456 (0.394)
Redist. × In gov.		-0.063 (0.084)		-0.063 (0.081)
GALTAN		0.244** (0.083)		0.270** (0.081)
GALTAN emphasis		0.040* (0.019)		0.026 (0.018)
GALTAN pos. × GALTAN emph.		0.001 (0.003)		0.0004 (0.003)
Time diff (CHES)		-0.022 (0.195)		-0.040 (0.190)
Constant	2.401*** (0.610)	0.468 (0.926)	3.369*** (0.600)	1.420 (0.930)
Country FE	NO	YES	NO	YES
Observations	202	202	202	202
R <sup>2</sup>	0.661	0.838	0.661	0.846
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.652	0.806	0.652	0.816

Note:

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A9: Main findings: employing party positions on redistribution

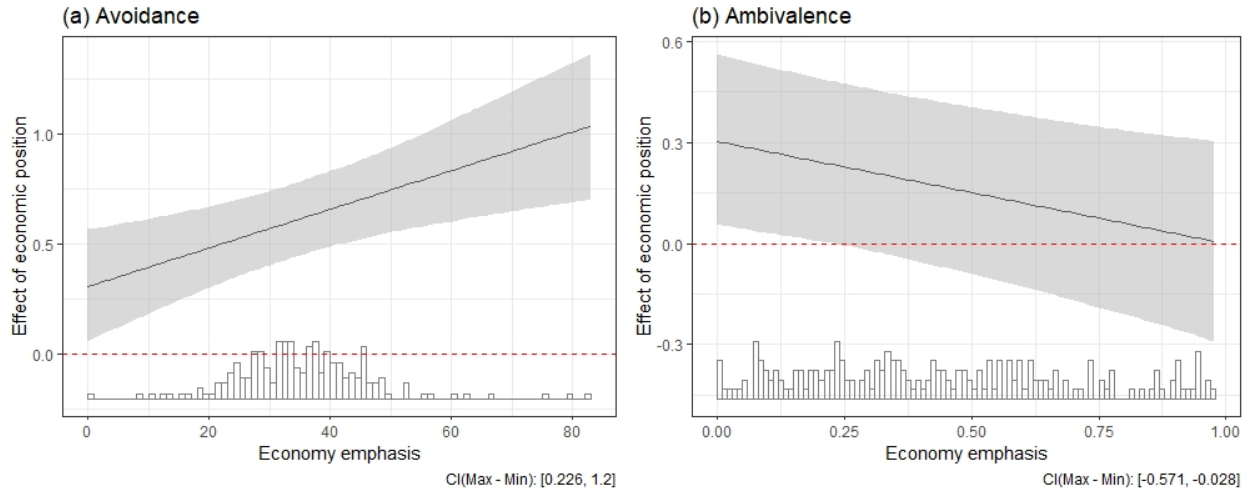


Figure A8: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A9 – Column 2

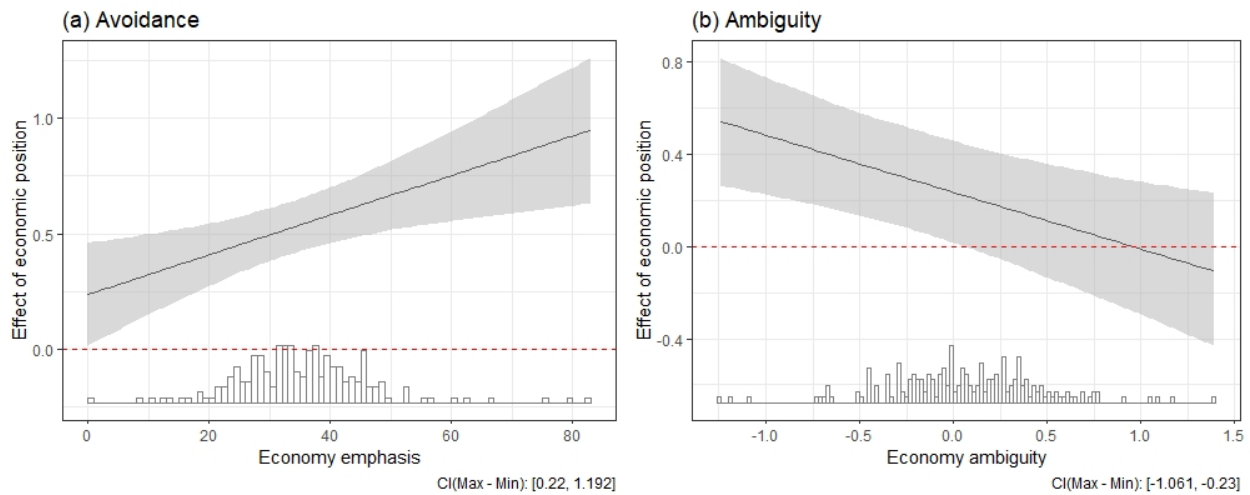


Figure A9: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A9 – Column 4

#### 4.4 Alternative moderator: voter disagreement

Table A10 utilizes an alternative measure of party ambiguity. It uses voter disagreement on the party's left-right position (CSES) rather than expert disagreement on the party's economic position (CHES).

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>		
	Ambiguity	No controls	Full model
Economic position	1.557*** (0.158)	1.339*** (0.192)	1.138*** (0.164)
Economy emphasis		-0.032* (0.014)	-0.018 (0.014)
Eco. pos. × Eco. emphasis		0.006* (0.003)	0.005+ (0.002)
Voter disagreement	2.977*** (0.410)	2.905*** (0.409)	2.441*** (0.373)
Eco. pos. × disagreement	-0.432*** (0.078)	-0.418*** (0.078)	-0.392*** (0.067)
Inflation ch.			-0.291** (0.106)
Eco. pos. × inflation ch.			0.047* (0.021)
Vote %			-0.040** (0.015)
Eco. pos. × Vote %			0.010*** (0.003)
In Gov.			0.655+ (0.344)
Eco. pos. × In gov.			-0.117+ (0.063)
GALTAN			0.171* (0.072)
GALTAN emphasis			0.021 (0.016)
GALTAN pos. × GALTAN emphasis			0.002 (0.002)
Timediff (CHES)			0.004 (0.082)
Constant	-4.196*** (0.821)	-2.979** (0.982)	-3.743*** (1.046)
Country FE	NO	NO	YES
Observations	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.679	0.685	0.829
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.676	0.679	0.806

*Note:* + p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A10: Main findings: employing voter disagreement

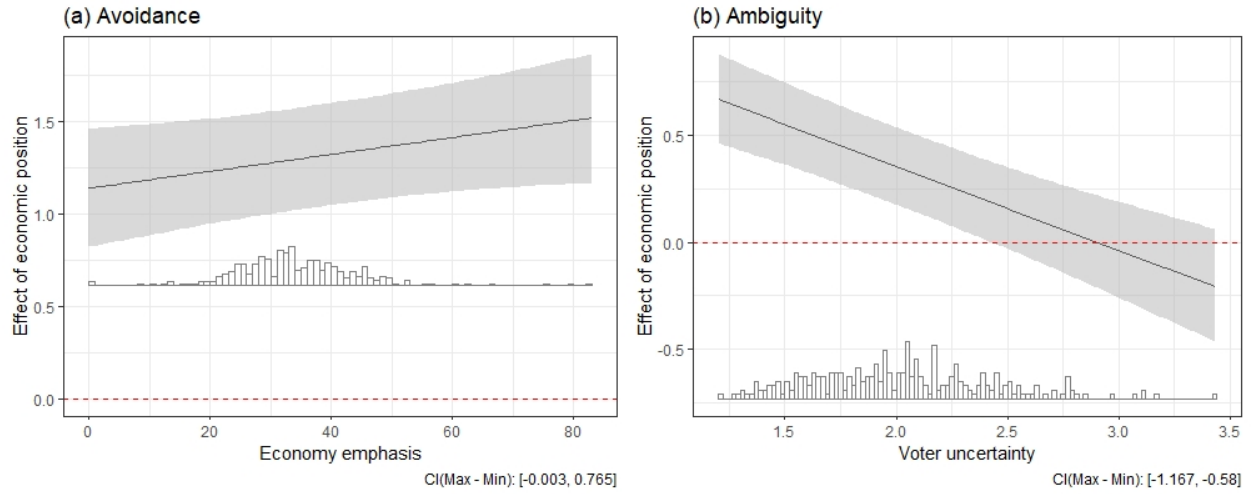


Figure A10: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A10 – the full model



## 4.5 Alternative design: Testing the three strategies together

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Economic Position	0.715*** (0.033)	0.502*** (0.105)	0.779*** (0.066)	0.675*** (0.034)	0.424*** (0.115)	0.150 (0.104)	0.247* (0.109)
Economy emphasis		-0.040* (0.016)			-0.047** (0.015)	-0.031* (0.013)	-0.028+ (0.014)
Eco. Position × Eco. emphasis		0.006* (0.003)			0.008** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.006* (0.002)
Economy ambivalence			3.336*** (0.778)		2.432** (0.824)	1.249+ (0.740)	1.130 (0.751)
Eco. Position × Eco. ambivalence			-0.413** (0.130)		-0.263+ (0.138)	-0.104 (0.122)	-0.048 (0.127)
Economy ambiguity (logged)				1.433*** (0.422)	1.211** (0.439)	0.972** (0.369)	1.022** (0.377)
Eco. Position × Eco. ambiguity				-0.151+ (0.085)	-0.132 (0.085)	-0.157* (0.071)	-0.146* (0.072)
Inflation Δ						-0.341** (0.110)	-0.350** (0.110)
Eco. Position × Inflation Δ						0.064** (0.022)	0.067** (0.022)
Vote %						-0.049** (0.016)	-0.041** (0.016)
Eco. Position × Vote %						0.012*** (0.003)	0.011*** (0.003)
In Gov.						0.690+ (0.361)	0.757* (0.365)
Eco. Position × In Gov.						-0.126+ (0.065)	-0.147* (0.066)
GALTAN Position						0.184* (0.075)	0.222** (0.074)
GALTAN emphasis						0.012 (0.016)	0.028+ (0.017)
GALTAN Position × GALTAN emphasis						0.003 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Time diff (CHES)						0.063 (0.053)	-0.006 (0.086)
Constant	1.628*** (0.176)	2.969*** (0.553)	0.882** (0.276)	1.816*** (0.180)	2.870*** (0.583)	1.772* (0.732)	1.521+ (0.871)
Observations	296	296	296	296	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.614	0.623	0.639	0.639	0.664	0.784	0.814
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.613	0.619	0.636	0.635	0.656	0.771	0.787

Note:

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A11: Main findings: testing avoidance, ambivalence, and ambiguity in one model



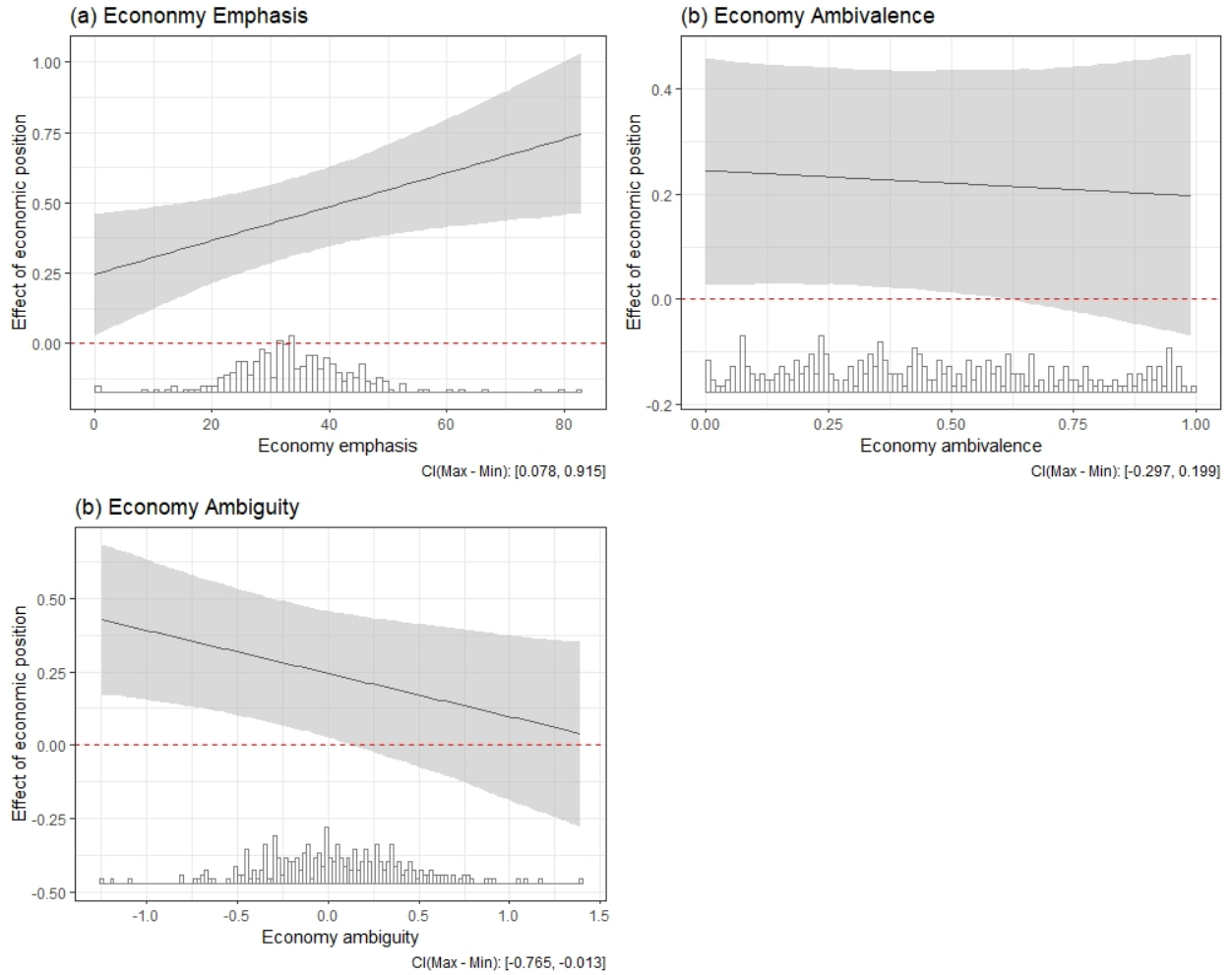


Figure A11: Marginal effects of economic position: Table A11 – the full model

## 5 Additional analysis

### 5.1 Using CMP data

This section investigates an alternative empirical strategy to test the hypotheses. Specifically, in this section I measure party positions on the economy from the CMP by employing a variation of Lowe et al's (2011) *logit rile* measure of party position.<sup>1</sup> There is however one main caveat: employing party position on the economic sub-dimension from the CMP makes it not possible to test the *Hypothesis 2* regarding the moderating effect of ambivalence on the economy. The main reason is that the employed measure of ambivalence resembles the logic of CMP-based measures of party positions: the prevailing theme of the CMP coding is dividing issues to two sides, positive and negative. The CMP-based measures of party positions are calculated after comparing the emphasis given the two sides of the issue. The measure of ambivalence, therefore, correlates very highly with the CMP-based measure of party positions on the economic sub-dimension ( $r= 0.9$ ). To avoid multi-collinearity issues, this section only tests Hypotheses 1 and 3 (i.e. avoidance and ambiguity, respectively): this should not be a problem given that ambiguity and ambivalence are two substitutes; therefore, what applies to ambiguity is expected to apply to ambivalence, a finding that is supported in the main analysis.<sup>2</sup>

I measure party position on the economy following the procedure highlighted by Lowe et al (2011). Although the authors explain the construction of a general left-right party position, I limit the logit rile index to only economic issues (listed above in Table A3) to measure party position on the economic sub-dimension. Specifically, party position was measured using the following formula:

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<sup>1</sup>I thanks anonymous reviewers for suggesting that test

<sup>2</sup>The interaction effect between economic position and ambivalence is however in the expected direction (negative,  $t= -1.475$ ). However, the result is not reliable given the high correlation between the two independent variables.

$$\text{Economic position} = \log(R + 0.5) - \log(L + 0.5),$$

Where R is the sum of quasi-statements dedicated to right-leaning economic categories, and L is the equivalent measure for left-leaning categories (Lowe et al, p. 131; cited in the manuscript)

The main results of this test are presented in Table A12. Model 1 presents a baseline model that regresses the perceived party position on the left-right scale on the *logit* economic position. The correlation is positive, as expected, indicating that the more the manifesto expresses right-leaning policies on the economic sub-dimension, the more voters perceive the party to be right-wing, and vice versa. The correlation is however weaker when compared to the CHES measure employed in the manuscript:  $R^2$  in the latter is 0.61 compared to 0.4 in the former. One could therefore easily conclude that voter perceptions correlate more strongly with party positions of CHES expert survey than from CMP, a finding highlighted in the literature (cite). Model 2, in addition, interacts the economic position with emphasis on the economy in the manifesto. The interaction is positive and significant, indicating stronger correlation between party position on the economy and its left-right ideology the more the party emphasizes the economy in its manifesto, and vice versa. The finding is therefore identical to the main analysis. The marginal effect of economic position is plotted in Figure A12. The left-panel shows that the marginal effect of party economic position almost doubles when we move from the minimum to the maximum value of economy emphasis.

Model 3 interacts party economic position with economic ambiguity. Again, the interaction is highly significant and negative, indicating that the effect of economic position declines as the uncertainty surrounding party economic position increases. Likewise, the left-panel of Figure A12 shows the marginal effect of economic position across different values of ambiguity. The Figure shows almost identical effect to the main analysis.

Model 4 adds both interaction effects together, and Model 5 adds control variables. In both models, the effect of economic position is again positive and significant. Likewise, the two interaction effects are both significant and in the expected direction.

Finally, Model 6 repeat Model 5 but adds country dummies. All variables remain unchanged, except that the interaction term with economy emphasis drops below the significance level, but comes in the expected direction. Figure [A13](#) plots the marginal effect of economic position across levels of economic emphasis (left-panel) and ambiguity (right-panel) from Model 6. The two panels show the effect of economic position increasing as emphasizing the economy increases, and declines as ambiguity increases, respectively. Taken together, the analysis using different measure of economic position supports the analysis reported in the manuscript.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Perceived L-R Ideology				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Eco. Position	1.288*** (0.092)	0.738** (0.260)	0.668** (0.253)	0.240 (0.233)	0.489* (0.239)
Eco. emphasis		0.019 (0.013)	0.019 (0.012)	0.035** (0.011)	0.020 (0.013)
Eco. pos. × Eco. emphasis		0.016* (0.007)	0.015* (0.007)	0.013+ (0.006)	0.007 (0.007)
Eco. ambiguity			0.060 (0.381)	-0.203 (0.332)	-0.258 (0.355)
Eco. pos. × Eco. ambiguity			-0.596** (0.215)	-0.404* (0.186)	-0.497** (0.189)
Vote %				0.040** (0.013)	0.042** (0.013)
Eco. pos. × Vote %				0.024** (0.009)	0.025** (0.009)
In Gov.				0.298 (0.283)	0.380 (0.284)
Eco. pos. × In Gov.				-0.113 (0.192)	-0.044 (0.197)
Inflation Δ				-0.046 (0.098)	-0.028 (0.102)
Eco. pos. × Inflation Δ				0.007 (0.067)	0.018 (0.067)
GALTAN Position				0.237* (0.097)	0.276** (0.097)
GALTAN emphasis				0.034 (0.021)	0.048* (0.022)
GALTAN Pos. × GALTAN emphasis				0.003 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)
Constant	6.787*** (0.152)	6.149*** (0.462)	5.983*** (0.454)	1.975* (0.796)	2.884** (0.969)
Observations	296	296	296	296	296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.400	0.411	0.454	0.629	0.679
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.398	0.405	0.445	0.610	0.637

*Note:* + p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A12: Additional analysis: CMP data

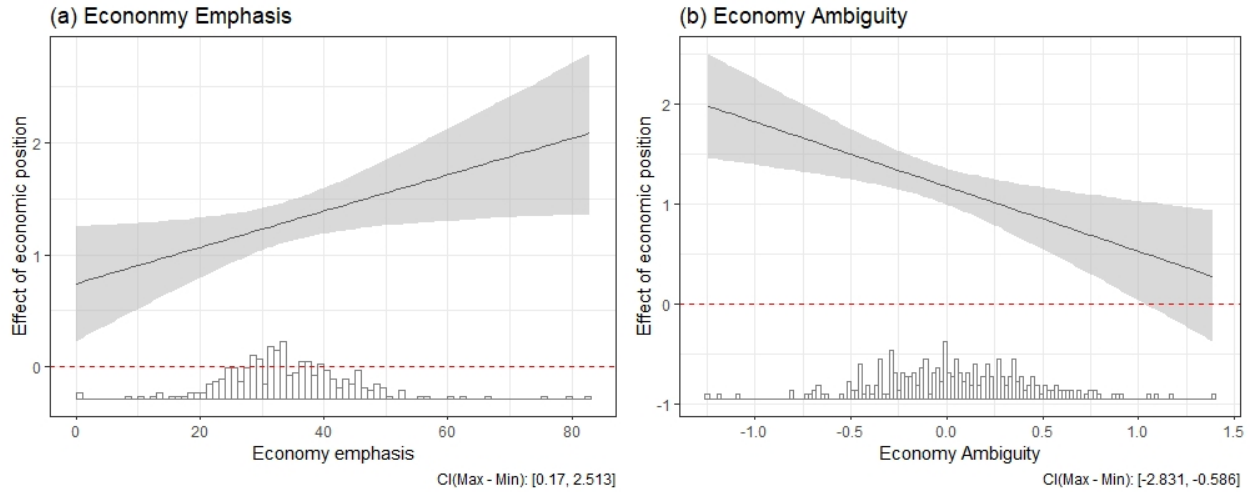


Figure A12: Marginal effects of Table A12: simple models

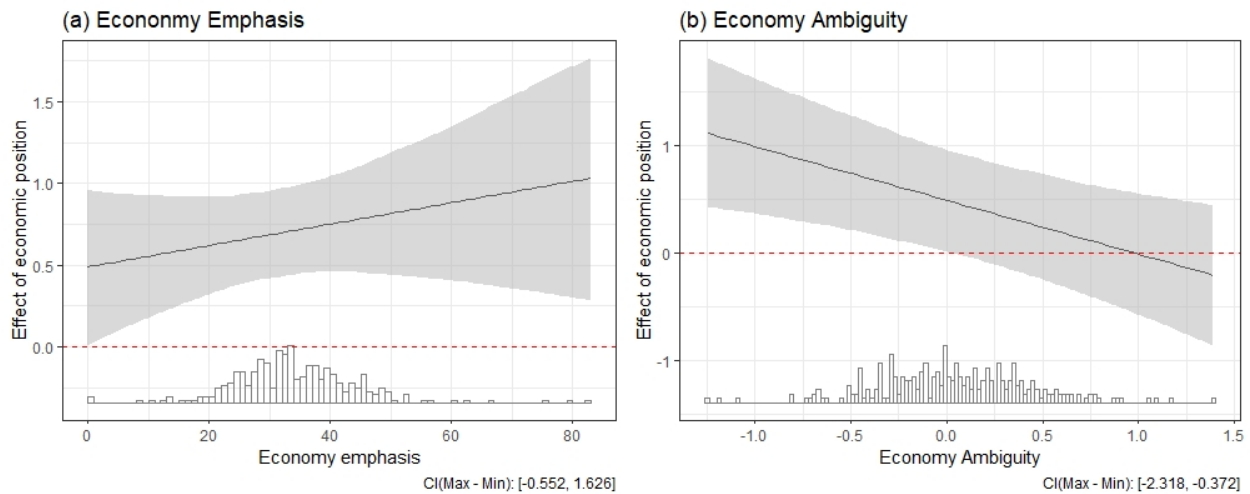


Figure A13: Marginal effects of Table A12: full model

## 5.2 Using Data from Actual Election Campaigns (PolDem)

To further investigate the robustness of the findings, I measure party positions on the economic sub-dimension from actual election campaigns. Specifically, the National Election Campaigns data-set (PolDem) (Kriesi et al, 2020; cited in the manuscript) codes up party statements during the month prior to national elections to several issue categories. Unlike

the CMP, the PolDem data-set covers national newspapers, and therefore provides a realistic source of what the parties deliver to the electorate. It is important to note that the PolDem data is only available for one-third of the observations included in the main analysis. However, that could be a useful exercise: given that we employ a different data-set and a third source of information, would the expectations of the study hold? This is the question I aim to test in this analysis.

The PolDem coders assign party statements to a number of categories. There are overall three economic categories: economic liberalism, welfare, and economic reform. The ‘economic liberalism’ and ‘welfare’ categories indicate the direction of the actor’s position (for example, whether the actor is pro- or anti-welfare). By contrast, the ‘economic reform’ category indicates general demands for changing economic policies with no precise position. Therefore, I limit the analysis to economic liberalism and welfare.

The analysis includes 7287 statements on economic liberalism, and 5942 statements on welfare. The PolDem variable for party positions (named *direction*) ranges from +1 (the party statement supports the issue, e.g., more welfare policies), to -1 (the party statement opposes the issue). I harmonized the direction variable for both economic liberalism and welfare categories so that bigger values express right-wing position (pro- economic liberalism & anti-welfare) and smaller values express left-wing position (anti- economic liberalism & pro-welfare).

The values were aggregated to the party-election level: the party’s position on the economic sub-dimension is the average of the direction of all statements – related to the economic liberalism and welfare categories – in the current year. After aggregating the data to the party-election level, the overall number of observations is 110 (party-election) coming from 11 countries between 1997 - 2014. The countries, elections, and number of parties per country and election are shown in Table [A13](#)

Hence, party economic position is measured from PolDem, whereas everything else remains the same as in the main analysis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Except that I do not include country FE to not overload the model with too many variables, given the few observations available. Including the country dummies however does not affect the results.



	1997	1998	2002	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Austria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
France	0	0	5	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Germany	0	4	4	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0
Greece	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0
Ireland	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
Latvia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Netherlands	0	4	6	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Portugal	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
United Kingdom	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table A13: Number of cases per country-election

Table A14 and A15 report the results of this test. The baseline model (Model 1) – in both tables – regresses the party’s perceived L-R position – the main outcome variable – on the party views about the economy, as employed from the PolDem. As expected, there is a positive correlation between the party views on the economy and its L-R ideology. The correlation is however weaker:  $R^2$  is only 0.32 compared to CHES ( $R^2 = 0.61$ ) and CMP ( $R^2 = 0.4$ ).

Table A14 tests H1 & H2. Model 2 interacts the party’s economic position with economy emphasis: although no significant result, the interaction comes in the expected direction. The marginal effect of economic position are plotted in Figure A14 (left-panel): the figure shows only a slight increase in the effect of economic position. Model 3 interacts the interaction with economic ambivalence. As hypothesized, the interaction is negative and statistically significant (p-value < 0.01), indicating that the effect of economic position weakens as the party emphasizes left-wing and right-wing economic policies at the same time. Again, the marginal effect of economic position is plotted in Figure A14 (right-panel). The figure shows that at the low levels of ambivalence, the effect of economic position is positive and statistically significant. The effect becomes indistinguishable from zero at higher level of ambivalence. These results remain unchanged in Model 4 which adds the two strategies together.

Model 5 adds the full set of controls. The effect of economic positions falls short of statistical significance. However, the conditioning effect of economic emphasis and economy ambivalence remain positive and negative, respectively, as expected in the hypotheses. Figure A15 shows the marginal effects graphically: the left-panel shows that although the effect of economic position is not significant, it becomes significant at higher levels of economy ambivalence. The right-panel also shows that the conditioning effect of ambivalence retains its hypothesized negative effect. The 95% confidence interval however contains zero because of the weaker effect of economic position as employed from the PolDem data in comparison to the other data-sets as highlighted above.

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R Ideology</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Eco. Position (PolDem)	2.300*** (0.327)	2.107+ (1.212)	2.114** (0.628)	1.866+ (1.036)	0.616 (0.812)
Eco. Emphasis		0.012 (0.020)		-0.002 (0.018)	0.029* (0.013)
Eco. Position × emphasis		0.005 (0.037)		0.010 (0.033)	0.024 (0.025)
Eco. ambivalence			3.748*** (0.687)	3.740*** (0.724)	1.999*** (0.532)
Eco. Position × ambivalence			-3.710** (1.265)	-3.838** (1.362)	-1.710+ (0.958)
Inflation $\Delta$					-0.129+ (0.074)
Eco. Pos. × Inflation $\Delta$					0.011 (0.150)
In Gov.					0.090 (0.213)
Eco. Position × In gov.					-0.178 (0.445)
Vote %					0.013 (0.008)
Eco. Position × Vote %					-0.0005 (0.018)
GALTAN Position					0.516** (0.161)
GALTAN emphasis					0.076* (0.030)
GALTAN Pos. × GALTAN emphasis					-0.003 (0.005)
Constant	5.302*** (0.168)	4.894*** (0.700)	3.602*** (0.407)	3.687*** (0.631)	-1.085 (1.015)
Observations	108	108	108	108	108
R <sup>2</sup>	0.319	0.321	0.536	0.537	0.824
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.312	0.301	0.523	0.515	0.797

Note:

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A14: Additional analysis: employing PolDem data to test H1 and H2

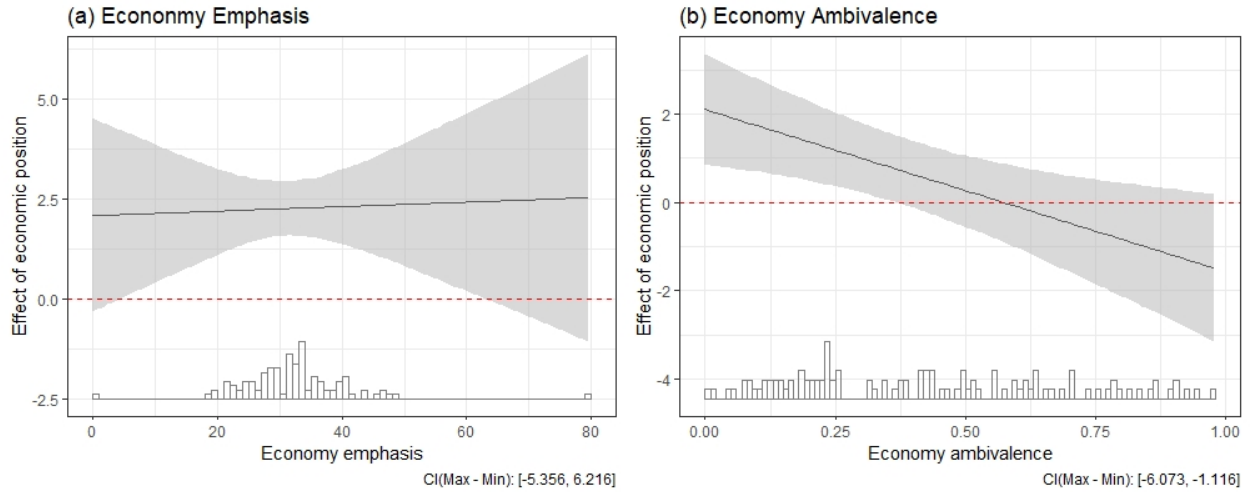


Figure A14: Marginal effects of Table A14: simple models

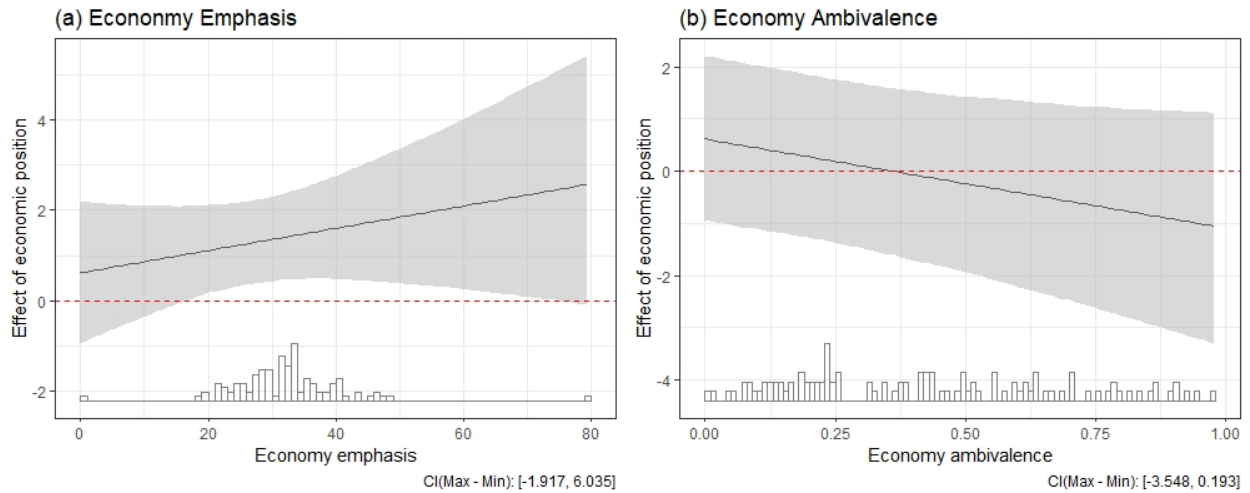


Figure A15: Marginal effects of Table A14: full model

Table A15 tests H1 & H3. Model 1 and 2 are identical to Table A14. To test H3, column 3 interacts economic position with ambiguity: the interaction is negative and statistically significant (p-value < 0.001), indicating that the association between economic position and L-R ideology weakens as the uncertainty surrounding party economic views increases. Figure A14 (right-panel) plots the marginal effects of economic position across the different

levels of ambiguity. The figure shows that the effect of economic position declines as ambiguity increases. The results remain unchanged in the full model after adding controls. The marginal effects from the full model are presented in Figure [A17](#).

Taken together, The findings are similar to the main analysis and the additional analysis in the previous section, despite using an alternative data-set that employs a completely different data-generating process and a different sample.

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived L-R ideology</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Eco. Position	2.300*** (0.327)	2.107+ (1.212)	2.064*** (0.288)	0.036 (1.096)	-0.008 (0.799)
Eco. Emphasis		0.012 (0.020)		0.007 (0.018)	0.022+ (0.013)
Eco. Position × emphasis		0.005 (0.037)		0.064+ (0.033)	0.035 (0.024)
Eco. ambiguity			1.168** (0.372)	1.235** (0.370)	0.750** (0.270)
Eco. Position × ambiguity			-1.574* (0.623)	-1.871** (0.641)	-0.983* (0.429)
In Gov.					0.195 (0.207)
Eco. Position × In gov.					-0.122 (0.442)
Vote %					0.018* (0.008)
Eco. Position × vote %					0.020 (0.019)
Inflation Δ					-0.049 (0.072)
Eco. Position × Inflation Δ					0.078 (0.149)
GALTAN Position					0.591*** (0.162)
GALTAN Emphasis					0.064* (0.030)
GALTAN Pos. × GALTAN emphasis					-0.004 (0.005)
Constant	5.302*** (0.168)	4.894*** (0.700)	5.251*** (0.148)	4.983*** (0.605)	0.057 (0.999)
Observations	108	108	108	108	108
R <sup>2</sup>	0.319	0.321	0.489	0.508	0.829
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.312	0.301	0.474	0.484	0.804

*Note:*

+ p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Table A15: Additional analysis: employing PolDem data to test H1 and H3

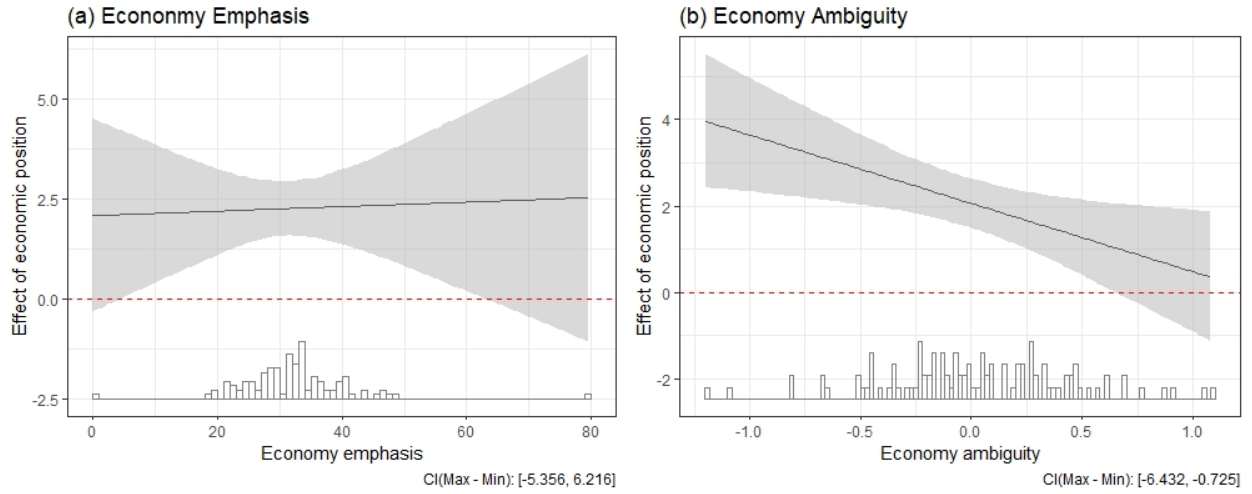


Figure A16: Marginal effects of Table A15: simple models

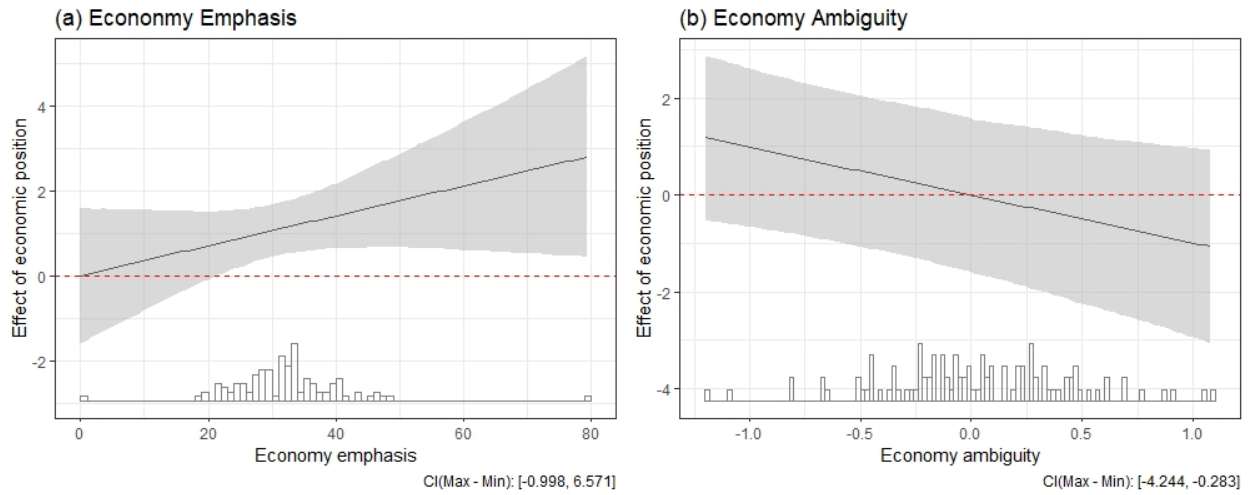


Figure A17: Marginal effects of Table A15: full model